

An Undergraduate Academic Journal of Gender Research and Scholarship

Through Gendered Lenses

The Gender Studies Honor Society

Gender Studies Program—University of Notre Dame 2014

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Acknowledgements

This edition of *Through Gendered Lenses* marks its fifth year of highlighting gender scholarship at the University of Notre Dame. The number of those responsible for the success of the journal extends far beyond the breadth of this page, and it is with sincere gratitude that we honor their contributions and commitment.

Through Gendered Lenses would not exist without the Gender Studies Program, which both educates the scholars within these pages and creates a platform upon which gender can be theorized, researched, discussed, and depicted. Abigail Palko, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Pamela Wojcik, Program Director, deserve significant acknowledgment for their involvement. Immeasurable recognition is due to Linnie Caye, Program Coordinator, whose sage advice and familiarity with various channels, timelines, and procedures guided the production of the journal. Her invaluable insight was enormously helpful, and the Honor Society is truly grateful.

The Honor Society is indebted to its many generous benefactors. We are indebted to the Boehnen Fund for Excellence in Gender Studies, the Genevieve D. Willis Endowment for Excellence, and the alumni and allies who sponsor the Gender Studies Program at the University of Notre Dame. Their continued support afforded these scholars the opportunities to pursue their research and allowed for the creation and maintenance of this journal to spotlight their endeavors.

And, these scholars deserve special thanks as well, and all who submitted their work to *Through Gendered Lenses*. Many students are toiling in creative and advanced projects and, though these six essays

represent the most innovative and thorough compositions, countless others across campus are refiguring and reexamining gender in new and notable fashions. We appreciate all these efforts and hope this edition inspires next year's inquiry.

Letter from the Editor

Gender extends far beyond the pages of this Journal, permeating every aspect of our world. As such, the scope of *Through Gendered Lenses* has no boundaries; topics range from discussion of human trafficking to Kara Walker to *Sailor Moon*. Thank you, truly, to the students featured within this journal for fearlessly delving into complicated and controversial topics, actively researching complexities that frame society, and setting an example of passionate scholarship. Thank you, humbly, to the readers and Gender Studies students for your unwavering support, appreciation for research, and engagement with peers. It is our hope that this fifth edition of *Through Gendered Lenses* provides fresh insight into both historical and contemporary issues relating to gender, and serves as a springboard for future exploration.

Christina Dines, 2014

Editor In Chief

The Gender Studies Program

The Gender Studies Program is an interdisciplinary academic program in the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue a major (full or supplementary) or a minor. The field of Gender Studies analyzes the significance of gender—and the cognate subjects of sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and nationality—in all areas of human life, especially in the social formation of human identities, practices, and institutions.

The Gender Studies Program gives scholars the methodological and theoretical tools to analyze gender and its cognates in their chosen disciplines in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It also provides its students and alumni with an intellectual framework in which the analysis of gender and its cognates can be creatively and critically applied to their personal, familial, professional, and civic roles. In the context of the Catholic identity of Notre Dame, Gender Studies facilitates the study of the intersection of gender and religion in the shaping of ethics, culture, and politics. Alongside our diverse array of courses drawn from across the university, our summer internship and academic-credit internship programs emphasize the holistic and practical life applications of a Gender Studies education at Notre Dame.

If you would like more information about the Gender Studies Program, please stop by our office in 325 O'Shaughnessy Hall or visit our website at genderstudies.nd.edu.

Iota Iota Iota: Undergraduate Gender Studies Honor Society

Iota Iota Iota, or Triota, is an Undergraduate Honor Society composed of sophomore, junior, and senior Gender Studies majors and minors. The Notre Dame chapter of Triota was formed in 2006, and its members are the Gender Studies Program's top students as demonstrated by their overall academic performance. All members have earned at least a 3.5 GPA in Gender Studies and a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0. As the primary unit of undergraduate student service and leadership in the Gender Studies Program, Triota offers gender studies students multiple opportunities to engage their interests in gender issues beyond the classroom setting. Members of Triota contribute to an environment of academic excellence, encourage undergraduate research and scholarship in Gender Studies, foster relationships among students and faculty, promote interest and awareness of gender issues, and academically represent the Gender Studies Program. *Through Gendered Lenses* is their main project throughout the year. Additionally, members of Triota promote the Gender Studies major and minor at various campus events and host study breaks during finals week for all undergraduate majors and minors.

If you are interested in becoming a member of Triota, please visit our page on the Gender Studies website, genderstudies.nd.edu, to learn more about us or to download an application.

Triota Members 2013-2014

Christina Dines	2014
Rachel Hughes	2015
Zoe Jimenez	2014
Katie Lee	2016
Lex Lorenzo	2015
Faith Mayfield	2015
Nora O'Sullivan	2015
Natalie Perez	2014
Molly Porter	2015
Molly Shank	2014
Shannon Sheehan	2016

Sailor Suits and Ball Gowns: The Battle Between the Disney Princesses and *Sailor Moon*

Rona Vaselaar

Rona Vaselaar is a Sophomore Chinese major at the University of Notre Dame. After taking Introduction to Gender Studies during her Freshman year she became interested in the effect of gender representation in media on children.

“Pretty Guardian of Love and Justice in a Sailor Suit! Sailor Moon has arrived! In the name of the moon, I’ll punish you!” – Sailor Moon, Vol.1 Ch.

2¹

“So this is love, so this is what makes life divine.” – Cinderella, 1950

From the time they are born, many young girls are taught to follow the examples set forth by the Disney princesses. Exposed to Disney at a young age, these girls can sing every song from *Cinderella*, *Snow White* (1937), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). They have saved China with *Mulan* (*Mulan*, 1998) and battled for peace with Pocahontas (*Pocahontas*, 1995). Aladdin (*Aladdin*, 1992) has taken them on wild adventures as Jasmine, and more than one have kissed frogs in the hopes of becoming the next Tiana (*The Princess and the Frog*, 2009), resulting in an unfortunate salmonella epidemic.² For a long time, girl culture was completely dominated and defined by Disney, who lured little girls with their beautiful princesses, handsome princes, and fancy dresses. However, in 1995, a new show dared to challenge Disney’s authority over girlhood. This TV show and the manga series from which it was born soon invaded the hearts of millions of little girls. This series is *Sailor Moon*.

Sailor Moon’s explosive popularity completely enveloped a generation of girls otherwise overpowered by Disney. For every girl that balanced books on her head to get that princess posture, there was at least one other tossing her hand into the air, shouting, “moon prism power!” For every hour spent dancing with the prince, there was an

hour spent fighting crime in Tokyo with magical tiaras and scepters. Finally, there was another definitive work for girls that held worldwide influence. But why the obsession with this Japanese series? What did *Sailor Moon* have that the Disney princesses did not?

While the Disney princess movies demote femininity as a means of passive acquiescence in a patriarchal society, *Sailor Moon* weaponizes femininity and portrays it as equal to masculinity in order to create an empowered coming-of-age story for young girls.³ While Disney princess movies depict a world of damsels in distress that can only be saved through masculine-defined relationships, *Sailor Moon* told girls that “cute” and “adorable” exuded power. In this essay, I will compare the Disney princess movies to the *Sailor Moon* manga and TV show in order to provide an analysis of their construction and representation of femininity. I will compare and contrast the character representations, feminine sexuality, movement within the text, gender identity, and so on between both traditions. I will also note the differences between the “average” Disney princesses, such as Cinderella and Belle, and what are commonly considered the “feminist exceptions,” such as Mulan and Merida (*Brave*, 2012). In so doing, I will expose the negative influences of Disney as well as the positive influences of *Sailor Moon* and explain what these influences mean in the context of developing girls.

Special Note

It should be noted that this essay is limited in two major regards. First, I am focusing on an American perspective due to Disney’s prevalence and origins in America. While some of these arguments may be applicable as well to Japanese girlhood, it should be

noted that I am clearly writing from a very American cultural understanding and point of view. Second, I do not seek to focus primarily on what the animators and writers at Disney intended to do. Rather, I seek to show that their productions, for various reasons perhaps outside of the realm of their intent, promoted passivity within a patriarchal society.

Round One: The Display

One of the main draws of *Sailor Moon* is its animation. Much like Disney, *Sailor Moon* features beautiful, slender girls with large eyes and perfect hair. However, unlike Disney, *Sailor Moon's* animation was designed to project an image of feminine strength as opposed to feminine passivity. The sailor uniforms, camera angles, and figure proportions of the sailor scouts all convened together on this one goal. By contrast, Disney princesses were typically drawn with mild expressions, forced into restricting clothing, and deprived of their own sexuality. Thus, *Sailor Moon* succeeded in portraying the embodiment of "girl power," whereas the Disney princesses were obviously happily trapped within an oppressive patriarchy.

In Japan, the ultimate symbol of girl power is the schoolgirl uniform. Required by most Japanese schools, girls have adopted the schoolgirl clothing and transformed it into a fashion statement. Girls began to make their school uniforms conform to the stylistic trends of the time by changing the lengths of the skirts, adding loose socks, accessorizing, and otherwise customizing their uniforms. Today, fake schoolgirl uniforms are being produced for girls who don't like their school uniforms, or don't have a required uniform for school, proving that the schoolgirl uniform has been accepted into girl culture.⁴ It is

fitting, therefore, that the sailor scouts transform from the long-skirted, plain, school-sanctioned schoolgirl uniform to the more hip, short-skirted, big-bowed, sailor-style schoolgirl uniforms for their superhero identities. Each uniform is customized to fit each girl's personal identity, with varying colors and accessories. By proudly wearing the schoolgirl uniforms, the sailor scouts are accepting their girlhood; by customizing their uniforms and battling with them, they are taking control of their own girlhood and using it as a means of power. This formal declaration of girlhood and its acceptance depicts girlhood as a powerful entity, thus suggesting the equality of femininity and masculinity.

Although the schoolgirl uniform is a declaration of girlhood, the figures of the sailor scouts after their transformations have an element of voluptuousness that touches upon their identities as young women transitioning into adulthood. The short skirts of the sailor uniforms accentuate their long, slim legs. The bows add volume to their bosom and the flared skirts give width to the hips, giving the girls semi-hourglass figures. While wearing their everyday, school-regulation uniforms, the sailor scouts express their girlhood. However, once they transform, their budding feminine sexuality is more clearly displayed.

Female sexuality in media is often portrayed as dangerous and carries a negative connotation, an idea exemplified by Ursula the sea witch in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), whose voluptuous body and overtly sexual movements identify her as the main villain of the film. There are many female villains in *Sailor Moon* who also display this evil, dangerous sexuality, such as Queen Beryl. However, the sailor scouts

display their own sexuality proudly and utilize it for the purpose of fighting evil. Not only is femininity powerful, but it can also be a force for good, thus simultaneously implying that the negative connotation of feminine sexuality is undeserved and supplying us with an alternate worldview in which this idea is not assumed.

The presentation of the sailor scouts and their positions in the reader's gaze emphasize their reclamation of their own femininity. In many manga and anime, female characters are subject to male-directed fanservice, resulting in numerous "panty shots" and overtly sexual scenes designed to satisfy the male gaze. *Sailor Moon* avoids this problem entirely because it was written by girls, for girls.⁵ The camera never wanders up the skirt or down the shirt. The manga does not fetishize the girls' breasts or backsides. The anime, as Naoko Takeuchi, the show's creator, admits, fetishizes the girls to a higher degree and is penetrated by the male gaze moreso than the manga.⁶ However, the essence of *Sailor Moon* isn't female sexual display to satisfy men. Rather, it is female sexuality as naturally exhibited by women. By angling shots that display their femininity without oversexualizing it, *Sailor Moon* reclaims femininity for women.

On the other hand, you will never find a Disney princess in a sailor skirt or a schoolgirl uniform. Because Disney princess movies are period pieces, the costumes are typically fit to period with certain modifications to make the clothing more appealing to young girls. The Disney princesses look perfectly natural while trapped in their corsets and heavy skirts. Of course, a princess will sometimes appear who dares to shun her period's patriarchal clothing, such as Mulan.

Mulan is often hailed as a feminist work because she impersonates a man and cross-dresses in order to enter the Chinese army in her father's place. Although at first glance we might say that this represents the concept that power can only be gained through rejection of femininity and adoption of masculine traits, it must be noted that when Mulan saves China she appears in her dress, scaling rooftops and zip lining in a full skirt. Although Mulan refuses to be restricted by her clothing, her dresses can hardly be considered a symbol of her feminine power. Rather, she has to learn to express her power despite being confined to dresses and, by extension, the conventions of femininity. In order to gain power, she must first free herself from femininity by taking on a male identity, i.e. rejecting dresses for a military uniform.

Merida, another "feminist" Disney princess, also rejects the formal clothing she is forced to wear by her mother. She fails to emancipate her power through adoption of other feminine clothing. Rather, she rejects her femininity by rejecting ultra-feminine formal clothing. Thus, we have two kinds of princesses. The first are perfectly happy fulfilling their passive roles in the patriarchy, exemplified in their period clothing. The second group seeks to gain power, but must do so by rejecting their femininity rather than accepting femininity and using it to empower them, as expressed in their resistance of their feminine clothing. Not one princess uses her clothing as a personal statement to both accept femininity and allow said femininity to empower them. The opposite is expressed in *Sailor Moon*, where the traditional clothing of girlhood essentially becomes a weapon.

Far from simply rejecting feminine power, the Disney princesses also reject their own humanity. When observing the Disney princesses, it becomes obvious that no matter what the princess is doing, she is always impeccably beautiful. Each and every expression is drawn in order to be pleasing to the eye. Even when Mulan is weeping in the mountains after her abandonment by Li Shang, her expression is beautiful. Her face is composed and there are no wrinkles or exaggerated features that would indicate emotional distress. Her eyes are clear and all that expresses her sadness is a tear or two sliding down her cheek. This expression is obviously unrealistic and romanticized.

Sailor Moon's crying face, by contrast, is exaggerated and comical. It does not pretend to be beautiful or to express her inner grace. It more accurately expresses Sailor Moon's emotions and suggests that there is nothing wrong or unattractive with their turbulent, uncontrollable nature. The Disney princesses' expressions are always completely controlled, even when the princesses are in the throes of terror. No imperfect shot of a Disney princess exists, whereas there are plenty of imperfect shots of Sailor Moon, such as when she is binge eating. The perfectly controlled expressions of the Disney princesses suggest that they are not actually living beings. Rather, they are dolls meant to act as accessories for the patriarchy, usually represented by the princes. Sailor Moon and her friends are able to freely express themselves because they are not dependent on any stock male characters and are treated as dynamic, living beings rather than the fake plastic flowers that are the Disney princesses.

Sexuality is another important part of a woman's life that is completely ignored by Disney. Unlike the flashy sailor girls, the Disney princesses are entirely deprived of their own sexuality. They have unrealistically modest figures that mask their feminine sexuality. They are given almost completely flat shapes to imply the purity of girlhood rather than the reality of feminine sexuality. Even characters like Ariel and Jasmine with their scantily clad tops are desexualized. Their busts are de-emphasized and almost non-existent, despite the provocative nature of their clothing. Rather than displaying their sexuality, they seem to be attempting to drown it in the chaste purity of male-defined girlhood.

Although the sailor scouts are schoolgirls, their sailor uniforms foreshadow their eventual entrance into adult female sexuality. Furthermore, chastity is not an assumption for these girls. Sailor Moon's child falls from the sky, implying that she will have a sexual relationship with Tuxedo Mask. Additionally, she often spends the night at his house rather than return home and multiple shots exist that depict them in the same bed. Although Sailor Moon is clearly engaging in a sexual relationship, her purity is never in question because her heart is pure. Rather than her value as a woman being defined by her chastity, her purity is something internal and moral.

The lack of feminine sexuality and action in Disney movies is reinforcing the patriarchal idea that "good" women must be chaste and submissive. By demonizing sexuality and volition, the Disney princesses promote a message of guilt and fear for young girls just beginning to discover the true meanings of sexuality and adulthood. *Sailor Moon*, on the other hand, is able to acknowledge feminine

sexuality without submitting it to the male gaze, thus reclaiming feminine sexuality for women. Furthermore, the sailor scouts' reclamation of patriarchy-designated fashion for women further enhances the conception of "girl power" and how it can change and affect society. In this way, it becomes clear that *Sailor Moon's* message is one of feminine power, whereas the Disney princesses, in many cases, aren't even treated as fully human.

Round Two: Dancing through the Medium Space

Femininity is often associated with words like "grace," "beauty," "flowing," and "dancing." When speaking of feminine grace, the lithe dancing of Cinderella and Prince Charming is called to mind. Smooth and slow, they flow through the medium space effortlessly. *Sailor Moon*, however, seems to have had a very different conception of feminine movement. Transformation scenes and sailor-specific attacks appear every few pages in the manga, and at least once per episode in the anime. These attack sequences do not necessarily mean that the sailor scouts are not graceful like the Disney Princesses. The difference is that the scouts' graceful movements pack a punch. Furthermore, due to stylistic differences, Disney Princesses adorn and float through their surroundings without necessitating an effect, whereas the sailor scouts control their surroundings and the progression of the medium in general. It is clear here that the scouts take femininity beyond passivity, whereas Disney princesses fails to do so.

One of the main attractions of the *Sailor Moon* anime is the construction of the sailor scouts' transformation scenes, particularly those featuring Sailor Moon. During her transformations, Sailor Moon floats through an undefined space, usually one consisting of stars and

sparkles. As she floats through the air, she dances, often striking graceful and exaggerated ballerina poses. Her clothing wraps itself around her, drawn to her body by the sheer power of her femininity. As she poses and is adorned with the representations of femininity that will soon act as her weapons, the music swells and voices sing her name over and over in the background. When the music hits its climax, she opens her eyes, offers the audience a confident smile, and strikes a cute but powerful sailor pose. It is clear that the entire space is revolving around her and is defined by her femininity. Essentially, it is her feminine power that drives the transformation and makes it possible.

It is important here to note that the purpose behind manga is to create a movie-like experience, due to Osamu Tezuka's influence on the manga medium.⁷ This goal gives rise to the variance in camera angles, backgrounds, and paneling that make *Sailor Moon* so distinctive. In early Disney animation, on the other hand, the backgrounds and perspective were often static, observing the princess from afar from a strictly omnipotent point of view. This drawing style resulted in a completely different viewing experience between *Sailor Moon* and Disney. For *Sailor Moon*, the environment was subject to the sailor scouts' actions. The perspective circles the girls and often closes in on them, blocking out the rest of the environment. The perspective also centers on the girls' movements, such as when Sailor Moon points her scepter straight at the viewer and appears to make eye contact with the audience. Thus, it is clear that the sailor scouts are in complete control of the perspective and representation of the environment. In early Disney movies, however, the princess effortlessly floats into and out of

the scene without leaving behind any sort of effect. This passivity emphasizes her role as a lifeless accessory, as her movements affect no change. It should be remembered that as Disney's drawing-style matured, the static nature of the backgrounds and perspectives was lost, and the princesses began to have more of an effect upon their environment, as is particularly evident in Mulan's training scene during the song "I'll Make a Man Out of You." However, they still cannot compete with the intense camera action of Sailor Moon. As the sailor scouts use their powers to propel the perspective backwards, it becomes clear that they are in complete control of the perspective and the scene in general, whereas Disney princesses are only able to work within the confines and limitations of the static scenes. The ability of the sailor scouts to change a scene from static to dynamic is unthinkable for Disney princesses.

The ability to control the movement of a scene and the representation of an argument is equivalent to the ability to control the viewer by manipulation of perspective. Because the sailor scouts are essentially able to manipulate the viewers, they are able to operate outside of the medium and thus their power has another dimension. Disney, on the other hand, places their princesses in scenes that control the princesses through their rigid construction and immobility. These scenes further restrict the power and mobility of the Disney princesses, creating a niche to which they must conform. The designation of the princesses to a certain role within the scene parallels the designation of the princesses to a certain role in a patriarchal society. In this role, they passively interact almost exclusively with men. The idea of interacting with women presents a very interesting dilemma.

Round Three: Female-to-Female Relationships

Mulan has Mushu. Cinderella has her mice. Snow White has her assortment of forest animals. Additionally, they all have princes to take care of them. What do they need female friends for? The lack of female-to-female interaction in most early and some later Disney princess movies promotes the conception of female relationships as bad or inferior to masculine relationships. Essentially, if you want a friend, you'd better stick with men, who you can depend on.

Meanwhile, Sailor Moon is studying with Sailor Mercury, cleaning the temple with Sailor Mars, or playing games at the arcade with Sailor Venus. The sailor scouts' lives are defined by their relationships with each other. By having these female friendships, they generate more power. Instead of avoiding feminine relationships, they exalt them.

When it comes to the Disney princesses' sidekicks, almost all of them are male or have no speaking parts and, as such, are ambiguous in gender. Cinderella's main mice are both male, and the Fairy Godmother is a mythical creature who spends a limited time on screen.

Furthermore, Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother's relationship is incredibly superficial and doesn't develop at all throughout the course of the movie. Mushu is a male character, while Crickey has no definite gender. The animals in *Snow White* are mostly ambiguous and provide limited interaction. When she finally experiences human interaction, it is with the male dwarves. Besides the princesses, there are virtually no important females in the Disney movies, unless the villain is a female. When other females are present, they usually represent a source of tension. In *Mulan*, Mulan's mother is constantly pressuring her into becoming a bride, thus forcing her to act like someone she isn't. In

Pocahontas, Pocahontas and Nakoma's relationship is defined by tension, judgment, and distrust. In *The Princess and the Frog*, Charlotte is a completely comic and highly superficial character who does not develop at all throughout the course of the film. This theme of non-development is a serious issue, as it implies that females are static and don't mature, thus dehumanizing women.

Brave, however, seems to present us with quite a different representation of female relationships. Merida and her mother have a tense relationship due to her mother attempting to pressure her into an arranged marriage. Eventually, the two have to work together in order to reverse a curse that Merida has accidentally placed upon her mother, which acts as a valuable bonding experience between them. In the end, Merida and her mother are able to understand each other and experience a close mother-daughter relationship. While Merida and her mother have a valuable and substantial relationship that grows and develops over time, they are clearly the exception that proves the rule.

By nearly exclusively having positive relationships with males, Disney is telling young girls that feminine figures make inappropriate companions. The princesses are typically able to sustain relationships with men because they are acceptable feminine figures in that they are passive and perfect in their lifelessness. Thus, they are superior to regular women and, as such, cannot have relationships with them. In shunning female society, they are affirming the superiority of maledom while deeming femininity as inferior, making them perfect companions to the patriarchy.

Sailor Moon, by contrast, revolves around feminine relationships, with masculine relationships playing a supporting role.

The relationships between the sailor scouts are what enable them to fight effectively and defeat the enemy. Furthermore, the girls constantly provide positive encouragement and support each other in all walks of life, such as school and relationships. Although the girls definitely have arguments from time to time, they are ultimately strengthened through their relationships with each other. Although Sailor Moon has a relationship with Tuxedo Mask, which is central to the main story, he is the only male character that regularly appears in the manga and consistently acts as an extra support for the girls. Ultimately, the girls' emotional and mental growth as sailors and young women is due to their female relationships. This redefines female-to-female relationships as positive experiences and suggests that girls should feel comfortable interacting with each other.

Furthermore, the female-to-female relationships among the sailor scouts are dynamic and realistic. The occasional fights between the girls add an element of realism to the relationships without designating feminine relationships as overly dramatic. The girls begin as total strangers and must develop their relationships over the course of the story, presenting us with a narrative of developing feminine bonds. Their bonds are often reaffirmed during fight scenes, thus drawing them closer as friends and partners. Thus, we are able to see a realistic depiction of healthy, developing feminine relationships.

The definition of feminine relationships by the media is not necessarily a favorable one, and is often reinforced by the Disney princesses, who almost exclusively choose male society. *Sailor Moon's* more realistic approach to feminine relationships depicts both the tensions and joys of having female friends without villainizing feminine

relationships. In so doing, *Sailor Moon* is able to validate the value of feminine relationships for young girls who may find themselves forced to choose between feminine and masculine relationships as they begin to interact with their peers in the more sexualized domain of puberty. These depictions of feminine relationships are also reinforced by the in-text depictions of masculine relationships.

Round Five: Female-to-Male Relationships

The prince and princess's relationship in the context of Disney is fairly easy to define. In most Disney movies, the princess is a beautiful and pure damsel in distress who is saved by the dashing, heroic prince. Prince Charming saves Cinderella from her life of undeserved servitude and makes her his queen. Snow White and Sleeping Beauty (*Sleeping Beauty*, 1959) are both awakened by true love's kiss. Belle is saved from the wolves by the Beast. Eugene cuts off Rapunzel's hair to save her from the wicked stepmother. Although future princesses had somewhat more expansive roles, most of the early – and most well-known – Disney princesses had one goal: fall into a dangerous trap so the prince would come to the rescue. In *Sailor Moon*, however, the males were mostly background characters, and Tuxedo Mask, Sailor Moon's lover, fulfilled the role of the damsel in distress. Thus, Disney princesses teach girls that a woman must surrender all power and become totally helpless in order to have a successful relationship with a man, whereas *Sailor Moon* seeks to remove gender bias from female-to-male relationships.

In early Disney princess narratives, the princess was in dire straits when the prince showed up to save the day. The only way she was able to meet him was after she had undergone some kind of

extreme suffering. Her suffering could only be relieved by the prince's love, often taking the form of the kiss. Some examples of this narrative device are *Sleeping Beauty*, *Tangled* (2010), *Snow White*, and *Cinderella*. This basic narrative endorsed the theory that femininity was insufficient for handling the trials of the world, and a masculine hero was needed to shield the princess from reality, as femininity cannot survive in the real world. Even *Mulan* was unable to break the spell of masculine heroism. Mulan becomes a hero only by first entering into masculinity by joining the army. She ends up rescuing Li Shang on two separate occasions, once as a soldier, Ping, and once at the end of the movie when she has reverted back to her female identity. However, she was only able to rescue him after having assumed a masculine identity, suggesting that her assumption of masculinity was what made her heroic.

Merida, on the other hand, seems to have been able to successfully break the spell of masculine dependence, which is one reason that her story is often hailed as a feminist narrative. In order to save her mother, she must sew together the tapestry that she previously ripped asunder. When she pulled apart the tapestry, she was simultaneously rejecting her own femininity and her feminine relationship with her mother. By returning to femininity to repair the relationship with her mother, she is finally able to save the day. This narrative is clearly more feminine-positive than the rest of the Disney characters, which presents an issue. Out of all of the Disney princesses, only one is truly able to rescue herself and her mother by using her femininity; the rest must resort to masculine heroism to save the day.

This trope of masculine heroism and feminine distress should no longer be reinforced in our society.

While Prince Phillip was kissing Aurora awake from her death-like slumber, Sailor Moon had her hands full fighting to save Tuxedo Mask from yet another foe. Tuxedo Mask's power is not equal to that of Sailor Moon and is arguably also inferior to that of the other sailor scouts. As such, in the narrative he is constantly a target of the villains. Sailor Moon spends much of her time rescuing him out of love, and she does so without dressing up as a man or rejecting her feminine identity. Instead, she uses her feminine powers to save him every time. Furthermore, Tuxedo Mask never suggests that he is superior to Sailor Moon. He constantly calls attention to Sailor Moon's power, marveling at how impressive it is and commenting on his own inferiority. He supports Sailor Moon by encouraging her when she fights and makes various references to her unbeatable strength. Rather than feeling emasculated by her superior power, he admires her and uses her as a source of inspiration to make himself stronger.⁸ Most importantly, they share a mutual respect for each other. Not only does their relationship reverse the gender stereotype in order to destroy it, but it also teaches young girls what a healthy relationship between a man and a woman should be – one of equality, respect, and mutual admiration.

Finally, Sailor Moon breaks gendered boundaries by not only saving Tuxedo Mask, but also by saving herself. Sailor Moon is actually the moon princess, Princess Serenity. The sailor scouts are charged with protecting Princess Serenity, and Sailor Moon is the head of the Sailor Scouts. This duality of identity shows that Sailor Moon is actually in charge of saving herself.⁹ For once, we have a princess who is saved

by her femininity rather than being incapacitated by it. This plot device empowers femininity and challenges the assumption that it must be inferior to masculinity.

The gender bias in Disney movies represents the remnants of a past society that should no longer be influencing a society that is moving towards equality. By allowing these movies to influence our developing girls so strongly, we are doing them a great disservice in preparing them to live in a society that we are trying to destroy. *Sailor Moon's* male-to-female relationships are located on the opposite end of the spectrum, representing the completely equal distribution of power in relationships for which we are striving. *Sailor Moon* is necessary because it is preparing girls for the world in which they should expect to live and in which they deserve to live.

Round Six: Perfection and Male Affirmation

When confronted with a beautiful, thin princess with perfect hair and makeup, it is easy to feel inferior. No matter how beautiful you are, you will never be as beautiful as Ariel. No matter how well you dance, Cinderella will always dance circles around you. No matter how charismatic you are, Aurora will always beat you when it comes to charming the prince. Disney princesses are role models for perfection who set young girls up for failure. In contrast, *Sailor Moon* chose to tell the tale of a bunch of average girls who grow up to be extraordinary young women. These girls are far from perfect. They wake up late, get angry at each other, and break out in hives when cute boys send them love letters. However, through their experiences and mistakes they are able to grow and mature, which is what makes *Sailor Moon* an effective coming-of-age story for young girls.

The perfection of Disney princesses is an excellent indicator of their two-dimensional nature. Many of the princesses remain completely static throughout their story simply because they were perfect to begin with, and so they cannot be improved upon, such as Cinderella, whose only change is in status. Mulan is a dynamic character because she discovers her true self throughout the course of her narrative, but she must adopt masculinity in order to do so, rather than exploring her own femininity. Merida develops as a character in that her relationship with her mother teaches her that she must embody some characteristics of masculinity and some of femininity in order to be successful as a ruler. Besides Merida, Disney princesses are very static. They drift into the story with a smile on their faces, are won by the prince, and leave the story much the same as they came into it. These narratives are not stories about growth and development; they are stories about women as accessories that are made for the sole purpose of being pleasing to the eye and raising the status of the man.

Unlike Disney, there are no perfect characters in *Sailor Moon*. Sailor Moon is constantly late, fails most of her classes, wastes all day on video games, and overeats. Sailor Mercury is very intelligent, but she is often overly competitive and is horribly shy with boys, breaking out in hives whenever she gets a love letter. Sailor Mars, the mysterious shamaness, is hotheaded and impatient. The beautiful Sailor Venus easily becomes jealous and is obsessed with boys. Sailor Jupiter is horrible at studying and is hung-up on her ex-boyfriend throughout much of the anime. Each character has her strong points and her weak points, making it easy to identify with them. Girls could pick their own personal sailor scout as their guardians because each

girl was unique but accessible. Although these girls were imperfect by societal standards, they were the saviors of the earth, moon, and eventually the galaxy. *Sailor Moon* told girls that they could still achieve greatness without conforming to outdated conceptions of the “perfect lady.”

Another important issue in both the Disney and the *Sailor Moon* universes is food. Weight is an important consideration for young girls, who are constantly under societal pressure to have the perfect figure, usually obtained through dieting. The image of a young woman eating salad – rather than an actual entrée – with her friends is prominent in current media. The Disney princesses reinforce this image of abstention from food by being completely emancipated from the need to eat. The princesses are very rarely shown eating, or even in the presence of food. Even Ariel, who has “dinner” with the prince, barely eats anything. One of the only princesses actually shown eating something substantial is Mulan, who has porridge shoved into her face by Mushu. Clearly, this is meant to be comic and she is not actually willing to eat the food. Their abstention from food further dehumanizes them, supporting the theory that they are not living beings at all, but mere accessories to the patriarchy.

Sailor Moon, on the other hand, pokes fun at the image of the foodless woman. Sailor Moon and Sailor Jupiter are especially food-obsessed, constantly shown devouring their food in a manner that can be considered comically violent. Sailor Moon’s overindulgence in food is often rebuked by the other sailor scouts, who ask her if she wants to be a “fat sailor scout.” In this way, *Sailor Moon* draws attention to the societal pressure on young girls to be skinny. *Sailor Moon* also uses

Sailor Moon and Sailor Jupiter to point out that girls are only human, and they have to consume food whether society discourages it or not. It is also worth noting that the sailor scouts never actually gain weight or become less attractive due to their eating habits. Their sailor identities are meant to reveal their inner beauty and power, thus, this guiltless consumption of food could indicate that indulging in food does not reduce their value or beauty as women, despite what society may say. Another reading of this phenomenon is simply that the girls are so perfect that their bodies can never be destroyed through their unhealthy habits. However, they are clearly not perfect characters, as previously stated, and because their sailor identities are meant to reflect their inner identities as feminine persons, the former reading is reasonable.

The Disney princesses may exude charm, beauty, and grace, but what about confidence? The princesses are happy and gentle, but most of them do not exactly project confidence. There is no need because they are flitting through life perfectly. Their affirmation comes from the admiration of the princes and other in-text male authorities such as father figures, so they do not need self-affirmation. As such, they do not have a need for confidence because they simply don't have an opinion regarding themselves. The sailor scouts, however, are constantly reaffirming themselves and projecting confidence, not just in action but in word as well. For example, Sailor Moon introduces herself as the "pretty guardian in a sailor suit." In so doing, she is affirming her confidence in her own beauty and identity. From this affirmation, we can see that she does not need the male gaze to validate her. While the Disney princesses are deprived of self-evaluation and are oblivious to

their own “perfection,” the sailor scouts acknowledge and proudly proclaim their self-worth and value as girls. According to *Sailor Moon*, it is crucial to evaluate yourself in order to believe in yourself, and there is nothing negative or egotistical in acknowledging your own beauty and having a sense of self-worth.

The need for male affirmation is also necessary for the Disney princesses’ personalities, especially for those characteristics that are outside the bounds of societal normalcy. Belle, for example, is considered strange by the townsfolk due to her love of reading. Her love of learning must be validated by the Beast, who presents her with a library. Mulan’s masculine power must be validated by her father, the emperor, and Li Shang. Ariel’s transformation into a human and marriage to Eric can only take place with her father’s blessing. The sailor scouts also have their own quirks, but they require no male affirmation. Sailor Jupiter loves to bake and garden. Sailor Mercury is incredibly intelligent. Sailor Mars is an expert in the paranormal. Sailor Venus is obsessed with becoming a pop star. Sailor Moon is boy crazy and loves video games and manga. However, their ability to fight effectively reflects the fact that they do not need any external validation to be powerful. Their power and confidence is internal, implying that other girls may also find power within themselves. Thus, the sailor scouts give girls a strong sense of self-empowerment.

Not only is the “perfection” of the Disney princesses inaccurate, but it is also impossible to achieve because it necessitates losing one’s humanity. Girls cannot stop eating, but due to cultural influence many of them try, resulting in anorexia and other eating disorders. By supporting media that advocates the non-humanity of women we are

by extension supporting the cultural influence that promotes eating disorders. Furthermore, male affirmation is the key to defining this feminine perfection. By delegating the understanding of feminine perfection to men, society is depriving women of the right to their own identity. *Sailor Moon* counters these assumptions about femininity. It denies the state of non-personhood as feminine perfection by denying the idea of feminine perfection in general. The self-affirmation of the sailor scouts also reveals that they have the right to their own identity. In these points, we can see the essential non-personhood of the Disney princesses and how it contrasts from the personhood of the sailor scouts.

Round Seven: Gender and Sexuality

Disney princesses are incontrovertibly feminine and their true gender identity is never in question. They conform exactly to what is expected of the feminine gender: heterosexual relationships. They are unable to express a lesbian sexuality or identify as genderqueer. If they were to act outside of these heteronormative standards, they would no longer be considered perfect. *Sailor Moon*, however, is filled with lesbian sexuality and gender ambiguity. The range of identities for the sailor scouts, therefore, is much larger than that of the Disney princesses. This confrontation between male-defined feminine perfection and female identity is a huge point of tension between the *Sailor Moon* and Disney universes.

It is an unwritten rule in Disney that a princess cannot receive true love's first kiss from another girl, and she cannot be saved from imminent doom by a female figure. The question of lesbianism is excluded from Disney because if a girl is not an accessory to the

patriarchy, then she has no place in the narrative. Girls who prefer the love of other girls are rejecting male love and protection and, by extension, the patriarchy. While these princesses were being guarded from the evil temptations of feminine sexuality, Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune formed a formidable-yet-sweet couple in the *Sailor Moon* narrative. Although Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune are both girls, no one questions their love for one another, and their relationship is presented as equal to the heterosexual love shared by Tuxedo Mask and Sailor Moon. This equality further removes the negative connotation from the female-to-female relationships that range from friendship to love.

Sailor Uranus's cross-dressing also suggests equality between masculinity and femininity. She assumes the appearance of a man during the day and accepts a masculine identity. When she transforms, her girlhood becomes apparent and she accepts her feminine identity. The balance of these two forces becomes her own special power. Furthermore, her butch fashion sense doesn't devalue her feminine identity. She appears equally as comfortable in her sailor suit as in her masculine clothing. Her very identity suggests that not only are masculinity and femininity equal, but they also can co-exist. A girl can express masculinity and femininity without worrying that one will contradict the other.

Although cross-dressing is represented in *Mulan*, it has a much different representation than in *Sailor Moon*. Initially, Mulan's cross-dressing causes her to feel uncomfortable, and she is unable to identify with a masculine gender. As time goes on, however, she becomes comfortable in her masculine identity and is empowered by it. When

she returns to save China and the emperor in her dress, three of her soldier friends dress as women in order to infiltrate the palace. However, the soldiers that assume a feminine gender are comic figures rather than masculine ones, and dressing as a woman becomes a joke. Li Shang, the prince figure of the movie, does not deign to dress as a woman and assume a feminine identity because he, despite constantly needing Mulan's help, is depicted to be sufficiently powerful as a man.

Sailor Moon also gives a positive representation of genderqueer. The Sailor Starlights are a group of male pop idols that transform into sailor scouts to help Sailor Moon and her friends. The twist is that when the Sailor Starlights transform, they change from handsome teenage boys into beautiful teenage girls. Although they change their sex, their personalities and characteristics do not change. Regardless of their sex, their gender remains in place. This stability suggests that gender isn't dependent on the sex of the person. Rather, gender identity is the expression of a set of internal characteristics.

Although some may be tempted to argue that *Mulan* also positively presents genderqueer, it is difficult to discern whether Mulan is more comfortable as a man or as a woman. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that Mulan can no longer assume a masculine identity once she has been discovered to be a woman. Despite what personality changes she may undergo, she must still wear a dress and return to her parents' house to serve as a daughter, thus returning to the female gender. Although she appears to be happy at the end of the movie, she is still in need of the affirmation of the masculine characters. Although she has explored her masculine identity, she cannot be identified as a

man in gender by the end of the movie. Thus, it is difficult to argue that she is a true expression of genderqueer.

Lesbianism and genderqueer are just as valid identities as heterosexuality. *Sailor Moon* clearly expresses this truth with a wide range of characters that are completely accepted within the text. These lesbian and genderqueer characters are represented as no different from the heterosexual sailor scouts that self-identity as girls. Furthermore, the difference in these identities does not create a gap between the girls that cannot be bridged. Because both identities are valid, there is no tension surrounding the lesbian and genderqueer characters. In Disney, however, there is no lesbian or true genderqueer presence. These identities are completely absent in Disney, thus suggesting that they are invalid and even nonexistent. This denial of identities other than heterosexuality can create confusion in young girls, who find themselves more attracted to girls than boys, or who find that they identify better with the male gender than with the female gender. This utter denial of these girls' existence can cause severe issues for a girl as she ages and struggles with her "invalid identity." It is important that these "alternate" identities be introduced into our current society as valid in order to expunge the bias that current society feels against them.

Bonus Round: The Franchises

It would be a mistake to compare the Disney and *Sailor Moon* texts without realizing that their media extends beyond the texts themselves. Each franchise produces millions of toys, stickers, jewelry, clothing, and Halloween costumes every year. These products are directed at young girls and act as a strong supplementary influence

from the texts themselves. The franchises provide crucial clues as to how the texts are being represented to young girls.

The *Sailor Moon* franchise offers a fairly accurate representation of the text and allows girls to assume the guise of sailor scouts. For young girls, sailor costumes and toys are very popular. As girls enter into adolescence, *Sailor Moon* keychains, earrings, cosplay costumes, and cellphone straps take center stage. *Sailor Moon* dolls and figurines feature the girls in their sailor scout uniforms, fully poseable with accompanying weapons. They have a variety of interchangeable faces to express a large range of emotions. Images of the girls presented are usually in their power-wielding positions featured during or after their transformations. The franchise uses cute or “kawaii” versions of the girls to symbolize girl power. Thus, their products are a constant reminder of the positive power of femininity.

The Disney franchise, by contrast, has redesigned their characters in order to make them more perfectly fit current societal standards of beauty. Cinderella’s gaze has become significantly sultrier. Belle’s hair has become more voluminous. Pocahontas’s costume has been completely redone and she has gained several new accessories to glamourize her previously earthy image. Perhaps one of the most appalling redesigns, however, is Mulan’s. She has shed her simple peasant clothing and donned a sparkly, elaborate Chinese princess gown. Her hair is done up in pins and a tiara. Her previously natural look has been destroyed by pounds of makeup. Essentially, the previous quirks in the Disney princesses’ appearances have been expunged and replaced with a modern conception of beauty. They have been redefined in order to fit more uniformly into the current

patriarchy, and in so doing have begun to contradict some of their earlier conceptions, causing confusion within the franchise itself as to what are the “true” identities of the princesses.

Another controversial redesign was that of Merida. Since *Brave* was a Pixar production, its drawing style was quite different from that of the other Disney princesses, and Merida was drawn in a much more realistic fashion than previous princesses. Her shape was somewhat stout to compliment her identification as a tomboy, and her face was cute but somewhat less mature than the other princesses. When the princesses were redesigned, Merida was given a more voluptuous shape and her hair was considerably tamer. Her face was more mature and beautiful and she wore the princess dress that she despised in the movie. This redesign was met by a cry of outrage by the people who had hailed Merida as a truly feminist princess, including *Brave*'s director.¹⁰ Her redesign to fit her into a more traditional feminine role destroyed any feminist aspect of her representation. It is easy to see that the redesign of the princesses creates a uniformity that supplements the patriarchy while devaluing the princesses and feminine individuals.

Another point of intrigue is the dolls, particularly the Mulan doll. When Mulan first came out, a variety of dolls featuring all of Mulan's roles were released. You could buy Mulan in her matchmaker outfit, or you could buy her in her warrior uniform. You could buy her with long or short hair. You could buy her with Li Shang and Kahn, her horse. The new doll, however, comes in her matchmaker outfit with long hair, wearing makeup. If you want to buy her warrior outfit, it must be purchased separately. She is clearly made to play with as a

princess, not as a soldier. Therefore, the masculine identity that she tried so hard to achieve has been completely destroyed. She is reduced to the simple non-human feminine accessory that is so characteristic of Disney.

In contradicting itself to fit current standards of masculine-defined beauty, the Disney franchise is revealing the issue that revolves around feminine perfection: there is no longer a widely accepted definition of feminine perfection. As society has become more equality-minded, the idea of the perfect woman has changed drastically. Thus, the Disney princesses must be modified in order to fit the rapidly-changing standards of beauty. *Sailor Moon's* franchise did not undergo any significant redesigns because the sailor scouts identified themselves rather than relying men to identify and validate them. Thus, the changing standards of male-defined beauty and desire are not relevant. The girls define themselves and as such become timeless feminine figures that girls of all generations can look up to.

Conclusion

Disney princesses are “perfect,” lifeless accessories to a patriarchal society from which women should be trying to break free. A clear discrepancy exists between Disney princesses and the reality of femininity. If Disney movies were directed at young adults rather than young girls, perhaps this biased representation of women would be somewhat less concerning. The issue at hand is that Disney princesses are often idolized by young girls who are trying to understand their place within adult society as feminine figures. Disney is teaching these girls to be passive, perfect, non-human dolls to gain the affirmation and approval of masculine authority. This not only causes self-esteem

issues, but also promotes and normalizes unhealthy relationships. By projecting these conceptions onto young girls, we are setting them up for failure as they enter into adulthood and struggle with their maturing sexuality and femininity.

Fortunately, *Sailor Moon* has arrived on the scene in an attempt to dispel these negative portrayals of women and femininity. The normalcy of the girls, their acceptance of and weaponizing of femininity, and their self-affirmation results in a positive image of femininity and girlhood, giving truth to the term “girl power.” Furthermore, *Sailor Moon* extends beyond heterosexuality and sex-based gender identity. *Sailor Moon* teaches young girls to be accepting of these “alternate” lifestyles by presenting them as completely normal and even common within today’s society. By expanding their worldview and teaching self-reliance, *Sailor Moon* proves to be a positive role model for young girls entering into a lifelong battle of sexism.

In a world dominated by sexism, it is essential that young girls have a role model who teaches them to be strong and self-reliant. Disney princesses have been a constant obstacle to achieving this goal. However, *Sailor Moon’s* influence has become increasingly extensive over the years. Although *Sailor Moon* has become somewhat less well-known since the anime has stopped airing, the narrative still exerts a positive influence over young girls, even today, and an even stronger influence can be expected with the new anime coming out in 2014. It is my hope that parents will begin to subvert conscientiously the influence of Disney by exposing their children to *Sailor Moon* and other

such true feminist narratives. In so doing, we may be able to project more positive messages about feminine identity, power, and sexuality.

¹ Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon Volume 1* (New York: Kodansha Comics, 2011), 35.

¹ “*The Princess and the Frog Fans Fall Ill after Copying Film*,” Metro, accessed Dec 11, 2013. <http://metro.co.uk/2010/02/01/the-princess-and-the-frog-fans-fall-ill-after-copying-film-67331/>

¹ The introduction of the idea of weaponized femininity in *Sailor Moon* and *Sailor Moon* as a coming-of-age narrative can be found in: Missturdle, “On the Importance of Magical Girl Heroines and Weaponized Femininity.” *Missturdle* (Tumblr blog), accessed Dec 11, 2013, <http://missturdle.tumblr.com/post/46471029695/on-the-importance-of-magical-girl-heroines>

¹ Brian Ashcraft and Shoko Ueda, *Japanese Schoolgirl Confidential* (Japan: Kodansha International Ltd., 2010), 11-29.

¹ Nevermore999, “Gushing about the Sailor Moon Manga Rerelease and Feminism.” *Adventures of Comic Book Girl* (blog), Mar 22, 2011, accessed Dec 11, 2013, <http://nevermore999.livejournal.com/132687.html>

¹ Jason Thompson, “Episode XLI: Sailor Moon.” *Jason Thompson’s House of 1000 Manga* (Anime News Network blog), Mar 3, 2011, accessed Dec 11, 2013, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/house-of-1000-manga/2011-03-03>

¹ Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 235.

¹ Nevermore999, “Gushing about the Sailor Moon Manga Rerelease and Feminism.”

¹ Thompson, “Episode XLI: Sailor Moon.”

¹ Ben Child, “Brave Director Criticises Disney’s ‘sexualised’ Princess Merida Redesign,” *The Guardian*, accessed Dec 11, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/13/brave-director-criticises-sexualised-merida-redesign>

**Beyond Truth Telling: Domestic Abuse,
Restorative Justice, and Healing**

Lisa Taylor

My name is **Lisa Taylor**, and I'll graduate this year (2014) with a major in Political Science and a supplementary major in Peace Studies. I'm interested in gender studies from a political angle - broadly, how the personal becomes political and the empowerment of women. Within the field of gender and peacebuilding, my specific interests are restorative justice, trauma healing, violence against women, and Latin America. After graduating this year, I hope to integrate a gendered approach into a lifelong career focused on international justice and peace.

Participating in the women's liberation movement during the 1970s to raise awareness of widespread crimes of violence against women, renowned trauma specialist Judith Herman describes receiving dozens of letters as women nationwide wrote to her about their lives, verbalizing their pain and trauma. Sifting through testimonies of domestic abuse and sexual violence, Herman "realized the power of speaking the unspeakable and witnessed firsthand the creative energy that is released when the barriers of denial and repression are lifted."¹ Restorative justice, too, seeks to lift such barriers of denial and oppression by empowering victims, offenders, and communities to work together to repair broken relationships. While widely and successfully applied to juvenile and property crimes, restorative justice confronts a unique challenge in the case of gendered violence, especially domestic abuse.² How can restorative justice address entrenched patterns of violence? What about the serious possibility of re-traumatizing the victim? Are restorative methods focused on spoken testimony (conferencing, circles, victim-offender mediation, etc.) the true pathway to empowerment and healing?

In this paper, I will trace the development of various feminist approaches to gendered crimes, noting the intersection of feminism and restorative justice with special attention to the unique challenges posed by domestic abuse. Conceptualizing domestic abuse as a traumatic violation of human relationship that demands a response, I

¹ Herman 2.

² In this essay, the following terms will be used somewhat interchangeably: domestic abuse/violence, partner abuse/violence, and intimate abuse/violence.

consider how both feminist and restorative approaches propose empowerment for the goals of justice and healing. Furthermore, I argue that the viability of effective restorative justice programs hinges upon adapting to diverse populations, including addressing challenges posed by post-modern feminism. Incorporating alternative perspectives, including multicultural and queer voices, and considering new conceptions of empowerment beyond spoken testimony are crucial for the future viability and widespread adoption of restorative programs in the name of therapeutic justice.

Understanding Domestic Abuse

As a widespread phenomenon, sexual violence tends to be extremely underreported, but base estimates illustrate rampant and pervasive violence within intimate relationships. For example, in the United States, estimates indicate that at least 25-50% of women are physically assaulted by their husbands during the course of their marriage.³ Yet the unique crime of domestic abuse, perpetrated within an ongoing and intimate relationship, poses a striking challenge for the justice system. Love and violence intertwine in complex ways, permeating the fabric of the relationship and blurring the distinction between perpetrator and victim. As many as 95% of domestic violence cases feature a male offender physically abusing a female victim,⁴ so this essay proceeds with the historically vulnerable status of women in mind while also seeking to move beyond false binaries of male/female and perpetrator/victim. Violence is not restricted to heterosexual relationships, and comes in a variety of forms – physical, verbal,

³ Tift 3.

⁴ Kim 202.

psychological, and many others. Thus, understanding domestic abuse requires close attention to the diverse ways that human beings hurt one another and cope with pain.

A basic typology by Michael Johnson sketches three types of intimate partner abuse: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence.⁵ Intimate terrorism, “a pattern of violent coercive control” is the most commonly imagined or prototypic form of domestic abuse, in which one partner uses a combination of physical abuse, sexual violence, economic exploitation, emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, victim blaming, and other methods to control the other partner. Within heterosexual relationships, men are overwhelmingly the primary perpetrators, although intimate terrorism has also been identified in lesbian couples.⁶ The second type, violent resistance, involves a similar dynamic, except the victim herself responds with force either instinctually or in an attempt to stop the violence. Finally, situational couple violence “does not involve an attempt on the part of one partner to gain general control over the other and [. . .] is roughly gender symmetric in terms of perpetration.”⁷ It often arises when verbal arguments become aggressive, and aggression turns to violence.

Framing domestic abuse as the battering of women by men, Larry Tiffitt notes that abuse often arises within contexts of

⁵ Johnson 290. This typology has been criticized by other scholars for certain limitations. While recognizing Johnson’s work as an enormous contribution to domestic violence literature, Clifton Emery argues for a more nuanced understanding integrating concepts of order, power, and legitimacy. For my purposes, however, I find Johnson’s work a useful starting point.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

“considerable stress [. . . and] traditional sex-role and gender expectations but with only fragile resources to maintain the dominance.”⁸ That is, with the decline of explicit legal social control of women, men accustomed to traditions of male entitlement and hierarchy find other methods to control their partners – methods often unnecessarily violent. Moreover, “physically violent battering also commonly occurs within a family context of social isolation, lack of community affiliation, and low access to outside resources [. . .] women become literally imprisoned within their households and communities, terrorized with fear for their safety and that of ‘their’ children.”⁹ In addition to physical injury, victims of abuse develop psychological disorders, depression, and anxiety that impair healthy functioning of mind, body, and spirit. In this way, domestic abuse exemplifies a type of “insidious trauma” perpetrated on a daily basis, entailing continued violent physical and psychological interruption. Violence descends to the level of the ordinary, resulting in various “effects of oppression that [. . .] do violence to the soul and spirit.”¹⁰ However, despite this poisonous infiltration of violence into daily life, many victims are too intimately tied to their partners to break away.

The Debate over Restorative Justice

Drawing upon social contract theory, the traditional criminal justice system conceptualizes crime as a violation against the state – crime is a manifestation of the socially unacceptable, and the transgressor must be punished. This perspective, however, fails to

⁸ Tiff 9.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Brown 107.

address victims' needs, often exploiting victims for fact-based testimony and discounting their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Expressions of identification with the perpetrator, including love, or a desire to remain in the relationship but end the violence are often completely ignored. Recognizing the need for a victim-centered process as well as acknowledging the traumatic effects of crime on communities, restorative justice seeks a different approach. In restorative philosophy, crime is a break in relationship demanding attention and reparation. Attuned to the needs of all parties – victims, offenders, and the community – restorative programs aim to find justice and aid in healing. They ask three questions: Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these?¹¹

As many models of restorative justice involve some kind of encounter (victim-offender mediation, conferencing, circles, etc.), the use of these programs is highly contentious in the case of domestic abuse. From the perspective of many feminist and victim advocacy groups, concerns about safety and re-victimization almost prohibit considering informal processes of restorative justice.¹¹ Proietti-Scifoni and Daly review the previous literature on the debate for restorative justice in cases of gendered violence, identifying certain serious concerns:

Potential for women's safety to be compromised.

Potential for power imbalances to go unchecked, which can reinforce violent behavior.

¹¹ Zehr 21.

Potential for offenders and bystanders to manipulate the process.

Relevance or meaning of 'genuine apologies' in relationships characterized by violence.

[. . .]

Potential for victims to be pressured into participating or coerced [. . .]

Uncertain role and function of 'the community,' when communities are under-resourced or may reinforce rather than challenge violent behavior.

Mixed loyalties of friends and family, who may partly support victims, but also support offenders and collude with the violence.

Symbolic implications: informal processes reflect a re-privatization of violence, and outcomes may appear too lenient [. . .]¹²

Can restorative justice processes effectively mitigate such concerns and address the complexity of domestic abuse? Perhaps understanding the alternative – the traditional criminal justice system – fruitfully grounds the debate.

Historically, the criminal justice system has seriously failed to adequately address victims' concerns and needs. Only one-fifth of all rapes and one-quarter of all physical assaults are reported to the police, suggesting that "victims of intimate partner violence do not consider

¹² Proietti-Scifoni and Daly 272.

the criminal justice system an appropriate locus for resolving conflicts with intimates.”¹³ In fact, only 30% of women seek to use the traditional criminal justice system as a response to domestic abuse,¹⁴ and even for those who do, very few ever see their attacker convicted.¹⁵ Rarely understood is the intimate connection between victim and abuser, and victims are consequently overwhelmingly encouraged to abandon the relationship. The desire to end the violence, not the relationship, fails to be considered within the traditional system.

Restorative justice thus offers an alternative for those unsatisfied with the current legal system. With its focus on relationships, accountability, restitution, and healing, restorative justice processes delve deeper to address the needs of victims, offenders, and communities. Katherine van Wormer identifies four important reasons for prioritizing restorative justice over the current system. First, it is a solution-based process. For example, in family group conferencing (FGC), the victim, offender, their respective families, and a trained mediator come together to brainstorm practical solutions to address the harm or broken relationship, assessing ways for the offender to make amends. In cases of domestic abuse, the members of FGC may decide to create a monitoring system. They may collectively decide for the abuser to attend anger management classes to learn healthy relationship skills or find therapeutic resources for the victim to work through her emotional pain. Another advantage of restorative justice is the emphasis on hearing the voices of marginalized people, historically

¹³ Grauwiler and Mills 51.

¹⁴ Grauwiler and Mills 59.

¹⁵ McGlynn 833.

women. In the traditional criminal justice system, the offender stands front and center – all efforts focus upon sanctioning and punishing him. The victim often unjustly becomes a tool for the prosecution, unable to tell her full story. Thirdly, restorative justice attends to the need for healing. Recognizing the historic failure of punitive justice, restorative programs address the deep emotional pain of all those involved. In some North American native rituals, healing circles allow groups of victims to gather. Seated in a circle, the members pass a feather or talking stick to allow each person to speak in turn and listen to the stories of one another. According to van Wormer, “truth telling and open communication are primary.”¹⁶ Finally, restorative programs offer an avenue to reestablish the therapeutic potential of the justice system, importantly revitalizing the role of social work. Although in certain cases, social workers have the potential to re-create dangerous power dynamics,¹⁷ the profession of social work prioritizes the values of “service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationship, integrity, and competence.”¹⁸ In cases of serious crime, especially in situations of abuse where women are psychologically and emotionally traumatized, the justice system must seek to make holistic healing an important goal. Jonathan Doak argues for a more emotionally intelligent legal system that “should act as a social agent that is capable of [. . .] enhancing [. . .] one’s emotional life and sense of psychological well-being.”¹⁹ Ending cycles of violence

¹⁶ van Wormer 110.

¹⁷ *cf.* Keeling and van Wormer.

¹⁸ van Wormer 113.

¹⁹ Doak 439.

therefore depends partly upon reestablishing the therapeutic function of the justice system, working for the healing of all traumatized parties. *Feminist Approaches to Domestic Abuse and Restorative Justice*

Because women constitute the majority of victims of domestic violence, various feminist approaches over the years have struggled to find effective political ways to end violence and empower women. In the following sections, I trace several feminist approaches, identifying their intersections with restorative principles. Beginning with second wave feminism, I note how the criminalization of sexual violence fails to engage restorative principles and facilitate healing. Restorative principles begin to align with feminist thought with the emergence of standpoint feminism, focusing on giving voice and truth-telling. Women regain voice and autonomy, empowering themselves and combating abusive violence. Finally, while acknowledging the important advancements of standpoint feminism, I consider the challenges posed by post-modern feminist thought, investigate forms of empowerment through the keeping of silence, and examine alternative methods of healing. Drawing upon multicultural and queer perspectives, I reconceptualize agency while noting implications for the future of restorative justice.

The First Feminist Impulse: Criminalizing Sexual Violence

Second wave feminists emerged onto the political scene in the 1960s with a burst of righteous anger, responding to a history of patriarchal oppression and refusing to be silenced within the private sphere any longer. Advocating for equality in every sphere, part of the rich political agenda of second wave feminism was a commitment to

end violence against women. Jumpstarted by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* which criticized the limited domestic role of women, feminists began proclaiming that the personal is political and advocated for a series of reforms addressing gender inequality. Domestic abuse, historically viewed as a private problem, arose as a social problem demanding political action.

Mainly conceptualizing the cause of domestic abuse as patriarchal oppression, second wave feminism sought to criminalize sexual violence. Grauwiler and Mills assert: "Angered by the criminal justice system's long history of disregard for a woman's right to live violence-free, mainstream feminist advocates have lobbied for and won legislative reforms that have ultimately criminalized domestic violence through mandatory arrest and prosecution policies."²⁰ Such policies and laws mandate that police officers and prosecutors pursue cases to the fullest extent of the law, even if this disregards the victim's wishes. For example, under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994, "zero tolerance became the battle cry."²¹ This bill, passed as an attachment to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, reflects the cooption of the antiviolence movement by the state and criminal justice system as a staggering \$1.2 billion was appropriated for criminal justice responses to victims and perpetrators, mainly utilizing mandatory arrest and prosecution policies. The Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, although considered a community intervention method, also uses a state-enforced approach, focusing on bringing the assailant into the criminal justice system,

²⁰ Grauwiler and Mills 50.

²¹ *ibid.*

enforcing legal sanctions, and providing safe housing for the victim.²² The widespread use of civil and criminal restraining orders in situations of domestic abuse indicates that safety for women is assumed to be “best met by physical distance from the perpetrator, thereby requiring temporary if not permanent separation.”²³ While nobly seeking to provide safety for victims and change batterers’ patterns of abuse, such an overwhelming focus on the criminal justice system tends to ignore if not completely marginalize the voices of many women.

Despite its many drawbacks, in light of widespread violence against women and the absence of institutionalized restorative programs, the legal system has been seen as the only way to challenge historically ingrained asymmetrical power relations. Looking back, Clare McGlynn seeks to explain the initial feminist emphasis to criminalize sexual violence, describing how the formal criminal justice system “remains ‘the recognized way of demonstrating that society takes something seriously.’ The hope has been that in harnessing the power of the state to condemn sexual violence, we could work toward its eradication.”²⁴ Responding to the need to end violence against women, feminist reformers compromised by allowing the antiviolence movement to become swept up in a larger tough-on-crime agenda.

Because crime constitutes a transgression against the state in this conventional perspective, punishment of offenders often does not serve victims’ needs, including their important desires for truth-telling

²² Tift 127.

²³ Kim 201.

²⁴ McGlynn 836.

and healing. The system fosters a false notion of female passivity, implying that “overcoming such passivity necessarily involves leaving the male abuser”²⁵ and implying that helpless women need to be “rescued.” This overlooks complex ways in which agency is exercised and ignores the stated desire of many women to end the violence, not the relationship. Moreover, even the wide sweep of the criminal justice system fails to bring justice for all victims of domestic abuse, as Kim notes below:

Women who do not speak English are still denied shelter because they cannot participate in their support groups; undocumented women are still told that funding does not permit them access to services; women racially profiled as drug users are still routinely screened with tyrannical scrutiny; persons who fall outside the conventional definitions of sexual orientation or gender identity are often left with no options whatsoever or vulnerable to further dangers of homophobia or transphobia within those spaces meant to deliver safety.²⁶

Feminist goals to end abuse have clearly been coopted by the system, “used to bolster state power, not in order to empower victims, but as a means of exercising control, particularly over marginalized and vulnerable communities.”²⁷ Second wave feminists, despite good intentions, have failed to address battered women’s reality and provide justice and healing.

²⁵ Grauwiler and Mills 51.

²⁶ Kim 200.

²⁷ McGlynn 837.

Standpoint Feminism: Voice, Truth-Telling, and Therapeutic Justice

Addressing historic oppression and silencing of women, standpoint feminism works to recover the female perspective and understand the unique social reality of women. Rejecting the unjust use of women as tools for state prosecution, unable to tell their full stories and find healing, standpoint feminists highlights several important concepts: creating social and institutional space for women's voices, challenging male-domination in the realm of public speech, and emphasizing choice. Instead of being unwillingly forced to prosecute after reporting violence, women deserve to determine the most appropriate procedure for their experiences of domestic abuse. In fact, McGlynn notes that most victims do not cite punishment as a key priority. Rather, "the goal most commonly sought was exposure of the offender as an offender."²⁸ Furthermore, "victims sought validation from the community, by 'denunciation of the crime'" and, as such, "victims' needs and wishes are often diametrically opposed to the requirements of formal legal proceedings."²⁹ Women want their experiences to be honored and recognized, not exploited by the state to exact retributive justice.

Standpoint feminism begins with the notion that women, as historically silenced and less powerful members of society, have unique voices that deserve recognition and social space. Katherine van Wormer observes that,

Of special relevance to women's victimization are the following standpoint feminist values: reliance on the woman's personal

²⁸ McGlynn 838.

²⁹ *ibid.*

narrative for truth-telling; acceptance of a holistic, nondichotomized view of reality including a merging of the personal and the political; a focus on choice and options; an understanding of the gendered nature of power relations in the society; and an emphasis on personal empowerment and respect for one's personal dignity.³⁰

Allowing all voices to be heard also constitutes a key component of restorative justice, as all are encouraged to gather and tell their stories to begin the project of repairing broken relationships.

A specific example of such discursive restorative methods to address domestic abuse is an Intimate Abuse Circle (IAC). Because approximately 50% of women in abusive relationships choose to stay in them for emotional, cultural, or religious reasons,³¹ IACs use a culturally sensitive approach specifically designed for couples who chose to stay together despite the abuse within the relationship. Seeking to “understand the violence rather than lock it away,”³² both the victim and the abuser meet in order to problem-solve, move forward, and heal from the violence. They bring members of their care communities, including family members and community leaders who have the specific role of honoring the couple's decision to stay together but also to develop concrete and measurable ways to end the abuse. A professionally trained facilitator mediates the process to ensure that the process is victim-centered and that oppressive dynamics are not

³⁰ van Wormer 109.

³¹ Grauwiler and Mills 51.

³² Grauwiler and Mills 65.

reproduced in the circle process. All are allowed to speak, so that “the people who actually own the issue – the parties themselves – [. . .] claim their stake in healing it.”³³

Another similar method focused upon empowerment for both parties is victim-offender conferencing, which brings the couple together to discuss the harm and broken relationship. Led by a trained professional mediator, the conference allows the victim to express her pain, asking important questions including the ever-present, “Why?” The offender also receives an opportunity to accept accountability, express remorse, and offer restitution.³⁴ Both of these discourse-based approaches – IACs as well as victim-offender conferencing – have been applied to domestic abuse, but require much preparation and skilled mediators. The satisfaction cited by many participants indicates that these conversation-driven encounters have judicial authority as well as great potential for personal healing.

These restorative processes move beyond simple fact-based testimony and punishment of the offender to apprehend the notion of therapeutic justice. Although the concept of therapy is widely degraded, the pervasiveness of domestic abuse in society warrants seriously considering the potential therapeutic dimension of the justice system. Doak, conceptualizing restorative justice as “a vehicle for emotional redress,”³⁵ notes how restorative encounters “resonate closely with the considerable body of psychological evidence that links oral or written accounts to a reduction in feelings of anger, anxiety, and

³³ Grauwiler and Mills 66.

³⁴ van Wormer 110.

³⁵ Doak 439.

depression [. . .], to higher levels of self-confidence [. . .], and even improved physical health.”³⁶ In fact, in conjunction with standpoint feminists and restorative justice practitioners, therapists and trauma specialists overwhelmingly emphasize the necessity for victims to tell their stories.

From a neuroscientific perspective, Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart describe how the human brain physically stores traumatic memories in a different location. Unlike normal memories, the “speechless terror” of certain violent events means that “the experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioral reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks.”³⁷ Healing thus entails drawing this memory back into the linguistic area of the brain that processes events: “Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and transformed into narrative language.”³⁸ From a neuroscientific perspective, healing entails telling one’s story to physically move the memory into the linguistic processing area of the brain, thus integrating it into one’s life history.

This has been overwhelmingly supported by traditional clinical therapy. Judith Herman identifies three stages to recovery from trauma: establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. The criminal justice system has focused overwhelmingly

³⁶ Doak 440.

³⁷ van der Kolk and van der Hart 172.

³⁸ van der Kolk and van der Hart 176.

on the first step – establishing safety by leaving the abuser. Restorative approaches, especially in conjunction with standpoint feminism, have gone further to focus on testimony as part of the second step of remembrance and mourning. According to Herman, “In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma [...] completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated in the survivor’s life story.”³⁹ Importantly, the basic principle of empowerment applies in that the victim must choose to tell the story, to express her pain and brokenness. The role of a therapist is to witness the trauma as the story is told, much as how, with restorative conferencing techniques, the mediator witnesses broken relationships in the aftermath of crime. The dominance of discursive therapy in clinical practice for decades testifies to its effectiveness in many situations, and its powerful legacy should not be underestimated.

Clearly standpoint feminism and restorative techniques have taken positive steps towards healing, closely aligning with neuroscientific and clinical approaches emphasizing voice, testimony, and the integration of memories into one’s life history. However, despite this great contribution, one important question still stands: what about victims who do not want to tell their stories? Since choice is a hallmark value of standpoint feminism and restorative justice, how can victims who wish to remain silent find healing without participating in processes like IACs or victim-offender conferencing? Although testimony assumes the cathartic and therapeutic function of

³⁹ Herman 175.

speech and the need to escape zones of oppressive silence, the assumption that this is the only way to find healing must be challenged. In what ways can silence be empowering? In what alternative ways can justice be approached?

Postmodern Feminism and New Possibilities for Restorative Justice

Despite its important emphasis on voice and uncovering different and gendered social realities, critics peg standpoint feminism as an essentialist philosophy that assumes the existence of “women” as a coherent category, even constructing a type of mythical feminine essence. As a brand of social difference feminism, standpoint feminism begins with the assumption that men and women are different and then assigns social significance to this difference. For example, in contemporary culture of extensive sexual assault, men and women inhabit extremely different realities. Thus, their distinct experiences and realities imply that men and women have fundamentally different perspectives on social interactions – for instance, women consider different questions than men do (Will my clothes invite unwanted attention? Should I walk home alone late at night? Is it safe to talk to him?). Standpoint feminists importantly seek to allow women space in public discourse, but often problematically assume that women are a coherent group. Mary Dietz argues that, “at the level of practical politics and strategic organization, social difference feminism’s [standpoint feminism’s] articulation of women’s experience and the quasi-prescriptive character of its generalizations appear limited and reductive, not only privileging whiteness and “consciousness” but also

excluding axes of domination and oppression other than gender.”⁴⁰ As standpoint feminism operates upon these assumptions and, like many restorative programs, seeks to prescribe truth-telling for healing, how do alternate perspectives complicate the project of justice and healing? Standpoint feminism’s essentialist philosophy lends itself to clear political action – men are perpetrating violence and must be punished, women are victims and must speak out – yet crucially misses important contributions of diverse and nontraditional perspectives, including multicultural and queer viewpoints.

Postmodern feminism moves beyond the binary of female and male, victim and perpetrator. Emphasizing the vast, legitimate, and diverse array of female (human) perspectives and challenging the biological legitimacy of the category of “woman,” postmodern feminists examine a range of oppressive structures beyond patriarchy. In addition to challenging male privilege, they challenge privileges of whiteness, wealth, heterosexuality, and colonialism. Although postmodern feminism resists a neat list of definitive characteristics, it can be understood as embracing diversity, challenging binaries, and understanding the linguistic social construction of human life and norms.

Restorative justice also shares a commitment to challenging binaries, acknowledging the ambiguity of the distinction between victims and perpetrators. The ambiguity of desire is drawn out in an especially salient fashion in the case of domestic abuse as women often identify with their perpetrators. Despite disruptive and prolonged

⁴⁰ Dietz 408.

violence, they still feel love and intimacy, and many times reject the traditional suggestion to leave their partner to end the violence. Seeking alternative methods of empowerment, many women look beyond the clinical paradigm of truth-telling. As Ann Cvetkovich suggests, “the forms in which silence is broken are complex – more complex than fact-obsessed therapeutic, legal, and mass cultural institutions bent on confession, sometimes for healing, sometimes for discipline and persecution, would have one believe.”⁴¹ To reach all those suffering, especially those grappling with domestic abuse, restorative justice faces a new challenge: how to adapt to the concerns of post-modern feminism and consider alternative methods for empowerment.

Alternative Voices and Creative Agency: The Indian Partition and Butch/Femme Identities

From an Indian cultural perspective, Veena Das analyzes the way women in post-Partition India creatively used silence as a method of empowerment. After this period of history marked by brutal sexual violation, zones of silence prevailed when women were asked to narrate their experiences. Women said that “it was dangerous to remember” and that they must “drink the poison” of these memories, holding the pain and violence within:

These memories were sometimes compared to poison that makes the inside of the woman dissolve as a solid is dissolved in a powerful liquid [. . .] none of the metaphors used to describe the self that had become the repository of poisonous

⁴¹ Cvetkovich 100.

knowledge expressed the need to give expression to this hidden knowledge. Or rather, containing it was itself the expression of it. This code of silence protected women [. . .] since the violation of their bodies was never made public.⁴²

In a culture where sexual violation implied social death, women could not speak about their experiences. Denied of this method of truth-telling for empowerment, Das describes how women discovered other creative ways to express agency, notably through metaphors of drinking the poisonous violence and holding it within their bodies. Refusing to let silence be equated with passivity, women converted their “passivity into agency by using metaphors of pregnancy – hiding pain, giving it a home just as a child is given a home in the woman’s body.”⁴³ One artist, Sa’adat Hasan Manto, gives literary expression to the metaphor of the body as a container of poisonous knowledge by describing a woman sitting in front of a mirror. Unable to coherently express her pain, garbled nonsensical words spill from her lips as she draws grotesque designs on her body, creating “a body that is appropriate for the time: in those days, she says, women had to grow two stomachs – one was the normal one, and the second was for them to be able to bear the fruits of violence within themselves.”⁴⁴ Despite verbal silence, such creative metaphors illustrate that empowerment entails much more than truth-telling. It requires adapting and living.

⁴² Das 54.

⁴³ Das 55.

⁴⁴ Das 55.

Drawing upon butch/femme lesbian identities and sexual practices, Ann Cvetkovich also challenges the dominant restorative approach to understanding empowerment as overt action and public speech. Like postmodern feminists, Cvetkovich seeks to understand oppression beyond the patriarchal domination of women and understand ways that other marginalized communities have reacted to traumatic experiences. Investigating the femme and butch identities of lesbian relationships, she concurs with Das's suggestion that finding agency is more complex than political action or simple truth-telling. Within butch/femme relationships, the "untouchable" butch is often seen as the leader in lovemaking, giving sexual pleasure to her femme partner. Femmes, tasked with receiving butches' advances, are often associated with traditional gender paradigms of femininity and weakness as they lie beneath butch lovers and welcome penetration. However, interestingly, many self-identified femmes "counter the notion that this position [on bottom] is a passive one."⁴⁵ Citing their active desires to be entered and using the word 'receptivity' rather than 'passivity,' femme lesbians linguistically deconstruct the stigma of weakness and the idea that being penetrated is traumatic. Arguing that "allowing oneself to be touched is an action,"⁴⁶ they point to a radically new notion of empowerment, showing love by moving beneath their butch lovers, demonstrating vulnerability and receptivity.

Even butch lesbians, who seem to embody traditional notions of agency in their active, dominating sexual leadership, undermine this notion of empowerment by refusing to speak about their feelings, by

⁴⁵ Cvetkovich 57.

⁴⁶ Cvetkovich 59.

being “untouchable.” They refuse to enter the realm of public speech, guarding their feelings in a code of silence. Like many Indian women from the Partition, this silence may be read as an action, as a sign of strength. Cvetkovich tells the story of lesbian couple Jess and Theresa. Their life together, unaccepted by the larger community, is disrupted traumatically one night as Jess (the self-identified butch lesbian) is arrested and jailed, subjected to public and physical violence. In the wake of the event, Jess is unable to discuss what happened to her, even with her receptive femme lover, Theresa. Theresa does not play the role of clinical therapist or mediator, trying to draw out a spoken narrative, but rather “The sign of intimacy [in their relationship] is not having to say everything, being granted the dignity of refraining from the trauma of rehearsing the pain and humiliation again. Theresa offers her [Jess] the sanctuary of not having to express herself in the way that she is too often forced to do publicly.”⁴⁷ Jess maintains her silence and finds empowerment through the intimacy of a relationship – for her, truth-telling does not offer the best pathway to healing.

In light of these observations, Cvetkovich apprehends alternative ways of healing, arguing that it is “useful to examine everyday practices in which touching and being touched, both sexually and emotionally, are means by which somatic and psychic experience is negotiated. Experts [. . .] are increasingly turning to the body as a place where trauma is both experienced and healed.”⁴⁸ Although restorative programs often narrowly focus on speech and language as a method for healing, perhaps the body can also be a way to negotiate meaning,

⁴⁷ Cvetkovich 76.

⁴⁸ Cvetkovich 81.

healing, and justice. This is especially important for the potential of restorative justice in domestic abuse cases, in which touch, usually a sign of love and affection, has transformed into a mechanism for prolonged violent abuse. In post-abusive relationships, how can touch be re-negotiated and re-learned in a positive fashion? If women desire to end the violence but stay in the relationship, learning proper expressions of physical affection is an important task for restorative justice participants.

Cvetkovich provides further examples of this extremely complicated project – understanding touch and healing in new contexts – through examples describing lesbians recovering from childhood incest. Rejecting the traditional clinical approach and “refusing any quick-fix solution to trauma, such as telling the story as a mode of declaring an identity or seeking legal redress,” she examines alternative forms of healing including music, bodily rituals like mock castration, anger, storytelling, photography, and performance art. For example, the members of the lesbian band Tribe 8, performing at the alternative and radical Michigan Womyn’s Festival, sing about their past sexual abuse. Describing how their “music and performances allow them to unleash aggression and pain,”⁴⁹ the band also stages controversial performances – lead singer Lynn Breedlove even strapped on a dildo at their 1994 concert and performed a mock castration – acknowledging that “conflict and anger can emerge as a necessary component of psychic resolution.”⁵⁰ Doak concurs, declaring the importance “for

⁴⁹ Cvetkovich 85.

⁵⁰ Cvetkovich 87.

victims to acknowledge the legitimacy of feelings of anger.”⁵¹ Restorative processes often allow anger to emerge through language, but fearing borderline violence, fall short when it comes to expressing anger through the body. Developing ways to effectively harness rage and channel it through the body is thus an important task for the therapeutic potential of restorative justice.

Further stressing the importance of alternative healing methods beyond literal truth-telling, Cvetkovich tells how lesbian survivors have used methods of storytelling, focusing on “emotional truth” rather than “literal truth” because “imaginative work that may bear an oblique relation to the actual event of sexual abuse can ultimately be more ‘healing’ than an explicit rendering of the event.”⁵² Others, like Staci Haines in *The Survivor’s Guide to Sex*, describe somatic forms of therapy in addition to storytelling, “retraining the body as opposed to constructing memories or stories.”⁵³ Although victims and survivors of abuse often feel threatened by any situation resembling their former abuse, using these “triggers” can be an iterative mechanism used to imbue former negatively charged experiences with positive healing energy, transforming pain and hurt into reconciliation and healing. Venturing forward again and engaging in healthy, non-abusive physical intimacy can be a powerful (albeit incredibly complicated and perhaps borderline dangerous) method for healing. Somatic forms of therapy indicate that healing is “a process that engages the body and consists in rituals of performance that defy

⁵¹ Doak 448.

⁵² Cvetkovich 94.

⁵³ Cvetkovich 114.

simple notions of disclosure.”⁵⁴ If restorative justice is to be a vehicle for emotional redress, certain difficult questions must be addressed. How can restorative justice move beyond discursive healing? What diverse forms of empowerment, both silent and spoken, must be considered? How can safety and justice be assured for all victims of violence?

Restorative Justice and Domestic Abuse: Beyond Discursive Healing Techniques

In this final section, I will consider the possibilities for new restorative ventures in light of postmodern feminist insights, recognizing that diverse people heal in diverse ways. Because the antiviolence feminist movement in the U.S. has historically been dominated by white, heterosexual, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied, U.S.-born, and English-speaking women, notions of healing have often been limited to the clinical approach that developed out of that specific context: telling the story of abuse in detail, using language as catharsis. While this clinical contribution has been crucial for restorative techniques such as conferencing and circles, bringing justice and healing to all people involves incorporating alternative voices.

Mimi Kim describes a new approach of intersectionality, “an alternative paradigm contesting the simple primacy of gender and promoting the perspectives and agendas of marginalized communities.”⁵⁵ This means that, in practice, “women of color, including queer and gender-variant people, have increasingly created independent institutional spaces that support complex identities,

⁵⁴ Cvetkovich 95.

⁵⁵ Kim 204.

analyses, and responses to intimate, state-initiated, and other forms of violence.”⁵⁶ One example of such an independent institutional space is the organization Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, which challenges the involvement of the state in the struggle to prevent and end violence against women and children. Another example is Critical Resistance, an organization dedicated to deconstructing the prison-industrial complex. Both organizations criticize the role of the state and the justice system and often distrust restorative justice practices practiced in close coordination with the state. They seek to deconstruct the state’s monopoly for bringing justice to communities.

Building upon the work and philosophy of these organizations, the organization Creative Interventions was established in Oakland, California in 2004 and provides an intriguing example for the future of restorative justice in response to postmodernist views. From the stance of intersectionality, Creative Interventions was founded as a resource center to “create and promote community-based interventions to intimate and interpersonal violence, in alignment with the liberatory goals of the social justice movement.”⁵⁷ Focused on responding to communities of color, immigrants, and people identifying as LGBT, it rejects the historical legacy of failed state intervention to focus instead on practical, down-to-earth models of community intervention. As an organization advocating restorative justice, Creative Interventions calls upon family and community members to end the violence occurring in their everyday sphere. In the case of domestic abuse, family members, friends, and community members

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Kim 195.

play crucial roles in challenging violence. Kim describes the new Community-Based Interventions Project:

This demonstration project seeks to develop, pilot test, evaluate, document, and distribute a replicable comprehensive alternative community-based approach to violence intervention. This approach is aimed toward expanding the capacity of oppressed communities to end and prevent violence by equipping its most accessible resources – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others toward whom persons in need first turn – with the model and tools to effectively intervene. This focus on the front lines of intimate and family violence raises the possibility of intervention at early stages of abuse, offers more accessible and sustainable resources, and builds intervention and prevention strategies into the very spaces and places where violence occurs – homes, streets, and communities.⁵⁸

Unlike most current restorative programs, this community intervention does not depend upon initial engagement by the survivor. This means that, even if certain victims of abuse find empowerment by maintaining their silence, community members can work on behalf of the victim to hold the offender accountable. Anyone can initiate a community intervention, so victims who reject truth-telling as the most appropriate healing method for themselves can still find themselves within the range of restorative justice. Moreover, unlike the traditional

⁵⁸ Kim 207.

approach of establishing safety first, “this alternative model does not presume safety to be the ultimate goal of violence intervention. Rather, Creative Interventions offers space for the articulation of a more nuanced individual and collectively oriented set of goals often held by survivors and community members.”⁵⁹ This is especially applicable to cases of domestic abuse, because so many women express reluctance to leave their partner. The state often advocates single-mindedly for victims to leave their abusers, but this new community intervention model seeks to understand human complexity and brainstorm pragmatic ways to end the violence, not the relationship. This model advanced by Creative Interventions crucially breaks new ground for restorative justice practices because, unlike many current discourse-driven techniques which are victim-initiated, community interventions seek to understand nuanced understandings of empowerment, moving towards communal and therapeutic justice.

Conclusion

Decrying rampant sexual violence and domestic abuse, various feminist approaches have sought to bring justice to victims and hold offenders accountable. Second wave feminists set in motion the antiviolence movement, using the traditional criminal justice system and advocating for zero tolerance and criminalization. In light of the many failures of this approach, including the marginalization of women’s voices, standpoint feminists then proposed new, restorative alternatives focused on voice and truth-telling. In line with clinical approaches, restorative techniques such as Intimate Abuse Circles and

⁵⁹ Kim 208.

victim-offender conferencing have effectively allowed many victims and offenders to examine their relationship and begin the project of repairing it, especially in the case of domestic abuse. However, despite this important step, restorative justice must continue to adapt to the needs of diverse populations, considering how silence itself can be a form of empowerment. The inclusion of alternative voices is crucial for galvanizing change and bringing justice to all people, especially those within historically marginalized and oppressed communities. By adopting the perspective of intersectionality and investing in more ventures such as the Creative Interventions Community-Based Intervention Project, restorative justice has the revolutionary potential to successfully address intimate violence, respond to the needs of victims and offenders, and bring healing to the broken.

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**Female-to-Male Transgender Youth on YouTube:
Becoming a Man on Social Media
The Community Built from an Individualist Platform**

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Zoe Jimenez is graduating with psychology major with a minor in gender studies in May of 2014. Her research interests include queer theory and masculinity studies. She is honored to be included in this volume of *Through Gendered Lenses* as she believes it important to shed light on how the transgender individuals find community on Internet sites such as Tumblr and YouTube.

Names and other identifiers have been changed or removed in the interest of preserving the anonymity of the individuals discussed in this ethnography.

The channel page for a YouTube user is open. The featured video is titled “FTM 1 Year on Testosterone” dated February 5, 2013. As pictures of a person with long hair, a thin frame, and sad eyes slide across the screen, a voice starts to speak. “I feel like I just want something for myself to call it, just be like ‘this is what I am.’ I don’t know, maybe it’s just the way that words have been used towards me. I’m supposed to take them back, but I don’t really want them. It doesn’t matter that I’m a girl. Maybe I’m not like a girl. What’s next, you know? I don’t... I don’t know. I am genderqueer⁶⁰. Just call me M.” The voice-over reflection ends as home videos come on the screen. You see M⁶¹ interacting with friends and hiding behind their long hair. Their friends talk to them excitedly in the background as M stares at the camera that is recording them. Eventually, the videos transition to photos, and you see that M has cut their hair. Their eyes have gained just a little bit more light in them. There is a slight smile on their face as they look at the camera. The photos cut to another video of M. You see them adjust their binder—a tight undershirt worn to compress the chest to be as flat as possible—underneath their shirt. They begin to speak. “I just came out as trans like 2 weeks ago. Not sure yet if I am going to

⁶⁰ Genderqueer is nondescript identity for those people who neither identify as male nor female and fall outside the gender binary and cisnormativity.

⁶¹ I will use the following gender neutral pronouns to refer to M: they, them, their, theirs.

document my transition. I want to, like... I want to be supportive, and I want to be there for other guys, but you know.”

You pause the video and see that there are 78 videos, and all of them have pertain to being a person who identifies as a female-to-male (FTM) transgender person in the world. Glancing at the videos, you realize that M eventually changed his name to Matt⁶², and he is identifying himself with male pronouns. From the video thumbnail previews on the page, you can see that as the videos become more recent, Matt’s facial structure changes, facial hair begins to grow, and his shoulders become broader. In the end, Matt decided to document his transition on YouTube and be a resource to other FTM trans youth on the interactive platform. He opens up this life-changing transition into his true self to the world, and he is not the only one.

There is a whole community of FTM transgender individuals on YouTube that document their own personal transitions, be it socially, hormonally, surgically, or a combination of the three, and in order to offer their experiences as resources to other transgender youth who watch the videos. In the thousands of videos on YouTube of these “transguys”, they frequently discuss the contradictory nature of trying to pass as biological men without any detection of their transgender status while simultaneously posting personal videos of their transition on a public Internet social media site. Many trust that since the topic of female-to-male transgender people is not a common one, they can hide behind the thin veil of their peers’ ignorance on the

⁶² As they now identify as FTM, I will use the pronouns: he, him, his to refer to Emory.

subject, but a simple Google search of “FTM” and any of their names will yield video results from these channels.

This small YouTube community brings new light to the discussion of how male-identified youths learn how to be masculine. Most of the ethnographic research on masculinity studies focuses on the ways in which cisgender⁶³ boys and young men learn to present their masculinity in ways that are acceptable to the wider society. Few academics realize the great theoretical and practical importance of studying the experiences of transgender males as they navigate the murky waters of masculinity as people who were socialized to be women. In this ethnography, I will be analyzing the following three themes and how discussions on these themes are meant to help the presumed audience of other transguys of these videos: (1) the personal responses and self-analysis of the transguys to the physical changes that occur during hormonal therapy and gender confirmation surgery, (2) their discussions of passing, or the ability of people to be read as the gender with which they identify, in the contexts of school, work, and leisure, and (3) their function as resources to other transguys on YouTube.

Methods and Limitations

For this ethnography, I searched the term “FTM” in the search bar of YouTube.com and scoured the video results for channel pages of FTM youths to find videos from the beginning of their social and

⁶³ Cisgender refers to the state in which a person’s biological sex matches their gender identity. An example of this is a person born with normative male genitalia who identifies as a man.

physical transition (usually starting with their first shot of testosterone, or “T”). I observed the videos of five transgender youths ranging in ages from 17 to 24. Four of the boys are of white European descent, while one is Latino. Four of the white youths are from different cities across the United States. The Latino youth, David, is from Canada near the border of New York. The last youth, Zach, is from England in the United Kingdom.

My criteria for the subjects of this ethnography were as follows: YouTube channels that contained (1) consistent video uploads documenting a person’s physical transition, (2) at least one video exclusively discussing their social transitions, i.e. a discussion concerning how they pass, and (3) at least one video identifying the channel as a resource for information and support for other transguys during transition. I watched two to three hours of video content per channel, spanning the entire documentation of their transition up to the last video posted on their channel. I made sure to watch videos with titles that signaled that they would discuss “passing” or any other aspect of their social transition.

My methodology while observing and taking notes on the YouTube content of the five transguys was influenced by Judith Butler and Connell’s work on the social construction of gender, gender presentation, and gender performativity and how it relates to men in society. In using this framework, I called on the work of other researchers informed by Butler and Connell. I analyzed the behavior and thoughts of the transguys in relation to Pascoe’s work on behavior regulation and Nespor’s discussion of how spaces influence the behavior of individuals.

The medium through which I observed my subjects forced me to take the role of a passive observer. Because I did not have a personal YouTube account or channel, I was not able to contact any of the subjects directly to ask questions. I was only allowed to view the content that the subjects deemed appropriate to publicly upload to YouTube. It must be noted that I am not a member of the transgender community, and as such, I cannot attest or personally relate to any of the feelings or observations the subjects discuss in their videos. I am but an ally to the community, and I take care to refrain from extrapolating the amount or personal significance of any discrimination the youths discussed in the videos. As an ally, I cannot and do not intend to speak for the transgender community, but I hope my research can enlighten the wider public about the unique struggles of transgender male youth in proving their masculinity throughout their lives.

Validation: Becoming Masculine Before His Eyes

All of the transguys I observed began their YouTube channels at the same time as they began their hormone replacement therapy of testosterone, either by injection or application of a gel. As alluded to in the first videos of the channels, the commencement of testosterone treatments is an exciting time in which only patience and time stands in the way of their bodies changing to look more masculine. All of the transguys structured their channels around the month markers of the date they started their hormone replacement therapy to talk about the changes their bodies experienced in that month.

Four out of the five transguys relished in the changes that happened every month, eager to show the changes to the audience on YouTube and sad when certain changes were not visible on video because of lighting or video quality. They often admitted that the small changes of the first couple months on testosterone may be in their heads, but promised they did feel like changes were occurring. As the months went by and more videos were made about the changes they were experiencing, the same four guys grew more and more confident with their bodies. In later videos, the four guys smiled more and stood up straighter. In his “2 Months on testosteroneee!” video, Adam comments, “I feel awesome... I got facial hair, indeed, I do. If I let it grow for two weeks, you can kind of see something.” In the beginning months, the youths were aware that changes were small, but after years of having a post-pubertal female body, any changes were good changes.

These trans youth are excited to watch the masculinizing effects of testosterone happen before their very eyes, a puberty that confirms their gender identity. While they cannot ever reach the hegemonic masculine ideal of “normative” heterosexuality, power, and dominance introduced by R.W. Connell, they, like cisgender men, reach for that ideal in the ways available to them (Connell & Messerschmidt 832). With the introduction of hormones, they are able to see themselves as men with deeper voices and broad shoulders. Growing up in a gendered society, they recognize that they are slowly fitting the look of biological men and look forward to being gendered as men by society. They recognize the importance of looking like men while identifying as men in their society so that their masculinity can be seen as legitimate by the rest of society (*Gender Trouble* 46). The audience

to which these guys must perform is society as a whole, which defines masculinity and deems acceptable their performances of masculinity, and they are, in turn, excited by the prospect of being gendered correctly (*Gender Trouble* 35). While they may never reach hegemonic masculinity, after months on testosterone, they now have the personal confidence, informed by what they have learned about acceptable masculinity from society. In fact, in several cases, they mused that they think they are physically attractive, one step closer to hegemonic masculinity. The transguys rejoice when they can recognize that the body they now have will be sufficiently masculine to the audience that polices their gender performances.

There is one thing hormone replacement therapy cannot give these men: a male childhood socialization from birth. While my subjects are the extremes, Jan Nesper argues every child goes through types of suppression during childhood socialization to moderate their behavior and rationalize socially desired behavior (127). These transguys were socialized as females, and in being taught to mimic what is attractive to men for at least ten years, they could extrapolate how to be masculine to a limited degree. In the beginning of their social transition, they were forced to make a conscious decision about the ways in which they are going to act in light of what is expected of men, how they personally identify, and what they were taught as children about men (Connell and Messerschmidt 837). All of the transguys discussed that there was a level of exaggerated performativity based on information about masculinity gathered from their limited knowledge. Similarly, C.J. Pascoe argues that many men perform their masculinity in exaggerated ways to be deemed sufficiently masculine by their peers

(45). Interestingly, I observed when the transguys on YouTube stopped consciously performing their masculinity and began to act out the version of masculinity that came most naturally to them, they began to become more comfortable with themselves and their gender identities.

With the exception of Zach, the transguys discussed this problem, many times wishing they could have changed that aspect of their childhood, but ultimately coming to terms with the reality of their situation and their own ways of being. In a memorable video about this subject, Adam poetically reflects “I’m probably 79% male and 5% female...Maybe I am just another star in the sky of gender” (“Changes & Reflections”). He later states that he embraces the way he acts as who he is and decides to not try to present more masculine than he already presents, unconcerned with other people reading him as a gay male and “thriving in ambiguity”, a form of resistance to hegemonic masculinity (Way 70). Four of the five transguys eventually come to this same conclusion. They are ambivalent to being read as gay because the goal of their transitions is to be comfortable in their own bodies as men and, over the course of their transitions, be read as such in the eyes of society, as well.

There was one stark exception to this trend, and his name is David. From the beginning of his hormone therapy, David seemed unsure of his decision to start testosterone and by extension, his decision to masculinize himself to the same degree as the other transguys. In his video about completing one year of testosterone treatment, he talks about feeling like he rushed into hormone replacement therapy, saying, “I don’t feel like I regret taking T or anything like that. I mean, I love the person that I am now... [but] I do

feel like I did rush into it and stuff like that,” and informs the audience that he will be stopping testosterone therapy. As Pascoe asserts, there are some boys for which heavy emphasis engaging in dominant masculine behavior can cause psychological trauma by internalizing the constant need for approval by society (156). Pascoe discusses the ways in which other people marginalize these non-normative boys, and David provides an example of how placing the masculine ideal ahead of one’s own wishes psychologically affects a boy. David shows his YouTube audience very personal footage of sobbing while injecting testosterone, asking himself why he was continuing his hormone therapy. While continuing to identify as a transgender man, he discusses his decision to embrace his female socialization and subordinate masculinity while still feeling confident in his body in his hormone therapy anniversary video.

As exemplified by David, there is a small portion of the transgender community that stops hormone replacement therapy at least for a small period of time. As is the case with cisgender males, the feelings surrounding the masculine nature of male bodies are different with every transgender male. The male transgender community assumes that looking as masculine as one can and constantly attempting to reach hegemonic masculinity are the goals of hormonally transitioning. However, the goal of reaching hegemonic masculinity is impossible and possibly discouraging, considering the fact that masculinity must be won while at risk of being lost in every interaction (Connell 79), and all of the youths realize this over the course of their transitions.

Despite being unable to reach hegemonic masculinity, in a very literal way all of the transguys I observed are self-made men, the American ideal of masculinity that Michael Kimmel describes in his book, *Manhood in America*. While they are not within classical definition of self-made men, just as the Self-Made Man proves his own masculinity through hard work and individualism, the transguys create their masculine identities in spite of the obstacles they faced in their youth (Kimmel 16). These transguys were socialized as women, and by virtue of the sex into which they were born, they were forced to deliberately mold their bodies into more masculine shapes and learn how to be men consciously. However, just as all men, they acquire the plight of constantly needing to prove their masculinity to those around them, and this is especially salient in interactions with people who knew them before they publicly identified as transgender (Kimmel 23). All of the transguys expressed in their videos self-consciousness about the ways they acted in light of them being socialized to be women even after passing as biological men.

Passing: Becoming Men in Others' Eyes

Beyond the fact that they feel that they were born in the wrong body, the reason life is so hard for many transgender youth is that their gender performance is read as opposite to the gender with which they identify. In the first month of starting testosterone, all of the transguys expressed happiness, gratitude, and excitement for the chance to finally be read by society as male. Many of the frustrations throughout the transition revolve around instances of misgendering even after starting testosterone and experiencing male puberty. In one video, John

described his experience with misgendering in a French airport on the way back from a vacation:

“For the pat-down, the man, which any time I get a pat-down it’s always by a man because men get patted down by men and women get patted down by women. Well, they understood that I was trans, but the man asked me, ‘Have you had surgery?’ and I had to say ‘no’ because I figured you shouldn’t lie in an airport. So, I had to get pat down by a woman, and that was what upset me the most...they pulled me aside while I was getting a pat-down by a woman, and it was just really embarrassing for me...it kind of messed me up a little bit.” (“FTM Travel Abroad”)

The transguys mused that it would be easier if it were not social custom to gender a person based on outer appearance, but as Judith Butler discusses in her book, *Gender Trouble*, the group is the bearer of what is considered normal, especially in terms of gender identification (35). It is society as a whole that decides who is masculine or feminine enough to be considered a man or a woman. In the instance John experienced, the airport security agent independently decided what criteria John had to meet to be considered a male. Because John did not fit the arbitrary criteria of the agent, he was misgendered and treated as a woman. There is not an overarching standard by which all men must fit to be deemed “masculine enough”. Especially in the case of John, Jan Nesper’s work on spaces by which people are read differently becomes significant. In the space of the airport, the security agents deemed that “bottom surgery”, or the possession of a penis, was necessary to be

considered a man, and John was defined by the space in which he moved (Nespor 121).

As the months on testosterone pass, the transguys pass more and more often as biologically male. After quite a few months on testosterone, the only word to describe the guys, excluding David, is absolutely giddy as they relate stories of passing. Matt, a 22 year-old from Los Angeles, has an interesting analysis of how society treats him, saying that it “feels good” but he wondered aloud why the interactions would be so different when he is same person underneath more masculine skin. Judith Butler would argue that it is the programmed power struggle inscribed in the gender-obsessed society that informs society’s reactions to different genders (*Gender Trouble* 21). As a person being read as a male, Matt possesses more power than he once did as a “social female” in the past, and in interactions, people give him more respect than they had when he was perceived to be a woman.

Interestingly, when the guys do not pass in society, they often do not correct the person who misgenders them until several instances of misgendering within the situation. Matt tells a story in which he had a conversation over the phone with a woman and only after she misgenders him various times, does he speak up and correct her. Why would these transguys allow various instances of misgendering before correcting the offender, if at all? After watching the videos in which the guys in this study talk about this, they consistently discussed the influence of social pressure and stigma involved in correcting an instance of misgendering.

As members of this heteronormative, male-dominated society, the guys realize the embarrassment both people face in these types of

situations. It is only when their dysphoria overpowers the pressure to remain complicit to their society that they speak up. In this society, “the frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality” (*Frames of War* xiii). The invisible enforcing agent in misgendering situations is often the embarrassment of correcting the other person. It is important to note that physical safety must be assessed in each instance of misgendering, but, in the cases of the guys I observed, they do not realize the power they willingly give other people when they do not immediately correct an occasion of misgendering. Acting in this way allows complicity to the binary, essentialist society they wish subvert by transitioning. To put it more eloquently, they fall victim to the idea that, as R.W. Connell states, “it is the group that is the bearer of masculinity” (77). The transguys allow other people to place them within a frame of a binary gender society under the category of “female”, an identification that they not only do not identify with but oftentimes an identification that triggers an uncomfortable state of dysphoria. The fact that the transguys wait a period of time to correct individuals who mistake them for the opposite gender does, in fact, reinforce the idea that individuals have a right to gender the individuals with whom they come in contact.

Advice and Support for Other Guys

The personal information the transguys share on their videos are not only meant to document their personal transition into physically more masculine people, but also to help other transguys as they themselves transition or think about transitioning, especially in

terms of beginning testosterone hormone replacement therapy. Zach, the transguy from the UK, focused his YouTube channel on documenting visible changes and complications of hormone therapy and his surgeries. Generally, his videos about his physical transition were very formal without discussions about emotional reactions; in videos, he listed off physical changes on testosterone or gave updates about his top surgery (mastectomy) results. Exceptions include a video in which he told his coming out story and two videos with his girlfriend. What his channel lacked in personal reflection and emotionality in the rest of his videos was compensated by the factual information he provides to his viewers who have yet to begin any aspect of transitioning. He even provided a “how-to” on how to pass as a FTM transperson pre-testosterone.

Zach’s channel parallels Niobe Way’s analysis of academic literature discussing how many guys incorporate the societal expectation of emotional stoicism into their relationships with other guys. From what was observed, Zach is very private with his emotions in his interactions with other transguys through videos, giving only information necessary to pre-transitioning guys. While this may be practiced to promote his own personal safety in “real life,” I would argue that it is also reflective of how he relates to other people in light of societal expectations of men, as he states that he has become more stoic over time since the beginning of his transition. To quote Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner,

“Our sex may be male, but our identity as a man is developed through a complex process of interactions with the culture in which we both learn the gender

scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable (Kimmel and Messner as cited in Way 58).”

While boys may be emotionally stoic with some peers, they exhibit emotionality with others. In Zach’s case, we see that he does allow himself to show emotion in videos with his girlfriend, Shiva. Because the cultural perspective on romantic relationships allows for more intimate sharing of personal feelings, Zach is more emotionally available to Shiva, and he allows more emotion to come through in the videos in which she co-stars.

Zach is the stoic exception with the group of transguys observed. They are boys who are not expected to desire intimate friendships with other men, yet they share things with their transgender audiences that they would not share to many people offline. They upload very personal and emotional videos about their transitions, discussing the personal and interpersonal implications of their transition. In those discussions, they speak directly to the trans viewers on YouTube, paralleling Way’s findings that adolescent and young adult boys resist the cultural stereotypes pushed upon them, desiring to share intimate details about their lives to people to whom they relate on a deep level (86). It is not surprising that four out of the five transguys choose to share intimate details about their lives to other transguys on YouTube despite how public the platform is. The transgender community is small, and the opportunity to come in contact with many transguys is low unless you reach out to others on the Internet. In the same vein, the transguys in my observations recognize that there are not many resources for young transguys

outside the Internet, and they offer the resources they can as transitioning guys to young men that may not have what they need offline. While the group of friends is unconventional, the FTM trans community is essentially a group of close friends with back and forth communication via YouTube comments and private messages about a development process that affects all of them. Such as the culture-resisting men in Way's research, they engage in deep conversation for advice and support about the life-changing process they are undertaking as they transition (86).

Gender: Social Construction and Then Some

The guys discussed in this ethnography are just that: guys. It is true that they were assigned a female sex and gender at the time of their birth based on physical characteristics, but, because they identify as men, they are men. Their determination to transition hormonally, surgically, and socially to force society to view them as men is the convincing evidence to their personal concrete identification as men. Comparing their behavior to studies and ethnographies done by gender and masculinity studies academics demonstrates the similarities between cisgender males and transgender males far outweigh the differences. They are all men who are all people grappling with the expectations placed on them by society and their own personal wishes and desires.

After 18 hours of watching the YouTube videos of Adam, Matt, Zach, David, and John, I, as an ethnographer, have to question the validity of the argument that gender is purely a social construction. While I wholeheartedly reject the idea that gender and actions, likes,

and emotions associated with different genders are innate in each individual, it would be careless to ignore the fact that there is something yet to discover about gender when looking at transgender individuals. Their legitimate feelings show us that the essentialist view of gender in our society is damaging to individuals, but in another, if gender identity were not in some way essential to at least a few people, transgender individuals would not exist in Western society. What, then, must people do to change the culture to allow the people within society to express their gender in ways they deem necessary to their psychological wellbeing? Claiming that gender is neither essential nor socially constructed would be doing a disservice to all of society: those who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, those who identify with the opposite gender, and those who identify as both or neither.

The thought of changing the way gender is handled in Western society to allow for a public discussion of these issues is radical, and it will take many years and countless hours of hard work on the part of feminist, gay, and transgender activists. However, the discussion is blossoming in academic and activist settings. There are personal steps individuals are taking to be respectful of the gender of every person. For example, I attempt to refrain from gendering any person based on anything other than their personal identification, but even that can be a dubious decision based on the delicate safety issues surrounding people who are transgender in highly gender-traditional spaces, such as the University of Notre Dame in which I live and study. Being a person who is transgender in these kinds of spaces is at best, psychologically difficult and at worst, physically dangerous. While it

may be unwise to ask the pronouns of every person in spaces that are dangerous to transgender individuals, being an ally and advocate for these people in these spaces is paramount. Whenever possible, the concerns of this community should be at least mentioned in discussions about changing these spaces. Transitioning is a difficult process, and speaking up for transgender individuals will show that there are people offline that these individuals can look to for support and comfort like the community available on YouTube.

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**Acquiring a Historical Lens on Trafficking in Africa:
Gendered Dimensions of Vulnerability, Consent, and
Exploitation**

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Dougie Barnard, a member of the class of 2015, is majoring in Theology and Peace Studies and minoring in International Development Studies. He is greatly indebted to Professor Paul Ocobock for developing his interest in gender studies and his ability to use gender as a lens for understanding historical processes.

Human trafficking has been labeled “modern day slavery” and has surged near the top of the list of human rights issues of the twenty-first century. As social activists seek to understand human trafficking, they have drawn many comparisons to slavery evident during the period of the transatlantic slave trade because human rights emerged out of the abolition of slavery. It is important to analyze the historical perspective of slavery so that we can illuminate similarities in contemporary trafficking and address the underlying causal factors that perpetuate slavery today. Within human trafficking and the historical phenomenon of slavery, women and young girls have a special role; they are in a unique position to display the gendered imbalance of power. By analyzing historical slavery in Africa through the lens of gender and sexuality, we gain insight into modern-day slavery as it relates to women. The disempowerment of women demonstrates gendered power dynamics evident in modern-day sex trafficking and the historical phenomenon of slavery, supporting Joan Scott’s theory that gender is signified by relationships of power.⁶⁴ The common aspects of modern-day trafficking – outlined in the United Nations (UN) Palermo Protocol of 2000 – and the historical phenomenon of slavery in Africa are dimensions of vulnerability, subdued consent, and control or exploitation.

In order to understand contemporary trafficking in Africa, it is imperative to analyze the roots of trafficking by gaining a historical perspective. Doing so, however, requires acknowledging the “complex interplay of history, ideology, globalization, labor demand, poverty, and

⁶⁴ Joan W. Scott "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review*. 91.5 (1986): 1067.

social vulnerabilities in yielding persistent but changing forms of the demand and supply of coerced women and children in Africa.”⁶⁵ By using a modern definition of trafficking, we can pull out broad aspects of trafficking today that can be traced back to the past. The UN Palermo Protocol of 2000 defined trafficking as, “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power on a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”⁶⁶ The UN’s definition emphasizes several broad aspects of trafficking. First, it recognizes that victims of trafficking are in positions of vulnerability. Second, it reveals that consent is often achieved through measures of deception and coercion. Third, trafficking contains an element of control often expressed through the use of threats, force, financial manipulation, and violence. Fourth, the inherent power dynamics within trafficking lead to exploitation. Since human trafficking is a broad topic – ranging from domestic servitude and confinement to forced prostitution – I will focus on aspects within historical slavery in Africa that are characteristic of the trafficking of women today explicitly for the purposes of sexual exploitation, or “sex trafficking.” Females were highly valued within the

⁶⁵ Benjamin J. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, *Contextualizing Trafficking in Women and Children in Africa. Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake*. Edited by Benjamin J. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 17.

⁶⁶ UNODC, *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto* (New York: UNODC, 2004), 7.

historical phenomenon of slavery because of their reproductive capacities and role as sexual objects. The elements of vulnerability, subdued consent, control, and exploitation that are manifested in the UN's definition of modern-day trafficking have relevance to historical slavery in Africa.

Vulnerability, the first shared element within the UN's definition of trafficking, arose from females' marginal position in society and "added value" due to their reproductive capacity and inability to control their body. Women and children experienced the most vulnerability in slavery within Africa and were at greatest risk for being taken as "exchange" slaves. On the East African islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, Elizabeth McMahon found that women and children were especially vulnerable to kidnapping and being sold into slavery. Slave traders in the western Indian Ocean region "preferred slaves between the ages of ten and twenty and rarely resold slaves over thirty."⁶⁷ Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, writing about female slavery within the Zarma region of westernmost Niger, uses the term "exchange" slaves to refer to those taken in raids.⁶⁸ He contrasted exchange slaves with domestic slaves, saying exchange slaves were

⁶⁷ Elisabeth McMahon, *Trafficking and Reenslavement: The Social Vulnerability of Women and Children in Nineteenth-Century East Africa, Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. Edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 33.

⁶⁸ Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *The Songhay-Zarma Female Slave, Women and Slavery in Africa*. Edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 133.

“considered like the cattle” and “were not people but a commodity.”⁶⁹ De Sardan remarks, “The bulk of the prisoners taken in a raid or during a war were women and children.”⁷⁰ Women and children were the preferred “exchange” slaves because they had identities that could be “subsumed into whatever culture they were sold.”⁷¹ Since children were still forming and developing, they were most easily able to adapt to new cultures and women were able to integrate into new places through their children.⁷² In addition to having mutable identities, women and girls were valued over male slaves because of their role as sexual property and their reproductive function. For example, in speaking about slavery in Western Sudan in the nineteenth century, Martin Klein writes, “The master or his dependents can maintain sexual relations with her [the female slave].”⁷³ If offspring resulted from these sexual relations, the female slave’s master inherited them as dependents. This added value of female slaves made them particularly vulnerable to being captured during wars and raids.

The patriarchal elements of society, kinless status of many female slaves, and economic disempowerment also increased women and girls’ vulnerability. The coercive cycle of slavery was such that even if persons escaped, if they had no kinship relations, they would likely end up under the “care” of another master. Therefore, the important

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷¹ Elisabeth McMahon, *Trafficking and Reenslavement*, 34.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Martin A. Klein, *Women in Slavery in the Western Sudan, Women and Slavery in Africa*. Edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 88.

societal value of kinship networks meant that once a person became disconnected, for whatever reason, from their kin, their risk of being enslaved increased *as well as* their risk of reenslavement were they to escape.⁷⁴ In his report on slavery in West Africa, Alan Christelow said, “where slaves, particularly women, tried to escape, if they had no family to escape to, they usually wound up with a new owner.”⁷⁵ Christelow identified patriarchy as an important element in the social vulnerability of women. As dependents, women had no means of economic empowerment and once freed from slavery, they had little choice but reenslavement. Therefore, in a slave-owning society, patriarchy served to facilitate traffickers in producing a seemingly endless supply of vulnerable women and girls. In these cases, slavery substituted for kinship relations, providing a new network of dependence. These examples highlight that the slave trade was widespread and interwoven into the social and economic fabric of African culture. The disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to the slave trade affirms Scott’s theory that gender is signified by power relations.

The second aspect of the UN’s definition of trafficking – subdued consent – is portrayed through deception and familial coercion. Sex trafficking in colonial British West Africa operated through prostitution and often included familial consent. In 1939, Bessey Assor, a Nigerian woman living in the Gold Coast, returned to

⁷⁴ Elisabeth McMahon, *Trafficking and Reenslavement*, 34.

⁷⁵ Alan Christelow, “Slavery in Kano, 1913-1914: Evidence from the Judicial Records.” *African Economic History* 14 (1985): 67.

Nigeria to purchase a young girl.⁷⁶ Ms. Assor paid the girl's family and obtained parental consent under the pretense that a husband was waiting to marry the young girl in the Gold Coast. Investigations revealed that the husband was a nine-year old boy, and that Ms. Assor kept the young girl in her home and forced her to prostitute. The young girl's case was not unique, as the Criminal Investigation Division of the Gold Coast Police reported an increase in the number of women and girls trafficked from Nigeria for sex work.⁷⁷ The spike in sex trafficking was a direct result of the increasing demand for commercial sex caused by an influx of thousands of European and American military personnel into the Gold Coast during WWII.

The role of parents in the sex trade is an issue under researched and difficult to speak about with certainty. Carina Ray writes, "As Ruby Andrew and Benjamin Lawrance observe, parental coercion remains one of the most difficult elements of child trafficking to track and prosecute, despite the frequency with which it occurs."⁷⁸ Notwithstanding, critical generational concerns are at play. Why would parents sell their daughters with the knowledge that she would be sexually abused? First, as was the case in the example with Bessey Assor, sometimes parents were deceived. Traffickers offered marriage, education, and labor jobs as socially desirable opportunities to lure parents into selling their daughters. Poor economic conditions, fathers' desire for the accumulation of wealth, and many other factors caused

⁷⁶ Carina Ray, *Sex Trafficking, Prostitution, and the Law,* " *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake*. Edited by Benjamin J. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 101.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

families to sell their daughters. The lack of consent or knowledge of young women and girls entering the sex trade due to coercion and deception accentuates the power relations characteristic of slavery.

I want to be careful to avoid applying modern anti-prostitution feminist views, which argue that sex work is degrading and reinforces the patriarchal order, to the practice of prostitution within Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Accordingly, many cases of the sale of daughters into prostitution required no deception in order to gain familial consent. Ray confirms this by saying, "Some families were involved in organizing the sex trade into which their daughters entered; what is less clear is the extent to which coercion was used to extract their participation."⁷⁹ Subdued consent through deception or coercion is a critical feature that distinguishes modern "trafficking" from prostitution. "Trafficking," a socially constructed term, which has its roots in the word *traffic*, has evolved significantly in its usage towards defending victims whose rights – to bodily integrity, to seek employment, to not be confined, etc. – are being violated. Modern activists and scholars have difficulty distinguishing between involuntary trafficking and voluntary migrant sex work. This distinction is no easier when analyzing African slavery, as oftentimes the line between enslaved and voluntary was blurred.

Families' complicity in the sale of their own daughters raises important questions: *did young girls have a choice in the matter? Were young boys also sold into coerced labor networks? From a generational standpoint, how did this practice affect relations between young persons*

⁷⁹ Ibid., 109.

and adults or elders? Though we do not have clear answers, Carina Ray's research reveals that elders often manipulated the need for coerced labor by deceiving parents into selling their children. The Criminal Investigation Division of the Gold Coast Police's 1939-40 report states that "a large number [of girls] had been brought here by elder women on the pretext of marriage or to learn trading and domestic work and had been taught to be prostitutes."⁸⁰ Within the Nigerian division of Obubra, in Ogoja Province of the Cross River basin, investigators claimed, "there is hardly a family that has not an interest in it, and Elders openly admit that they receive a fee, amounting to some pounds, from every woman who practices this calling."⁸¹ Elders, motivated by the opportunity to become profiteers, established the systematic selling of girls into this "calling" within their communities. The hierarchical power structure, which favored the elders and made youth liable to exploitation, was taken advantage of by those it privileged most, exacerbating the power divide between elders and youth. This highlights that sometimes parents, relatives, or elders in the community coerced young girls into consent.

The third aspect of the UN's definition – control or exploitation – was exemplified through physical and sexual abuse, financial restraints, and norms of female slaves' sexual subservience. While some women and girls were acquired by purchase, others were captured in war or raids. Adzo, a young girl from northern Ghana, was abducted

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

while harvesting vegetables.⁸² She was about ten or twelve years of age when she was captured. After puberty she was forced to become one of her owner's wives, despite her adamant refusal. Women and girls embodied lack of control not only in the capture phase of slavery, but also in their everyday lives. The story of Swema reveals elements of physical abuse and coercion that were employed by slave traders and owners to maintain control over their slaves. The patterned, physical and sometimes sexual abuse of female slaves occurred within a gendered power structure of inequality. Swema was born in Yaoland, East Central Africa, in 1855.⁸³ Swema and her mother were enslaved and taken into an Arab caravan. While journeying, caravan leaders maintained strict control over food rationing, preventing slaves from eating. The leaders "threatened severe punishment" for anyone that attempted to get food. Physical abuse included "impervious blows from sticks" and severe beatings that caused Swema's mother to describe their fate as "more bitter than death."⁸⁴ Despite Swema's growing feebleness, the caravan leader was unwilling to abandon her. He said, "I can't leave her here, I bought her on behalf of my patron. If I abandon her, I will lose a *piastre* [silver coin] which comes to me for each slave head."⁸⁵ The leader's unwillingness to leave Swema behind shows the

⁸² Claire C. Robertson, *Post-Proclamation Slavery in Accra. Women and Slavery in Africa*. Edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 243.

⁸³ Edward A. Alpers, *Female Vulnerability in East Africa. Women and Slavery in Africa*. Edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 196.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

simple economics of the slave trade that led to the commodification and exploitation of slaves. Slave traders and owners gained status and wealth at the expense of brutally dominating and disempowering female slaves like Swema and her mother.

Slavery enhanced the marginality of women and girls in many parts of African society by permitting the economic control of female slaves. In the Gold Coast Colony, Robertson writes that while the status of free girls was only slightly better than slaves, “at least they could look forward to assuming more rights and authority as they got older.”⁸⁶ While slave women were near the bottom of the social hierarchy, “slave girls must have been in the very lowest position, debarred by legal status, age, and sex from any freedom of action.”⁸⁷ Robertson writes that women slaves were supposed to hand all of their earnings to their masters.⁸⁸ This act of creating economic dependence through disempowering female slaves was fundamentally about control. The removal of slave girls’ earnings gave them special marginality in society that supported a gendered power dynamic of exploitation.

The kinless nature of many female slaves allowed for manipulation and control by their masters. Female slaves that were taken prisoners during war or raids and transported great distances were in a position subject to control because in their new society, they

⁸⁶ Claire C. Robertson, *Post-Proclamation Slavery in Accra*, 227.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

were kinless.⁸⁹ Curtis Keim writes, “The kinlessness of the female slave largely determined her status and treatment. She could not become a wife in the true Mangbetu sense...therefore she did not deserve any respect.”⁹⁰ The total lack of kin by these female slaves resulted in them being equated with property in Mangbetu society—they were “livestock to be disposed of” and could be beaten, mutilated, and executed.⁹¹ Kinless slave women that were subject to being treated like worthless property exemplify the exploitation and complete removal of social mobility of female slaves within the Mangbetu-related peoples of northeastern Zaire.

The gendered power differential often illustrated between female slaves and masters was also present as structural exploitation in the unequal treatment between male and female slaves. While male slaves were also exploited, they “had greater potential status mobility than female slaves” because of their social worth in Mangbetu society.⁹² Male slaves could receive wives and even trade and accumulate goods if their production was high. Additionally, if they were obedient and respectful, they could even be freed after several years of service, unlike female slaves. The discriminatory treatment of female slaves in comparison to male slaves in Mangbetu society in the nineteenth century demonstrates how patriarchal elements created systems of social worth whereby female slaves were disempowered. The

⁸⁹ Curtis A. Keim, *Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu, Women and Slavery in Africa*. Edited by Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997, 147.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 149.

structural exploitation of female slaves in Mangbetu society underscores Scott's theory that gender is signified by relationships of power.

The control and sexual exploitation of women and girls occurred through established norms of the rights of slave masters. Female slaves were often viewed as sexual objects and consequently had little or no rights over their body and sexuality. De Sardan highlighted that masters often used female slaves as "sexual assets."⁹³ Even after a female slave had been married, de Sardan argues that her master was "in a position of force in relation to her," retaining power to objectify her as a sexual commodity. Klein says, "A defining characteristic of the female slave was her lack of control over her body."⁹⁴ Women and girls were not only human merchandise of the slave trader, in which the same was true for male slaves, but also objects to be exploited sexually. They could be given to satisfy visitors or soldiers because they had little control over their sex lives.⁹⁵

The norm of slave masters having sexual rights over their female slaves extended to include having the right to inherit any offspring. The inadvertent impregnation of female slaves shows that sometimes their reproductive capacity and role as sexual objects were exploited together. Klein recounts how two slave women were given to visitors and after the explorers left, both were pregnant.⁹⁶ The children of slaves within the Zarma (present-day Niger) region belonged to the

⁹³ Olivier de Sardan, *The Songhay-Zarma Female Slave*, 137.

⁹⁴ Martin A. Klein, *Women in Slavery in the Western Sudan*, 87.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

master of the woman, “just as the increase of a herd belonged to the owner of a cow.”⁹⁷ Sexual exploitation of female slaves made possible the production of offspring that created more dependents for slave masters. The sexual disempowerment of women and girls within slavery emphasizes the third aspect of the UN’s definition of trafficking: control or exploitation.

Modern-day trafficking continues today throughout Africa, finding ways around legislation and hiding in the demand for coerced labor. “Between 2000 and 2010, ‘forty-four of fifty-one sub-Saharan African nations...passed new antislavery and anti-trafficking statutes.’”⁹⁸ However, enforcement of these laws is inadequate at best, and embarrassing at worst. Like Eurocentric colonial antislavery laws, international pressures coming from outside of Africa have largely driven these statutes; therefore, the laws have shallow roots in African governments and inevitably contain many blind spots and shortcomings.⁹⁹ Despite a significant lack of child-trafficking statistics recorded worldwide, studies show that children make up 60% of trafficking victims in Africa.¹⁰⁰ Research shows that many children are

⁹⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁹⁸ Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran, *Human Bondage in Africa*, 4.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Kreston, *The Story of Elsie: A Case Study of Trafficking in Contemporary South Africa. Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. Edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 208.

trafficked from West Africa to the European Union.¹⁰¹ Estimates say there are currently 270,000 victims of trafficking in the EU, many of which come from Africa.¹⁰² According to a study by Child Exploitation and Online Protection, West African children from Nigeria represent the highest number of victims trafficked into the United Kingdom.¹⁰³ Our understanding of modern-day slavery, which is driven by a demand for coerced labor, can be greatly enhanced by gaining a historical perspective. This comparison is important because the common aspects of vulnerability, subdued consent, and control or exploitation can be used in legislation, projects, and campaigns to address human trafficking.

Modern-day trafficking is plagued by similar aspects relevant in the historical phenomenon of slavery in Africa. Contemporary research studies on South Africa report that, “parents, particularly mothers, are among the primary traffickers in children,” and that there is a “close relationship between intrafamilial sexual abuse and exploitation.”¹⁰⁴ This reflects historical patterns of subdued consent, where family and community members often coerced young women into the slave trade. Additionally, studies have found that children who are most vulnerable to recruitment for trafficking are child-headed

¹⁰¹ Margaret Akullo, *Child-Trafficking Policymaking between Africa and Europe. Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. Edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 190.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁰⁴ Kreston, *The Story of Elsie*, 207.

households due to losses from HIV and AIDS.¹⁰⁵ These children are often orphans and disconnected from kinship networks. The historical phenomenon of slavery in Africa showed that women were marginalized and susceptible to slavery if they did not have kinship ties or a male protector. In Kevin Bales' book about new slavery, he comments on the vulnerability that results from having marginal status in society: "Being poor, homeless, a refugee, or abandoned can all lead to the desperation that opens the door to slavery, making it easy for the slaver to lay an attractive trap."¹⁰⁶ The social vulnerability of women and girls is an aspect of modern-day trafficking that was also relevant to slavery in Africa's past.

Analyzing the historical phenomenon of slavery through the lens of gender and sexuality demonstrates that women had little control over their body. Women and girls retained high value as slaves due to their reproductive role and use as sexual objects. The story of Bessey Assor, a Nigerian woman who purchased a young girl from her family and forced her into sex work, demonstrates that high rates of prostitution can increase instances of trafficking. Modern-day trafficking includes the sexual exploitation of women and girls through the commercial sex industry. Kathleen Fitzgibbon writes, "Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and the Gambia are becoming increasingly known as destinations for sex tourists to exploit local populations,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 208.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. London: University of California Press, 2000, 32.

especially children.”¹⁰⁷ Fitzgibbon also cites that child prostitution is on the rise within Africa.¹⁰⁸ Modern-day slavery often occurs through these avenues of commercial sex work, as was true in the story of Bessey Assor, wherein women and girls are sexually exploited and commodified to profit their owners.

The liberation of women from slavery creates economic growth and increases education rates, empowering women to become participating members of civil society. Gaining a historical perspective on slavery in Africa will aid our understanding of the contemporary slave trade and suggest deficiencies in current anti-trafficking efforts. Quirk and Vigneswaran characterize this importance by saying, “current patterns of exploitation tend to have important antecedents, which help to explain why – and on what types of terms – certain categories of people continue to find themselves vulnerable to human bondage.”¹⁰⁹ Recognizing evolving forms of social hierarchy and patriarchy that continue to plague trafficking victims today will direct action to the economically and socially disadvantaged. Modern day sex trafficking in Africa exploits the “special powerlessness of women and children”¹¹⁰ that has characterized the historical phenomenon of slavery. The current trade is built on antecedents from the historical slave trade in Africa, including the dimensions of vulnerability, subdued consent, and control or exploitation referenced in the UN Palermo Protocol of 2000. These historical antecedents should be used as lens to

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Fitzgibbon, "Modern-Day Slavery? The scope of trafficking in persons in Africa." *African Security Review*. no. 1 (2003), 83.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran, *Human Bondage in Africa*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Bales, *Disposable People*, 111.

seeing contemporary human trafficking; ideally this historical lens will shape policy and legislation that protects the women and girls who are most vulnerable to enter the trade today.

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**“He Attack Someone Who Matters?”:
Classed and Raced Representations of Victims
on *Law & Order: SVU***

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"In the criminal justice system, sexually based offenses are considered especially heinous. In New York City, the dedicated detectives who investigate these vicious felonies are members of an elite squad known as the Special Victims Unit. These are their stories."

The above words begin every episode of NBC's *Law & Order: SVU*, the first spin-off of Dick Wolf's *Law & Order*, which premiered on September 20, 1999. The show, now in its fifteenth season, follows a NYPD unit, largely focused on partners Detective Elliot Stabler (Christopher Meloni) and Detective Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay), that specializes in sexually based crimes, often against women and children. The show tends to base its storylines loosely, or sometimes not so loosely, on cases that have received a lot of recent media attention – they are “ripped from the headlines,” as it were. It is true that *Law & Order: SVU* can be poignant in its depiction of these realistic crimes and the great lengths to which the detectives will go to advocate for their victims, rejecting “the assumption that only virtuous and sexually chaste women can be violated,” (Cuklanz & Moorti, 308). However, the representations of these victims are often problematic, and they regularly display the profound difference in the treatment of victims of different races and socioeconomic statuses. These representations of lower-class women, prostitutes in particular, demonstrate lesser interest in victims who are not seen as “special” in comparison to young, white, “innocent” female victims. Furthermore, the misrepresentation of non-white victims, often playing into common stereotypes, is also a point of concern, as, “Societal racial stereotypes – exacerbated and reproduced in media images – can translate into structural racism” (Deo et al., 148). I argue that these representations,

although surely intended to be accurate portrayals of the differing treatment of victims of sexual assault in our society, simply serve to normalize such discrepancies in attitudes toward victims. Regardless of intention, the discourse of certain women, particularly prostitutes, “deserving” or “asking for” sexual violence reinforces these notions, perpetuating attitudes that sexual assault and rape have different implications depending upon the victim to whom the violence is directed.

In its first five minutes, episode four of season one, entitled “Hysteria,” serves as a prime example of the intersection of issues of race and class on the show. In the episode, Detective Stabler and Detective Benson are called in for the case of a dead black woman found in Times Square who is believed to be a prostitute. When Benson asks the police officer on the scene how he knows she is a prostitute, he replies, “After 30 years in Vice, I think I know. You get to the point where you can just smell ‘em.” While Benson in particular seems rather disgusted with his words, the officer would likely not have been bold enough to make such a callous statement in front of police officers with whom he was unfamiliar if it was not the type of dialogue that was generally acceptable within the police force. As the officer ogles the body of the scantily clad victim, the camera, too, follows his gaze, focusing on the victim’s body in a manner that is atypical of white victims. The focus is on this young woman’s buttocks and thighs, in particular, as her skirt is hiked up, reinforcing the fact that “Black female bodies are typically seen as sexual – audiences rarely see anything else” (Hasinoff, 330). Before being asked to leave the scene by Benson, the officer refers to the victim as “NHL,” which Benson

translates for the Medical Examiner to mean, “no humans involved.” It is immediately clear that this victim, and many others like her, is treated differently because of two major factors working against her, neither of which she had any control over – her race and her class.

The insensitive discourse among the police officers, even those within the Special Victims Unit, as well as the witnesses they encounter, indicates the degree to which dialogue of “deserving” or “asking for” sexual violence is embedded in our culture. As Benson and Stabler go to the streets in hopes of getting a lead from some women who may have known the victim, they end up talking to a handful of prostitutes, who are mixed in both age and race. When Benson shows them a photo of the victim’s body, one of the prostitutes, a slightly older, white woman asks, “Who’d she piss off?” The notion that the dead prostitute could have done anything to make someone so mad as to brutalize her is frankly absurd. The fact that this question comes from a fellow woman, and prostitute, demonstrates the degree to which this mentality has pervaded the minds of both men *and* women. Similarly, once the SVU detectives discover that the victim was not in fact a prostitute, but a student majoring in cultural studies at Columbia University who spent her free time volunteering at a literacy center, Detective John Munch (Richard Belzer) asks, “What was Miss Goody Two Shoes doing wearing rock-my-world pumps, not to mention a micro mini and a belly shirt?” Detective Monique Jeffries (Michelle Hurd) rebukes him, stating that it was hot that night and that she would wear that clubbing, too. Benson joins in, admonishing Munch, “Are you saying she’d be asking for it?” It is important to note that only the female detectives see cause for issue with Munch’s statement, with

Stabler agreeing that he would never let his daughters leave the house in such get-ups. Similar insensitivity is seen in the common use of the term “whore” to refer to the victim by some of the detectives, with only Jeffries speaking out against it, taking on the role of the quintessential “angry black woman.” Interestingly, though, the Medical Examiner and the detectives, both male and female, often refer to victims who are prostitutes as “hookers” and “streetwalkers.” While most people would argue that these terms are not as offensive as “whore,” it becomes an issue of where one draws the line between what is acceptable and what is not. The use of any of these terms creates a culture in which these women are known, and valued, only by their profession, which is a short leap to deeming them “NHI.”

In their investigation, the detectives discover from the other prostitutes that this same perpetrator may have also attacked a Latina prostitute named Lorinda Gutierrez, who was able to escape. On the show, the detectives often profile serial rapists or killers through the similarities in their crimes, and they question when an element varies from the pattern. In this case, the perpetrator was known to have raped and strangled two black prostitutes, however, at no point do the detectives question the fact that the third escaped victim is Latina, which indicates the manner in which race is often “not rendered invisible, but it is also not presented as specific and particular” (Banet-Weiser, 221). The handling of these three cases together indicates a trend observed in the *SVU* series: “Specifically, although a single white victim was frequently the sole focus of an episode on ‘SVU’, minority victims were almost always portrayed in groups” (Britto, Hughes, Saltzman & Stroh, 47). This tendency causes one to wonder if the

victim has to be white to be deemed “special” enough to warrant her own episode. Lorinda, in particular, is of ambiguous national origin, but her “otherness” is characterized by an unrecognizable accent and the use of the Spanish word “cojones.” However, her stylistic representation as “urban,” with big earrings, bright clothing, and curly hair, makes her race a non-issue; it seems the SVU detectives perceive her as sufficiently ambiguous-looking that the change of victimology does not need to be considered. As the detectives interrogate her, she finally demands, “Why you working this so hard? He attack someone who matters?” The silence from the detectives is deafening. Her question hits exactly at the heart of the issue of the difference in treatment of race and class. The notion that crimes against prostitutes do not matter serves to perpetuate a rape culture in which women do not step forward with complaints for fear of not being believed, often due to factors beyond their control, such as race and class.

Throughout the episode, there is a secondary storyline with Stabler’s family that serves as a stark contrast to the ongoing case with the prostitutes. Stabler has a wife and five children, and they appear to live a comfortable, middle-class existence. In the beginning of the episode, Stabler’s thirteen-year-old daughter announces that her friend is pregnant. The friend is older, but, by “older,” she means fifteen years old. As Stabler grapples with this information and a sudden need to give his daughter a meaningful sex talk, the storyline serves as the polar opposite to his case, in which a number of the prostitutes he interviews are not much older than his daughter. The lives of these prostitutes are situated as particularly foreign and unnatural in comparison to the image of Stabler’s, at this moment, idyllic family, with his only familial

concern being his daughter's understanding of the merit of saying "no" to aggressive men.

Episode one of season four, entitled "Chameleon," also provides space for analysis of both class and race, as the episode opens with the bust of a "nightclub" that is actually a brothel, introducing the prostitute "Chantilly" (Sara Ramirez). Although she is quite obviously Latina, she is presented as very whitewashed, wearing a bad blonde wig. Also, clearly lacking a bra, she wears a satiny blue dress and a cheap-looking crystal necklace to mark her to the audience as a prostitute. Upon the entrance of the police officers in the raid, she tells one of them that a man tried to rape her. He replies in a snarky manner, "Sweetheart, if they don't pay you, it's not rape. It's theft of services." While there are certainly extenuating circumstances surrounding this example, being that she claims rape in the midst of a raid, the fact that the police officer does not, even for a moment, seriously consider her claim illustrates the classed valuations of women. Furthermore, the fact that he diminishes her claim to "theft of services" suggests that because she is a prostitute and agrees to have sex with a number of men for payment that a situation could not arise in which she would say "no." The treatment of prostitutes as objects for sex, as indicated in the attitude of this police officer, illustrates the manner in which even women who choose to come forward can be deprived of a voice as a result of prevalent stereotypes of certain classes in society.

Chantilly, though, serves as more than an example of someone who is not taken seriously by an insensitive police officer; she

challenges the norms that dictate which crimes are investigated most thoroughly and who deserves help. When Munch sarcastically retorts to her, "Tell us three hundred more times. We love the sound of your voice," she is quick to say, "Hey! I'm a victim! Why are you gonna disrespect me?" She knows her rights and demands to be heard. However, Munch is not the only SVU detective who treats her rudely, as she proclaims to Olivia, "We [prostitutes] get punished, because we don't act like society's version of a woman. We're at risk and nobody cares!" Even when she becomes exasperated, demanding the names and badge numbers of the police officers, a request that is completely within her rights, the SVU detectives continue to ridicule her. The fact that these police officers, who are supposed to be an elite squad trained in sensitivity for such matters, cannot even take her seriously indicates the degree to which Chantilly, and other women like her, are not viewed as "special" enough to warrant one's full attention and respect. Chantilly wants her experience to be heard, because the man who attempted to rape her is also suspected of strangling and killing her friend, another prostitute. She is strong enough to make her voice heard, but the question becomes, should she have to be? While Chantilly serves as a representation of the unfortunate manner in which many prostitutes and lower-class women are treated by the justice system, repeated portrayals of prostitutes in this manner only serve to normalize such experiences, possibly further inhibiting other victims of sexual violence from coming forward.

In contrast to Chantilly, Maggie Peterson (Sharon Lawrence), who is also a prostitute, emerges as a representation of the type of victim who receives attention. The detectives first meet Maggie after

she has killed the suspect in Chantilly's attack and her friend's murder after he tried to rape her, too. Despite the fact that Maggie is also a prostitute, she is presented as more of a "high-class" prostitute than Chantilly. She is the stereotypically beautiful, white, blue-eyed, blond-haired woman – she has no need for a cheap wig like Chantilly's to increase her desirability. Furthermore, although her dress is pulled down, being that she has just been raped, it appears more expensive than Chantilly's, and she also wears a fancy lace bra. The class difference is only emphasized by the fact that Maggie was attacked in a relatively nice hotel, as evidenced by the luxurious linens and the ornate bed frame, whereas the attempted assault on Chantilly was in a dark and crowded "nightclub" during a police raid. Beyond class markers, though, Maggie comes to the detectives bearing physical wounds in a manner that Chantilly did not, which also calls into question to what degree a victim has to be brutalized to "look like a rape victim." Her meek, fearful demeanor seems to endear her more to the detectives, whereas Chantilly's comparatively abrasive mannerisms only alienated them. Though both these women are prostitutes, the differing treatments of the two indicate the impact of race and class even within this subgroup of women.

The detectives soon realize, though, that their poor rape victim, Maggie, is in fact a serial killer, adding a new dimension of complexity to her representation. Although she is a rape victim, they realize that she targeted various men with shady criminal records to rob them of their money and then kill them. When the detectives go to her hotel room to arrest her, she could not look less like a prostitute. Her blonde hair is perfectly coiffed, and she is dressed in a twinset and a

conservative knee-length floral skirt, as she holds onto her infant son. This representation is one of the most poignant images contained in these two episodes, because her appearance is similar to any white, middle-class woman in her thirties, illustrating the degree to which one cannot rely on perceptions of race or class to determine “who matters.” Surely no one would ever accuse this woman of “asking for” or “deserving” sexual assault or rape, but the fact is that she knowingly put herself in situations to potentially be assaulted, in order to have reason and opportunity to kill the men for their money. Therefore, whether intended or not, in this scene, *SVU* makes a powerful statement that the perceived severity of sexual violence cannot be measured by a person’s class or race.

This shift in the representation of the character of Maggie adds a new level of complexity; she is simultaneously a prostitute, a single mother, a rape victim, and a serial killer. Initially it may appear to be empowering that this woman can be depicted as a serial killer, as women are surely also capable of committing heinous crimes, however, this representation is also problematic:

Male sexual victimization and female offending were both greatly exaggerated on “SVU”, redefining the gendered nature of sex crimes for the viewing public. By de-gendering both the offenders and the victims of rape the focus is placed on the individual offenders rather than an understanding of social problems that lead to sexual assault (Britto et al., 51).

The overrepresentation of women, such as Maggie, as offenders on *Law & Order: SVU*, as argued by Britto and colleagues, illustrates the

postfeminist notion that “the personal is personal.” Just as sexual violence is often not reported because it is viewed as a personal issue instead of in the context of systematized violence against women, the “de-gendering” of offenders and victims serves to deemphasize the culture of rape against women that exists, as well as the problems that need to be addressed in order to put a halt to such normalized violence.

Maggie’s many contradictory roles make her character difficult to represent to the viewer, but also difficult to prosecute within the confines of the show. When Assistant District Attorney Alexandra Cabot (Stephanie March) argues for the death penalty, the District Attorney, also a woman, teases her that she will be labeled “the enemy of feminism.” Cabot twists the argument of her opposition, instead trumpeting what an advocate of women’s rights she is when she proclaims, “As far as I’m concerned, this is a coup for women’s rights everywhere. Maggie Peterson has a right to a needle in the arm just like any cold-blooded killer.” Beyond the fact that she is a woman, though, some people argue that her position as a rape victim should take the option of the death penalty off the table. While the discussion surrounding her possible execution revolves around her rape, it is interesting to consider to what degree the same discussion would be occurring if she was not a mother, well-groomed, or white. This paper primarily focuses on the varying representations of victims on *Law & Order: SVU*, however, the character of Maggie, as victim turned perpetrator, provides an interesting opportunity to raise similar questions regarding the classed and raced representations of female criminals.

In her criminal trial, as the role of Maggie as a mother becomes a major issue, it becomes clear that “women perpetrators on *SVU* also frequently fall back on exaggerated forms of gender myths to legitimate their crimes, blaming crimes on family members or rationalizing criminal acts as ultimately benefiting them” (Cuklanz & Moorti, 316). Maggie is sharply dressed in her court appearance, as she explains to the jury the necessity of her being a prostitute to care for her son. In stating this motivation for her choice to sell her services, she becomes a sympathetic figure to the jury in a manner that a character such as Chantilly never could be, as Chantilly was repeatedly berated for putting herself in danger. Maggie received similar admonishment, but only in cross-examination on the witness stand, as Cabot attempted to delegitimize her claim that all of the men she killed perpetrated violence against her, forcing her to kill them in self-defense. Maggie invokes the idea of “motherhood as salvation” as she empathetically states on the stand, “He’s the most important thing in my life. He’s the only good thing that I’ve ever done. He’s my little prince.” Her role as mother appears to give her a free pass to do nearly anything in the name of providing for her son. The divide in representation, even just among prostitutes, into mothers and non-mothers, illustrates the way in which certain actions are perceived as acceptable or unacceptable in society. While middle-class women who make claims of rape may be worth more time than prostitutes, prostitutes who are mothers are normalized as a subgroup within the class that are “less deserving” of violence than the average prostitute.

The episodes of *Law & Order: SVU* discussed in this paper serve as studies of the problematic classed and raced representations of

victims on the show. These representations should not be taken lightly as merely products of a fictional television show. Rather, it should be recognized that the discrepancy in treatment of the various victims only serves to normalize these differences, creating a culture in which certain women are made to believe that they “matter” less than others. This discourse is clearly not unique to *Law & Order: SVU*, as in their article “Television Viewing and Rape Myth Acceptance among College Women,” LeeAnn Kahlor and Dan Morrison cite a 1992 analysis by Brinson that examined 26 prime-time television storylines containing references to rape:

42% of the storylines suggested that the rape victim wanted to be raped, 38% of the storylines suggested that the victim lied about the assault, and 46% of the storylines suggested that the victim had “asked for it” in the way that she dressed or acted (male and female characters were equally likely to make this accusation) (731).

Surely rape as the focus of *Law & Order: SVU*, among numerous other shows, could be seen as positive in that it is bringing this formerly taboo topic to the mainstream media. However, shows of this genre can do so much more, particularly in terms of proportionately representing the class, race, and age of victims, as well as the many intricacies and roadblocks within the justice system in connection with rape. Furthermore, eliminating the discourse of “deserving” rape, even in instances in which this notion is refuted, would aid in removing this pervasive view from the collective mind of our society, allowing the

dissemination of the fact that all victims matter. According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail. *Law & Order: SVU* creates a utopia in which nearly every rapist and killer can be caught and jailed in forty-two minutes. Hopefully, by reassessing the representation of sexual assault and rape on television, the jail rate of rapists will one day reach even close to those utopian levels.

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**Stereotypes and Freud on the “Uncanny”
Providing an Explanation for Criticism
Towards the Work of Kara Walker**

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Caitlin Lackner (Class of 2014) is a Sociology and Art History major from the Washington D.C. area. Caitlin wrote this paper for an art history seminar, "Gender and Sexuality in Modern Art," taught by Professor Kathleen Pyne. She has always liked to look for connections between her majors and is interested in the ways that gender and race infiltrate the work of contemporary artists. Caitlin chose to submit her paper to the journal as she feels that art is an effective way to explore and contemplate the ways that gender and sexuality have shaped the historical past, as well as society today. Next year, Caitlin will be attending law school and ultimately hopes to practice child and family law.

Introduction

African American artist, Kara Walker, is best known for her signature medium— black cut-paper silhouettes on a life-sized scale, placed against a white wall. Walker’s visual vocabulary is comprised of a fantasy slave plantation and stereotypical figures that evoke Black folklore, historical novels, memorabilia, movies, cartoons, Harlequin Romances, and nineteenth-century slave autobiography.¹¹ She combines disturbing content in her works—desire, violence, sex, and torture—with beauty, through her use of a fluid line in rendering her figures and depicts a “world run amok, full of mischief and violence, scatology and sensuality.”¹² Scenes depicted in her works range from humorous to shocking, and often employ stereotypes such as the master, the mistress, the slave mistress, the pickaninny, the mammy, and the Southern belle.¹³ While Walker is one of the most prominent young artists working today, she is also considered to be one of the most controversial African American artists. As a result, her work is both commended, as well as decried.¹⁴

This paper will therefore provide insight as to why the cut-paper silhouettes of Kara Walker and more specifically the piece, *Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994), were subject to outrage and criticism from the public, art critics, and even other female African American artists. In examining Walker’s work within the framework of racial stereotypes, specifically, the portrayal of the hypersexuality of African-Americans, and within the Freudian framework of the uncanny, a conclusion as to why her work was subject to distaste and censorship can be reached.

The Silhouette

Walker's technique is significant, as it contributes to the reactions of viewers and critics when confronted with her work. She works with black cut- paper silhouettes, which is in itself a throwback to another era. The silhouette was fashionable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century as part of a neoclassical revival and was a prized way to capture an individual's likeness.¹⁵ This enables her to evoke the past in order to criticize it and the effect it has on the present.¹⁶ Walker makes sketches of what she intends her images to be, draws them on paper on the reverse side, and then cuts free-hand, without computer or digital assistance. Walker displays her pieces against a large white wall at exhibitions.¹⁷ This medium, technique, and process are important to her works for many reasons. First, the use of only black and white contributes to the fact that her pieces comment on race relations between Blacks and Whites during the antebellum South. The use of black and white therefore references the racial dichotomy she examines. In addition, it is clear that Walker attempts to maintain a balance in her work through her technique. At first glance, the forms are beautiful. However, once the subject matter depicted is recognized, the work becomes regarded as controversial and disturbing. This pairing of beautifully cut forms and gruesome subject matter is recognized as "the most powerful contradiction"¹⁸ in her work, and therefore also contributes to the criticism with which her work is met. This however, will be further discussed using Freudian theory to examine why and how this technique and pairing impacts viewers.

Visual Analysis of *Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994)

Walker's paper installation, *Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*¹⁹ was first exhibited in the artist's 1994 New York debut, which inaugurated her signature medium: black cut-out silhouettes of caricatures of antebellum figures arranged on a white wall. The work was most recently on display in New York's Museum of Modern Art from June 2010 to September 2011 and was installed as a panoramic mural.²⁰ The work spans fifty feet wide and is thirteen feet high and as with many of her other works, the title is a sarcastic reference to the "romantic" historical novels of the South, such as Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind*.²¹

On the far left of the installation, a White Southern belle leans in for a kiss from a White gentleman, a reference to the historical romance the work's title evokes. A mysterious pair of feet however, emerges from under her dress and initiates the unsettling racial and sexual images that appear to this couple's right. A young Black boy holds a dead chicken by its neck, offering it to a topless Black girl that floats on her back near the shore. To her right, and in the center of the composition, is a small hill upon which a young girl performs fellatio on a White master's young son. Above the children, a Black man floats in the sky as a result of his ballooned genitalia. Beneath him, a Black woman lifts her leg so that she may mindlessly excrete dead babies. The final couple on the far right includes a White gentleman who has picked up a sweeping Black woman and buries his head under her dress. Due

to this work's explicit racial and sexual subject matter, I will use it to apply the framework of stereotypes, specifically hyper-sexuality, and develop a partial explanation for why Walker was met with criticism from other female African American artists.

Criticism from Female African American Artists

Walker and her work met heavy criticism from Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell, female African American artists that worked in the 1970s and also dealt with issues of feminism, race, violence, and slavery. In 1997, Saar spearheaded a letter writing campaign against Walker's work, out of a concern that her art fed into a racist discourse rather than acting against it.²² Saar said on Walker's work:

I felt the work of Kara Walker sort of revolting and negative and a form of betrayal to the slaves, particularly women and children; that it was basically for the amusement and the investment of the White art establishment.²³

Saar also stated, "...This is like closet racism...Here we are at the end of the millennium seeing work that is derogatory and racist."²⁴ In October 1997, Pindell stated:

What is troubling and complicates the matter is that Walker's words in published interviews mock African Americans and Africans...She has said things such as, 'All Black people in America want to be slaves a little bit'...Walker consciously or unconsciously seems to be catering to the bestial fantasies about Blacks created by White supremacy and racism.²⁵

Based on these criticisms from other African American female artists, it is evident that they regard Walker's works as racist, as well as playing into and satisfying White supremacy in society. In order to explain these remarks, I will consider how, through including the racist

stereotype of hyper-sexuality in *Gone*, Walker is seen as contributing to Black female oppression, as it creates what Patricia Hill Collins defines as, “controlling images.”²⁶

Criticism as Explained by Stereotypes, Hyper-Sexuality, and “Controlling Images”

Criticism towards Walker’s works from artists such as Saar and Pindell are rooted in the idea that through the inclusion of racist stereotypes, Walker trivializes both the historical and contemporary suffering of Black males and females. The stereotype of Black male and female hyper-sexuality permeates the entire work of *Gone*, and can thus be considered as contributing to the work’s racist nature. In *Gone*, Walker includes historical stereotypes of hyper-sexuality that emerged throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Historically, Black women were differentiated from White women in a sexual sense. While the former were defined as sexually immoral and promiscuous, White women were elevated out of the realm of sexuality and were considered to be chaste and passionless.²⁷ This stereotype is evident in *Gone* when comparing the White couple on the far left of the work to the young Black girl performing sexual acts on a young White male. The White female is clearly not sexually promiscuous. While she does lean towards her partner for a kiss, their interaction remains civil and affectionate. The young Black girl however, is clearly subject to this historical stereotype of hyper-sexuality. She is subservient to the young White male, both sexually and physically, and has entered into an interaction considered to be sexually immoral and corrupt, especially due to her young age.

Walker includes additional historical stereotypes of Black male and female hyper-sexuality. According to Bowser, "One of the English slave traders' earliest written comments was about African sexual behaviors" in comparison with seventeenth-century Englishmen.²⁸ One remark from slave traders was that "African men's genitalia were enlarged and 'got in the way' when they walked."²⁹ This stereotypical trait is clearly referenced in *Gone*. The genitalia of the only adult Black male in the piece is so large that it exceeds the size of his entire body and it takes on the function of a hot-air balloon. An additional historical stereotype was that Black men and women were incapable about caring for their children and families.³⁰ The woman on the right of the installation, who lifts up her left leg and watches as two infants fall on the ground as they are excreted from her body, embodies this stereotype of hyper-sexuality. While Black women were historically attributed with being sexually immoral and promiscuous, they were also regarded as unwilling to care for and love children produced as a result of their sexual endeavors.

Walker's inclusion of Black males and females that reference the historically formed stereotype of hyper-sexuality contributes to Saar and Pindell regarding the works as racist. To Marshall, depicting Black females as hyper-sexualized or as objectified creatures of sex is racist, as it influences our identity and relationships today and was used and continues to be used, by White and Black men to legitimize sexual and social exploitation.³¹ Walker's works are also considered racist because they justify the continuance of Black oppression in society today by publically reassigning additional historically racist qualities such as submission to White authority, oversized genitalia,

and a lack of affection towards one's family to Black males and females. However, Walker's inclusion of these stereotypes may have also led to criticism from Saar and Pindell due to the fact that they represent "controlling images."³²

In "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," Patricia Hill Collins, a sociologist working with feminism and gender within the African American community, argues that, "Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering Black women's oppression."³³ To Collins, these characterizations exist as controlling images of Black womanhood, "designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be a natural, normal, and inevitable part of everyday life."³⁴ She states that these controlling images emerged from the slavery era, which fostered an ideology that created these four interrelated and socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood. These images consequently reflect the dominant group's interest and maintain Black women's subordination.³⁵

The fourth of Collins' controlling images, the "Jezebel, whore, or sexually aggressive woman," is evident in Walker's work, *Gone*.³⁶ According to Collins, this image emerged among slavery and functioned to "relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men..."³⁷ The Black female figures of *Gone* that engage in sexual activity with White men, the young girl on the hill and the woman who had been sweeping, embody this controlling image of the "sexually aggressive woman."³⁸ Both Black female figures are treated as sexual

beings by White men, either willingly or unwillingly– it is unclear which. Nevertheless, Walker’s use of the stereotype of hyper-sexuality categorizes these two females as the fourth type of controlling image. In effect, the depiction of Black females as possessing an uncontrolled and aggressive sexuality provides White males with the opportunity to assault, manipulate, and oppress the Black female, both in *Gone* and in contemporary society. To critics such as Saar and Pindell, Walker is therefore charged with the creation of a controlling image, which subsequently “provide[s] ideological justification for racial oppression [and] the politics of gender subordination...”³⁹

Criticism towards Walker’s work can also be understood through the fact that Betye Saar takes the opportunity to challenge representations of the Black mammy and thus, controlling images, in her own art. In her piece, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972),⁴⁰ Saar reconfigures the meaning and power of the stereotypical figure and controlling image of the Black mammy. This piece depicts the recognizable figure of the happy, female cook of a Southern plantation. She is armed with a rifle and holds a mulatto child, which shows “the reality of the abuse slave women were subjected to by their white masters.”⁴¹ The mammy figure however, smiles proudly while clutching the child and both mammy’s are armed with “tools of revolution: her broom, rifle, and pistol, ready to gain freedom by force if necessary.”⁴² In addition, Saar includes a large, clenched black fist, symbolizing Black power and strength, in front of the mammy and child. It is clear that Saar does not depict Collins’ first controlling image of the faithful, obedient, mammy. According to Collins, these controlling images depicted the mammy as loving, nurturing, and caring for her White

“children” and “family,” which consequently symbolized the “dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power.”⁴³ In her piece, Saar explicitly rejects this traditional image symbolizing White oppression. Instead, she instills the mammy figure with power, evident in the large fist and weapons, and liberates her from existing as a passive, submissive, socially constructed controlling image. Like Saar, Walker includes figures in her works, such as *Gone*, that reference oppressive controlling images. However, unlike in Saar’s piece, the figures in *Gone* are not empowered nor do they reclaim a stereotype or controlling image in place. Instead, Walker invigorates the stereotype of hyper-sexuality in portraying Collins’ controlling image of the sexually aggressive female. Saar’s criticism of Walker and her work can thus be attributed to this significant distinction between the artists, in regards to either disempowering or adhering to controlling images of Black females.

Criticism as Explained by Sigmund Freud on “The Uncanny”

In 1999, Walker’s work entitled, *The Means to an End- A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* (1995),⁴⁴ was removed from part of the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum exhibition called, “Where the Girls Are: Prints by Women from the DIA’s Collection.”⁴⁵ Similar to *Gone*, this piece was a five-panel, cut-paper silhouette of an antebellum plantation scene. This work had been a part of the museum’s permanent collection for three years, but three weeks before the opening of the exhibition, board members complained that the piece was offensive.⁴⁶ According to Annmarie Erickson, DIA Director of Communication and Marketing, the primary contention was that there was “no clear art-historical perspective” in the controversial work.⁴⁷ The removal of this piece from

the exhibition demonstrates criticism Walker faced from other members of the art community due to the “offensive” nature of her works. This act of censorship can be partially explained through Freudian theory and more specifically, the concept of the uncanny.

In Sigmund Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” (1919), he writes that the subject of the “uncanny” “...belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror...”⁴⁸ In addition, the uncanny “is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”⁴⁹ However, “the quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect.”⁵⁰ According to Freud, the super-ego projects all things it represses onto the image of “the double.” When faced with this double later in life, it is experienced as “uncanny,” as it calls forth this repressed content. The result is anxiety, which “can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs*.”⁵¹ In Freud’s words, “This class of morbid anxiety would be no other than what is uncanny...for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.”⁵²

Criticism, distaste, and offense towards Walker’s paper-cut silhouette works can therefore also be partially explained through Freud’s understanding of the uncanny and repression. According to Reinhardt, these negative reactions and “anxiety brought about by Walker’s works speaks to the uncanniness of her pieces.”⁵³ In reference to Freud, Reinhardt argues that the uncanny nature of Walker’s art is due to anxiety produced when faced with a recurrence of something

held in our mind that has been repressed.⁵⁴ When a viewer therefore encounters Walker's images, they are confronting the uncanny, due to the fact that they are facing the return of something repressed in the self. Reinhardt states that anxiety and discomfort arises, "...as we who view [her work] are urged to confront the bearing of the slave past on the White supremacist present."⁵⁵

When faced with Walker's work, viewers, especially White male viewers, are therefore confronted with images and actions that represent a history they wish to forget. Walker's figures and scenes portray a repressed past, which puts viewers in a challenging position in forcing them to come to terms with a difficult history. For example, when viewing *Gone*, individuals are forced to recognize and reflect upon issues that occurred during the antebellum South, such as the sexual manipulation of Black female slaves by their White owners and sons. In effect, these viewers may criticize and dislike the work due to its uncanniness and the anxiety it produces in shedding light on a portion of history that seems too terrifying and disturbing to have occurred. However, the subject matter is also somewhat familiar, as all are aware that this history was in fact reality at one point in time.

According to Bourke, the presentation of these pieces also causes the viewer to face "the un-thought fragments of the self—shards of aggression and sexuality—that one would prefer to forget."⁵⁶ In other words, viewers are confronted with images that may conjure up one's own past indiscretions or pain. For example, individuals who instigated or fell victim to rape might experience anxiety and the uncanny when confronted with Walker's figures that act out instances of sexual violence. As a result, these individuals may find Walker's work

revolting and offensive, due to the fact that they call to mind repressed memories, or violent parts of the self that one tries to conceal.

The medium and technique of her works, black paper silhouettes, may also intensify the uncanny feelings brought about by them. To Reinhardt, Walker's silhouettes act as shadows, which heighten the effect of the uncanny. Shadows, like the uncanny, are simultaneously unknown and familiar and call for recognition but at the same time fail to allow any complete understanding of what is being represented.⁵⁷ Reinhardt states:

To look at Walker's silhouettes is to confront the deeds and misdeeds of shadows... acting...of their own violation. The effect is heightened further still by the fact that these are portraits not of living bodies but of figures of collective fantasy and phobias: they are thus, in a sense, the spectators' own shadows.⁵⁸

To Bourke, presenting viewers with their own shadows creates an opportunity for viewers to engage with the work, and recognize their own thoughts and preconceptions in terms of the issues presented, as well as those held in society.⁵⁹ Walker therefore calls viewers to ask the question: "how does representational art call me into implication, and into account for the meaning I make from this history?"⁶⁰

In sum, by applying Freudian theory concerning the uncanny, repression, and anxiety, the DIA's censorship of Walker's piece, *A Means to an End*, and distaste towards her works as a whole can be partially explained. Walker's works produce criticism and anxiety due to the fact that her works are uncanny, as they bring to mind a repressed and difficult history and compel viewers to struggle with confronting images and figures that are strangely familiar to the self, but that have

purposefully been forgotten.

The Intentions of Kara Walker in Regards to Stereotypes and Freudian Theory

In addition to providing an explanation for the criticism towards Walker's works, the frameworks of stereotypes and Freudian theory can also be applied to examine Walker's intentions and why she employs controversial subject matter and themes. The parallels the artist's statements draw between these frameworks and her own thoughts on her art also provide support for why her art generated criticism. In a conversation between Thelma Golden and Kara Walker in 2001, Walker comments on her selection of subject matter and theme. She reveals her interest in time and history– "how we perceive history, how we romanticize history, and at the same time when life and art merge and converge around those conflicts."⁶¹ Additionally, she states that the creation of her work was sparked in a realization that the way Black people represent themselves in artwork is Eurocentric and White-male identified.⁶²

Walker also states in this conversation that in graduate school she began looking at work "like Betye Saar's and other work of the era that resurrected the Aunt Jemima figure with a vengeance..."⁶³ She admits that while she was interested in these "overdetermined stereotypical figures" she seemed "to feel most compelled to work with...those [figures] who were somewhat mischievous and evil" and thus "tried to incorporate a pretty broad spectrum, perverse if you will, of racist stereotypes, but always [wound] up back to this pickaninny, 'nigger wench' figure."⁶⁴ The fact that Walker was familiar with the

work of Saar and likely Pindell, but less interested in the powerful adaptations of stereotypical characters, such as the Black mammy, parallels the previous discussion of Walker's use of stereotypes and reproduction of controlling images. It can be inferred that Walker's statement on her greater interest in depicting more stereotypical and racist figures may have sparked criticism from artists such as Saar and Pindell. This is because rather than choosing to depict Saar's stereotypical figures instilled with vengeance and power, Walker is drawn to depicting the more explicit and direct "racist stereotypes."⁶⁵

In the dialogue, Walker also briefly describes how her own works affect her. She states that she is "sometimes horrified by the thoughts that come to [her] mind..."⁶⁶ and that she conceives her larger pieces "...as kind of a dreamscape. It encompasses all of these different characters or elements that are all aspects of yourself or your psyche or some of the people in your life, manifested in different forms."⁶⁷ Walker's own allusion to her work as depicting horrifying thoughts from the mind, as well as a familiar aspect of the psyche or memory, parallel the application of Freudian theory to work. While Walker does not explicitly reference Freud in this statement, she does recognize that creating her work forces her to come to terms with horrifying thoughts and ideas, perhaps ones that had been repressed. In addition, she acknowledges that her works are dreamlike and contain elements that are both familiar and unfamiliar. In her works, aspects of the self are recognizable, but they are "manifested in different forms."⁶⁸ The pairings of fear, the familiar, and the unfamiliar thus call to mind the application of Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919) to Walker's art and how

viewers of her work, including Walker herself, may experience a sense of fear or discomfort when encountering it.

Conclusion

The criticism, censorship, and distaste towards the work of Kara Walker can therefore be explained through an application of stereotypes and controlling images, as well as through Freudian concepts such as, the uncanny and repression. The criticism she received from African American artists such as Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell are due to the fact that Walker's works, like *Gone*, are infused with historically racist stereotypes, such as hyper-sexuality. As a result, Walker produces what Patricia Hill Collins recognizes as, "controlling images," which maintain Black female oppression in society. To artists such as Saar, who references a controlling image in her work, yet removes its negative effect by empowering the mammy, Walker's works are racist. This is because Walker's use of stereotypes invigorates the presence and oppressiveness of controlling images in society, rather than eliminating it.

The criticism and censorship towards other works of Walker, such as *A Means to an End*, can be partly explained through Freudian theory. The anxiety and discomfort produced when encountering her art can be attributed to the fact that the subject matter and figures call to viewers' minds a repressed history that one wishes to forget. In addition, Walker's medium, black silhouettes, heightens this effect, as viewers are faced with what appear to be their own shadows, engaged in actions and situations that are uncanny, because they seem to be simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. To position my examination of Kara Walker within the larger racial-sexual discourse of the 20th

century, I will consider it in relation to Lorraine O'Grady's call for a reclamation of Black female subjectivity⁶⁹ and to ideas presented in the 2008, "Feminist Time: a conversation."⁷⁰

In "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," O'Grady finds a problem with whether to apply psychoanalysis to cultural and feminist theory, as it is inherently a Western, male theory.⁷¹ Refusing to apply psychoanalysis to non-European cultures, or stating that it cannot refer to these cultures "is to constitute those cultures in total 'otherness' or 'difference'...or to try to demonstrate, that it can, is to constitute them as the 'same.'"⁷² To O'Grady, "no matter how many times you ask the question of the universality of psychoanalysis or how you pose it, you will not arrive at an answer."⁷³ She therefore calls for the application of psychoanalysis to theory concerning other cultures to be sent back to basics, as it "contains contradictory meanings, as well as some that are unforeseen by its current theory."⁷⁴ It therefore remains unclear where my application of Freudian theory, in order to come to terms with criticism towards the art of an African American artist with controversial African American subject matter, fits in relation this discourse. While O'Grady advocates that psychoanalysis should be revisited before applied to theory concerning color and non-European cultures, it is clear that there is no consensus on whether it can or should be applied because in applying this theory, other cultures are either constituted as "other" or as the "same."⁷⁵ My examination of Kara Walker however, does echo what O'Grady believes to be the most effective way to win "back the position of the questioning subject for the black female..."⁷⁶ To O'Grady, this is a "two-pronged goal," as "there must be provocations intense enough to lure aspects of her image from

the depths to the surface of the mirror” and a “probe for pressure points...where, when enough stress is applied, the black female’s aspects can be reinserted into the domain.”⁷⁷ My discussion of the effects of Walker’s works clearly demonstrates an adherence to these two goals. It is evident in the reactions towards her work, and when examined in the two frameworks I presented, that her pieces are provocative and thus encourage viewers to think about and reflect upon historical race relations, as well as Black females then and now.

The work of Kara Walker was also explicitly mentioned in “Feminist Time: A Conversation,” by Rosalyn Deutsche in relation to the concept of social change and art’s relationship to social change.⁷⁸ Deutsche states, “When the viewer of Walker’s work examines her own implication in racism, isn’t that a form of social change?”⁷⁹ This question ties into my discussion of Walker’s use of shadows in regards to repression. As mentioned previously, Bourke argues that in presenting viewers with shadows that resemble their own, viewers become engaged with the work and recognize their own thoughts and preconceptions in terms of the issues presented, as well as those held in society.⁸⁰ Walker’s work therefore contributes to social change, as her figures provide the opportunity for viewers to recognize and confront their own race-related thoughts and ideas concerning history and society. Due to the potentiality of this positive effect, Deutsche states that she wishes for feminism to continue to “problematize politics,” as Walker does through her controversial art.⁸¹ Walker does this in presenting viewers with harsh stereotypes that were not only historically held, but may also be held, or repressed, by members of society today. My examination of Walker therefore fits well with this

conversation, as Walker's art brings about social change and problematizes politics, which to Deutsche, must continue to occur in feminist and racist discourse.⁸²

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