

**Undergraduate Academic Journal of Gender Research and Scholarship**

# Through Gendered Lenses Volume 10

**The Gender Studies Honor Society  
and Gender Studies Program  
University of Notre Dame 2019**



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## **Acknowledgements**

This year marks the tenth edition of *Through Gendered Lenses*, which highlights undergraduate Gender Studies research and scholarship at the University of Notre Dame. We present this journal in honor of those whose commitment and determination make this endeavor possible.

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The Honor Society especially acknowledges its many generous benefactors. We would like to thank the Office of Undergraduate Studies of the College of Arts and Letters, the Boehnen Fund for Excellence in Gender Studies, the Genevieve D. Willis Endowment for Excellence, and the alumni and allies whose sponsorship of the Gender Studies Program supports the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship.

Finally, we are grateful for the contributions of our undergraduate scholars whose work is the foundation of *Through Gendered Lenses*. The Honor Society appreciates your time, enthusiasm, and dedication to gender studies scholarship, and we are honored to feature the work of our peers.

## **The Gender Studies Program**

Gender Studies at Notre Dame is an interdisciplinary academic program committed to excellence in teaching and research related to gender and sexuality. We develop, promote, and support research, creative work, pedagogy, service, and activism that respect human dignity, foster solidarity, and build toward the common good locally, nationally, and globally. We are a resource to the Notre Dame community regarding issues related to gender and sexuality, and we work to bridge rigorous scholarship with student development and leadership.

Our curriculum offers a diverse array of courses drawn from across the University and provides students with the tools to critically explore gender as it intersects with other social categories such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, religion, and nationality. In Gender Studies courses, students examine the historical development and cultural variations of gender in relation to the social formation of human identities, relationships, practices, technologies, and institutions. Our curriculum equips students with an intellectual framework through which the intersectional analysis of gender can be critically and creatively applied to their other coursework, as well as to their personal, professional, and community roles. Our undergraduate students benefit from internship programs that emphasize the holistic and practical applications of a Gender Studies education, and thus allow students to connect their learning with community service and positive social change.

For more information about Gender Studies at Notre Dame, visit [genderstudies.nd.edu](http://genderstudies.nd.edu) or contact [gender@nd.edu](mailto:gender@nd.edu).

## **Iota Iota Iota: The 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. Notre Dame's Alpha Phi 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

If you are a Gender Studies major or minor interested in becoming a member of Triota, please visit [genderstudies.nd.edu](http://genderstudies.nd.edu) to learn more about us or to download an application.

## **Triota Members 2018–2019**

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## Letter from the Editor

One of the most compelling aspects of the Gender Studies program at Notre Dame is that it is an interdisciplinary program, allowing it to adapt and include courses from just about any department into its repertoire. Inherent in this quality is a universal truth of gender: it is found everywhere, in everything, helping to shape institutions as well as being shaped by institutions, impacting our lives in ways we might not notice at first glance (or even at second glance).

The essays published in this year's edition of *Through Gendered Lenses* are a perfect example of this. They discuss gender in science, health, literature, cultural narratives, politics, literature, and film. These essays, through their varied perspectives, help express the immeasurable value of gender-focused scholarship and the work that we all must continue to do, both within and outside of academics, to continue deconstructing gender's place in our society.

Reading these essays allows everyone access to the complex gendered systems at play in our society, no matter your background. These kinds of understandings are important and relevant to our everyday lives, particularly in this moment in history. There will always be a special value in being able to use a gendered lens to view society.

Through this process I have been given a peek into a number of concepts and areas of study that I had never considered before, and I, along with the rest of Triota, hope you come out of this experience feeling the same way.

Enjoy!  
Abby Ferguson  
Class of 2019

## **About the Editor**

Abby Ferguson, a native of Houston, Texas, is currently a senior at the University of Notre Dame completing a double major in Gender Studies and Psychology. Her courses in the Gender Studies department have helped shape her perspective of the world and she is excited to be able to apply these perspectives in her post-grad life, both in whatever job she pursues as well as in her daily activities. Outside of class work, Abby likes to binge TV shows, advocate for racial and gender equality, and call out her friends for gender-normative statements.



**Transgender Voice and Communication Therapy:  
The Need for Comprehensive Training  
for Speech-Language Pathologists**

Elizabeth Stockwell

Elizabeth Stockwell attends Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. She is a Communicative Sciences and Disorders major and a Gender and Women's Studies minor. Elizabeth is a member of Saint Mary's National Student Speech Language Hearing Association chapter, Feminist United club, Dance Ensemble Workshop, and Saint Mary's College Dance Team.

Transgender individuals may choose to pursue therapy with a speech-language pathologist for many reasons, but for Caroline Temmermand, the impact she felt her identity and voice would have on her family became the ultimate reason to seek therapy. “After [my family] found out I was transgender,” Temmermand told Public Broadcasting Service reporter Alexandra Sarabia, “. . . I wanted them to feel comfortable around me in public situations” (2016). Temmermand also cited safety as a reason she attended speech therapy for two and a half years, stating that “the less clues you can give people, the better—the safer you are” (Sarabra, 2016).

Temmermand received therapy at the voice clinic in George Washington University, where speech-language pathologist Adrienne Hancock practices. When asked about conducting speech therapy with transgender clients, Hancock stated, “[the clinicians] try to walk a fine line between reinforcing stereotypes of male and female and finding a person’s genuine and authentic presentation of their gender” (Sarabra, 2016). Hancock uses her clinical experience to help transgender individuals develop a voice and communication style that fits their goals for therapy and makes them feel comfortable and confident with their new voice.

Therapy provided by speech-language pathologists must be individualized to the client, to ensure that the therapy goals set for

voice and communication abilities will be met. Many speech-language pathologists, however, have not received enough training to be confident in their ability to perform therapy for transgender clients (Hancock & Haskin, 2015). Because every therapy session must be individualized, speech-language pathologists must possess an abundant amount of clinical expertise and cultural competency knowledge. As a profession, speech-language pathologists need more training and information regarding transgender individuals in order to better serve transgender individuals in a therapy session.

In this paper, the work of a few notable people will be cited. Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) Adrienne Hancock's research and writings about voice and communication therapy and LGBTQ populations will be cited to convey the need for training and advocacy among SLPs. Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality will be explored in the context of cultural competency. Primary sources from Public Broadcasting Service and The Washington Post will be cited to include the voices of people who have received voice and communication therapy. Not every transgender person chooses to participate in voice and communication therapy because participation in therapy may not be as high of a priority to some people as it is to others or one may face barriers that prevent them from seeking

services, but seeking voice and communication therapy may be empowering for those who do seek therapy.

The role of assessing and transforming a transgender individual's voice and communication skills often belongs to a speech-language pathologist. During therapy sessions, the SLP may use a combination of their clinical experience and the transgender individual's goals to create a plan to meet the client's goals. The therapy plan will be highly individualized in effort to meet the client's goals, but areas addressed in therapy could include pitch, resonance, intonation, articulation, verbal language, and nonverbal language. The SLP's goal for therapy with a transgender client should cumulate in a concrete plan to ensure that the client develops a voice and communication style that is congruent with the client's gender identity.

Children learn how to communicate at a young age and their communication skills are often taught by parents and society in a gendered manner, which could make the process of transitioning more difficult for some transgender individuals. While every therapy session must be individualized, many clients may choose to address communication skills typical of the client's preferred gender. Communication includes any way in which someone relates to other people; this can involve verbal and nonverbal communication. Access to voice and communication therapy, however, may be limited for

many because speech therapy may be classified as optional by many insurance companies (Nutt, 2018). If one participates in voice and communication therapy, they can set numerous goals that could include many domains, but the client and clinician must always work together to provide the client with the best therapy possible.

Many transgender clients may choose to include changing their voice as a therapy goal. Voice refers to the movement and usage of the vocal folds, larynx, and oral cavity, but for the purpose of therapy with transgender individuals, voice could refer to one's vocal pitch, or how high or low one's voice sounds to listeners. One's vocal pitch, or fundamental frequency (F0), is measured in hertz (Hz). Typical male speech has an F0 of 110 Hz, while typical female speech has an F0 of 220 Hz. Because men typically have thicker and longer vocal folds than women, men's F0 tends to be lower, and this biological difference in F0's between speech perceived as male and speech perceived as female can be difficult for transgender individuals to navigate (Creaven & O'Malley-Keighran, 20). Many SLPs have the clinical knowledge necessary to safely aid one in raising or lowering their F0. The role of aiding one in safely raising or lowering one's F0 falls within the scope of practice of an SLP, but many SLPs may be unfamiliar with this area of practice (Creaven & O'Malley-Keighran, 20).

Voice and communication therapy can help transgender individuals find confidence in their voice. When 15-year-old client L.A. transitioned, she sought voice therapy to raise the pitch of her voice. When L.A.'s SLP asked her why she chose to partake in voice and communication therapy, she stated that she wanted to raise the pitch of her voice for safety concerns, acceptance, and as a step toward finding confidence in her voice and identity. During her time in voice and communication therapy, L.A. rose her F0, strengthened the volume of her voice, learned to reduce the speed of her speech, and gained a new confidence in herself and her voice (Hancock, 2015). L.A.'s voice and life changed as a result of therapy. Without partaking in voice and communication therapy, a transgender individual may not have the resources necessary to safely and efficiently find the security and confidence in their voice like L.A. did.

One may seek voice and communication therapy to help them learn how to communicate in a manner that they associate with their gender identity. Research conducted by Hancock, Stutts, and Bass, found that the language one uses can be stereotyped to belong to a specific gender. Language that they found to be more typical of women included precise words used to describe colors, a more frequent use of tag questions, swearing less often than speech typical of men, a wider range of intonations during speech, and a more frequent use of polite speech

(Hancock, Stutts, & Bass, 2015). While raising one's F0 may be an important goal for some people in voice and communication therapy, learning communication and language skills typical of their gender identity may also be an important goal for some. Learning the typical communication skills of one's gender identity could help them better reach their goals of acceptance and self-confidence.

For some transgender individuals, partaking in voice and communication therapy can improve their quality of life. In Emma J. M. McNeill's study on transgender voice perception, McNeill found that, while there may not be a significant relationship between the measured F0 of one's voice and their happiness, evidence shows a strong correlation between how a person perceives their voice and their personal happiness (McNeill, 2007). This could mean that how one perceives their voice can be more indicative of their quality of life than the actual F0 of their voice. In Christina Vernier's research, she found that, for transgender women, having a voice that may be perceived as more masculine, or has a lower F0, leads to a lower quality of life. Vernier also found that a person's perception of their own voice may be more important to their quality of life than how others perceive their voice (Vernier, 2017). In voice and communication therapy, people learn how to safely and effectively change their voice and communication habits to meet their therapy goals, and during this time,

people gain confidence that may lead them to be more satisfied with their voice, and possibly more satisfied with their life.

To some members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, the decision of whether or not to disclose their membership in the community may prevent them from seeking services. In a survey conducted by Rebecca J. Kelly and Gregory C. Robinson, results concluded that one's sexuality or gender identity may prevent them from seeking the service of an SLP or another medical professional in fear of their safety and quality of care. Kelly and Robinson found that LGBTQ people with a speech or language impairment who did not live in urban areas met with SLPs less often than LGBTQ people with speech or language impairment who live in urban areas. The survey also found that LGBTQ people who live in the American south or midwest also met with SLPs less often than LGBTQ people who lived on either the west or east coast (Kelly & Robinson, 2011). This information may be even more prominent for transgender individuals as SLPs who have experience assessing and treating transgender clients may be more sparse in non-urban areas and in the midwest and south. This information identifies a need for either improved or more SLP services in the midwest and south, particularly in non-urban areas.

Speech-language pathologists have a wide range of information and training regarding transgender clients and voice and communication therapy. In a survey conducted by Adrienne Hancock and Gregory Haskin, a need for more information and training among SLPs regarding LGBTQ populations was identified. Hancock and Haskin's research found that 47% of SLPs did not receive any instruction on transgender voice and communication therapy in their education and only 2% received extensive training on transgender voice and communication therapy. This lack of information may prevent SLPs from providing quality therapy to transgender individuals. Some SLPs, approximately 8% of those surveyed, stated that they do not feel qualified or have enough information to work with transgender individuals, but many of these people claimed that they would be open to learning and working with transgender clients in the future. However, 4% of those surveyed indicated that they could not provide therapy for anyone who identifies as LGBTQ due to "moral" reasons. While most, 77%, of the SLPs in this study reside in the United States, 23% reside in either Canada, New Zealand, or Australia, indicating an international need for more comprehensive training regarding the needs of transgender individuals (Hancock & Haskins, 2015). Hancock and Haskin's research demonstrates that, while many SLPs may be willing to learn about the needs of transgender individuals and voice

and communication therapy, many colleges and universities do not include this information in their curriculum and not every SLP may be open to providing voice and communication therapy. As it is possible for one to harm their vocal cords if they do not seek professional aid in raising or lowering their fundamental frequency, it is essential that transgender individuals feel comfortable and safe seeking the services of an SLP. In order for SLPs to be able to provide all clients with the most productive and practical therapy possible, SLPs must be educated on as many areas of the practice as possible, including voice and communication therapy.

Cultural competency training ensures that SLP's acquire the information needed to best serve all of their clients. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), every SLP, audiologist, and speech, language, and hearing scientist must complete training for cultural competency. ASHA defines cultural competency as the process of "understanding and appropriately responding to the unique combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that the professional and client/patient/family bring to interactions" (Cultural Competence). ASHA identifies race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, veteran status, and linguistic differences as areas of cultural competency, but it does not include gender identity (Cultural Competence). While ASHA uses an intersectional approach to

identify many areas of one's life that could influence the care that they receive, including gender identity could allow SLPs to better serve their communities because they would be encouraged to seek information on how to best serve transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. ASHA's guidelines for cultural competency take an intersectional approach. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality can be defined as how multiple facets of one's identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, contribute to the privilege that one experiences in society (Crenshaw, 1993). By implementing guidelines requiring ASHA members to become knowledgeable in areas such as race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, veteran status, and linguistic differences, ASHA encourages its members to consider how the many identities that a person holds may affect their life experience. Considering one's many identities can be useful for clinicians conducting voice and communication therapy because it allows clinicians to better understand and achieve the client's goals as the clinician may be able to use their other cultural competency knowledge to help the client as well.

Transgender clients may not be away of the services that speech-language pathologists can provide. In a study conducted by Jean Sawyer, Jamie L. Perry, and Ashley Dobbins-Scaramelli, research found that 43% of those surveyed did not believe that an SLP could provide

services for transgender clients. The same study found that only 9% of those surveyed had participated in therapy with an SLP for voice or communications concerns. When asked if they would consider attending voice or communication therapy with an SLP, 97% claimed that they would not consider attending therapy or they had marked “no comment” on the question (Sawyer, 155). This information provides evidence that an information gap regarding voice and communication therapy is present for transgender clients as well. The lack of information on voice and communication therapy can be observed from both parties involved, and this indicates a need for improved information and access to information about transgender services to professionals and transgender individuals. Advocating for SLP services to be accessible to transgender individuals must begin by advocating for more awareness of the service by both SLPs and transgender individuals who have knowledge about voice and communication therapy.

Transgender individuals may not be aware of the services that an SLP can provide. In a study conducted by Sawyer, Perry, and Dobbins-Scaramelli, one participant stated, “most people I know who have been to a speech-language pathologist go there because of. . . lisps and [the] inability to say their R’s” (2014). Another participant stated, “I assume the majority of them (SLPs) do not. . . work with trans-communities. I

thought they more dealt with people with speech impediments” (2014). While SLPs do work to correct articulation disorders such as an inability to produce “r” and “s” sounds, SLPs also have the ability to aid transgender individuals in reaching their vocal and communication goals. Because transgender individuals may not be aware of the services that an SLP can provide, SLPs must advocate for voice and communication therapy.

Not every transgender individual wishes to seek voice and transgender therapy. As a result, communication therapy may not be necessary for some individuals. In a study conducted by Sawyer, Perry, and Dobbins-Scaramelli, one participant stated, “I do not feel that transgender people. . . should seek out the help of a vocal coach or anyone else who trains people in how to sound like the stereotype of a gender” (2014). This individual does not wish to seek voice or communication therapy due to a personal conflict with the practice. Another participant in the same study stated, “I wish the title of the profession would be speech-language specialist. Pathologist adds to the notion that something is always already wrong with trans-people” (2014). This individual may believe that seeking the aid of an SLP may be stigmatized because of the language used in the title of the professional. Transgender individuals have the right to

choose what, if any, medical or therapeutic support they choose to seek, including voice and communication therapy.

Transgender individuals may face barriers to attending voice and communication therapy. When asked about barriers to therapy, one transgender individual stated, “the main barrier is a lack of trained clinicians, lack of clinicians with experience, knowing where to go and knowing who to talk to” (Creaven & O’Malley-Keighran, 30). While this individual cited a lack of trained clinicians and a lack of public knowledge as barriers to therapy, financial and security concerns are also among common barriers that prevent transgender individuals from seeking therapy (Creaven & O’Malley-Keighran, 23). These barriers affect a transgender individual’s voice and communication therapy experience before they meet with an SLP for the first time. If one lives in an area without an SLP who has received training for working with transgender clients, then therapy may not be productive or, in some cases, accessible.

Another barrier that prevents transgender individuals from receiving voice and communication therapy could be the lack of a referral pathway. When a transgender individual consults with a physician or mental health professional, whether or not the individual will receive a referral to an SLP will depend on the professional’s knowledge of transgender health services, if a nearby SLP has

experience working with transgender clients, and the goals of the individual. If a healthcare professional is unaware of the services an SLP could provide a transgender individual, the professional would not refer the individual to an SLP, and this could be a disservice to the individual (Creaven & O'Malley-Keighran, 23). While SLPs must be aware of the needs of transgender clients, healthcare professionals must also be aware of the needs of transgender clients to ensure that the individuals receive the support they need to reach their goals for transitioning. Without an established referral pathway, transgender clients may not be connected with trained and experienced professionals who would be able to aid the individual in reaching their goals.

A few steps can be taken to ensure that transgender individuals have a pleasant experience when meeting with an SLP. When a person enters a clinic, they will often be given a clipboard with paperwork to complete. This paperwork may include an area where one must check a box to signify if they identify as male or female, and this can be limiting to some people. The idea of checking either "male" or "female" can be difficult for some as they may feel that these two boxes do not adequately describe their gender experience. If clinics allowed clients to self-report their gender instead of providing boxes to check, the clinic would allow clients to identify themselves more accurately, thus

allowing for a more individualized therapy experience. Because, for insurance reasons, the clinic may request to know a person's legal sex, a clinic could provide two identification boxes; one box to indicate the client's legal sex and another box to indicate the client's gender experience. Including a third area to claim one's preferred pronouns could also be useful for clinicians and clinic staff as to prevent mis-gendering the client. After obtaining the client's gender identify and pronouns, using the correct gender and pronouns would help the client feel accepted in the therapy space.

A second way for clinics to better serve their clients would be to ensure that all clients know that if they chose to disclose their LGBTQ identity, clinicians and clinic staff cannot and will not release that information to anyone. In voice and communication therapy, SLPs must know the goals of the client, and in doing this, one may have to disclose their transgender identity. By ensuring that clients know that the clinic will not release their gender identity to others, it could lead to a more productive and helpful therapy session and transgender individuals may feel safer when seeking services. This could be done by posting a non-discrimination policy and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) statement in the clinic or by ensuring that all clients receive a copy of the clinic's non-discrimination and HIPAA statement.

A third way to ensure that transgender individuals receive the best care possible could be for ASHA to include gender identity in their cultural competency requirements. While ASHA claims in their code of ethics that discrimination based upon gender identity/gender expression will not be tolerated (Code of Ethics), ASHA does not include gender identity consistently throughout their online resources. If ASHA included gender identity in their cultural competency requirements, this may lead colleges and universities to better prepare their students to work with transgender individuals and encourage current SLPs to learn about how they can provide the best possible therapy to transgender individuals.

Voice and communication therapy can be beneficial to those who decide to partake in therapy. Because therapy must be individualized to be effective, SLPs must be knowledgeable about voice and communication therapy and be willing to work with their client to reach their goals. As voice and communication therapy and information about transgender individuals may not be adequately taught in many speech-language pathology programs, advocating for the needs of transgender clients among their peers becomes the duty of those with knowledge about voice and communication therapy and transgender individuals. Becoming knowledgeable about voice and communication therapy, while not currently required by ASHA's cultural competency

requirements, will allow SLPs to provide their transgender clients with the best support and therapy possible.

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**Homosexual Conversion Therapy:  
When Faith and Science Collide**

Ashton Weber

Ashton Weber is a member of the Class of 2022, double majoring in Economics and Global Affairs. Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Ashton now resides in Flaherty Hall. On campus, she is part of the Hesburgh-Yusko Scholars Program, Matriculate, the *Observer*, and the Office of Outreach and Engagement Recruitment. Ashton is actively interested in the influence of religion on politics and wrote her final research paper for her first-year university seminar about science, religious attitudes, and legislation surrounding homosexual conversion therapy. She hopes that this work will help foster dialogue and understanding within the Church community.

Prior to 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) listed homosexuality in their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which was used by psychological professionals to diagnose patients with mental illnesses. This decision was met with discontent from several psychiatrists, so the manual changed its phrasing to “ego-dystonic homosexuality” in its 1980 publication. However, by 1986, psychiatrists agreed that there was no evidence suggesting that homosexuality could qualify as a mental disorder or illness and they removed its mention from the DSM entirely.<sup>1</sup> Although mental health professionals have recognized that homosexuality is a natural characteristic of individuals and does not require treatment, many religious officials and groups continue to condemn it. Several faith traditions, most notably that of the Catholic Church, preach doctrine based on the complementarity of man and woman (essentially meaning that males and females were created differently so that they could complement and complete one another). Under this doctrine, homosexual behavior disavows the intentions of the creator, which means that it would directly contradict Church teaching. Prior to the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, a practice called conversion therapy was recognized as viable by the mental professional

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<sup>1</sup> “Facts About Homosexuality and Mental Health.” *Attitudes and Group Identity Lab (Ledgerwood) - Psychology*, [psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts\\_mental\\_health.html](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_mental_health.html).

community and it was used to “switch” people from their homosexual orientation and make them heterosexual. Conversion practices were often painful for individuals to undergo and could have long-term negative effects. However, homosexual behavior was so heavily condemned that people would rather suffer through “conversion” than proceed with life as normal. Conversion practices are now recognized as destructive and grounded in no legitimate science, which means that the APA does not endorse them, and several states are even moving towards their illegalization. However, this has driven up the demand for conversion “services” to be provided by religious groups, often in secret. The relationship between homosexual individuals and religious institutions has grown increasingly tense—due especially to religious endorsement of conversion therapies. However, after examining the ideologies of these institutions, it appears that religious institutions ought to be some of conversion therapy’s biggest critics.

### **What is Conversion Therapy?**

Conversion therapy was founded on the basis that homosexuality should be classified as a mental illness. Its main goal was to destroy an individual’s homosexual tendencies and replace them with “normal,” heterosexual ones. Therapies were carried out through various means—both behavioral and chemical, with the hopes that homosexual

individuals could be “converted” from their disease. Conversion therapy has also been called reparative therapy, the use of the word “reparative” implying that homosexuality is innately tied to something deviant or broken about a person and that it requires repair.

In the 1940s, some of the most physically intrusive conversion therapies were carried out in the form of lobotomies. Such a procedure involved the removal of pieces of the prefrontal cortex that were thought to “contain” homosexuality. The extraction of “tainted” segments of the brain became commonplace practice and some of the nation’s leading medical establishments (including Mass General, Johns Hopkins, and the Mayo Clinic) performed lobotomies as treatment for homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, a drug called Thorazine, otherwise known as a “chemical lobotomy” was created. Following its introduction in 1954, establishments decided to move from lobotomies towards this drug because it was recognized as less destructive to patients.

Another form of treatment was known as aversion therapy. Aversion therapy is defined as, “psychotherapy designed to cause a patient to reduce or avoid an undesirable behaviour pattern by conditioning the person to associate the behaviour with an undesirable

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<sup>2</sup> Scot, Jamie. “Shock the Gay Away: Secrets of Early Gay Aversion Therapy Revealed.” *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 7 Dec. 2017, [www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-scot/shock-the-gay-away-secrets-of-early-gay-aversion-therapy-revealed\\_b\\_3497435.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-scot/shock-the-gay-away-secrets-of-early-gay-aversion-therapy-revealed_b_3497435.html).

stimulus. The chief stimuli used in the therapy are electrical, chemical, or imagined aversive situations.”<sup>3</sup> This method of treatment was used to “cure” homosexuality when doctors would show patients images that would sexually stimulate them and then administer a high level of shock or a vomit-inducing drug so that the individual would mentally associate homosexual arousal with an undesirable condition. The effectiveness of these therapies was heavily questioned, especially because they had such adverse physiological effects on individuals.

### **Does it Work?**

Dr. Evelyn Hooker began to conduct research on “normal homosexuals,” at the time considered an oxymoron, in 1953. Hooker befriended a homosexual university student named Sam From and he gave her access to the information and subjects she would need to prove that homosexuality was not, in fact, a mental disorder. Her research compared heterosexual and homosexual males who were not involved in any form of therapy. Tests that were recognized as scientifically sound measurements of psychological adjustment were conducted on hetero- and homo- sexual males and Hooker had their results reviewed by several other doctors, who could identify no

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<sup>3</sup> “Aversion Therapy.” *Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2018, pp. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

difference between the two groups' results. This allowed her to reach the conclusion that homosexuality was not a mental disorder, which was used to prove that conversion therapy should not be used on homosexual individuals. Hooker has since been recognized by the APA as the "myth buster"<sup>4</sup> because it was her research that led the APA to remove homosexuality from the DSM.

In 2003, a man named Robert Spitzer released a study called, "Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation."<sup>5</sup> In this study, Spitzer provided data from 200 phone interviews with individuals who formerly identified as homosexual but, after at least 5 years of therapy, identified as heterosexual. The purpose of the study was to disprove the preceding research which had all pointed to conversion therapies being ineffective at producing a "conversion" and harmful to the overall wellbeing of patients.

Spitzer's research was met with great criticism from the scientific community. In 2006, a collection of previously published papers that collectively prove homosexual conversion to be unscientifically

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<sup>4</sup> Milar, Katharine S. "The Myth Buster." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, Feb. 2011, [www.apa.org/monitor/2011/02/myth-buster.aspx](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/02/myth-buster.aspx).

<sup>5</sup> Spitzer, Robert. "Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, vol. 32, no. 5, 2003, pp. 403-417.

supported was published under the title *Ex-Gay Research: Analyzing the Spitzer Study and Its Relation to Science, Religion, Politics, and Culture*. A doctor named Pedro Ruiz wrote a review of this collection in 2007<sup>6</sup> and he was clear that his original impression of the novel was that an irresponsible scientist was wasting time and energy to reinvestigate the validity of research that had been accepted for decades just because one doctor interviewed 200 individuals and believed that his small sample could overturn widely accepted fact. However, in his review, Dr. Ruiz admits that the book was beneficial for understanding the historical and cultural factors surrounding the research. The addition of these insights further proves the consensus that homosexual conversion should not be considered a viable therapeutic practice. Although it became widely accepted within secular and scientific circles that homosexual conversion therapy is ineffective and immoral, religious circles have been slower to agree.

### **Conversion Therapy and the Catholic Church**

Catholicism has long upheld the sanctity of marriage and the institution of the nuclear family as one of its primary foundations. Holy imagery within the Church is gendered (the Church is a “she” and Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> Ruiz, Pedro. “Ex-Gay Research: Analyzing the Spitzer Study and Its Relation to Science, Religion, Politics, and Culture.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 164, no. 1, 2007, pp. 176–177.

Christ, her savior, is “he”). The Holy Family (Mary- woman, Joseph- man, and their son Jesus) are uplifted as the ideal image of home relations, which Catholic families are asked to strive to. Obsession over man-woman relationships as the only acceptable form of love have led many members of the Church to adopt an anti-gay ideology. Although no documents directly condemning homosexual people have been approved by The Vatican, several papal encyclicals and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) itself clearly state that homosexual actions are sinful.

*Humanae Vitae*<sup>7</sup> (which, translated, means “Of Human Life”) was an encyclical of Pope Paul VI published in 1968. It was written in response to the introduction of the birth control pill in the US and expressed the Church’s stance against the pill. The text also addresses family relations and human sexuality, and the document’s strict use of heteronormative terminology expresses that homosexual individuals were seemingly excluded from Catholic Church documents and teachings.

Within *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI explains the essential nature of human sexuality as recognized by the Church. Sexual intimacy, or “conjugal love” is to only occur between married men and women, who are open to the conception of children through their sexual union. This

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI. “*Humanae Vitae* On the Regulation of Human Births (1968).” *Papal Encyclicals*, 28 July 2017, [www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6humana.htm](http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6humana.htm).

definition of sexual love essentially devalues all sexual unions that are unable to be fruitful. The Church does not only indirectly devalue homosexual union in this encyclical, it also directly refers to homosexual acts as disordered in the Catechism. CCC 2357<sup>8</sup> says of homosexuality:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved. This paragraph of the Catholic Catechism (which contains the Church's official stance on all its teachings) shows that homosexual acts are not licit within the Church. The next paragraph explains that all individuals deserve respect and that homosexuality does not undermine one's personhood, so homosexual individuals should be treated with the

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<sup>8</sup> "Catechism of the Catholic Church- Second Edition." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Roman Catholic Church, 1992, [ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html#566](http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html#566).

same respect and dignity as heterosexual individuals. Nonetheless, they should not act upon their homosexual inclination. It seems that the Church's call to respectful treatment of homosexual individuals would lead it to deny conversion therapy. However, this is not the case.

The Church has not officially taken a strong stance about whether it would endorse conversion therapy as a viable option for LGBTQ+ individuals. However, a document published by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops<sup>9</sup> does not advise against it. The document states: There is currently no scientific consensus on the cause of the homosexual inclination. There is no consensus on therapy. Some have found therapy helpful. Catholics who experience homosexual tendencies and who wish to explore therapy should seek out the counsel and assistance of a qualified professional who has preparation and competence in psychological counseling and who understands and supports the Church's teaching on homosexuality.

The document is clear that individuals should only consult trained professionals, but it also asserts that these specialists should support the Church's stance on homosexuality. Essentially, the document says that individuals who choose to receive therapy to reverse their homosexual tendencies should feel free to do so—even though this is

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<sup>9</sup> "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, 14 Nov. 2006, [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/upload/ministry-persons-homosexual-inclination-2006.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/upload/ministry-persons-homosexual-inclination-2006.pdf).

grounded in no scientific evidence. The Catholic Church is not the only religious group to endorse, albeit indirectly, conversion therapy.

### Evangelical Christianity

The same year that homosexuality was removed from the DSM (1973), the first “ex-gay” ministry, called Love in Action, was founded. Three years after that, a coalition of ex-gay ministries was founded and named Exodus International. Both organizations were recognized as evangelical ministries within Christian communities. Love in Action changed its name to Restoration Path in 2012 and Exodus International shut down last year, after its founder realized the harm that his ministry had done to the LGBTQ+ community. During the time that these organizations were functioning, they facilitated the conversions of many individuals—often through emotionally and physically painful means.

Love in Action has been in the media recently because of a film called *Boy Erased*, based on Garrard Conley’s memoir of the same title.<sup>10</sup> Conley was the son of a pastor who, after being ousted as homosexual to his parents by his rapist, was enrolled in a Love in Action conversion camp. He writes in his memoir, “We were learning step one of Love in Action’s twelve-step program, a set of principles equating the sins of

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<sup>10</sup> Conley, Garrard. “Boy Erased.” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 92 no. 2, 2016, pp. 82-94. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/620212.

infidelity, bestiality, pedophilia, and homosexuality to addictive behavior such as alcoholism or gambling: a kind of Alcoholics Anonymous for what counselors referred to as our ‘sexual deviance.’” As Conley continues, he explains the sort of “therapy” that he was put through at Love in Action. He was asked to draw a genogram of his family’s sins and to trace how his homosexuality came to be. He had to publicly admit his sexual sins and apologize for his deviance. He explains how miserable he and the other participants were and says, “It was our fear of shame, followed by our fear of hell, that truly prevented most of us from committing suicide.” Gerard Conley’s experiences undergoing conversion therapy have placed it back in the eyes of the media and drawn national attention to the suffering that homosexual individuals underwent at the hands of people and communities that they once trusted, especially religious communities.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, conversion can be defined as,<sup>11</sup> “The fact of changing one's religion or beliefs or the action of persuading someone else to change theirs.” This definition shows that the word conversion is inherently religious, so the relationship between faith groups and conversion practices should not be surprising.

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<sup>11</sup> “Conversion | Definition of Conversion in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries, [en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conversion](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conversion).

## State Governments

In 2012, the state of California passed a bill making the professional practice of homosexual conversion therapy on minors illegal. This, however, would not prohibit non-licensed religious groups and clergy from engaging in conversion practices. State senator, Ted Lieu, the bill's drafter, cited the psychological harm caused by conversion therapy as the reason for his decision to draft it. He equated conversion practices to child abuse, and is quoted as saying, "These attempts are quackery, and this kind of psychological abuse of children must stop."

Fourteen other states<sup>12</sup>, including Illinois, New Hampshire, Maryland, and Nevada, in addition to the District of Columbia, have passed legislation making homosexual conversion therapy practiced on minors illegal. This year, attempts to spread the bill so that it would also ban conversion practiced on adults were made in California. However, this extension has since been tabled as an issue to be tackled when the committee has sufficient time to involve religious communities in the conversation.

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<sup>12</sup> "Conversion Therapy Laws Map." *Movement Advancement Project | Foster and Adoption Laws*, [www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion\\_therapy](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy).

## **Religious Institutions**

The laws that have been passed do not apply to religious institutions, which are still free to implement conversion practices as they please. The only notable ramifications of these laws for the religious community are that they would not permit a licensed therapist to employ conversion practices during paid therapeutic advising, regardless of what their faith tradition teaches about homosexuality. According to a legal document about the implications of a ban on conversion for religious communities, “Some therapists have objected to conversion therapy restrictions as interfering with their religious exercise, believing that they have a religious obligation to assist someone with conversion from same-sex attractions.”<sup>13</sup> This document further explains that some of these therapists have tried to file legal cases and fight for their right to practice conversion therapy, but each of these instances has resulted in the court’s decision to uphold the ban.

## **Conclusion**

As legal institutions move toward practices of illegalizing homosexual conversion therapy, it is necessary to analyze the

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<sup>13</sup> William S. Hein & Co., Inc. HeinOnline Religion the Law. (2015). *Implications of Restricting the Use of Conversion Therapy for Religious Providers*.

foundations of these therapies and the reason that they have become illegalized. In the United States, youth movements have made it clear that the LGBTQ+ community is much more active than it was in the past (a time when conversion therapies were commonplace). Activism in communion with scientific proof that conversion practices are ineffective and harmful have minimized the popularity of these treatments in recent years. The media's portrayal of such therapy has changed drastically since the 1960s, when a man had to write a letter to the editor of *The Lancet*,<sup>14</sup> complaining that it had published article which failed to recognize the harmful nature of conversion therapies. Today, media features several examples of the harms of conversion therapy, including the recent films *Boy Erased* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*.

Although the scientific and secular communities have agreed that homosexual conversion therapy should be banned, religious communities are still hesitant to agree. This presents a strange juxtaposition because many religious communities, especially the Catholic Church, uphold their commitment to the dignity of every human person and the just treatment of individuals. It would therefore seem obvious that such institutions would be blatantly opposed to

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<sup>14</sup> Bierer, Joshua. "Treatment of Homosexuality." *The Lancet*, vol. 277, no. 7174, 1961, p. 451.

“therapies” that have been proven to have lasting negative physiological and psychological effects, yet they seem to be the only groups that still promote them. As history continues, religious groups will need to decide whether to accept the facts that have been presented and alter their teachings to become more inclusive of the modern world or to remain in their ways and receive backlash from younger generations. As youth are being taught the scientific facts that conversion therapies misuse therapeutic methods to promote a political and theological agenda, they will likely stray from religious communities and ideologies that laud such treatment. They will also actively avoid groups with inconsistent teachings—those who claim to love and support all people, yet actively work against the LGBTQ+ community. Religious groups should actively oppose conversion therapies, yet they seem to be the largest supporter of these therapies today. If religious communities do not come to amend their ways, it seems that they will not only continue to preach inconsistency, but they will also begin to lose followers and relevance.



**Women's Health Education:  
A Capabilities-Approach Assessment of Justice in the US**

Margaret Spesia

Meg Spesia is a senior originally from Joliet, IL. She is majoring in Theology and Peace Studies and is deeply interested in the way the two disciplines inform topics such as education, women's health, and grassroots social change. Some of her most fulfilling experiences in college have been encounters with the Catholic Worker movement in South Bend and West Virginia and through Dorothy Day's writing. She is excited to live as a Catholic Worker after graduation and finally tackle her pleasure-reading booklist.

In the past seventy years, research and products related to menstrual health and fertility management have drastically changed. However, studies<sup>1</sup> indicate that most women in the United States are not equipped with knowledge about even some foundational aspects of these advances, leaving them at a disadvantage for informed decision-making with regards to their health. This paper seeks to understand the content of women's health education in the United States today by examining the institutions and ideologies that influence it. Considering the current state of women's knowledge and applying the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and presented by Colleen Murphy in *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation* (2010), I submit that poor education on this issue is a justice issue, inhibiting women's opportunities to shape their well-being through informed choice.

In order to explore such a broad topic effectively, this paper is divided into several sections. After this introductory section, I present my social location in relation to women's health education in the US, in order to explain my reasons for undertaking this project, and present the perspective from which I draw. The third section provides definitions of the main subjects of my paper, hormonal contraceptives

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<sup>1</sup> All studies referenced throughout this paper were conducted exclusively on women in the United States, making findings particularly applicable to this discussion.

and fertility awareness-based methods (FABMs), as well as discussing the history and context of this issue and the conflict that drives it. The fourth section introduces the capabilities approach as a framework for assessing women's health education as it relates to justice (Murphy 2010). In the fifth section, I offer recommendations for future changes and I conclude by synthesizing the discussion at hand and presenting suggestions for future research.

### **Identity and perspective**

There are several directions this research could have gone. Out of all the justice issues in the world today, why focus on women's health education? What's more, why attend only to contemporary United States, a developed nation with more resources for women's health than most countries in the world? I wanted this paper to reflect some of the central themes of my training in Peace Studies at Notre Dame, which has formed me to see education as an integral element in the freedom to achieve well-being that can promote a sustainable peace in societies. Education is impactful in many areas, such as nutrition or legal rights. However, my Peace Studies formation has also taught me the compounding effect of intersectional issues – in this instance of gender and educational access. Thus, I am curious about how an inadequate education in women's health disproportionately impacts

women and limits their ability to make informed decisions. The approach that the United States takes to birth control reverberates throughout the world, most clearly through its involvement in development and family planning worldwide (Guttmacher Institute, 2018). It is, therefore, important to confront the education of American women in order to then understand how women in other countries are impacted. This discussion could be further narrowed to consider how often-marginalized groups such as women of low socioeconomic status or limited education might be disproportionately impacted, but before advancing to important questions such as those I first felt a need to investigate the overall health education of women in the US.

In many fundamental and intersectional ways, this issue is quite personal to me. At 21 years old, I am certainly within the age range for whom menstruation is an indication of overall health (Daniels, Daugherty, Jones, & Mosher, 2015). This has made menstrual health extremely relevant to me, just as it is for all women my age. As a lifelong citizen and resident of the United States, the method by which we are educating our women is a similarly important topic in my life.

Two other significant influences in my decisions regarding contraception mirror the two approaches to viewing contraceptives: on the basis of morality (when related to sexual activity) or on that of health. My Catholic faith has shaped my understanding of the human

person and sexuality, contributing to my moral disagreements with contraception use for the sexually active person (Catholic Church, 2012). From the health side, my desire for holistic and natural treatments has made me dissatisfied with hormonal contraceptives and led me personally towards fertility awareness-based methods (FABMs). Most of my understanding of FABMs came through a teacher-training course for one particular method, FEMM (Fertility Education and Medical Management). Taking these most relevant aspects of my identity into account, I hope to set them aside as much as possible and trust that my background can inform rather than hinder my ability to evaluate the nature and quality of women's health education and the impact that this has on justice in the United States.

Given these aspects of my identity most salient here, I am extremely interested in the quality of women's health education as it relates to *informed* choices. Acknowledging the root of my interests, this paper nonetheless aims to set aside any discussion on the morality of contraception. I plan to explore the subject through a lens primarily concerned with building a vision for women's health education that allows them to be capable of truly informed choice and flourishing to select in full knowledge the birth control method they desire.

## **Women's Health Education: Product and Process**

Both hormonal contraceptives and FABMs have their own interaction with the natural processes within a menstrual cycle and both impact overall health differently. Hormonal contraceptives include the Pill, intrauterine device (IUD), injectable, vaginal ring, implant, and patch. For a more effective focus within the subject of hormonal contraceptives, this paper primarily attends to the information women receive about the Pill. Similarly, the wide range of information sources (including websites, parents, and friends) is here limited to two: health care providers and schools. Health care providers were selected because studies show that a woman's doctor is the most influential factor in her choice of birth control method (Johnson, Pion, & Jennings, 2013). While no studies show sexual education classes having nearly the same influence, they have great potential to do so given their wide reach to young people and institutional nature. This allows for a type of top-down reform that cannot be replicated within relationships or even the internet. As such, middle and secondary schools were chosen to be another informational source that I examined. These topics and educators will be the primary focus of this paper. However, before considering educational approaches I will first take the time to clarify the birth control and health management methods most relevant to this discussion.

## ***The Pill***

According to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), hormonal contraception is the most widely prescribed drug for women (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011). While there are many different forms of contraception, The Pill is the most popular of these hormonal products and is therefore a focus of this paper. The NCHS conducted a National Survey of Family Growth in 2015, reporting that 79.3% of women who had ever had intercourse had used the Pill at one point. One in four women currently using a contraceptive method are utilizing the Pill method (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). Planned Parenthood and the CDC both report it to be 91% effective at preventing pregnancy (Planned Parenthood, 2018). There are other reports that assign an effectiveness rate as high as 99% when the Pill is used perfectly (National Health Service, 2017). Given its prevalence in the United States, it is important to determine how much women know about the Pill: both how it works and how it impacts the many aspects of menstrual health.

## ***Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABMs)***

In contrast to the Pill and other contraceptive methods, FABMs are rarely used as a primary method of birth control and are often ignored as a tool for understanding menstrual health. The NCHS report on women who had ever had intercourse showed that 15.9% of them had

ever used the “rhythm method,” which is outdated and much less effective than other FABMs, but it was the only type included in the survey (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). A mere 0.1% of women age 15-44 are current users of a FABM, but as many as 60% of women have reported being interested in learning more about them (Witt, McEvers, & Kelly, 2013; Dumitru & Duane, 2016). It is difficult to find accurate statistics on the effectiveness of FABMs because the rhythm method is often “lumped in” with the other, modern methods that are supported by current science (Dumitru & Duane, 2016). Studies that include the rhythm method assign a pregnancy prevention effectiveness rate as low as 76%, while studies that exclude that method find FABMs to be over 98% effective when women are instructed how to use them (Planned Parenthood, 2018; Frank-Hermann, et al., 2007). Although not as prevalent as the Pill, FABMs are a natural method of menstrual health management and birth control and therefore play an important role in this conversation.<sup>2</sup>

### **The current state of women’s health education**

There are several studies on the average health education experience of a woman in the United States. While these observations

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<sup>2</sup> This NCHS survey also reported that 38.4% of women are not currently using any form of birth control, mostly because they are pregnant, postpartum, trying to get pregnant, not having sex, etc. (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015).

are based on large sample groups, the conclusions that they draw are not insignificant when evaluating what most women know about their menstrual health. FABMs are first discussed, followed by hormonal contraceptives with a particular focus on the Pill. The role that health care providers and schools play in educating women about both of these methods is also presented. The evidence presented here suggests that women *do* have significant gaps in their understanding of the most important aspects of menstrual health and the methods that contribute to its management.

### ***Knowledge regarding fertility awareness-based methods***

The Fertility Education and Medical Management Foundation articulated contemporary developments in FABMs by insisting that fertility education “is broader than being able to identify ovulation and the fertile period” (Grizzle Fischer & Vigil, 2013, p. 46). While those are important components of any FABM, a comprehensive education in these methods should also include the timing of ovulation within a menstrual cycle, the biomarkers that indicate that event, and when in a cycle fertility declines (Grizzle Fischer & Vigil, 2013). All of this information can be used both for birth control and as a tool to identify unhealthy symptoms. Unfortunately, few women are aware of the biomarkers of the cycle and therefore have a limited understanding of how they point to fertility or health.

Knowledge about fertility is often insubstantial or inaccurate, according to the Child Trends Research Center. Of women age 18-29, only 42% can correctly identify the six days within a menstrual cycle when a woman might be fertile. This number rose only to 60% among women who reported that they were practicing Natural Family Planning, a popular FABM (Berger, Manlove, Wildsmith, Peterson, & Guzman, 2012). This is corroborated by another study from the Guttmacher Institute that found 40% of women were unfamiliar with the ovulatory cycle (Lundsberg, et al., 2014). Despite these informational gaps, women are certainly capable of understanding and recognizing their fertility given a proper education. A World Health Organization study of Natural Family Planning was conducted to answer the question of whether women could successfully be taught to recognize fertility based on their cervical mucus. The findings demonstrated that “irrespective of cultural, educational, or economic background, over 95% of fertile women could recognize the mucus signs of fertility” (Ryder & Campbell, 1995, p. 233). This essential knowledge gap is therefore one that can be remedied.

There are many reasons for a lack of FABM knowledge and use among women; often reported are the incompatibility of the methods with women’s lifestyles, concerns about effectiveness in pregnancy prevention, insufficient training, or simply a lack of awareness (Witt,

McEvers, & Kelly, 2013). Many non-Catholic women may be wary of the origin of FABMs in the Catholic Church (Gilbert, 2013). FABMs are also commonly considered outdated, likely due to the pervasive perception that they are simply the rhythm method, which again is largely ineffective and is rooted in reproductive research of the early twentieth century (Rodriguez, 2014; Duane & Adams, 2018). These are some of the primary barriers a woman may face in her ability to understand or employ FABMs.

Both health care providers and schools have an important role to play in filling this knowledge gap. A survey of 465 female patients at family planning centers revealed that only 20.8% had ever been told about a FABM by a health care provider, contributing to the conclusion that “When health care providers present methods in a positive, unbiased way, women are more likely to consider it as a method; however, many health care providers are inadequately prepared to discuss [FABMs]” (Witt, McEvers, & Kelly, 2013, para. 3). An utter lack of information on FABM curricula for schools indicates that they are even less represented in the classroom than they are in the examination room.<sup>3</sup> This may be due to the fact that FABMs can be used for achieving pregnancy in addition to avoiding it, which seems

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to distinguish FABM from abstinence-only curricula. Even abstinence-only courses can be guilty of ignoring the wealth of information available through FABMs. Support for FABMs need not detract from schools’ focus on preventing teenage pregnancy.

unsuitable for high school students who are usually far from starting a family. However, the usefulness of FABMs for understanding menstrual and overall health should outweigh the potential irrelevance of this application of such methods. These misconceptions that women carry about FABMs could be replaced by essential information if health care providers and schools were more attentive to this topic.

### ***Knowledge regarding hormonal contraceptives***

Of the women who take hormonal contraceptives such as the Pill, many do so for treatment for health issues such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) in addition to birth control (Jones, 2011). Women know that these products can both prevent pregnancy and minimize the many uncomfortable or painful symptoms that may emerge from unhealthy menstrual cycles. At the same time, some common symptoms of the Pill include headaches, mood changes, nausea, back pain, breast pain and swelling, and decreased libido (Wolski, 2014). Long-term use can negatively impact cardiovascular and venous health. Many of these side effects occur because the hormones included are synthetic; often women who are aware of these potential side effects see them as an acceptable trade-off for pregnancy prevention (Sitruk-Ware & Nath, 2011). Some of the subtleties of consumers' choices might still be unacknowledged; in a study on college students, 79.3% incorrectly responded to a basic question about how birth control pills

work<sup>4</sup> and 63% reported that they knew little or nothing about the product (Toews & Yazedjian, 2012). This should be a concern to all health care providers who are offering hormonal contraceptives as a solution to medical issues. While they are widely prescribed and used, contraceptives are nonetheless another area in which women remain under-informed.

Schools hold great potential for wide-reaching pedagogical improvements if done well, despite the fact that they have not historically been influential (Lundsberg, et al., 2014). A 2018 report on the state laws and policies regarding sex education summarized legislation on public school curricula. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia (DC) currently mandate sex education, and thirteen of those states require that the information given be medically accurate. In eighteen states and DC, there is a requirement that information on contraception is provided (Guttmacher Institute, 2018). While major variations exist between states, school districts, and even classrooms, legislation is one indicator of the information that teenage girls receive. Additionally, the CDC's National Health Education Standards define eight healthy behavior outcomes of a good pre-K to

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<sup>4</sup> The question read: "The Pill a) prevents ovulation; b) keeps cervical mucus very thin; c) changes the lining of the uterus to make implantation unlikely, d) both a and c; e) all of the above" (Condelli, 1998).

12th grade sexual education curriculum (CDC, 2012).<sup>5</sup> These laws and guidelines are telling of the tone and content of sexual health curricula throughout the United States, in whatever way they trickle down to individual teachers' practices. Notably, in both the legislation about requirements in curricula and these healthy behavior outcomes, there is no mention of teaching girls about the endocrinology that is central to menstrual cycles and shed light on much of menstrual health management.<sup>6</sup>

With the ever-increasing use of the internet as an additional resource to doctors and schools, there is a growing volume of information on women's health. However, in my research I realized how confusing it can be to navigate the many contradictory, inadequate, or even incorrect resources that one comes across. Knowledge gaps clearly persist, especially regarding the impact of hormonal birth control on reproductive endocrinology, the existence and identification of the fertile period, and the biomarkers in the menstrual cycle as they relate to overall health. I have so far looked at *what* women know about FABMs and contraceptives and *how* they learn it, ultimately drawing the conclusion that they are not being educated about central aspects of their health. Next, I will turn to *why*

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<sup>5</sup> These healthy behavior outcomes are included in the appendix at the conclusion of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the endocrinology of menstrual cycles, see "The Case for FEMM: White Paper" (Grizzle Fischer & Vigil, 2013 p. 2).

this is the case and by *what* process we arrived at this disjointed and insufficient education.

### **How women's health was lost in an ideological debate**

As has been discussed, there is a lack of information on FABMs and contraceptives within the messages of major and credible influencers such as doctors and schools. Though we know significantly more about reproductive health than we did seventy years ago, these scientific advances do not seem to have led to a more comprehensive education for women. Instead, ideological beliefs<sup>7</sup> underpinning both FABMs and contraceptives have polarized the discussion in such a way that it often seems impossible to find information that is not somewhat biased against the "other side". Here I work to understand how these two "camps" developed and the detrimental impact their divide has had on women's health education.

### ***Ideology behind fertility awareness-based methods***

There are many beliefs about women, fertility, and intercourse that historically underlie support for FABMs. A primary voice in the moral argument against contraceptives and in favor Natural Family Planning has been the Catholic Church, as seen in the 1968 papal encyclical

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<sup>7</sup> Examples discussed here are by no means a representation of every individual who uses each of these methods, but they are generalizations that are helpful in understanding this process of polarization.

*Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968). Of course, not all proponents of FABMs agree with the Catholic Church that intercourse needs to be procreative; there are secular organizations that recommend FABMs in conjunction with barrier-method contraceptives such as condoms. Nevertheless, many of the most vocal supporters of FABMs root their beliefs in the religious belief that sex should be reserved for marriage, marriage should be procreative, and fertility is a gift to be sustained rather than eliminated (USCCB, 2018). These deeply rooted moral disagreements with contraceptives make it difficult for people to separate the ethical side of the debate from the medical side.

### ***Ideology behind contraceptives***

Contraceptives, too, hold great ideological meaning that has underpinned their development and promotion, playing an integral role in the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and beyond. This counterculture revolution that resisted traditional beliefs about authority, sex, women, and minorities found a vehicle in contraceptives. The development of the pill was seen to give women more power through fertility control and a resulting promise of equality and freedom (Garner & Michel, 2016). This theme of liberation through contraception continues to dominate modern discourse, often referring

to either its role in the sexual revolution<sup>8</sup> or women's advances in the workplace<sup>9</sup> (Richards, 2018; Seligson, 2010). It should be noted that some contraceptive users are less interested in the freedom of sexual liberation than the freedom from painful and unhealthy hormonal dysfunctions, rooting their support primarily in health rather than ideological motivations (Jones, 2011). Yet in the ideological realm, hormonal contraceptives' most vocal supporters link these products with the equality<sup>10</sup> that women have historically been denied and are still fighting for today, rejecting traditional views about sex and marriage in the name of liberation.

### ***Development of The Pill: the growth of a divide***

The first birth control pill was developed in 1953 by activist Margaret Sanger, philanthropist Katherine McCormick, and scientist Gregory Pincus. This original product, called Enovid ®, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1957 for the treatment of menstrual disorders. Three years later it was authorized for contraceptive uses (Garner & Michel, 2016). Many celebrated the

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<sup>8</sup> Though a crass example, Planned Parenthood recently ran a successful ad campaign titled "Freedom to F\*ck" (Richards, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Forbes Magazine's article "Beyond the Bedroom: What the Birth Control Pill Really Did for Women" demonstrates this view with the line "women were no longer spending their critical career-building years--their 20s and early 30s--barefoot and pregnant" (Seligson, 2010, para. 11).

<sup>10</sup> The discussion surrounding what "equality" means in the context of feminism is complex and important, so much so that any extended attention to this interesting topic would detract from the focus of the paper.

development of this technology as a new source of liberation and empowerment for women (Planned Parenthood, 2015). Despite its popularity, the pill has also undergone criticisms and adjustments since its debut. Medical journalist and women's health advocate Barbara Seaman in 1969 wrote *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, a controversial book that questioned the product's safety (Fox, 2008). Her protestations contributed to a 1970 Senate hearing on the pharmaceutical industry, after which the FDA ordered that the hormone levels of the Pill be dramatically lowered, and possible side effects be listed on packages (Congressional Digest, 2012). Discussions surrounding the safest methods of birth control have persisted in subsequent decades, while contraceptive products continue to be widely viewed as an essential part of women's health care (Planned Parenthood, 2015). In addition to those who opposed the Pill early on for health reasons, there was also an ideological opposition to this new availability of fertility-free intercourse, fueled by the Pope's condemnation of it in *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968).<sup>11</sup> Many Catholics of the 1960s felt conflicted by this teaching and a debate was sparked from within the Church that has continued ever since (Hoffner, 2018). From its very beginning, the Pill has found both supporters and

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<sup>11</sup> Besides his assertion that contraception was contrary to natural law, Pope Paul VI was concerned by the resulting potential for infidelity, reduction of women to sex objects, or imposition of birth control methods by governments (Pope Paul VI, 1968).

critics that root their arguments within both health and ideology.

In the decades immediately following the development of the pill, there was an overall decrease in birth control research and development. As Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, PhD notes in the *American Journal of Public Health*, “In 1970, 13 major drug firms were actively pursuing birth control research and development (of which nine were American); by 1987, there were only four (with just one located in the United States). Little has changed since then, despite the continued success of the pharmaceutical industry and the expansion of small biotechnology enterprises” (Watkins, 2012, p. 1473). The first IUD, hormone shot, patch, and emergency contraception products were all developed in the 1970s or beyond, but Watkins points out that they all are based in the same hormone-centered model and have largely avoided exploring other methods of birth control. In the context of this ideological rift, I suggest that one contributing factor of the educational stagnation is a lack of motivation on either “side” of the debate. Those who support hormonal contraceptives may not see a need to explore alternative options for women when the existing products meet ideological and practical goals, and those who oppose them may not want to fund contraception research of any kind. This stalemate has left true women’s health by the wayside, and the lack of new research has trickled down to our pedagogy.

## ***Perceptions of the other***

Both those who support and oppose contraceptives can be accused of letting ideological arguments muddle the conversation about health and education. There is a long history of linking an anti-birth control argument with disapproval of sexual activity outside of marriage and traditional views about the intended fecundity of intercourse. Of course, those who view sexual intercourse differently feel attacked by these accusations of immorality. Such highly personal and emotional topics have led to much mud-slinging, as seen in a review of U.S. Press Coverage of Contraception from 1873-2013 (Garner & Michel, 2016). These tensions continue to be present today.<sup>12</sup>

Ideological differences have made it difficult for people of different perspectives to work together for a common goal of effectively educating and caring for women. In my own experience, it seems that those who have committed themselves to a FABM cannot understand why women want to consume a product with so many side effects and conclude that those who developed the products cannot truly care about women. On the other side, many I know who support contraceptive use struggle to understand why women are still shackled by low-tech, seemingly outdated FABMs. They see an objective of those who promote FABMs to be the suppression of reproductive rights and

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<sup>12</sup> See reference to Rodriguez on page 8.

freedoms. These are both uncharitable views that cut meaningful conversations short. Of course, there are many people who do not fall into these rhetorical categories, but their motivations tend to be more health- than ideologically-focused (Gilbert, 2013). Within the ideological realm, both sides often fail to understand that the “other” is also fighting for women and likely is working for that goal in the best way that they know how. Unfortunately, this subtle dehumanization of the “other side” has often led to biased information in one way or another.

Nowhere is this ideological divide more apparent than in the media. In articles that support contraceptives, pro-FABM people have been described as anti-science and anti-woman, and their arguments against contraceptives as “a stunning distortion of science” (Traister, 2017; Belluz, 2017). FABMs have also often been characterized as “woefully ineffective” (Lampen, 2017, para. 1). On the other side, those who support FABMs have accused contraceptive proponents of disregarding the harmful side effects of hormonal birth control (Gilbert, 2013). Pro-FAM authors have complained of being “force fed the idea that we must fix our unbroken fertility” and have even described women who use contraception as potentially having “zero personal control” (Johnson A., 2014, para. 11; Wilhelm, 2016, para. 10). As Jill Lepore, professor of American History at Harvard, commented: “there's

a surprising lack of basic human charity when people talk about this issue, no matter what their position” (National Public Radio, 2011, para. 22). These biases in the media are pervasive and indicative of a highly charged debate that runs through all of women’s health education.

The current divide between these ideologies has many implications for women’s health education. These two “camps” seem to have very different visions for women, fertility, and intercourse. As a result, the quality of our health education for women has suffered; women know more about the ideologies behind contraceptives or FABMs than they do about the scientific facts of both of these methods of birth control and menstrual health. Given the research presented here, I reaffirm that women do not have enough information on their menstrual health and the methods offered to them to make truly informed decisions.

### **Capabilities Approach**

The capabilities approach to justice is a conceptual framework developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum which is expounded upon by Colleen Murphy in her 2010 book *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation*. As Murphy explains, the approach is “The effective freedom or genuine opportunity of individuals to achieve valuable doings and beings, or functionings” (p. 94). Examples she gives of these functionings include being respected, adequately nourished, and

educated. The autonomy and possibility to realize these functionings is integral to any vision of justice within this framework, and similarly informs the identification of existing injustice. In other words, the factors that shape the state of capabilities can be conceptualized as “What a person has, and what a person can do with what she has” (Murphy, 2010, p. 96).

The capabilities approach is a valuable tool for discussing injustice in women’s health education because it promotes a positive view of the human person as a being able to choose flourishing so long as no essential functions are hindered by internal or external forces. This is a perspective that I assume both ideological approaches to women’s health education would support, making it an advantageous framework for constructive discussion. Second, the capabilities mindset provides both a tool for comprehension and critique as well as a path for peacebuilding. As Murphy explains, it “enables us to understand the various kinds of harm involved in common unjust institutional structures and patterns of interaction, and the ways in which it may be possible to repair them” (p. 94). For these reasons, I propose that the capabilities framework is an essential tool for understanding the injustice present in women’s health education and for building a more just system.

## Capabilities in light of women's health education

The application of the capabilities framework to this topic is both important and enlightening. Murphy explains the vital role that education can play in the approach when she writes that being educated is an example of a functioning that is a “constituent of individual well-being,” which an individual may or may not be able to achieve and contributes to his or her overall capabilities (p. 95). A woman's overall capabilities are limited when she does not truly have an opportunity to be educated; that is, when the only education provided to her is incomplete or insufficient. This explanation of functioning highlights the particular importance of evaluating institutions in this framework, for Murphy argues that they play a significant role in “defining and structuring the genuine opportunities of individuals” (p. 100). For this reason, it is fruitful to consider schools and healthcare providers and their relation to women's health education.<sup>13</sup> In light of truly supporting capabilities, I will first look at how this education currently relates to the framework and then propose what it *should* look like.

Before one applied the capabilities framework, one could perhaps argue that women in the United States are free to seek any information

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<sup>13</sup> While internet resources are certainly influential, the lack of institutionalized structure across the internet leads to a very different approach than the focus of this paper.

they please about their health. While there may be gaps in their education, women can (and many likely do) work to find supplemental instruction. It may seem that women are free to do what they like, but in truth most have not received the necessary tools to make that a reality. This is reinforced by Murphy when she points out that “An individual can be free from external interference and still be unable to realistically pursue and achieve any valuable options” (p. 95). One example within women’s health education of this inability to exercise a true freedom to learn can be found in women’s knowledge of endocrinology within menstrual cycles. If a woman knew about the four basic hormones that control the cycle, she could then investigate and interpret information on hormonal imbalances or the interplay between contraceptives and the body’s hormones. Much of that research is currently inaccessible to the average woman, which raises questions about how our teachers and healthcare providers are being prepared (or perhaps not) to disseminate this information. When this framework is applied to the current state of education, it is clear that women are not truly free to achieve their desired state of flourishing.

While the capabilities framework brings problems to light, it also provides guidance for a way forward. Considering the weight Murphy attributes to institutions, it makes sense that policy is an important consideration within this approach. She emphasizes that public policy’s

role within this framework “should not be to ensure that certain choices are made, but to ensure that the *conditions are in place* from which an individual can choose from among a number of valuable options how her life will go” (p. 99). When the capabilities approach is applied to women’s health education, it necessitates a call for policy that doesn’t limit capabilities but rather allows women to make their own decisions without forcing them to follow one particular path. This way forward provided by the framework allows for a vision of the future that should be taken seriously.

### **Freedom: a place for ideologies to meet**

Of the connection between capabilities and freedom, Murphy writes: “Capabilities reflect the genuine opportunities open to an individual; the greater the capabilities of an individual, then, the freer she is to achieve what she desires or values” (p. 98). This is an important concept within the context of women’s health education. As I have discussed,<sup>14</sup> both of the major ideological perspectives on birth control are in some way rooted in the concept of freedom. While they may have different conceptions of it, both would likely agree that freedom is central to their beliefs. While individuals or groups may disagree on what freedom looks like to *them*, the capabilities approach

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<sup>14</sup> See discussion on page 12.

provides a vision for allowing the freedom of all. Rather than pushing only one definition of freedom, Sen and Nussbaum's approach articulated through Murphy's refinement allows for a third way in which both groups can be freer to share their views alongside the other's. The more a woman's capabilities are increased through improved education, the more freedom she has to shape her own life with independent, informed choice about her medical care. The centrality of freedom in both the capabilities approach and the different ideologies of birth control may make this a meeting point for disagreeing parties to unite in the interest of improving our focus on fully educating women.<sup>15</sup>

When the capabilities framework is applied, instances of injustice come more sharply into focus. If we are to build a society that allows women to live to their fullest capabilities, we must provide them with the freedom of full, factual, and impartial education regarding their menstrual health and birth control. This discussion and application will now inform a set of recommendations for expanding justice for women.

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<sup>15</sup> This point will be taken up more in the next section when I turn to recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

### **Women's health education re-envisioned**

Overall, women's health education needs to provide women with a more complete view of their health and medical management options. It is vital that menstrual health decisions are seen in relation to *whole* health (Grizzle Fischer & Vigil, 2013). This education should communicate the central events of a menstrual cycle along with the tools to recognize concurrent biomarkers and what they indicate about hormonal activity in the body. Women should be given the necessary information to understand how hormones and ovulation indicate health or a lack thereof as well as their relation to fertility. Different methods of birth control should be presented within the context of this biological foundation so that women understand *how* and *why* the resulting positive or negative effects occur. Women should be able to understand the many ways to avoid unplanned pregnancy so that they can choose a birth control method in the freedom of fully informed choice. The capabilities approach does not support an either/or approach to education that informs women about contraceptives at the cost of FABMs or vice-versa. Rather, full information on both and more should be given so that women can decide for themselves. In short, women's health education should be aimed at a vision of comprehensive information and support from educational resources to

allow for long-term, overall health.

### **Addressing injustice at the level of processes**

In order to provide a truly comprehensive health education, it is important to bridge the divide between the ideologies whose messages underpin education. Achieving this might be possible if proponents of the different ideologies were to increase their communication and mutual understanding through discussion and relationship across ideological divides. Most likely, both parties see any existing injustice stemming only from the other group. It is therefore essential to create spaces for each to truly listen to the other, restoring a view of the other as interlocutor rather than villain. These discussions should be encouraged and facilitated between many types of people, including policy-makers, academics, teachers, parents, and doctors. This will likely not resolve every conflict within the ideological dispute, but studies have shown that contact is overall an effective tool in improving intergroup relations (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013). While such a proposal can seem abstract and overwhelming, there are many ways that it could be envisioned and applied at a grassroots level. The purpose of this contact between groups should be to humanize and re-establish the credibility of all who are working for women's health with the goal of supporting women's full capabilities to navigate their health.

The recommendations presented here recognize the need to affect change at both the level of education and of the process that contributed to its continued mediocrity. While there are specific topics that could be implemented to more fully support each women's capabilities, it is doubtful that those changes could occur without communication and collaboration between supporters of different birth control methods. These recommendations are helpful places to begin conceptualizing a health education that holds up the ideals of the capabilities approach for true justice for women.

## **Conclusion**

I began this paper by reflecting on my own social location with respect to women's health education in the United States. I then presented the current state of this issue and the divergent ideologies that have led to women being so uninformed. Upon applying Sen and Nussbaum's capabilities approach, I offered preliminary recommendations for moving towards justice in both the ideological divide and the educational content. All of these sections find their place in an overarching discussion about how each woman's right to fully live out her capabilities has been lost in the polarization of ideologies surrounding birth control. These ideological motivations have led to stagnation in research and, most of all, in education. Because of the

fundamental gaps in their health education, women are currently unable to make fully informed choices to shape their own health decisions.

Going forward, there are many topics within this subject area that still need to be explored. My suggestions for further research include the particular experience of low-income women with health education and management as well as the link between US foreign aid and birth control as it relates to education and informed choice. While there are many questions that require attention, I offer these preliminary explorations as a contribution to the discussion surrounding women's health education and how the United States can better support women in freely structuring their menstrual health management.

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## **Appendix**

The suggested outcomes for sexual health curricula as determined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2012).

### **Healthy Behavior Outcomes (HBOs)**

***A pre-K – 12 sexual health curriculum should enable students to***

HBO 1. Establish and maintain healthy relationships.

HBO 2. Be sexually abstinent.

HBO 3. Engage in behaviors that prevent or reduce sexually transmitted disease (STD), including HIV infection.

HBO 4. Engage in behaviors that prevent or reduce unintended pregnancy.

HBO 5. Avoid pressuring others to engage in sexual behaviors.

HBO 6. Support others to avoid or reduce sexual risk behaviors.

HBO 7. Treat others with courtesy and respect without regard to their sexuality.

HBO 8. Use appropriate health services to promote sexual health.

**Experiences of Objectification**  
**A Lack of Bodily Autonomy in the Bildungsroman**

Caroline Christmann

Caroline Christmann, a resident of Flaherty Hall, is an Arts and Letters Pre-Health and Political Science double major originally from New Orleans, Louisiana. A senior, she is completing a thesis about the intersection of public health and public policy before beginning medical school in the fall. Her paper explores the bodily autonomy available to modern female protagonists and the ways in which characters like Bridget Jones and Katniss Everdeen attempt to take ownership of themselves.

Historically, a significant portion of female *bildungsroman* development has involved the work of the protagonist to obtain physical autonomy by working within the constraints of outsiders who perceive ownership over her, developing independence and a noncoercive sense of community. The *bildungsroman*, or novel of development, has traditionally focused on the coming-of-age or growth of men, due to their greater autonomy, but in many ways, *bildungsroman* stories have evolved significantly in tandem with evolution of societal expectations and roles that allow women greater freedom. Women's greater autonomy in the public sphere has allowed for the emergence of *bildungsromane* about women that mirror the earlier works about men. However, transitions in availability of roles and overt expectations of women have not resulted in a gain in physical autonomy for those women—the bodies of women still do not truly belong to themselves. Instead, power over the female body has shifted from the hands of potential suitors to the hands of society at large. Greater opportunity for women has resulted in greater opportunity for external evaluation and appraisal of value, with the evaluators continuing to overstep and demand control over the physiques of the women with whom they interact. Works like *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Hunger Games* display clearly this lack of autonomy through a representation of Bridget's and Katniss' different roles and

opportunities, and thus their *bildungsroman* development, limited by external ownership of their bodies. Self-fulfillment is an essential part of *bildungsroman* development, one that cannot be achieved if one's physical existence is under consistent control of suitors or bosses. The difficulty for women in achieving ownership of their own bodies has halted or impeded *bildungsroman* for centuries in marriage, the workforce, and even in a dystopian revolution.

Throughout history, women have been considered largely the property of others: first, their fathers' and eventually, their husbands'. Their thoughts were inherently their own, although they could be shaped, but their bodies were strictly regulated and controlled by the men – and even other women – in their lives. Things like movement and appearance were tightly controlled, and demands for physical independence were punished. Because beauty and femininity were pivotal in securing a husband, and thus lifelong financial and social stability, parents, maids, governesses, and family members took it upon themselves to ensure that young women met the exact demands of potential suitors, who were responsible for dictating what qualities were acceptable in the women they interacted with. In this entire process, young women had no say; every aspect of their physique was strictly regulated to conform to the demands of others. As societal standards changed, so did the paths of development of characters living

within their constraints. It has become acceptable to hold jobs, speak publicly, and marry for love in ways of which earlier female protagonists could only dream. On a surface level, equality has been achieved, so male and female *bildungsroman* journeys should mirror each other in a way that was impossible when women were so overtly treated as property. And yet, the paths of development of women remain fundamentally different from their male counterparts, in large part because a superficial change in expected roles has not translated to a more fundamental change in a woman's bodily autonomy. Perceptions of external ownership of a woman's body have not disappeared; rather, they have been suppressed and made implicit, such that a guise of independence and respect can be worn while attempting to manipulate and control women in the family or in the workplace.

In the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), this subtler form of ownership is explored in detail through both Bridget's more general obsessions and her specific experiences with suitors and in the workplace. Bridget may not be bound in long dresses and reprimanded for activities as simple as a long walk, as was the case for the protagonist who inspired her, *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth Bennet, but this does not mean she is any freer from the constraints of external ownership that Elizabeth faced. Bridget's obsession with her weight is

not a result of some internal drive for better health; rather, it is driven by her fears about the perceptions, expectations, and demands of those in her world. The many changes she attempts to make to rectify perceived issues with her appearance – mined in the movie for comedic value – are not a necessary part of her journey of development but rather part of a regime imposed by bosses, boyfriends, and society at large stemming from the fact that even as a woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bridget does not truly own her body.

Nowhere is this more on display than a scene in which Bridget, a newly minted reporter at a local news station, is told by her boss to put on a miniskirt. Bridget had just quit her previous job, where her boss Daniel Cleaver used his position of power to sleep with her, taking advantage of her crush on him to satisfy personal desires before cheating on her. When, after a discouraging job search, Bridget admits the reason for her departure from her previous job, her new boss hires her immediately, replying simply, “Incidentally, here at *Sit Up Britain*, no one ever gets sacked for shagging the boss” (00:48:45). For Bridget, a modern woman who is supposedly the master of her own destiny, a change in employment does not correspond to a change in perceived ownership over her body. Daniel Cleaver certainly took advantage of her, seeing it as his prerogative to flirt with an attractive employee – and even to grope her at work parties – but this transition in Bridget’s

employment is critical for an understanding of Bridget's broader situation because it shows that the view of Bridget's body as something available to her boss or to the public for enjoyment is not limited to Daniel Cleaver's office. Her new boss, a nameless character with approximately ten seconds of screen time and only three lines exchanged in conversation with Bridget, sees her body as belonging to him just as much as romantic antihero Cleaver does. The statement that she could not be dismissed for sleeping with the boss is not a brief from human resources about a fireable offense; it is a thinly-veiled attempt at flirting, something that he sees as acceptable because she has accepted a professional offer from him. She is not an individual he is working with as an equal – she is just as much his property, something for him to enjoy in the workplace, as she is a colleague.

This attitude is made apparent in Bridget's first televised interview. The same boss who hired her, who has clearly seen her as an object in his possession from their first meeting, gives her a significant professional opportunity when he allows her to interview firemen on Bonfire Night. His comments in giving her the assignment, however, reveal that this professional opportunity is not any more motivated by professionalism or equality than his initial hiring of her. "Bridget Jones," he begins, "where are you? Put on some more makeup – I want you on camera. I'm thinking miniskirt, I'm thinking fireman's helmet. I

want you pointing a hose, I want you sliding down a pole – and then go straight into the interview,” (00:50:44-00:51:17). Even in an intensely professional context, surrounded by both male and female coworkers, this nameless boss gives Bridget a professional opportunity both motivated by and centered on her looks. Her appearance is his primary motivator and something that he identifies will be popular with viewers. Her career advancement in this moment is not motivated by qualifications, quality of work, or enthusiasm. Rather, it is a product of the producer’s personal enjoyment of her physique and his knowledge that that physique will be popular with viewers of *Sit Up Britain*. His comments – to put on a miniskirt, to add more makeup – are far outside of the realm of professionalism both because he views her appearance as something that he personally can control and because he understands that this edited appearance is what viewers want from their news anchor. Bridget’s body is an object for consumption – this time, not for family and suitors, but for bosses and the public watching her on TV.

As evidenced by *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, increased opportunity for women has not resulted in *bildungsroman* stories in which women have autonomy over their own bodies. The journey toward gaining that autonomy, toward a place where a woman’s appearance is her own and not dictated by and maintained for others, remains an integral part of a

female *bildungsroman* journey. The change in opportunity available for women in terms of entry into the public sphere, such that women are no longer necessarily reliant on men for incomes or basic survival and marriage can become a choice, rather than a necessity, has not meant that women have gained physical autonomy. Control has not been returned to women; rather, it has been spread out and expanded, so that entire communities can have an opinion. The suitors who once set standards have expanded to include not only potential husbands but bosses, friends, TV personalities, and the general public. Bridget does not truly have any more bodily autonomy than her literary predecessors; the fact that she seeks both a job and a husband means not that she controls her own body in the process but that bosses and the public who consumes her work have joined potential husbands on the list of people empowered to make demands of her.

Suzanne Collins' treatment of bodily autonomy in her novel *The Hunger Games* sheds light on this transition in and expansion of control particularly effectively by removing the traditions of a society with which the reader is familiar to throw into sharper relief the ways in which Katniss' body is owned by everyone but herself. By removing the superficial trappings of modern society and inserting relevant themes, like that of bodily autonomy, into a dystopian world in which nothing is familiar, Collins reframes the reader's perspective and allows herself

room for astute and detailed examination of a very familiar phenomenon. Katniss' very survival in the novel, after she volunteers to replace her sister in a 24-way fight to the death, is dependent entirely on her body. This reliance on her body, however, can be divided into two very distinct categories: her physical skills in the arena, which she's honed through years of hunting and foraging, and her physical appearance, which will help her get sponsors that can provide food, medicine, or weaponry. Katniss' actions, personality, and appearance are polished throughout her time in the Capitol to make her more appealing to the public with enough disposable income to purchase her survival. Once in the arena, her pretend relationship with Peeta, in which she lends physical and emotional intimacy in exchange for public sympathy and survival, serves to continue the external ownership of her actions. At the outset, kissing Peeta is not a voluntary outcome of romantic feelings but a calculated decision to woo sponsors invested in their semi-fabricated love story. Because the stakes are life-and-death, rather than offhand comments in the workplace like those featured in *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *The Hunger Games* is able to more overtly portray Katniss' lack of bodily autonomy and to exaggerate the role that it plays in her *bildung*, resulting in clear applicability to the modern societal standards dictating real-world *bildungsromane*.

The first-person narration employed by Collins in her novel renders Katniss' lack of control particularly resonant. The reader is able to feel acutely the detachment with which Katniss views her situation. She is not angered by her lack of physical autonomy; on the contrary, she's rather unfazed by it. Upon her arrival in the Capitol, Katniss is whisked away to a stylist and his team to be beautified, with strict instructions from her mentor not to protest under any circumstances. Every aspect of her appearance has been handed without her consent to the stylist Cinna, who has the freedom to dress her in anything from miner's overalls to a coating of coal dust. When Katniss first meets Cinna and his team, her tone is resigned, and she becomes a passive observer of her own discomfort as she narrates the interaction: "He walks around my naked body, not touching me, but taking in every inch of it with his eyes. I resist the impulse to cross my arms over my chest" (Collins 64). An entire conversation ensues, with Katniss entirely naked and showing no significant reaction. This pattern continues throughout the novel, with more resignation than anger in Katniss' tone when forced to comply with standards for display. When she, knowing that the audience at home wants to see physical intimacy, first kisses Peeta and is rewarded with a pot of broth from her sponsors, her wry thought of, "One kiss equals one pot of broth," sounds far more transactional than emotional (Collins 261). This is uncharacteristic of a teenage girl's

first kiss, perhaps, but entirely in line with the fact that the kiss belongs to Katniss no more than any other action or body part within the tight regulations of the Games. The first-person narration makes such scenes, in which Katniss' body is not only intended for public consumption but actively being consumed by that public as entertainment, all the more jarring because such lack of control, observed in more subtle ways within real-life societal constraints, is on overt display through the eyes of a largely resigned narrator.

Perhaps startlingly, Katniss has a much greater sense of physical ownership in personal moments with Peeta than she does in any interactions with people who should – in theory – have no such claim over her. She is embarrassed by the thought of seeing him naked, even though moments before she had thought “Naked bodies are no big deal in the arena, right?” (Collins 254). In that moment, in an interaction with a boy on whom she is developing a crush, they both own their bodies in a way they do not with Haymitch (their mentor), their stylists, their government, or casual viewers of the Games. Similarly, Bridget spends days analyzing a single cryptic statement from her current object of interest, Mark Darcy, that grants her ownership over herself in a way that no other character has allowed: “I like you very much, just as you are” (00:56:26). In both cases, the actual suitors have made few, if any, bids for ownership over the bodies of their love interests. In that

way, these modern *bildungsromane* are quite different from their predecessors. In earlier novels, suitors were interested in the ways in which their loves conformed to expected standards, as well as the ways in which they did not. While the original Mr. Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice* may not have viewed his love's body as property in the way that many men of the time period did, the relationship was largely informed by societal standards and interests that framed a woman's body as something belonging to others. Mr. Darcy, for instance, is greatly concerned with Elizabeth's beauty – it is the first thing he registers about her – and a large part of his transition in feelings involves coming to find her beautiful. Even in novels that feature these relatively nontraditional characters, matches frequently end with appropriate suitability in terms of wealth and attractiveness. Concerns over beauty and social suitability in these stories indicate a degree of subconsciously-perceived ownership, even in progressive romantic heroes of the Victorian Era.

As a mark of changed culture, Bridget and Katniss have suitors that are drawn to them for their own sakes in a way much different than earlier versions of the same genre, which illustrates the transitions in societal norms with respect specifically to love. Shifts in what women are expected to yield to potential suitors, however, have not changed the fact that women *are* expected to yield their autonomy; it is merely

the identity of the suitor that has changed. Sponsors in *The Hunger Games* and employers in the real world of *Bridget Jones's Diary* can make impactful decisions based on how well women match up to their internal standards. Bridget's weight loss is the product of a general public consensus on how women should look, one that is strictly enforced and effectively similar to the one Hunger Games viewers use as a metric for choosing favorite contestants. The identities of the "suitors" themselves have changed with society, but society itself has changed much less than it appears, with true bodily autonomy still largely out of reach.

Katniss' body is actively bought and sold without her consent, with Haymitch serving as a broker for sponsors who admire her spunk, her love story, or inevitably, her looks. Cinna gives Katniss "a great advantage" when he renders her appearance unforgettable: he enables her appearance to make an impression in the minds of people willing to buy her survival (Collins 78). The literal purchasing of Katniss' life by those who see her as their property is certainly far more extreme than Bridget's experiences with a boss who engages in inappropriate advances, but in both cases, the women have had almost all autonomy co-opted by those in positions of power around them. The extremism of Katniss' story lends a more effective lens to traditional modern female

*bildungsromane*, like that of Bridget, in which ownership occurs in equally sinister but much subtler ways.

In many very significant ways, stories of women like Bridget or Katniss differ from their predecessors. Unlike Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss* (a traditional *bildungsroman*), who was not allowed to attend school because she was a woman, Bridget Jones is college-educated with a job. Similarly, Katniss' father chose to teach her to hunt despite the fact she was a daughter, not a son. However, as modern *bildungsromane* illustrate, one important transition that has yet to occur is a yielding of control over the female body to the female in question. Part of their *bildungsroman* journey remains finding a balance between self-fulfillment, which necessarily requires such autonomy, and union with a society that denies it, rather than personal growth into a society that already recognizes their rights to this control both explicitly and implicitly. Stories like that of Bridget and Katniss serve to reflect on the lives of women sharing similar experiences in real life, a fact reflected in the immense popularity of both works and one that is mirrored by the semiautobiographical nature of early female *bildungsromane*. The evolution of the female *bildungsroman*, a product of the evolution of the society with which the protagonist must come into union, is a useful metric both for the progress made in increased respect and opportunities and in the areas in which women still lack

autonomy and control, even over something as personal and simple as their own bodies.

**Reimagining the Feminine Ideal in the English Renaissance:  
A Challenge to Petrarchan Love**

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As an act of social construction, imagining women deserves both attention and criticism. “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun,” remarks Shakespeare’s speaker in the famous Sonnet 130. In the subsequent surprising comparisons that follow, this speaker appears to disparage his lover, whom he describes as having “black wires” for hair and breath that “reeks” (4, 8). Only in the final couplet is Shakespeare’s magic revealed: “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare” (13-14). In imagining his lover as a rather hideous creature whom he still loves incredibly, the speaker implies the impossibility of a feminine ideal. Simultaneously, Shakespeare speaks *through* the speaker to attack a larger social phenomenon: English Renaissance poets’ attempt to construct women through stereotypical poetic devices, such as those which assert that the woman’s eyes *are* like the sun. Understanding how women are imagined allows for the analysis of how women are idealized. By not only participating in, but also challenging feminine idealization, literature provides us with a fitting avenue for this exploration.

During the English Renaissance, poets revived Petrarchan love in sonnets. Petrarch, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poet, popularized through his sonnets the image of a man’s pining over a woman who does not return his love. In reviving this stereotypical idea of love in their sonnets, English Renaissance writers poised themselves as Petrarchan lovers

while representing their ladies as Petrarchan sonnet mistresses. Forming the lady as the Petrarchan mistress, the paragon of Elizabethan beauty, forced these poets to idealize women. Highly aware of the repercussions of subscribing to Petrarchan love and representing woman as ideally beautiful, both William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser criticize through their works the revival of Petrarchism. This term refers to both the trope of Petrarchan love and the stereotypical sonnet conventions used by Petrarch. In his comedy *As You Like It*, Shakespeare attacks Petrarchism through his establishment of Rosalind as an anti-Petrarchan sonnet mistress and through his use of her character to show that Petrarchan love ruins relationships. In Book Three of his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser takes the opposite approach to criticizing Petrarchism by establishing Florimell as a Petrarchan sonnet mistress whose idealization by men degrades love to lust and denies women their inherent value.

Although Renaissance poets used the Petrarchan framework in their sonnets, they also introduced anti-Petrarchan conventions. This over-arching area of tension in Renaissance culture—the combination of Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan elements in sonnets—was espoused by virtually all Renaissance poets and is most evident in three main areas: the sonnet form, the speaker’s consciousness, and the use of metaphors and imagery. Analyzing how the sonnet developed during

this period and how this development influenced poets' representation of women illuminates the main Renaissance sonnet conventions of which Shakespeare and Spenser were aware. Comparing this analysis against *As You Like It* and *The Faerie Queene* clearly shows how Shakespeare and Spenser attack these conventions and representations of women.

Poets of the English Renaissance revolutionized the form of the Petrarchan sonnet yet retained the two-part form of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence. Michael Spiller claims that many Renaissance poets used the new sonnet form created by Thomas Wyatt, which had a different rhyme scheme than Petrarch's sonnets, while adhering to the traditional Petrarchan two-part sonnet sequence (106). While Spiller discusses the changes in the form of individual sonnets, Carol Neely explores how the form of the overall sonnet sequence developed during this time. She claims that poets adhered to the two-part division, but she specifically compares how Renaissance poets treated Petrarchism in each half of the sequence. She claims that in the first half, the poets often represent "the conventional Petrarchan situation" which portrays "the static relationship of the adoring/lamenting poet-lover to an immovable beloved" ("Sonnet Sequences" 368). She argues that in the second half, the poets represent anti-Petrarchism in that the actual "presence" of the sonnet mistress, as opposed to the Petrarchan

representation of her absence after her death, “leads to increased mutuality, eroticism, and conflicts” (368).

Renaissance poets manifested this major divergence from Petrarchism through the complexity of the speaker’s consciousness; these poets created speakers who simultaneously displayed Petrarchan desires and anti-Petrarchan elements. Spiller argues Renaissance poets often dealt with the theme of Petrarchan desire because this desire, the “master analogy for all desire,” also analogized Pietro Bembo’s myth of the Queen of the Fortunate Isles (125-126). Spiller explains that this myth depicts a dominant queen who represented “the union of Truth, Power, and Beauty,” and who was “both desired and feared” (75-76). He argues that during the Renaissance, Queen Elizabeth “was prepared to become the living enactment of that myth,” and that this connection led poets to express their desires through the analogy of love as “desire for political success, for maximizing one’s power,” and “for success in real sexual love” (126). Although the Renaissance sonnet speaker focuses on his desires like the Petrarchan lover does, Spiller argues that in Renaissance sonnets, “the speaking self finds its subject matter in the disturbance or difficulty of its own consciousness” (58). For example, Spiller argues that Wyatt’s speaker is unstable like Petrarch’s, but that he has more of a “social” than “cosmic” worldview (88). He also argues that Philip Sidney’s speaker represents the stereotypical Petrarchan

lover, but that this speaker “wittily deconstructs” the poem by acknowledging the “metafictional problems” of his own words (115). Regarding Shakespeare’s sonnets, Heather Dubrow argues that the speaker is Petrarchan in that he “show[s] uncertainty over his own agency” (125). However, Spiller notes an anti-Petrarchan aspect of Shakespeare’s speaker by noting that this speaker often laments about the “hypothetical” rather than the actual cruelty of the sonnet mistress (157).

The tension between Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism is also evident in the metaphors and imagery these English speakers use to describe women. Spiller argues that Petrarch used a pastoral, natural landscape in his sonnets “to act both as a backcloth and source of metaphor” (53). He also claims that during the Renaissance, some poets, like Thomas Watson, adhered to these pastoral Petrarchan metaphors when describing the sonnet mistress, while others, like Shakespeare, clearly rejected them: “‘My mistress’ eyes’, said Shakespeare in an anti-Petrarchan moment, ‘are nothing like the sun . . .’” (55). *The Spenser Encyclopedia* calls these metaphors used by Watson, and even Spenser, the “‘bad’ kind of conceits” (Ruthven 189). These conceits, or common metaphors, describe the stereotypical Petrarchan mistress: a chaste woman with the hallmarks of ideal beauty including blonde hair, a high forehead, and fair skin.

Shakespeare denounces these “reworking[s] of the Petrarchan idiolect of unrequited love” by avoiding these metaphors in his sonnets and mocking them in sonnets like Sonnet 130 (189). Spiller also argues that some poets, like Sidney, used other metaphors that are very unnatural and therefore anti-Petrarchan, such as Sidney’s “theatre of pleasure” (117). Spenser also uses anti-Petrarchan theatrical metaphors in his sonnets, but he does still employ Petrarchan metaphors. Cousins argues that Spenser’s speaker describes his lady with standard Petrarchan images, such as the “starry light” of her “laming eyes” (100). Cousins also argues that these metaphors, which Spenser uses to describe Elizabeth Boyle in the first sonnet of *Amoretti*, his book of sonnets, are Petrarchan because they echo “a motif often used by Petrarch to evoke Laura’s mystique,” which was his focusing on the ideal beauty of his lady’s eyes (100). He further argues that the use of these Petrarchan metaphors connects to the speaker’s view of the lady as a conquest, which was a theme “familiar across the literature of courtly love in general and Petrarch’s verse in particular” (101).

Exploring how Renaissance poets dealt with the stereotype of the idealized Petrarchan mistress shows the tension between Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism in their representations of women. Dubrow argues that the “unfailingly beautiful” Petrarchan sonnet mistress was “appeal[ing]” to Renaissance poets because she represented “simplicity.

.. at a time when many issues about gender were problematic” (47). Although Renaissance poets often did represent the stereotypical Petrarchan sonnet mistress in their poetry, Spiller argues that Shakespeare was anti-Petrarchan in that his sonnet mistress was more indifferent than stereotypically “cruel”: “What is extraordinary in Shakespeare’s sonnets . . . is the recurring sense that the speaker is being brushed aside, by a lover who is insufficient: not interested enough in him even to be cruel” (156). Additionally, Shakespeare’s sonnet mistress is striking for her physical difference from the Petrarchan mistress. Her hair is not blonde, but dark, and Shakespeare represents this physical difference in Sonnet 130 through another mockery of the Petrarchan conceit: “If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head” (4). Similarly, Spenser criticizes the Petrarchan mistress by praising his lady not only for her beauty, but also for her intelligence and constancy. For example, Spenser writes in *Amoretti* LIV, “Yes she beholding me with constant eye, / Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart” (9-10). In his criticism, Spenser highlights the falseness of appearances and forces readers to question the relationship between the interior and the exterior.

Dubrow also claims that Renaissance poets, “like Petrarch, typically stage the relationship between male and female in terms of elisions, reversals, displacements, and reversals of gender” (86). However, she

also notes that unlike Petrarch's speaker, the English speaker exhibits an attitude toward the sonnet mistress in Renaissance sonnets that is "more overt, more virulent, and more aggressive" (86). Dubrow also comments on the female voice in Renaissance sonnets. She claims that like Petrarch, Renaissance poets "praise" women's voices, but that unlike Petrarch, the poets tend to "erotici[ze]" these voices (88). Although Dubrow makes this point, she also notes that when women do speak in the sonnets, they "often express doubts about Petrarchism" (90). Neely argues that for Renaissance poets, the sonnet mistress is not a "symbolic object" like she is for Petrarch; instead, the sonnet mistress is more than a symbol, but still less than a full "participant in mutual passion" ("Sonnet Sequences" 383).

Several main themes relating to sonnet conventions and representations of women can be traced throughout Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The first theme is how the lady's presence within sonnets, as opposed to her absence, provides the opportunity for conflict with her pursuer. The second theme is the pursuer's view of the lady as a conquest he hopes to achieve for power and fulfillment of sexual desire. The third theme is the pursuer's aggressiveness toward the lady while he focuses on her hypothetical cruelty. The fourth theme is the use and mockery of Petrarchan conceits that idealize the woman and associate her with pastoral

imagery. A final theme is that no matter how the lady is represented in Renaissance sonnets, she is never made present enough to be a full participant in passion with her pursuer; for if she were, she could no longer be idealized.

In his comedy *As You Like It*, Shakespeare attacks English Renaissance sonnet conventions and idealized representations of women by presenting to his audience a female protagonist, Rosalind, who subverts the Petrarchism his contemporaries were reviving and revising in their sonnets. Rosalind not only proves to be the complete opposite of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress, but also, in the role of Ganymede, criticizes the stereotypical Petrarchan aspects of the other characters. Although Shakespeare seems to curtail the lady's ability to be a full participant in passion in his sonnets, he refutes this sonnet convention entirely in *As You Like It* by actually allowing Rosalind to verbalize her love for Orlando. In giving her this agency in speech, Shakespeare uses her, as Dubrow argues, to "express doubts about Petrarchism" (Dubrow 90). Neely argues that when the lady does become a full participant in passion, "Petrarchan conventions are viewed as obstacles to the relationship. They are made brittle, mocked, and eventually discarded" ("Sonnet Sequences" 383). *As You Like It* exhibits this phenomenon. Further examining Act 1 Scene 2, Act 3

Scene 2, and Act 3 Scene 5 illuminates exactly how Shakespeare attacks Renaissance Petrarchism.

As the object of Orlando's desire, Rosalind defies the stereotype of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress. In Act 1 Scene 2, Shakespeare sets up Rosalind as the opposite of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress by crafting her as an assertive, confident woman who has no issue flirting with Orlando. Her assertiveness counters the typical passiveness of sonnet mistresses. A prime example of this important difference occurs when Rosalind, in a manner very uncharacteristic of the sonnet mistress, brazenly tells Orlando after watching him wrestle, "Sir, you have wrestled well and overthrown / More than your enemies" (*As You Like It* 1.2.254-255). From this early point in the play, Rosalind fully participates in passion with Orlando because she can be present in conversation with him. Shakespeare adheres to the major English Renaissance anti-Petrarchan sonnet convention of representing the lady as present, rather than absent, by making Rosalind present in this play. However, his depiction of Rosalind's love for Orlando challenges the Renaissance sonnet convention of framing the present sonnet mistress as cold and unemotional. Neely notes that in 1.2, "[l]ovesickness overtakes Rosalind and Orlando simultaneously as both 'fall' in love at first sight" (*Distracted Subjects* 123). The love between Rosalind and Orlando is equal and mutual; both Rosalind and Orlando

experience the same emotions and love for one another. Neely argues that the Renaissance conception of lovesickness, which can be understood as “the pathological underside of—and the antidote to—idealized and sublimated Petrarchan love,” provided the basis for gender fluidity which Shakespeare explores through his comedies “because it can strike anyone and fasten on anything” (*Distracted Subjects* 99). Struck by love, Rosalind represents anti-Petrarchism and this gender fluidity throughout the rest of play by criticizing Petrarchan stereotypes as herself and under the guise of the male Ganymede.

In Act 3 Scene 2, Shakespeare mocks Petrarchan love through shaping Orlando’s character as a stereotypical Petrarchan lover. Orlando’s love letters for Rosalind clearly establish him as a Petrarchan lover, pining for his lady and writing poems “in witness of [his] love” (3.2.1). Their lack of poetic skill shows not only Orlando’s limited education, but also Shakespeare’s mockery of Renaissance sonnet conventions such as the use of Petrarchan conceits and the idealization of women. As a man with limited education, Orlando may have gleaned only the stereotypical aspects of love at court, which would explain his stereotypical idealization of Rosalind: “*From the east to western Ind, / No jewel is like Rosalind*” (3.2.88-89). He, like the Petrarchan lover, believes that her ideal beauty makes him unworthy of her love: “*Heaven would that she these gifts should have / And I to live and die her slave*”

(3.2.155-156). Although at the beginning of the scene the other characters do not know the author of these verses, they still recognize the flaws of the poetry: Touchstone calls it “bad fruit,” and even though Rosalind seems flattered by the poems at first, she eventually admits that “the feet were lame and could not bear themselves without the verse” (3.2.117, 3.2.171-172). Beyond the inadequate form of Orlando’s poetry, Orlando’s use of the “bad” Petrarchan conceits, such as associating Rosalind with the pastoral image of “*fairest boughs*” and idealizing her “*graces*,” or virtue, shows Shakespeare’s disdain for this Renaissance sonnet convention (Ruthven 189, 3.2.137, 3.2.145).

Orlando and Ganymede’s encounter in 3.2 shows Shakespeare’s mockery of Petrarchism through Orlando’s lovesickness and Rosalind’s objections to Petrarchan love. When Orlando meets Ganymede in the forest, he presents himself as a Petrarchan lover, claiming that his love for Rosalind is so strong that he is “love-shaked” (3.2.373). Rosalind, acting as Ganymede, responds to Orlando by criticizing Petrarchism. Her claims reflect her position as the opposite of the Petrarchan mistress. Her description of what a man in love should look like mocks the stereotypical Petrarchan lover, and she compares Orlando’s qualities to those of this man: “A lean cheek, which you have not, a blue eye and sunken, which you have not, an unquestionable spirit, which you have not, a beard neglected, which you have not” (3.2.380-383).

The editors of The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *As You Like It* note that in Rosalind's description, "blue" means "discolored from exhaustion or weeping" and "unquestionable" means "unsociable" (114 [nn 381, 382]). Rosalind, therefore, criticizes the Petrarchan lover for allowing his love and sorrow to consume his life; this criticism solidifies her as a critic of Petrarchism.

In Act 3 Scene 5, Shakespeare continues his attack on Petrarchism through Rosalind's conversations with Silvius and Phoebe. In this scene, Shakespeare sets up the typical Petrarchan situation which Renaissance poets were representing in their sonnets. Silvius, overcome by his love for Phoebe, pleads for her to love him. His view that she "scorn[s]" him for no apparent reason reflects the sonnet convention of representing the lady as idealized, but cruel (3.5.1). Phoebe's presence in this scene and her ability to converse with her lover depicts the sonnet convention of making the lady present rather than absent. As Neely argues, this presence inevitably leads to an increase in "conflict" (*Distracted Subjects* 368). Phoebe responds to Silvius by rejecting his claim that she has hurt him. Her pointing out of this fact reflects the sonnet convention of the Petrarchan lover's focus on the hypothetical, rather than the actual, cruelty of the lady: "Lie not, to say mine eyes are murderers. / Now show the wound mine eye hath made in thee" (3.5.20-21). Through this response, Phoebe ironically

acts as the Petrarchan mistress by denying Silvius her love while simultaneously criticizing Petrarchan sonnet conventions through her assertion that Silvius's lament is based on "lie[s]" (3.5.20).

Under the disguise of Ganymede, Rosalind enters the scene; she berates both Silvius and Phoebe for their Petrarchan love, and her remarks call for "Petrarchan conventions" to be "discarded" because they have, as Neely argues, created "obstacles to the relationship" (*Distracted Subjects* 383). Through Rosalind's criticism of Phoebe, Shakespeare mocks the sonnet convention of using Petrarchan conceits to idealize the lady: "'Tis not your inky brows, your black silk hair, / Your bugle eyeballs, nor your cheek of cream / That can entame my spirits to your worship" (3.5.51-53). Rosalind's description of Phoebe clearly indicates that she looks physically different from the typical Petrarchan mistress. Her hair, "inky" and "black," is not the light, blonde hair considered beautiful in the Renaissance (3.5.51). Similarly, her "bugle," or "black" eyes and "cream," or "yellowish-white" colored skin are dark in comparison to the beautiful light eyes and fair skin of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress (3.5.51, 130 [nn 51, 52]). Rosalind continues Shakespeare's criticism of this sonnet convention by arguing that Silvius is "foolish" to idealize the lady whom he loves, which makes the lady see herself as more beautiful than she really is: "'Tis not her glass but you that flatters her, / And out of you she sees herself more

proper / Than any of her lineaments can show her" (3.5.59-61). Line 59 is perfect iambic pentameter. The stress in the third foot of this line falls sharply on the word "you," and this emphasis shows Rosalind's desire to convey to Silvius that he is at fault for idealizing Phoebe (3.5.59). As the opposite of a Petrarchan sonnet mistress herself, Rosalind orders Phoebe to avoid falling into the stereotype of the cruel, Petrarchan lady by instructing her to forgive Silvius and accept his love: "Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer" (3.5.66). Rosalind's demand shows not only that she believes Phoebe is too at fault, but also that it is possible for Phoebe to experience love that is not Petrarchan. Through Rosalind's demand and the exaggerated Petrarchan conventions that Silvius and Phoebe present, Shakespeare both mocks Petrarchan love and calls for it to be replaced by love in which no one idealizes nor scorns.

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare challenges the sonnet conventions of his time by exposing the limitations and frivolousness of Petrarchan love in these key scenes. Establishing Rosalind as the antithesis of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress from the beginning allows her to express Shakespeare's anti-Petrarchan attitude throughout the play. Rosalind's ability to secure her love with Orlando in the final scene solidifies her agency in their relationship and indicates the mutual passion Shakespeare allows both Rosalind and Orlando to experience because

they are not bound by Petrarchan love: “To you I give myself, for I am yours” (5.4.121). Through representing Rosalind’s presence in her relationship, Shakespeare shows the consequences that result from English Renaissance poets’ revision of the Petrarchan sonnet convention of representing the lady’s absence. Rosalind’s anti-Petrarchan nature leads to conflict not only with her pursuer, Orlando, but also with anyone who displays Petrarchan attitudes. Her criticism of Orlando’s Petrarchan conceit-laden poems and of his Petrarchan lament serve as Shakespeare’s mockery of Renaissance poets’ revival of Petrarchan sonnet conventions, and her criticisms of Silvius’s Petrarchan idealization of the lady and Phoebe’s Petrarchan scorn of her pursuer further Shakespeare’s mockery of the conventions of Petrarchan love.

In his poem *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser also challenges Petrarchan sonnet conventions, but does so differently than Shakespeare. Spenser crafts Florimell, one of his main female characters in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, as the epitome of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress. Because she is idealized, Florimell can never be a full participant in passion with anyone the way Rosalind fully participates in mutual passion with Orlando. Shakespeare’s presentation of Rosalind as anti-Petrarchan forces him to mock Petrarchan conventions and reject them for their frivolousness. Rather than simply mocking Petrarchan

conventions, Spenser presents a more serious challenge to Petrarchan conventions by presenting through the misfortunes of the Petrarchan Florimell that idealizing women is not just ridiculous, but dangerous. Analyzing *The Faerie Queene* Book 3 Cantos i, vii, and viii clearly shows how Spenser both aligns with and diverges from Shakespeare in his attack on Renaissance poets' revival of Petrarchan love.

By crafting Florimell as the Petrarchan sonnet mistress in Canto i, Spenser places her in a position to be victim to men who, like English Renaissance poets, use Petrarchan love to express desire to conquest for power and sexual love. At the beginning of this canto, Spenser does to Florimell the opposite of what Shakespeare does to Rosalind—he shapes her as Petrarchan, rather than anti-Petrarchan. Florimell, like many of Spenser's characters, is not explicitly named at her introduction. Arthur and Guyon, while walking through the forest with Britomart, see a beautiful woman, with a face “as clear as Christall stone” fleeing another man who pursues her (Spenser III.i.15). In this initial physical description, Spenser begins to describe Florimell as the idealized Petrarchan sonnet mistress by noting her clear, beautiful face. Spenser further describes Florimell as Petrarchan by noting her “faire yellow locks” that also characterize the stereotypical Petrarchan sonnet mistress (III.i.16). This description directly contrasts with Rosalind's description of Phoebe's “inky brows” and “black silk hair” (3.5.51).

Rosalind's description of Phoebe shows Shakespeare's focus on the the anti-Petrarchan physicality of the woman to criticize Petrarchan conceits. Spenser, on the other hand, physically represents Florimell as the idealized Petrarchan sonnet mistress to criticize poets' use of Petrarchan desire to analogize "bestly lust" and conquest (III.i.17).

After watching Florimell ride past them, Arthur and Guyon rush to help her; however, Spenser's explanation of why they do so leads the reader to question the goodness of Petrarchan pursuit. Spenser writes that Arthur and Guyon feel "gealousy" when watching Florimell flee her pursuer, which editor Dorothy Stephens notes can mean not only "righteous indignation," but also actually jealousy in that "they might like to be in the forester's place" (12 [n 2]). Spenser's intentional use of this word opens Arthur and Guyon's motives in pursuing Florimell up to the reader's interpretation. However, the rest of Stanza 18 and Stanza 19 provide convincing evidence for the belief that in pursuing Florimell, Arthur and Guyon give in to lustful desires and desires to achieve the conquest of the idealized woman. Spenser indicates that Florimell becomes a conquest for the men because they want to "win" her and implies that they want to win her because she, "the fairest Dame alive," is perfectly ideal (III.i.18). Spenser's criticism of Arthur and Guyon comes from contrasting them with Britomart, whom Spenser describes as "constant" (III.i.19). This description of Britomart

challenges the Renaissance sonnet convention of representing women as inconstant. However, Britomart's constancy also serves as a point of comparison between herself and the men who, by only focusing on external beauty, "so lightly follow beauties chace" (III.i.19). Spenser's association of Britomart with constancy and of Arthur and Guyon with inconstancy not only shows his disdain for Petrarchan pursuit for sexual conquest, but also flips a Renaissance gender stereotype represented often through sonnet conventions. The fact the Britomart is dressed in a man's armor in this scene also reemphasizes Spenser's gender-bending in this stanza. With this criticism of Renaissance poets' expanding Petrarchan love to Petrarchan lust, Spenser, like Shakespeare, also uses some degree of gender fluidity to expose the pitfalls of Petrarchism.

In Canto vii, Spenser continues his criticism of Petrarchan love by framing the witch's son as a Petrarchan lover who submits to lust completely. In the beginning of Canto vii, Florimell enters the house of the witch, and Spenser warns readers of the witch's villainy by noting her "hellish arts" which she tries to "hide" from everyone else (III.vii.6). The witch notices Florimell's Petrarchan beauty. She sees Florimell's "golden wreath" of hair and views Florimell as "heavenly," more like "some Goddess" than mortal (III.vii.11). When the witch's son arrives, he also sees her as extremely beautiful: "He coming home at undertime,

there found / The fairest creature, that he ever saw" (III.vii.13). He, so in awe of her Petrarchan beauty, just stares at her: "So stared he on her, and stood long while amaz'd" (III.vii.13). The son's reaction closely echoes the reaction of Arthur and Guyon upon seeing Florimell for the first time. They also idealize Florimell by considering her the "fairest" woman in the world, and overcome by her beauty, they "gaz[e] after her a while" (III.i.17-19). Spenser goes on to highlight the "brutish lust" of the son; the fact that Spenser describes the men's reactions to Florimell in the same manner provides further evidence that Arthur and Guyon were also feeling lust for Florimell. However, Spenser provides no indication that Arthur and Guyon's lust is as "beastly" as the forest man's or as "brutish" as that of the witch's son (III.vii.15, III.i.17). Spenser continues to criticize Petrarchan lust by claiming that the witch's son, as a Petrarchan lover, does not actually love Florimell at all. He, like English Renaissance poets, represents Petrarchan love as sexual conquest. Spenser represents this sexual desire through fire imagery. He describes the image of the son's desire as a "wicked flame" that grows into an "outrageous fire" (III.vii.16). Spenser's use of the word "wicked" clearly indicates his criticism of this type of desire, and the use of fire imagery itself may point to Spenser's belief in the dangerous, uncontrollable nature of lust (III.vii.16). Spenser further criticizes the son for not actually loving Florimell by calling his actions

toward her “semblaunces” and “resemblaunces,” which Stephens notes are just “empty demonstrations of love” (III.vii.16, 134 [nn 4-5]).

Like Shakespeare, Spenser also expresses the lived experience of the lamenting Petrarchan lover, but he does so more poignantly than Shakespeare does. After Florimell leaves the witch’s house, the witch’s son begins to lament losing her. Spenser uses striking imagery to describe the intensity of this lament. He claims that the son “knockt his brest with desperate intent, / And scratcht his face, and with his teeth did tear / His rugged flesh, and rent his ragged heare” (III.vii.20). What is so striking about these lines is their unsettling, visceral images. The witch of course notices this reaction of her son’s, and she longs to find a way “to restore” him “to plight,” or to “healthy condition” (III.vii.21, 135 [n 8]). The notion that the son needs to be restored to health implies that he is experiencing some kind of sickness. However, his lament cannot be fully characterized by Neely’s idea of “lovesickness” in the Renaissance, which Shakespeare represented through Orlando, precisely because the son did not experience love in the first place (*Distracted Subjects* 99). Therefore, Spenser’s claim that the witch will try to cure her son is a more of an ironic depiction of lovesickness than Shakespeare’s clear depiction of the lovesickness of Orlando, who professes himself to be “love-shaked” (3.2.373). Spenser represents the son as a lamenting Petrarchan lover who does not actually love the lady

and whose physical desires give way to an intense, physical response upon losing the lady. On the other hand, Shakespeare's representation of Orlando as a lamenting Petrarchan lover who does love the lady leads him to portray Orlando's lament through love poems which use Petrarchan conceits to represent Orlando's love for Rosalind. Orlando's response to losing Rosalind is not physical because his desires were not only physical; he idealizes her beauty, but he also loves her for her wit. The witch's son, with purely physical desires, has only a very physical response to losing Florimell. This response serves as a criticism by Spenser of the English Renaissance poets' use of Petrarchan love to analogize desire for power and sexual conquest through his representation of the danger in which it places the lady and of the torment it causes for the man. While Shakespeare comically mocks the Petrarchan lover and Petrarchan conventions, Spenser more seriously criticizes the Petrarchan pursuer for his dangerous lust.

In Canto viii, Spenser shifts the focus of his criticism from Petrarchan sonnet conventions to English Renaissance poets themselves by fashioning the witch as the creator of a Petrarchan sonnet mistress. After his mother shows him Florimell's girdle, the son returns to his "former griefe," for he now believes that Florimell is dead and that he has no "hope" of ever regaining her (III.viii.3). The witch decides to help her son by crafting a being that looks exactly like

Florimell. Her creation of this woman parallels Renaissance poets' creation of an idealized Petrarchan sonnet mistress. The witch aims to create a woman so perfect "that even Nature selfe" would envy her beauty and so realistic that no one would be able to tell the difference between this False Florimell and the True Florimell: "[S]he boldy tooke / to make another like the former Dame / . . . / So lively and so like, that many it mistooke" (III.viii.5). In this description of the witch's ultimate goal, Spenser shows the deceptive nature of the exterior of the woman. He expresses anxiety over what the exterior hides by using unsettling images to describe her creation. The material used to make the False Florimell is "congealed," or "frozen" and mixed with "virgin wex," or "wax" to create a substance that resembles blood, but, of course, is not blood (III.viii.6, 152 [nn 2, 5]). Spenser's concern lies within the difference between what is real and what "seemd to the eye" (III.viii.6). By relating to readers the grossness of the interior, he undermines the notion that only ideal beauty matters for women, which serves as a criticism of English Renaissance poets' creation and idealization of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress. Like the English Renaissance poet, the witch goes on to craft the False Florimell with stereotypical Petrarchan traits, including "two burning lampes" for her eyes that were "shyning like the skyes" and "golden wyre" for her hair (III.viii.7). Stephens rightly notes that this stanza "parodies the standard Petrarchan blazon"

(152 [n 11]). The witch's formation of the False Florimell with these physical characteristics represents the Renaissance poet's use of the "bad" Petrarchan conceits (Ruthven 189). Shakespeare literally mocks the use of these conceits through Orlando's poorly written poetry. Spenser, however, takes a more allegorical approach to the criticism of using Petrarchan conceits by fashioning the witch herself as a symbol for Renaissance poets who were reviving this Petrarchan convention.

In Book Three of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser criticizes the dangers of Petrarchism through these three cantos. Florimell's idealization in the beginning of the book places her as the object of sexual desire for men, which dangerously forces her to live almost as a fugitive to prevent falling prey to one of these men. The son's lust for Florimell represents a perversion of Petrarchan love which can lead to submitting completely to one's lustful desires. Through these two dangers, Spenser attacks the Renaissance revival of the Petrarchan convention of idealizing the sonnet mistress and the Renaissance use of Petrarchan love to represent desire for sexual conquest. In allegorically using the witch's creation of Florimell to criticize Petrarchan conceits, Spenser criticizes the convention of Petrarchan conceits and denounces both methods of deception and attempts to ignore the woman's inherent value.

Although Shakespeare and Spenser take opposite approaches to criticizing Petrarchism, the necessary critiques that follow from their approaches reveal that they both identify the revival of Petrarchan love in Renaissance culture as a dangerous enterprise. Setting up Rosalind as the brazen anti-Petrarchan sonnet mistress forces Shakespeare to mock Petrarchism, for it prevents mutual passion in relationships. Alternatively, establishing Florimell as the perfect image of the Petrarchan sonnet mistress forces Spenser to consider the main consequence of idealization, which he views as undeniable lust. Both authors challenge Renaissance sonnet conventions in their works to show the reality of these repercussions. Shakespeare's mockery best suits the form of the comedic play, which would present audiences with vibrant representations of his attack on Petrarchism through the expressiveness of Rosalind's assertiveness and the exaggeration of Orlando's and Silvis's laments. On the other hand, Spenser's less comedic approach to his criticism best fits the form of poetry, in which his allegorical and often ambiguous language forces readers to dig beneath the surface and consider how Florimell's story serves as a critique of Renaissance society. Regardless of approach or form, both Shakespeare and Spenser, in framing the flawed Rosalind as assertive and witty and the perfectly beautiful False Florimell and gross and

deceptive, argue that idealizing women neither represents them accurately nor recognizes their beauty that transcends physical traits.

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**Representing Chicana Women in**  
***The Rain God and Woman Hollering Creek***

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Beginning in the 1970s, the Chicana feminist movement captured its impassioned audience in the midst of the greater Mexican-American movement. In this paper, I distinguish between Mexican-American as a broad ethnic and historical identity, and Chicano and Chicana as a political identification. These Chicano men and women, weary of the prejudices that they had experienced in American society, channeled their frustrations into a social justice effort to obtain equality and the ability to self-determine. Spirited Mexican-American women, however, empowered by their participation in the movement, also became acutely aware of the gender-motivated barriers to their ultimate independence. The Chicana experience within the Chicano movement was seemingly oxymoronic, as women fought for liberation while remaining oppressed by machista attitudes. From this severe repression blossomed the beginnings of Chicana feminist thought. The broader feminist debate had finally been extended to Chicana women, as they obtained a newfound sense of consciousness to the generations of systemic sexism that tainted their culture.

The concept of Chicana feminism was soon thereafter applied to Chicano literature, as both male and female authors promoted contrasting motives of the Chicana experience through their narratives. A common theme present in Chicano literature is the misrepresentation of female characters, which is often achieved

through the presentation of oversimplified Chicana women. This widespread trend can be attributed to the theme of Latino masculinity that contextualizes these novels. As a result of this machismo, Chicana women exist in the background, rarely to be brought to the forefront as full-fledged, dynamic characters. Novels such as *The Rain God* written by Arturo Islas maintain this stereotype, portraying female characters as paper dolls to be pitied, rather than admired. Through this representation, *The Rain God* paints a picture of the traditionalistic gender dynamic of Chicano culture. Islas delves into the centrality of Latino masculinity by subjecting the novel's Chicana women to instances of severe gender inequality, often at the hand of close neighbors and family. While their male counterparts are fiercely independent, these women are almost helpless without a patriarchal figure present. Due to the proliferation of this sexist portrayal, authors such as Sandra Cisneros have ventured to challenge it. In *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros calls the frailty of Chicana women into question by presenting strong, independent women as the lead characters of her stories. Drawing upon her experiences as a Chicana, Cisneros challenges gender norms that have largely governed her own life. She explores the possibility of self-determination for the Chicana as she empowers, rather than disfranchises, women in their relationships. These women are charged with the task of navigating their own

identities in the midst of rigid gender norms, and ultimately accomplish this feat through the rejection of the stereotype of Chicanas as incapable, reticent women. Through the comparative analysis of women in *The Rain God* and *Woman Hollering Creek*, we can see how separate representations of Chicana women, as either dependent or independent individuals, impact their sense of self-determination in the presence of Latino masculinity. In order to abandon their stereotype of weakness, Chicana women must have the freedom to make their own choices and be granted the dignity that they deserve.

A stark disparity between women in *The Rain God* and *Woman Hollering Creek* is the ability to take action in difficult situations. Characters like Juanita and Lola in *The Rain God* allow themselves to be taken advantage of by the men in their lives, rather than persist in their own efforts to obtain respect. Because of this, the two women remain subjected to the moral shortcomings of their husband and lover, Miguel Grande. The machista mentality of Miguel Grande leads him to have a false sense of dominance over both Juanita and Lola. For example, he believes that his wife is simple-minded, completely unsuspecting of his perpetual infidelity: "For the first twenty-five years of their marriage, Miguel Grande was content with Juanita's lack of worldly wisdom and the ease with which he could sleep with other women. His only self-imposed rule was not to spend the entire night with them, but to return

home to his wife and his sons feeling refreshed and independent” (Islas 61). Miguel Grande exploits Juanita’s apparent naivety in order to justify his need to have sex with other women. Her “lack of worldly wisdom” creates an image of Juanita as a background fixture, too unintelligent to take notice to her husband’s obvious sins. In *Chicana Feminist Thought*, an anonymous author highlights the problematic portrayal of the Chicana as ignorant, stating, “She is kept in a closed shell, protected from all the ‘evils’ in the world by the men in her family” (82). The author explains that this shielding of reality leads the Chicana to be readily influenced by the dominant male figures in her life because she is seemingly incapable of thinking for herself. As in the case of Juanita, the Chicana becomes helpless to the actions of a man and behaves as a bystander in the midst of conflict. Furthermore, Miguel Grande’s facade of commitment to his family is criticized by the description of his “self-imposed rule,” which he utilizes to warrant adultery as a basic right he is granted as the man of the household. Through Miguel Grande’s complete lack of respect for Juanita, Islas pointedly mocks the spiritual union of marriage in a machista world.

Chicana writer Cherríe Moraga provides an explanation for the habit of Chicano men to use sexism in managing their emotional vulnerability. Because marginalized members of society are often regarded as feeble, the masculinity of the Chicano man becomes

severely threatened. Therefore, he seeks to belittle those who will readily comply with his order to fortify his injured ego (Cloud 90). This expectation of an unequal partnership between a Chicano man and his female counterpart thus becomes internalized by the Chicana. As a result of this twisted dynamic, the Chicana enters a subservient role in her dealings with male relatives: “[Chicano men]...do not think twice about always being served first or always returning home after a night of partying away the money the women have earned to find their rooms clean, their beds made and their clothes neatly folded and put away” (Cloud 89). The patriarchal backbone of traditional Mexican-American culture remains intact by the Chicana’s acceptance of sexism, despite the exploitation upon which it heavily relies.

Similarly, Juanita’s best friend, Lola, is also subjected to mistreatment at the hand of Miguel Grande, her lover. When Miguel Grande sees Lola dancing with other men at social gatherings, he immediately becomes aggravated by her flirtatious demeanor. Infuriated by her freedom as a single woman, Miguel Grande believes that Lola is his property and no one else’s: “He stared at her with rage. He could not understand how she could speak to him like that. He wanted to kill her and felt she should be begging him for mercy after all he had given up for her. He did not know why he couldn’t bring himself to tell her the things she did hurt him deeply” (Islas 70-71). Miguel

Grande is completely perplexed by Lola's defiant response to his attempt to assert his dominance over her. Despite his overwhelming obsession with Lola, he views her as a sacrifice, and thinks of his love as a "gift" to an undeserving, lonely woman. His intense anger is only heightened by his inability to articulate his jealous feelings to Lola, as it would compromise his manhood. While this passage seemingly points towards the strength of the Chicana in challenging the traditional power structure between men and women, Lola's tactics in establishing her independence only serve to bolster Miguel Grande's abounding confidence: "When he forced her to the couch, she knew she had won. Men were easy to deal with sexually. Without a word and very quickly she took off her clothes, and he was at her. Her knowledge of these mysteries helped her say several times without meaning it, 'Hurt me, Miguel, hurt me.' She moaned as if indeed he were and, in that way, gave him the illusion that he was in control again" (Islas 71). In this passage, the primacy of the Chicano man's needs before those of a woman's are emphasized. The repetition of the words "hurt me" compel the reader to pity Lola, as she twistedly allows Miguel Grande to feel empowered by her physical pain. Chicana poet Rina Rocha comments on this disturbing phenomenon, which is reflected by the actions of Lola and Miguel Grande, in her poem "To the Penetrator:" "your eyes bite / and your words cut / But I like the pain... / you tease

me / on to the edges of my brain / then / you soothe me with / your hands / and I uncoil my thoughts / ...and I hate the love I feel for you.” This paradox of affection and affliction, of love and pain, is frequently seen in Chicano literature, as Chicana women wrestle with their sexual desires for men that prey upon the intensity of their emotions (Ordóñez 79). When a Chicana woman gives into her longing for love, the power of emotional manipulation is then handed to the Chicano man. *The Rain God* spotlights the regularity of male domination in Chicano culture: for Lola to gain a sense of autonomy, she must first grant this feeling of dominance to Miguel Grande. Martínez further articulates this concept of the Chicana as secondary: “Despite the hard life faced by the working class Chicana...she is expected to live according to attitudes and prejudices imposed by sexism” (33). Because of the sexist disposition of Chicano culture, Lola is perpetually a second-class individual, forever less important than her male counterpart. This principle, thus, infiltrates into all aspects of her life—even her sexual relationships.

While in *The Rain God*, Islas portrays the Chicana as defenseless to the commands of a “superior” man, Cisneros presents a different persona in her female characters in *Woman Hollering Creek*. For Cisneros, the Chicana is powerful, a woman who takes action and determines her own fate. The Chicana characters in Cisneros’ stories carry the spirit of *El Movimiento* for Chicano liberation as independent,

dynamic women who demand the right of autonomy. In her publication *Regeneración*, leading Chicana feminist Francisca Flores discusses the burgeoning identity of the liberated Chicana: “[Chicanas] can no longer remain in a subservient role or as auxiliary forces...The issue of equality, freedom, and self-determination of the Chicana—like the right of self-determination, equality, and liberation of the Mexican [Chicano] community—is not negotiable” (García 5). Likewise, Moraga expands upon the motivation of the Chicana to deliver herself from the ties of sexism in her feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, proclaiming, “I am the welder. I understand the capacity of heat to change the shape of things. I am suit to work within the realm of sparks out of control. I am the welder. I am taking the power into my own hands” (Moraga, quoted in Cloud 84). One such character that effectively reverts the gender power dynamic is Clemencia, a Chicana woman that has an affair with a white man named Drew. In the chapter “Never Marry a Mexican,” Cisneros creates a unique situation in which the dominant partner in the relationship is the woman. Clemencia recalls her tumultuous affair, asserting her dominance over Drew: “You’re nothing without me. I created you from spit and red dust. And I can snuff you between my finger and thumb if I want to. Blow you to kingdom come. You’re just a smudge of paint I chose to birth on canvas. And when I made you over, you were no longer a part of her, you were

all mine...Not an inch did I give back" (Cisneros 75). The diction utilized in this passage conjures an image of Clemencia as a powerful creator. Because of Clemencia's supremacy, Drew is reduced to a miniature object that can fit in her hand. She performs the actions, while he is helplessly acted upon—a stark contrast to the power system at play with Juanita, Lola, and Miguel Grande in *The Rain God*. For Cisneros, the woman's actions dictate the man's existence—an impossible reality within traditional Chicano culture, as "most Chicanas have been pre-conditioned (brainwashed) into the idea that they cannot speak up or be smarter than their men" (Anonymous 82). Through an exaggerated presentation of Clemencia's power over Drew, Cisneros calls attention to the necessity for Chicana women to be liberated from injurious stereotypes.

By challenging the conventional image of the Chicana as a defenseless creature to be pitied, Cisneros simultaneously expresses her fervent support for a lifelong aspiration of countless Chicana women before her—the empowerment of the Chicana in literature. Like-minded advocates for Chicana feminism push similar ideals of gender equality, in an effort to transform sexist sentiments within their culture. In her collection of essays entitled *Nepantla*, Chicana writer Pat Mora vocalizes her personal ambitions for the Chicana as a progressive "desert woman," announcing, "Much as I want us, my daughters, my

niece, Chicanas of all ages, to carry the positive aspects of our culture with them for sustenance, I also want us to question and ponder what values and customs we wish to incorporate into our lives, to continue our individual and our collection evolution” (53). In this way, Mora daringly signals at the elephant in the room, whispering at her fellow Chicanas to hold close the principles of moral soundness that have positively shaped their lives, but to disparage those that have limited their potential. Mora understands that this “evolution” is somewhat radical, given the traditionalistic gender dynamic that dominates Mexican-American culture, and thus encourages widespread solidarity among Chicana women: “We can learn from the desert, from the butterflies and snakes around us, how vulnerable a creature is in transition. We can offer one another strength and solace, protection from harsh elements, from the painful cold of sexism...the space for exploration” (53). Cisneros, in her creation of maverick women like Clemencia, taps into this uncharted territory of the empowered Chicana, contributing to a revolutionized understanding of Mexican-American women in similar written works.

Like Clemencia, another female character in *Woman Hollering Creek* that defies the Chicana stereotype is Inés Zapata, wife of Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. In the chapter “Eyes of Zapata,” a

young Inés abandons the traditional gender norms of her culture, displaying her feminine power to a male suitor:

“Love? We don’t say that word. For you it has to do with stroking with your eyes what catches your fancy, then lassoing and harnessing and corralling. Yanking home what is easy to take. But not for me...You were handsome, yes, but I didn’t like handsome men, thinking they could have whomever they wanted. I wanted to be, then, the one you could not have. I didn’t lower my eyes like the other girls when I felt you looking at me” (Cisneros 109).

In this passage, Inés challenges the institution of Latino masculinity by a simple glance. Young ladies are meant to politely shift their eyes down when being given male attention; Inés, however, maintains her defiant stare towards the young man. With a single action, Inés criticizes the restraining societal expectations of the Chicana: “From birth, her life is a predestined pattern...She goes through high school acquiring a strong sense of competition with other Chicanas for the attention of the boys...she is expected to become a wife and mother...” (Martínez 32). Through her own experiences, Mora provides a practical context for the expectations set forth for the Chicana as a result of the discriminatory attitudes that surround her, stating, “[My mother] tells me that when she was first married and lived in what became home to her four children, she would clean all day. In the late afternoon, she would sit and study the straightness of picture frames and curtains...Given how intelligent my mother is, I’ve always regretted that she wasn’t given the opportunity...to attend college” (80). In the past,

the Chicana solely existed within the strict confines of the household, living for the benefit of her husband and children. However, by use of rhetorical question, Inés rejects this stereotypical representation of Chicana women. She does not want to partake in the machista idea of “love,” as it primarily consists of conquering the hearts of naive and vulnerable young women. The words “lassoing and harnessing and corralling” paint a picture of the Chicano man as a wild cowboy, carelessly reigning in Chicana women at his leisure. The man, aware of his attractive appeal, expects Inés to melt at the catch of his gaze. Instead, Inés mocks his machista attitude by becoming an unattainable object of his affection, an outrageous move for a Chicana. Despite her efforts to achieve gender equality, the Chicana is often stripped of her dignity by her male counterpart: “The Chicana may be working 16 hours a day to support her children, but she will still be viewed as a sexual object, rather than a human being” (Martínez 33). In response to this dilemma, Inés daringly asserts her own dominance, proclaiming that she is not a prize to be won by a man, but an independent, confident woman.

Another contrast that can be drawn between women in *The Rain God* and *Woman Hollering Creek* is the extent to which the women are comfortable in their own skin. In *The Rain God*, Juanita prevents herself from the ability to feel completely (whether it be sadness, happiness, or

love). Once Juanita learns about her husband's longtime infidelity, she restrains her inner anger and even pities Lola. For Juanita, having a husband as a partner—rather than a lover—takes precedence over her own feelings: "When Miguel returned to her Juanita welcomed him back with open arms. She promised herself to learn what pleased him in bed and to devote more of her free time to him instead of to friends and social activities...he started going out on Friday nights without telling her where he was going or when he would return...She continued to see to it that he ate well, and washed and ironed his clothes as diligently as before" (Islas 103). This passage outlines the plight of the Chicana as she is confined to the household. Despite Miguel Grande's unfaithfulness to Juanita, she is unable to stop caring for him and performing her duties as his wife. Martínez outlines this dynamic of Chicano family relations, stating, "Eventually, the Chicana will marry and become pregnant...After one, two or three children, it is likely that her husband will leave the home...Even if he doesn't leave the home, the situation is very hard and psychological tension grows between the couple" (32). Juanita attempts to ease this "psychological tension" by going about her life as normal, despite knowing that her husband and best friend have committed adultery in her midst. She retreats to performing daily rituals (cooking and cleaning for her husband), which are seemingly ingrained into who she is; without them, her identity is

lost. In this way, the woman cannot exist without the man—she must be attached to him so that she may have a purpose. Juanita’s desperation to preserve a morsel of their marriage leads her to alter who she is in order for her husband to be pleased. In distancing herself from others, Juanita acts as a mere shadow of her husband, an undefined figure that helplessly follows his every move. Because Juanita is incapable of allowing herself to become infuriated by Miguel Grande’s infidelity, she feels compelled to alter her own actions, rather than dare to separate herself from her cheating husband.

*Woman Hollering Creek* entirely challenges the rigid household structure of Mexican-American culture, as it is presented in *The Rain God*. Cisneros introduces a unique female character named Felice, an unmarried woman who assists a young mother named Cleófilas flee an abusive home. Cleófilas is shocked by the unapologetic nature of Felice, and soon envies her independence: “Everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup. A pickup, mind you, but when Cleófilas asked if it was her husband’s, she said she didn’t have a husband. The pickup was hers. She herself had chosen it. She herself was paying for it” (Cisneros 55). For Felice, the pickup acts as a tangible symbol of resistance—a physical rejection of the stringent societal norms of the Chicana. The repetition of “hers” and “herself” emphasize Felice’s possession over not only the pickup truck, but her

own identity. However different from the stereotypical woman, Felice is comfortable with who she is, free from the restraints of a man. Cleófilas' incredulity at Felice's pickup only serves to deepen her own desire to attain freedom. Because her life has been determined primarily by the men around her (her husband, father, and brothers), Cleófilas craves this spontaneity and the ability to self-determine. Martínez comments on the vehicles that serve to purposefully restrain the Chicana, as she lacks control over her own life: "...she is expected to live according to attitudes and prejudices imposed by sexism. These include ideas about virginity, false definitions of femininity and the double standard (one standard of sexual behavior for women, a different standard for men)" (33). Felice actively opposes these sexist principles by redefining femininity, which is clearly seen through her ownership of a pickup. Unlike Juanita, Felice is completely unafraid to fully release her emotions, regardless of who is present: "Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy...Pain or rage, perhaps, but not a hoot like the one Felice had just let go. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, Felice had said" (Cisneros 56). Felice permits herself to openly feel happiness, sadness, or rage. Her ability to act upon these impulses is reflective of her deep sense of independence, which she expresses vocally. Mora reflects upon the necessity of an emotional liberation for Chicana women, pondering,

“How do we create space for ourselves to be ourselves, our...Chicana selves? Space in ourselves to hear ourselves, space free of the pollution of bigotry and bias, space free of contemporary colonizers. Space for play and dance” (67). From this complete release of self-doubt, the Chicana is empowered to become her most vibrant self, sentient of her feelings and confident enough to act upon them. For Cisneros, Felice serves as the symbol of the new Chicana—a woman with a powerful voice, free from the chains of societal repression.

Through her presentation of the Chicana as a dynamic, fully formed individual, Cisneros directly challenges Islas’ depiction of female characters as “paper dolls.” At the end of *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros describes her deep desire to alter the damaging stereotype of the Chicana, stating, “...I want them to be women who make things happen, not women who things happen to...Not men powerful and passionate versus women either volatile and evil, or sweet and resigned. But women. Real women. The ones I’ve loved all my life...The ones I’ve known everywhere except on TV, in books and magazines...Passionate and powerful, tender and volatile, brave. And, above all, fierce” (161). In this heartfelt passage, Cisneros cries out to society, pleading for the end of prolific Chicana stereotyping in the media. She proclaims that the Chicana is not a pitiful symbol—a lost cause that could have once been an opportunity for great change.

Rather, she nostalgically recalls her own memories of Chicana women, and urges the return to this forgotten idea through her complex representation of Chicana experiences. Because of authors like Sandra Cisneros, the common depiction of the Chicana as secondary to her male counterpart is effectively challenged. Unlike Islas who primarily maintains the Chicana stereotype of weak, dependent women throughout his stories, Cisneros forces her readers to pay attention to this injustice through the presentation of fiercely independent individuals. Unlike Juanita and Lola who remain trapped in their situations, Clemencia, Inés, and Felice resist the gender power dynamic within the Chicano culture. As a result, these spirited female characters are brought to the forefront so that their power is incapable of being ignored. In this way, Cisneros provides critical commentary on the current state of Chicana representation—for the Chicana to receive the dignity that she deserves, she must be portrayed as strong and independent, capable of both self-acceptance and self-determination.

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***Working Girl* and Nancy Fraser**

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Brought to the world in 1988, Mike Nichols' film *Working Girl* portrays the struggle of working-class Staten Island native Tess McGill to break into the corporate world of Manhattan. She faces the schemes of her well-to-do female boss Katharine Parker, the (not unwelcome) advances of Jack Trainer, and the (very unwelcome) harassment from various other male workers. The film serves as a comment on the contemporary brand of feminism known as neoliberal feminism. In order to understand this commentary, we must investigate precisely what this "neoliberal feminism" is. Nancy Fraser explains how the feminism of the mid-twentieth century evolved into the variety portrayed in *Working Girl*. Postwar (that is, WWII) feminism took its aim at "state-organized capitalism" and the gendered assumptions that lay in government conceptions of aid and wage (556). The state-run economy doled out "stigmatized poor relief" to women and children, while "workers" (men) received "respectable social insurance" (706). This was due to the schema of the "family wage," the idea that men were "the principal, if not the sole, economic support of his family, and whose wife's wages, if any, were supplemental" (706). This left women out of the economic, cultural, and political spheres that men dominated. To remedy these exclusions, second-wave feminism identified three goals: redistribution of economic power to women, recognition of

women in culture, and representation of women in politics. The ultimate goal was emancipation from sexist government control.

In feminism's struggle for emancipation from oppressive state policies, its call for freedom was co-opted into the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism is the strain of capitalism that arose around the 1980s, replacing the welfare state and public provision with "personal responsibility" and "the lean, mean, 'competition state'" (557). This new economic philosophy embraced the feminist critique of the family wage with open arms, birthing a feminism that was reinvented in "market-friendly" terms (34). Neoliberalism's bond with feminism churned out a philosophy of liberation that focused largely on recognition over redistribution as it built "a new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women's waged labour" (558). Women's subordination became "discrimination that prevents talented women from rising to the top" which "validates the entire corporate imaginary"(34). Rather than questioning the systems that disadvantage these women in the first place, neoliberal feminism posits that with enough hard work, any woman has the potential to be a good earner for her family. While potentially uplifting on a personal scale, this way of thinking only gives capitalism more bodies to perform labor that largely benefits the 1%. Opportunities for "breaking the glass ceiling" that are central to the neoliberal feminist romance are largely limited to

middle- or upper-class white women, leaving working class women and women of color behind.

*Working Girl* sharply criticizes this commodified, neoliberal feminism. The film is very aware of empty, classist promises neoliberal feminism offers, and exposes them throughout. The film offers sharp commentary on the deep classism that runs through corporate America, and also delivers a take on the traps in the secretarial field. However, the film fails to offer an effective criticism of the sexism in the workplace, complicating its feminist message. Both Katharine and Tess struggle with the unwanted sexual advances of their coworkers, and these men never face repercussions. Tess's ascension into the corporate world is also largely thanks to a male executive, Jack Trainer, rather than purely by her own skills.

The exposition throws us right into the classism that Tess faces on a day-to-day basis as a working-class woman in New York City. We open on a crowded ferry, where Tess McGill and her friend Cynthia are travelling from Staten Island to Manhattan for their downtown office jobs (0:02:11-46). Tess announces that she can't join Cynthia for lunch because she has speech class, to remedy her heavy Staten Island accent. Cynthia comedically responds, "What do you need speech class for, you talk fine!" exemplifying the stereotypical working-class accent that Tess must get rid of if she is to be taken seriously by corporate America

(0:03:04-7). Cynthia's interjection also serves as meta-commentary from the filmmakers; it's not the way Tess or Cynthia talks that is the problem, but rather the prejudice they face as a result. In addition, despite already having her degree (which we find out later in the film), Tess must be late to her own surprise birthday party because she has "Emerging Market Seminar" (0:03:13-5). Lacking a privileged background, she must use her own personal time to "improve" herself. However, even this isn't enough. In the office, we learn Tess has been trying to enter the "entree program" - likely some kind of business mentorship. However, her boss tells her she has been turned down again, reminding her, "You have to remember, you're up against Harvard and Wharton graduates, whadda you got, some night school, some secretarial time on your sheet?" (6:21-8). Despite Tess's ambition, her hard work is not enough to make up for her lack of prestigious background. A figure such as Tess would be praised by neoliberalism, as she is the pinnacle of taking "personal responsibility" for herself. However, Tess does not actually see any payoff; the meritocracy fails to recognize her merit.

When Tess is transferred to Katharine Parker's office, she is faced with everything she is not. Katharine is the neoliberal feminist ideal: an upper-class woman who broke through the glass ceiling and became an executive. She dresses in expensive clothes and speaks without an

accent - at least, without the stigmatized Staten Island accent. If it was not already clear how much this woman's upbringing has put her ahead of Tess, Katharine is actually the younger of the two. When Tess reveals she has just turned thirty, Katharine replies obliviously, "Really? Well I'll be thirty next Tuesday. We're practically twins" (14:00-2). It is not lost on Tess what this means. Katharine, in less time than Tess, has gone much further in her career. As Katharine discusses her expectations for Tess, she continues to flaunt her high status. She makes an indirect comment about Tess's attire, stating, "I consider us a team, Tess, and as such we have a uniform: simple, elegant, impeccable" implying this is not how Tess is currently dressed; she follows this with a quote from elite designer Coco Chanel, probably not even realizing designer clothing is inaccessible to Tess (0:15:21-9). Tess, however, senses this aloofness, and asks directly how she is dressed. Katharine, forced to recognize her privilege, can't even look at Tess when she responds, "You look terrific. You might want to rethink the jewelry." (0:15:37-9). In the bathroom, a forlorn Tess takes off her bracelets and wipes off her eyeshadow, considering how her appearance has been another token of her working-class background holding her back.

The climax of the class conflict between Tess and Katharine comes as Tess is helping Katharine prepare for a romantic ski getaway with the latter's boyfriend. Tess has just failed to secure Katharine the room

she wants in the lodge, so Katharine calls the owner (speaking in his native language) and uses her own status to secure the room. As she hangs up and confides to Tess her confidence in being proposed to that weekend, she quips, "Tess, you know, you don't get anywhere in this world by waiting for what you want to come to you. You make it happen. Watch me Tess. Learn from me." (0:23:54-24:02). Katharine, of course, does not realize how much of her own agency comes from her class privilege; she falsely believes she can simply pass on her moxie to Tess and that will fix her situation. Of course, the filmmakers are very aware of the irony of this situation. They even stage Tess below Katharine for this scene, the former kneeling on the ground looking up at the latter, indicating their stark difference in status. Still in this position, Katharine lies to Tess about the rejection of her radio purchase idea for the company, not revealing she plans to steal the idea for herself. This makes the next exchange even more outrageous. After Tess thanks Katharine for trying to make her idea work, Katharine has the audacity to redirect the situation to Tess's own agency. "Tess. Tess! Look at me. Who makes it happen?" Katharine asks in a patronizing manner, to which a slightly confused Tess responds "...I do" (0:24:25-35). As if speaking to a child, Katharine asks again, "Who does?" to which Tess responds insistently, "I do, I make it happen." (0:24:36-41). Katharine's affirmation is a clever foreshadowing of the main plot of the

film: "That's right. Only then do we get what we deserve." (0:24:41-44). Only when Tess realizes Katharine's dishonesty does she truly take Katharine's advice to heart. Within the neoliberal feminist schema, working class women can't just "make it happen" themselves unless they break the rules and lie, because the system is built against them.

Katharine's ski injury gives Tess an opportunity to "make it happen" by essentially pretending to be someone like Katharine. As Tess adopts aspects of Katharine's identity to pose as an executive, she reveals how deep the currents of classism run in the corporate world from the inside. She plays to the expectations of others, adopting her Staten Island accent when pretending to be her own secretary, and reverting to her "Katharine Parker" voice when posing as an executive (0:31:39-32:21). Unable to purchase expensive clothing of her own, she wears Katharine's, having a panic attack when she realizes just how much it costs to dress like her; Cynthia's response, "Six thousand dollars? It's not even leather!" to the price of Katharine's evening dress is funny but also brutally honest about how different classes of people conceive of the price of "nice" clothing (0:34:09-25). Tess has Cynthia cut her hair short like Katharine's, insisting that if "Ya wanna be taken seriously, you need serious hair" (0:35:01-4). Lacking a nice briefcase (Katharine has evidently taken hers on vacation) Tess must lie and say "I've lost my briefcase" rather than admit she can only afford the cheap

expandable file she carries (0:46:04-5). As Tess undergoes her transformation, even donning Katharine's glasses, she realizes how much success in the business world is due to your appearance, rather than your ideas. More and more, Katharine's tone-deaf Coco Chanel quote is turning out to be true: people will only notice and respect you if you dress well.

As Tess faces pushback from everyone in her life about the precarious turn her career has taken, she never hesitates to justify her course of action. When Cynthia tells her she is ruining her life, she quickly fires back, "No, I'm trying to make it better. I'm not gonna spend the rest of my life working my ass off and getting nowhere just because I followed rules that I had nothing to do with setting up ok?" (1:02:16-27) Tess, as well as the filmmakers, do not feign ignorance to the system that is stacked against people like her, against working class women. She even fearlessly defends herself to Oren Trask, who, clueless, asks why she did not tell the truth about her radio idea in the boardroom when Katharine confronted her. "Well, no one was going to listen, sir, not to me," she correctly insists, "I mean you can bend the rules plenty once you get upstairs, but not while you're trying to get there, and if you're someone like me, you can't get there without bending the rules" (1:44:22-32). Tess has sharply identified the central

paradox of corporate success, one that only she can see as the one bending the rules.

Related to issues of class is the trap of secretarial work. Part of the neoliberal feminist fantasy is the idea that you can work your way up a company, starting from the bottom and (with enough elbow grease) ending up at the top. However, as a secretary, Tess is locked out of many opportunities for advancement. Daphne Spain's *Gendered Space* identifies the limitations placed on the knowledge of secretaries. Secretaries are in charge of the flow of information, but their own personal use of this information is strictly regulated. As quoted from a secretary rule book, it is the boss, not the secretary, who owns the information. In fact, "secretaries are paid *not* to use their knowledge for personal gain, but only for their employers' gain." The experiences gained by secretaries are not owned by them, and thus cannot be used to gain promotions. In addition, any supposed "original" idea that comes from a secretary will immediately be met with suspicion, since it is possible the secretary actually encountered the idea from someone else (119).

This is the scrutiny Tess faces as a secretary. Her great ideas are never taken seriously as her own; she has no ownership over her knowledge. She has brilliant ideas and often gives her bosses advice on stock options, but clients "don't wanna hear it from a secretary"

(0:04:53-5). Secretarial time is not considered a valuable asset on Tess's resume for the entree program (0:6:21-8). When she goes to Katharine with her radio purchase idea for Trask Industries, hoping for understanding from a female boss, Katharine is immediately suspicious. She questions Tess rigorously, inquiring, "No chance you overheard it, say, on the elevator? Somewhere?" (0:20:34-40). When Tess insists it is her own, original idea, Katharine steals it for her own rather than give Tess credit. If not for Tess's scheming, there would be no consequences for this, for who would believe a secretary? When Katharine confronts Tess in the Trask Industries board meeting, she maintains this strategy, exclaiming "And this woman is MY SECRETARY!" as proof Tess stole *Katharine's* idea (1:31:55-6). Tess even knows her business partner and lover, Jack Trainer, would not have entertained her ideas if he thought she was a secretary, as male bosses largely see secretaries as potential sexual partners and nothing else (1:38:49-58).

After all these experiences, Tess finally becomes the boss and begins to change how secretaries are treated. With a new job at Trask Industries, she has her own secretary. Knowing how it feels to be on the other side of the desk, Tess forges a much more egalitarian relationship with her secretary than other bosses, insisting her secretary, or "assistant" as the woman likes to be called, only get her coffee if she's getting some for herself (1:49:32-6). As the camera pans out to a

broader view of the building and the cityscape, we are left with the impression that this is the beginning of the new era, when workers will be more highly respected in the workplace regardless of their positions.

This uplifting, egalitarian message is complicated by the romantic and sexual relationships between male and female coworkers throughout the film. Both Tess and Katharine face constant harassment from male coworkers, the perpetrators of which never face any consequences. Tess is fired from her job at the beginning of the film for publicly calling her boss a pimp after he sets her up for an “interview” that is really a hookup. The HR employee who places Tess in a new job says nothing about the sexual harassment Tess has faced, only dryly commenting, “Tess, Tess, Tess, you don’t get ahead in this world by calling your boss a pimp” (0:11:30-7). The repeated message is that the sexual advances of men are simply something standard in the corporate world, and the agenda is not to end these sexual advances but to deal with them effectively. At Katharine’s party, she must pretend to entertain the sleazy seduction of a lower employee. Tess remarks how “smooth” Katharine is in dealing with this sexual advance, to which Katharine replies off-handedly, “Never burn bridges. Today’s junior prick, tomorrow’s senior partner” (0:19:00-4). This illustrates first how easy it is for men to work their way up the corporate ladder, as opposed to how difficult it is for women. It also shows how little

consequence men's sexual conduct has on this ascension. By contrast, if a woman wants to advance like Katharine has, she must not rock the boat and outright reject these advances. Women can only rise up in the business world by earning the sexual approval of men, thus reducing their ability on yet another score to make a name for themselves in their own right.

Given the traumatic experience Tess has with Bob "from arbitrage," a sensible viewer seeking poetic justice would think there would be no men involved in Tess's rise to success. This is sadly not true. Tess's success in impressing the men at Trask Industries is largely due to the male executive, Jack Trainer, she recruits as her business partner. Jack is her in into the corporate world; he is the one who makes her ideas heard by other corporate men and even gives her a real briefcase (0:50-17-27). When Tess tries to set up a solo encounter with Oren Trask at his daughter's wedding, Jack quickly becomes accusatory, frantically asking, "Are you trying to fly this thing without me?" due to his own insecurities about his position (1:04:27-30). However, the kicker occurs when he repeatedly insists, "You need me, you know...You need me at that meeting" (1:05:23-5; 1:05:29-30). Tess's partnership with Jack is where a large part of her authority comes from; without him, no one would listen to her, and she knows this. When Tess is exposed by Katharine and kicked out of the deal, it is only Jack's testimony to her

character which saves her, as no one will listen to her side of things. As Katharine and Oren Trask are about to go up the elevator, Jack refuses to join them, saying “Not without her” (1:39:55). Trask immediately assumes that Jack’s judgement is sexual rather than moral, crudely scolding, “And you shouldn’t go letting your Johnson make business decisions for you” (1:40:08-9). It is only Jack’s support which gives Tess the ability to win back her deal.

How can we understand Tess’s dependence on a male figure in terms of the commentary on neoliberal feminism? Tess’s relationship with Jack, which could be seen by some as an equal romantic partnership, could be a remedy to the purely sexual advances of other businessmen. There is no reason, after all, that Tess cannot have both professional success and romantic happiness. However, is Tess truly emancipated if she needed a man to do it? Simone de Beauvoir weighs in on this point. In her landmark book, *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir shares the following anecdote: “Some years ago a well-known woman refused to permit her portrait to appear in a series of photographs especially devoted to women writers; she wished to be counted among the men. But in order to gain this privilege she made use of her husband’s influence! Women who assert that they are men lay claim nonetheless to masculine consideration and respect” (162). This is a fairly accurate analogue for Tess’s situation, as Tess succeeded in a

male-dominated field but needed the approval and alliance of men to do it. This, unfortunately, reinforces de Beauvoir's theory that woman is the Other, that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (163). In a film which offers a complex commentary on a new form of feminist, this is a blunder of extraordinary proportions. Too focused on the classist nuances of neoliberal feminism, *Working Girl* forgot about crucial aspects of "feminism," namely that you shouldn't have to rely on men to get to the top.

In conclusion, *Working Girl's* feminism is much more complicated than it seems on the surface. Within a highly nuanced commentary on the classist feminism of the day, the film stumbles in terms of actually offering a solution to the sexist hegemony of the corporate world. Lutz keeps his job, junior pricks become senior partners, Jack Trainer helps Tess to the top, and Oren Trask's questionable remarks are left unquestioned. Though the film was made in 1988, the issues of sexual harassment and male dominance it brings up ring quite true 30 years later in 2018. One can only hope that contemporary movements like #MeToo and Time's Up will continue to draw attention to the lack of action on the part of ending workplace harassment, and will allow us to ask honest questions about the future of the shared workplace of men and women.

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