



Volume 6 • 2017

The Undergraduate Journal of the Senior Seminar in Women and Gender Studies

The College at Brockport, State University of New York

# DISSENTING VOICES



## Our Voices

Our voices are about rediscovering our curiosity and exposing that capitalism is the tragedy in society that distances women from equality. We seek to unmask those who have been silenced and give them the agency to share their experiences and voice with the world as a historical and experiential reference as to why and how women are oppressed. By raising awareness about the strict gender binary, we are dismantling stereotypes and saying “fuck you!” We seek to show that religion and feminism don’t have to be at odds and that the nuclear family isn’t the only definition of family. We encourage giving young women hope when no one understands, owning who you are, and being free to express yourself in ways that make you happy. Be you, do you! Don’t let the bastards grind you down!

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# Dissenting Voices Cover Art

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The cover portrait is a photographic composite of one identity characteristic of each person in the WMS 421 Senior Seminar course. The abstract painting of vivid colors that frames the portrait represents the brilliant minds that have intertwined to create this volume. The use of different colors represents our diverse backgrounds, that when put together, become radiant. The handprint placed on the chest represents our extension to others and prompts readers to join us in the fight for social justice. The knuckles with the word *“feminist”* written in calligraphy are positioned on the back journal cover to leave readers with something other than a blank ending. This photographic composite is meant to create a new face of dissent.



## Note from the Editor

I am thrilled to introduce volume six of *Dissenting Voices*, a student engineered e-Journal collaboratively designed, authored, and published by undergraduate Women and Gender Studies majors as an extension of their Women and Gender Studies Senior Seminar at The College at Brockport.

*Dissenting Voices* grows out of a course learning structure where Women and Gender Studies students reflect upon their undergraduate experience in the discipline, and through engagement, activism, and synthesis of acquired knowledge, establish a theoretical foundation to inform future feminist practices. Course readings comprise students' discipline-specific interests, enabling an intellectual forum in which students dialogue on a women and gender focused topic. This work culminates in a meaningful capstone project grounded in contemporary and emerging feminist scholarship.

*Dissenting Voices* volume six is the largest volume to date, representing ten authors who write across a wide span of topics important to the Women and Gender Studies discipline. In Opening Voices, two essays introduce the volume. Essay one is a timely study of peace and security which asks, where are the women in the teaching of international relations? Essay two interrogates the witching of women throughout history, arguing that society uses the witch image to marginalize women who push back against patriarchal codes. More Voices centers the volume where six authors pull at personal stories of dissent. Essays in this section include a critique of systemic poverty and the challenges of growing up poor, the complexities when religion and politics collide in the arena of women's reproductive health, how Asian American identity is formed in relation to lesbian identity, nuclear family deconstructed through adoption, gender stereotyping among siblings, and the mail order bride industry. Closing Voices bookends the volume with an essay and book review. The essay interrogates ways female bodies are objectified in media, pageantry, and pornography. The book reviews question the gender double standard in Jessica Valenti's *Sex Object: A Memoir* (20016), and *He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Women Should Know* (2008).

Curious. Witchlike. Poor. Religious. Lesbian. Adopted. Barbie. Bride. Pornographic. Objectified. Like the inspired journal cover, these composite words punctuate volume six, and in these words, authors demand that we become curious about what we don't see or know, that we scrutinize the societal structures that obscure equality, and that we

increase opportunities to validate diverse identities common to ourselves and the world. From the photographic composite through to the feminist inspired fist, the authors here plant seeds of change. Let's listen closely to their words. They are the knowers of today who will better inform our tomorrow. And they are gender justice warriors through and through. A concluding photo essay documents some of this women and gender-inspired activism. Bridging theory with praxis, *Dissenting Voices* preserves the authenticity of student voice, sanctioning a wide range of ability and talent that students' senior seminar coursework engenders.

In my early role as Brockport's Women and Gender Studies Director and faculty developing a new Women and Gender Studies senior capstone course, I had what seemed a pipedream in conceptualizing a student journal. Semesters of dynamic student activism and thought inspired me to imagine a women and gender studies publication that would bring to light undergraduate creative agency realized on the cusp of feminist knowledge. *Dissenting Voices*, as named and populated by its 2012 student founders, and pioneered onward by this 2017 class, is this dream forward.

Barbara LeSavoy, PhD  
Director, Women and Gender Studies  
Executive Editor, *Dissenting Voices*

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# **Dissenting Voices Editorial Board**

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# Make America Curious Again: Integrating Feminism into Undergraduate International Relations Studies

*The systems and institutions that exist in our country are strategically designed to maintain patriarchy and privileged masculinity. Complacency of the majority ensures that these structures remain intact. In this paper, I consider the exclusion of feminism and discussions of gender from undergraduate political science and international studies courses, and why it is critical for us to be paying attention to it now perhaps more than ever before. I suggest that this exclusion only helps to ensure that patriarchal dominance continues into the future. We have the potential to change by adopting a more curious mindset.*

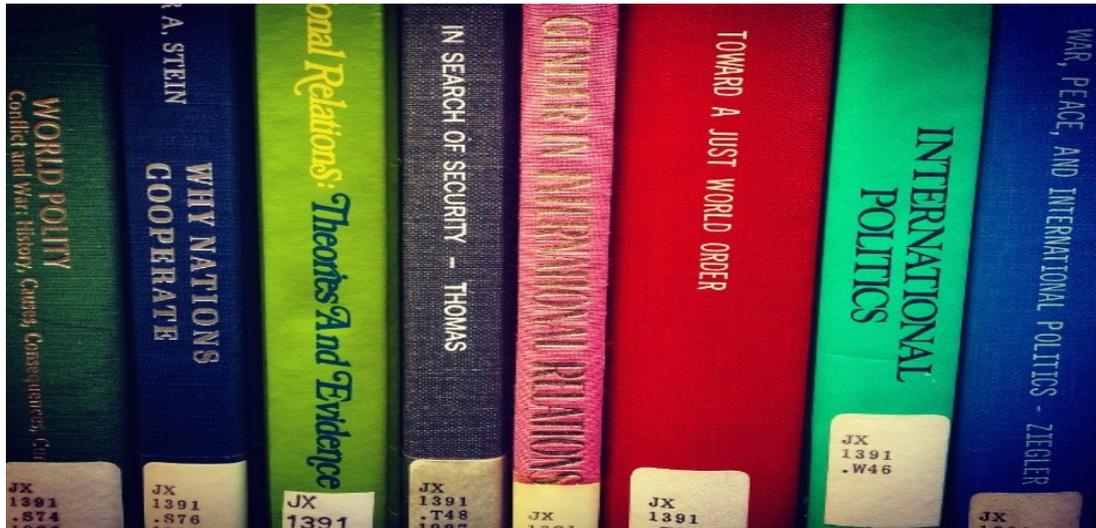
*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.*

Don't let the bastards grind you down.

~Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

## Introduction

The current year is 2017. The bastards are grinding away and patriarchy is rearing its ugly head in the United States of America. The systems and institutions that exist in our



country are strategically designed to maintain patriarchy and privileged masculinity. Complacency of the majority ensures that these structures remain intact. However, since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, groundswells have been shaking these foundations. There are now a number of visible cracks in the walls and ceilings, rays of light shining through to remind us that there are opportunities for even greater change to take place. *We the people, of these United States*, just need to make a more conscious and concerted effort to do so. And how do we do that? We become curious and critical about the world in which we live.

These efforts must start, at the very least, in our higher education

institutions. Colleges and universities are key sources of knowledge dissemination. When knowledge is withheld at the higher education level and patriarchy and masculinity are reinforced through teaching, our whole country suffers. This may seem like an extreme claim to make but, in reality, it is these institutions that are responsible for educating and preparing the next generation of American professionals. If this is what we teach, it will be what we practice. This cannot be underestimated, especially as we turn our attention to undergraduate political science and international studies programs. Graduates of these programs will go on to participate in government and lead of our country.

Over the last 30 years, feminist international relations (IR) and gendered approaches to foreign policy and national security have been gaining attention in both the academy and in government. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council formally acknowledged the importance of including women's experiences with conflict in security and peace decisions through Resolution 1325. There are currently 64 countries with National Action Plans on how they plan to integrate women, peace, and security into their domestic and foreign policy (Peace Women, 2017). On one hand, these National Action Plans are evidence of commendable progress. On the other, this progress is rather elementary and somewhat insignificant because many of the plans are little more than words on paper. Furthermore, a majority of the world's countries have yet to indicate any intention to pursue a National Action Plan in the near future.

It is easy to blame those in the federal government for failing to address gender equality in more meaningful ways. It is much harder for us to take a step back and consider how we, as citizens, have contributed to these failures as well. In this paper, I argue that one reason for patriarchal

dominance in government ideology and practice is the exclusion of gender from undergraduate political science and international studies courses. I reflect on my unique journey as both a student and federal contractor, and why it is imperative that universities begin paying attention to feminist IR in security and foreign policy courses. I examine some of the divides that exist within IR academia through a sample of public, comprehensive colleges in New York State. Using knowledge from transnational feminists and feminist IR scholars, I explore and analyze some of the reasons professors provide for not integrating gendered perspectives into their coursework. I arrive at the conclusion that the absence of this knowledge from instruction is due, in large part, to a general lack of respect for feminist thought throughout the discipline. The purpose of this paper is not to debate the merits of different IR theories, but rather, to think critically about why feminist IR is not being included in security and foreign policy studies and the potential consequences of its continued exclusion. The paper ends with a call to action.

### **Key Terms**

The purpose of this section is to provide clarification to readers from

diverse backgrounds on a number of discipline-specific Political Science and Gender Studies terms that I use throughout this paper.

*International Relations (IR)* is used to refer to the academic discipline that focuses on the interaction of actors in international politics. Theorists tend to focus primarily on the state.

*Feminist IR* is a subfield of IR that focuses on interaction of actors in international politics through a gendered lens with a primary focus on individuals and their experiences within the state.

*Foreign Policy* is defined as a government's strategy in dealing with other states (It is worth noting that "state" is used to refer to a country, whereas "government" refers to an administration. When governments change, foreign policy approaches and priorities change).

*National Security* is the concept that a government should protect the state and its citizens against crises. Sometimes this is achieved through displays of power, other times through peace.

*Subaltern* are people who are thought to be and are treated as subordinate, inferior, or of a lower rank. In this context, subaltern individuals are those who live socially, politically and

geographically outside of hegemonic Western power structures.

### **Becoming Curious, Gaining Authenticity**

My curiosity in feminist international relations began during the third year of my undergraduate studies. By simultaneously pursuing degrees in Political Science, International Studies, and Women and Gender Studies, I put myself in a unique position to consider the intersections of these disciplines. I loved studying feminist and political theory and found myself particularly intrigued by my National Security course. It became an exciting space where I could merge theory with practice, where I could analyze different threats to certain types of security (i.e. military, human, environmental, etc.) through the lenses of realism, liberalism, and democratic peace theory. When I returned in the fall of the following year, I started talking with a professor about the role of women in security and wondering what knowledge existed on the topic. To my surprise, and that of my professor, there was a whole school of thought and a number of government initiatives devoted to it. This discovery was both fascinating and frustrating. Fascinating because all of my interests converged in one space,

but also frustrating because I had not been introduced to any of it in my National Security or IR courses. I realized that we had learned about the effects of certain decisions on states, but we had not discussed the effects on individual lives in as much detail. We had debated a variety of international security issues, but considering who is and isn't allowed to participate in security decision-making processes wasn't one of them. And finally, I realized that we had read the theories of many prominent male IR scholars (i.e. Doyle, 1986; Fukuyama, 1989; Huntington, 1993; Waltz, 1995), but we hadn't even heard mention of any leading feminist IR scholars (Enloe, 2014; Steans, 2013; Sylvester, 2001; Tickner, 2014). This is where my questioning of undergraduate Political Science and International Studies courses began.

In search of what was missing, I started doing my own independent research on the connection between gender relations and state security. I was pulled in by Mary Caprioli's (2000) empirical research on gender equality and state conflict, studies (Anderlini, 2007; Gizelis, 2011) demonstrating that women's participation in peace processes leads to more sustainable peace deals, and the number of

different perspectives offered by feminist IR scholars (Enloe, 2014; Runyon & Peterson 2014; Tickner, 2014). There certainly wasn't a shortage of knowledge to explore. I found myself particularly interested in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the subsequent National Action Plans and initiatives that emerged from it. Again, I was struck with fascination and frustration. I loved knowing that there was work being done to integrate women into conversations about peace, conflict, and security, but I couldn't help feeling that, over the course of more than 16 years, very little substantial progress had been made towards fulfilling the original charge of Resolution 1325.

Beginning in February 2016, I was fortunate enough to augment this research by working as an intern and then contractor for the U.S. Department of State. This allowed me to witness and take part in foreign policy decisions at the federal level as they were being made. I had the opportunity to analyze how the United States government was implementing its National Action Plan and to contribute to conversations about its quinquennial revision. I observed how women engaged in conversations about foreign policy decisions and the

incredible outcomes of granting them access to this work. I also learned about the unfortunate consequences that can result from governments excluding women from peace and security efforts. While working at the Department of State, my colleagues commented that it was uncommon for a student my age to be so versed in the details of the women, peace, and security agenda. They wondered if I had been taught about it in school; I wondered why I had *not* been.

After leaving Washington, D.C., for my final year of undergraduate studies, I reflected on all of the knowledge that my studies and fieldwork had introduced to me. As a student, I experienced a complete absence of feminism from international relations until I became curious and started exploring it on my own. While working for the government under the Obama Administration, I saw women and feminism every day in the policies and approaches being taken across federal agencies and within various bureaus. I realized that there was a rift between the theories we were being taught and those that were being acted upon in practice. To close this gap, we need to look to where we learn about different theories, policies, and practices. Secondly, to improve the work being

done for women, peace, and security, people need to actually know that the concept exists. Where do theory and praxis meet? In the classroom. How do people find out that things exist? They become curious and then they share their knowledge.

### **What We Are Taught...**

Liberal and realist thought are largely considered the two theories that dominate mainstream IR academia. Both are rooted in three basic ideas: (1) states serve as the key actors in the international system, (2) states are selfish, and (3) the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no overarching, international authority (Mingst & Toft, 2014; Thayer & Ibryamova, 2010; Waltz, 1979). Where realism and liberalism depart from one another is how to approach and understand state relations. Liberal theorists maintain a fairly positive outlook on human nature and believe that cooperation between states will ultimately create order in the international system (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Fukuyama, 1989; Mingst & Toft, 2014). Neoliberal thinkers, such as Michael Doyle (1986), are responsible for popularizing a subdivision of knowledge known as democratic peace theory, which states

that democracies don't go to war with one another (Thayer & Ibryamova, 2010). Inspired by the work of Immanuel Kant (1795), the goal of liberalism is to achieve global peace. For this reason, liberal theory is often critiqued as being in search of what is most ideal or what should be.

In contrast to liberalism, realists claim to present the international system as it exists but are often critiqued for being too pessimistic in doing so. If the main idea of realism had to be summarized in one word, it would be "power." Realism is much more complex than that, of course, but ultimately it is concerned with states, power, and security (Jackson & Sorensen, 1999). It is primarily concerned with the struggle for balance and distribution of power. Hans Morgenthau's (1948) *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* served as one of the most seminal works in IR for decades and remains an important text on international politics as a struggle for power (Jackson & Sorensen, 1999). Shortly thereafter, Kenneth Waltz (1959; 1979) offered a neorealist perspective on anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system. Realists focus almost solely on power and structures, rather than individual [state] behavior, to explain outcomes, and tend to

advocate for conducting foreign policy without too much of a care for morality (Kennan, 1986). In 1993, Samuel Huntington provided an important perspective on the imminent *Clash of Civilizations*, in which he states, "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict...will be cultural" (Huntington, 1993, p. 22). Although it's been more than 20 years since the piece was published, it's clear that we are currently experiencing this very clash firsthand.

### **...And What We Are Not**

J. Ann Tickner (2014) asserted that until 1988, "it is safe to say that...the presence of women and gender issues had been completely ignored by the IR discipline" (p. xv). Since then, the field of feminist international relations has gained strength and the attention now being granted to women and gender issues in the international community and foreign affairs is unprecedented. Feminist IR scholars do not seek to completely reinvent the field of international relations. Rather, they ask us to be critical of the knowledge within it "because it is based on assumptions about human nature that are partial and that privilege masculinity" (Tickner, 2014, p. 8). Cynthia Enloe (2004; 2014) became one of the first prominent

feminist scholars in IR and began with a very simple question: “Where are the women?” No one was asking it, but she made the case that we needed to. Since then, a number of feminist scholars (Blanchard 2003; Steans, 2013; Runyon & Peterson 2014; Sylvester, 2001; Tickner, 2014) have entered into IR and offered important knowledge about challenging our understandings of power, security, and protection within the state system because they have been defined absent of the individual and gender relations.

Scholars advocate for disassociating women and femininity with peace when considering international affairs. Much of our language is structured in dichotomies that work in tandem with one another (i.e. male-subject vs. female-object) and support existing power structures. Linking women and femininity to peace (while linking male and masculinity to power) ensures that “female” continues to be seen as soft and weak (and male as hard and strong). Like most feminists, those in IR seek to expose this privileging of masculinity and androcentric ideologies in mainstream academia (Harding, 1986; LeSavoy and Bergeron, 2011; Tickner, 2014). Feminist IR scholars ask us to shift our focus from state to individual

and to notice the role that gender has in both inter- and intrastate relations.

### **Putting Feminist Thought into Practice**

In 1995, at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, Hillary Clinton famously declared that “women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights.” In *The Hillary Doctrine*, Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl (2015) note “linking women to ‘hard’ national security affairs...was the obvious next step after Beijing” (p. 21). In 1997, then-President Bill Clinton named Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, which effectively put a female at the helm of the federal agency that manages U.S. foreign policy for the first time ever. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council formally recognized the unique role that women play in peace and security, as well as the adverse effects they tend to suffer in conflict, through Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. Around this same time, feminist empiricists (Caprioli 2000; Caprioli, 2005; Hudson, Caprioli, Ballif-Spanvill, McDermott, & Emmett, 2008) began conducting quantitative studies that proved that state stability and conflict were inherently linked to gender equality.

Gradually, the Security Council released a number of resolutions clarifying and expanding the scope of their original declaration.<sup>1</sup> Member states were called upon to create country-specific plans on how they intended to implement the women, peace, and security agenda initiatives (United Nations Security Council, 2005, p. 1). In 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, proclaimed, “the status of the world’s women is not simply an issue of morality – it is a matter of national security” (Hudson & Leidl, 2015, p. 53). Within one year’s time, the Obama administration affirmed this claim and formally committed U.S. foreign policy to advancing women around the world through the launch of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (Executive Order No. 13,595, 2011).

Federal agencies took this commitment seriously. The Department of State, Department of Defense, and USAID are responsible for leading implementation efforts of the U.S. NAP within our borders and beyond. As the plan states, its “goal is as simple

as it is profound: to empower half the world’s population as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace” (The White House, 2016, p. 2). It focuses on five major themes, national integration and institutionalization, participation in peace processes and decision-making, protection from violence, conflict prevention, and access to relief and recovery (Executive Order No. 13,595, 2011). Some of the most visible products of the NAP can be seen in initiatives through the Office of Global Women’s Issues that seek to address women’s economic empowerment and education and ending violence against women, as you’ll notice in Figure 1. Men and women across government agencies were



*Figure 1.* U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announces the U.S. global strategy to empower adolescent girls on March 15, 2016 at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. Photo taken by author.

<sup>1</sup> See UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009); UNSCR 1889 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013); and UNSCR 2122 (2013) for more information.

equally committed to promoting gender equality because they all understood that “the subjugation of women is a threat to the common security of our world” (Hillary Clinton as cited in Hudson & Leidl, 2015, p. 3). Throughout the Obama administration, there was clear evidence of feminist thinking being put into practice, but this work was not emphasized or even discussed in my courses on national security.

### **Finding the Missing Link**

As I thought more about what we are taught and what we are not, I became evermore curious to know if, and how, undergraduate political science and international relations programs in New York State are integrating feminist IR and gendered policies into their courses. In search of some answers, I designed a small research project.<sup>2</sup> I reached out to six comprehensive, public higher education institutions requesting copies of syllabi for national security and foreign policy courses as well as

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of the research, please see: Schroeder, T, (2017) "Why Women? Gender Mainstreaming in Undergraduate International Relations Discourse." *Senior Honors Theses*. Senior Honors Theses. 174.

<http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/honors/174>.

interviews with the professors teaching those courses. Although my sample size was small and my results are only generalizable for the schools that were included, a majority of professors did not include women, gender, or feminism in their courses. In order to address the issue, I needed to also understand professors' reasoning for excluding gendered perspectives. Most of the professors agreed that feminist IR and gendered approaches were too far outside mainstream teaching and curriculum approaches. Participants stated that feminist IR in political science instruction lacks both presence and legitimacy within the field, and that, as a theoretical approach, it is still new and under development. Related to this, they each expressed that there was a lack of available and easily accessible scholarship on the subject matter. All three professors stated that they did not have enough time to teach “the basics” *and* feminist IR or the role of women in security. They also expressed that there simply wasn't enough student interest in the topic to devote significant amounts of time to discussing it.

### **Responding to Reasons for Exclusion**

How can we be interested in something that we don't know exists? That is my

response to the final reason cited above. We don't go into our courses knowing what realism and liberalism are or what they each say about the international system. We become curious and take an interest in them once we have been introduced to them. That is what needs to happen with feminist IR; if it were introduced, students would at least have the opportunity to consider it. The main two points that I want to focus on are scholarship and legitimacy. As far as available scholarship is considered, we have to consider it from two different perspectives. To claim that there is not enough scholarship or knowledge on feminist IR and women in security is absolutely false. Feminists have been contributing their perspectives to International Relations through both qualitative and quantitative research for over 30 years and it has been almost two decades since the women, peace, and security agenda was first introduced within international community. As if this is not enough proof of its existence, the U.S. has been integrating feminist ideals into its foreign policy priorities for more than five years and there are even entire research institutes solely devoted to producing knowledge on the role of women in peace, conflict,

and security.<sup>3</sup> This body of knowledge is available.

When we consider scholarship that is both available *and* easily accessible, we are faced with a different situation. I want to bring you back to the image of the books at the beginning of this article. When I went looking for textbooks in the security studies section of my college library, I found one pink book titled *Gender in International Relations* (Tickner, 1992). I was able to find other sources in a section devoted specifically to gender and IR, but the rest were located in the women's studies stacks. This is problematic. Feminist IR is as much a theory about IR as any other IR theory, yet it is relegated to gender-specific sections of texts in the library, which further obscures its visibility and reach as important to the IR field. As I explored the available introductory texts on international relations (Mingst & Arreguin-Toft, 2014; Jackson & Sorensen, 1999; Steans & Pettiford, 2001), the missing feminist IR problem goes deeper. Out of these three sample texts, only one (Steans & Pettiford, 2001) gives equal attention to *all*

<sup>3</sup> See Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security and the Institute for Inclusive Security as examples of this.

perspectives and themes of IR theory. Co-author Jill Steans is a leading feminist IR scholar, so this makes sense. The other two texts only mentioned gender in the table of contents or as a heading within a chapter. Jackson and Sorenson (1999) address “gender” as a source of a dissident voice and an alternative approach to IR as an academic subject (p. 59-61). The authors later devote approximately six pages to considering gender as a “New Issue in IR” to international relations (p. 257-262). I would not consider feminism to be a “new issue” today, but, at the time this textbook was written in 1999, it was still a relatively new theoretical approach. I call attention to this because it demonstrates the fact that much of IR continues to rely on outdated knowledge rather than seeking newer, more contemporary thinking.

The textbook by Mingst and Arreguin-Toft (2014) is a more recent publication and still does not mention gender or feminist IR in its table of contents.<sup>4</sup> Rather, readers will come

<sup>4</sup> Mingst & Arreguin-Toft recently released the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of this textbook in 2016. The updated version is slightly more inclusive of feminist IR theory.

across such topics under alternative approaches, radical perspectives, and in a nifty “you decide” section. This final section is the most problematic of the three because it implies to the reader that they get to decide whether feminist IR is a legitimate body of knowledge. For example, the prompt is: “Assume for the sake of argument that due to systematic exclusion from state leadership opportunities (or female self-selection out of such opportunities) Tickner is right. Would a world led by women be more peaceful?” (Mingst & Arreguin-Toft, 2014, p. 99). The language used by the authors is condescending and treats feminist IR as a joke. The authors suggest that, for the purposes of the exercise, students should assume Tickner’s work is credible, but they do not offer any commentary on why students should maintain that belief beyond the prompt. Furthermore, the prompt fails to accurately depict feminist IR theory because it associates women with peacefulness, which is one of the very social constructs that feminist IR scholars encourage us to challenge and disrupt. If introductory textbooks in the discipline chose not to include gender or do so in negative, inaccurate, and surface-level ways, it is valid for

professors to cite accessible scholarship as a challenge to teaching feminist IR.

The issue with textbooks also speaks to a larger issue in the discipline as a whole. As a discipline, International Relations is incredibly masculine and does not allow very much space for feminism to take hold. It is unfortunately not surprising that feminist IR theory is not considered to be a legitimate field of knowledge because Women and Gender Studies, as a discipline, is often met with skepticism throughout academia. This is especially evident in the latter example of textbooks and in the comments made by the professors in my study. The male participant in my study stated that he preferred "more realist approaches," and that feminist IR is "too idealistic." In other words, this professor values the privileging of, and power conferred to, masculinity in realist theories.

Epistemological issues have been challenging feminist IR scholars for over three decades and are sure to continue into the future (Tickner, 2014). Epistemology is the term given to theories of knowledge and knowledge production (Letherby, 2003, p. 19). When we think of knowledge, we must ask ourselves who has the privilege of creating it, possessing it,

and controlling it. Knowledge production has historically "been dominated by patriarchy and men have used their positions of power to define issues, structure language, and develop theory" (Letherby, 2003, p. 20). Because of this, the contributions of feminist researchers and the validity of their work are often called into question. Gayle Letherby (2003) distinguishes between two different types of knowledge – "*authorized knowledge* [or] the knowledge of the academy and *experiential knowledge*," which can be defined as "the knowledge generated from experience" (p. 20). Men are privileged in the sense that their work is considered to be more legitimate in the eyes of the academy, and consequently, they have greater authority than feminist knowledge that has been derived from lived experiences and constructed outside the patriarchal code.

### **Why Feminism? Why Now?**

For much of history, knowledge within the international relations discipline has been produced by men and for men. Much of this scholarship focuses on war and the state but fails to consider how the individual experience of war and peace affects state security. Feminist perspectives on international

relations, which account for these impact experiences and which suggest that women play critical roles in global politics, are therefore seen as less credible and less legitimate than traditional, male-centered/male-dominated knowledge.

The field of IR also, ironically, neglects to consider the role that colonialism played, and continues to play, in the international system. By focusing only on the state, IR has effectively silenced the voices of the individuals living the reality of what is “state.” Postcolonial and transnational feminist thinkers, such as Chandra Mohanty (2003) and Gayatri Spivak (1993), discuss how western feminisms tend to overshadow or silence the experiences and feminism cultivated by women in the developing world. While feminist IR scholars do try to bring these perspectives into the field, postcolonial and transnational thinking provides a unique lens for thinking about the dilemma of feminism within IR as a whole. In her 1988 essay Spivak asks, “Can the subaltern speak?” She considers the ways that western logics

have supplanted the local logics (i.e., ways of living, thinking, being, etc.) of individuals living on the margins in the developing world and concludes “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (Spivak, 1988, p. 105). In the field of International Relations, women and feminists are the subaltern. Just as Spivak (1988) says, this perspective cannot be heard or read and, if professors are expecting feminism to enter mainstream theories like realism, it never will be.

During the Obama administration there was a marked commitment to promoting and empowering women both domestically and abroad. Women served as some of President Obama’s top advisors (Figure 2) and he explicitly stated that he “made advancing gender equality a foreign policy priority” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). Despite the fact that women were present and actively participating in foreign policy decisions for the last eight years, professors were not talking about feminist IR and gender concerns in their national security and foreign policy courses.

Now, we have President Trump. Within his first 100 days, the Trump administration and Republican Congress have made it unbelievably clear that advancing women is not one of their priorities. Rather, it appears to be the exact opposite. This was first made clear only three days into his presidency by signing an Executive Order to reinstate the Mexico City policy, more commonly referred to as the global gag rule. This law prohibits international organizations that provide family planning services from receiving U.S. funding.

Other restrictive measures on women's health have been passed since, but what remains so jarring about the image of this Executive Order being signed (shown in Figure 3) is the fact



*Figure 2.* Former President of the United States, Barack Obama, meeting with three of his top advisors in the Oval Office. By Pete Souza, posted February 6, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQLbcLmBitE/?taken-by=petesouza>

that it is a group of white men smiling as they strip women around the world of their ability to access safe healthcare providers. The absence of women in this frame is similar to the absence of feminism in the IR discipline and undergraduate classrooms. Women are nowhere to be seen or heard now. We know, from a variety of empirical feminist studies (Caprioli, 2000; Caprioli, 2005; Hudson et al., 2008), that state stability is inherently linked to gender equality, that states with greater gender equality are more stable. This is precisely why we need feminism in international relations and we need to start paying attention to it now. We need it in our ongoing government



*Figure 3.* Current President of the United States, Donald Trump, signs an Executive Order reinstating the global gag rule surrounded by his advisors on January 23, 2017. From “Trump Reinstates Global Gag Rule to Cut Off Family Planning Funds Abroad.” by Becca Andrews, 2017,

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/01/trump-global-gag-rule>

operations, and we need it to be introduced in political science and international studies undergraduate courses.

### **A Call for Curiosity**

Over the last year, Margaret Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale* has become remarkably popular and relevant again. When asked if the dystopian novel was written as a prediction for what was to come in American society, Atwood (2017) responded that it wasn't. Rather, she said that she wrote it in the hopes that "if this future can be described in detail, maybe it won't happen" (Atwood, 2017, p. 6). The society she describes is governed by the subjugation of women, religious tyranny, and totalitarianism (Atwood, 2017). Unfortunately, these oppressions are becoming all too familiar in contemporary America. Our responses to these forces are somewhat different but also somewhat similar to those of the people of Gilead. Just as in Gilead, some American citizens do not realize what is currently taking shape behind closed doors in Washington, D.C. In Gilead, "there wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction" (Atwood, 1985, p. 174). In America today, there are a

number of people taking to the streets to advocate for rights and protections of all, but there are equally as many just sitting at home accepting and not questioning what's going on around them. Beyond the reasons given in official statements and through different media outlets, many have stopped asking why; we've stopped being curious. Feminist IR scholar Cynthia Enloe (2004) wrote about becoming "more and more curious about curiosity and its absence" (p. 2). She said that in becoming curious about something, we must also confront our previous lack thereof. And what we find, as Enloe states, is that "so many power structures – inside households, within institutions, in societies, in international affairs – are dependent on our continuing lack of curiosity" (p. 3). It is for that reason, that I conclude this paper with a call for curiosity.

*Students*, the time has come to be curious about the education you are receiving. I want you to invest in an exploration of your education and ask questions like what is missing, who is being silenced, and why are certain groups absent from what I am learning? Conduct your own research, advocate for your interests, and make your voices heard.

*Professors of mainstream IR theories and approaches*, I call upon you to become curious about feminist IR theory and the role of women and gender in the field. Seek out research by feminist scholars; consider how your own language and research is gendered; recognize the ways that gender is a prominent factor in government practices and policies. I want you to attend the sessions on feminism and gender when you go to annual conferences for your discipline and, most importantly, I want you to be curious about your students. Give them the chance to consider feminism as one of the many perspectives on international relations.

*Feminist IR scholars*, this is a call to become curious about new ways of being curious. Start asking why you are not being included and represented fairly in textbooks; consider ways you can move out of the safety of your feminist circles and into less accepting spaces where your voices are needed the most. Continue to penetrate the mainstream; do not give up.

*Textbook editors and publishers*, I call on you to become curious about equal

representation of *all* theories. Ask why and where feminist IR and gender is missing; do not allow the legitimacy of feminist knowledge to be up for debate if you are not going to do the same with all other theories.

*To those in our government agencies*, become curious about academics. Reach outside your immediate circles to better understand the knowledge being produced by scholars and then share how your policies align with or differ from their theories and research. Consider ways to connect with American higher education institutions and help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This is a call for *everyone* to challenge commonly held perceptions and seek new ones; to question the power dynamics that are operating between individuals and within the state system; to not fear feminism or women having a voice in the study or practice of foreign affairs; to not let the bastards grind you into a state of complacency.

This is a call to everyone to make America curious again.

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# A Feminist Perspective on the History of Women as Witches

*This paper explores the ways that women have been deemed witches throughout history. Salem, 1692, was a heightened time for witch accusations. The women accused left a mark on history and their identities became the mainstream stereotype of witches seen in media and pop culture. Transgressive women and women in power are called witches in contemporary United States as they were hundreds of years ago. The witch image is used to reinforce gender inequality and marginalize women who push back against our patriarchal society.*

## Introduction

On June 18, 2015, my girlfriend and I drove to Salem on a whim succeeding a five-day beach vacation in Cape Cod to celebrate my birthday. We stayed no more than three hours in that tiny town and most of it was spent finding parking and looking for a bathroom. As someone who has always felt a particular allure towards mysticism and new age literature I was expecting to feel the ground tremble below my feet as I stepped into the graveyard that held so many of the women and “co-conspirators” persecuted for suspicion of witchcraft. Instead, all I felt was the judgment of a nearby tour group as their guide scolded us for listening in without having purchased tickets. As we walked around, I was disturbed by how little of this small town was authentic. Plastic bobble

heads of green witches stared back at me as I gazed into the numerous spell shop windows that claimed to be the "real deal." The trip left me thinking three things: I could now check Salem off of my bucket list of places to visit, "Crap, now we won't get home until four a.m.", and why are we capitalizing on centuries of the wrongful persecution and brutal murder of so many women?

Even as time progresses, there are contemporary issues that exemplify the oppressions women in the 17th century faced. During the 1650s in New England, English Quakers began to integrate female spiritual leaders into their churches, believing that anyone, regardless of gender, could teach the divine truth (Karlsen, 1989). Puritans rejected such inclusion and branded female spiritual leaders as witches who needed to be exterminated. And still today, women who hold positions of power and mastery are methodically suppressed by patriarchal societies. In 2011, Julia Gillard was elected as the first female prime minister in Australia. A rally erupted. T-shirts and flyers were distributed with images that depicted Gillard as a witch: an old, haggard, flaming witch on a broomstick. This was a blatant display of misogyny and ageism. Gillard was slandered with

pejorative rhetoric such as "bitch" and "ditch the witch," a direct threat to her gender identity upholding an authoritative position (Petherbridge, 2015). There is a long history of women in power being discredited and persecuted that is particularly visible in early modern British America during the Salem witch-hunts. Contemporary witch-hunts exist in spaces where women hold positions of power or possess similar characteristics to that of the women who were deemed witches centuries ago. This essay examines the Salem, Massachusetts, witch hunts of 1692 by looking at ways the witch image can be used to reinforce gender inequality and marginalize women who push back against patriarchal societies.

### **A Brief History of Spirituality in British America**

The bible says, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18, King James Version). These words were a way of life for the Puritans living in New England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The people of Puritan faith lived their lives in total devotion and worship. Any occurrence, be it significant or minute, was believed to be willed by god. Some people, referred to as "cunning folk," possessed abilities that could only be explained by the supernatural. This was

not a rare phenomenon. In fact, it was commonplace to have many cunning folks in a community. They acted as community healers for the sick, were able to see the future, and could cast protection and good fortune for those in need (Godbeer, 2013). This was not seen as a threat to the church when practiced with good intention.

While most cunning folk practiced a set of rather benign skills, others were accused of using their supernatural abilities with malice by wielding power through the occult. This mastery was called witchcraft. The Puritan clergy believed that the people who practiced witchcraft were possessed or doing the devil's work. Any suspicion of bewitchment was automatically blamed on the cunning folk of that community. Due to a close proximity and familiarity the townspeople had with one another, it was easy to accuse a neighbor of witchcraft when situations went awry. People who grew sicker or died in the care of a cunning folk healer were considered to have been bewitched (Godbeer, 2013). It became precarious to practice healing of any sort as the paradigm of healers-as-witches took root.

Salem, Massachusetts, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was a heightened time in American history for witch accusations.

Any misfortune, illness, or deviance was foremost suspected to be a result of witchcraft.

### **Not All Women Are Created Equal**

The treatment of Puritan women (and women today) is rooted in biblical times. Richard Godbeer (2011), author and professor with a special interest in Early American witchcraft, explains,

Eve's legacy as the female prototype was double-edged: on the one hand, she served as a successful helpmeet in the Garden of Eden; on the other, she was Satan's first human ally. Eve was worthy of honor as Adam's companion prior to their fall from grace, but her disobedience to God at the Devil's bidding made her the first witch (p. 13).

The story of Eve, the original sinner, was projected onto women living in the Puritan society. Women were "worthy of honor" for being wives but deemed witches if they disrupted their functionality in society.

There was no discrimination based on gender when it came to having supernatural abilities and there are no records to indicate that more women than men practiced witchcraft. The discrepancy lies in the accusations and convictions of witches. This disparity can be explained by the compulsory gender norms of the Puritan society and

the women who defied them (Godbeer, 2013). In other words, the reinforcement of the strict gender roles (i.e., women as mothers, caretakers, and homemakers) made it easy to target the women who stepped outside of their assigned role. Powerful women and/or women who transgressed the boundaries of the gender binary were seen as an evil. Female bodies, as the weaker sex and descendants of Eve, were more vulnerable to “the Devil’s influence” (Godbeer, p. 11, 2011). Having little autonomy and agency, women were easy targets for blame.

Puritan women existed as a means to an end. The “means” being faithful wives, mothers, companions, and caretakers, and the “end” being obedient, devout Puritan children. Women who defied this role were seen as “Servants of Satan” (Godbeer, p. 397, 2013). A woman’s transgressive behaviors could only be explained by possession of the devil. The “good” women who remained subservient and holy were seen as “handmaids of the lord” (Godbeer, p. 397, 2013). The church considered women to be a “necessary good,” needed for the Puritan way of life (Godbeer, p. 396, 2013). Women were dichotomized as either the “necessary good” or a witch. The polarity between the two was

frightening in that it created room for women to incriminate other women. As Godbeer (2013) points out, “women as well as men internalized the claim that women were more vulnerable to the devil’s influence. As women accused other women, they participated in the negative assumption about their own sex” (p. 397). Women disparaging other women are common in patriarchal societies. The cry of misogyny is challenged when women accuse other women, but the reasoning to do so is because they have been indoctrinated with patriarchal beliefs.

Women who press down upon other women, often due to a false sense of superiority, are participating in the ongoing oppression of women. Not all women are created equal. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw constructed a multiple identity structure called intersectionality, which recognizes the multifaceted identities everyone carries, and how they play into privilege and oppression (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016). It seems abstruse that some women would subjugate other women, but their gender is not the only piece of identity at play. While race and sexuality are not discussed at length in this paper, many women who acted as oppressors possessed identities that granted them the privilege to be oppressive. In the

17<sup>th</sup> century, and still in contemporary United States, that privilege is often a product of white, heteronormative, Eurocentric appearances and beliefs.

The majority of Puritan women who made witchcraft accusations about other women were young girls (Godbeer, 2013). Having been raised in an arguably cult-like religious society, children were taught that disobedience is a sign of possession. Due to the Indian War that struck just before the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, many young girls were orphaned as a result of the devastations on their town (Godbeer, 2011). Being without a family, these girls had little to no promise of marriage and children due to the lack of a dowry (Godbeer, 2013). They were raised by family members who subjected them to servitude, as well as physical and psychological abuse. These rebellious behaviors could be considered warranted, but during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was seen as weakness that welcomed them into the devil's outstretched arms. Some of these girls were persecuted as witches. Others, in order to disguise their own unruliness, would accuse older women of bewitching them. Those children became known as the "afflicted girls" (Godbeer, 2013). It was the testimonies of the afflicted girls that began the

Salem Witch Trials of 1692 (Godbeer, 2011). It is unknown whether the afflictions were real or fiction, or some combination of the both. Regardless, the persistence of the afflicted girls to blame their behaviors on bewitchment only escalated the witch panics.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood (1986) writes: "her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison" (p.72). In this scene, a group of handmaids, women forced to relinquish all bodily autonomy in order to be used as slaves for reproduction, tell another handmaid that the gang rape she experienced as a child was her fault. An Aunt, a class of women whose purpose is to condition the handmaids to abide by their new place in society, prompted this admonishment. Atwood's novel is partially influenced by the Salem witch-hunts, and although fiction, the experiences of the handmaids exemplify similar experiences to those of the accused in Salem, 1692.

### **Ding-Dong the Witch is Dead**

Sarah Good, one of the first accused of being a witch during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, was a woman of endless misfortune. Arrested on February 29, 1692, she denied the accusations. Despite her denial, many testified against her in court and months later

she was convicted (Godbeer, 2011). In her diary she wrote:

We [Sarah and her second husband] lost our few acres, so that to live at all we had to beg. But I would not be servile, as a proper beggar must. I had my pride, and it was rubbed raw daily, until the neighbors felt that I was not humble, not grateful enough for their bounty. They construed my mumbling as curses, and perhaps they were right. How could I be unresentful, seeing others flourish who were no more deserving than I? (Good, 1692, as cited in Carrier, 1981, p. 154).

Sarah Good suffered. Some of her accusers were neighbors who had previously aided and/or sheltered her until they could not stand her bitterness. Mothers claimed that Good tormented their children by pinching or squeezing them. Others claimed Good choked, bent their limbs, hurt them in some supernatural manor, or cursed at them. Many villagers claimed to be victims of her apparition, an evil supernatural spirit, in other ways such as mysterious killing or sickening their livestock, witnessing her naked bloody body at night, or seeing her fly (Godbeer, 2011). Good was sentenced and sent to prison. Soon after, her four-year-old daughter, Dorcas Good, was sent to prison for using witchcraft as a method to seek revenge on those who

incriminated her mother (Karlsen, 1989). Dorcas Good's outlandish and deviant behavior does not seem unlikely for a child who had been victim to such injustice and suffering. Her situation was dismal at best. On July 19, 1692, Sarah Good was put to death by hanging (Godbeer, 2011).

The majority of Sarah Good's crimes were crimes against Puritan expectations. Good was defying her role as a proper Puritan woman. Her own husband testified against her, as he could not stand her aggrieved nature. She was angry. Life and luck failed her in devastating ways. More women than men testified against her, be them adults or children. Patriarchal beliefs about gender and behavior are the reasons women were divided into handmaidens of the lord or servants of Satan. Patriarchal systems within the Puritan society separated women.

Sarah and Dorcas Good were products of their environment; poverty, homelessness, and patriarchal societal pressures. Witches were not only a threat to men, but also a threat to the women who conformed to the Puritan way of life (Holmes, 2002). This summary does not give Sarah Good's story any justice, but it does exemplify how her resistance to conform made her a target for blame and accusations

of witchcraft.

### **What Do We Think About When We Think About Witches?**

Satire is the leaven that keeps pictorial misogyny alive and fresh (as fresh, that is, as a dried dog turd that comes up nice and slippery in the rain). In satirical mode, then, let's assume we can connect a history of misogynistic visual representation with current manifestations of gender and age discrimination. Then it could be proposed that it is contemporary women's lack of humour that prevents them from identifying a hasty fondle by a parliamentarian as an innocent bit of fun, or "Ditch the Witch" as just a pun.

-Deanna Petherbridge, *Witches: A History of Misogyny*, 2015

In contemporary United States, memes, virtual pictures with captions, are used to relay messages about society, the human experience, and politics. While memes are intended to be humorous, they often have significant meaning. Memes are effective in that through humor viewers feel more connected and aware of the people and society around them. When used to convey messages about a specific person or organizations of people, memes can be detrimental. The imagery is sent out into the vast World Wide Web to be seen as the representation of that

person or organization of people. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls that representation a controlling image, which is imagery designed to make inequalities natural and normalized by using stereotypes or already existing images to justify or reinforce oppressions. Collins (2000) writes:

As part of a generalized ideology of domination, stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning. Because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. They do so by exploiting already existing symbols, or creating new ones... 'Others' of society who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for its survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries. African-American women, by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging (p. 69-70).

The peak of the Salem Witch Trials happened in 1692, but witch-hunts existed long before then and all around the globe. While Collins (2000) was writing about black womanhood, the concept of a controlling image can be used to justify oppressions within any group of people. Women are

relentlessly controlled through imagery. The witch, a stereotype used to control women in 1692, is still being used in contemporary contexts. The implications of witch imagery are tacit; even without historical knowledge, the message would be clear.

Popularized images of witches look something like the *Wicked Witch of the West* or the beautiful queen that transforms into the haggard old woman from *Snow White*. Disney did not create these derogatory depictions of women; rather, they have significant meaning dating back centuries. Stereotypes, while dangerous and hurtful, do not evolve from thin air; they have a history. Most of the women who were seen as witches were widows or postmenopausal (Godbeer, 2013). Not only did widows no longer have to perform wife-duties, which in itself was seen as an absurdity, they also did not have a husband to protect them from allegation of witchcraft. Postmenopausal women were seen as witches when they “suddenly” could no longer bear children (Godbeer, 2013). The primary role of women was to produce and raise more Puritan children. When this could no longer be done, it was seen as a sign of wickedness. These women, in their barren-aged bodies, were undesirable, and they became the

archetype that is seen in imagery of witches.

The depictions of witches seen in literature, art, and media were at one-point interpretations of how witches looked. Physical attributions that correspond with age, socioeconomic status, or deviance were used as tools to incriminate women who fit into those categories. Sarah Good (1692) wrote: “As for being a witch, I looked the part - bent, haggard, leathery-skinned - though in prison I would bear my last child and watch it die” (cited in Carrier, 1981, p. 154). Good knew her appearance was a piece of evidence in the case against her. Unable to care for her family, herself, or bear more children, Good was a victim of her own body.

### **Contemporary Witch-hunts**

The notion that men are innately superior to women is built into the infrastructure of society in contemporary United States. The gendered hierarchy practiced by the Puritans, unfortunately, was not surpassed. Holding an authoritative and powerful position as a woman challenges patriarchal beliefs of gender roles. The contemporary denigration of women politicians as witches is rooted in a historical context.

When Hillary Clinton ran for the 2008 and 2016 presidency, the press and other media platforms vilified her. Pictures of her as an evil, haggard witch plastered the internet. The rhetoric used to caption the pictures were typically phrases from movies or books about witches. Just by doing a quick search on the internet, you can find endless pages of images that transform women politicians into witches. One in particular is an image of Hillary Clinton as the Wicked Witch of The West, smirking as she peers into her crystal ball that holds a picture of the Oval Office. The projection of the Oval Office in the crystal ball is important. Clinton is a woman who tried to enter a predominantly male space; a woman has never been President of the United States. Instead of recognizing her as an equal candidate, she was controlled by the image of the witch. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979-1990, was deemed a witch during her time in office and after her death. After releasing news of her death, “Ding dong the witch is dead” was a reoccurring response from her media opposition.

Julia Gillard, Sarah Good, Hillary Clinton, and Margaret Thatcher all have something in common. None of them

utilized an apologetic to counteract their transgressive behaviors. The “feminine apologetic” refers to subconscious or subtle actions that validate femininity (Ferree & Wade, 2014, p. 144). The example of women in sports is often used to understand the apologetic:

Her athletic ability received little comment, despite that being the ostensible purpose of the event. This kind of representation of the female athlete fulfills the public expectation that femininity conflicts with sports participation, conveying to both the athlete and the public that it is femininity that is more highly valued than sports performances. Hence the need for the apologetic (Wughalter, 1978, p.12).

For women to avoid scrutiny (i.e. being called a witch) she must remain feminine. Above all, our society strives to maintain gender order. When a woman enters a space that historically has only welcomed men, using a feminine apologetic allows her to be valued for abiding by the gender binary. Women in similar positions of public power, who push back against conformity, will face greater challenges.

### **Conclusion**

Adam, the first man created in God’s image, was the prototype for

humankind. Eve (the descendant of a rib) was the second sex (de Beauvoir, 2011), the other, the gendered, the original sinner. We see this depiction of woman as the other in Atwood's (1986), *The Handmaid's Tale*, and in other influential feminist writings such as Simone de Beauvoir's (2011) *The Second Sex*, which theorizes man as essential, and woman, his other. Sex role theory states that men and women must act the part that society has designated to their own sex in order to maintain and serve their function in society (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016). Do sex roles really date back to the Garden of Eden? In some ways, yes. The story of Adam and Eve set the standard for how men and women are to be perceived in society. Although societies, cultures, and contexts evolve, the treatment of women as the second sex remains.

Witch-hunting was a method to condemn Puritan women who did not perform femininity the way they were expected. Contemporary witch-hunts function the same way. What is the social gain of the constructed witch? The answer: Imagery of the witch is used to perpetuate gender inequality and maintain social order. But the social loss is devastating. The continued capitalization on the witch perpetuates the devaluing of women. In Salem,

Massachusetts, the wisdom of cunning folk women, healers, and spiritual leaders was taken from history. Contemporary society does not benefit the way it could if women were able to hold positions of power without being discredited or suppressed. For people like Sarah Good, who did not have the privilege of power, the social loss from the witch as a controlling image is different. Good exemplifies the ways the witch image controls women who are powerless. Maybe the knowledge and leadership of those suppressed women would have led to a society that has more empathy for marginalized and mistreated people.

Looking forward, women will still continue to be seen as witches. But like so many other degrading images or words, there can be a shift in the way they are understood. Queering the witch can prospectively change the way women understand its meaning. Instead of being a tool for denigration, it can be an identity for empowerment. My name is Maggie Rosen and I am a witch.

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# A Face of Poverty

*The circumstances are different for every individual who lives in poverty. Society foremost believe the information about poverty from people who have not experienced it, as opposed to the people who have. When people in poverty try to defend themselves from societal stereotypes, they are pushed back and told to know their place. It is as if we have zero credibility in our experiences living in poverty. The policies targeting people in poverty do not include us in the decision making. We are told to just get up and walk out of poverty. We are stereotyped and shunned from the economically privileged in society. If we are to one day become successful, we are still not worthy enough of the upper classes. We have aspirations, intelligence, experience, families, compassion, and most importantly we, have lives. People in poverty have stories that many could not fathom. This is my story.*

## Introduction

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.”

-Angela Y. Davis, as cited in Kelty, 2017

My sisters and I were waiting in the car while our mom was inside of the gas station. We noticed it was taking a while for our mom to come back, so my older sister went inside to check on her. Our mom had a gallon-sized Ziploc bag with coins that she was using to pay for gas. One by one she counted out the change anxiously hoping it would reach just enough to get her by for the week. The cashier was the first person to express his frustration. After his remarks, the people in line behind her started making comments

and urged her to get out of the way. My mom came back out with my sister and proceeded to fill up her tank. I looked out at my mom and saw the tears rolling down her face. I do not think she felt shame, but the intensity of the experience brought her to tears. In that moment, I realized that money was an issue for my family.

The United States Census Bureau (2017) places the 2016 poverty threshold for a household with a family of four at an average yearly income of \$24,563. Being a single mom in the state of Missouri with three children, my mom made less than \$15,000 a year. This made me question how many people in Missouri lived below the poverty line. In 2015, the total Missouri population was 5,901,975, although 875,704 Missourian adults and 277,687 Missourian children lived at or below the Federal Poverty Level (Missouri Community Action Network, 2017). If so many people in just this one state are living at or below the poverty line, how do children born into poverty get the same opportunities as a child in a middle or upper class family? The fact is they do not.

For most of our lives, we lived in low-income housing. It was not until people started making negative comments about the neighborhood we lived in that I truly realized we were

living in poverty. Throughout my entire life, I have been reminded that I come from an economically disadvantaged family. I often reflect on the judgments people have made about my family. I am not only writing as someone who is still poor, but as someone who persevered even when I was discouraged and pushed to the margins. My story is not one of those once-in-a-lifetime success stories that you hear about in the news or in movies. The truth is, I'm still in poverty, and I will continue to face economic and social challenges as I move forward. My story details some of the challenges of growing up poor and explains how being poor continues to be the greatest hindrance of my success.

### **Childhood**

My family's circumstances have a lot to do with my own story of poverty. After my parents divorced, my father got remarried and had my brother. Similarly, my mother remarried and had my younger sister. My mother ended up getting divorced again but even during that marriage, she was still playing the role of a single mom. My step-dad was an alcoholic, drug addict, and never kept a job. He lived with us but he was not part of the family; he manipulated my mother into enabling him. Throughout my entire childhood, my

parents were constantly in court fighting for custody of my older sister and me. Since my parents were always in custody battles, I moved around a lot. I attended seven different schools by the time I graduated high school.

In court, my parents frequently fought about who was the better parent and who had a better living environment, but the truth was, neither of them were exemplary parents and neither had a better living environment. I remember walking to my elementary school without a coat because neither of my parents could afford one. When I was in first grade, my parents were called because I came to school so cold that I was crying. That year, my babysitter, whose house we stayed at in the mornings before school, bought me a coat.

Throughout my childhood and teenage years, I noticed different ways my parents coped with being poor. My father would act like he had enough money to afford a stable living environment, but that was only to impress our friends, family, and the court. My mother never tried to deny that she was living in poverty. She knew it and she worked every day and tried as hard as she could to pay the bills. Just because they handled it differently does not mean one parent was better than the other. In my father's household, it

was a secret that we were living in poverty, even though it was obvious that we were. Putting on a facade to hide the fact that we were in poverty was something that I began to start doing myself.

### **Teenage**

I felt the most embarrassment about being poor during my teenage years, and would do anything to hide it. I would add a few dollars into my lunch account so that no one knew that I got free lunches. When friends would ask me to buy them food, I would be able to do it without them questioning my financial status. It took a lot of effort to keep this facade. Even though I knew some of my friends also had free lunch, I never let them know that had it. I felt that if I told anyone, they would pity or make fun of me.

Privilege is an invisible package that is given to us by society. A great example of privilege comes from Felicia Pratto and Andrew Stewart's (2012) study:

Members of powerful groups...do not realize that they are privileged because they don't have the social-comparison information to recognize the discrimination they do not experience..., the poverty they don't experience..., and the prejudice they do not experience..., but which members of subordinated groups do (p. 31).

Many privileged people do not

adequately understand that kids are made fun of for being poor. Something as small as getting free lunch can make other kids treat you differently. It might have been my consistent anxiety of having to hide my disadvantage, but I saw the ways people pitied or made fun of other poor kids, and I did not want to be a target.

My poverty cover-up was constant and I was always conscious of my appearance. I shopped the clearance sections at name-brand clothing stores and received used clothes from people just so I would be able to look like the other girls at school. I tried so hard to fit in and not let people notice I wore the same Hollister shirt twice in one week. One day I was sitting in class, wearing my new shoes that my father bought me from Walmart. A girl sitting next to me looked down at them, started laughing, and she proceeded to say, "Are those WALMART shoes? Why would you get those? They are so ugly!" After that day, I never wore those shoes again. The embarrassment that flushed through my body at that moment had an impact on me. I thought that no one would notice that they were not name brand shoes. I thought that I was safe from judgment, but I let my guard down and someone noticed. At 13 years of age we try to impress others to fit in with the so-

called "popular kids." But most of the popular kids were the wealthier kids in my school. Even at a young age, educational institutions reflect the greater society in that socioeconomic status influences power and control. I look back on this moment and can still feel the flush of emotions that I experienced. I wonder if that girl remembers what she said to me. I wonder if she knew how painful it was for me as she publicly shamed me for wearing inexpensive shoes. I also wonder, was she too putting on a facade?

The education system was a challenge to my lower socioeconomic status. The public schools in my hometown require fees that need to be paid for each student before the beginning of the school year. If those fees are not paid, the school issues a notice of the outstanding bill to the students. The registration fees usually total a minimum \$300 for each year. During those years, my dad or step-mom took me to registration and expressed agitation with the costs. My dad fought with my step-mom about the money for school, they did not have the means to pay for my education. I wanted to play sports, but the registration fees did not include sports. The cost of playing sports exceeded \$1,000 each year. I played sports during my freshman year

after raising the fee money. After that first year, I realized that I was not able to afford extracurricular activities anymore. Being able to get involved in extracurricular activities was a privilege I did not have.

During my freshman year, I became friends with a girl who I met through the cheerleading team. Her father owned a successful business in town. When I arrived at her house and stepped inside, I instantly became uncomfortable. She lived in what I consider a lavish home, at least compared to the places I had lived. My discomfort stemmed from entering a space of economic privilege, something I never experienced or had. Anytime she asked for something from her parents, she usually got it without much hesitation. I found myself not being able to afford doing the activities she wanted to do together. One day, during the summer before my sophomore year, my friend's mom picked me up from my dad's house to take us to the public pool. When her mom saw my house, I could tell she realized why I was never able to afford the activities that required money. She began to pay for me to do things like go to the pool, the movies, and more. I felt a lot of guilt and continuously expressed how grateful I was for her kindness and generosity.

Later that summer, I was riding in the

car with my friend and her mother. My friend asked for something, and when her mother told her no, my friend began to get upset and threw a fit. Her mother replied, "You are very lucky to live the life you have! You should appreciate what you have! What about Melissa? Would you want to live like Melissa has to? I bet she doesn't throw a fit when she doesn't get what she wants!" I often reflect on the embarrassment I felt when my friend's mom used my struggles as a tool to reprimand her daughter. I know her mother did not say that with malice, but she did make me feel that I was less of a person compared to them.

I believe she used my circumstances as an example because she knew her daughter would never want to be in my situation. The problem with her thought process was that I was born into my circumstances; I did not want to be poor. I did not do anything to become poor. I wanted to be able to throw a fit when I did not get something. Experiences like this made me alter my methods to more effectively hide my socioeconomic status. I rarely invited friends over to either of my parent's homes. After that embarrassing moment in the car with my friend and her mother, I began lying about where I lived. Since I walked to and from school, I occasionally had

friends walk with me. When we got closer to my house, I went up the steps to my neighbor's house acting as if it were my own because it was nicer than mine. I waited until they walked further ahead and quickly ran into my house.

In my junior year of high school, I decided to move out of my father's house to live with my mom. While the living conditions were considered better at my father's house, certain circumstances pushed me to start living with my mom. My mom lived in an income-based three-bedroom apartment. She worked part-time at a grocery store while trying to be available at night for my younger sister. Since I moved across town, I had to switch high schools. Due to demographics, the school included wealthier students. On my first day, I got called to the principal's office. I sat down while he asked what neighborhood I moved into. After I answered the question, he expressed that if I was to make any trouble at the school, I would be expelled without question. I was confused as to why he said this to me. I did not have many records of deviance. I had only gotten a few detentions and a couple in-school suspensions, which is considered normal at my previous school.

As I became older, I began to understand why the principal unjustly

reprimanded me. The administration had preconceived notions of my behaviors due to the low-income neighborhood where I lived. Police patrolled my neighborhood every day. Kids from this neighborhood were perceived as criminals or troublemakers. Leonard Beeghley (2000) explains,

Poverty does serve certain functions for a capitalist society. It keeps a pool of low-skilled workers available for jobs no one else will do. It keeps prices down, via the inflation argument. It also creates jobs for people who regulate and/or serve the poor. However, persistent deprivation also increases the chance that crimes will be committed, and the poor are found guilty more often than others, whether they are or not (Cited in Koepke, 2007, p. 3)

It is easy for people who have the privilege of never experiencing poverty or living in low-income neighborhoods to stereotype people who come from those circumstances. But this also makes me curious about how people who come from poverty perceive others in poverty. Do people in poverty stereotype others in similar situations? I do not know whether my principal came from a privileged economic background or not. But what I felt was the acknowledgment of where I came from and the preconceived ideas of what that meant. The more I was stereotyped, the more I became aware

of my actions and how they could be skewed into the stereotype of how poor people act. Social psychologist Claude Steele (2010) writes:

This means that whenever we're in a situation where a bad stereotype could be applied to us—such as those about being old, poor, rich, or female—we know it. We know what 'people could think.' We know that anything we do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it. And we know that, for that reason, we could be judged and treated accordingly (p. 5).

The stereotype itself is the only thing that matters to people; even if it is untrue, society still enforces it. This concept is all too real for me. Being a woman who comes from poverty, there are things that I do or say that can give others a reason to believe I fit the stereotypes. The wild part is, I too believed in the stereotypes of poverty. I continuously tried to not conform to the stereotypes, therefore I unconsciously believed in them.

Most of the time, I worked at least twenty to thirty hours a week between two jobs. One of my jobs was working for a fast food chain. Since I was at school during the week days, I worked nights and weekends. I usually got out of work between 12:00 and 2:00 a.m. Thankfully, I worked in walking distance from my neighborhood so I

did not have to find transportation. With my earnings, I was able to save up enough money to buy a prepaid phone. I was laughed at for having a flip phone in school, so when a friend was selling her outdated iPhone, I seized the opportunity and bought it.

That month I went to the nurse's office at school because I wasn't feeling well. When she suggested that I go to the doctor, I explained to her that I did not have health insurance and that Medicaid was not available to me. She looked down at my phone and said, "Well then how do you afford an iPhone?" I had to explain myself to her about buying it from a friend and using a pre-paid sim card. But why did I have to explain myself to her? Why do I have to even explain myself while writing this? Why are people in poverty not deserving of nice things?

I was 16 years old. Why was I being blamed for not being able to afford healthcare? It is as if she was saying that if I did not have that iPhone I would be able to afford healthcare. "The lack of funds and insurance means little to no healthcare for people, so the poor are less likely to prevent illness" (Koepke, 2007, p. 3). This shows how the system continuously oppresses people in poverty. It is not as if we can choose to opt out of certain care, we cannot afford it. In fact, 773,000 of

Missourians do not have health insurance and 420,000 of those who are uninsured are working adults (Missouri Community Action Network, 2017). There is a difference between the privilege to choose and being unable to choose.

So, where does the line get drawn in stereotyping people in poverty? We are vulnerable to any attack against our lifestyles. Victim blaming can happen in many contexts and what that nurse said to me is an example of victim blaming; she questioned my lifestyle as a poor person. My circumstances echo this,

...cumulative causation affects people of color and people living in poverty equally. The poor are subjected to inadequate school funding and then blamed by society for not valuing education. They are placed in substandard public housing in bad neighborhoods and then are criticized for not keeping up the property. They are denied job opportunities and then are shunned for not valuing hard work. They are denied the resources that would allow them to improve themselves and are then denigrated for not doing so. (Sernau as cited in Koepke, 2007, p. 8)

I am damned if I do and damned if I don't. I am criticized for trying to create a different outcome for myself. If I make one mistake while trying to do so, I am deemed unappreciative of opportunities. Then that stereotype of

poverty comes back into play and enforces the notion that I somehow deserve to be in poverty.

In the week of my 18th birthday, the housing authority taped a notice on the door of my apartment. The notice stated that since I was turning 18 the housing authority required that I immediately needed to start paying, and our rent would increase. I was to either pay the increased amount every month or I would have to do 20 hours of volunteer work. I was already working two jobs and I was in the last semester of high school. The last option given to me was eviction. That being the only feasible option, the day before my birthday, I packed all my things and had to figure out where I could stay. I could not afford the increase in rent nor to take off work to do volunteer work. In distress, I called a friend. Her mom was sitting next to her, heard what was going on, and told me to bring my belongings to their house. My friend's family took me in, gave me my own room, fed me, and made sure I had what I needed.

I did not try to impress people as much during my senior year of high school. I kept to myself because I was too busy to try and involve myself with other students. I was working full time and trying to make a living. During that year, I recalled how much I had

previously tried to hide that I was poor and how hard I tried to look like everyone else. I questioned, why did I try so hard? Every day I look back on how I was taught to hide where I come from. I wonder, if I did not have nice clothes to wear to an interview, would I have been less likely to get a job? Why do people who are poor need to look poor? But when we do, judgment is placed upon us.

“Passing” is something many from underrepresented races, classes, genders, and sexual identities do to try and fit into the cultural majority, to slide under the radar and not be tagged as different. My version of passing in society was trying to pass as economically stable. Especially during our teen to young adult years, we want to fit in with the majority. We try to hide anything that makes us different or places us out of the norm. At least, that is what I did. There is not a correct way to pass in society when you are poor. Even if you do have nice things, people still know you are poor and then try to expose your effort to pass.

My senior year was coming to an end and graduation was right around the corner. The same principal who told me not to make any trouble when I transferred my junior year, called me into his office. He explained that I had missed an inexcusable amount of

school to be able to graduate that year. Hearing that automatically made me break down into tears. I explained to him that I was missing school to go to work and help my mother with my younger sister. At that moment, I felt that I would never get anywhere further in life and that I would always be stuck in poverty. After he calmed me down, he told me that he understood that I had extraordinary circumstances and decided to excuse my absences. In return, I would go to school every day from then on for the rest of the semester. He told me that if I needed to be late to class to give him a call in advance so that he could inform my teachers. He asked me if there was anything that he could do to help me get to school on time. He even talked to my teachers and made sure I had breakfast even if I arrived late to school.

I was not a perfect student. I do not think anyone can be a perfect student. I skipped class a lot just like many of the other students. But the main reason I was showing up to school late is because I took my younger sister to school in the mornings, which started later than high school did. Even though I missed a lot of school, I never had poor grades. I made honor roll even in my last semester. I loved my classes, but I did not like being at school. Being bullied in school influenced my decision

to show up. Paul Gorski (2012) confirms,

It might be easy, given the stereotype that low-income families do not value education, to associate low-income families' less consistent engagement in on-site, publicly visible, school involvement (such as parent-teacher conferences) with an ethic that devalues education. But to do so would require an omission of considerable evidence to the contrary (p. 309).

I had teachers and faculty members who understood and ones who did not. Those who did not know my circumstances thought I was lazy and did not care about school. Parent-teacher conferences were very important in school, but since my mom worked during those hours that they were scheduled, I went alone. Some of my teachers were upset, and I could tell that they thought my mom did not care enough about my education. Some of them thought that I never told my mom about the conference. But I never missed a conference. Even though they were meant to be a conversation with a parent about my education, I wanted my teachers to know that I did care.

### **Adulthood**

After graduating high school in the spring of 2013, I was accepted to the university in my hometown. Fortunately, I applied for scholarships

and received financial aid to be able to attend. My first year at the university was all right, but I felt unhappy with my surroundings. I felt that even though I was in college, I did not have a plan for my future or believe that I could be successful. I never wanted to stay in my hometown. I saw friends and family try to move away, but they always ended up coming back because it was too expensive to live anywhere else. My mom always said to me, "Melissa, you need to get out of this black hole of a town. This place is so dark and depressing. One day I hope I get out." I know that if I were to ever move away and become successful enough, I would help my mom and little sister get out of that town. I always told my mom that once I became rich, I would buy her a little house in Hawaii for her to live in. The reason that I am in college is to make a better life for myself but also for my family.

During the summer of 2014, I decided that if I were to ever strive for something greater, then I would need to leave. I knew if I were to stay, there would always be obstacles in the way. So, I sold everything I had, except what I packed in two suitcases, and purchased a one-way ticket to Rochester, New York. Some people I knew who lived in Rochester suggested that I move there. They offered me the

opportunity to stay with them until I found a place of my own. Once I arrived, I applied to transfer to another college and was accepted.

There were a few challenges that I dealt with when I first arrived. The people who I was staying with stole all the money and my personal belongings. I was homeless and did not know anyone else in the area. I worked at a coffee shop at the time. I went into work the next day frantic about where I would be able to sleep that night. My co-workers overheard my phone call with my sister in which I explained what happened. They offered me a place to stay for a few days until I could find a permanent place to live. I ended up staying with one of my co-workers for four months. The fact that he barely knew me but was willing to let me stay at his place for free is one of the kindest things that someone has done for me. During that time, we became very close. We have been friends ever since.

### **College**

In the present day, it is my senior year of college and I am living on my own, working two jobs, and attending school full time. I am a double major in Psychology and Women and Gender Studies with a minor in Studio Art. My GPA is above a 3.0, and I have been inducted in the Triota National Honor

Society for Women and Gender Studies. Even though I have good academic standing, it takes a lot of effort to keep those grades. When I was younger, I felt that I was not as smart as some of the other kids, even though I had the same public education. One thing that I realized since being in New York is that the public education is much different from the one I received in Missouri. Every day is a challenge for me when it comes to my school work. But it was not just the education that I was lacking, it was my upbringing that hindered me from education in and outside of the classroom. *Ain't No Makin' it* by Jay MacLeod (1995), helped affirm for me that my education was different. MacLeod (1995) writes,

Children of upper-class origin, according to Bourdieu (1997) inherit substantially different cultural capital than do working-class children. By embodying class interests and ideologies, schools reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes and systematically devalue that of lower classes. Upper-class students, by virtue of a certain linguistic and cultural competence acquired through family upbringing, are provided with the means of appropriation of success in school. Children who read books, visit museums, attend concerts, and go to the theater and cinema (or simply grow up in families where these practices are prevalent) acquire a

familiarity with the dominant culture that the educational system implicitly requires of its students for academic attainment (p. 13).

Reading this helped me realize that I am as smart as my peers. The differences in my own success lay in not being given the same opportunities to thrive and learn as a child. I may try harder to catch up to my peers in college, but that is what makes me strive for more. I feel accomplished when I am praised for my work and when people notice my will to learn.

Privilege and oppression intersect place (where we begin in life) and identity, the social categories of race, gender, sexuality and ability under which we fall and are categorized by society. Even though I live below the poverty threshold, my privileges give me many opportunities others may never have. This is important to recognize because understanding poverty means understanding how power and privilege operate. Despite coming from what is considered a “rough” neighborhood, I am a white woman who lived in that rough neighborhood. I remember when the cops would patrol our neighborhood every day. They usually treated me kindly, but my friends who were not white were always questioned. As a teen, I did the same deviant things as

many of my other counterparts. The difference was that I never got caught and that is primarily because the police did not suspect me. People are not afraid of me. This is my privilege for being white.

Another privilege that I have is that I usually have a way to receive food and shelter. My mom had a place to live, even if it was not ours. She found a way to feed us. We did not go hungry. She might have, but my siblings and I never knew. She made sure we had what she could provide for us. I think about the people who have taken me in while I was homeless, but many people who end up homeless do not have that same opportunity. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016) reported, “On a single night in January 2015, 564,708 people were experiencing homelessness — meaning they were sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program” (p. 3). Not having to live outdoors or in a shelter, like many homeless people do, is a privilege that I acknowledge.

My life changed when I moved to New York State and immediately received full coverage under Medicaid. It was very easy to apply for, and I was instantly approved. I have always been given numerous obstacles when trying to receive Medicaid in Missouri. When I went to the doctor, the secretary had to

tell me that I was not covered any longer through Medicaid. I was never given a notice that it was discontinued; I just would not have it. This happened countless times. Trying to receive health insurance in Missouri put so much stress on my life growing up that I gave up and stopped applying. The healthcare system makes it so difficult to get coverage. I should have been worried about tests at school, not about receiving health insurance. The fact that I was approved and given zero obstacles in New York has made me recognize how much of a privilege it is to be insured. From experience, government assistance programs require recipients to remain poor in order to continue receiving support. For instance, if I were to make just \$100 extra a month, my assistance would be discontinued. So why should I try and better my life by trying to get out of poverty when my income still would not be enough to cover basic necessities? I might be able to earn more money that would make me ineligible for Medicaid, food stamps, and most importantly, financial aid, but I would then not make enough to cover my health and education expenses.

Throughout my college experience, professors assign material that frequently needs to be finished by the next class with only one day in-between

each. Most of the time, I am working at one of my jobs after class and every weekend. In reality, I do not have a day off. I am either in school, doing schoolwork, or at work. I understand that homework and college are a package deal and it is designed to help reinforce what we are learning in class. But students come from different backgrounds and income levels, and many college professors never even consider this variable when assigning out of classroom coursework. Heather Hollifield-Hoyle and James Hammons (2015) write about college students living in poverty, finding,

...while college and university practices and activities have recognized and embraced the diversity brought to campus by women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gay and lesbian students, college administrators, student-support staff, and faculty are still lacking in awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the challenges faced by low-income students (p. 30).

When I only have one day to complete an assignment, I find myself frantically trying to finish it or having to meet with professors to explain to them that I work a lot and I did not have enough time. If I do not work enough hours, I cannot pay rent, my bills, afford food, or even afford the cost of the highly priced books required for those classes.

I hear all the time that my health is more important than work or school. Being able to pay my bills and pay them on time plays a major role in my physical and mental health, and this correlates with my success in school.

I still face financial aid challenges. I have the privilege of receiving full financial assistance to cover tuition. But the only downfall is that I must include my mother's annual income when applying for financial aid. I am no longer considered a dependent of my mom and it creates a burden for me to get her information sent to me from Missouri to New York. I have provided for myself since the age of 15 and do not have economic support from my parents. Problematically, when I tried to get financial aid to cover courses during the summer, the financial aid office at my college explained that the only way I was going to get summer funding was if my parents applied and were denied a loan. I explained to the financial aid advisor that I do not have parents to do that for me. For summer financial aid, having my parents apply for loans was the only option. But that was an option that I did not have.

My adulthood experience is just beginning. I write this as a 22-year-old woman who has the privilege of receiving higher education. I think about all the people who supported me

emotionally and financially throughout my life. They are the reason I am succeeding today. While in college, I became a scholar in the McNair Research Program. It is designed for participants who are either first-generation college students with financial need, or members of a group that is underrepresented in graduate education and have demonstrated strong academic potential. The goal of the McNair Scholars Program is to increase graduate degree awards for students from underrepresented areas of society. This program has shown me that I am able to further my education and it has given me the skills to do so. I have many plans after I graduate with my undergraduate degree. After graduate school, what I want to do in life is still in question. A major focus for my future is to educate others across the nation on poverty. I want to help kids who come from low-income families understand that they do have a future, that there is a chance for them. I have so many goals I want to reach in my lifetime and I am just getting started. I am going to go from poverty to PhD.

### **Conclusion**

I am never truly satisfied with where I am in my life; I am always reaching for more. I am constantly planning my

future and waiting for the day that I can sit back and say, "I did it." When I hear others say that they believe poor people are lazy, I am confident enough to stand up for others and myself. I do not speak for everyone in poverty, but I will continue to dismantle false societal beliefs of what it means to live and learn as a poor woman.

People in poverty tend to work more hours and have more than one job. Usually these jobs, like most blue collar work, require a lot of physical strain, such as working in a factory where there is no air conditioning and large machinery that lets off heat. My mom worked in a factory and used to come home during her lunch break dripping in sweat. She would be so broken down after her shift. The next time you hear someone say that poor people are lazy, have them read this. It might not change their minds, but hopefully, my story can provoke people to think about why they stereotype people in poverty.

From childhood, to teenage years, and finally, into adulthood, I can advocate for myself in a way that I was never able to do before. I challenge our capitalistic society that works to keep others and me in poverty, down. While in college, I have thought about how it truly pays to be poor. I have state and federal supported healthcare, I am approved for full financial aid for

college, and I am in the McNair Program, which will help me pursue graduate level studies that will help me succeed in the workforce. I have been given opportunities like these that many do not have. But I sometimes worry about the future. What if I do not make enough money to take care of my family and myself? This is troubling, but I sometimes wonder if I should remain poor so that I do not have to worry about losing my assistance.

I am at a college that provides me the education and voice that I need to change my future. I have learned so much about myself, but I still have so much more to learn. I still catch myself justifying to others why I have a nice car, phone, or new clothes. I know I should not have to explain myself to people and yet I still do it. When people compliment my nice outfit, I always mention how much my entire outfit costs. Sometimes I do not even realize I am doing it. It has been ingrained in my mind that I must always be ready to defend myself. There is nothing wrong with explaining to people how much my outfit costs; it usually strikes a great conversation. But the fact that I automatically do it is the problem. The fact is, I am deserving of the things I have. I work so hard and I have come a long way from where I use to be. I will create change, and I will keep working

hard to dismantle stereotypes. As Angela Davis once said, “We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society.” That is exactly what I strive to do.

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# The Complexities of Being a Pro-Choice Catholic: How Religion and Politics Collide

*The separation of church and state has been indicated in the United States Constitution since the ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791. Ideally, this was intended to ensure that no one religion would receive privilege over another in the political arena, and that citizens have the freedom to practice their own faith without fear of persecution. In contemporary United States, religion has become a powerful influence in modern day politics and the line distinguishing church from state has become hazy. This is especially prevalent in the realm of reproductive rights. The fight for access to reproductive healthcare, such as contraception and safe, legal abortions, become more combative, as proven by the “pro-life” vs. “pro-choice” dichotomy. The implication that being pro-choice means you do not believe in the sanctity of life, while being pro-life means that you do not believe women should have control of their own bodies, increasingly alienates more and more people who are able to see the complexities surrounding abortion. Unfortunately, it is not just United States citizens that are affected by changes in policies surrounding family planning; it is also women in developing countries who have even less access to these services than we do. This paper addresses the complexities that come with the Catholic Church participating in politics, in addition to examining the way Catholicism and conflicting ideologies surrounding female reproductive health affect the United States and other cultures worldwide.*

## Personal Experience

I was raised Roman Catholic, attended Sunday school every week for a decade, and was confirmed in April, 2011. I still consider myself a practicing Catholic and try to attend mass every week. I struggled with my faith for a long time in high school and early years of college. The conflict began in my seventh or eighth year of Sunday school when the church I originally attended had to shut down, prompting many families in our congregation including mine, to start attending a different Catholic church in our town. For the first time, I began to butt heads with some of my Sunday school teachers and feel increasingly frustrated with the way the faith was being presented to me. My first recollection of “rebellious” against my faith was arguing with one of my Sunday school teachers about whether people who commit suicide go to Hell. She very adamantly asserted that while tragic, it was a selfish act and taking a life is the ultimate sin. I expressed that I felt like she did not seem to really understand the complexities of what she was stating or how isolating depression can be, even for the most devout of Catholics. The class ended without either of us budging on our positions, and it left me feeling incredibly confused and lost. The God I felt I knew and loved could never

punish someone experiencing that level of pain. My teacher made it clear that this is what Catholicism preaches; therefore, this is what I was expected to believe. I began to wonder where I fit into a faith that did not seem to be open to understanding varying degrees of mental health on an individual level.

While my increasing frustration with church school leaders is what started my struggle with Catholicism, it was not what caused my ultimate conflict. It is no secret that the Catholic Church takes one of the most aggressive stances against access to artificial birth control and abortion. As I began to identify as pro-choice, I felt I needed to step away from my faith. The Catholic doctrine makes it clear that contraception and abortion are unacceptable, despite the fact that the Bible does not directly prohibit either (Blackburn, 2011). In the New Testament, Jesus introduces the Law of Love and says, “There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12: 31). It states, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12: 30-31). The basis of the Catholic faith is rooted in these words, and beyond it, the Bible is written to allow for growth within a changing society, something that has allowed it to

be as influential today as when it was written. Unfortunately, many current religious leaders do not interpret the flexibility of the Bible in this way. This was not always the case. Saint Antoninus, archbishop of Florence in the fifteenth century, openly defended the use of early abortion in circumstances where the mother's life was in danger (Maguire, 2001). Pope Adrian VI canonized him in 1523. This shows that there is no one Catholic view on abortion; there have always been degrees of variation (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009). One can practice faith and still recognize the complexities of reproductive justice. It is in trying to stay true to both sides of one's identity where we find blurred lines.

The women in my life guided and influenced my faith greatly. I know several strong, intelligent, Catholic women for whom I have immeasurable amounts of love and respect. I understand why some feel issues such as abortion are undeniably wrong, because I once felt this way too. That said, these women allowed me to create my own opinion, and while we may not see eye-to-eye, we still feel connected in faith. This made it clear to me that it is not the conservative views of reproductive health that I struggle with, but the way it was thrust upon me by

certain authority figures in the church, and the way it is forced upon people who have no ties to the Catholic Church. Daniel C. Maguire (2001), a former Catholic priest and current ethics professor at Marquette University, has been a longtime activist for women's reproductive rights. In his book about abortion and religion, he touches on the complexities that come with Catholicism in politics:

For one thing, the Catholic Church is the only world religion with a seat in the United Nations. From that seat, the Vatican has been active in promoting the most restrictive Catholic view on family planning, although more liberating Catholic views exist (p. 31).

By participating in the United Nations, the Church is not only saying that there is only one correct Catholic way to view reproductive rights, but also pushing to restrict others' access to family planning. I would argue that many people with no ties to the congregation feel the influence and pressure of Catholic views on reproductive health and sexuality.

In the past few years, I have been able to come back to my faith, finding ways to balance my liberal beliefs with the scripture. I now realize the core of Catholicism and teachings of the Bible do not have to be at odds with the political and social beliefs I hold. That

being said, it does not come without internal conflict, as I know that my Church is still immensely conservative. While I love the basic values and beliefs of the Church, I grow increasingly more impatient with its political influences. As Catholics, our morals and beliefs are shaped with substantial influence from our own faith, something that could be said of someone from any religion or perhaps, a lack thereof. How can we spread God's message of love, kindness, and acceptance if we are simultaneously condemning thousands of people for believing something different?

### **About Catholicism**

Catholicism is a branch of Christianity deeply rooted in tradition with a tendency to fight against changing society instead of embracing it. Not all Christian denominations struggle quite as much with change. The United Presbyterian Church and the American Baptist Convention came out in support of birth control in the late 1950s (Goldberg, 2010). According to Goldberg (2010), several other prominent denominations also came together to acknowledge their shortcomings when it came to contraception: "Christian thought has, especially in the area of the family and its relationships, often clung to tradition

without taking into account new knowledge" (p. 49). Needless to say, the Catholic Church was not one of them. As early as the 1960s, the Pope announced that artificial contraception for any reason was "intrinsically evil" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993, para. 2366-2372). Because of the emphasis on authority and tradition in Catholic faith, no prominent religious leader since then has reversed their stance on contraception, despite an open and avid desire from many Catholics to do so (Ruether, 2006). In fact, only about 15% of Catholics in the United States have stated that they believe the use of contraception is morally wrong (Ruether, 2006). Despite this, conservative Catholics have led the crusade against contraception and those who support it for decades.

Perhaps the most controversial argument surrounding reproductive freedoms is abortion rights. Some denominations of Christianity, such as the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, allow it in circumstances of incest, rape, or if the mothers' life is in danger (Liu, 2013). The Catholic Church is known to offer none of these exceptions and openly denounces abortion for any reason (Liu, 2013). According to the Church, women should not only abstain from using artificial birth control, but they should

also under no circumstances terminate an unwanted pregnancy (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993, para. 2373-2379).<sup>5</sup>

Lacking from this conversation is the idea that most women seeking abortions actually take into account their morals and beliefs and still feel that abortion is their only option. Ann Furedi (2016) lays this out very simply in her book, *The Moral Case for Abortion*, stating, “That abortion can be a woman’s moral preference and the outcome of a personal and private choice, which she should be free to make for herself, is rarely considered and even more rarely stated” (p.6). If we truly want to eradicate abortion, the first step is looking at the ways society approaches sex and motherhood. Catholics are taught not to judge, but rather, to help and show kindness to others, something it seems is often forgotten when religion is brought into the political arena. Rickie Solinger’s (2013), *Reproductive Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know*, devotes an entire chapter to discussing the intersections of religion and reproduction with a chapter section that focuses solely on the Catechism.

<sup>5</sup> See also *This is the Faith: A Complete Explanation of the Catholic Faith* (2002) by Canon Francis Ripley.

There are a few groups who identify as Catholic and support women’s reproductive freedoms, such as Catholics for Choice (CFC). In their mission statement they say, “We are part of the great majority who believes that Catholic teachings on conscience mean that every individual must follow his or her own conscience – and respect others’ right to do the same” (Catholics for Choice, n.d., para.1). CFC does not pretend to speak for the Vatican, but instead, shows there can be diversity in the way Catholics view issues such as reproductive freedoms, abortion, sexuality, etc. The Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has openly denounced this group and what they stand for (Quindlen, 1993). They made it clear they do not believe CFC can be considered “an authentic Catholic organization” and continue on in their statement to say, “In fact, the group’s activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000). Simply put, the NCCB believes that because the CFC identifies as pro-choice, they cannot possibly call themselves Catholic. Apart from being an intolerant response, it shows that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is

unwilling to allow outspoken differences of opinion when it comes to abortion. It is also prudent to note that women are not allowed to become bishops or priests, therefore, the group condemning this behavior is made up exclusively of men.

### **A Global Perspective**

Religion plays an influential role all around the world. The Catholic faith in particular is practiced in all corners of the globe. Because of cultural differences, the ways that religion and politics interact can be different from how the two intersect here in the United States. In many ways, even with the disparities of abortion access and regulation on a state to state-wide<sup>6</sup> level in the U.S., an argument can be made that many American women still have opportunities to decide for themselves what they believe is best for their own bodies. Unfortunately, this is just not the case around the world. Goldberg (2010) emphasizes:

For people living in the world's richest developed countries, it can be hard to grasp just how terribly women are treated in much of the world. Sexism and

<sup>6</sup> For more information on women's access to reproductive health services across the United States and globally, see The Guttmacher Institute, <https://www.guttmacher.org>

violence exist everywhere, but political correctness or condescending romanticism about exotic others should not obscure the fact that women in the third world often have it much, much worse (p. 9).

As a privileged woman living in the United States, I have the freedom to express a difference of opinion from my faith, without worry of serious retribution. However, in 2006, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines decided they would withhold sacraments (baptisms, communions, confirmations, weddings and last rights) from anyone who used or supported contraception (Ruether, 2006). This is not an isolated incident; most Catholic hospitals globally are not allowed to carry emergency contraception. In developing countries, this is an alarming issue because the Catholic hospital could likely be the only hospital in the area (Ruether, 2006). As Goldberg (2010) said, "Overwhelming abuse and devaluation of women, especially in poor countries, is the biggest human rights crisis in the world today" (p.11). Instead of religion liberating and supporting women, it is inadvertently oppressing them and their agency.

When it comes to rape victims, the Church is no less forceful in their stance against abortion. In Nicaragua, a

nine-year-old girl, Rosita, was raped and impregnated by her stepfather (Goldberg, 2010). The Catholic Church was very much involved in trying to ensure she did not receive an abortion, taking up the argument that this baby was a blessing from heaven (Goldberg, 2010). This is an opinion often vocalized by the Catholic Church to counter the argument that abortion is allowed in cases of rape. Rosita's case was no different. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "Human life is sacred" (para. 2258), but by putting an emphasis on the life of the fetus over the life of Rosita, what are we saying about Rosita's life? Is the life of a nine-year-old girl less sacred than that of her fetus? Does it truly matter that she can physically carry a healthy child to term if it comes as a steep cost to her emotional wellbeing? In addition to all of this, the conversation was almost entirely focused around her potential abortion, rather than outrage at the abuse she had experienced. As a Catholic, I do not believe we can boast about valuing life while simultaneously showing a disregard for the lives of women who may choose to have an abortion.

Maguire (2009) discusses another example similar to the story of Rosita, telling the story of a Catholic doctor who had to perform an emergency

abortion in order to save a pregnant woman's life. The story was brought to Father Bernard Haring, a Redemptorist Moral Theologian, after a priest told the doctor that he made the wrong choice. Father Haring disagreed with the doctor on the stance that both the fetus and the mother would have died had the surgery not been performed. Maguire (2009) wrote, "Fr. Haring asked: by what thinking could the fetus have such a right to life that it could kill both itself and the woman by exercising it? Such rights, he said, do not exist" (para.12). By insinuating that the life of the fetus is more important than that of the woman, we are diminishing her worth. Women are not just incubators for creating children; they are living, breathing humans. Susan Bordo's (2003) work looks at how defining women by their reproductive capacity can negate their contributions to society beyond reproduction. Yes, with pregnancy comes responsibility, but it should not be at the expense of a woman's life.

### **Religion in U.S. Politics**

Despite efforts from conservative Catholics, not all Catholic politician's platforms adhere to the Church's teachings. Democratic politicians such as Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden are both open about their Catholic faith and the

fact that they support access to contraception and access to safe and legal abortions. Biden has stated that he does believe life starts at conception; however, he doesn't believe he has the right to impose that view on someone else. This is a noteworthy example of how faith can shape your morals and values for your own life without hindering the recognition of alternative faiths and belief systems unique to different social and religious groups (Berenson, 2015). Pelosi received abundant backlash from several bishops after stating in an interview that in traditional Catholic teaching, life begins at three or four months of pregnancy rather than the time of conception. Maguire (2009) supported Pelosi, explaining that even God allowed some "evils" in cases where greater evils would arise as a result. He articulates this well saying:

Today a Catholic legislator who thinks all abortions are evil could still vote to sustain its legality since banning legal abortion leads to illegal abortions with a high loss of life, especially for poor women. History proves that criminalizing abortion does not decrease the number of abortion but does increase morbidity and mortality. (Maguire, 2009, para.4)

Reducing abortion to a question on when life begins is reducing the conversation entirely.

Catholics who support the right to choice are simply saying yes, abortion is tragic, but it is also more complicated than the "pro-life" vs. "pro-choice" dichotomy. Jeannie Ludlow's (2008) article "Sometimes It's a Child and a Choice: Toward an Embodied Abortion Praxis," focuses on how neither side of the abortion argument acknowledges the concerns of the other. Ludlow (2008) points out that while, "...much feminist discourse around abortion emphasized its benefits to the exclusion of its complexities," adversely, there should be "...consideration of both fetus and woman, not fetus at the expense of woman" (p. 30). The labels "pro-life" and "pro-choice" limit the conversation surrounding abortion, creating a "them vs. us" atmosphere. This only leads to furthering the battle lines between the two and leaving many people unsure where they stand. In overlooking the complexities of abortion, not only are we preventing important conversations, but we are failing women.

This conversation is not limited to democratic political leaders. Republican and Catholic George Pataki, who served as Governor of New York, was pro-capital punishment and pro-choice, two issues the Catholic Church strongly opposes. In 2013 there were six Catholic judges on the Supreme Court:

John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Anthony Kennedy, Antonin Scalia, Sonia Sotomayor and Clarence Thomas (Berenson, 2015). Two years later in 2015, the court ruled 5-4 that same-sex marriage is legal in every state, something the Catholic Church has advocated against. Justices Kennedy and Sotomayor both fell in the majority, showing that religion does not always dictate political decision (Berman, 2015). Social and political views are personal to everyone; it is possible to maintain your faith while also supporting issues such as same-sex marriage or a woman's right to her reproductive health.

### **Conclusion**

I do not want to pretend to have all answers; reproductive issues such as abortion are incredibly complex. There is no black and white solution to this. In a way, it is easy for me to assert that the Church should not be participating politically, but what about all the good that they do alongside this? They advocate for the poor and homeless and for peace instead of war. This care and compassion for the struggling is part of the core of Catholic faith. So why is it that when it comes to reproductive health, the Church's political agenda can feel like an attack to many women? As I struggled with this question,

someone close to me recently laid it out very simply. She said, "The Church's position in the case of refugees or the poor is about dignity, but in the case of abortion is about preserving 'life' even at the expense of a women's dignity. It strips women – never men – of their ability to exercise moral judgment" (S. Smith<sup>7</sup>, personal communication, April 24, 2017). It is as if we do not trust women to know what is best for themselves or their fetus. This need to control women's fertility feels like a desire to control women themselves, without regard for their dignity or needs.

There is not one "Catholic view" on contraception and abortion; it varies from person to person. Many Catholics support individual choice and many do not. Neither point of view makes the other a bad Catholic. This is obvious in my life when it comes to all the women who have supported me in my faith. Our opinions on issues of reproductive nature vary from liberal to conservative, but the love and respect for each other remains. We are all Catholic and connected by essence of our faith; to love and show kindness to others. When the Church tries to enforce conservative views as the only Catholic way to practice, it is not doing justice to

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym

the diversity of life and its own congregation.

There is no denying that the physical and emotional consequences of religious influence in politics are felt all around the world in varying degrees. There are countless arguments as to why the Catholic Church as an institution should not be participating

in politics but perhaps the most important one of all is that it should be focused on spreading God's message of love and acceptance. It is important to remember how to respect others and show compassion for all kinds of people, not just the ones who fit a very specific and increasingly unrealistic prototype.

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# Coming out in Asian American Culture

*The purpose of this project is not to speak on the experience of all lesbian Asian Americans, but only the experiences of three lesbian Asian Americans: Sam, Jesse, and Sophie. The experiences of three individuals cannot be applicable to all lesbian-identified Asian Americans as their stories do not provide full understanding of the influential culture sanctions. This essay is merely an attempt to bring the invisible stories of these three women to the forefront, thus allowing the stories to become accessible so others can recognize that identifying as lesbian is not a betrayal of Asian American culture and identity. “Coming out” can manifest in whatever way feels natural, and the bond of family can help assuage the internal struggle of desegregating sexual and racial identity.*

## Introduction

As visibility of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) community and culture increases, the importance of understanding lesbian Asian American identity increases as well. The concept of “coming out” is an intricately interwoven aspect of American culture. The pervasiveness of American culture manipulates cultures brought from other countries as people emigrate. Not only does American culture dominate and absorb appealing or sellable aspects of other cultures, it forces those who wish to maintain their traditions or culture to manipulate, modify, or adapt their traditions or culture so it may be acceptably practiced in America.

The increased visibility of LGBTQ identities affects those who are considered a part of the racial majority. In American LGBTQ culture, there is a heavy importance placed on “coming out of the closet.” The action of “coming out” can be simple or difficult, as many factors, such as familial ties, media, peers, and autonomy, can be influential. Because those who identify as Asian American are often labelled as the “other,” it is important to understand how the term “coming out” is defined, as well as how Asian American identities are formed in relation to a lesbian identity. In this paper, I interview three cis-gendered<sup>8</sup> women: Sam, Jesse and Sophie<sup>9</sup>. They are all first generation, born in America, and identify as lesbian and some variation of Asian American.

### Coming Out

“Coming out is a complicated, life-long process” (Pak, 2011, p. 339). This can be understood to be true regardless of ethnic identification. Although coming out is a process, there is a standard sought-after result. Author George Chauncey (1994), in *Gay New York*,

<sup>8</sup> Born with the anatomy of the gender they identify with.

<sup>9</sup> Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality.

claims it was not until the 1960s that the term “coming out” was applied to gay society. Until then, “coming out” was used to reference debutants, or young women, coming out as being of courting age (Chauncey, 1994). The term “coming out” seems fitting and applicable to LGBTQ society. When people come out, they are “coming out” to LGBTQ society.

In the article, “Ethnic/Racial Differences in the Coming-Out Process of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: A Comparison of Sexual Identity Development Over Time”, authors Margaret Rosario, Eric Schrimshaw, and Joyce Hunter (2004) break the term “coming out” into two parts: “identity formation” and “identity integration.” They define “identity formation” as the period when LGB individuals “become aware of their developing sexual orientation, and begin to question whether they may be LGB” (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004, p. 216). As a result, they “explore their emerging sexual LGB identity by engaging in sexual activities” (p. 216). This precedes “identity integration,” or when one accepts their LGB identity. Examples of one accepting their LGB identity include: “adopting more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, feel more comfortable with others knowing about their sexual

identity, disclose that identity to others, and become involved in LGB social activities” (Rosario et al., p. 216). This process seems linear and restricting; in other words, not everyone engages in sexual behavior as a means to explore their homosexual identity. Essentially, coming out is about grounding one’s sexual identification in some form of deviation from heterosexuality, and can be understood to be a process that unfolds over time.

### **Asian American Identity**

“Asian American” remains an umbrella term as Asia contains various countries, locations, and cultures. This is important to remember as the Asian American identity is researched and becomes more visible. The cultural representation or experience of one or a few people who are classified as “Asian American” can lead to the misrepresentation, and therefore, wrongful generalization of all who can identify as Asian American. There are commonalities among Asian American and racial minority existence.

Tradition and family continue to be a strong influence to the foundation of many Asian American cultures. In northeastern Asia, Confucianism taught the lesson of putting the needs of others before one’s own needs and desires (Ho, 1994/2004). Although

many are not practicing Confucianism, Confucian beliefs have influenced the inherent perspectives of etiquette and propriety for generations. Because of the socioeconomic status of many in Asia, children are often needed to help support the family. Therefore, “the independence of the child is not functional (thus not valued), because an independent child may leave the family and look after his or her own self-interest when he or she grows up” (Kagitcibasi, 2005, p. 411).

Despite being born in America, many Asian American children have parents who were born and raised in Asian countries. This usually means the children will be raised straddling two cultures -- the culture of their parents, and the culture of their country. Western culture values the pursuit of the individual and, since suffrage, has made strides to empower the individuality of women. Traditional Asian culture grounds a woman’s identity in the relationships she has with men, father, brother, husband, son, and in her familial roles (Chan, 1987). When a woman merges lesbian identity with Asian American identity, she can be perceived as deviating from her traditional Asian culture. This is because “homosexuality is perceived as the result of decadent, Western urban society” (Tremble, Schneider, &

Appathurai, 1989, p. 260). It is assumed that the woman is attempting to “fit into white culture” (Tremble et al., 1989, p. 260). In a sense, she is abandoning her racial identity in pursuit of developing her sexual identity. Often, this is irreconcilable. However, studies have shown that the pressure to maintain family, which Asian Americans lesbians have internalized, also is true for the entire family unit (Tremble et al., 1989). In many cases, the family will aim to reintroduce the lesbian-identified woman into the family because the need to maintain the familial bond is stronger than the need for the woman to maintain a traditional gender role.

### Who are They?

#### Sam:

On a windy day in winter I met with Sam. She is 25 years of age. She was born, raised, and currently lives in Rochester, NY. While she maintains a close relationship with her mother, she and her father are rather distant. Sam’s mother is half Chinese, half Vietnamese. Both her mother and father emigrated from Vietnam. When asked, Sam identifies as a cis-gendered Asian American lesbian. Between the ages of nine and 19, Sam started to question her heterosexuality. At the age of nine, Sam met a girl online who

confided her love for another girl. At this point, Sam realized it was possible to be interested in girls. Although this experience did not cause Sam to think of herself as a lesbian, it did inspire her to question the heteronormative rules of sexuality imposed upon her.

She began to research homosexuality online through chats and forums. She came out to her online friends before coming out to anyone else. During this time, Sam became acutely aware of the stance her father and brothers had on homosexuality. When Sam was young, her brothers speculated about her sexuality. Because they thought she was lesbian, they would beat her up. She also grew accustomed to homophobic remarks from her father and brothers. Sam says these experiences influenced her discomfort in being open about herself with her family. Despite this, they did not hinder her from acknowledging her sexuality. However, they helped frame her belief that homosexual relationships should be



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normalized and not need proclamation. Today, Sam wonders why anyone should care who she is in a relationship with (personal communication, 2017).

### Jesse:



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Writing, journaling, and literature have always been grounding points for Jesse. Jesse is 24 years of age. Her birth parents are divorced and remarried. For the sake of this paper, her stepfather is referred to as “father” and her birthfather is referred to as “birthfather.” Her mother emigrated from Korea. Her birthfather, and many generations of his family, were born in America. When Jesse’s mother was with her birthfather, Jesse recalls her mother striving and pushing to provide better lives for the family. Her mother used *Hooked on Phonics* so that Jesse could become fluent in English. *Hooked on Phonics* delivers educational materials to facilitate learning the English language through phonetics. Her mother provided the main source of income,

while Jesse’s birthfather was content filling the role of stay-at-home dad. Therefore, her mother made the majority of the financial decisions.

Her mother imposed the expectations of an Asian household, but the stereotypical role of “submissive Asian housewife” was not fulfilled. There was an understood expectation that Jesse would succeed academically. Despite this, Jesse’s mother would not ask for Jesse’s report card. Instead, the message of Jesse’s academic success was so ingrained in her that she would automatically present her report card to her mother. After Jesse’s mother and birthfather split, her mother married another man. He had emigrated from Vietnam. Jesse recalls the behavioural changes that occurred for her mother. Jesse’s mother opened a restaurant however, it was in her father’s name. There was a transitional period. Jesse recalls much of the financial responsibility being transferred to her father while her mother took on a supportive role. Despite this, her mother was still very involved in the labors of the restaurant. Growing up, Jesse cannot recall a time when her mother made homophobic comments. In fact, Jesse recalls an incident when her mother commented on a very attractive woman who came into the

restaurant her family owned (personal communication, 2017).

**Sophie:**

“There is something soothing about being immersed in water. To feel yourself glide though the water. Faster and smoother. Swimming is why I’m still here.” Sophie jokes that she has been swimming since before she would walk. She never claims to be the fastest or best swimmer, just that she can out-swim most people. She is 29 years old and relocated to New York some years ago because of her partner at the time. They have since split however; she remains here to test herself. She says staying here is the hardest thing she has ever done. She has a very close relationship with her family and talks to her mother every day. She makes a point to visit her family yearly and sends photo messages often. Life was not always this easy. Sophie vividly recalls almost 10 years of navigating a strained relationship with her family.



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Her father was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to Hawaii when he was a teenager. He did not move to the mainland until college, and recalls having close friendships with native Hawaiians and other Chinese-born children who had emigrated with their family. Despite this, he was taught to renounce his Chinese heritage and told that America is where one could find power. Sophie’s father was taught to blend in so he could beat the Americans at their own game. To be successful, he was to speak English and excel at his studies. Sophie says there are many ways her father is obviously and behaviourally Americanized. He prefers to speak English and readily admits his wife is more financially savvy, thus relinquishes all his earnings to her, and typically defers major household decisions to his wife. These are just a few ways Sophie recognizes her father is not “typically Chinese.” But as they both age, she recognises the subtle ways that he maintains his Chinese culture. It is less about his behaviour and more about his perspective.

Sophie says that most people think Chinese fathers raise their daughters to be useless, but she points out it is important to understand where in China that person was born and what the socioeconomic status of the family is. Her father’s family worked for the

government. Sophie believes this moulded his perspective that she should not only be successful academically, but she should be self-sustaining. He taught her to change her car oil, build a fire, read, think strategically about her spending, and most importantly, drink quality whiskey.

Sophie's mother was born in Mexico. Her family emigrated when she was 11 years old. She was raised by her grandmother and grew up surrounded by her aunts, uncles, and cousins. She speaks Spanish fluently and often cooks Spanish food. Sophie and her mother talk frequently with her mother's family. Growing up, Sophie's family never mentioned anything pertaining to homosexuality. In fact, Sophie is certain she had not heard the terms homosexual or lesbian until she was in high school (personal communication, 2017).

### **Only White People are Lesbian**

Much research has been done on the Asian American identity and lesbian identity from a theoretical framework that is influenced by western culture. Intersectionality covers much ground, however for this paper, it is the theoretical framework that establishes the existence of and studies "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities" (McCall,

2005, p. 1771). In other words, intersectionality encourages research to recognize that people experience life in ways that touch upon their identity. In any situation, a person perceives what is happening based on their multifaceted identity. Gender, race, class, age, sexuality, etc., all have an influence. This is important to apply to lesbian Asian American identity. The way one develops sexual identity will be influenced by their racial identity, just as the way one develops racial identity will be influenced by their sexual identity.

All three participants expressed an internalized impression that homosexuality is a "Western" concept or lifestyle not applicable for Asian Americans. This sentiment is evident in other research as well. Tremble et al. (1989) state, "homosexuality is perceived as the result of decadent, Western urban society" (p. 260). This is problematic as lesbian Asian Americans identity exists. As stated above, it is assumed that Asian American women will live their lives finding meaning from their roles according to their families and the men they will marry (Chan, 1989). Despite this, all three women in my study expressed that their families imposed upon them a pressure for academic success. They did not understand academic success as a means of empowerment, but as a means

of “saving face” or their contribution of bringing honor to the familial unit. Pursuing education is acceptable because it can be utilized for financial success within the American culture, whereas embracing their lesbian identity would be received with negative reaction because it does not directly lead to financial success. Instead, it is seen as an attempt to “fit into white culture” (Tremble et al., 1979, p. 260). In a sense, all three women believed they would abandon their racial identity in pursuit of developing their sexual identity.

**Sam:**

“Being white and lesbian is simple, the only problem with the person is they are lesbian. But being Asian and lesbian, there’s two things wrong with you. You know what I mean?” Sam jokes (personal communication, 2017). She tells me that not only is the person lesbian, but as an Asian American, she is betraying her culture and heritage.



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Because there are limited examples of lesbian Asian or Asian American representation, one must forge her own path to consolidate her identities. Sam believes developing a lesbian identity becomes another aspect of life one must juggle. Sam says she is lucky because she does not perceive this pressure from her mom, but knows others who feel the pressure to choose between their Asian American identity and their lesbian identity.

Growing up, Sam thought she was asexual. She wasn’t interested in boys and assumed her interest in girls was friendship. She spent a bit of time on the internet in various chatrooms. One day Sam’s internet friend expressed being attracted to a girl. It was this moment that Sam realized the feelings she had for certain girls were the same feelings her school friends expressed having for certain boys. She did not understand this to mean that she was a lesbian. At the time Sam did not understand what identifying as a lesbian could mean. Sam developed a community through the internet which not only accepted her sexuality, but encouraged her to admit her sexuality to herself. Despite this, Sam did not engage in sexual activities with women until she entered college. She thinks this is because she was too close to home, and while at home, it was important for

Sam to behave in ways that her family deemed appropriate. Sam decided she would abide by the rules imposed upon her, but would continue to like whomever she liked.

### **Jesse:**

A group of Jesse's childhood friends taught her and her other friend about terms like "gay". When she was younger, Jesse's friend and neighbor would kiss her. They kept it a secret, almost knowing they would be frowned upon if anyone knew what they were doing. Jesse recalls that her friend used to come sleep over. She slept in Jesse's bed or they made a fort together on the floor. Initially no one thought anything of it because it is common for girls to share a bed in most Asian cultures. But in the night when everyone was sleeping, Jesse and her friend would kiss. She recalls that she was not opposed to it and grew to like it.

In time, Jesse's friend's brothers explained that "gay" was bad, and when



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they called something "gay", they were actually implying that something was undesirable. Jesse began to think about her and her friend. One night, when her friend came over, she tried to kiss Jesse. When Jesse hesitated, her friend told her that people cannot be gay until they are 10 years old. Jesses says that this made sense to her at the time because she enjoyed kissing her friend and did not want to stop. She thinks of this enjoyment as what set her apart from most girls. Instead of chasing boys, she was chasing the girl next door.

### **Sophie:**



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"High school ruined everything. Actually, let me clarify. It ruined everything I knew and created something unfathomable" (personal communication, 2017). Sophie remembers her relationship with her mom before the issue of girls, boys, and sexuality became a topic of conversation. She says she was carefree and felt whole. Despite being a reserved

child, Sophie told her mom everything and life seemed easier. Everything changed in high school. Sophie attended a Roman Catholic, all-girl high school. Although she was never particularly religious, she was required to attend mass, read and write essays about scriptures, and take religion courses.

Sophie remembers the first day of high school. She walked into her homeroom English class and dropped her books. She says she spent the remainder of the school year sitting in front of the most beautiful person she had ever seen. Until that moment, dating and relationships were just something that occurred in television shows by people who looked much older than high school age. By no means were those people in homosexual relationships. As far as Sophie was concerned, dating and relationships involved a boy and a girl. At the time, Sophie hadn't heard of homosexuality, but in that moment, all Sophie knew was the feeling of catching her breath and the numbness in her arms.

Fast-forward a year later. Sophie was going steady with a boy, but she recalls thinking often about the girl from her English class. She made a point to befriend this girl, and that was when she knew what fuelled the discontent

she felt in her current relationship. After some messy experiences, Sophie's mother discovered the relationship between Sophie and the girl from the English class. She forbade Sophie from seeing her. Sophie recalls her mother telling her that white people are lesbians and because she and her family are not white, Sophie could not be a lesbian. To convince her family that she was not a lesbian, Sophie started dating a different boy. He was a very good friend of hers. Shortly after the relationship began, she knew she wasn't interested in a romantic relationship with him. She also knew her mother was not fully correct. Sophie was not white, but she certainly was a lesbian.

### **Who Decides that We Must Come Out?**

Adrienne Rich (2003) writes about "compulsory heterosexuality" in her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience." Rich says that compulsory heterosexuality is the assumption that women and men are inherently sexually drawn to the opposite sex. This assumption is littered throughout literature and social sciences, and results in the perception of lesbian identity as deviant, abhorrent, or invisible (Rich, 2003). It is also problematic as it assumes that gender identity is consistent with sex, and

subsequently, sex establishes sexual orientation. In other words, a child born with female genitalia is inherently sexually attracted with a person born with male genitalia, and vice versa. However, research is showing this not *always* to be true, as there are a variety of factors, not simply the sex of the individual, that contribute to the development of sexual orientation (Perrin, 2002). This has resulted in the need to research and raise awareness that gender should be unlinked from anatomy and that anatomy should be unlinked from sexual identity (Frankowski, 2004). The action of coming out can be understood as an answer to the increased need for visibility of identifications that deviate from compulsory heterosexuality.

Coming out via proclamation results in both positive and negative outcomes. Coming out can produce positive outcomes as it raises people's awareness that heterosexuality is just one of many sexualities, and it enables people to make a personal connection; people will personally know someone who does not identify as straight. However, these positive outcomes are contingent on the "assumption that coming out has an empowering effect on the individual" (Benozzo, Pizzorno, Bell, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 293). Should her social circles deem homosexuality

negatively, the individual is empowered because proclaiming her sexuality enables her with the possibility to inspire a change in perspective (Benozzo et al., 2015). She becomes a pioneer for justice in the gay rights movement. But is the action of proclaiming one's sexuality helpful? This way of coming out is a performative act that reinforces heteronormativity (Butler, 1990).

In the paper "Coming Out, But into What? Problematizing Discursive Variations of Revealing the Gay Self in the Workplace", authors Benozzo et al. (2015) reference Butler's (1990) argument that coming out is performative because one is never simply comes out once. "Performativity", defined and coined by Butler, is a series of repetitive performances comprised of stylised actions and behaviors with the intention of expressing one's understanding of the dominant conventions of gender. Butler argues "the act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that's been going on before one arrived on the scene" (Butler, 1988, p. 526). Society expects people to adhere to specific gender roles through behaviour, actions, and language. It is a repetitive action that must be completed multiple times and in various social settings (Benozzo et al., 2015).

The repetitive nature of coming out reinforces heteronormativity because it establishes the *need* for one to establish sexuality as something other than the assumed heterosexual sexuality (Benozzo et al., 2015). Not only does it reinforce the notion that those who do not identify as heterosexual are different, it creates a hierarchal system which pits those who will not come out against those who do come out (Benozzo et al., 2015). Finally, it upholds the presumption that sexuality is a fixed and unwavering aspect of one's identity (Benozzo et al., 2015). It is important to think about the reasons we choose to come out and to who we choose to come out to. In the stories that follow, all participants came out to friends or family because they needed to come out to themselves. They have been selective about who they disclose their sexual identity, not out of fear, but because they simply did not feel it necessary to come out to everyone.

**Sam:**



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From there, she told me she loved me, and will always be by my side. And I don't have to have kids and to be happy, and enjoy my life. Because I don't need a man to be happy (personal communication, 2017).

Sam first told her online friends that she was interested in girls. This was how Sam learned about lesbian identity. Since Sam started identifying as a lesbian, she only felt the need to tell her mom. Otherwise, she has not felt the need to disclose her sexual identity to anyone else. She did not understand what was accomplished by the disclosure. Because of the homophobia she experienced from her father and brothers, she was fearful that the people she would tell would treat her the same way they had. But she was emboldened by the community she gathered online.

Later, she decided to tell her high school friend. At this point, Sam was less fearful about how people would react and more unassuming. Sam says she did not expect a positive or negative reaction when she decided to tell her friend. Nevertheless, her friend was happy. Since then, Sam has been in a few of relationships with women. These happened by chance. At the age of 19 she was kissed for the first time by a girl at a nightclub. Despite being a bit taken aback, Sam agreed when the girl asked if she wanted to go on a date. The current year is 2017 and only eight

months ago Sam came out to her mother. From Sam's perspective, despite this, her mother was ecstatic when she came out to her. She had already suspected Sam was a lesbian. Sam does not overtly tell people she is a lesbian. Instead, she is out to herself and engages in lesbian relationships openly. People can see or find out that she is a lesbian because of this. If asked, or during conversation, Sam will use the pronoun she/her when referring to her girlfriend.

**Jesse:**



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If there is not a lot of visibility, then we should probably organize. Because it's way more difficult to come out when you're alone, as opposed to a group. Right, it's easier to come out now as opposed to 30 years ago, because of the LGBT community that exists (Jesse, personal communication, 2017).

Jesse came out to her mom while they were repainting her mom's restaurant. Shortly before this moment, Jesse recounts a story of a Christmas party

with her birthfather. At this party, her aunt confronted her about a Facebook dialogue between Jesse and her friend. Jesse interpreted this as being outed by her aunt. She believed the news would reach her mother eventually. Although Jesse did not feel the need to come out about her sexuality, she identifies two reasons why she decided to tell her mother. The first was because she cares for her mother and wanted to be the one to tell her. The second is because Jesse did not want to lie through omission to herself or anyone else.

Jesse says that she chose to tell her mom while they were repainting the new restaurant as a power play. They were undertaking this difficult task during the hot, sweltering summer months. Jesse knew her mother would not hire anyone to help and therefore she would not turn Jesse's assistance away. By choosing this setting, Jesse figured her mom would be required to extend acceptance of Jesse's sexuality. She told her mother that she was visiting her roommate's family for holiday. When her mother asked why, Jesse said she and her roommate in college were "together." Her mom responded neutrally, saying she knew because Jesse did not adhere to gender roles and exhibited attraction to girls at a young age. According to Jesse, her mother does not particularly condone

the relationships she has with women and has expressed a notable happiness when the relationship ends. She interprets her mom's happiness when relationships end as a glimmer of hopefulness that the demise of the relationship indicates the possibility that she will date a man.

In the present time, Jesse makes a point not to hide her sexuality. She has not directly come out to other members of her family and believes proclaiming her sexuality is unnecessary. She is out in other aspects of her life and does not intentionally hide her relationships. Jesse has left a company because she did not feel the company was supportive of homosexuals. During the hiring interview with her current employer, she intentionally slipped in a story about her and her girlfriend of the time.

Jesse identifies as a lesbian. She made a point to be clear that she does not identify as queer. Jesse claims that visibility is important, and as more women identify as queer, the strong lesbian identity gets washed away in the perspective of those who do not understand the complexities of sexuality and sexual identification. For Jesse, coming out is important, but it must be done in ways that normalize lesbian identity. Proclamation is best done when subtly slipped into conversation.

### **Sophie:**

Over tea, Sophie tells me, "I don't think I actually really came out to my parents. I told my mom 'I like women,' but I never clarified what that meant. And she never asked." Sophie decided to tell her mother because she foresaw her life spiralling out of control. She no longer excelled in school, did not have goals to strive for, and simply, she felt like a stranger to herself. Leading up to that moment, Sophie's friends were trying to convince her that her life was out of control because she was hiding her sexuality from her family. They told her that family should accept her sexuality. If they did not, then they never loved her to begin with.

She recalls sitting on the curb and hesitantly calling her mother to say she wanted to tell her father everything. She remembers the pause then alarm in her mother's voice. According to Sophie, that was the moment she realized that she never wanted to come out. By telling her mother she liked women, she



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made a promise to herself only to sleep with men if she wanted to, not because she wanted to be straight. At the time, Sophie knew her father would require her mother to choose between the family and her daughter. She still believes this to be true, but is less bothered by it.

Sophie dated her ex-girlfriend for about five years. During that time, her girlfriend was welcomed into the family. Sophie understands it as a very don't-ask, don't tell situation, but is not bothered by it. She does not see herself as a publicly affectionate person and did not have the desire to be affectionate with her girlfriend while around her family. She believes coming out via proclamation is not the only way to come out. Sophie grew up in a household influenced by Asian culture because her father was born and lived his youth in Asia. She believes the stress of the importance of family, coupled with the minority status of Asian Americans, means Asian American youth do not feel they can leave their family unit. This results in the need to understand that while sexual identity is important, it is not always the primary way a person identifies.

### **Family Bonds Us**

The article, "Growing Up Gay or Lesbian in a Multicultural Context", by

Bob Tremble, Margaret Schneider, and Carol Appathurai (1989), addresses three conflicts that children of immigrants experience when coming out. "They are in conflict with: (a) themselves, (b) their family, and, (c) their culture, or, in the case of ethnic youngsters, tied to the New World by such things as school system, two cultures" (p. 256). According to Tremble et al., all these conflicts intersect with each other, however a person's culture has a strong influence on whether a person is accepted as homosexual within family. The coming out process established by Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2004), identify formation and identity interrogation, have been deemed the "standard" progression indicators of the coming out process. It is assumed that the progression for racial minorities may be slowed due to "cultural factors" (Rosario et al., 2004).

There is widespread assumption that one's relationship with their family will be a large factor in delaying lesbian identity formation. In Asian culture, a large emphasis is placed on familial connection. It is assumed this conflict is irreconcilable. However, studies have shown the pressure to maintain family Asian Americans have internalized, is also true for the entire family unit (Rosario et al., 2004). In many cases, the

family will aim to reintroduce the lesbian identified woman into the family because the need to maintain the familial bond is stronger than the need for the women to maintain a traditional gender role.

The article "Autonomy and Relatedness in Cultural Context: Implications for Self and Family" (Kagitcibasi, 2005) establishes that "autonomy" is defined in two dimensions. The first, "interpersonal distance" is defined as separating one from other through well-defined boundaries and barriers, however, there remains a degree of connectedness (Kagitcibasi, 2005). The second, "agency", is defined in terms of who is ruling or has command over you (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Kagitcibasi (2005) equates agency to autonomous morality, when one is ruled or governed by oneself and heteronomous morality, and when one is ruled or governed by another or an external entity. The difference in the latter is establishing distance from an external influence whereas the former is establishing distance within connection and relationship with other. By separating autonomy into two dimensions, "interpersonal distance" and "agency," one becomes able to identify as an autonomous being on two different spectrums. It becomes possible to want and establish distance within

relationships, but remain bound to the beckoning of family. This allows one to develop an individual identity and simultaneously maintain the collective identity; "the family is a team working together to build family honour" (Li & Orleans, 2001, p. 75).

Everyone contributes individually to the success of the family name. By blending the two dimensions, the understanding of autonomy becomes singular "feminist theory crossed over the two dimensions, defining autonomy as separateness and contrasting the female development toward relatedness with the male development toward autonomy" (Kagitcibasi, 2005, p. 405). Although this example specifically refers to gender, this is relatable to lesbian Asian American identity because it identifies how a singular definition of autonomy is detrimental to lesbian Asian Americans. In Western culture, establishing and developing queer identity implies the need for autonomy. If autonomy is solely defined as "separateness," the development of queer identity becomes homogenized. This is not relatable to lesbian Asian Americans as they may request and enforce non-traditional boundaries to allow space to develop their lesbian identity, however they remain loyal in the broader ways to their families.

**Sam:**



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I was different in school, more outgoing than I was at home. I think it's because school was less restrictive than school and around my friends. This made me realize something. At the time, I didn't know what it was, but I think it was just that I felt sort of stifled, you know, with the way my brothers and dad were.

Sam attributes her coming out to a couple of factors. The first is the realization that her behavior was different when in school compared to around her family. The second is the sense of independence she experienced since entering college. Looking back, Sam notices her behavior in school was much more extroverted when compared to her behavior around her family. She speculates this is because the school environment, and the relationships she had with her friends and peers were not as restrictive as the environment at home and the relationships she had with her family. Upon entering college, Sam discovered that people not only did not care about

her attraction to women, but they congratulated her.

Sam thinks she felt restricted in her home setting because her brothers and father were not supportive of homosexuality. Despite her father and brother's perspective, Sam's mom has always been supportive. Sam moved away for college but maintained a close relationship with her mom. Sam visits her mom for weekly dinners. This is important to her. She believes time away from home enabled the development of her identity outside of her family's expectations of her. It helped her maintain the connection she has with her mom and was vital for Sam to consolidate her racial and sexual identity.

### **Jesse:**

Jesse maintains a relationship with her mother. Although she and her mother do not talk directly about Jesse's relationships with women, her mother knows. Jesse believes that this is



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something her mother is getting used to. In many ways, Jesse's mother has inspired her to be successful as she strives for accomplishment in her work. Soon, she will go to school for her Master degree. Sometimes Asian American children will do a trade-off. They will trade financial and/or educational success for relationship freedom.

Jesse remembers the day she waited for a girl she liked. It would be her first relationship where they dated for a bit before entering a relationship. She was nervous and anxious, but excited. It did not matter that her mom may express happiness if or when the relationship would end. What mattered was Jesse knew what she was doing, her mom knew what she was doing, and neither tried to stop it from happening.

**Sophie:**

If I hadn't learned to listen, I don't know how things would be. And some would say 'well why did you have to learn to listen and not your parents?' Which is



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fair, but someone must start; I guess I just happened to have more of the skills to do it. I'd like to think that my demonstration was beneficial for my family to learn to do it too (personal communication, 2017).

Sophie cannot recall the number of men she slept with in the hope and intent that one of them would help her become straight. But she can recall her second year of college and promising herself that she would not sleep with men unless she desired to do so. This was when Sophie believes that she started to pick up the pieces of her life. She said relations were estranged between her family and her for many years. In fact, she recalls at least five years when her family did not speak to her. Those were the hardest years. She moved home because her mother fell ill. She lived there for just over a year. Sophie describes this time as when she had to acknowledge and lose her ego.

Growing up, she was good at listening and following directions. But to hold an emotional space of someone else, when you are screaming inside, is a different way of listening. Instead of railing against her family, she realized they saw her as more than her sexual identification. She started to see herself as more than her sexuality as well. This enabled her to listen to her mom about why her mom did not want her to be

with women, it enabled her to have level conversations, and most importantly, to have conversations with her family about non-controversial issues. In the end, Sophie is convinced doing this showed her mother that she was not a rebellious or deviant child. It gave her mother faith to let Sophie establish her own life.

Sophie and her parents are very close. She is in a healthy and happy relationship and vaguely discusses it her mother. Although she has never told her father, he knows of her girlfriend. He believes they are only friends and is welcoming. Sophie recognises that not everyone is this lucky; she believes that most families love their children. Unfortunately, they are taught their children should be heterosexual. She thinks the hardest part is when parents realize that someone is changing the terms on them. And, like with most people when change occurs, it is hard, though possible, to adapt when someone else initiated it.

### **Conclusion**

Racial and sexual identity are not mutually exclusive. As each develops, they interact and intersect with the other, creating a complex interwoven fabric that is the foundation for perception and identity. It is important to recognize this when researching

lesbian Asian American identity. The culture of Asian American identity typically maintains the values and traditions, because many Asian Americans either emigrated from Asia or are first born to parents who emigrated from Asia. They place a heavy weight on the maintenance of familial bonds; subsequently, everyone does their part to bring honor or shame to the family. Often, this strong connection can be viewed as stifling to an Asian American woman's lesbian identity formation. This is because many Asian cultures maintain the expectation that their daughters will marry men and bear children. Obviously, this expectation is not always filled.

There is a Chinese saying roughly translated to, "A bad thing may become a good thing under certain conditions." It is told to people who experience unfortunate events. For some, having a daughter who is lesbian, or being a girl who realizes she is lesbian, can be considered an unfortunate situation. The daughter is viewed to be rebelling against her family by embracing white, Western culture. The second half of the saying implies that blessings can be birthed from these unfortunate situations. It is most important that those experiencing the unfortunate event are open to the possibility of

change. In this instance, familial bonds remain important; they simply adapt.

Essentially, “cultural sanctions are not fixed values. They are perceived and interpreted by individuals, families, communities, and are modified in application by the perceived characteristics of the individuals involved” (Tremble et al., 1989, p. 257). The Chinese saying, “one radish, one hole” implies that everyone in the family plays their role. Because of the

importance of family, maintaining connection with one’s family allowed Sam, Jesse, and Sophie to consolidate their racial and sexual identity. It also enabled them to combat the myth that only white people are lesbians. As a result, they manifest Asian American identity in a way that does not require a constant proclamation. Instead, they live their lives as if lesbian identity is the norm.

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# Deconstructing the Nuclear Family Through Adoption

Not flesh of my flesh, nor bone of my bone, but still miraculously my own.  
Never forget for a single minute, you didn't grow under my heart but in it.

--Fleur Conkling Heyliger, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Joy of Adoption*, 2015

*Adoption tends to be described as an alternative form of family, but for a mother or father, family has no restrictions. This paper looks at the ways adoption deconstructs and recreates the idea of family. Existing research across fields of study surrounding family fails to cover specific research on adoption and lacks the research that looks at the ways adoption and other alternative family forms disrupt and distort the biological family unit. The word "family" can be defined in many different ways, and is a specific and individualistic concept. However, within the cultural sphere of family, biogenic families tend to be the culturally assumed and idolized form of family in today's culture. As an individual who is an adoptee and has grown up in what is assumed to be an alternative family dynamic, this auto-ethnographic essay focuses on looking at the ways adoption redefines family and motherhood, as well as how the binary institutions of our American society is built to maintain the biogenic family ideal.*

## **Asian, Adopted, a Woman**

I am adopted. I am Asian. I am a triplet. I am a woman. This paper examines what all four of those statements mean. Not many people can say they have been adopted, and

very few individuals can say they are a triplet. Growing up as an adoptee was a concept that, until I was older, was never a thought on my mind. Unsure of what adoption even meant, I grew up for a portion of my childhood life being unaware of what it meant to be an adopted child. Being a child of a different ethnicity was also a concept that I was never aware of or of great importance throughout my childhood and teenage years. Since the moment I knew I was adopted and different than my adopted parents, I continue not to let it affect who I am or how I define myself within my family today, which is another point I explain throughout this paper. Not being able to recognize my family dynamic and racial differences for the majority of my time growing is something that has impacted the ways I identify with myself and with others, but has not altered my definition of family or how I value myself within my family unit. I have struggled both internally and externally with being both adopted and of non-white descent at times during my middle school, high school, and college years. Being the target of negative, pejorative, and offensive comments and stares has affected both the way I identify with

myself and the ways I identify with my peers and family friends.

Our society coins the term “family” as both binary restrictive and culturally normative, while viewing adoption and other forms of family dynamics as alternatives and not truly a family. I, however, am challenging the cultural assumption that argues a family can only be formed or defined based on biological parenting and natural childbearing. “Although family continues to be a critical unit in demographic and social analysis, perceptions of what constitutes the ‘family’ vary across groups and societies” (Tillman and Nam, 2008, p. 1). More importantly, the definition of family has and continues to be one that has, for the most part, been seen as a universal definition that most countries worldwide agree with. Family, according to most societies, is a group of individuals affiliated by birth, marriage, or living situations. (United States Census Bureau, 2017). The United States ideologies on family may be accepting of intentional families, families that are not biological, but the way an adoptee is perceived by society and his or her peers is affected by the fact that he or she is adopted.

In college, during my second semester of junior year, I was sitting in a Women and Gender Studies class, when my classmate called me out on being adopted, and argued that adoption is both “a sad excuse for parenting,” and “doesn’t make someone a part of a family.” Similar to this experience, there has been multiple times growing up where I questioned both my identity and the role I played in my so-called “fake family.” I have been a victim of cruel bullying, such as being picked on with words describing me as “cornbread,” “banana,” “yellow colored” and having been asked questions such as “Why is your mom not Asian like you?” “Why are you yellow?” or “Why do you not look like your mom?” These questions put me in pause mode and made me question myself and my worth simply because I was both Asian and a child of a family who I was not born into.

Being able to challenge and speak on intentional families versus creative families is a topic that I hope more individuals become aware of and curious about. I am not arguing that biological families are not a valid form of family; I am stating that it is not the only form of family. Because family is one of the most important and key ways an individual defines themselves, I

am speaking out for other adopted and racially diverse individuals, in hopes that sharing my experiences with privilege, ethnicity, oppression, and discrimination, will help others better understand that a biogenic family is not the only way you can define what a family means.

God knew...that it doesn't matter how your children get to your family. It just matters that they got there.

-Kira Mortenson, “Pregnant with ‘One of Your Own!’ . . . Cringe”,  
2014

### **Western Ideals on Family and Adoption**

The United States has long recognized and labeled the nuclear family as a father, mother, and their biological kids. Furthermore, the nation’s ideas about kinship and family have been based off the notions of biology, leaving Americans strongly defining parenthood in a biological sense. However, as of 2014, only 20% of all households in the U.S fit this definition (Stone, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a family is defined as a householder and one or more other people related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (Stone, 2014). Although we continue to see rising numbers in the types of

nontraditional families such as single parent, lesbian or gay, blended, or even partners who are not married, the ideal definition of family has been long seen and respected as a heteronormative, biological space (Lansford, Abbey & Stewart, 2001). This heteronormative, biological space is in every effort trying to be preserved as the “real” definition of what family means. The institution of family itself is reinforced by the state and society's expectations surrounding family and all it encompasses. How does adoption disrupt and challenge biogenic ideas of the nuclear family? Constructing and choosing to create meaningful bonds with individuals who you are not biologically related to you is a concept many Americans across the country consciously choose to do. Therefore, adoption comes to challenge the reconstruction of family, as well as the reconstruction of motherhood. Adoption, however, is simply one form of that alternative family.

Across the United States, there are multiple types and forms of adoption one can go through. Because there are many terms, I discuss them briefly. To begin, there are two main forms of adoption: closed and open adoptions. Closed adoptions do not involve any information given about either family, where there is also no contact between

both families. Once the adoption is complete, the information surrounding that adoption is sealed away. (National Adoption Center, 2017). Unlike closed adoptions, open adoptions require some form of communication and information shared between the adoptive family and the biological family, as well as the child. (National Adoption Center, 2017). Stemming from the closed and open adoptions, there are also different types of adoption that involve foster care, orphanages, and independent adoptions. Foster care and orphanage adoptions involve the adopting of a child that was either put in foster care because the parent cannot support the child, or that the child is placed in a home as a foster kid. Independent, international, and infant adoptions involve a child being adopted as an infant through a lawyer, facility, or physician, rather than through an adoption agency (National Adoption Center 2017). It is important to briefly identify and discuss the differences between the types of adoptions that exist in Western culture, because it helps contextualize my story as well as is important to my thesis and overlying argument.

Our skin doesn't match.  
You don't have my eyes or mouth,  
and our faces aren't the same shape.

..

Our skin may not match but  
we match hearts.

--Christy Wagner,

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/101401715/we-match-hearts-pink-ombre-typography>, 2012.

### **My Story**

In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, on December 8th, 1995, I was adopted and able to become a part of a family. My family and I now celebrate this day in which my parents named "Gotcha Day." The date one is adopted is not a date that every family celebrates, but is a day my parents named to hallmark the adoption and the most important day of their lives. To this day, my family and I come together on this day to celebrate the adoption and our family.

Going back to the beginning, my soon-to-be adopted mother and father were waiting on a call from the adoption agency in Vietnam, praying and hoping for good news. It was a mid-evening in July when my mother answered the phone call and was asked if she wanted to adopt three Vietnamese girls instead of just one, who also happened to be identical

triplets. They were told that a set of triplets were dropped off to the agency and were available for adoption either separately or together. At the time, my parents were open to the possibility of adopting twins or a set of siblings, but never in their mind did they think they would be asked to adopt triplets. My mother says that it was the happiest day of her life being called by the agency; besides the day she arrived in Vietnam and we were given to her.

After receiving the good news and preparing for a long trip, she hopped on a plane to Vietnam with one of her closest friends to help bring us home while my father stayed behind to build cribs and prepare the house for a life filled with three Vietnamese babies.

Once my mother finally arrived to the adoption agency and all the paperwork was filed and complete, the agency performed a ceremony for myself, my sisters, and the other Vietnamese children who were being adopted that day as well (See Figures 1-6). This ceremony was something the Vietnamese adoption agency did whenever a child was adopted. This ceremony was unique to the agency I was adopted from, and it was very special to my mother. Concluding the ceremony, my mother was given the



Figure 1.



Figure 4.



Figure 2.



Figure 5.



Figure 3.



Figure 6.

three of us and sent off on her way. We spent our final days in the hotel room in Ho Chi Min before flying back to New York.

Awaiting us at the airport in New York were about fifty to seventy people, including photographers and local news reporters, my father, grandmother, close colleagues, and local residents of the area.

Days and weeks following our arrival, newspaper articles were published about my parent's adoption, and in ways, our lives were being put on display (See Figures 7-8). Even David Muir, the host of our hometown news channel Nightly News, included a segment on our adoption that televised multiple interviews with my parents, family friends, and other local residents. My mother told me she took interviews over the phone in Vietnam, to and from the airports, and even outside our home. I can remember reporters with their photographers coming to our house. They would hang around in our backyard to ask both my parents, my sisters, and me various questions surrounding our emotions, experiences, and reactions to the adoption, constantly taking photographs. My parents were even asked if they wanted to put my sisters and me on television, in local commercials and other advertisements.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Unfortunately, I do not remember the exact moment when I realized I was adopted and of a different ethnicity than my parents. I believe this is mostly because I never questioned those differences.

Earlier, I wrote about the surrounding stigmas that comes with adoption, such as the stigma of illegitimacy which can influence the ways adopted children and their families view themselves and their family, as well as how open children and/or parents are to discussing the adoption itself (Kohler, Grotevant & McRoy, 2002). People who do not

know my story or my parent's story may likely see my adoption as illegitimate, similar to how the majority of Western culture views parenting and family as inherently biological. However, my parents never treated me as illegitimate in any sort of way. In fact, I was only treated with the most love and passion any parent would give to his or her child. And that is exactly what I hope readers take away from my personal account. No matter who you are, where you come from, and where you end up, you should never let patriarchy, society's definitions, or people's negative words tell you something is not real, valid, or right.

As years passed, I continued to never realize I was growing up in a family that wasn't most people's typical version of a nuclear family. I faced multiple forms of racial discrimination and bullying like I previously mentioned, but so did my parents.

One instance I remember was in second grade on Martin Luther King Day, when my sisters and I were first coming across race and differences in skin color. A few boys in our class made many statements addressing my sisters and me as "weird and different" because we did not look exactly like the majority of the students. Ultimately, the boys told us that we should not be in the class.

Both of my parents, especially my mother, have experienced this type of prejudice in public from their colleagues, members of the church, and even bystanders in the grocery store. Complete strangers would gawk and make judgmental glares at my parents and me in public simply because we looked different. But why is that? And why does looking different than the majority in a crowd always cause people to stare? Is it because we are Asian, because there are three of us, or because we are not white? Adoption answers these questions.

Although there were many times that the difference in my skin color was pointed out, I cannot recall the moment I asked myself "Why am I different?" I remember every instance I was bullied and every moment I was questioned about my adoption, but I cannot pinpoint the moment when I realized I wasn't my parent's biological child. It was never a topic of discussion my parents even brought up, and if it was, it obviously had little to no effect on what I defined as family.

If I could remember a time my parents talked about our adoption, I know that those talks we had never put into question what my family meant, and specifically, what adoption even was. As I grew older my parents and I had more discussions about where I

was from, what had happened to my birth parents, and the possibility of going back to Vietnam one day to experience for myself where I was from. Although some of the conversations left me with hundreds of thoughts going through my head, I never understood why all of these details mattered. Until I was old enough to recognize difference in skin color and what racial discrimination was, not once had I thought about my birth parents or going back to Vietnam to discover where I was from. Throughout my entire life up till those moments, I believed to have only one mother, father, and one family.

I have found myself asking the same questions over and over again: “Why does being adopted or having an adopted child matter in terms of being a ‘real family?’” and, “Why does being both adopted and a racial minority have to affect other people’s opinions about what constitutes a family?” My parents are my parents and I have never, not even once, thought otherwise.

Telling my story gives me a chance to explore these questions, as well as gives other people a chance to read what it is like for a 21-year-old adopted college student to continually face prejudice and discrimination based on the color of her skin and family background. Furthermore, by telling my story, I

hope it speaks to others to rethink and challenge the social construction of family. My story shows that a child does not have to be “related by blood” or “biologically related to” a parent to be considered part of a family, and a member of a real family.

### **Motherhood Defined through Adoption**

“Adoption as a parenting option separates the biological from the social, nurturing part of parenting, thereby challenging notions of parenting as a process of childbearing and childrearing” (Miall, 1996). The relationship between feminism and motherhood continues to be a complex one with multiple perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. Many feminist scholars and researchers such as Betty Friedan (1967) and Shulamith Firestone (1970) are just a few of the iconic feminists who have written and argued against gender inequality, and the barriers and restrictions motherhood has on women. “Family is almost synonymous with a woman and is unsurpassed in importance in most women’s lives” (O’Connell, 1994, p. 75).

Society assumes women derive a certain sense of identity, self-worth, and accomplishment from being a mother and from her family. In fact, becoming

a mother can be one of the most defining moments in a woman's life.

Mother/father/child relationships are typically understood to be based on "blood" relations. Single mothers, lesbian mothers, adoptive mothers, divorced mothers, and mothers of interracial relationships are just a few of types of mother/child family forms that go against the traditional nuclear family, thus being considered the minority. Adoptive relationships between a mother and her adopted child are assumed and argued to be different and unlike the "true" mother/child relationships biologically based families have. However, the relationship between a mother and child is simply unique and different based on the individual, and that is where adoption comes into the picture.

In addition to the relationship between a parent and child, there is the western idea that motherhood is derived from pregnancy. A woman's ability to birth a child is considered her greatest accomplishment, her most powerful form of agency and control. Due to the many institutions that have placed women's bodies as a defining feature of their self-worth and value, society places specific attention on the women's main role as a reproducer and mother. (Motherhood and Feminism, 2010). Furthermore, motherhood and

the biological relationship between a mother and her child are both glorified and praised throughout Western culture.

In her book *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone (1970) proposes the argument that the problem women have with breaking against the notion of reproduction was the biological ideology that pregnancy was a necessity for all women to reach their fullest potential. Firestone argues that this thinking oppresses and exploits women who go against this biological notion. Similar to Firestone, feminist Sara Ruddick's (1995) book *Maternal Thinking* argues that the idea of maternal instinct should not just be attributed to biology. I agree with both Firestone and Ruddick. I additionally argue that adoption is another valid form of agency that goes against the idea of pregnancy as a woman's greatest accomplishment. I argue that a woman's option to either reproduce or not, or to choose another form of child rearing, is a valid one. Pregnancy and motherhood is indeed a wonderful and valid option; it is not the only option.

Adoptions are viewed by society as a woman's "last resort" to motherhood while biological parenthood is assumed to be the primary model of a family. Many mothers who do not follow this are not as accepted or viewed as "real"

mothers, which are challenges my mom struggled with and experienced throughout her life once she adopted my sisters and me.

Although I focus strictly on motherhood through adoption, my story is not meant to disregard or devalue fatherhood and what adoption defines fatherhood as. My father defines himself in the ultimate category of a “real” father and has never seen adoption as something that redefined his role as a father.

Telling my story about my adoption and my experience growing up in a non-biological family helps me further understand that family does not have to be defined by the number of same genes I have with my parents. Just because my mother is not the woman who gave birth to me does not mean that she is not my mother. I argue that biology does not equate family and motherhood. Adoption creates a family just as much as biological motherhood does.

### **Ethnicity, Authenticity and Privilege**

Although I cannot pinpoint the exact moments in my life when I recognized the privilege my adoption has given me, as well as the ways my ethnicity played a role in my family, these experiences have helped me identify the ways my ethnicity both put me in privileged and

racially oppressing experiences. My ethnicity and privilege have both contributed to the authenticity of my adoption and my experiences growing up as an adopted child. I was fortunate to be adopted into a stable and loving family, and this privilege also plays a role in the authenticity of my adoption and growing up in a white and western culture. Although being Vietnamese and of a different skin color than my parents, growing up in the social class I was blessed to be a part of, and the privileges social class can provide for an individual or family, has provided me access to many opportunities that many people do not have.

My story of my adoption opens people’s eyes to becoming more aware about the types of family dynamics that exist, as well as how privilege, ethnicity and patriarchy all work together to create the experiences I have been through. My adoption story also is a power story to anyone who has struggled with patriarchy’s restrictive binary family definitions to push individuals to not let our patriarchal society define who you are.

Telling my story reinforces my adoption as an authentic form of family, but also opens the question of the cultural authenticity of my story, which asks, “Why were the reporters so interested in grabbing at my story?” Is it

because my sisters and I were Vietnamese, or is it because international adoptions across different countries were not popular? Was it because people saw my parent's journey to adopt my sisters and I as a rescue narrative? Or was it because we were triplets? My story became important enough to be reported and published on, but why? My paper may not answer these questions, but it brings these questions to light as to why my adoption was so fascinating to so many people across the country.

There are arguments surrounding the idea that adoption is a way for many underprivileged children to gain access to a better, healthier and stable life. I can say that if I was not adopted, my life would be completely different, but I cannot say it is simply because I was adopted that I was given a better life. Having grown up and been raised by two white, middle class parents is what has given me the privilege I am beyond lucky to have. It is all because of them that I live the life I do, and because of them that I am able to get a college degree and have access to better opportunities than I might not have had in the same way if I was not adopted.

### **Adoption and its Importance**

Kinship does not have to be strictly based on genetics but has and will

continue to be based on an individual's choice. By sharing my story and exploring the ways adoption and motherhood through adoption disrupt the binary assumption of family, I reject biology as a basis for kinship and defining family. Adoption does more than just blur the lines of the nuclear family; it reveals the ways family does not have to be defined based on only blood. I am not trying to reject or disprove the notion that both motherhood and family in a biological sense is not a valid form of family. I am simply arguing that a biologically based family, or motherhood through pregnancy, is not the only valid form.

When telling my story to others, or explaining to strangers that I am a triplet who happens to be adopted into a white family, I find myself realizing how lucky and privileged I am to have been adopted, raised, and have grown up in such a loving and caring family. Unconditional love, acceptance, care, and the bonds I carry with my mother and my father are what equates a family, not my genes. In fact, the family I am a part of gives me the most "biologically real" feelings I have ever experienced.

Being adopted has not changed the way I view myself or what I think constitutes a family. My adoption has instead only intensified my urge to increase people's knowledge and

understanding about motherhood and adoption. I ask you to stop and rethink the idea of kinship and how adoption can break down the barriers and social constructions around the nuclear family.

### **Conclusion**

This work emerged from a place of frustration and anger, as I was struggling with my identity and how my family dynamic and racial background affected that identity. I argue that regardless of being part of a non-biological family, the family I have can be considered the most authentic family there is.

What constitutes a family is based on the individual and no textbook, no reported statistic, and no person can dictate what a family truly means. It is both critical and important to continue challenging and disrupting the biogenetic family and the assumptions and stereotypes that come with motherhood, pregnancy, and childrearing. We must continue to push towards further acceptance of different

family dynamics -- family dynamics that are not what is considered most comfortable, or normal. We must also realize that increased knowledge of adoption and motherhood can lead to the push for more adoption policies and research done on adoption and the way adoption challenges the idea of biological motherhood.

It is so important to me as a feminist and an adoptee to help others gain a better understanding and knowledge on the various forms of family dynamics, as well as to show people that we have the power to break down the binary barriers that are placed on family and motherhood. I will not let patriarchy and the labels patriarchy tells us we should or should not be define who I am. Labels and definitions are simply words and should never restrict who you are or who you want to become. By telling my story, I have come to a sense of what family means to me and the importance of what it means to be part of an alternative form of family. So I ask you, what does the word "family" mean to you?

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# Oppression or Opportunity: The Selling of Mail-Order Brides

*It is the memory of my aunt that inspired my research of mail-order brides. I was curious as to what factors encourage women to leave their families and home to come to another country as a mail-order bride. The international trafficking of mail-order brides is not a new phenomenon, but since the advent of technology the capitalistic industry has exploded. In this paper, I discuss the oppressions and opportunities that the potential mail-order brides have to consider. Since the mail-order bride industry is continuously growing, it needs to be monitored to minimize the violence against women.*

## Introduction

Women from economically underprivileged backgrounds in developing countries are targeted by marriage brokers and sold into the “lavish life” of a mail-order bride. Gender discrimination in these countries has left women with three choices for work: A migrant worker, a prostitute, or a mail-order bride (Lloyd, 2000). The prospective brides are marketed to men as possessing hegemonic femininity (Liu, 2015). Hegemonic femininity is a social construction that women maintain the hierarchy of gender, which enforces the belief that men are dominant and women are subservient (Velding, 2014). This structure creates a power imbalance in which men have full control. The men are led to believe that the women they choose to marry are family-oriented, have no interest in education or working, and do not believe in divorce (Lloyd, 2000). This heteronormative patriarchal entitlement can draw in men who are abusive and can be

potentially dangerous for women who step outside of their gender role (Webber, 2009). The potential brides are not always cognizant of domestic violence risks.

Upon entering the United States, the new brides may feel isolated due to the sudden immersion in an unknown culture and language. The women are at a disadvantage by having little to no knowledge of the deportation or domestic violence laws (Lloyd, 2000). Only having their husbands to turn to for help, the women are in danger if their husbands are the reason they need help. There are times that mail-order brides end up in a healthy and positive situation, but many find themselves being physically or mentally abused (Lloyd, 2000).

My aunt was a mail-order bride. My research objective was to find out what factors push women to leave their families and home to come to another country. Do the women feel the information they are told before they consent to become a mail-order bride is accurate to the experiences they have when they begin their new life? In this paper, I am going to look at the mail-order bride industry, specifically mail-order brides that are exported to the United States from the Philippines and Russia.

## Looking In

I am going to tell the personal story of my aunt's experiences. Before I begin telling her story, I want to explain my privileges and where I stand as an outsider looking in. I am a white woman who was raised in a middle class family in the suburbs of western New York. I was not aware of the feminist movement at the time of this story, but I was aware of my own desire for equality for myself and my loved ones. My own privilege and western views leave me with biases when looking into my aunt's situation. I am not judging her, but I am being critical towards my uncle, her husband, as we come from the same family and cultural background.

My uncle was in the Navy and for a period of time he was stationed in the Philippines. There, he learned of Filipina women. He observed that their cultural values placed women in a submissive role as selfless caretaker of the home and children (Demanarig & Acosta, 2016). The presence of the American military in the Philippines can serve as a way to glamorize life in the United States and reinforce the idea of white dominance over Southeast Asian women (Lloyd, 2000). I wonder, did my uncle's immersion in Philippine culture influence his desire to marry a Filipina woman?

After my uncle was discharged from the Navy, he married a woman who was a mail-order bride from the Philippines. Growing up, I did not know my aunt was a mail-order bride, but I was aware that she was not originally from the United States. In my early twenties I was in need of an inexpensive babysitter for my daughter. My Grandmother knew that my Aunt was looking to make her own money in order to visit her daughter in Florida, so arranged for her to watch my daughter. My aunt watched my daughter 50 hours a week and I paid her \$75. Most of the daycare services in my area cost \$250 per week. The arrangement with my Aunt was an unheard of price. My aunt was a great caregiver for my daughter and treated her as if she were one of her own children.

I felt lucky to have a babysitter who was inexpensive and an excellent caregiver. When I no longer needed my aunt to babysit, she thanked me for paying her a generous amount of money each week. My aunt saw this amount as generous because babysitting had allowed her the chance to make her own money. The opportunity to make money was one my aunt never had, and she was excited to pay her own way to visit her daughter whom she had not seen in a few years. Now that I am older I realize that I was exploiting my

aunt by using her as cheap labor. This was not my intention. I justified the situation by telling myself we were family helping each other out. At the time I was a young single mother making minimum wage and my aunt was looking to make her own money. Paying my aunt \$75 was a means of survival for me.

Even though they were not poor, my aunt and uncle lived in a small house located in a neighborhood in the inner city of Rochester, NY. The neighborhood had a high poverty and crime rate. There was garbage scattered along the road and in the grass. The majority of the houses in the neighborhood had boarded up windows, broken glass along the sidewalks, and driveways that were crumbling apart. Their house was nice inside, but set up to meet the needs of my uncle. They owned one vehicle because my aunt did not have a license and my uncle did not want her to drive anywhere on her own. Their house consisted of a small living room with an oversized blue sectional couch that had a built-in cooler for my uncle to put his sodas in. The couch took up the whole living room, leaving only enough room to put a television in the corner. Off of the living room was a small dining room. My uncle comes from a large family so there was a large table that

could seat up to ten people. In order to maneuver around the table, you had to push the chairs out of the way. In the back of the house was a tiny kitchen where my Aunt spent most of her time. This kitchen was small with limited space for her to cook, but she made do with what she had.

I often witnessed how cruel my Uncle was to his wife. I will never forget the time I went into their bedroom to help put laundry away and noticed that my Aunt had minimal space for her belongings. There was the bed they slept on, a closet that had been turned into a pantry for my Uncle's snacks, and a keyboard hooked up to the computer with a microphone for my Uncle to record music. I asked my Aunt where she kept her things, as it was clear to me that she didn't have a spot in their bedroom. She explained that there was a small dresser set up in the hallway for her use. Seeing the setup of the room was very unsettling to me, but my Aunt was unbothered by her living conditions. Another instance where I saw how unfairly my Aunt was treated was when I was picking my daughter up. My Aunt, who barely stood 5 feet tall, was struggling to carry the garbage out of the house to the garbage can. My Uncle saw her and yelled, "Hold on a minute." I thought to myself, "Aww, how sweet he's going to help her."

Instead, he walked up and handed her another bag and said, "Don't forget this." Witnessing this interaction left me feeling shocked and angry. I looked to her for a reaction, but she kindly took the bag and walked outside.

In talking with my Aunt, she explained to me that her life in the United States has been great compared to the life she had experienced in the Philippines. My Aunt's cultural view was that she was expected to sacrifice her needs to benefit her family. She explained to me that this expectation was reinforced by her family throughout her childhood. My Aunt wanted to show her appreciation to my Uncle by being a good wife and mother. It was implied that my Uncle had saved her from the poor conditions she experienced in the Philippines. It was in this conversation that I found out my Aunt was a mail-order bride. I tried to understand her point of view, but growing up where I did, this was hard to do. I left that day curious about how horrible her experience in the Philippines must have been if this life is glorious to her. I wondered: did being able to leave the Philippines as a mail-order bride make her feel empowered? This was a question that has been left unanswered.

My Aunt passed away from cancer shortly after visiting with her daughter

in Florida. In less than a year my Uncle ordered a new bride from the Philippines to come live with him, repeating the cycle. I do not speak to either of them. This is mostly due to my Uncle's mistreatment towards my late Aunt and also because Uncle speaks poorly about her since her passing. I do not agree with my Uncle's opinions of my Aunt, I witnessed her dedication in trying to please him. Even though my Aunt was happy, I still feel anger towards my Uncle for treating her as an object that could simply be bought and owned, instead of treating her as an equal human being.

### **Literature Review**

A mail-order bride is a woman who lists herself on a website with the intent to move and marry a man from a different country. Women who want to become mail-order brides use a marriage broker to facilitate the process in finding potential husbands. The reason women choose to become mail-order brides is because it may be their only chance at class mobility or it may be an only means to escape a poverty-stricken nation (Lloyd, 2000). This can be seen as empowering as the women are taking charge of their futures. Marriage brokers are people who seek out women, typically living in developing countries, and capitalize on

their economic inequality (Lloyd, 2000). Marriage brokers market the women to potential husbands from economically advanced countries (Liu, 2015). The prospective brides participate because they are hoping to move into a safer, more stable environment.

The process of selling or purchasing women can be viewed as openly trafficking women to men (Lloyd, 2000). The definition of human trafficking is the exploitation of a vulnerable human being for profit or personal gain (Hume & Sidun, 2016). The process of trafficking consists of the recruitment, transportation, purchase, and sale of a person (Huda, 2006). The United States human trafficking law does not apply to mail-order brides; this is because the women or their families give some form of consent (Lloyd, 2000). Once in their new lives, mail-order brides may realize they were trafficked by deception. The women lack the resources to verify anything their potential husbands tell them before they move out of their country.

The mail-order bride industry is a capitalistic-driven \$2 billion international industry. There are an estimated 2,700 mail-order bride agencies worldwide, with about 500 of them operating in the United States (Lloyd, 2000). This industry continues

to grow. From 2012-2013, the mail order bride industry saw a 29% increase (Health Research Funding, 2014). According to Health Research Funding (2015), approximately 10,000 mail-order bride marriages occur in the United States every year. This continued growth shows that the demand for mail-order brides will only continue to increase. The industry has expanded to include mail-order grooms and mail-order brides for same sex marriages. While this essay focuses on heterosexual men purchasing heterosexual brides, this substantial industry growth across diverse categories of identity warrants more research in this area.

The regions that most mail-order brides are imported from are Russia, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Central America, but the largest supplier of mail-order brides is the Philippines. Mail-order bride companies charge an average \$6,000-\$10,000 per bride, however, prices can go up to \$15,000 (Lloyd, 2000). The mail-order bride does not receive any money from this exchange.

In order for a woman to become a mail-order bride, she is required to provide the marriage broker information such as: Weight, measurements, interests, and photographs (Lloyd, 2000). This

information is used to create a profile that will capture the attention and approval of potential suitors. Prospective husbands are able to flip through digital pictures and pick out the women they want as if they are ordering out of an electronic department store catalog (Lloyd, 2000). This way of marketing women superficially allows men to pick out women like a commodity. This capitalistic approach sells feminine sexuality for profit. Men are not buying wives based on their personalities, but based on external features and sexual fantasies. This way of marketing women as mail-order brides can make men feel like they are entitled to own the women they purchase. This objectifies women, but the idea of being chosen by looks could also be empowering as well by giving them confidence.

Before the advent of the Internet, bride profiles were put into catalogs, but because of the explosion of technology, they are added onto Internet websites such as; loveme.com, fantasybrides.com, anastasiadate.com, and rosebrides.com (Sarker, Chakraborty, Tansuhaj, Mulder & Dogerlioglu-Demir, 2013). Technology has made the industry more visible and productive by providing email as a source of advertising and decreasing the turnaround time in communication. For

instance, anastasiadate.com averages about 2.6 million visits per month (Heath Research Funding, 2015). You may see advertisements in your own email with a caption like, “come pick up the lady you deserve”.

Once a woman is chosen as a potential mail-order bride, the couple corresponds via mail or email. The exchanges typically go through a translator since the man and woman may speak different languages. Because the potential brides are not fully involved in the communication process, translators sometimes take the liberty to eroticize the conversation or objectify the women in an effort to make her seem more alluring and sexually eager (Liu, 2015). Once the connection has been made, the agency sets up travel arrangements for a week long “romance tour” for the man to come meet his potential bride (Liu, 2015).

The “romance tour” step of meeting face-to-face is an important part of the United States immigration law (Lloyd, 2000). If the couple decides to marry, the agency applies for a fiancé visa. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2015), once approved, the fiancé visa allows the woman to enter the United States for 90 days so that a marriage ceremony can take place. This process does not

allow the couple to fully get to know each other.

Even though the mail-order bride industry is virtually unregulated in most of the world, the United States has passed laws protecting the mail-order brides who used U.S.-based mail-order bride companies (Lloyd, 2000). In 2005, the United States passed the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA), requiring mail-order bride industries to do a background check on men wishing to purchase a bride. The law also requires the industries to provide foreign brides with informational domestic violence pamphlets (Webber, 2009). This law requires men to provide financial information, criminal arrest records, number of previous marriages, and number of children. Other immigration regulations have been placed on these marriages, such as the husbands have to sponsor the bride’s citizenship over a period of time (Lloyd, 2000). This delayed citizenship gives the men full control over the women who want to stay in the country. The laws tends to criminalize the mail-order brides more than protect them from abusive relationships and exploitation (Lloyd, 2000).

This industry is unregulated because proponents argue “there is no justification for state intervention”

(Lloyd, 2000, p. 351) that infringes on personal freedom and rights to privacy. Many mail-order brides are victims of fraud or fake marriages. They end up in forced prostitution, loveless marriages, or oppressive labor. The lack of regulations has allowed the industry to grow and treat young women as commodities to be exploited (Cullen, 2002). “From what I’ve seen in the Internet bride trade, the happy stories are the exception,” says Dorchen Leidholdt, director of the Center for Battered Women’s Legal Services of New York City’s Sanctuary for Families (Webber, 2009). Available reports show that the divorce rates for mail-order marriages are about 20%, which is about half of the average American divorce rate (Health Research Funding, 2014).

Attorney Layli Miller-Muro runs the Tahirih Justice Center in Virginia, and has tracked problems in the mail-order bride industry for years. The Tahirih Justice Center, an international women’s rights group, has surveyed 175 legal-aid groups in the United States. More than half of these groups reported clients who had been abused by husbands met through marriage brokers (Briscoe, 2005).

Although information showing that mail-order brides are being isolated and abused is publicized, lawmakers are

ignoring the open trafficking of women as mail-order brides (Lloyd, 2000). Instead of the United States government focusing on the consequences of immigration, there should be more laws in place to help protect mail-order brides. Lawmakers must be careful not to push the industry underground, creating a situation where there is no protection for these women.

### **Nataliya**

In 1998, Nataliya, 26 years of age, was a college student from Ukraine who wanted a husband. She met a Russian-American woman named Natasha Spivack, who ran an internet matchmaking site called “Encounters International”. Spivack told Nataliya she had just the man for her. He was a successful handsome American businessman named James Fox. Nataliya and James met in the United States and married two months later. Soon after their marriage, James started physically abusing Nataliya (Briscoe, 2005).

Nataliya turned to Spivack for help but she was told that all American men were crazy. Spivack explained to Nataliya that if she did not remain complacent, her visa would be revoked and she would be sent back to the Ukraine. Nataliya did not want to go back, so she did what she was told.

Shortly after, her husband physically abused her while she was breastfeeding their child. He hurt her so badly that she had to go to the hospital. Her husband was charged with attempted murder. It was from there that she was able to escape to a women's shelter (Briscoe, 2005). Once safe from her abusive husband, Nataliya decided she was going to sue Spivack and Encounters International. She hired a lawyer named Randall Miller who represented her in the lawsuit. After hearing the case, the court ruled in Nataliya's favor (Briscoe, 2005).

The jury's ruling was based on the failure of Spivack to tell Nataliya about a provision in the immigration law that protects foreign women from deportation if they are leaving abusive husbands (Briscoe, 2005). This provision is called the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (Belleau, 2003). This law was created to protect women and children who are victims of domestic violence from being deported if they cooperate with law enforcement against their abusers (Belleau, 2003).

The judge also stated that Encounters International did not properly vet James Fox as they had led Nataliya to believe. A jury awarded Nataliya \$433,500. Spivack still denied she had done anything wrong because her

involvement ended when Nataliya and James were wed (Briscoe, 2005). James was initially charged with attempted murder, however, the charge was lowered to assault. James was mandated by the court to take an anger management course. At the completion of the anger management course, the assault charge was expunged from his record. Because of this, James was able to pass a background check and marry another Russian mail-order bride (Briscoe, 2005). This story is a horrific example of how violent men can easily obtain mail-order brides.

### **Lera**

The next story is about Lera Loeb, a young woman from the Ukraine. She grew up in a one-bedroom apartment with her parents and brother-. Lera's parents were doctors, but being a doctor does not make you wealthy in the Ukraine. Living a life of poverty and crime was something Lera did not want, so she worked hard academically. Because of Lera's hard work, she was able to come to the United States with a scholarship and study in New York City, New York (Loeb & Pilot, 2009).

Unfortunately, Lera's visa was not renewed for the following school year and she had to return to the Ukraine. When she returned home she became very depressed and could not assimilate

back into her old lifestyle. She and her parents came up with the solution of her becoming a mail-order bride. Unlike the United States, becoming a mail-order bride is an acceptable alternative for impoverished women (Loeb & Pilot, 2009).

Lera noticed the ways that women posed themselves seductively on the website in order to appeal to American men (Loeb & Pilot, 2009). She did not want to do the same thing and decided to take modest photos. In her biography, Loeb (2009) wrote that she was looking for an open-minded man who would be supportive of a career-driven woman. Lera realized some men were blatantly looking for a subservient wife, and she even received correspondence from a man telling her that he was looking for a Ukrainian woman to take care of him in the bedroom (Loeb & Pilot, 2009).

After days of looking at profiles, Lera found a man named Steve who was a music producer and art collector. He was from New York City, where she had attended school on her academic scholarship. His profile excited her and so she contacted him. Steve and Lera corresponded for two months before Steve booked a flight to the Ukraine and meet Lera face to face. Lera felt safe with him and was desperate to get out of the Ukraine (Loeb & Pilot,

2009). Lera came to New York City, and two days after her arrival she and Steve were married. After a week Lera started looking for jobs to establish herself. Her first job was not successful, but she found a job as an assistant with a fashion designer. She was able to return to school and finish her degree while writing a blog about the fashion industry. Her blog exploded with approximately 10,000 hits per day (Loeb & Pilot, 2009).

In “Yes, This Woman is a ‘Mail-Order Bride’”, Lera wrote about her experience as a mail order bride. She stated that the potential dangers of becoming a mail-order bride are not as known in the Ukraine as they are in the United States. She was not worried about her safety when becoming a mail-order bride (Loeb & Pilot, 2009). The story of Lera exemplifies that not all mail-order brides end up in an abusive or unhappy situation. Lera felt empowered as a mail-order bride. She was able to escape the harsh conditions of the Ukraine and come to the United States to become a successful career woman (Loeb & Pilot, 2009).

### **Consent**

What does consent mean as a mail-order bride? First, I am going to describe United States consent laws. Then, I am going to apply feminist

theory as it plays a critical role in understanding consent in this context. I will compare radical-cultural feminism and radical-libertarian feminism to provide multiple perspectives. In order for consent to be legitimate in the United States, there needs to be freedom from violent threats, competence, and sufficient knowledge as to attitudinal consent (Simons, 2006). These conditions allow the person who gives consent the opportunity to set their boundaries. Feminist and legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon (2005) was extremely influential in setting the standards of consent laws. Economic differences, the lack of political representation, and physical power of women hinders their ability to give consent. In other words, all women, not just mail-order brides, cannot give consent.

Legal consent is ambiguous, meaning it is open for interpretation by attorneys and the judicial system. Consent is viewed by the courts on a case by case basis, sometimes not ruling in the favor of the victim (Simons, 2006). Radical feminists have been instrumental in redefining consent in a variety of different situations. Radical feminists are a population of revolutionary women who do not believe in system reform, as liberal feminists do. Radical feminists believe that men oppress

women, and the truest form of oppression is sexism. Radical-cultural feminists believe that heterosexual relationships are oppressive, and that pornography and prostitution are exploitive. On the other hand, radical-libertarian feminists believe that pornography and prostitution can be empowering for women (Tong & Botts, 2017). According to radical-cultural feminist beliefs, women cannot consent to being a mail-order bride because women are not treated as equals in society, and this inequality causes coercive relationships between women and men (McGregor, 2005).

Capitalism, gender hierarchy, and dominance allows American men to use their privilege to dominate and take advantage of women in vulnerable situations. Most women who become mail-order brides are doing so because they are in a dire situation. This position leaves them at a disadvantage, and powerless to their potential husbands, the American government, and the mail-order bride industry. All of these factors inhibit the bride's ability to give consent.

Claiming that all mail-order brides are exploited can be problematic. Consent is performative; it is an action that one does (McGregor, 2005). So, if a person becomes a mail-order bride, they are performing that action and therefore

are consenting. Arguing that all mail-order brides are oppressed is a form of victimization. This victimization sabotages equality by saying that they cannot take care of themselves, which creates a need for protection by men (McGregor, 2005). Mail-order brides are viewed by some as an expression of agency or a form of liberation, meaning that the women act independently and make an autonomous life decision. We cannot judge other cultures due to our own cultural biases. Women should be able to choose which relationships and life choices are better for them without interference. When women become mail-order brides, they are offered opportunities such as having a higher standard of living and more women's rights. Women also have the opportunity to send money to their families (Sarker, et al., 2013). Having economic power allows women to have more control over their lives within a patriarchal society (Lerner, 2006).

In "Selling Sex for Visas", Denise Brennan (2002) points out that women are involved in an economic strategy that is exploiting and capitalizing on the very system that seeks to exploit them in return. Becoming a mail-order bride can be seen as a necessary survival strategy for economic advancement (Brennan, 2002). The mail-order bride industry is seen as a way out of a poor

economic situation, making it an empowering experience for the mail-order bride. This could be the only opportunity women have for class mobility. Marrying a man means you marry into his social class and privilege (Lerner, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Through my research, I discovered that being a mail-order bride can be both oppressive and liberating. The mail-order bride industry is growing and fueled by capitalism and patriarchy. The industry capitalizes on women's economic vulnerability, leading them to believe that they are being saved. It is my hope that the mail-order bride industries will become legally liable to help women who turn to them when they find themselves in an abusive marriage. From Nataliya's story, it can be concluded that the mail-order bride companies offer no assistance or guidance to the brides once they enter the United States. The mail-order bride industry should not feel their duties end with "I do".

I have found little to no statistical data on the potential spousal abuse, domestic violence, or other harm the mail-order brides may face. This could be due to numerous reasons: Many mail-order brides fail to come forward with abuse, the mail-order bride

industry can justify someone's abuse by providing statistics on couples who are happily married, and lastly, the government may feel since the couples enter a contract voluntarily they have no jurisdiction over the relationship. I hope that this knowledge will bring more awareness to the issue, and more

research and statistical studies will be done as a result. I feel that the exponential growth of the industry warrants more scholarly research. Based on what I have learned, I now have a better understanding of my Aunt's situation and why she found comfort and safety in marrying my Uncle.

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# I Am Not Barbie, and I Do Not Need a Ken

*Throughout history, women have faced unfairness and gender inequality. Women are stereotyped and mistreated every day. Some examples are, women are paid less than men, and women have to cover their bodies in public (if not, it is their fault if something dangerous happens to them). Home is supposed to be a safe haven for women, but what about if the unfairness happens at home by the people we love the most? Mistreatment can come from our parents. As a young woman who was treated differently than my brother, I talk about my experiences and how they have shaped my life. I strive to help others understand and be more aware of the inequalities between siblings and parents.*

## Introduction

It was upsetting living in a household where men were treated different than women. Growing up, my little brother had more privileges than I. He could be disobedient without punishment. I used to question my mother and ask her why my little brother had more privilege than I did even though I was older. Her response was always, "Because he is a boy." I am sharing this personal story about how my life was shaped by this mistreatment.

It wasn't until I went to college that I learned about feminism. I realized that I am a feminist and that I have been one since I was a child. It felt good to know that there is a word and body of knowledge for what I had felt in my heart for so many years. It empowered me!

In college, I finally met a group of women who felt the same way and were as strong

mind as me. However, it also saddens me that it took me so long to realize that I was a feminist and that it is not normal or acceptable for women to be treated differently than men. I did not learn this in grammar school, at church, and certainly not at home. Even though my mother and stepfather tried to program me to think that men have more privileges than women, I never believed it. Something inside me just could not accept their views.

I was interested to learn and read more about this topic to find out if studies have been made to argue my point to let parents know that gender differences between siblings do have consequences and negative impacts on children. Two separate reviews of the book *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* by Lise Eliot (2009) discuss Eliot's proposal that it is how parents perceive their babies that creates the gender differences many assume are inborn. Eliot cites studies showing "adults perceive baby boys and girls differently, seeing identical behavior through a gender-tinted lens" (Begley, 2009, para. 2). Eliot's theory is rooted in very tiny differences present in infancy which are magnified by parental treatment, explains J. A. North in the review, "Do Parents Create Gender Differences?". North hopes that Eliot's theory will help parents

recognize their unconscious prejudices.

Another interesting article is "Family Favorite? Parents and Siblings See Imbalances in Parents' Attention Differently" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007), which is about how parents treat their children differently and how siblings and parents often have very different ideas about what is happening and why. This research explains a study that was conducted with 74 two-parent, middle-class families with one child between the ages of 11 and 13 and a teen sibling who is two to four years older. Both parents and siblings were interviewed individually about family interactions. The outcome of this research is that it is important for families to talk about parent-child interaction and for moms and dads to listen to what their kids are telling them about how parental actions are affecting them. To me, this is very important because as a woman who experienced parental conflict, I felt that my mother did not listen to me which caused me to rebel against her and view her negatively.

Susan D. Witt (1997), in "Parental Influence on Children's Socialization to Gender Roles" explains that children learn at an early age how to be a boy or a girl in our society. They first learn from their parents. I learned from my

mother what it meant to be a girl and what rules and behaviors I had to subscribe to. Witt also describes how, as a child growing and developing, “the gender stereotypes they are exposed to at home are reinforced by other elements in their environment and thus perpetuated throughout childhood and on into adolescence” (p. 253).

Witt explains how studies have been done that prove parent-child relationships have effects on development that last well into adulthood. Because of these long-lasting effects, the parent-child relationships are one of the most important developmental factors for a child. Because of my mom’s views, our relationship suffered tremendously and it lasted until adulthood. My mom finally realized that I was my own person and I was going to make my own choices no matter what she wanted. I spent a long time away from my mother. It was during that time that I finally realized I have control over my life and she cannot dictate my decisions.

### **Some of my Story...**

I had a great childhood. Since I enjoyed playing with Barbie dolls, my mother made sure I had all the Barbie accessories to keep me occupied. One day, my mother found Barbie and Ken

naked under my bed. She asked me, “What is this?” and I replied, “They are a couple and they are in love.” My mother, with a concerned look on her face said, “Barbie and Ken can’t do that unless they are married because it’s a sin and because good girls don’t do things like that. Let’s set up a wedding and get them married.” I was excited! Mom was finally going to play Barbie with me. My mother sewed Barbie a beautiful white wedding dress out of white material she found in her closet. She combed her hair and expressed how excited Barbie was that she was finally going to become a respectable woman and live happily ever after with Ken. My mother went as far as making real cupcakes as cake for the wedding. When it was time for Barbie and Ken to get hitched, my mother was the priest who officiated the ceremony. My mother was trying to instill a message in my brain about gender role expectations, but as a child, I did not know her intentions.

I have two sisters and one brother. My sisters and I agreed that my brother was my mom’s favorite. She did everything for him. She cleaned his room and bought him the latest fashions. As a child, I did not see the differences in treatment because my mother always said that housework belonged to the girls, so to me, it was

normal. My sisters and I had to clean our room ourselves, but my mom cleaned my brother's room. As girls, we had chores around the house like sweeping, washing dishes, and dusting, etc., but my brother only had to take out the garbage. As I grew into a teenager, I started seeing the unfairness more clearly.

When I was 15 years old, my oldest sister started to voice her opinion and talk back. When she did express herself, she would get slapped or punished. I saw my sister staying in her room for hours at a time, punished and sad. One time she got caught reading a romance novel and it was taken from her. My mother said that it was indecent for her to read such books. I saw my sister cry herself to sleep.

My sister and my mom's relationship was deteriorating before my eyes. One day, my sister did not come home. She had run away at only 16 years old. Even though I was seeing these things, I did not understand why my big sister was giving my mom such a difficult time. I cannot remember how many months passed, but eventually my sister returned. However, this time she was with a guy. She looked healthier, brighter, and stronger. Something was different. She was pregnant. My mom told my sister that she had to get

married because it is a sin to have sex outside of marriage. My mom went on to say that it did not look right for my sister to be unwed and pregnant. It was not long before my sister and her new boyfriend were married. This situation taught me that it was my destiny to be married to whomever I had sex with. If not, I would be sinning in the eyes of God. Just like Barbie and Ken.

When I turned 16 years of age everything started to change for me. I started to retaliate, and because I was not getting the treatment that I deserved at home, I started acting out in school. I felt so disrespected and voiceless at home. I was not going to let anyone outside the home silence me. I would get into fights at school when people tried to help me. I did not get in trouble at home because I never started the fights; I was just defending myself. My mother never questioned why I was fighting so much at school. She was just happy that I wasn't a punk and that I never lost a fight. Everything was different for my brother though.

When I was 18 years old, my brother was 16 years old. He could stay out until 12:00 a.m., but I had to be in the house by 7:00 p.m. My mom said that young ladies should not be out late because it makes them look "fast" and people might get the wrong impression

of them. Furthermore, my brother could have girls over to our house, but I could not have boys over to our house or even date. My mother used to say that you never know what could happen because a boy could take advantage of me and I could get pregnant, but a girl could not take advantage of a boy. I was always confused with my mother's views because they did not make sense to me. Yet, as "just a girl," who was I to question my mother?

Because of my confusion and anger, I would get upset and would start problems with my brother's girlfriends just to fight them. I figured that if I fought his girlfriends, they would not want to come over any more. If I could not have company, then neither could my brother. I took extreme measures to get fair treatment, but I had to do what I had to do and act radically to get my point across.

From 16 to 18 years of age, my mother and I did not get along. I would get into arguments with my mother because I wanted to voice my opinions, but there was no getting through to her. My opinions were not valued and were not important. I hated this with a passion. When my mother would scream at me, I would raise my voice louder. If I had the audacity to prove to

my mother that what I was saying made sense, my mother would slap me across the face. That was when I knew I made my point. The arguments would only last five minutes and they ended with getting slapped or storming to my room and crying myself to sleep. I just did not understand why I was being treated so harshly while my brother's life was so easy. This treatment hurt me and made me see my mother as weak instead of a strong woman. This treatment made me not respect my mother's views or even take her advice whenever she wanted to keep me safe. Because of this, I made a lot of mistakes in my life. But why did my mother feel this way?

My mother always told me that she wanted me to be better than her. I did not understand why she still wanted to keep me in the same bubble she was in. She said that I should find a husband, get married, and have children. I should keep a clean house and keep myself clean, and that I should keep my legs closed or men will talk negatively about me and call me horrible names. In my young mind, I did not care what any man said about me. My mom's words no longer mattered to me; they went into one ear and out the other. I did not respect my mother's words because I did not respect her views.

I remember at 18 years of age, I was a

senior in high school and I got into a relationship with a boy. I was surprised when my mother let me date him because he was the opposite of everything my mother wanted for me. I did this on purpose. But now I can see that the only reason my mother accepted him was because she had ulterior motives. Once my mother found out that he and I were having sex, she told me that I had to marry him. She tried to pull the same stunt she pulled on my big sister, telling me that it was a sin and this and that, but I said no. I am not marrying him. I am not Barbie and this is not a game. My life was not a game my mother could control. My boyfriend ended up breaking up with me because everything was just too much for him, and I did not blame him. Later in life, I ran into him and realized that if I had married him, I would have been miserable because of the person he had become.

A year later, I met another guy. I was 19 years old and he was 29. I became pregnant and we got married. I wasn't ready for marriage, but I guess my mom's shenanigans worked. It was so programmed in my head that it was the right thing to do. I married the father of my child even though I was not in love. My marriage lasted three years. With a two-year-old and a six-month-old, I

decided to leave my husband because I was not happy. I wanted more for myself; I wanted to be free. I did not want to be like my mom and be with a man who I was not happy with.

So, I bounced! I got a small two-bedroom apartment, saved up for five years, and then bought a home for myself and my beautiful children. I became an independent woman all by myself. Years have now passed and I am no longer angry at my mother. In fact, we have a good relationship. Rebuilding our relationship was not a walk in the park. I had to put my foot down many different times to let my mother know that she cannot control my life anymore. Trust me, it was not pretty. I no longer blame my mother for her treatment towards me and my siblings because it was all she knew at the time. But it had me asking, why did she react so negatively toward me as a girl growing up, and if she could go back in time, would she do things differently? Her reaction really made me aware that something was not right about my mother's views and my rights as a woman.

### **A Mother's Point of View...**

Just listening to my mom's life stories and what she went through helped me have empathy towards her and put my

feelings aside. I sat with mom and I asked her to explain the reasons that she treated my brother differently than her daughters. She rolled her eyes at me and said “don’t start.” I explained to her that I am just trying to understand the reasons behind her behavior. This made her feel more comfortable.

My mother explained that when she was young she could go outside one hour per day, but her brothers could stay out until 9:00 p.m. I asked her if she felt upset that her brothers had more privilege than her, but she said no because it was normal treatment to her and she was used to it. My mother agreed that when she had daughters, she repeated the same treatment because that was all she knew. When asked if she could go back in time, would she treat her daughters differently, she stated that she would not because she wanted her daughters to have morals. She wasn’t going to have her daughters be used by men thinking that they were going to sleep and get her daughters pregnant with no commitment.

While talking with my mother, I brought up the time that my mother married Barbie and Ken, and she stated that she was trying to teach me that couples should not sleep together if they are not married. She said women

should have morals so that men can respect women. My mother said that at 16 years of age, she ran away from home with her boyfriend. When I asked her why she ran away, she stated that circumstances and problems at home made her leave. I asked her to elaborate. Annoyed, she said, “you know, problems because I started liking a boy.” My mother was married at 16 and by the age of 24 she already had four kids. She was married to my father, who was physically abusive, did not value her, and was constantly in and out of jail. It did not matter to her mother that she was so unhappy, it only mattered that she was married and not having sex and children outside of marriage. She finally divorced my father after he got eight years in prison for robbery.

I wanted to go deeper into my mother’s life, but she shut down. She did not want to talk any longer. I am not sure if she comprehends that the reason she ran away was because her mother was treating her differently than her brothers and that this caused the problems at home. After going through what she went through with my father, she still does not comprehend that having your daughters marry men who are not good for them, all to cover up a sin in her mind, is damaging for her daughters. Sometimes I think it is

because she does not want to admit that she was wrong because admitting she is wrong to her means that she failed as a mother. I do not think she failed as a mother at all. She made choices based on her upbringing and what she knew was right

Even after my experience growing up with my mother, she is a great woman in my eyes. I appreciate my mother because even though she had a rough life before and after divorcing my father, she kept her daughters safe and never had different men around us. She is God-fearing, family oriented, has a big heart, and loves to feed everyone.

### **Conclusion**

I did not let my experience take my voice away. I became rough around the edges and able to take on anything that the world brings at me. It has helped me become an independent and strong woman and be more aware of the way that I treat my children. My sisters are all the same way. My brother is

currently in jail serving time. I mostly think the reason we are all strong and independent is because we decided to take the good aspects of my mother's views and make it better. This is not the case all the time and it does not apply to every woman.

Women have faced unfairness and inequality throughout history and get stereotyped and treated unequally every day. Gender discrimination in the home starts with parents and it is important for parents to be aware of these unfair treatments and the damages treatments like these can cause. I am lucky to have broken the walls down and be more aware of the double standards to ensure that my children are treated equally, but this is not the case with all women.

When I asked my children if at any moment they have ever felt that I treated them unfairly because of their gender they said "no, you treat us fairly, and we are free have a voice." My experiences have taught me that I am not Barbie, and I do not need a Ken

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# Sexual Objectification of Female Bodies in Beauty Pageants, Pornography, and Media

“All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water.”

(MacKinnon, 1989)

*Have you ever watched a beauty pageant contest? What about mainstream pornography? These two capitalistic industries continue to enforce the misogynistic view that the female body is to be consumed by the male population. I argue that the societal standards we commonly consider to be the norm affect female embodiment and what it means to be a woman in contemporary society. Beauty standards, gender roles, sexualization, objectification, and the male gaze all point towards this ideology that the female body is to be consumed by men. I argue we need to abandon these societal standards that control female bodies and behaviors in a heteropatriarchal world and advocate freedom from the male gaze for all women.*

## Introduction

In an effort to improve the way the female body is viewed, my essay examines the ways pageantry and pornography (porn) uphold the misogynistic view that women are sexual objects to be consumed by men. Both industries continue to enforce patriarchal

ideologies upon members of our society. Men are viewed as strong, powerful, and full of intellect, while women are seen as inferior, weak, obedient, and submissive to men. These cultural ideologies still exist in the twenty-first century and continue to reinforce the belief that women exist to benefit men.

My research asks: How does the production of beauty tie into violence, objectification, and sexualization of the female body within pageantry and pornography? What aspects of pageantry are reflective or parallel to pornography and vice versa? What cultural messages do pageantry and pornography relay to the public? When do we cross the line of separation between selling a product and selling the woman's body? What societal standards are present in both pageantry and pornography that may put the female image at risk in a male-dominated society? These are all questions that I researched by focusing on women's bodies as my centerpiece, while also seeking to understand how the media twists the view of women's bodies.

The history of pageantry serves as a reminder that women's bodies are restricted by the measuring tape and judge's approval of their physicality.

The evolution of pageantry swimsuit contests from a one-piece bathing suit, to a two-piece bathing suit, to a bikini is a perfect example of how society continues to expose and objectify women's bodies. Will swimsuit competitions, as they become increasingly more revealing, continue to undress women until they are naked? What does nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women's equality?

As more of women's bodies are put on display, women become more vulnerable to society's judgments. Howard Fremont Stratton (1922) states that a pageant was "an evolution of thought, of history, of aspiration, to set before the eyes events of life, and possibilities of art" (p. 208). This statement could not be more opposite to how pageantry is viewed today: The female body, as subject, is the main focal point rather than the focus of her identity as a contestant. Pageantry also allows viewers to experience their sexual fantasies in ways that influence the production of pornography. People within a heteropatriarchal society derive pleasure from watching women parade around in their swimsuits and ball gowns. The "male gaze," a symbol of women's exploitation, is evident in how women pose onstage and look into the

camera (Dow, 2003). It is the seductive look, the one where the woman looks over her shoulder, which we commonly associate with leaning into the “male gaze.” A main focal point for my research is the messages pageantry and pornography broadcast to the public regarding female embodiment and in turn, how women are viewed by society.

### Literature Review

My research focuses on the similarities and parallels between pageantry and heteropatriarchal pornography. I define heteropatriarchy as the norm of being in a male-dominated and heterosexual society (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2016). Capitalism is profound within both industries that use the female body for profit, whether it is through a national pageant competition aired on television or the consumption of pornography. Mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography, particularly between heterosexual cisgender<sup>10</sup> men and cisgender women, is geared towards providing male sexual pleasure. Erotic advertisements (see Figure 1), images in pornographic magazines, such as Playboy, and erotic films

<sup>10</sup> “Cisgender” or “cis” is defined as an individual’s biological sex aligning with their gender identity (Serano, 2007).

portray women porn actresses as subservient to the dominant male actor.

I analyze the pageant and pornography industries through a radical feminist lens. Radical feminists want to achieve liberation through disrupting patriarchy (Tong, 2014). This framework focuses on the sex and gender oppressions of women. The saying “the personal is political” refers to the theory that women’s experiences and problems are the result of many political and societal oppressions (Hanisch, 1969). This 1960s and 1970s phrase was used as a rally cry by feminists to declare the issues that affected women’s personal lives such as household work, childcare, equality in the workplace, sex, abortion, and appearance (Hanisch, 1969).

Radical feminist theory states that we need to dismantle the patriarchy so that women are not oppressed by society’s



Figure 1. Dolce & Gabbana From "Beauty in the Media," by S. LeComte, n.d. ([beautyinthemedia.weebly.com](http://beautyinthemedia.weebly.com)). In the public domain.

standards of men being superior. Many radical theorists believe that capitalism deems sexuality as a discursion of power (Tong, 2014). Tong discusses that radicals strive to get to the root of sexism in society and believe that there is nothing salvageable in the patriarchal sexist world we live in.

There are two branches in radical feminist thought: Radical libertarian and radical cultural. The radical libertarian philosophy is sex positive, wants equality for all gender identities, and sees pornography and sex work as potentially empowering (Millet, 1969; Firestone, 1971). The radical cultural philosophy is female-centered (without male influence), where sex work is seen as oppressive and is anti-pornography (Daly, 1978).

Mary Daly, a radical cultural feminist, wants to replace androgyny with what she calls the “wild female” (1978), a woman who is beyond masculine and feminine roles. Daly rejects the terms of masculinity and femininity as products of patriarchy and she tells women that they must remain radically apart from men. She, along with many other radical thinkers and legal scholars, like MacKinnon (1989), wanted an end to patriarchy and its’ sexual oppressions (Dworkin, 1981). Radical cultural thinkers, such as Andrea Dworkin

(1981), use MacKinnon’s legal writings on sexual harassment. Women are used as objects and entities in much of the porn industry and are subjugated to violent pleasures and coercions (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Dworkin (1987) states that men invade and occupy women’s bodies during heterosexual acts, while on the other hand, MacKinnon believes that women in patriarchal societies cannot consent to heterosexual sex.

Within most heterosexual pornographic content, you typically see the woman in a submissive role compared to her male partner. Power dynamics play a huge role in the objectification of women’s bodies because men are seen as superior. The dominant and submissive roles between two consenting partners embrace the powerful-versus-powerless theme seen in mainstream heteropatriarchal pornography. Radical libertarians may view the powerful-versus-powerless roles as empowering for the participating women (Tong, 2014). Radical cultural feminists, on the other hand, see pornography as oppressive because male dominance is still rooted in the industry (Tong, 2014). Carolyn Bronstein (2011) states that anti-pornography feminists believe women who participate in power-versus-

powerlessness sexual behaviors are encouraging female sexual objectification, male domination, and female submissiveness.

Violence towards women can also be seen within Gonzo porn, which is rooted in sexual violence (Dines, 2010). Women in Gonzo porn are violated by enforced gagging, vomiting, or vaginal, oral, and anal penetration all at the same time (Dines, 2010). These acts dehumanize women into instruments used for pleasure. MacKinnon (1989) states, men want “women sexually accessible, have-able, there for them, wanting to be taken and used, with perhaps just a little light bondage” (p. 327). MacKinnon says that any kind of pornographic image is sexualized violence. Her work is not talking about Gonzo porn specifically, but rather helps explain the objectification that we see in advertisements like Dolce & Gabbana plastered across billboards and television screens that marginalize women.

The pageant industry is associated with a male-centered or patriarchal institution of mass media that uses sex and gender oppressions against women. We see this through television shows such as *Toddlers & Tiaras* and the *Miss America Pageant*, streamed live every year. Most women are told that they can

only act, dress, and talk in a feminine way. This is where gender comes into play because pageantry is the ideal feminine lifestyle a woman can pursue. It embraces all three of the ways in which women must perform. Some pageants emphasize fake hair, makeup, skimpy clothing, and thin body as examples of how women present themselves to society within this business. Women should not have to dress provocatively in order to get attention!

I blame our patriarchal society that focuses on objectifying women's sexuality for the purpose of capitalism and the benefit of men. We see this when women model in pageants to compete in the beauty industry while men are told to be breadwinners and compete intellectually in the workforce. We can also see how capitalism benefits from women being submissive in relation to porn films through the amount of profit the United States pornography industry generates, which ranges from \$4 to \$7 billion dollars each year (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). This profit largely privileges white male power. MacKinnon (1989) states that even if women own and agreeably participate in pornography, it is still rooted in patriarchy.

Popular industries of pageantry and mainstream pornography have control over what cultural misogynistic messages they produce. By viewing societal influences through a patriarchal lens, we can see the pressures that women conform to or abide by in order to fit in our male-dominated society. Such factors include the standards of beauty, gender roles (Ferree & Wade, 2015), the “male gaze,” sexualization, objectification, and male pleasure. I next explain how these factors exist within both pageants and pornography and how the female body is used for profit.

The link between pornography and violence is what many feminists want to publicize. The subordinating porn practices lead to inequality among genders, classes, races and sexualities in our society (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). In my research, I identify the term “violence” to mean negative views and criticisms of the female body as a result of following societal standards. Pertaining to films and porn images (advertisements) serving as a form of patriarchy and sex and gender oppression towards women, women are seen as submissive to men. Most pornography between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman deems women as the objects men must acquire in

order to reach full satisfaction or pleasure because most pornography is produced by men, bought by men, used by men, and made primarily for the benefit of men (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). According to Robert Jensen (1998), ignoring what privilege means is the ultimate privilege. Men are ignorant to their superiority in society; therefore, in porn, men have a compulsion to dominate women.

Carolyn Bronstein (2011) describes the anti-pornography movement and its focus on the oppression women felt under male sexual power. During the 1976 to 1986 anti-pornography movement, radical libertarian pro-sex feminism focused on sexual freedom for women by encouraging them to discuss pleasure, sexual desires, and lust (Bronstein, 2011). The Barnard Conference of 1982 provided the opportunity for pro-sex women to talk about their theory and voice their opinions on a national scale, but it also caused uproar by the anti-pornography feminists who were not invited to the conference (Bronstein, 2011). Anti-pornography feminists protested the *Diary*, a booklet representing the conference proceedings, and they stood outside the conference location distributing their own pamphlets, claiming the conference only

represented a portion of the feminist views on sexuality (Bronstein, 2011). This conference started the “sex wars”, the divide between sex positive and anti-sex women of the 1980s, but it also opened up the discussion on female sexuality and challenged the anti-pornography debate on sexuality, making it more complex (Bronstein, 2011). The history of radical libertarians and radical cultural feminists influence the ways pornography is viewed in contemporary society.

There are social pressures that women endure relating to the perfection of body image. Many women are conditioned to not recognize the societal pressures that are enforced upon them. For example, if a woman is overweight, she is fat-shamed and deemed unattractive and unacceptable in society. Capitalism plays a part in fat-shaming because women will buy makeup, surgically alter their bodies, and change their physical appearances to be seen as attractive. We should not be putting restrictions on bodies. Each individual should be accepted for who they are, not how they look. Society needs to be aware of how women are affected within the capitalistic industries of pageantry and pornography that profit off of female embodiment.

Feminist research recognizes the pageantry or pornography aspect of mass media (Bronstein, 2011; Dworkin, 1981). Many feminist scholars continually express their dislike with the use of female bodies as sexualized objects in ways that benefit men’s desires (Hester, 2014; MacKinnon, 1989; Valenti, 2016). Patriarchal views affect women’s body image and the future of female sexuality (Dines, Jensen, Russo, 1998; Valenti, 2016). The messages regarding the female body and experience, particularly as an entity for men, ultimately provide insight into if and how such portrayals may serve as an oppressing force to young girls and women in contemporary culture.

### **Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall**

As a woman in twenty-first century society, I am subjected to the ways young girls and women are expected to act, talk, look, and so on. According to Jessica Valenti (2008),

We see images of unattainable beauty norms everywhere -- in magazines, television, advertisements, movies, you name it. All touting the same image of what’s supposed to be an attractive woman: white, thin, blond (usually), big boobs, the whole package (p. 30).

Beauty standards make young girls and women think they must conform to characteristics of whiteness, thinness, and attractiveness. Women are constantly told that they have to be thin but also have curves with a big bust. Beauty expectations have

. . . become so normalized! Oh, don't like your tits? Shove some new ones in there! Hate your nose? Cut it off. Feeling chubby? Suck that fat out! You don't actually *want* that vagina, do you? Trim trim (Valenti, 2007, p. 211).

Women have to stop hating their bodies, because if they do, it will be a revolutionary act in itself (Valenti, 2007).

Women in pornography and pageantry are thin; they are taking up less space. This represents less power, agency, and voice. The way we understand beauty is racialized in the ways that beauty is ascribed to middle/upper class white women, and how capitalism then markets and reproduces this beauty to the white female population. Images of beauty focus on the ideal woman as having light skin. This affects what women and society perceive to be "beautiful".

What is the true definition of beauty anyway? The representation of what it means to be "beautiful" evolves as society progresses. The history of

pageantry serves as a reminder that women's bodies are restricted by the measuring tape and the judge's approval of their physicality. Although there are competitions based on other forms of talent, the overarching message is the female body being judged on physical looks. According to young boys, there are six different types of "girl": The cute girl, the pretty girl, the hot girl, the sexy girl, the fat girl, and the ugly girl (Valenti, 2016). After I read this statement in Valenti's *Sex Object: A Memoir* (2016), I found myself asking the question: Who/what determines if a girl is considered "ugly?" My answer: Society, patriarchy, and capitalism.

Within both pageantry and pornography there are set standards that women have to meet in order even to be considered a possible participant. Some examples may include being white, having a thin waistline, and performing heterosexuality. These characteristics represent the "ideal" woman, which has been the pattern for decades.

Women should be taught to value their intelligence, abilities, etc., instead of just valuing themselves for looking hot in a bikini and making themselves available to men (Valenti, 2007). In most pageants, women are valued for their beauty and physical appearances

above all else, while the male population watches on and “gazes” at the exposed female bodies. It is not very often that we see heavier women taking part in a mainstream porn film or being plastered across *Playboy* magazine. While you can see that pageantry enforces beauty standards upon the contestants very clearly, pornography does the same with actresses who take part in sexual acts. Heteropatriarchal pornography industries focus on the use of heterosexual intercourse to achieve male pleasure at the expense of female sexuality (O’Callaghan, 2017).

Female bodies are utilized for profit within the advertising industry, plastering their bodies in advertisements in a sexual way to draw in consumers. Rebecca Coleman (2008) points out that bodies are not separate from the media, but rather, are understood through the images displayed to its audience. In other words, consumers understand and experience female bodies through the advertisements portrayed to them. Many advertisements can be seen as erotic or pornographic to the young adult eye. Some examples include Dolce & Gabbana, Suit Supply, Tom Ford, and other similar fashion brands sold to women (see Figures 1-10). My research



Figure 2: Tom Ford. From "Controversial Campaigns: 9 Banned NSFW Fashion Ads You Probably Shouldn't See," by M. Stempien, 2015

(<http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/galleries/tom-ford-for-men-2.html>) In the public domain.



Figure 3. American Apparel. From "Rape culture," by the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness, n.d.

([stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/rape-culture/](http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/rape-culture/)). In the public domain.

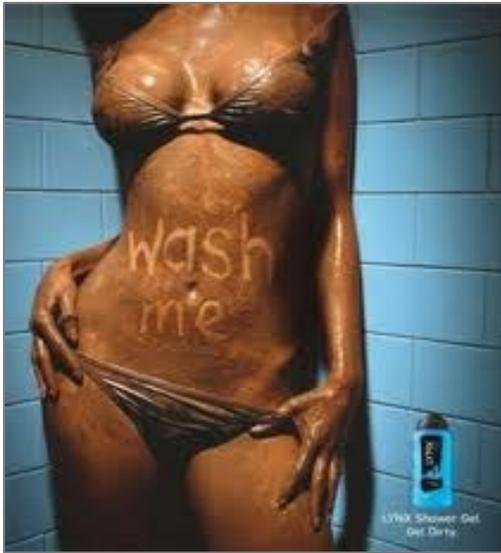


Figure 4: Axe. From "Rage against the media, not against ourselves," by V. Rodriguez, 2014 ([womenandmediafa2014.blogspot.com/2014/10/rage-against-media-not-against-ourselves.html](http://womenandmediafa2014.blogspot.com/2014/10/rage-against-media-not-against-ourselves.html)). In the public domain.



Figure 5: Budweiser. From "Objectifying Women in Beer Advertisements," by Timali and Haya, 2013 (<https://sheisnotathing.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/objectifying-women-in-beer-advertisements/>). In the public domain.



Figure 6: Calvin Klein. From "Sexual assault counselor asks: Why is it OK to use sexual violence as a marketing tool?" by M. Tankard Reist, 2010 ([melindatankardreist.com/2010/10/sexual-assault-counselor-asks-why-is-it-ok-to-use-sexual-violence-as-a-marketing-tool/](http://melindatankardreist.com/2010/10/sexual-assault-counselor-asks-why-is-it-ok-to-use-sexual-violence-as-a-marketing-tool/)). In the public domain.



Figure 7: Kit Kat. From "I don't believe this is an official Kit Kat ad (nsfw-ish)," by M. Copyranter, 2012 ([copyranter.blogspot.com/2012/03/i-dont-believe-this-is-official-kit-kat.html](http://copyranter.blogspot.com/2012/03/i-dont-believe-this-is-official-kit-kat.html)). In the public domain.

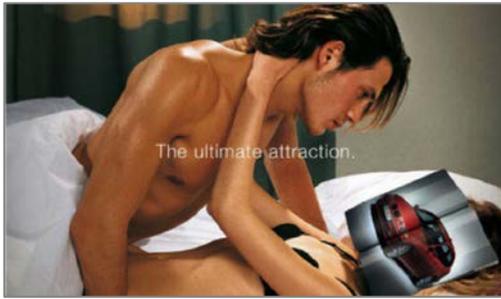


Figure 8. BMW. From "An 'Easy' Ride," by octobersveryown, 2016 ([newsactivist.com/fr/node/11508](http://newsactivist.com/fr/node/11508)). In the public domain.

is interested in whether these advertisements serve as a form of pornography while also relating to pageantry in the way advertisers use the female body. The majority of the advertisements I look at portray white women who display the thinness ideal. The women have to perform “sexy” in order to sell the product being shown in



Figure 9. Suit Supply. From "Suit Supply shameless ad campaign: Distracting," by G. Hudson, November 1, 2010 [blog]. (<http://openzedoor.blogspot.nl/2010/11/suit-supply-shameless-ad-campaign.html>). In the public domain.



Figure 10. Gucci. From "Fashion Ego," by Fiona, 2016 (<http://contemplatingcatapostrophes.org/fashion-ego/>). In the public domain.

the advertisements, and they serve as tools to bring in capital for the industry.

Although some pageant contestants and onstage performers may experience a boost in self-confidence when they compete, they are still viewed as a “beauty” onstage. Young girls and women are highly judged when performing onstage and it impacts their confidence in themselves and their bodies in negative ways. The portrayal of unattainable media images of women contributes to low self-esteem in young girls and women (Coleman, 2008). Coleman - states that the media serves as a guidebook or a manual on the acceptable appearance of a modern-day woman. Media, whether it is a pageant contest aired on television, an erotic advertisement, or a pornographic film, portrays the acceptable female body.

Any other bodies are deemed ugly, unacceptable, or are shamed and do not fit into society.

It is important to note that many women competitors in pageantry have a positive experience when competing. Some compete in family owned pageants that are more value based, meaning family oriented and focusing on who the contestants are as a person or viewing pageantry as a lifestyle. Competing may give some young girls and women confidence, but at the same time, they are told what to do and how to look. Even though some pageant contestants may like to compete, I examine how they might be unaware of what messages the industry produces to the audience in regards to their bodies.

I am not criticizing girls and women who compete, but rather, the industry's purpose for presenting the contestants in sexual ways. Women in pornography are told how to dress and do their hair and makeup based on what trends and styles are popular during that time. This not only impacts women's self-image, but it also continues to bolster capitalism. Women will also compare their physicality to other women in order to achieve a better image. The age of the contestants is also very important. Miss America contestants have to be in the age range of

approximately seventeen to twenty-four years. This enforces young femininity in the industry and contributes to the image of ideal beauty as young and vulnerable.

### **Undress Me with Your Eyes**

One of the most important aspects to address in a patriarchal society is the "male gaze." Bonnie J. Dow (2003) identifies the male gaze as a societal factor in which women want to be seen as acceptable through the eyes of men. If they are deemed unacceptable because they do not exemplify the ideal version of female embodiment, then they are outside standards. Performing onstage or onscreen is a perfect example of being in a place where your body is judged by outside viewers.

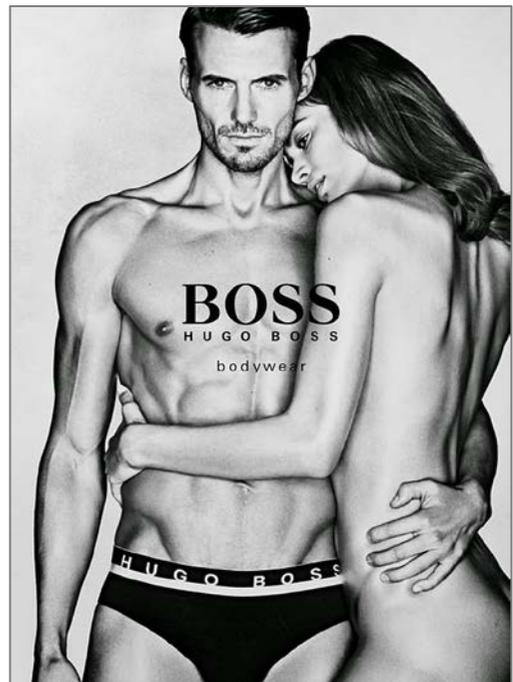
Pageantry, an industry largely focused on swimsuit contests, is a great example of the male gaze when women pose at the end of the runway and look over their shoulder into the camera. This look over the shoulder is symbolic of the male gaze definition and is commonly done so in a sexual manner. My question is: Will the pageants continue to undress female pageant contestants until they are naked? This could happen in the future. We see images of naked women everywhere, without their genitals or nipples

showing, so the next step would be to show these areas. If this did happen, I believe that the meaning of the male gaze would be more focused on female genitalia and breasts, due to the exposure to the audience. This could put female contestants more at risk of being marginalized and sexualized, and opportunities to be anything else would be restricted, as they would be representing a pornographic image.

Many women in our society today do not find erotic advertisements to be appealing. Actually, they find them to be hurtful to their identities as women (Douglas, 1995; Kilbourne, 1999). The models in the advertisements are being portrayed as sexual by nature and depicted as sex objects used to sell products. Why do women have to be sexualized in order to sell a product? The reason: Sex sells. The Tom Ford image (Figure 2) of the naked woman hiding her vagina behind a bottle of men's cologne and holding another bottle of cologne between her breasts, is too revealing and unnecessary, and it could potentially be seen as borderline pornography. What message does this image imply to the public? Women are to be viewed only by men, and this advertisement portrays this with the woman having her legs wide open with an erotic expression on her face. To me,

this advertisement is saying, "Take me!" It is being marketed to men and implies that if men buy this cologne, women will come running to them, wanting to have sex. If advertisements like this are being publicly displayed for all to see, how is this helping or changing the way society looks at women's bodies?

I did some extra digging and found that images of male genitalia is not as



*Figure 11.* Hugo Boss Bodywear. From "Alex Lundqvist Fronts Hugo Boss' Spring/Summer 2013 Bodywear Campaign," by Davide, 2013, ([www.thefashionisto.com/alex-lundqvist-fronts-hugo-boss-springsummer-2013-bodywear-campaign/](http://www.thefashionisto.com/alex-lundqvist-fronts-hugo-boss-springsummer-2013-bodywear-campaign/)). In the public domain.

highly exposed to viewers as compared to female genitalia. In mainstream media, the male genitalia is covered by an object or not fully exposed, unlike the Tom Ford advertisement that just barely covers the woman's vagina and breasts. In many advertisements with men scantily clothed (only boxers worn), women are usually present and even more undressed and sexualized (Figure 11). The media continues to produce the message that women's bodies are for the consumption and touch of men, which upholds the misogynistic view that women are for men only.

Girls as young as five, such as the girls on the television reality series *Toddler's & Tiaras*, worry about their physical appearance and how to act sexy (Palmer, 2013). Again, there is that male gaze factor playing into how a young girl has to act in order to attract a man's attention. A five-year-old should not be worrying about how to act in a sexual manner in order to grab the attention of the audience. For example, "A two-year-old named Ava is told to mime taking off her clothes and to 'shaky shaky' by her father while on stage" (Palmer, 2013, p. 133). The reality television show makes young girls look older (see Figure 12), while in pornography the women look younger.



Figure 12. Toddler's & Tiaras. From "TLC's Toddler's and Tiaras: Way Too Much or Just Enough?," by C. Parish, 2014, ([tvcriticism2014.blogspot.com/2014/05/tlc-s-toddler-s-and-tiaras-way-too-much.html](http://tvcriticism2014.blogspot.com/2014/05/tlc-s-toddler-s-and-tiaras-way-too-much.html)).

In the public domain.

Both industries, in different ways, enforce the young-woman-in-her-twenties look.

*Toddler's & Tiaras* is negatively impacting the way society views young female bodies and could possibly lead to an increase in child pedophilia. Christine Tamer (2011) supports this argument, writing,

A government official in Thailand recently ordered the removal of the swimsuit category from a child beauty pageant because such a ‘contest could stir sexual fantasies in some audience members while others might be tempted to have sex with a child prostitute’ (p. 87).

She explains that many countries outside the United States fear American child pageants and the “glitz” factor (Tamer, 2011). The girls who participate in the reality television show *Toddlers & Tiaras* believe that when they have their physical appearances altered or changed, they become more “beautiful” and valuable to the audience (Palmer, 2013). The male gaze supports patriarchal capitalism because society profits from young girls’ and women’s interests in wanting to look beautiful or acceptable in the eyes of the judge and audience.

### **Male Pleasure**

Sexualization and objectification are two major concepts to consider when discussing the patriarchal lens through which women are viewed. Sexualization is making something sexual in nature or character. For example, women are sexualized because of their bodies; typically, their breasts and vaginas are the focal points. Objectification is similar but this deems someone or

something as an object. There has been research reported on the history of bathing suit competitions in pageantry. Scholars Howard F. Stratton (1992) and David Glassberg (1990) studied bathing suits in pageantry and how they started from a one-piece and over decades evolved into a bikini. Society continues to expose female bodies for capital. Addressing the nakedness concern about pageant contestants, what would nakedness mean in the context of beauty pageantry and women’s equality?

Pageantry and pornography allow men in the audience to experience sexual fantasies, whether it be watching *Toddlers & Tiaras* on television, *Miss America* live in person, or an adult film at home. Men can start to blur reality and fantasy as a result of pornography. For example, a man is having sex with a woman while fantasizing about another woman in a pornographic film that he watched earlier (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Some men even watch pornography while performing the same act on the woman they are having sex with (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). Can men get erections just by viewing pageantry? I absolutely think they can. Valenti (2016) stated that in her own encounters she has noticed men taking pictures of a woman’s bare back when it is exposed to use later for

their own pleasure. This relates to pageantry in how anyone can view the women's bodies onstage. The bathing suit contests make it very easy for men to fantasize about the contestant's bodies due to large amounts of skin showing and the suit highlighting the female figure.

Catharine MacKinnon (1989) states, "It is to argue that the excitement at reduction of a person to a thing, to less than a human being, as socially defined, is its fundamental motive force [sex]" (p. 130). MacKinnon and Dworkin (1981) both contributed to this argument by saying that porn is sexually discriminatory towards women. MacKinnon states, "It constructs women as things for sexual use and constructs its consumers to desperately want women to desperately want possession and cruelty and dehumanization" (p. 327). Women are viewed by the pornography producers as objects and entities to be sexually violated by the male actors. This sets the stage for sexual harassment, rape, or violence against women (Bronstein, 2011). On the other hand, are women being "raped" if they are only involved in the porn industry for the money? Can women give consent if they participate in pornography? MacKinnon believes that women are not able to give

sexual consent, and therefore, pornography promotes rape situations. If a woman agrees to engage in a specific sexual act, then yes, it is consensual. But if a woman agrees to be an actress in a porn film without knowing what type of acts she will have to endure, then that is not consent. An example that would support MacKinnon's argument would be Gonzo porn. This type of porn is rooted in severe violence and causes harm to the female body physically and mentally (Dines, 2010). This further implies the false ideology that women are not human; therefore, they can be violated.

I am not criticizing the sex acts that are pleasurable to some porn actresses. I am looking at how pornography could potentially hurt the involved women, whether physically or how women are viewed by society as objects. Just like bell hooks (2014) wanted feminist theory to be accessible to everyone, I want people to be aware of what feminist equality means and the potential exploitation pageantry and pornography introduce. I want people to be familiar with what it means to be a woman in society and why gender equality is crucial. If women are denied viable education and employment, then consent to engage in pornography is

coerced by a patriarchal market that legitimizes the work of men as part of capitalistic production. So capitalism does, in many ways, create a sex class where women are relegated to service work in which sex work and pageantry are a part. This relates to how MacKinnon (1989) states that sex is forced upon women and they have no choice when it comes to engaging in sexual activities when the pornographer tells women what to do in order to please the male actors. If a woman does not have the viable resources to provide for herself, she may be forced into doing pornographic acts that she does not wish to.

### **Conclusion**

Within pageantry and pornography, gender roles set standards that women must follow in order to be considered as a contestant or porn actress. In both industries, women are told to embrace their femininity, whether it be acting out their heterosexuality on camera or physically representing it in pageantry. The male gaze ties into power dynamics because within pageants and pornography women perform to be accepted as attractive enough to pleasure a man or beautiful enough to move forward to the next round. The women on stage represent the ideal

vision of femininity that includes wearing heels, having fabulous hair, elaborate gowns, and makeup. While pageantry focuses on the physicality of women's bodies, pornography focuses on the dominant and submissive roles played by the male actor and female actress that lead to power-versus-powerlessness relationships. A woman's purpose is restricted and confined to an object for male consumption in both industries. This is what Dworkin (1981) and MacKinnon (1989) object to. Other feminist scholars like Gail Dines (1998), Robert Jensen (1998), and Susan Douglas (2010) also view this as objectionable.

Pornography is a great example of the portrayal of masculine and feminine gender roles. Pornography between two heterosexual individuals is geared towards providing male pleasure. By watching porn, young boys can learn about sex and sexuality, which reinforces the oppressive view of women (Dines, 2010). Power dynamics play a role in the objectification of women. Gayle Letherby (2007) states,

Women are considered naturally weak and easy to exploit and, as the subordinate sex, women's psychological characteristics imply subordination – i.e., they are submissive, passive, docile,

dependent, lack initiative, are not able to act, to decide, to think and so on (p. 23).

Within most pornographic content involving a cisman and ciswoman, you typically see the woman in a very submissive role compared to the male actor. Dines (1998, 2010) and Jensen (1998) discuss how these gender roles can be detrimental and can lead to harsh sexual acts committed by the male actor. Bronstein (2011) supports their argument by stating that anti-pornography supporters focus on the oppression of women by patriarchy and the continuous rise of sexual violence that ensures the domination of male power and female exploitation. These masculine and feminine gender roles are programmed and so ingrained in our society based on sex that it is hard for women to escape these social constructions.

Overwhelmingly, women in erotic advertisements are being overpowered and submissive to the men in the images. These two distinct roles have defined women's position to men and continue to imply that women are second-class in society. The women are

put in vulnerable positions. For example, the American Apparel image (Figure 3) shows a woman with her legs wide open. The woman looks sad and distraught. These kind of erotic advertisements enforce the message that women are for men, for the man to take, and the image implies a rape scene. The gender roles and power dynamics society prescribes to men and women tell women to be obedient, submissive, and weak, while men are expected to be smart, the breadwinner, strong, aggressive, and dominant.

The pageant and pornography industries have no right to tell women how to be beautiful, how thin of a waistline they must have, how they have to be obedient and submissive to the male gaze, or how using their bodies to produce capitalism is positive. Although there is no sexual contact within the pageant industry, there is a connection in how pageantry and pornography interrelate in regards to sex and gender oppressions enforced upon women's bodies, turning them into an object of oblivion.

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# Double Standards in Everyday Life: Book Reviews

## Introduction

Although I have always been aware of the double standards and gender stereotypes of being a woman, a mind-blowing moment occurred in my spring 2016 Feminist Theory class. I had never subscribed to the gender double standard<sup>1</sup> towards sex or even thought about it until I watched the documentary *Inside Deep Throat* (Bailey & Barbato, 2005) about Linda Lovelace. This documentary follows Linda Lovelace, former adult film star, and deconstructs the film *Deep Throat* (Gerard & Peraino, 1972), which featured Lovelace performing oral sex on a large penis. *Deep Throat* was a hit across mainstream America. When it premiered in 1972, it was the first time that a female actor had performed that type of oral sex (deep throating) in popular cinema (Bailey & Barbato, 2005). However, the film was not a hit for Lovelace, who years later, testified that every time she watched herself in the film, she felt like she was being raped (Bailey & Barbato, 2005).

Why did people judge her? What prompted her to take this role? Moreover, would it be so bad if she did want to perform this role? Traditional gender roles, gender inequality, and sexism are constructs based solely on the ways society socially inscribes

<sup>1</sup> According to the sexual double standard, boys and men are rewarded and praised for heterosexual sexual contacts, whereas girls and women are derogated and stigmatized for similar behaviors (Kreager, 2009).

sex and gender identity. I considered the compromises Linda Lovelace faced while reading feminist scholar Jessica Valenti's *Sex Object: A Memoir*, and her 2008 title, *He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know*. Valenti argues in both books that women should not have to follow traditional gender stereotypes in our society. I agree and argue the same.

Jessica Valenti

**Sex Object: A Memoir**

New York: HarperCollins, 2016.

224 pp.

This book is called *Sex Object* not because I relish the idea of identifying as such: I don't do it coyly or to flatter myself. I don't use the term because I think I'm particularly sexy or desirable, though I've been called those things before at opportune moments (Valenti, 2016, p. 2).

In *Sex Object*, Valenti's first memoir, Valenti discusses the daily pressures forced upon women to look and act a certain way. She demonstrates through her writing that society views women as sexual objects first and people second. She makes the reader take a closer look at sexism, which she defines as "the way women are treated like objects, the way we make ourselves into objects and how the daily sloughing away of our humanity impacts not just our lives and experiences but our very sense of

self..." (p. 3). Valenti explains that the sexism she experienced a decade earlier still plays a role in her life. This is essential to Valenti's argument that women face daily sexual harassment such as catcalling. Sexism is real and it affects women more than one would think.

**Part One**

*Sex Object* divides into three parts. The first part of Valenti's memoir begins with "Line Violence," which discusses the cycle of violence in Valenti's family where "rape and abuse are passed down like the world's worst birthright" (p. 10). Valenti recognizes that this is not a phenomenon unique only to her family:

Yes, we love the good men in our lives and sometimes, oftentimes, the bad ones too -- but that we're not in full revolution against the lot of them is pretty amazing when you consider this truth: men get to rape and kill women and still come home to dinner cooked by one (p. 15).

Valenti writes about personal events such as being asked out by her teacher. She argues that men do not experience the daily harassments and sexism that women do.

Valenti hopes that expressing a want for change can result from telling the truth about what happens to women day-to-day. Women are hesitant to talk about their experiences because when

we do decide to talk about the sexism, we are called man-haters and accused of being overly sensitive or unable to take a joke. “But no one wants to listen to our sad stories unless they are smoothed over with a joke or nice melody” (p. 15). However, in order to enact change women must speak up about their experiences.

“Line Violence” has meaning for me because I was sexually harassed at my place of employment. I am a library page, which means I shelve materials and keep the library neat. I used to park my book cart and organize books in the very back of the library with two green chairs directly in front of me. One afternoon, an older man sat in one of the green chairs to read an erotic novel. I noticed his hand was in his pants. I was a shy 17-year-old, but I told my boss and he and the branch manager of the library called the police. Not only do these issues affect us in the present, they affect us for years to come.

## **Part Two**

The second part of Valenti’s memoir is about the good men in her life and the not so good men. Reading the second part of the book, I thought about how much she learned from every experience and how it led her to her current husband. When dating, she knew what she liked and what she did

not like. Much of her sexual promiscuity and relationships helped her discover herself. She determined from her experiences that she does not like the way women are treated and that she is going to do something about it. The chapter “College” resonated with me the most. Valenti discusses her relationship with her college boyfriend Paul, a good guy:

I would like to say that being with someone who legitimately loved and respected me brought out the best in me but the truth is that anything good that Paul gave to me I rejected. I know that I loved him – he’s probably the only other person than my husband for whom I really think that’s true – but I treated him poorly, still (p. 95).

I not only have a Paul, but this matches up with my current circumstances: looking forward to graduation, building a career for myself, buying a home, and starting a foundation for the rest of my life. It is difficult because I know I love my Paul, but at the end of the day, I reject anything nice he does for me. This chapter validated that I cannot be responsible for someone’s happiness. Valenti did not want to be a homemaker and a stay at home mom. I have similar feelings to this. This is a gendered stereotype that women should not have to follow. A woman can

choose to be whomever she would like, be it homemaker or president. The choices lie with her.

### Part Three

The third and final part of Valenti's book is primarily about her adult life and caring for her baby, Layla. Two parts of this section made an impact on me. Valenti writes,

*Fake it till you make it*, but at what point are you just a fucking faker? The feminism of the day says we need to lean in and stake our claim and not be shy about our accomplishments, but it wasn't so long ago that taking up any kind of space was considered feminist blasphemy – a thorn in the movement's side (p. 143).

"Fake it till you make it" is something I say all the time, but how long can I fake it until I am not myself anymore? Even now, when I am telling people about my major in Women and Gender Studies and that I am a feminist, I sometimes want to back in a corner because I have received so many negative responses. Feminism is important to me, and I need to stand behind what I believe in without worrying about what others will say. The second part that stands out to me is when she writes about her second abortion. She was married, had a career, and already a mother to her daughter. Valenti explains how she questioned

her own abortion decision because of the stigma and her position as a mother. However, it is her body and her choice no matter what.

Jessica Valenti

### **He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know**

California: Seal Press, 2008.

224 pp.

Valenti does not present any solutions in *Sex Object: A Memoir*; she simply states how detrimental sexual objectification is and what women have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. In her previous book, *He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know*, Valenti exposes the gender double standards society places on women and men, and presents straightforward solutions on how to try to remove the double standard.

Valenti explains that it is hard enough to be a woman politician in a man's world, but women also have the added pressures of judgement based on how they look. This was true in the 2016 United States presidential election. The media cared more about what Hilary Clinton was wearing and how much jewelry she had on than they did about her political platform. The solution Valenti presents is to draw attention to

these intolerable actions. Even sharing an article, image, or post on social media about the detriments of sexism could be powerful. One of the reasons I enjoyed *He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know* is because while many authors simply write about a problem, Valenti proceeds to present a solution. As a reader, I walked away from this book angry, sad, and hopeful about the future for women. Even with the concrete solutions Valenti presents to the reader, I was able to brainstorm additional ideas of my own to try to change the treatment and perception of women.

Both of Valenti's writings are significant to me because of the sexist double standards that I have encountered in my life. Based on my experiences growing up, I did not fit into the typical gender stereotypes, the expected roles, actions, and behaviors designated to any given sex or gender. The expectation of women is to love the color pink, paint their nails, and wear makeup. While I admit that I do like some of these things, I also like being outside, getting dirty, and working on my car, which society stereotypes as being masculine activities. Growing up, my dad always had motorcycles, snowmobiles, and four wheelers. I remember going for

rides on these and LOVING it. My dad has never prohibited me from doing certain activities based on gender stereotypes. My dad encouraged me and my brother to always pursue what we wanted regardless of other's judgements.

I was 11 years old when my parents divorced. Many women in my life told me that I was wrong in making the choice to live with my dad. Since I was 11 years old people have told me, "a man can't raise a girl;" "girls need their mother." As I got older, the comments have turned into, "you don't want to buy a house without a man." Part of me is infuriated that others doubt my autonomy, and then the other part of me is sad that some women have no idea what they are capable of because they are solely dependent on men. In *Sex Object*, Paul tells Valenti a story when she was very drunk about how she does not need a man. He reminded her that she could take care of herself. This is exactly how I feel; I can take care of myself. I do not need a man. The difference between needing and wanting a man is huge.

### **Conclusion**

As Valenti describes in both *Sex Object* and *He's a Stud, She's a Slut and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know*, gender stereotypes such as

driving, mowing my lawn, and working on my car, are all activities I received negative backlash for because they are not considered feminine. When I was 16 and got my drivers permit, I drove a truck, which generated a ton of negative attention from friends and family. Rather than being excited and proud of me for learning to drive, these individuals paid attention to the fact that I was a girl driving a truck. Recently, I moved away from home, but I rent an apartment from my dad. To help him out, I mow the lawn at his house. Maternal family members and friends make comments like, "That's a man's job" or "Why do you do that, you poor thing." I remember thinking to myself, why is this such a bad thing? This helps my dad and makes me feel accomplished. Those same people criticized me for working on my car. Last summer, my dad and I changed the oil and then rotated the tires on my car. As I was putting one of the front tires back on, I heard a voice behind me say, "Oh, you've got Becky working on her car. You better be careful; she might break a nail." Why can't a girl work on her car? Many people take pride in their cars, and regardless of gender, it is important and useful to know basic car care and repair. People are more concerned about gender roles and what people are

"supposed" to be doing rather than the actual productive and exciting things we have going on in the world.

All of my experiences with gender double standards relate back to Valenti's writings. She is encouraging young women to break out of these typical gender roles and double standards. Like Linda Lovelace, you do not have to do what society has decided for you. Valenti has experienced a lot of sexist backlash in her writing, and this became especially visible after publishing her memoir. Some examples of the hate emails Valenti received are included in the endnotes of *Sex Object: A Memoir*. These include:

GET BACK IN THE KITCHEN  
AND MAKE ME DINNER,  
BITCH.

Tiny brained women, why did we  
ever let them think they are someone?

- Email, June 8, 2008 (p. 193)

Or,

Jessica you are having a baby? I  
thought you didn't believe in having  
babies...just killing them. I feel sorry  
for your child who will learn to  
devalue human life.

- Email, May 1, 2010 (p. 197)

Or,

Show me a woman or girl, and i [sic]  
will show you someone with issues.

no respect for themselves and their bodies.

- Email, March 15, 2012 (p. 198)

This is real. It shows real emotion and feelings about how people view women. It does not say whether these people are

men or women, but this shows the sexism. If Valenti did not prove her point, these emails sure do. Note to self: Be you, stop adapting to the rest of the world, let the world adapt to you.

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# WMS 421 Activism







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