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Gender Research and Scholarship

Through

Gendered

Lenses

Edited by

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Gender Studies Program—University of Notre Dame 2012

Cover design by Caitlyn Kelly with Kyla Wargel

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Acknowledgements

We would like to conclude by extending our appreciation to the contributors to this year's journal and to all of those who submitted their brilliant research for consideration. We hope that this volume demonstrates the

diversity and talent that characterizes gender research among undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

For the third year in a row, the Gender Studies Honor Society is proud to present *Through Gendered Lenses*, *an Undergraduate Academic Journal of Scholarship and Research*. From American Studies and Anthropology to Psychology and Peace Studies, the wide variety of submissions reviewed this year is truly a testament to the growing presence of gender-related scholarship at Notre Dame. As members of the Gender Studies Honor Society, we are pleased to afford our four authors due recognition and exposure for their distinctive work in the field of Gender Studies. Their papers on gender, as it pertains to Education, Art History, Political Science, and Literature, exemplify the interdisciplinary nature and pervasive relevance of Gender Studies. We believe that there is something in this journal to interest everyone, and we hope that you find this journal to be as engaging, stimulating, and entertaining as we do!

Best,
Kyla Wargel
Maureen Choman
Jennifer Gast

The Gender Studies Program

Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary academic program in the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue a supplementary major or a minor. Gender Studies analyzes the significance of gender and the related issues of sex, sexuality, race, class, and religion. The Gender Studies program approaches these issues holistically through the lenses of arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Students in the Gender Studies program develop a skill set that allows them to analyze the methods and theories applied to gender and its related issues throughout history and in contemporary society. The Gender Studies program also teaches students to apply their classroom instruction to everyday life, including personal, familial, professional, and civic situations. The Gender Studies program complements the University's Catholic identity through the study of the intersection of gender and religion and the study of how this interaction shapes ethics, culture, and politics. Alongside our diverse array of courses drawn from across the University, our summer internship and academic-credit internship programs emphasize the applications of a Gender Studies education. The dynamic and growing field of Gender Studies offers students the chance to analyze existing institutions and to work to improve relations in all sectors of life. Gender impacts every person in our international community, which makes it a natural and relevant supplemental field of study for students with any primary major.

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

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Undergraduate Gender Studies Honor Society

Iota Iota Iota, or Triota, is an Undergraduate Honor Society composed of sophomore, junior, and senior Gender Studies majors and minors. Formed in 2006, Triota represents 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. Members of Triota act as liaisons between the Gender Studies Program faculty and administrators and the Program's students and continually identify ways to improve the academic quality of the Gender Studies experience for Notre Dame undergraduate students. *Through Gendered Lenses* is their main project throughout the year. Additionally, members of Triota represent and promote the Gender Studies major and minor at various campus events and host a study break each semester during finals week for all undergraduate majors and minors.

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

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The Effects of School-Based Sex Education on the Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes of Black Adolescent Females: Experience, Beliefs, and Suggestions for Future Programs

Clare Parks

Clare Parks (Class of 2012) is a Psychology major from Kiawah Island, South Carolina. Her paper was written for the capstone course of her minor, Education, Schooling, and Society (ESS). Clare became interested in the topic of school-based sex education in a psychology course as an undergraduate at Notre Dame, where she read evidence suggesting that many schools in the U.S. teach our youth about sexuality in a manner that biases white males while neglecting the position of females as well as racial and sexual minorities. This socially unjust tendency is one of the many factors that contribute to the disproportionately high rates of unwanted teen pregnancy and disease in the U.S., and this paper aims to highlight the unique and often overlooked perspective of the population most vulnerable to these poor health outcomes: young Black females. Clare hopes the results of this paper can inform policy amidst the current polemic surrounding school-based sex education programs, so that our nation's youth can be properly educated about healthy sexuality in an environment that caters to all types of backgrounds, including gender, race, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

The Effects of School-Based Sex Education on the Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes of Black Adolescent Females: Experience, Beliefs, and Suggestions for Future Programs
Clare Parks

ABSTRACT: The United States has the second highest teen pregnancy rate of all developed countries, and 15-24 year olds account for almost half of the 18.9 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) each year. Furthermore, half of black teenage females in the U.S. have at least one of the four most common STIs, compared with only one in five white or Latina Teens. These high rates have led to a long-standing dispute over abstinence education versus comprehensive sex education in our nation's public schools. Abstinence education, which has long been promoted by the government, teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside a heterosexual marriage as the expected standard for all students and emphasizes the benefits of abstaining. Comprehensive sex

education programs promote abstinence while also exploring the context for and meanings involved in sexual activity and teaching about contraception use. It is widely believed by psychologists that comprehensive sex education is more effective in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and STIs, as well as in delaying sexual initiation, than abstinence education. The effectiveness of comprehensive education, however, remains in dispute, due to the continuously increasing rates of teen pregnancy and STIs in minority youth.

Because data indicate that black adolescent females are the population most vulnerable to teen pregnancy and disease, this study explored the personal sexual education experiences of some of these students. A focus group consisting of five black females and one African-Indian currently enrolled at an alternative high school in the upper Midwest was conducted, and questions were asked about the sex education they received, how it affected their current sexual attitudes and behaviors, and what they suggest for future sex education curricula. The discussion that progressed illustrated how sex education is implements in various public schools and what effects these programs have on students' sexual experiences, while highlighting potential suggestions for the development of future sex education programs. This study aims to inform the issues surrounding school-based sex education, encouraging school systems to consider the severe vulnerability of certain minority populations, especially females, when designing and implementing programs.

Introduction

In 2008 and 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 39 in every 1,000 girls aged 15-19 gave birth in the United States, representing 10% of the four million births in the U.S. each year (CDC, 2011). Of these pregnancies, black and Latina teens were about two to three times more likely to give birth than white teens (CDC, 2011). These rates of teen childbearing, about nine times higher than most developed countries, cost the U.S. Healthcare system $9 billion annually (CDC, 2011). Furthermore, despite the fact that individuals ages 15-24 represent just 25% of the sexually experienced population in the U.S., they acquire almost half of all new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) annually (Weinstock, Berman & Cates, 2004). The 2009 Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report of the CDC suggests that some progress seen in previous years in the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents appears to be slowing down and perhaps even reversing (CDC, 2009).

In addition to the alarmingly high rates of teen pregnancy and adolescent STIs in the U.S., there are also clear racial disparities, with minority adolescents facing the heaviest burden. Rates of STIs, for example, are significantly higher in minority groups: in 2009, 1,816 of every 100,000 black adolescents aged 15-19 reported having gonorrhea, Chlamydia, or syphilis, compared to 420 Hispanic adolescents of the same age and 198 white adolescents (CDC, 2011). These discrepancies highlight the importance of effective and timely sex education programs for adolescents in order to prevent further spread of disease and unintended pregnancies while promoting healthy behavior in all races. The present study will focus on the school-based sex education experiences of minority high school females in order to evaluate what current methods, if any, effectively promote healthy sexual behavior in a population extremely vulnerable to teen pregnancy and disease.

Teen Pregnancy and STI Rates Across the Globe

There have been some significant improvements in the sexual reproductive health of American adolescents since the 1990s: teens have been waiting longer to initiate sexual activity than in the past, larger numbers of teens reported using contraceptives during last intercourse, and more teenage girls are learning how to effectively use the birth control pill (Kost, Henshaw, & Carlin, 2010; Abma, Martinez, & Copen, 2010; Santelli, Duberstein Lindberg, Finer, & Singh, 2007). However, American adolescents have much higher rates of pregnancy and STIs than their counterparts across the globe, despite similar levels of sexual activity (Santelli, Sandfordt, & Orr, 2008). For example, in 2007, the U.S. birth rate for females ages 15-19 was 42.5 births per 1,000 girls, whereas the teen birthrate in Canada and Spain was 13, the rate in Germany and France was 10, the rate in Italy was seven, and the rate in Japan and the Netherlands was five (Abma et al., 2010). Additionally, in 1997, the incidences of gonorrhea and syphilis were significantly higher in adolescents in the United States than in Western Europe—in fact, Russia was the only developed nation with higher age-specific rates for these STIs (Panchaud, Singh, Feivelson, & Darroch, 2000). There are several factors that have contributed to these global discrepancies in sexual reproductive health: American teens remain less likely than teens in European nations such as the Netherlands to use the birth control pill and emergency contraception (Abma et al., 2010; Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, & Knijn, 2008); American youth are more likely to carry their pregnancies to term (Schalet, 2011); and they also face an abundance of barriers in accessing contraception, as compared to sexually active teens in developed nations worldwide (Guttmacher Institute, 2010; Lehrer, Pantell, Tebb, & Shafer, 2007).

Some sociologists explain the disparities in global teen pregnancy and STD rates with the normalization of adolescent sexuality in European countries: after the sexual revolution of the 1960s, while teen sex began to be considered a normal part of development in many European cultures, it became an extremely

controversial issue for U.S. policymakers and educators and thus a taboo topic of conversation between parents and their children (Rose, 2005; Schalet, 2011; Santelli & Schalet, 2009). For example, before the sexual revolution, the majority of the Dutch population rejected acceptance of premarital sex just as most Americans did (Schalet, 2011). However, once research demonstrated that these views had drastically changed in the 1980s, and the general Dutch public no longer perceived premarital sex as morally wrong, media messages and policies regarding sexual health adapted, and Dutch culture slowly began to accept an open discourse about sexuality (Schalet, 2011). While Americans fought over policies concerning the availability of contraception and methods of sex education, religious leaders in the Netherlands were embracing oral contraception use, and discussions about sexuality were pervading the media, translating into more accessible contraceptives and decreasing teen birth rates (Schalet, 2011). Religious conservatives in America, on the other hand, initiated a federal sex education policy in the 1980s requiring schools to teach only abstinence until heterosexual marriage, and most American teens were reporting that they believed teen sex to be wrong through the 2000s (Schalet, 2011). These varying reactions to the sexual revolution help explain why European countries like the Netherlands have developed a more open construction of adolescent sexuality than Americans, which, in addition to greater accessibility to contraceptives, has led to lower teen birth and STI rates in those countries.

The tendency for Americans to associate sexual behavior with potential negative consequences, in addition to the high prevalence of religious devotion among U.S. adults, has led to the widespread belief that teen sex should be prevented (Schalet, 2011). First, it is widely accepted in the United States that sexual activity in the teenage years poses too many risks to the mental and physical health of our youth: research has associated early sexual activity with low self esteem in young girls, and the potential to contract a sexually transmitted infection is widely publicized (Michaud, 2006; CDC, 2010). This constant relationship between engaging in sexual activity and a number of

potential risks has made teen sex an act to which most of our population is opposed: even as acceptance of premarital sex grew in most U.S. religious groups after the sexual revolution, the majority of Americans, teens included, continued to report that sex between teenagers is always wrong (Schalet, 2010). Additionally, Americans are more likely to be devoutly religious than adults in the Netherlands, for example, which could influence Americans' beliefs about their children engaging in premarital sex (Schalet, 2011). The more religious an American is, the more likely that individual will be to disapprove of premarital sex. This attitude promotes the widespread condemnation of teen sex throughout our nation (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). These negative associations have left adolescent sexuality a hotly debated issue in the U.S., igniting decades of controversy over how it should be presented in our children's schools.

Sex Education in the U.S.: An Overview

In reaction to the sexual revolution, religious conservatives initiated a federal policy in the 1980s, requiring schools that wanted to receive government funding to teach students to abstain from sex until marriage. In 1998, based on the provisions of Section 510 of the 1996 Social Security Act, a total of $60 million of federal funding was spent on implementing these abstinence education programs in public schools (Santelli et al., 2006). Abstinence education is defined as having the "exclusive purpose" of teaching abstinence until heterosexual marriage as the "expected standard" for school children, while promoting monogamous relationships and providing evidence for the "likely" physical and psychological harms of sexual activity outside marriage (U.S. Social Security Act, §510(b)(2)). There are also two other federal-funding streams for abstinence programs: the Community-Based Abstinence Education of 2000 (CBAE; Title XI, Social Security Act §1110) and the Adolescent Family Life Act of 1981 (Title XX, Public Health Service Act), both of which also state the promotion of chastity as their primary goal (Administration for Children and Families, 2007).

Problems with Abstinence Education

However, research on abstinence education programs has shown that they do not increase rates of abstinence in adolescents (Trenholm et al., 2007), that they do not have any impact on the sexual behavior of teens (Kirby, 2007), that rates of pregnancy and STIs among students in these programs are unaffected (Underhill, Montgomery, & Operario, 2007), and, in some cases, that adolescents involved in these programs are less likely to use contraception and get tested for STIs when they do become sexually active (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001). Despite the wealth of evidence denying the effectiveness of abstinence education in preventing further spread of disease and unintended pregnancy, as of March 2010, funding for these programs was extended until 2014 (U.S. Social Security Act, §510(b)(2)).

Abstinence education programs also present some misleading information (Waxman, 2004) and promote hetero-normative values for a white patriarchal population (Santelli et al., 2006; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Ashcraft, 2006; Weis, 2000; Froyum, 2009). According to a report from the U.S. House of Representatives, some federally funded abstinence programs present deceptive information taught as "facts" about the effectiveness of contraceptives, risks of abortion, psychological and physical risks of sexual activity, and even human genetics (Waxman, 2004). For example, one curriculum taught students, "In heterosexual sex, condoms fail to prevent HIV approximately 31% of the time," whereas the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) consider latex condoms "highly effective" in preventing the transmission of HIV (CDC, 2003). Additionally, Bay-Cheng (2003) posits that several abstinence programs convey stereotypes of gender, race, and sexual orientation, perpetuating traditional gender roles in heterosexual relationships, portraying black adolescents as sexually deviant, and presenting heterosexuality as the norm, thus isolating a large portion of students with their characterization of sexuality and culture. Santelli and colleagues (2006) further propose that abstinence education programs are a violation of basic human rights: by denying adolescents adequate

access to sexual and reproductive health information and refusing to explore or even acknowledge other options besides abstinence, the government is eschewing its obligation to secure adolescents' rights to health and information, thus raising "serious ethical and human rights concerns" (78). The lack of accurate information as well as what some would consider biased representations of gender, race, and sexual orientation provided by abstinence education, presents a serious health concern for U.S. adolescents. These concerns are especially calamitous when considering the striking rates of teen pregnancy and age-specific STI's in U.S. youth, particularly in minority populations.

Problems with Other Methods of Sexual Education

Comprehensive sex education, though considered more effective in delaying sexual initiation in teens than abstinence education, remains flawed as well (Lindberg, Santelli, & Singh, 2006; Santelli & Schalet, 2009). Comprehensive programs aim to teach abstinence as the preferred choice of sexual activity for teens, while also providing relevant reproductive information, and their effectiveness in delaying sexual initiation is widely supported by research and health professionals (The Kaiser Foundation, 2002; Bleakley, Hennessy, & Fishbein, 2006; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Kirby, 2001). However, a number of researchers question whether the information taught by comprehensive curricula sufficiently communicates ways to achieve healthy sexuality in all teens, and whether these programs are being successfully implemented in schools (Kirby, 2001; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Schalet, 2011). Though comprehensive sex education has proven to be more effective than abstinence education in delaying sexual initiation and promoting safe sex when teens do engage in it, the high teen pregnancy and disease rates that remain in our country call into question whether schools could be doing even more to promote healthy sexual behavior, as is suggested by some data from Europe (Schalet, 2011; Santelli et al., 2006). Further still, many scholars wonder if the values conveyed by comprehensive programs are not inclusive enough to

penetrate the social barriers that ethnic minorities or LGBT students face, neglecting them just as frequently as abstinence education does (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Schalet, 2011). Still, comprehensive sex education programs remain the more effective option in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and STIs through school-based programs, and they fail to be implemented in the majority of our nation's schools.

Present Study: Purpose

In 2010, 29 states applied for Title V abstinence education funding, requiring them to teach abstinence exclusively and forbidding them to provide any comprehensive information about contraceptives or otherwise (SIECUS, 2011). In the state of Indiana, sex education must adhere to these guidelines, strongly emphasizing abstinence until heterosexual marriage as the "only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and other associated health problems" (Indiana Code 20-30-5, 2011). Although teen pregnancy rates in Indiana are lower than the national average, at 62 pregnancies per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 compared with the national average of 70 per 1,000 girls of the same age, Indiana teens are among the least likely in the nation to report having used a condom the last time they engaged in sex, and their STI rates, at 138 per 1,000 adolescents aged 15-19, are relatively high (CDC, 2011). These rates need to be reduced in order to promote the safety and health of Indiana youth and prevent further spread of disease, as well as unintended pregnancies. Though there are a number of factors that contribute to the high teen pregnancy and STI rates in the U.S., school-based sex education is undoubtedly a medium that could help improve our youth's sexual reproductive health if we identify more effective methods than those currently in use.

There is already a substantial amount of literature examining the effectiveness of school-based sex education due to the high numbers of schools still failing to implement comprehensive programs. The research is less abundant, though, in regards to evaluating how students perceive their sex education experiences. For this reason, I investigated the opinions of the

students themselves: what do some of Indiana's female adolescents think of their experiences with sex education? More specifically, if they could choose, what would their ideal sex education program teach them in school? Examining the students' wants and needs could guide the state of Indiana in designing an effective school-based sex education program; after all, the students are the individuals directly affected by these curricula each day.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Setting

The research was conducted at Hoover High School[*], an alternative high school in the upper Midwest. Hoover High School was created in 2010 in order to increase graduation rates and attendance of at-risk students in the area and to provide high quality education to under-served and often over-aged students. Of their approximately 360 students, 46% are black, 34% are white, 13% are Hispanic, 3% are multiracial, 2% are Native American, and 2% are Asian or Pacific Islander. Almost 60% of all students are qualified to receive lunch for free or at a reduced price (Indiana Department of Education, 2010).

Participants and Procedure

Participants were school females currently enrolled at Hoover High School, five black and one African-Indian, as data have shown high racial disparities in teen pregnancy and STI rates, especially in populations of lower socio-economic statuses (CDC, 2011; Lewis-Moss, Carmack, Sly, Roberts, & Wilson, 2010). All of the girls had engaged in sexual activity, two girls were pregnant at the time of the focus group, and one girl had been pregnant in the past, but miscarried. Only girls were interviewed because of the potential difficulties that could have arisen when discussing sex with both genders present. I recruited participants by familiarizing myself with the school and its students and by observing two "Positive Solutions" workshops for girls that take place two to three times per week during lunch hour with the school's social

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[*] Name has been changed.

worker. The goal of these workshops is to teach the girls how to solve conflicts with each other without violence and learn how to accept each other and themselves. The girls come on a voluntary basis as encouraged by the social worker. After observing two workshops, I asked the girls if they or their friends would be interested in helping with my research project on sex education experiences, and left the social worker with permission slips, reviewed by the school's principals, for them to take home. The following week, I returned, and I provided consent forms to the girls who had their permission slips filled out.

After the participants read and signed their consent forms, I told them that I was interested in hearing their sexual education experiences and that their honest answers were necessary to my research. I conducted a focus group to gain an understanding of what females in an at-risk setting in the upper Midwest are learning in school about sexual activity, how that has affected their behaviors and attitudes, and what they suggest for future programs. The girls and I spoke about their sex education experiences for one hour and ten minutes.

Measures

I asked the girls twenty questions about their experiences with sex education in school and about sexuality as a whole. Some examples of these questions were, "Who received sex education in school?"; "How was your experience in this class?"; "What were you happy that you learned?"; and "What would you teach younger girls about sex?" These questions led to an open discussion in which all the girls participated and provided me with valuable information about their lack of education on sexuality from school-based services.

<div align="center">Results</div>

This focus group illustrated the school-based sex education experiences of a number of teen girls in the upper Midwest area. It highlighted the several hardships that young black females must endure and the obstacles they face in the way of healthy sexual behavior. These girls' responses will be an important addition to school-based sex education research, as they expose potential ways

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to reach a population extraordinarily vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and disease through the words of various community members.

Sex Education Instruction

Because all of the girls were attending a different school at the time they received sex education, it was difficult to assess if one program--abstinence or comprehensive--was more effective than the other. Jasmine had received sex education at school in a neighboring state, and the rest of the girls received it at schools scattered throughout their home state. However, they all expressed that the only sexuality class they remember receiving was one class period during their freshman year of high school. All but one of the participants agreed that this class went into very little detail, prompting Nina to lament, "They really didn't teach. They just said don't have sex basically. You get STDs. You get pregnant. Um…that's about it."[×]

The girls also agreed that freshman year of high school was too late for the class to have any effects on their actions or beliefs regarding sexuality, with many suggesting that it should have started in 7th or 8th grade at the latest—in fact, they currently knew females as young as 6th grade engaging in sexual activity. They stated that what was taught in this class was poorly explained or not taken seriously by the students. Yvette had to repeatedly ask for help remembering what the word "abstinence," is, and the others who were familiar with the word were not necessarily taught its meaning. Nina said, "They always say that word [abstinence,] but they should have broken it down more. 'Cause that word really does mean something…they just should have broken it down for us." Thus, the few sex education programs that did exist at the schools these girls attended were ineffective in communicating relevant messages to students about healthy sexual behavior and had no effect on their subsequent actions and beliefs regarding sexuality.

[×] Quotes have been adjusted for grammar.

Effects of Sexual Education on Sexual Behavior

No participant indicated that her school-based sex education experience had a significant effect on her sexual attitudes or behaviors. The participants' comments indicated that all had previously engaged in intercourse, two were currently pregnant and one had been in the past, and all spoke of friends or acquaintances that had contracted an STI at least once. Nina mentioned that she engaged in sexual intercourse for the first time while enrolled in a local community-based sex education program, Postponing Sexual Involvement. All participants indicated that the information they did receive in their school-based sex education course was not useful to them, insisting again that it was "too late," and they were being taught "stuff [they] already knew."

Combating the Daily Challenges of a High School Female

Every participant strongly expressed the serious difficulty of resisting the flattery and manipulation of older male students, constantly lamenting over their past naïveté and how easily they were seduced, used, and left. Each girl independently remarked about challenges of being a young girl with insecurities, struggling to find the strength to resist the tempting "whispers" of older males—most regretted their decision to give in. They exchanged memories and realizations that "the dude's not going to be there 9 times out of 10," and "I was so scared" when the possibility of sexual activity first arose. While reflecting on her sexual experiences, Nicole expressed, "They [males] tell you they love you; that's not true. They eat, they sleep… sex is all they're thinking about." Other participants agreed that their past sexual encounters left them feeling manipulated and helpless.

The girls also all seemed to be victims of high school gossip, particularly about their sexual activity. They repeatedly agreed how hard it was to learn that their partners rarely kept details of their sexual episodes to themselves, this gossip often leading to self esteem issues in the girls and their loss of trust in relationships. In a discussion about this lack of privacy, Georgina stated bluntly that she now knows, "men are going to talk about you…They talk

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worse than females talk…and you're probably only doing it with this one person, but he knows all of your business and he's going to let it rip." The girls all agreed loudly with this sentiment.

Confronting Childhood Trauma

One surprising result was the general consensus among these participants that a number of their friends and acquaintances had been molested as a child, which affected their sexual activity later in life. When Nina discussed how hard it is for many teens to abstain from sex, Georgina added:

> Some people can't. I really know some people that are really addicted to sex. They either had problems when they were younger, like being molested, and they got used to the feeling and it never goes away. Some kids get molested and they're drawn from sex and other kids get molested and they just have to continuously have it.

The majority of the participants agreed, commenting that sex for these victims becomes "like a drug."

Another hardship these girls mentioned was watching the tumultuous relationships of their mothers and fathers and how often they saw their mothers abandoned after having a child. Many had watched their fathers leave their mothers with children and no money, forcing them to learn at an early age that they may not be able to rely on their partners. This vicious cycle of watching their mothers give birth while their fathers run away and come back as they please left all participants with low expectations for future relationships.

Participants' Thoughts on Current Sex Education Programs

Although I did not explicitly ask about it, many participants had interesting insights as to why their school-based sex education might have been so poorly implemented. When the girls were expressing frustration over how late their sex education was taught, Yvette commented, "They [the schools] don't want to say a lot [about sex] cause they don't want the kids to go out and do it…when really they'd be helping the kids, 'cause…if I was introduced to that stuff when I was younger, I wouldn't be having a baby right now." Nina had

a different perspective, telling the group that her teacher taught the class under the assumption that they had all already engaged in sex and it was "pointless" to try and teach about abstaining.

Suggestions for Future Sex Education Programs

After reflecting on their own experiences, the entire group of participants was in agreement that sex education should be taught regularly throughout middle school and high school by educators with backgrounds similar to their students', who would be honest and realistic about teen sexuality. Georgina, who is currently pregnant, proposed that girls like her visit schools and tell personal stories to younger girls, with the hopes that her regrets and challenges encourage others to abstain. Michelle felt that honesty and realism are the best policy: "People, parents, teachers, everybody: just be straight up and don't sugar coat anything—it is what it is!" Overall, the girls agreed that unenthusiastic educators simply telling students to abstain from sex will not effectively promote healthy sexual behavior: schools instead need honest educators to whom the students can relate and who truly care about their students' well-being to communicate adequate, realistic information about contraceptives, STI testing services and treatments, and relationships.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight significant flaws of various school-based sex education programs of the upper Midwest, exposing how little of an effect their curricula had on the sexual experiences and behaviors of several black adolescent females. The responses of these six participants illustrate the social barriers that a population extremely vulnerable to teen pregnancy and disease faces, suggesting that sex education programs may not resolve all of these issues. However, these girls' disappointment regarding their previous lack of sexual health awareness and understanding implies that providing adolescents with adequate information about healthy sexual behavior could help ameliorate everyday challenges of development, which would positively influence their decision making and health outcomes.

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Limitations

This study had a number of limitations. First, the time constraints of this semester-long project limited the amount of research able to be conducted: more time could have allowed for a comparison focus group with participants of different racial backgrounds, for example, to address questions about the relationship between racial barriers and sexual engagement. Secondly, because the focus group only consisted of six participants, these responses may not be representative of all young black females' school-based sex education experiences, and thus the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. The girls in this sample were even more unique due to the alternative high school setting. Finally, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, I was unable to directly test the girls' knowledge on sexual health, which could have led to more concrete results concerning what exactly they did and did not learn about healthy sexuality. Still, these results have important implications for how sexuality is taught in U.S. public schools.

Implications for Hoover High School

Because the participants agreed that freshman year of high school was too late for a sex education program to be effective in delaying sexual initiation, some of the girls' suggestions may be inappropriate for Hoover High School; local middle schools may instead benefit more from hearing the girls' experiences and translating them into an effective sex education curriculum. However, the results may prompt administration at Hoover High School to consider developing a class focused on healthy sexual decisions. It is clear from the participants' responses that a large number of their peers are engaging in sexual activity on a regular basis, and that many are unaware of how to do so safely. It may, therefore, be in the students' best interest for Hoover to offer classes on an ongoing basis that teach the importance of sexual health and making safe decisions. If sex education during freshman year of high school is incapable of delaying the sexual initiation of many students, as these girls suggested, it is important for Hoover High School and other local high schools

to consider classes that aim to help students engage in sex safely and avoid adverse outcomes such as unwanted pregnancy and STIs. Classes could be voluntary as long as enough students were aware of them being offered, and they could be held every month or so, regularly reinforcing the benefits of safe sexual decisions.

If the school system does not allow discussion of healthy sexual behavior during school days, perhaps Hoover could consider holding workshops after school, or contacting the local Planned Parenthood to see if girls could visit and obtain resources about their sexual health. If none of these options are possible, Hoover's administration may still want to find other ways to promote sexual well-being, such as through posters or brochures being offered in school, or informing students that teachers are there to talk if they have any questions. Spreading awareness about contraceptives and STI testing would be extremely beneficial to the students of Hoover High School as long as they are continuing to engage in sexual activity—simply talking to students about the importance of sexual health on a regular basis could potentially contribute to a reduction in the spread of infection and unwanted pregnancy.

Implications for Future Research

These results cannot be generalized to all U.S. youth due to the small and unique sample. However, the girls' responses still suggest that American public schools are not doing enough to delay sexual initiation or reduce teen pregnancy and STI rates. Because copies of the sex education lessons that these girls received were not available, it is not possible to conclude from this study whether abstinence education is less effective than comprehensive education. The problem appears instead to lie in failure to successfully implement any sex education curriculum at all. These girls only received one sex education class— one they considered to be too late to be useful and severely lacking any helpful information. While researchers and health professionals argue over the efficacy of abstinence versus comprehensive curricula, schools may be neglecting to teach either program to their students. This could be due to Schalet's (2011)

theory that teen sexuality is not normalized in the U.S. and thus makes teachers reluctant to discuss it with their students or could be due to lack of available services and sexual educators. Whatever the source, it is essential that all middle schools and high schools teach at least one type of sex education, though comprehensive programs would be preferred to ensure healthier outcomes in our youth.

Furthermore, future research on effective sex education programs may benefit from considering some of these girls' suggestions. Because black adolescent females are currently the most vulnerable population to unwanted teen pregnancy and STIs, it is essential that researchers and health professionals design a curriculum that caters to their unique societal position. Sex education may not be able to solve many of the issues that the girls mentioned, including manipulative older males or sexual abuse in childhood. However, programs that consider these obstacles could have the power to teach effective ways to cope with the temptation of sexual activity, to handle romantic relationships when a partner is insistent on sex, or to practice autonomy in sexual relationships. Researchers should examine the open dialogue about teen sexuality that Schalet (2011) proposes to be successful in reducing unwanted pregnancy and disease in the Netherlands: there, sex education focuses not just on safe sex but on intimacy in romantic relationships as well (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, & Knijn, 2008). This is reminiscent of the girls wishing they had known earlier that their partner may not always stay with them after sex and suggests that candid discussions about relationships may also be beneficial to our youth—this could reconnect teen sex with intimacy, a connection that is rarely made in the U.S. (Schalet, 2011).

It is essential that researchers and health professionals continue the pursuit of identifying sex education methods that drastically reduce our country's alarming rates of teen pregnancy and STIs, especially in minority populations. Though there are many other factors contributing to these high rates, including lack of availability to contraceptives, sex education that is

honest and realistic about sexuality and relationships for all populations could certainly contribute to reducing unwanted pregnancy and the spread of disease. A team of sexual educators that represents a number of different races and sexual orientations could reflect the varying experiences of sexual development that our youth endure, potentially contributing to better decision-making and a greater understanding of the importance of healthy sexuality—girls who are currently pregnant, for example, like Georgina, could tell their story, encouraging youth not to make the same mistakes as they may believe they did. Future research should examine the effects of a diverse sexual education team on relating to the various sexual identities of adolescents and promoting greater sexual reproductive health. Perhaps our nation's teen pregnancy and STI rates can only be drastically reduced when teen sexuality is normalized in the U.S. as it is throughout many European countries, but until then, identifying effective ways to promote healthy sexual behavior in schools is a vital component to improve the health and well-being of all American adolescents.

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"More Stunning Than Can Decently Be Expressed": Desire and Control in the Stunners of Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Caroline Maloney (Class of 2012) studies Art History and Anthropology at Notre Dame. This essay, entitled *'More Stunning Than Can Decently Be Expressed': Desire and Control in the Stunners of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,* was written for an upper-level course in the theoretical framework of art historical inquiry. In this assignment, students were asked to choose an art historical topic with which we already had some level of familiarity and then to apply to this topic one or more theories of the great art historians –Winckelmann, Vasari, Hegel, Wölfflin, Schapiro, Derrida, Panofsky, Foucault, Benjamin, Butler, Jones, etc.– in order to approach it with fresh perspective and to gain interesting insights.

"More Stunning Than Can Decently Be Expressed": Desire and Control in the Stunners of Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Caroline Maloney

I. Introduction

Inevitably sparking an "electric shock of beauty"[1] in the eyes and body of the beholder, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's shamelessly sensual 'stunners' simultaneously astonished, horrified, and enchanted viewers. Rossetti's 'stunners' emerged in his oeuvre in the period around the death of his wife and early muse Elizabeth Siddall in 1862, at which time the artist began to nearly exclusively paint close-up portraits of fleshly feminine beauties characterized by a "columnar neck, thick, sensuous lips, heavy mantle of hair, well-defined brow

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[1] George Rae, qtd. in Elizabeth Prettejohn, "'Beautiful women with floral adjuncts': Rossetti's New Style," <u>Dante Gabriel Rossetti</u>, eds. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn & Edwin Becker (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) 78.

and jaw line,"[2] and richly textured robes and bejeweled accessories.

This essay will examine issues of Victorian feminine typology, desire, and framing of Rossetti's 'stunners' through the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault's "The Repressive Hypothesis" and Amelia Jones' "'Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure': Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics." Specifically, it will analyze the way in which Rossetti's 'stunners' discursively produce or engage in the dichotomous Victorian conception of female sexuality that worked to regulate sexuality through a juxtaposition of the ideal, embodied in the normative, chaste, etherealized Christian woman, versus the deviant, characterized as sexually assertive, extra-marital, and even dangerous to society. This essay will then address the ambiguous moral meaning Rossetti attached to the various types of 'stunners' through their operation through desire, precluding the traditional Kantian approach to aesthetic theory. Finally, taking cue from Amelia Jones, this essay will examine how Rossetti simultaneously granted Victorian viewers access to forbidden fantasy in the paintings of 'stunners' while at the same time retaining the status of high art for the paintings by tempering their depictions of powerful, non-normative female sexuality through the devices of framing and objectification.

II. Historiography and Theoretical Intervention

The complex nature of female sexuality within Rossetti's oeuvre has inspired a rich historiographic tradition on the topic at hand. In general, there are two major conceptual focuses on which scholars have heretofore concentrated: Rossetti's engagement with discursive regulation of female sexuality in *Found*, and the typology and striking sensuality of Rossetti's 'stunners.' The former historiographic category has received particular attention from Linda Nochlin in

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[2] Susan Casteras, <u>Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art</u> (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987) 161.

her 1978 essay called "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman." Nochlin's essay examines Rossetti's painting *Found* from three major angles: through Victorian discursive regulation of sexuality, in comparison with William Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakening Conscience*, and through the lens of Rossetti's personal biography. Nochlin proposes that *Found* prescribes to the contemporary artistic conventions of representation of the fallen woman and that the painting reveals the 'ideological assumptions' Rossetti held regarding female sexuality. She also suggests that the despair of the prostitute in *Found* might represent Rossetti's own sense of disillusionment and despair at the end of his career, himself having once made an analogy of the artist and the whore in a letter to the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne.[3]

Similar to Nochlin, Lynn Nead also explores the Foucauldian discursive definition of Victorian female sexuality in her 1984 essay entitled "The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting." Nead explains that Victorian females were ideally urged to be sexually passive through moralizing paintings emphasizing the cult of domesticity, including George Elgar Hick's *Woman's Mission* series and *The Sinews of Old England*.[4] Nead also addresses the way in which the threat that assertive female sexuality and prostitution posed to the regulated social order was discursively disarmed through a mythology in which prostitutes were pitied because of the desperation, feelings of regret, alcoholism, and ultimate tragedy of suicide they experienced. Nead suggests that Rossetti's *Found* was an attempt on the part of the artist to discursively engage with this mythology of the fallen woman, ultimately aiming to encourage viewers to sympathize with and seek to save the Magdalen.

The other historiographic trend, being the examination of typology

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[3] Linda Nochlin, "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman," *Art Bulletin* 60.1 (1978) 152-153. JSTOR. 26 Oct. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3049751>.
[4] Lynn Nead, "The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 7.1 *Correspondences* (1984) 26, 28-30. JSTOR. 26 Oct. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable /1360063>.

and sensuality of Rossetti's 'stunners,' usually takes place within books of more general content. Jan Marsh's 1987 Pre-Raphaelite Women, for example, labels and briefly describes the common types of women featured in Pre-Raphaelite paintings at large. Specifically, Marsh cites "bohemians, stunners, holy virgins, nubile maidens, doves, mothers, fallen Magdalens, medieval damozels, sorceresses, allegories, icons, and pale ladies of death."[5] Crucially, Marsh identifies three types within the array of Rossettian 'stunners' that will be examined in this essay through discursive theory: "first is the fair, demure, modest maiden with her innocent attractions; the second is the proud golden beauty who might borrow a term from later 'sex goddesses'; and the third is the dark, enigmatic siren or *femme fatale*."[6]

Susan Casteras' 1987 Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art is helpful in its analysis of the sensual appeal of Rossetti's 'stunners.' Casteras offers insight into the new standards of womanly beauty put forth by Rossetti's 'stunners,' as well as the Pre-Raphaelites' general interest in the concept of the *femme fatale*.[7]

Also enlightening is Elizabeth Prettejohn's essay "'Women with floral adjuncts: Rossetti's New Style," published in an exhibition catalogue for the "Dante Gabriel Rossetti" exhibit at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, and the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, in 2003. Prettejohn traces the influence of sensual Venetian paintings, such as those by Titian, on Rossetti's 'stunners' in the 1860s and discusses the diversification of his style in the 1870s.[8]

Finally, Griselda Pollock's essays "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: The Representation of Elizabeth Siddall" and "Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytic Readings" were published in her 1988 book Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art. In the first essay,

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[5] Jan Marsh, Pre-Raphaelite women: images of femininity (New York: Harmony Books, 1987) 5.
[6] Marsh 27-28.
[7] Casteras 166-171.
[8] Prettejohn 57-58.

Pollock highlights male hegemony in Rossetti's art through an exploration of "woman's function as sign securing the privileged status for Rossetti in and through such polarizing formulations as male/female, artist/model, tutor/pupil, age/youth, and so forth."[9] Her second essay, "Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytic Readings," applies Freudian theory to Rossetti's 'stunners.' Specifically, Pollock claims that Rossetti's *femmes fatales* incite fear of castration in the male viewer, producing an anxiety about loss of the pre-Oedipal mother. Pollock also suggests that the viewer attains pleasure in beholding Rossetti's *femme fatale* paintings through the constant oscillation between a sense of threat and a sense of desire.'[10]

The following essay is greatly indebted to the aforementioned historiography associated with discursive regulation of female sexuality in *Found* and contemporary moral paintings, Pre-Raphaelite typologies of women, and the implications of the sensuality of Rossetti's 'stunners.' This essay seeks to understand how Rossetti's broader oeuvre prescribed to and participated in the Victorian discursive regulation of sex; how desire operated within the paintings of his 'stunners;' and how paintings of the 'stunners' work to frame and control female sexuality. Specifically, these objectives will be approached through an application of Foucauldian and Jonesian theory to several paintings of 'stunners' by Rossetti: the "fair, demure, modest maiden" in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael*, the "femme fatale" in *A Sea-Spell*, the "golden… sex goddesses" in *Fair Rosamund* and *Monna Pomona*, and the "nubile maiden" in *Girl at a Lattice.*[11]

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[9] Karen-edis Barzman, rev. of <u>Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art</u> by Griselda Pollock (Routledge, 1988) and <u>Visual and Other Pleasures</u> by Laura Mulvey (Indiana University, 1989), *Woman's Art Journal* 12. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1991), 37. JSTOR. 5 Dec. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library. nd.edu/ stable/1358188>.
    [10] Barzman 37.
    [11] Marsh 5, 27-28.

III. Michel Foucault's Discursive Theory

In "The Repressive Hypothesis," Michel Foucault claims that members of the European and American (upper) middle class experienced multiple discursive forms, including literature, art, institutional structure, religion, medical jargon, and everyday language use, that worked to control societal norms of sexuality in the Victorian era. Specifically, Victorian discourse inherently structured sexuality into a norm, characterized as heterosexual, married, adult, pro-creative sex, versus a transgression of that norm, characterized by sexual acts or proclivities that stray outside the norm in any way. Within the 'good' or culturally sanctioned standards of sexuality, women had further regulations imposed on them; medical jargon, conduct books, and religious practices, amongst other things, discursively created expectations of female chastity, sexual passivity, submission, and disinterest in corporal pleasure.[12]

The manifold ways in which sexuality was talked about, conceptualized, and categorized in the Victorian era worked as a means of sexual regulation for social control and stability. Not by force but by subconscious, discursively-imposed binary oppositions between the licit/illicit, chaste/impure, Madonna/Magdalen, and domestic angel/fallen woman, which subsumed all non-normative sexual heterogeneities into the latter negative categories, women were urged toward the former components of these binary pairs. Any deviancy was viewed as flawed and in need of serious reform, both for the wellbeing of the deviant individual and to divest the deviant individual of his or her threat against stable moral society.[13]

Rossetti's only paintings to explicitly regulate female sexuality are the already much-analyzed oil painting *Found*, begun in 1854 but never finished, and the 1864 watercolor *The Gate of Memory*. *Found* depicts a moment of reunion between a male countryside peasant and the lover from his youth, who

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[12] Nead 26.

[13] Michel Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis," ed. Paul Rabinow, The Foucault Reader (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 317-319.

has since turned to prostitution out of desperation to make a living in the city. Drawing upon the popular Victorian mythology of the prostitute, Rossetti includes symbols of the dangerous position of the prostitute: a bridge in the background hints at her likely fate of suicide, while the ensnared white calf represents the helplessness and endangered purity of the woman in the flesh market of the city.[14] *The Gates of Memory* depicts a prostitute peering down an alley towards a group of children and a flower-crowned girl, which make her regretful because they remind her of the youthful purity and innocence she has lost forever.[15]

Outside of these two isolated examples, however, Rossetti did not often paint morality scenes that specifically addressed issues of prostitution, chastity, and sexual ethics. It is reasonable to say that *Found* and *The Gates of Memory* are anomalous in the scope of Rossetti's oeuvre, and many scholars have convincingly argued that these were his only isolated attempts at painting conventional scenes of the mythology of the prostitute.[16] The limited instances in which Rossetti painted in this manner, however, imply that it may be helpful to instead turn our attention to the artist's more subtle engagement with the Victorian dichotomous model of female sexuality that is manifest in his far more common painting subjects of the 1860s-1870s: the 'stunners.'

Foucauldian discursive regulation will now be explored through an analysis of the ideal woman in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* and the deviant, depicted in various incarnations in *A Sea-Spell, Fair Rosamund,* and *Monna Pomona*.

IV. The Angel: Discursive Formulation of Ideal Female Sexuality

Rossetti's painting *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* discursively imposes an ideal vision of woman toward which it was implied Victorian Christian women ought

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[14] Nochlin 150.
[15] Nochlin 148.
[16] Nochlin 139-153; Nead 27-36.

to have aspired. In this painting, there is a central female figure who has a sensual and deeply soulful beauty: her body is robed, but her thick, white neck protrudes out to support a head of loose red hair and full red lips. While the damsel in Rossetti's painting does not necessarily have the physical traits we would expect to find in a traditional Christian painting of a pure, good woman, she seems innocently unconscious of her own beauty and despite her sensuality she retains a certain chasteness. The damsel's qualities of purity and sexual disinterest are suggested through her white, almost etherealized skin; her modest cloak that heavily drapes her body to hide its curves and deemphasize its shape by merging it with the space behind and around her; the soft, non-challenging, quietly self-contained nature of her side-focused gaze; and the cool light and muted color scheme that bathe the composition. The primarily non-sexual emphasis of this damsel, then, seems to be very much in alignment with the contemporary Victorian medical jargon, conduct books, and moralizing paintings that created expectations of passive, chaste, disinterested female sexuality safely contained within the procreative duties of the Christian wife.[17]

Further emphasizing the connection between ideal female purity and Christian duty, *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* has religious signification. The damsel assumes the traditional Christian gesture of the two raised fingers indicating a blessing. The woman's head and gaze are turned slightly away from the viewer; because we cannot see her surroundings or the object of her mystic gaze, we can determine only that she is entranced in some spiritual experience. A white dove hovers just behind the woman with wings outstretched in such a way that viewers at first have difficultly determining whether these are in fact the wings of the bird or if they might belong to angelic woman instead. The dove clasps what is perhaps an incense vessel in its beak; as a well-known Christian symbol of innocence and peace, the bird affirms the damsel's association with benevolent cosmic power. The damsel also holds in

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[17] Nead 26.

her hands the chalice of the Holy Grail, a symbol of the mysterious Christian power of salvation. In sum, the Christian symbols in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* unite natural beauty, bodily purity, and sexual passivity with spiritual salvation and fulfillment. Rossetti's damsel discursively reinforces the highest ideal of the female; she is the perfect angel who, when placed in the comfortable middle class home, stands as an exemplar to be admired and mimicked by Victorian women.

V. The Enchantress and the Mistress: Formulating Deviant Female Sexuality

Although Rossetti was admired for his paintings of holy women, far more common in his array of 'stunners' are female characters who discursively produce Victorian female sexual norms thorough their representation of deviancy. Rossetti's sexual deviants, amongst his most dazzling painted women, are portrayed as *femmes fatales* or as mistresses and harlots. Both of these types of deviants will be examined, as will the possibility of a hierarchy of deviancy associated with these two types.

The spiritualized *Damsel of the Sanct Grael* and the oppositional alluring, flower-crowned siren in *A Sea-Spell* were both painted after the model, Alexa Wilding, and so share many of the same qualities of beauty: swollen lips, loose and silky hair, thick exposed neck, and bright eyes turned away from the viewer. Despite these shared qualities, however, Jennifer Lee has noted Wilding's versatility: "the group of works in which she figures prominently includes all types of his fantastic visions of femininity – both the idealistic and the nightmare, the positive and the negative."[18] Rossetti's deeply contrasting conceptualizations of Wilding in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* and *A Sea-Spell*, then, will help to determine how he may have been influenced by and

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[18] Jennifer Lee, <u>Venus Imaginaria: Reflections on Alexa Wilding, her life, and her role as muse in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti</u> (MA thesis, University of Maryland, 2006) 17.

participated in the spreading of Victorian sexual norms.

As the siren of *A Sea-Spell*, for example, much more of Wilding's body is exposed than it was in her depiction as the damsel. Rather than the heavy, amorphous cloak worn by the damsel, a sheer, shimmering garment is all that covers the siren's radiant, voluptuous figure, failing to conceal her décolletage, shoulders, and arms.

Despite the inviting sensuality of the siren in *A Sea-Spell*, however, certain aspects of this painting connote dark undertones and even a threat of peril associated with the obviously sensual female character. As Susan Casteras has noted, Rossetti painted a number of *femmes fatales*, like this siren, who seem to "communicate, with their mystical silence, half-closed eyes, sensuous mouths, and mesmerized stares, a sense of magnetism, expectancy, and even potential danger."[19] For example, in the Greek mythological tradition, the siren's song ensnares the hearts of passing sailors so that the sailors stray from their course and meet their deaths on rocky reefs. The title *A Sea-Spell* immediately connects this painting with the pagan mythical sea tradition of the siren, so this siren's gentle plucking of the strings of the lute, rather like a spider's web, must possess the power to bewitch and lead astray male passersby. The "dazed… longing"[20] white seabird above the siren, a perfect foil to the dove about the woman in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael*, might represent the distraction and insatiable yearning that men will suffer should they come too close. David Sonstroem notes that "in an especially sinister touch Rossetti chose for some of the foliage that of the Venus Fly Trap,"[21] a plant infamous for the way it lures and captures insects passing idly by. Another symbol in this painting is that of the apple tree behind the siren. This is likely a reference to the tempting of 'innocent' Adam by Eve in the Garden of Eden, the original seducer of man who would bring about the suffering of mankind. These

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[19] Casteras 167.

[20] David Sonstroem, <u>Rossetti and the Fair Lady</u> (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1970) 158.

[21] Sonstroem 158.

symbolic dimensions of *A Sea-Spell* combine to convey a perilous power located in the frank sensual and corporal appeal of the siren; this is articulated particularly well by art critic Théodore Duret:

> This creature, a kind of sibyl, siren, or melusine, has none of the delicate graces of woman; she is nonetheless very living and, when one has gazed at her for some time, she becomes unforgettable; she exercises a kind of fascination, but mixed with inquietude; one is afraid to come too close to her, one fears that if she took you by the arms, she would make your bones crack.[22]

Ultimately, Rossetti's *femmes fatales,* as illustrated by the siren in *A Sea-Spell,* discursively label overt and powerful female sensuality as inappropriate, non-Christian, and bearing deleterious implications for men. Even if the *femme fatale* has not yet crossed the threshold of immoral sexual action, Rossetti gives viewers fair warning of the dangerous threat she poses to the upstanding moral character and even life of the man who transgresses female sexual propriety.

Rossetti's paintings of mistress or harlot-type 'stunners' also discursively arranged the paradigm of Victorian female sexuality into a binary opposition between the chaste ideal and the immoral deviant. The mistress-stunner, or "proud golden… 'sex [goddess],'" as Jan Marsh has called her, was the most sensually indulgent and morally provoking type of 'stunner' painted by Rossetti.[23] In formal terms, the mistress-stunner is often brought up close to the foreground of the canvas and painted on a larger scale than were the other 'stunners.' The bare neck, chest, and arms of the mistress figure standardly play prominently into her depiction, and she is often very richly adorned with flowers, jewelry, combs, feathers, and sumptuous fabrics. In iconographic terms, the mistress-stunner often contains direct allusions to adultery, promiscuity, and sexual ripeness in the painting's title and symbolism, serving thus as a flagrant transgression of the Victorian female sexual ideal.

Rossetti's painting of *Fair Rosamund* of 1861, for example, depicts

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[22] Théodore Duret, qtd. in Prettejohn 106.
[23] Marsh 27-28.

the radiant Rosamund Clifford, mistress to King Henry II in the twelfth century. King Henry II famously "had a house constructed for her in a maze at Woodstock near Oxford… [and] no one might visit her there except the king."[24] The red string tied to a golden rose on the wall in front of Rosamund represents the device used by the king to find the right path into the maze to find his lover, intentionally retractable to protect Rosamund from the wrath of his jealous wife, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. Rosamund is pictured here waiting for the king's visit, anxious, flushed, and feverish. The crowned heart, indicative of the love King Henry II has for Rosamund and his infidelity to Eleanor, and the rose motif, stemming from both Rosamund's name and its sexual implications, appear throughout the painting.[25]

Another example of the mistress-stunner, to be but briefly mentioned, is Rossetti's 1864 painting *Monna Pomona*. This painting is unabashedly spilling over with sexual symbolism: the woman's green dress falls away to show lacey undergarments beneath; golden necklaces emphasize the swollenness and, some would say, phallic nature of her neck; brown-edged white roses in the upper right corner signify the decay of purity, while fresh scarlet roses are scattered suggestively over the mistress-stunner's lap; and an apple in her hand possibly alludes to the temptation of man in the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, the face of this mistress-stunner is marked with a languid, distracted expression, as if she is dreaming of some recent or soon to come pleasure.

Ultimately, the opposition of female figures in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* and *A Sea-Spell, Fair Rosamund,* and *Monna Pomona* worked discursively to organize and regulate Victorian female sexuality of the middle class. As Nancy Armstrong has explained:

[The nineteenth century] concentrated on conflicts within the female

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[24] Paul Spencer-Longhurst, The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s (London: Barber Institute of Fine Arts & Scala Publishers, 2000) 38.
[25] Prettejohn 185.

character, between her innate desires and the role she was destined to occupy… The domestic woman and her demonic 'other' posed a psychological opposition. In political terms, however, monster and angel worked discursively as a team to suppress other notions of sexuality… that did not adhere to the ideal of legitimate monogamy.[26]

The opposition between Rossetti's deviant *femmes fatales* and mistress-stunners and the ideal *Damsel of the Sanct Grael* represent quite literally this opposition between the "monster and an angel" and leave no categorical identity outside these entities for women to take on. The angel in *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* is the ideal fusion of natural beauty, chastity, passivity, and Christian duty; as such she is presented as the highest ideal and she is associated with the power of salvation. The siren monster and mistress-stunners in *A Sea-Spell*, *Fair Rosamund*, and *Monna Pomona*, too, are naturally beautiful women, but their exposed, sexualized bodies and associations with infidelity pose serious problems for Victorian sexual ethics.

In some sense, it might be possible to identify a hierarchy of deviancy within the paintings thus far examined. Whereas *A Sea-Spell* provides explicit warning signs about the inherent peril in the tempting sensuality of a woman, the radiant mistresses of *Fair Rosamund* and *Monna Pomona* indulge more explicitly the exploration of deviant female sexuality. The startling boldness of their sexual content, even to modern viewers who think of themselves as living far outside the moral strictures imposed in the Victorian era, is made even bolder through the lack of symbolic danger embedded within them, as was the case in the *femme fatale* picture. As such the mistress-stunner paintings seem to be the 'most' deviant on the spectrum of Victorian female sexual norms, meaning they seem to wantonly transgress rules of propriety even more so than the *femmes fatales* because they are not warnings about the danger of temptation so much as examples of glowing, confident women who have already fallen to temptation and flouted societal norms.

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[26] Nancy Armstrong, <u>Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel</u> (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 253.

VI. Ambiguity and Desire in Rossetti's 'Stunners'

Despite the recognizable division between licit and illicit sexuality in Rossetti's 'stunner' paintings, the nature of the division is not necessarily moralizing in its message. Whereas Rossetti's unusual paintings *Found* and *The Gates of Memory* explicitly condemn deviant sexuality in the sympathetic way that was conventional amongst contemporary artists, his 'stunners' contain far more ambiguous dimensions of meaning. In contrast to his peers, Rossetti seems to have generally made fewer judgments about female sexual propriety because even where he depicted the dangerous consequences of deviancy, such as *A Sea-Spell*, he still presented the experience of deviancy as seriously desirable. As Jan Marsh has remarked, "womanhood is almost never shown as contemptible or base, and the images of the ensnaring sorceress are as idealized and beautiful as those of the courtly lady."[27]

So in spite of the fact that Rossetti's *femmes fatales* and mistress-stunners are meant to define and regulate Victorian female sexual norms through their depiction of the negativity of transgression of norms, they still elicit erotic response on behalf of the viewers of the paintings. Paradoxically, the very act of regulating and prohibiting aspects of sexuality in these paintings actually creates points of pleasure. This concept is best expressed in Foucauldian terms:

> The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. There was undoubtedly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure… Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered.[28]

The consequence of the illicit erotic bent of Rossetti's 'stunner' paintings, emerging at points of forbidden, deviant sexuality, seems to have been

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[27] Marsh 109.
[28] Foucault 323-324.

the debate about whether they could rightfully retain the status of high art with regard to aesthetic theory and contemporary reception. Amelia Jones explains that traditional Kantian aesthetics, originally recorded in his <u>Critique of Judgment</u>, and the likely Victorian consensus maintained that the art critic must suppress and transcend his personal tastes and desires in order to see purely and objectively the work of art and to experience the true beauty emanating freely forth from the artwork.[29] It is easy to imagine the Kantian art critic gazing upon *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* with approval; it seems possible to recognize her ethereal beauty in a non-sexual way, and as such this painting could have been considered tolerable and even ideal from the Kantian perspective. But to gaze upon one of Rossetti's mistress-stunners and remain totally divorced from her erotic implications seems difficult, perhaps even impossible.

Such may have indeed been the case, for contemporary reactions to Rossetti's mistress-stunner paintings seem to have been divided along Kantian lines. Some viewers disapproved of the blatant sexuality and sought to resist its temptation in the name of high art. When William Holman Hunt saw Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia*, for example, he remarked:

> I will not scruple to say that it impresses me as very remarkable in power of execution – but still more remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind peculiar to foreign prints… I would not speak so unreservedly of it were it not that I see Rossetti is advocating as a principle the mere gratification of the eye and if any passion at all – the animal passion to be the aim of art…[30]

Here, Hunt criticizes the slippage between "picture and viewer [designed] to elicit a response more intense than that normally considered appropriate to high art," even going so far as to compare *Venus Verticordia* to foreign pornographic prints.[31] And yet others, such as Rossetti's friend Algernon Charles Swinburne,

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[29] Amelia Jones, "'Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure': Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics," ed. Donald Preziosi, <u>The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 382-383.
[30] William Holman Hunt, qtd. in Prettejohn 77-78.
[31] Prettejohn 77-78.

reacted positively to Rossetti's 'stunners,' feeling them to be "more stunning than can decently be expressed" and freely allowing their desire to exercise itself as part of the full experience of the paintings.[32]

VII. Framing to Control Female Sexuality

We have now examined the notion that Rossetti discursively operates in and on the Victorian binary conceptualization of female sexuality by depicting either ideal chaste maidens or confident, sensual *femmes fatales* and mistress-stunners. A great deal of controversy initially surrounded Rossetti's paintings of women who fell into the latter category, but as drastically deviant the sexually-charged and desirable mistress-stunners were, the paintings of them ultimately won out as great examples of high art and feminine beauty rather than as pornography. It seems that an application of Amelia Jones' theory of framing might help to explain how it is that the Victorians were ultimately able to tolerate the very female figures they believed were threatening to destroy their society.

In "'Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure': Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics," Jones examines François Boucher's 1751 painting called the *Toilet of Venus*. The *Toilet of Venus* is a sensual, highly-ornate painting of the nude Madame de Pompadour. Jones notes that Boucher's depiction of the woman – "as paradigm of the female nude – works to contain just the uncontrollable erotic frisson that she invokes."[33] Like Boucher's *Toilet of Venus*, although Rossetti's 'stunners' may be "deified and given devastating potency through the very sexual power that Kant's aesthetics labors to contain" they are also "disempowered as… beautiful object[s]."[34] The powerful, confident, sexually-deviant 'stunners' on Rossetti's canvases who threaten to upturn male discursive control are objectified, reduced to mere commodities to be consumed by the male gaze and traded by males in the public

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[32] Algernon Charles Swnburne, qtd. in Spencer-Longhurst 36.
[33] Jones 382.
[34] Jones 383.

art market. Furthermore, the 'stunners' are generally framed in the foreground, literally held back from full view, agency, and freedom by the male painter and the male viewer. Not only does framing prevent actual access to this illicit focus of our desire, but it also precludes the societal upheaval that would come from it:

> This alluring woman [stunner] is ultimately unattainable, for the wall, bower, or toilette table that often literally holds her back reinforces the strange paradox of her being both sexy and yet soulful, desirable, and inaccessible. These women are being held back from perhaps unleashing a fearful sexuality.[35]

It is interesting to note that Rossetti's placement and extent of framing corresponds with the degree to which the given painting represents Victorian sexual deviancy. Depictions of ideal women and even enchantresses warning against temptation, for instance, are not resolutely encased in their compositions because they are not so much of a threat. In *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael*, the ideal woman is only loosely framed by unfixed, ephemeral leafy vines positioned very low down in the foreground. The close-up depictions of mistress-stunners such as *Fair Rosamund* and *Bocca Baciata*, contrastingly, are solidly architecturally enframed by walls of some sort that span across the foreground in front of the women, thereby granting only very limited access to these women who seriously transgress Victorian sexual norm of marital, procreative sexuality.

Even more solidly framed than the mistress-stunners is *Girl at a Lattice*, painted by Rossetti in 1862. In this painting, an adolescent girl struggles to catch a downward glance out of a window. The girl may very well represent what Marsh has named the "nubile maiden;" perhaps she is even a prefiguration of the archetypal mistress-stunner, having in common loose hair, flowers, and a red coral necklace.[36] Perhaps this girl is particularly heavily framed, bound on all four sides by unyielding architecture, because of her youth

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[35] Casteras 167.
[36] Marsh 5.

and the artist's perceived need to reign in the girl's budding sexuality until such a time that it is appropriate to reveal it. Although the mistress-stunner and the sexualized child are both transgressions of Victorian sexual standards and homogenized into the term 'deviant,' the latter is the more extreme form of deviancy and thus in need of greater control.

In general this pattern of correspondence between sexual deviancy and framing seems to hold true, although there are exceptions to the rule. *Monna Pomona*, for example, is one of the more sexually forward mistress-stunners of Rossetti's oeuvre, yet she lacks an articulated frame of architecture or natural foliage. Fascinatingly, even for some 'modern' viewers of the relatively sexually-liberated age of today feel uncomfortable when looking at *Monna Pomona*; she is almost too confident, too 'easy,' and too uncontrolled for us to safely enjoy. On the other hand, the painting of this mistress-stunner is cropped in such a way that only her most sexualized body features are included: face, neck, chest, fingers, torso, and lap. Perhaps *Monna Pomona* works less through framing than it does through objectification; the mistress-stunner's sexual body is offered to the penetrating male gaze for his pleasure and then freely bought and sold on the market, paradoxically not unlike the plight of the female subject in *Found* that Rossetti sought to remedy.

VIII. Conclusion

This study has endeavored to evaluate the discursive regulation, operation of desire, and use of framing in Rossetti's 'stunners.' While many scholars had already identified a general typology into which Pre-Raphaelite artists at large and Rossetti in particular have tended to cast their painted female figures, this essay sought to understand how Rossettian 'stunner' typology regulated female sexual discourse. It seems that Rossetti set up a clear binary model in which the ideal, sexually passive angel opposes the indulgently sensual, sexually assertive, and either tempting or adulterous woman.

Although Rossetti operated within and on Victorian sexual norms

through this binary model, this does not mean that he blindly conformed to 'appropriate' attitudes about female sexuality. In fact, Rossetti attaches ambiguous meaning and blatant desirability even to the sexually deviant female, which can perhaps be interpreted through the Foucauldian notion of the attachment of pleasure to the deviant through the very process of defining and condemning transgression.

The powerful operation of desire in the experience of Rossetti's 'stunner' paintings, both ideal and deviant 'stunners' alike, leaves little room for the Kantian aesthetic approach and instead requires Victorian audiences and viewers of today to indulge their fantasies in this arena. What ultimately makes this indulgence of pleasure acceptable, even in the stricter sexual regulatory framework of the Victorian era, is the disempowerment of the sensual female 'stunners' through objectification into art-objects to be consumed and traded amongst men and through the framing of 'stunners' to provide appropriate levels of restraint and symbolic control of the women who threaten to upturn Victorian patriarchal regulation.

In the end, it seems that Rossetti stands out as master largely because of his ability to allow viewers to indulge in their fantasies of temptation and the love affair while simultaneously providing cues in the form of the binary female sexual paradigm, symbolism of danger, disempowerment through commodification, and varied levels of framing to moderate these fantasies and keep them in the realm of the blissful imaginary. Whereas Rossetti's women are for the poet Swinburne more sensually pleasing "than can decently be expressed" in his artistic medium of words, it was Rossetti's mastery of the techniques and devices of visual art that allowed him to transcend indecency to create a space in which Victorians could safely indulge in their desires without threat of the catastrophic social upheaval that they believed would result were viewers to actually physically act on these desires.[37]

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[37] Algernon Charles Swnburne, qtd. in Spencer-Longhurst 36.

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Women's Representation in Government: A Comparative Analysis between British Parliament and American Congress

Jennifer Gast

Women's Representation in Government: A Comparative Analysis between British Parliament and American Congress

Jennifer Gast

> *Women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.*

Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792

> *Since 1918, when women were first able to stand as Members of Parliament, only 291 women have been elected, but during the same period 3,363 men were elected. If it were possible to put all the women who have been elected into the House of Commons today, they would still be in the minority.*

Baroness Gale, House of Lords, 30 October 2008 (Kelly and White 2009, 1)

The United States' Congress and the British House of Representatives face similar problems in raising women's representation in these political institutions. While these two industrial democracies have many shared characteristics, they each have different approaches to addressing this gender gap that reflect their individual historical, social, political, and structural contexts. In examining the supply of and demand for female candidates, we can see which strategies are the most effective for each nation and in addressing the source of the problem. While there has been an upward trend of female representation, both countries still have a long way to go to overcome historical and structural barriers and to achieve full gender parity.

Gender disparity: context and importance

The political representation of women in British Parliament has been slowly rising since 1918 when Countess Constance Markievicz, the first female MP, was elected. The United Kingdom has a history of low female representation in Parliament, with women constituting only four percent of the House of Commons, on average, from 1945 to 1985 and only rising to nine percent by 1992 (Campbell and Childs 2010, 19). This ranked the UK forty-ninth in the world for women in the lower House (Childs 2000, 55). The United States has had a similar history of progress, electing its first female congresswoman in 1917. Since then the US has had a slow, but steady, increase, only reaching ten percent representation in 1993. There are currently 93 women serving in Congress, a mere 17.4 percent, placing the US 84th on the global rankings of women serving in national legislatures (Carroll 2003, 5).

There are several broad factors explaining women's low levels of political representation including cultural, socioeconomic, and historical forces that can encourage or discourage women candidates from running for office. Specific political causes play a significant role as well. Systematic forces of legal rules, party systems, and the environment of elections combined with contextual factors within parties such as party ideology and rules make a difference for who is elected (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, 21).

The call for more diverse representation in government is not unique to women as "the claim for women's political presence is part of a wider claim for a politics of presence made by other disadvantaged groups" (Childs 2011, 13). These groups argue the "normative case" for such a presence, which, first, focuses on bringing greater political equality to formerly disadvantaged groups, thus giving Parliament and Congress more legitimacy in representing its constituents. The argument then follows that these representatives will give voters a clearer indication of parties' policies on under-represented issues and such representatives will be greater advocates for said issues, bringing them into importance (Childs 2011, 14). Furthermore, a more diverse representation of elected officials will provide role models for both women and minorities, encouraging others to run for election in the future (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 248).

In the case of women, there are also several other arguments for gender parity in elected institutions. The first, justice issue, simply states women should be evenly matched with men as equal citizens and men should not be allowed to monopolize the political system (Lovenduski 2005, 23). The second, the pragmatic argument, contends that political parties have a vested interest in recruiting female politicians as female voters are generally more likely to vote for parties that elect women candidates who are more likely to represent their interests (Lovenduski 2005, 23). Finally, the difference argument follows that women have the potential to bring a different style of governing to both countries "which will change it for the better, an effect that is of benefit to all" (Lovenduski 2005, 24). Julie Dolan dubs this kind of style "feminine leadership," which emphasizes "consensus, collaboration, and empowerment" over more traditional masculine or "power over" leadership known for "competition, command, and control" (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 312-313). This can be achieved through either descriptive or substantive representation.

The former "proposes that women should represent women in proportion to their presence in the population" (Lovenduski 2005, 17). Such calls lead other groups, such as ethnic minorities, to call for similar quotas, which would be difficult to enact because of the large numbers of minority groups. Because of this, many feminist scholars instead call for increased substantive representation. This concept relies on the assumption that women representatives are more likely to act in the interest of women than their male counterparts and that their presence makes a difference in how policies are enacted. In the US, this is done through policy preference, roll-call votes, and support on women's rights issues (Reingold 2008, 129). Similar practices are observed in the UK through Early Day Motions, Parliamentary Questions, and debates. However, one must bear in mind that not all women share the same experiences and concerns and to focus on gender, rather than sex, in this relationship. Sarah Childs argues female representatives' "sense of affinity with women derives from a belief in women's shared gendered experiences" while still being aware of the complexity of differences including ethnicity, religion, and class (Childs 2006, 12).

This is seen in the US as "contemporary female legislators continue to exhibit differences in their policy attitudes and activities," compared to male congressmen, as they are more willing to work for feminist issues such as social welfare, sexual harassment, and family leave (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 249). This materializes in the concept of 'critical mass,' which states when women reach a substantial minority (typically 20 to 30 percent) they will act as a group to promote more feminist concerns (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 251). However, studies have shown critical mass to be inconclusive and scholars have agreed that a women's caucus is more productive in "increasing[ing] the amount of attention given to women's issues by providing a forum to discuss common interest and a network for allies to enlist as supporters of a bill" (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 252).

In the UK, the same concept of critical mass can be applied as there is a 'tipping point' at which a minority group has reached enough members to assert its interests (Lovenduski and Norris 2003, 88). However, Childs has re-conceptualized this definition to focus on *how* female representatives make a difference, rather than a specific percentage of representatives. In this way, we can see how the "substantial presence [of women] in Parliament makes women MPs more able to form alliance and act as a coherent force to affect the dominant culture of their institution, as well as being in a position to perform 'critical acts'…necessary to the feminization of political institutions" (Lovenduski and Norris 2003, 97). With each election of more female MPs, more feminist issues have been brought to the forefront in Parliamentary debates (Childs 2011, 19). Therefore, increasing the descriptive representation of women in both institutions does have an important effect on the substantive representation of women and their interests, even if it is not a perfect correlation.

Supply and demand: explaining the disparity

On the demand side, party selectors look at candidates based on a wide variety of factors such as experience, formal qualifications, personality, and other judgments. Candidates are typically evaluated through both direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination, in this case, judges someone based on the characteristics of their group, not the individual herself. This would include the typical attributes of a lawyer, a homemaker, or a local citizen. Selectors make value judgments off this, correct or not, such as a local citizen may be more dedicated to local politics and that a lawyer would be well educated. Indirect discrimination, on the other hand, "refers to the anticipated reaction among the electorate to certain groups" (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, 107). These assumptions are based off of who appears to be more electable, rather than one's qualifications. Therefore, demand is two-sided, based off of the preferences of party selectors as well as the electorate.

On the other hand, supply-side explanations are equally important and intersect with demand-side factors. Supply factors are those that influence the

pool of candidates that decide to run for office. This includes those who have access to resources such as time, money, and experience as well as those who are motivated to run (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, 108). Such candidate resources include personal finances, time commitments, union sponsorship, professional networks, and experience.

Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski argue occupational class is a large factor in who runs for Parliament, illustrating why there is a low percentage of women and minorities at Westminster as these groups are typically concentrated in lower-paying and less-skilled jobs. This distinction can easily be applied to US politics as well, as women have historically been concentrated in gendered occupations such as teaching, nursing, or remaining at home. This is connected to the "pipeline theory" where certain professions, such as business and law, feed individuals into political positions, typically at a lower level, which will eventually allow them to climb the political ladder (Dolan, Deckman, and Swears 2007, 148). Historically, women have been excluded from these professions and have had fewer chances to make the transition into politics. However, more and more women are entering these "feeder" positions, allowing them the opportunity to make this leap into public service (Dolan, Deckman, and Swears 2007, 149). As more women enter these professions, the pool of eligible candidates for nomination grows, lessening the impact of supply factors.

While British and American politics share many general aspects that contribute to gender disparity, they have different approaches to fixing the problem, based on their individual context. In particular, Parliament's supply issues are shown to be less acute compared to the US's supply issues. As such, British reformers focus more on addressing demand issues and party selection than on increasing the supply of candidates.

Facilitating British demand: all women shortlists

As we have seen, supply factors affect who decides to run for office and ultimately who is elected. In the past, it was deemed that there were not enough qualified women to run for Parliament and that the number of women

MPs would rise as more women participated in the public sphere. However, this is no longer the case as "there are [now] sufficient women candidates for all of the three main political parties…to select women" (Childs 2008, 61). In fact, there is a general consensus that the problem of women's representation in the UK is a demand problem rather than a supply one (Childs 2008, 61).

As mentioned, demand can be split into a two-step process based on the parties' selection of candidates and the electorate's preference once candidates are chosen. It has been well documented in British politics that the electorate votes along party lines, rather than on an individual basis, indicating that sex does not play a definitive role once candidates are selected (Lovenduski 2005, 64). This would imply that parties play a vital role in demand factors and in who is ultimately placed on the ballot.

There are several strategies that parties can implement to combat the effect of demand factors. The first, equality rhetoric, aims "to exhort women to participate in party politics and to seek political candidature," and is found in party platforms and speeches (Childs 2008, 62). The second, equality promotion, brings those typically unrepresented into the process. This includes training and assistance and can enhance candidate resources and motivation. These two strategies are widely accepted in the UK in all three major political parties. The final strategy, equality guarantees, requires increases in numbers, such as party quotas or reserved seats and creates an artificial demand for female candidates (Childs 2008, 62). Many feminist scholars advocate for equality guarantees, like all women shortlists, wherein if "parties chose to adopt such a strategy that would deliver parity of representation amongst newly elected MPs [the effect] would…significantly alter the representative balance of women and men MPs" (Childs 2008, 61). This success of such equality guarantees can be seen through the Labour's policies of all-women shortlists.

Shortlists were implemented in the 1990s by the Labour Party to improve the number of women in Parliament by requiring the selection of women candidates in some constituencies. The 1997 General Election resulted

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in 35 Labour candidates elected to MP positions solely from the use of all-women shortlists, resulting in 101 female Labour MPs and 120 women total in Parliament (Childs 2000, 55). This watershed election raised women's participation to the House of Commons to an all time high of 18 percent. As Childs shows, "when the demand for women is overt, with the adoption of all-women shortlists and/or when local constituency party members invite participation, women are more likely to consider, and be successful in, the recruitment process for parliamentary candidates" (Childs 2000, 55). The Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' failure to enact more widespread policies described above can be clearly seen, as the former lost seven women MPs and the later only gained one. The significant increase in the number of women Labour MPs compared to the other parties illustrates the effectiveness of the Labour Party's shortlist policy (Childs 2000, 55).

While shortlists were extremely influential in the 1997 general election and other parties began to add women's representation as part of their manifestos, the 2005 and 2010 general elections did not produce substantial increases in representation as 1997 did. Women MPs did increase by 2.5 percent from 2005 to 2010, but many predicted greater gains due to party manifestos that were committed to women's causes and issues (Campbell and Childs 2010, 760). While women MPs did increase by 14 to a record 21.9 percent, these figures do not reflect the full story.

Despite the fact that "all the parties were publicly committed to increase the diversity of representation," the 2010 election resulted in a decrease of 17 Labour women, 3 Liberal Democrats, and the Conservatives (while winning 97 additional seats) only increased to 48 women, falling short of their goal of 60 women (Campbell and Childs 2010, 769). On the other hand, the Labour Party still has more female MPs than all the other parties combined, despite losing 91 seats in 2010. Labour managed to raise the percentage of women within the party to 31 percent, whereas Conservative women only constitute 16 percent of the party (Campbell and Childs 2010, 770).

Conservatives did not fill the void left by female Labour MPs who lost their seats and instead only marginally increased their numbers. These gradual changes indicate that while equality rhetoric and equality guarantees do allow for incremental growth, equality guarantees are more effective. Rosie Campbell and Childs further argue that to keep increasing women's numerical representation notably, all other parties must also adopt effective "equality guarantees," such as Labour's policy of all-women shortlists (775). Despite the aims of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to improve women's representation through positive action, their official policies were not effective enough to make substantial change, as detailed below.

While the Conservative Party has less formal structures compared to the Labour Party, there are still activists who advocate for more gender equality. These representatives have formally criticized the party in their failure to adopt women's concerns into formal policy in the 2005 election (Childs 2008, 34). However, Conservative MPs are generally less likely to consider "themselves feminist or gender-conscious…and [have] concerns about being sidelined, pigeonhol[ed] and the concept of merit" (Childs 2008, 37). The Conservative Party's failure to feminize can be seen clearly in how their policies have been enacted.

As Tory leader, David Cameron had declared plans to incorporate more women into constituency selection encouraging half of lists to be women and a fair amount to be of ethnic minority groups. His "A-List" policy required half of the "priority list" in winnable seats to be women. However, this did not ensure that these women were actually selected in the final choice of candidates on the ballot (Kelly and White 2009, 15). The party has also been criticized for lack of women in Cabinet or other powerful positions, despite Cameron's calls for increase in such leadership roles (Kelly and White 2009, 17). These shortcomings are clearly illustrated in the 2010 general election as Conservatives "failed to select sufficient women in its winnable and vacant held seats" (Campbell and Childs 2010, 768). The Conservative Party did increase

the number of female MPs from 17 to 48 in the 2010 general election, but this fell short of their goal of 60 representatives and still only represents 16 percent of the party, a much lower percentage than that of Parliament as a whole.

The Liberal Democrats offer the most confusing feminizing rhetoric as their party manifesto contains the most progressive stance on feminist causes, yet has extremely low numbers of female representatives (Childs 2008, 39). In 2010, they sought to protect existing childcare, move to 20-hour free childcare, and to end the closure of maternity hospitals (Campbell and Childs 2010, 763). Yet, they previously defeated motions requiring 40 percent of each gender in 7.5 percent swing constituencies and selecting women when a MP stands down (Kelly and White 2009, 14). These contradictory messages indicate the Liberal Democrats need further progress to fully adopt feminist concerns into their official party practices.

In addition to parties' official policies, further constraints emerge for women since in "all three parties the barriers to women's selection could be explained by institutional sexism" ranging from overt discrimination to outright sexual harassment (Lovenduski 2005, 75-76). This is due to the system's long tradition as a male-dominated sphere as Westminster, in particular, fosters a "culture of traditional masculinity that is a major obstacle to women, [which]…supports institutional sexism in the political system" (Lovenduski 2005, 46-47). As all three parties struggle to combat this issue, a change in how British politics operates in general could be the solution.

Feminizing British Politics

The feminization of British party politics from 1997 onward focuses on "the integration of women into formal political institutions and…the integration of women's concerns and perspectives into political debate and policy" (Childs 2008, xix). Instead of simple numeric parity, many scholars advocate for this deeper incorporation of women's issues into British politics. This can be seen in recent years as political parties are just one political institution that has slowly become more feminized. More feminist concerns, such as childcare and

education, have become part of the political discourse regardless of which party is in power (Childs 2008, 23). Lisa Young evaluates the feminization of political parties based on certain categories including sex parity amongst its members, leadership roles attainable for women, and a party's commitment to feminist causes, as enforced in the party's manifesto (Childs 2008, 23). As parties become increasingly feminized, this will allow for more open debate and engagement of feminist issues (Childs 2008, 25).

However, it is important to mention that despite women's continuous demands for "individual and collective representation" and the trends towards the feminization of British politics, "women's organizations are [not yet] fully integrated into policy development [nor have] women's concerns [become] central to party policy" (Childs 2008, 49). This transition into full feminist parties will be a key step for every political party in the future in order to fully integrate women's concerns and policies into politics and help British politics, as a whole, become more feminized.

The American Gap: Supplying ambition

While we have seen that supply factors are not sufficient for explaining gender disparity in the UK, they do still have an effect on American politics, most notably through women's political ambition. While the "pipeline theory" of supply still applies as women branch into certain feeder fields, there is a gap in the supply of candidates who actually decide to run for office. Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox argue when women do run, they are not hindered on the basis of sex since they do not experience disadvantages in party support, financial contributions, or the vote share compared to their male counterparts. Although, "candidate sex does have some impact on voter attitudes and behaviors in congressional elections, that impact is small compared to more traditional political influences, such as political party and incumbency" (Dolan 2004, 160). Rather, women have comparable success to male candidates.

Yet, gender still plays an important role as women's representation still only increases incrementally each election cycle. Lawless and Fox contend this

is because fewer female candidates run in elections. Women are less willing to run because of demanding campaigns, lack of recruiting by the parties, familial duties and expectations, and diminished perceptions of adequate qualifications for the job (Lawless and Fox 2010). Even women already involved in politics are less likely to run for higher office and will settle for lower-level positions (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, 140). This results from gendered differences in political ambition; while men aspire to much higher levels of government, women do not feel this same pull.

Lawless and Fox argue the political ambition gap emerges from "long-standing patterns of traditional socialization that persists in US culture" (2010, 8). One part of the problem is that "traditional family roles and responsibilities make considering a candidacy a much more complex and distant endeavor for women than men (Lawless and Fox 2010, 63-64). This is evident as most female politicians run for office later in life because "for women, as housework and child care responsibility increased, the likelihood they would consider running for office declined" (Palmer and Simon 2006, 56). Women candidates are held accountable, not only to professional qualifications, but to familial obligations as well. Kathleen Hall Jamieson emphasizes this "double bind" wherein a woman's professional success indicates a failure as a wife and mother, but failure in her career means she should have stayed home in the first place (Lawless and Fox 2010, 71). This lose-lose paradox puts additional pressure on female candidates that their male counterparts typically do not have to face, as they must care for their home life in addition to their careers. These specifically "gendered demands and expectations…may make women in the candidate eligibility pool less likely than men to enter into traditional family arrangements" (Lawless and Fox 2010, 74). This can be seen as many women decide to run for office later in life, after raising children. However, this often costs women key leadership positions that are based on seniority and longevity (Palmer and Simon 2006, 69).

Women, therefore, are underrepresented in Congress because they do not run, not because of any gender bias they might face in elections; there is a

"gender gap in political ambition" (Lawless and Fox 2010, 1). This indicates the importance of supply factors, not in qualified candidates, but in who ultimately decides to run. However, this decision to run is also affected by party recruitment of candidates, a demand factor.

Creating demand: party recruitment and gatekeeping

While Lawless and Fox showed the lack of female candidates has contributed to gender disparity, there are also influential demand factors that affect women's representation. While many assume the US will continue its steady incline in female representatives as women break further away from traditional gender roles and into more public positions, this may not necessarily be the case. Despite women enjoying equal electoral success as men, prompting the phrase "when women run, women win," increasing the number of female candidates willing to run (supply) is necessary but not sufficient for gender parity (Sanbonmatsu 2006, 1). Kira Sanbonmatsu argues that who runs for office is not the only factor, but rather, that political parties have an important role in recruiting and selecting candidates to put on the ballot, indicating a demand factor (2006, 2). As in the UK, parties' demand for certain candidates has a crucial role, more so than any specific demands of the electorate. This is especially important as in general, "women of all backgrounds and party identification remain less likely than men to be tapped to run for office" (Lawless and Fox 2010, 110).

Parties have large recruiting and gatekeeping functions, including deciding which candidates are encouraged to run, which are discouraged, and supporting candidates in primaries (Sanbonmatsu 2006, 2). Conventional wisdom holds that weaker parties with more candidate-centered elections are detrimental to women, as party leaders have less control over candidate selection and as such are unable to select women (Sanbonmatsu 2006, 3). However, Sanbonmatsu finds that stronger parties actually hurt women candidates as such parties have larger gatekeeper functions and often work to keep women out who they believe have lower electability in some races (2006, 3). This is evident as

across all areas as "women were told less often that they should consider running for office [and] they were half as likely to receive suggestions about running for office from party officials, political activities, or other elected officials" (Palmer and Simon 2006, 54). This stems from not only the "masculine ethos pervad[ing] the recruitment process," but also the idea that female candidates can only win certain types of districts in specific states (Lawless and Fox 2010, 110).

While this gatekeeping is specifically a demand factor, it also has a strong correlation with the supply of women who pursue candidacy. In fact, "when parties seek out and encourage candidates, individuals who have never considered becoming candidates may be asked to run" (Sanbonmatsu 2006, 31). **"**Party's recruitment of candidates can create ambitious politicians," thus alleviating some of the supply issues associated typically with ambition theories (Sanbonmatsu 2006, 31). In this regard, political parties' demand and recruitment of female politicians increases the number of women likely to run for office. Supply factors are still important but can become less salient by mitigating the demand factors addressed above.

America's Dilemma: Incumbency

While parties can do more to recruit female politicians, incumbency plays a prominent role in the seats available for candidates. While incumbency is not unique to the United States, it is much more influential in the US than in the UK, which focuses on party affiliation, rather than an individual candidate. Incumbency affects the demand for women, and all politicians, as there are only a certain number of open seats every election cycle. Since 1950, incumbents in the House of Representatives have enjoyed a 95 percent re-election rate because of the built-in success of name recognition, lack of challengers, and the ability to raise more money than their opponents (Palmer and Simon 2006, 26). Because of this, "women have a hard time winning seats in Congress not because they are women, but because of incumbency – and most incumbents are men" (Palmer and Simon 2006, 48).

In 2008, of the 435 open seats in the House of Representatives, only 36 did not have an incumbent running. This, in part, can be attributed to the rise of careerism in Congress, leaving less open seats available as representatives decide to stay in Congress longer (Palmer and Simon 2006, 48). The remaining open seats tend to generate large competition from several qualified candidates who must rely on party support for the nomination. In this area, Democrats nominate women 30 percent of the time, while Republicans are slightly lower at 20 percent (Fox 2010, 201-3). However, "for women to achieve full parity in U.S. political institutions, women must be represented fully in both parties" (Fox 2010, 203). In this sense, one of the first steps is for parties to select women to run for office. While the Labour Party in the UK has begun to do this with their policy of all women shortlists, both major parties in the US lag behind without similar, official policies.

One demand way for the US to improve representation is to create more "women-friendly" districts. Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon showed that female representatives are not randomly distributed across the country, but instead certain districts have characteristics that are more conducive for women (2006, 151). In general, women represent smaller districts in more urban areas with larger amounts of activist women. These districts provide more seats and opportunities to run for women. This is because women are perceived as better on the salient issues in these communities, such as welfare policies and are typically perceived as more liberal-leaning (Palmer and Simon 2006, 159). If more gerrymandering were done to create such women-friendly districts, women would have a much better chance of being elected. It is important to note that men represent over half of the current women-friendly districts, indicating that women are not guaranteed these spots but that they would have better chances in such districts (Palmer and Simon 2006, 205).

However, it is crucial to examine such districts according to party affiliation. Democratic women tend to represent areas "that are more liberal, more urban, more diverse, more educated, and much wealthier than those won

by male Democrats" (Palmer and Simon 2006, 152). Similarly, Republican women succeed in districts "that are less conservative, more urban, and more diverse than those electing male Republicans; they come from districts that are 'less Republican'"(Palmer and Simon 2006, 159). While these types of districts are expanding, indicating further success for female candidates, it may come at the price of Republican women. As Palmer and Simon argue "the districts where Republican women have the best opportunity to win a primary are the districts where their prospects in the general election are the lowest" (2006, 189). So even as women-friendly districts are expanding, the effects are not equally felt across parties. While these structural changes can assist female candidates in the future, there are also calls for changes in to the general culture surrounding American politics and other feminist issues.

State Maternalism

        While examining the impact of supply and demand factors can help elucidate many of the main problems in women's representation, the distinction can only be taken so far. The case of state maternalism, detailed below, illustrates how supply and demand can be circular. Eileen McDonagh argues the political context of the state itself is one of the causes of gender disparity in the US that is not present in the UK. She contends, "State policies [can] generate more favorable public attitudes about the suitability of women as leaders, which subsequently lead to the election of more women to political office" (2009, 30). She goes on to say that compared to other nations the US lacks "state maternalism" or "public policies that guarantee positive rights to groups representing social or biological traits associated with women" (2009, 31). This is most clearly seen through welfare provisions, as many countries have now transferred care duties, such as the need for food, health care, education, and clothing, from the family to the state itself. In McDonagh's study, all of the comparable western democracies, including the UK, cover over 50 percent, if not more, of the cost of welfare provisions, while the US only provides 44 percent (2009, 35). In this regard, "80 percent of the world's democracies

comparable to the United States maternalize public policies by both their constitutional and funding commitment to provide for the welfare needs of the population" (McDonagh 2009, 40).

To fix this, McDonagh advocates for a 'hybrid state' that combines liberal individualism with maternalism. The first guarantees equality regardless of sex, race, or class while the second fulfills social citizenship, especially in regards to welfare provisions (McDonagh 2009, 55). Such a state combines both male and female traits in its political and legal discourse, signifying to voters "women's suitability as political leaders and [increasing] the percentage of women elected to political office" (McDonagh 2009, 57). This is typically accomplished through the adoption of welfare provisions, gender quotas, maintaining a monarchy while democratizing, or a combination of the three. McDonagh's study shows all three have a direct effect on the number of people who support women as political leaders. Compared to every 1000 people who do not support female political leaders, the adoption of welfare provisions increases the number of those who do support to 4370, 1520 for gender quotas, 4502 for constitutional monarchy, and 5091 for all three (McDonagh 2009, 85). Finally, McDonagh concludes that part of the US's failure to elect more women to office results from lacking these policies and focusing too much on individual rights rather than implementing more maternal politics (2009, 129).

This state-centered approach indicates there are more systematic forces in play than candidate selection or women's political ambition. So, as more female politicians are elected to Congress this can help facilitate a culture of state maternalism, that would in turn, create a more women-friendly environment, which would encourage and demand more female representatives. However, such a hybrid state is not sufficient for gender parity, as the UK has taken on many of the qualities that McDonagh describes. Though Britain has had more success in electing female politicians, they too have barriers left to overcome.

Conclusion

In general, female politicians in both Britain and America face similar problems in regards to supply and demand factors, such as recruitment and political ambition, which limit exponential growth. As we have seen in the UK, the supply of female candidates is slowly losing importance as an explanation for gender disparity. While it is still a factor in the equation, demand factors seem to play a bigger role as seen in the Labour Party's success in their use of all-women shortlists to elect female candidates, while the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats lag behind without such a clear-cut policy. However, these policies are not sufficient in bringing full gender parity to Parliament.

Comparatively, the US has even more obstacles to overcome, as American women are less politically ambitious than their male counterparts, which decreases the supply of female candidates. This is further compounded, as there are fewer opportunities for women due to incumbency and because political parties demand fewer female candidates, even keeping women out of certain races. While the US could achieve increased gender parity through the use of women-friendly districts and by implementing some of the UK's equality guarantees, there also needs to be systematic and cultural reform in both countries.

For the US, this means an adaption of more maternal state policies to incorporate feminist concerns into Congress and government. For the UK, this means the continued feminization of British politics as a whole. Both countries should work toward a political system that supports and encourages female candidates to the point where policies like all-women shortlist would no longer be needed. Instead, gender parity would become a naturally occurring phenomenon that supported itself in both supply and demand. However, such an ideal situation is a long way off and until it is achieved, reformers must continually work to promote policies like equality guarantees and women-friendly districts.

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Girls, Gimmick, and Gore: The Echo of Feminist Performance Art in the Emerging "Gurlesque"

Dylan Krieger

Dylan Krieger (Class of 2012) is majoring in English and philosophy at Notre Dame. She was first introduced to the Gurlesque in the summer of 2009, through her first of several poetry writing classes at the university. In "Girls, Gimmick, and Gore," her final research project for Professor Stephen Fredman's English elective "Poetry and Performance," she traces the Gurlesque's roots in early feminist performance art, illustrating that both art forms combine grotesque imagery and humor to construct portraits of strong, playful, and vibrantly embodied women. In turn, she is currently writing a creative senior thesis that cites the Gurlesque as a primary source of inspiration.

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In March of 2010, two young, female poets produced an anthology of contemporary poetry which they believe represents a burgeoning new voice in feminist literature, an aesthetic which they call the 'Gurlesque.' Constructed from the titles of the 1980s punk feminist movement known as 'riot grrrl,' the historically gender-mocking 'burlesque' theatre, and the brazenly horrific imagery of the 'grotesque,' the word 'Gurlesque' denotes for its coiners a poetics which distinctively unites Third Wave feminist irony and "girly kitsch" with the unabashedly monstrous physicality of the female grotesque (Glenum 4, 15, 17). However, in their respective introductions to their anthology, poets Arielle Greenberg and Lara Glenum make very clear that they are amply aware of their emerging sub-genre's artistic precedents. In fact, Greenberg dedicates

the entire opening paragraph of her essay to this topic, identifying what she views as the Gurlesque's "ancestors," "grandmother," "mother," and "aunts" in such writers, musicians, and visual artists as Anne Rice, Sylvia Plath, Dolly Parton, and Cindy Sherman (1).

Yet, quite noticeably, there is no mention here of any predecessor to the Gurlesque primarily involved in performance art. This is surprising for several reasons, not least of which because, although not itself an inherently performative style of poetry, the Gurlesque is nevertheless closely tied to myriad performance media through its self-confessed roots in burlesque theatre, carnival-esque spectacles, and riot grrrl-sponsored punk shows. And indeed, despite the failure of Greenberg's essay to mention them, many female performance artists from the 1960s onward have boldly incorporated grotesque physical processes into their representations of women.

Thus, in this essay, I will argue that, whether consciously or not, the Gurlesque has been significantly informed and anticipated by feminist performance art, specifically in its flippant utilization of the grotesque to question and subvert traditional conceptions of the female body and psyche. To this end, I will first establish the general character of the grotesque body beyond any particular gender or artistic medium. I will then demonstrate the vital role that the female grotesque plays alongside humor within Gurlesque poetries, by citing Greenberg's anthology and its introductory essays. Finally, and most importantly, I will examine the works of several prominent feminist performance artists of the latter half of the 20th century, evidencing the similarly central position they grant to both the grotesque female body and comedy. In the remainder of the paper, I will offer a brief but informed reflection on the inherently intuitive nature of the marriage between feminism, humor, performance, and the grotesque, stressing once again the indebtedness of contemporary Gurlesque poets to their more explicitly performance-oriented forebears.

However, prior to any meaningful discussion of the grotesque's appearance in feminist art, it is of paramount importance to identify precisely what is meant by the term. Indeed, it is perhaps all too easy to dismiss the word 'grotesque' as merely another name (albeit arguably more particular to the world of art) for gore or acute bodily disfigurement. Yet, according to literary scholar and theorist Mary Russo, the "grotesque body" does not necessarily denote any quality nearly this specific, but rather a general physical principle of permeability and change:

> The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world; "it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (*RW*, 27). Most of all, it is identified with the "lower bodily stratum" (*RW*, 20) and its associations with degradation, filth, death, and rebirth. The images of the grotesque body are precisely those which are abjected from the bodily canons of classical aesthetics. The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with…"high" or official culture…and [the] normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official "low" culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (8)

Thus, it is not only the bleeding or deformed body which can be categorized as grotesque, but any body which exhibits mutability, porousness, or expulsion – the salivating body; the weeping body; the ejaculating, urinating, or menstruating body; the body conceiving, distending, and giving birth; the body in nutritive or sexual acts; the pubescent body and the aging body; the body as subject and object of all the dynamic physical interchanges of daily life.

These are the types of bodies which Gurlesque poets, as participants in the grotesque aesthetic, depict so vividly. Indeed, as Glenum puts it in her "Theory of the Gurlesque:"

> [i]n Gurleque poetry, human bodies and human language…are not closed, discrete systems. They are grotesque bodies/systems—never finished, ever-morphing, unstable, and porous. The body…is a strange borderland, the site of erratic and highly specific (and language-mediated) desires. (Glenum 17)

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For example, in Ariana Reines' "Blowhole," the opening poem of Greenberg and Glenum's anthology, a nameless female figure exhibits a "leaking" head and "break"-able eyes: "SHE say when she drink liquid it leak into her sinuses…So he BROKE her eyes she face brain…Liquid shoot into her skull and leak out her eye hole" (27). Similarly, in Dorothy Lasky's "Boobs Are Real," a first-person speaker describes the penetration, injury, and secretions of her body at the hands of an enemy "they:" "They pierced my eyelids. They scalped my brain. / They ran their sweaty fingers down my sweaty back" (155, ll. 6-7). Here, the literary female grotesque is seen at its most daring, exploring in excruciating detail the open, volatile, and malleable bodies of women.

In fact, it is this flagrancy, nonchalance, and even playfulness that may be said to be the most truly psychologically liberating aspect of the Gurlesque's progressive form of feminism. In other words, although Gurlesque poets' grotesque depictions of female bodies could be viewed as unfavorable, degrading, or even exploitative of women, the utterly nonplussed tone of their poems defies such a reading by envisioning women as ultimately unconquered by their attackers and almost comically unfazed by their own physical vulnerability.

This subtle yet essential feature of Gurlesque poetics can be seen quite clearly in the two poems cited above. First, in "Blowhole," not only does Reines' poetic narration itself maintain a detached, matter-of-fact quality even while delivering such blush-worthy lines as "First he spit on my asshole and then start in with a middle finger and then the cock slid in no sound come out, only a maw gaping, grind hard into ground," but the "leaking" female figure similarly maintains control and satisfaction even in the face of male violence; indeed, the "he" of the poem only "breaks" her eyes after the text reveals "SHE want him to have murder her" (27). Likewise, in Lasky's poem, after the speaker recalls the gruesome detail that "[t]hey cut off [her] fingers," she flippantly muses that she "'did like those fingers'" (155, ll. 4-5). In this way, the poets who partake in the grotesque aesthetic of the Gurlesque not only comment on the

nature of the female body, subverting classical stereotypes of feminine beauty involving uniformity and permanence, but also counter conventional conceptions of the female mind, emphasizing psychological strength and whimsy over emotional fragility and self-seriousness.

Interestingly, both Greenberg and Glenum identify this prominent use of humor in Gurlesque poetics as a distinctive mark of Third Wave feminist theory. Hence, Greenberg observes in her "Notes on the Origin of the (Term) Gurlesque" that, in Gurlesque poems:

> there appeared almost no trace of the earnestness, sensitivity or self-seriousness that marked many such poems stemming from Second Wave feminism. In the place of a high-minded or moral stance, these new poems had people bashing one another with candelabras…they had unicorns in them, and sequins, and swear words, and vomit. (Glenum 4)

However, despite this rigid association with contemporary feminist ideals, the artistic technique of the Gurlesque – with respect to both grotesque imagery and flippant tone – appears as early as 1964 in the work of feminist performance artists.

Indeed, perhaps one of the very first and most famous of these figures is Carolee Schneemann, whose performance work began in the late 1950's ("Performance Chronology"). It was not until 1964, however, that Schneemann staged a performance of *Meat Joy*, an event piece in which the "attempts" of men "to turn women into static…shapes" and "solid unit[s]" "fails" miserably, as a "huge tray of raw" meat is "strew[n]" on the performers' bodies in what eventually becomes an utterly chaotic and orgiastic intermingling of living human with dead animal flesh (Rothenberg 516). It is impossible not to be reminded here of Russo's description of the grotesque over and against the "classical" body – "open," "multiple," and "changing," rather than "closed," "static," and "self-contained" (8). Indeed, *Meat Joy* vividly depicts not only the blood and guts of stereotypical grotesque violence, but also the general principle

of dynamic and interpenetrating physicality that underlies the grotesque aesthetic as a whole.

Moreover, according to art historian and author Dr. Jayne Wark, Schneemann is only one of several feminist performance artists of the 1960s and 70s who dabbled in grotesque portrayals of female physicality. In particular, Wark explains that such artists regularly "formulated their resistance to how female bodies and sexualities had been determined and disciplined within patriarchal culture" by "transgress[ing] taboos and defiantly flaunt[ing] the connotations of the corporeal body as 'abject'" (170). Within this context, Wark maintains, "the abject" can be thought of as "the alien within us" and is for this reason closely "associated with those borders of the body where the inside meets the outside, with the fluids discharged from orifices, and with matter out of place" (170). Some examples Wark gives of this kind of abject female physicality in performance art include depictions of menstruation in Mako Idemitsu's video *What a Woman Made* (1973), masturbation in Susan Mogul's "parodic" *Take Off* (1974), and wet kissing in Lynda Benglis's *Female Sensibility* (1974; 170-173). Here, again, although never explicitly labeled 'grotesque,' these early feminist performance pieces are observed to distinctly exhibit the grotesque's characteristic focus on bodily invasion, change, and expulsion.

Yet, as previously asserted, the women behind these performance works anticipated the Gurlesque not only in their decidedly feminist use of the grotesque, but also in their glib and often ironic tone of artistic presentation. Prominent art theorist and literary scholar Linda S. Kauffman playfully refers to these performance artists as "cutups," thereby alluding both to the "antiaesthetic" (i.e., non-classical or grotesque) quality of their work and to their reputation as "bawdy comics, satirizing the culture's investments in femininity" (104). Interestingly, Kauffman's very first example of such an artist is Schneemann, whom she claims "stages" the female body as a "site of contestation" in many of her works "through parody, defamiliarization, and

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incongruous juxtaposition" (106). According to Kauffman, this "staging" is masterfully demonstrated in one of Schneemann's best-known performance pieces, *Interior Scroll* (1975), in which "a naked Schneemann extracts a paper scroll from her vagina and reads a text [from it] on 'Vulvic Space'" (104). In this work, Kauffman argues, Schneemann boldly satirizes the process and politics of "naming" and subverts viewers' expectations by using a foreign "scroll" to "simultaneously evoke" both "the umbilical cord and menstruation" (105).

Another, more recent example of Kauffman's "cutup" is found in the French art-history professor and performance artist known as Orlan (107). Kauffman describes Orlan's latest and best-known artistic project as follows:

> [T]hrough plastic surgery, [Orlan] is transforming her face into a composite of the icons of feminine beauty. She tracks the interrelationships between sexuality and pathology, between the female body and the body politic, deconstructing femininity. Through a series of [performed] plastic surgeries, she is in the process of acquiring the chin of Botticelli's *Venus*, the nose of Diana, the forehead of the *Mona Lisa*, the mouth of Boucher's *Europa*, the eyes of Gerome's *Psyche*…[B]y putting [classical] theories into practice, she exposes all the implications they have overlooked: the arbitrariness of their standards, the impossibility of meeting them, the unchallenged assumption that every woman *wants* beauty. (107)

In Orlan's artistic endeavor, we see the grotesque in arguably one of its most explicit confrontations with classical standards of beauty. For, as Kauffman's above interpretation rightly suggests, Orlan's project could indeed be seen precisely as an illustration of the necessity of grotesque physical damage and alteration in the female pursuit of classical ideals. Thus, in short, Orlan demonstrates that the classical body is actually dependent upon and even subsumed by the grotesque, insofar as one must undergo the horrors of bodily invasion and reconstruction in order to achieve even a brief share in its static and sealed uniformity.

However, here, too, the grotesqueries of feminist performance art are accompanied by a heavy dose of humor and absurdity. For, as art critic and

historian Barbara Rose notes, Orlan's surgical performances are hardly "sincere" – at least not in any sense of the word that would paint them as a legitimately apt model for female behavior:

> Orlan's performances might be read as rituals of female submission…But actually she aims to exorcise society's program to deprive women of aggressive instincts of any kind…If the parts of seven different ideal women are needed to fulfill Adam's desire for an Eve made in his image, Orlan consciously chooses to undergo the necessary mutilation to reveal that the objective is unattainable and the process horrifying. (125)

Thus, according to Rose, Orlan's performances are precisely a parody of "female submission" to classical standards of beauty, meant to illustrate the "horror" that awaits such submission at its ultimate conclusion.

Yet, despite feminist performance art's undeniable penchant for irony, it may nonetheless be fruitful here to acknowledge some arguable differences between the humor of past performance artists and that of the contemporary Gurlesque. After all, we should take seriously Greenberg's claim that Third Wave feminism departs from Second Wave at least partly in the role it delegates to humor; for this is both an informed and oft corroborated claim, and for these reasons alone cannot simply be disregarded (Glenum 4).

In this context, it seems that Greenberg's contention regarding the Gurlesque (and, by extension, Third Wave feminist art in general) is that its sense of whimsy is so utterly absolute as to render it liable to mock not only the societal standards of beauty and behavior which are perceived to oppress women, but also women themselves. That is, instead of using the female grotesque to represent a discriminatory and wrongheaded view of women and their bodies (as the early feminist performance artists described above arguably do), Third Wave feminists use it to reveal a liberating and joyous truth: that the beauty and excitement found in female bodies – as in all bodies – often resides precisely in their "flaws," i.e., their irregularities, excretions, permeability, and ephemerality. Thus, whereas the humor of Schneemann and Orlan is nearly

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synonymous with "sarcasm" or "social critique," that of Reines and Lasky is more closely akin to mere silliness – light-hearted, victimless, and self-aware, rather than pointed, scornful, and "self-serious" (Glenum 4). Despite these differences, however, we may nevertheless observe in the work of both groups that the marriage between humor and feminist art is shown to be a fruitful and intuitive one.

Yet, according to some scholars, it is far from the only aesthetic union relevant to feminist art that displays these characteristics. More specifically, in his book *Rabelais and His World*, famed Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin points out that the female body holds at least as intuitive a relationship with the grotesque; for women are preeminently "penetrable, suffer the addition of alien body parts, and become alternately huge and tiny" (339). In this way, as Glenum puts it, "women represent the quintessential grotesque" (Glenum 17). This point can be illustrated further simply by revisiting the list of physical processes detailed above as examples of the grotesque (See page 3: "salivating," "weeping," "ejaculating," etc.); for, whereas the male body can undergo only a substantial portion of these, the female body can perform them all.

In the same vein, an argument can in turn be made for the inherent intuitiveness of the grotesque's pairing with performance. Indeed, when considering the staggering prevalence of the grotesque in modern art compared to in past eras, it is difficult not to imagine that this proliferation was due at least in part to the rise of new art forms in the early 20th century (such as film) that required the passage of time and thus freshly allowed for the representation of physical change. Such mediums, unlike painting or poetry, demonstrated the ability to accurately or even extravagantly depict the body's engagement in grotesque processes over time, and thus arguably drew new interest to the presence of this capacity in other performance-oriented art forms as well. Ultimately, whether these speculations are historically founded or not is of little importance here. What can be gleaned from their line of reasoning, however, is

that performative artistic mediums seem to be by their very nature particularly disposed to portraying the grotesque, insofar as they all fundamentally involve the core principle of its aesthetic: material change brought about by time.

Through these connections, it becomes clear not only that the Gurlesque's whimsical use of the grotesque to feminist ends was heavily anticipated by previous female performance artists, but also that the development of this latter influence in the 1960s and 70s was no mere coincidence: its combination of feminism with humor, performance, and grotesque physicality is indeed a natural and productive one, and one to which contemporary artists involved in the Gurlesque – whether themselves personally concerned with the role of performance in their own work or not – are deeply indebted. However, it is not out of the question that a careful look back at the history of the grotesque's relationship to performance would significantly alter a Gurlesque poet's attitude toward public readings and appearances. For, despite the richness and potency of grotesque literature, if revisiting the works of early feminist performance artists can teach us anything, it is that only with extreme difficulty can we underestimate the value of a live and vividly spatio-temporal performance to an understanding and appreciation of the grotesque body's transformations – within, without, and between gender boundaries.

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