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GENDER AND FEMINISM: THE STUDENTS' VIEW

Volume 2

Sara Martín Alegre (ed.)



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Sara Martín Alegre, Encouraging Students to Discuss Gender

The volume in your hands, kind reader, gathers together contributions mainly by the students enrolled in the third/fourth year elective 'Gender Studies', which I taught in the first semester of 2017-18, within the four-year BA in 'English Studies' here, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.¹ This is the second volume in what I intend to be a long series, called *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View*. The first volume, published back in 2014, is now close to 1000 downloads. This and other successful experiences publishing students' work online² have sufficiently proven to me that, despite the effort that editing involves, the whole process is worth it. It is a great satisfaction for me, both as a teacher and as an experienced researcher in Gender Studies, to have given the 29 authors a chance to express themselves in the diverse texts I offer it.

The project of producing this e-book started modestly as an attempt to imitate the first slim volume. Accordingly, students wrote a short personal essay (1000 words) for which they were given complete freedom of choice regarding topic and approach. However, worrying that the resulting document would be too limited, I decided to add a selection of the students' papers and, also, some other short essays. These were written for an exam based on freely choosing a passage from the handbook edited by Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson, *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. This explains why this particular text is so often referenced here. The papers have a list of 'Works Cited', whereas the section I have named 'See Also' references, apart from Robinson and Richardson's volume, other sources that I have mostly added myself to complement the essays.

The hardest task in editing this volume has been organizing the essays in an attractive sequence. The first part of the volume gathers together the 34 shorter essays written with the main aim of expressing an idea, rather than complying with the strict rules of academic work, whereas the second part offers 18 papers. Sometimes the difference is not so obvious and I have hesitated about where to place some essays. In the end, I have decided to separate the essays analyzing texts from the rest of the shorter pieces even when they were offered from a personal point of view. I hope this makes sense.

The reader will see that, anyway, the essays talk to each other across these convenient divisions, forming a quite homogeneous young, collective voice. This is to be expected: I find that the students enrolling in Gender Studies courses at university level are tolerant, open-minded and firm in their convictions. In a way this is a problem, for although I believe that their position is strengthened after taking one of these courses, I worry that as a teacher I'm not reaching the more conservative

¹ The syllabus for the course is available here: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/176581>. 8 of the 29 authors are guests: Lola Martín Pons is a second-year E.S.O. student; Yvette Damas is a BA dissertation tutoree; Sara Arenas is a graduate of English Studies; Montse Pons, Ana Sáez, Siobhan Dooley, and Laura Gutiérrez are students in the MA Advanced English Studies.

² See *Reading SF Short Fiction: 50 Titles* (<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/163528>), *Charming and Bewitching: Considering the Harry Potter Series* (<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/122987>) and *Addictive and Wonderful: The Experience of Reading the Harry Potter Series* (<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/118225>).

segment of the student body, much less the recalcitrant defenders of patriarchy (boys but also girls) most urgently in need of education. As a specialist in Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities, I am, above all, concerned by how hard it is to raise an anti-patriarchal awareness among young men, not because they refuse to listen but because I don't even have the chance to meet them in the Humanities. Only 10% of all students in English Studies are male. This does not mean that all 90% of female students are willing to learn more about Gender Studies, but I'm sure you see the problem. And apologies for using binary categorization...

Has anything changed since the publication of the 2014 volume? Yes, I think so. To begin with, the gender-related vocabulary has expanded spectacularly and you will find the 2018 students more confident when discussing issues such as intersexuality and asexuality. Also, and this has been crucial, the semester overlapped the Harvey Weinstein scandal in the U.S.A., the world-wide spreading of the anti-abuse #metoo Twitter campaign and the beginning of a very urgent debate on harassment at the work place in many corners of Earth. I have constantly made the point that masculinity is not patriarchy and that we need to take the chance to shed what many are now calling 'toxic masculinity' and to embrace healthier alternatives. This has been a constant topic of discussion in class, together with a perceptible weariness regarding labelling. As a student declared "I have been more labelled against than labelling". Soon we'll have to consider whether the current proliferation of labels to define gender and sexuality is giving positive visibility to marginalized bodies and minds, or furthering the divide between central heteronormativity and the peripheral rest.

As I wrote in my previous preface four years ago, I am not particularly happy to be teaching Gender Studies because I am very sorry that they are still needed. Teaching Gender Studies still involves many problems: it is hard to get the recognition you may earn in less confrontational fields³ and it often feels like painting yourself into a debased feminine corner, not to mention the problems caused by the habitual misreading of the word 'feminist' even among young women. Teaching Gender Studies is, however, also immensely rewarding since it has a very direct impact on young persons' lives, as you will see, and on my own, as I need to rationalize an anti-patriarchal discourse which is often too emotional for words, too grounded on rage and fear.

I'll finish by thanking once more the wonderful contributors from the bottom of my heart for working with me toward a better society, which I hope to see one day constituted as the norm. I am very, very proud to have elicited all these valuable insights into gender and feminism from them.

Enjoy...

Barcelona, February 2018

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<http://gent.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>

<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>, *The Joys of Teaching Literature*

³ See: "Teaching Gender Studies as Feminist Activism: Still Struggling for Recognition" <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/126586>.

PART ONE: PERSONAL VIEWS

Christine Johanna Seusing, We Are All Sexist: Why Gender Studies Should Be Obligatory for Everybody

Many people say that there is not a real borderline between a compliment and everyday sexism. In my opinion there is one, which becomes clear when you put the focus on the recipient. As soon as a woman feels uncomfortable with a ‘compliment’ or anything else not quite right that a man might have told her, you can say that this is chauvinism or everyday sexism.

A famous example of this problem discussed in Germany these days is that of 39-year-old Sawsan Chebli, State Secretary in Berlin for International Affairs. As such, she had been invited to give a speech at the annual general assembly of the German-Indian Association. Believing that State Secretary Chebli had not arrived yet, the former German ambassador in charge of presenting the act announced that they would start with the speeches immediately. Chebli responded from the first row, where she was sitting on her reserved seat, that she was already there, right in front of him. The former ambassador replied: “I did not expect such a young woman. And besides that, you are so pretty!”

Both the content of the comment and the occasion for uttering it are entirely inappropriate. What comes with the words of the former ambassador is the presumption that it is uncommon for an attractive woman to be also smart, successful, and in this position of political significance. Furthermore, this was an official event where Chebli was speaking in her position as the State Secretary—her physical appearance and her age are private concerns and should not matter at all. Amazingly, when Chebli narrated the incident on her Facebook page she became a victim of sexist attacks... She posted something that happens everyday everywhere on this planet: an instance of sexism against women. Sexual assaults, of the kind that Harry Weinstein perpetrated, are only the tip of the iceberg; everyday sexism of the kind that Chebli suffered, chauvinism, and macho behaviour is what makes this iceberg grow.

But what exactly is sexism? For me sexism is not only discriminating people depending on their gender. For me sexism is the way we expect people to act in a gender-specific way. This begins mostly even before birth. The kicks of a baby in the maternal body are valued differently whether the baby is a boy or a girl. People in general speak different to boys and girls; they give them different toys and dress them in a gender-specific way: girls in pink, boys in blue. The clothing and toy industry are happy about it. Thus society and culture create gender roles, which are prescribed as appropriate behaviour for a person of a specific sex. People are not given a choice to decide their own identity within these categories. This is the basis of sexism, those are the structures of thinking and behaving that are deeply connected to our society. The structures we all have to think about and confront because they need to be changed. To share incidents like the one affecting Sawsan Chebli or the campaign during which people posted under the hashtag #metoo about their personal experience with sexism

and sexual assault on social media is a good way to make visible in society that this problem still exists, that it is an everyday issue and more common than we all think. We need to make people more aware of sexism.

What I miss here is the voice of men. What we need in my opinion is a broad debate about sexism in which we involve the whole society, men and women, adults, teenagers and children. This is why Gender Studies should be taught in schools, kindergartens and certainly to educators, who often strengthen those behavioural roles. Everyone should become aware of the stereotypes that are inscribed so deeply in our society and the way most of us think, how we don't even notice their existence anymore. We need clarification! We need people to know that we are all sexist. Every day. In the way we talk dismissively about a boy in a skirt. In the way we buy pink clothes for our niece. In the way we judge people like Conchita Wurst and consider them not 'normal' just because they perform gender following their own interpretation. Gender Studies is a good way to show people what is happening in this society. That we take a random category, just as random as the size of our fingers or the look of our belly button, and categorize, stereotype and discriminate people depending on it. But this needs to end.

And as long as we all catch ourselves having those sexist thoughts, as long as there are different toys for boys and girls, women will be judged by their appearance and will have to face compliments coming with the awful truth of the widespread existence of sexism. We need to solve this problem by eliminating its origin: the sexism we all practice every day without even noticing. This is why Gender Studies today, against the backdrop of people like Harry Weinstein and many others, against the backdrop of the chauvinist behaviour of any German ambassadors and of women getting attacked for making public statements about this, should not only be taught in an academic context to privileged people, but to everyone in school, above all to the people who nurture the future generation and educate our children. So that in the future the matter of sex, of being a boy or a girl, becomes as unimportant as the size of our toes or the look of your belly button, and everyone can freely choose how they want to perform gender in their very own, un-stereotyped, way.

SEE ALSO

Ataman, Ferda. "Sexismus-Debatte in Berlin: 'Tragen Sie doch eine Burka'". *Spiegel Online* 21 October 2017. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/sawsan-chebli-sexismus-debatte-in-berlin-kommentar-a-1173995.html>

Kröning, Anna; Sabine Menkens. "Staatssekretärin prangert Sexismus an". *Welt* 21 October 2017. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article169668512/Staatssekretaerin-prangert-Sexismus-an.html>

Reuters staff. "Sexism or Compliment? German Politician Stokes Debate". *Reuters* 19 October 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-women-sexism/sexism-or-compliment-german-politician-stokes-debate-idUSKBN1CO1VQ>

Arantxa González Blanco, Gender and Sex: Social Construction or Social Obstacle?

Introducing Gender and Women's Studies is a book which deals with the key issues and developments in gender and feminist theory. The topic I cover here, from the first chapter by co-editor Diane Richardson, covers the issue of how gender, the gender/sex binary, gender inequality, and gender neutrality are conceptualized. Should sex be considered a social construction as gender is? This is a question that shows how significant and controversial this distinction may be when defining bodies as either male or female.

Firstly, "the distinction between sex and gender has been challenged by arguments that sex is just as much a social construction as gender. Rather than thinking about sex and gender as separate from each other, gender has increasingly been used to refer to any social construction having to do with the female/male binary, including male and female bodies" (Richardson 2015: 7). Thus, it seems more useful to combine these two concepts and abandon the sex/gender binary because, in my view, sex does not define a person.

Secondly, gender is usually associated with cultural and historic social roles regarding men and women. There is a need to associate practices and values to gender which labels someone as masculine or feminine. And in the case of children, their socialisation into a specific gender role is viewed as debateable when parents want to raise their child as 'gender neutral'. This is known as the process of becoming gendered and it reflects how making this distinction has consequences for both men and women: they cannot choose because they are supposed to behave as their assigned gender role imposes from the very beginning.

Thirdly, feminist gender theorists tend to focus on how gender role expectations lead to gender inequality. For instance, women are expected to perform the role of the good wife or the good mother. I agree that this idea might jeopardize and limit young girls growing up in a society that restricts them to be anything but this, and puts them in situations in which their educational aspirations (and the type of jobs they might end up doing) are also limited.

Following those two last ideas, Richardson mentions the Swedish gender-neutral pre-school *Egalia*. There, teachers follow a new set of rules such as using first names or genderless pronouns, selecting books that avoid traditional depictions of gender, or aiming at not limiting their students to social expectations based on their gender. Dismantling gender roles and pursuing gender equality is a core aspect in Swedish pre-school curricula. In my opinion, this type of school is the perfect example of a good solution to gender inequality issues. Spreading the model might seem difficult at first because it is different from the strict rules of our society but it is a start. These Swedish children, of course, are living in a bubble shaped by the school and it is uncertain how they will behave once educated and in society, but they will be the first generation not to treat people differently because of their sex or their gender, which I find beautiful.

In conclusion, the distinction between sex and gender seems to be less relevant on paper but no less controversial, mostly from a social perspective. From Richardson's point of view, there are still issues such as gender inequality, which greatly show how significant the consequences are of maintaining it and how society forces unwanted divisions upon people.

SEE ALSO

Richardson, Diane. "Conceptualizing Gender". Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2007. 3-19.

Cristina Montes Venegas, In the Name of Sex: Normativity and Sexual Centrality in Contemporary Society

When deciding on a topic to write about in this essay I had doubts on what to talk about, to be honest. I knew for a long time, even before I enrolled on this subject, Gender Studies, that I wanted to talk about social impositions and the struggles many of us suffer because of them, but it was always something very generic—something along the lines of gender obligations and the gender binary, the compulsory rule of (patriarchal) heterosexuality, bisexual erasure, abuse, feminism in general, etc. Of course this would entail writing a very long essay and, as much as I would like to give my opinion on these topics, the word limit is a restricted one.

However, my mind started to change due to various events. The first one is related to a comment made in class about how bisexual people face even more discrimination than homosexual people. This reminded me of a friend of my sister's who happens to be bisexual. I remember how he received comments such as: 'Why can't you decide what you are?', 'Are you ok health-wise?', 'You just want to be greedy and get both sides', 'You are only saying you're bisexual because you want to get attention from people' and, actually a comment by one of his (supposedly) closest friends offered behind his back: 'Yes, he's bi. More like a sex addict'. A second idea is related to how it was said in class that it is hard for men to follow an 'ideal' masculinity model and how this ideal can never be achieved. A third idea connects with asexuality and how asexual people face even more discrimination due to the central position that sex occupies in society. That was the moment when I decided to discuss here sexual normativity.

What I mean by 'sexual normativity' isn't only the imposition by which everyone should be heterosexual but also the fact that—regarding bisexual and especially asexual people—many people still believe that a) you have to choose who you are sexually attracted to, b) that you can't be sexually attracted to both males and females and c) that you can't be sexually attracted to nobody at all.

With regards to bisexuality, what it's true is that many bisexuals face the stigma of being regarded as either heterosexual or homosexual if they date someone from their same sex or from the opposite. Now, this is something which many still assume and, unfortunately, I'm embarrassed to admit that I still sometimes fall into the same trap (or sexist category) when I look at a male-female couple and I assume that they're both heterosexual. Assuming someone else's sexual orientation based on what you see is bad enough in itself. Yet, I believe that an even worse problem surfaces when, despite positively knowing that an individual is bisexual, others still purposefully deny the bisexuality of this person, invalidating their choice to label themselves as such and, as a result, force them to choose an option in a way which is not at all a choice.

Regarding (sexual) choice, asexuality is placed in today's society in a peculiar conundrum due to the newness and singularity of this sexual orientation. An asexual person is someone who does not experience sexual attraction and chooses not to have sex; however, some may choose to eventually have sex due to various reasons (such as pleasing someone else or out of the simple curiosity of experiencing sex) and many

may choose to masturbate as well. The amount of struggle that asexual people engage in connects with the following: the denial and pathologization of their identity, not being welcomed to the LGBT+ community by many, what is horribly known as 'corrective rape', being told that it's just a phase, the belief that they just have to try having sex to see if they like it—in the case of never having had sex—or the belief that they haven't found 'the right person yet' in the case that they've actually had sex.

This new label and definition may sound very foreign to us but, if you think about it, the arguments made against asexuals—and bisexuals as well—feel very similar to those made against homosexuals not so long ago. This may not seem very obvious to some people, however. Recently, I was discussing the matter of sexual orientation with two other persons and we all agreed that people should feel free to identify and label (or not) themselves as they wanted and not feel discriminated because of that. However, when the topic of asexuality came up one of them said that "those are just sick people"; she couldn't understand "how someone can identify as that" and expressed the opinion that they "should do some corrective therapies or something so they [could] be cured". To my dismay, the other person agreed and when trying to point out to them that this argument has the same false rationalisation as those made against homosexuals they both denied this and kept on offering similar opinions. Unfortunately, I've heard the same arguments made against bisexual people too. Needless to say, we aren't friends anymore.

The point that I'm trying to make is the same one that many asexuals (and non-asexuals too) stress: contemporary society is too focused on sex. Now, I'm not saying we should get rid of everything which poses a sexual connotation, of course not. What puzzles me is how sex is so central and everybody is so focused on what others decide to do (or not) in bed when this is actually (and shouldn't be) nobody's business and we should be more empathetic, kind and respectful instead of invalidating others' sexual experiences.

Lastly, of course when this argument fails there is always the prejudiced argument about what is 'natural or not'—how, in the case of asexuals, feeling sexual attraction is a natural and normal thing and, in the case of bisexuals, feeling sexual attraction towards only one sex and/or gender is considered natural and normal—and my 'favourite': how science can cure your 'sexual deviation'. Quoting model Rain Dove: "When did we take science and turn it into shackles?" Science can't be a tool taken as an only and absolute truth to invalidate people's experiences just because you're bisexual, asexual, homosexual, pansexual, etc. Likewise, instead of focusing on the absurdity that supposes to have a normative and 'ideal' sexuality, we should accept the diversity and differences of the many sexualities that exist and the benefit they can bring not only to feminism but to humanity as well. We can be better people if we try. We'll be better people for doing that.

SEE ALSO

Gender Capitalism, a TED Talk by model Rain Dove. 13 July 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKgfHc6umRU>

The Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), <http://www.asexuality.org/>
Young, Sarah. "Rain Dove: Meet the Firefighter Turned Model Who's Defying Gender Norms in the Fashion Industry". *The Independent* 10 July 2017.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/rain-dove-model-defying->

[gender-norms-fashion-industry-men-women-clothing-firefighter-a7832991.html](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747480.2017.1382991)

Dian Moschini Izquierdo, Challenging the Patriarchal Gender Binary: A New Feminist and Queer Insight on Gender, Sex and Sexual Orientation

Identity as we know is an important asset to understand who we are and has proven to be the key to our social interaction. Gender and sexual orientation seems to have many consequences in our lives; both in our personal experience as well in our roles in society. Precisely, questions of gender identity are openly discussed both in Feminism and Queer Studies since in our patriarchal society gender identities, personal agency and social structures often collide.

Certainly, patriarchy has proven to possess a binary gender system belief given promoting the assumption that there are only two genders (gender and sex seem to be the same concept), each of them assigned only one kind of performance that comes with strict social functions. This binary gender system will only accept an exact genitalia-gender correspondence arguing that the sex in which one individual is born has to be also their gender. Furthermore, patriarchy imposes a series of behaviours, characteristics and external performances assigned to each of these two genders normally punishing the fact of acting 'outside the box'.

Gender is seen as a central part of identity and as part of the organisation of a society that relies much on the correct gender performance of each of the two only genders. This, of course, creates inequality as a patriarchal societal organisation excludes much of the individual agenda and promotes violence against those who are not gender-conforming. In the chapter "Gendered Bodies: Gendered Lives" by Kath Woodward, she discusses how a binary society finds troubling the fact that, some individuals may challenge the certainty of these assumptions—that human beings can only be female or male and that this can be identified by their external body characteristics. She describes how "surgical interventions have been carried out so that the gender identities of intersex infants are consistent and conform to social and cultural external, visible expectations" (2002: 83); this troubling anxiety is absolutely related to the binary gender system, which promotes policies, practices and assumes specifically functions of each gender, e.g. women nurturing children, men working as breadwinners.

Feminism started to challenge patriarchy primarily fighting against the normalisation of gender roles along with assumed gender performances. Since this discussion opened, much more has happened inside the movement. For instance, in the 1970s gay and lesbian movements evidenced how closed-minded was the feminist movement given that patriarchal gender and sexual policies affected not only women's social rights but also their sexual freedom. Surely, feminism has acknowledged that a patriarchal society harms every gender as it also interferes with sexual freedom; the imposed view of gender and sex that characterises patriarchy is the reason why the intersectionality between feminism and the homosexual, and later queer, movements became absolute key. It is in this intersectionality that characterises the third and fourth-wave feminism where we find a true challenge of the binary system.

As mentioned before, within third wave-feminism and the fourth wave of feminism, the two movements began to realise the common ground for gender and sexual liberation. In addition, even though the LGBT+ community had accomplished some victories there is still a lack of laws that protect trans rights and there is little non-binary visibility (an umbrella term to refer to people that do not identify themselves as men or women). The empowerment and liberation of all genders from the patriarchal system must be seen as a fight common to feminism and the queer movements because the toxic assumptions of patriarchy have created violence against individuals that did not ascribe to the patriarchal 'gender box'. Furthermore, third and fourth-wave feminism choose to place intersectionality in the centre of the movement, fighting and protecting—and sometimes incorporating to their discourse—issues of non-binary and not gender-conforming people.

Coinciding with the arrival of the Internet and a new feminism wave—fourth-wave feminism was thought to be born in 2011 with the triumph of social networking platforms such as Tumblr—a new gender and sexual terminology began to be used by feminist and queer theorists. Sex is seen as the physiological characteristics of the body with which a person is born that include, for example, reproductive organs. Gender identity refers to one's own understanding of oneself in terms of gender categories such as: man, woman, transgender, gender-neutral or non-binary. We also may cite the famous phrase: "Sex is between the legs, gender between the ears". Sexual orientation, then, describes simply an individual who has sexual or romantic attraction for another human being; by the same token, sexual orientation is not the same as gender expression or gender identity. We can say then, that the concept of gender for feminism and queer movements has evolved to be understood as a spectrum, a fluid concept and not a binary one.

Finally, I would like to point out that feminism and queer movements have found a common ground in the fight against the imposed binary system that patriarchy promotes. Firstly, by challenging the restrictive gender performance, bringing new types of femininity and masculinity expression and, lastly, by changing the views on gender and sex terminology against a patriarchal system that pretends to jeopardise personal freedom in order to decide how to live or perform gender.

SEE ALSO

Woodward, Kath. "Gendered Bodies, Gendered Lives". Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2007. 75-90.

Albert Muñoz Varela, Not all Bodies Matter the Same

“bodies are made and remade in relation to the wider society
and are not simply given biologically”
(Woodward 2007: 89)

By that, Woodward means that human bodies are not solely “containers of the self”, but that they are constantly carrying and negotiating meaning. Hence, they are classified, graded and in a constant reshaping within a social frame that conditions them. A cow, for instance, has a body whose changes are exclusively biological. On the other hand, humans—to begin with—must wear clothes in public at all times; otherwise they could be fined or put in jail. From the very moment in which we are born, we are ascribed a gender and a sex that will heavily influence our lives. If one “is born a boy”, one will be encouraged to have short hair, be strong and not wear skirts or purses. If one “is born a girl”, one will be expected to have long hair, to be beautiful and to dress in a specific, “feminine” way.

Furthermore, if one is born as an intersex individual, chances are that violence will be applied upon the newborn, remaking its body so as to fit within the binary category of sexes imposed by doctors and the medical discourse. Intersex individuals—contrary to transsexuals—find themselves trapped in the system without having their own voice to decide. This would be an extreme example of what Woodward means by ‘bodies not being exclusively biological, but made and remade socially’.

Not all bodies matter the same; children used to be taught at school that there was a hierarchy of human races, with whites on top and blacks at the bottom. Nowadays, we may be tempted to think that that affirmation is outrageous and preposterous: we know that there is only one “human species”, as we know that differences are only visual/aesthetical. Nonetheless, is that really so? Do people really think every body matters the same? No. Some days ago, there was a terrorist attack at a mosque in Egypt. More than 300 people died, yet virtually none of us changed their profile image on Facebook, as some did when the terrorist attack hit Les Rambles in Barcelona. It is not only about “race”; male bodies have more chances of earning more money at work than female bodies doing the same kind of tasks; black bodies are more likely to go to jail than white bodies are; thin bodies are more likely to be beautiful (and thus happy?) than fat bodies, just as “disabled” bodies find more difficulties in society than “abled” or “normal” bodies. Our bodies are constantly classified, and yes, there are several hierarchies. The vast majority of advertisement that we are exposed to in our society stars beautiful white people. One might think that this is because of cultural reasons, and so as to feel more identified with them. Nonetheless, white people appear all around the world as the example of beauty sublimation, in countries where whiteness does not represent the bulk of society (think for instance of Japan and its Western obsession).

Patriarchy’s imposition of the beauty canon often results in depression and anxiety, especially for young women. This beauty canon makes people’s bodies change; it shapes and reshapes them. In this image dictatorship, bodies have to be

thin, tall, graceful, beautiful, perfect, white and sensuous. In the last century, in the US there was the vogue among Afro-Americans to bleach their skin white, so as to resemble the homogeneous, powerful society. It goes without saying that this vogue was really harmful for these people. In this sense, the body is our only tangible expression of our self. We exteriorise feelings and thoughts through our bodies. Neoliberalism takes advantage of it and offers hundreds of ways of changing our identities through the body. Everyday more and more women who want to reach the unreachable beauty canon, undergo aesthetic surgery to have bigger breasts, less fat in their bodies, more sensuous lips, etc. Men are not left behind in this regard: I personally know (and the personal is the political) some men who have changed their noses for aesthetical reasons.

To sum up with, Woodward states that human bodies are not solely biology, but that they are in constant dialogue with society, which makes and remakes them through aesthetic impositions and advertisement. These bodies are our only representation of our selves, and they are under constant violence, either psychological (the imposition of what Beauty looks like) or physical (being excluded from the narrative of not being white, being discriminating against in a job interview because of being a woman or “disabled”, or a minority). The system uses this violence as a tool of control, subversion and subjugation.

In further research, I think it would be of interest to mention non-Western civilisations and how their own societies create and reshape their bodies. For instance, within the Xhosa people (or the Jews) there exists the belief/rule that men should be circumcised; in countries where the Sharia is the law, thieves have their arms chopped off; in Japan, if you are a member of the Yakuza and you are dishonoured, your little finger will be removed. The examples go from body painting (or tattoos) to body mutilations (clitoris, for instance), dress codes or the shape of one’s feet (China). Human bodies, contrary to untamed animals, are not exclusively biological, but remodelled within a certain society and its traditions, rules and customs.

SEE ALSO

Woodward, Kath. “Gendered Bodies, Gendered Lives”. Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women’s Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2007. 75-90.

Belén González Gómez, Feminists Need to Relax

You don't like my title, do you? You may be experiencing a little bit of irritation, your teeth are perhaps clenching, your mouth is probably drying. You are thinking "What is going on in the head of this woman?" and maybe, just maybe, if you were on Twitter you would be cracking your fingers just about to tell me (now in 280 characters) how little capacity my brain has. Well, wait. Please, wait. Breathe and relax, count to three before you type, for you are on the verge of making a crucial mistake.

However, how could you wait? How could you relax? Women have been oppressed since ancient Greece, when the female body was declared to be only an aberrant and deformed version of the perfect one, which was the male body. We have been outraged, insulted, mistreated and forced to become objects controlled by men's whims and inclinations. We still are. Our mothers, sisters, friends and ourselves are raped, murdered and systematically discriminated against just because of our gender. Just for that. I get it. I understand. We are sick and we are tired.

This is why in Manresa, the city where I am from, the feminist emblem is painted on the wall of the main church, next to words in lilac demanding the right to decide on our own body. This explains why when Dani Mateo, a very popular Spanish comedian, tweeted a deplorable joke about menstruation⁴ hundreds of people went for his jugular. This frustration even makes some women believe that the world would be a better place without men, since this, in their eyes, would be the easiest solution to end patriarchal abuse.

In the end, this is how feminists look and feel like: a bunch of angry misandric people that none wants to associate with. *Women against feminism* is a clear example of this mistrust, a website where women claim that they don't need feminism because they "respect all human beings not just one gender", they "don't want to join a movement that call [them] alienated because [they] want to stay at home", "[They were] raped by one man, not by all men", "[They] want equality, not supremacy of the woman" or "men have issues too". My mother is another example. "Of course male chauvinism is not okay" she said some weeks ago "but you don't need to go to the other end". Even I, in the past, believed in these ideas.

All these declarations can seem funny at first glance. "All these people are confused!" you may think. And you would be right. Feminism is precisely what they believe feminism is not. And what they believe to be feminist is not at all what feminism is about. However, what I really find disturbing is not the fact that there are people who are confused by the terminology but why. Are pro-patriarchal people, the ones who make up horrible terms such as 'feminazi', trying to discredit the movement? Is it not our fault at all? Is it just a lack of information? Or could it be that sometimes we discredit our own ideals by behaving inadequately? I think all of these

⁴ Here it is...: "La regla = Excusa para decirle a tu novio lo que llevas acumulando durante 28 días. La regla es el Control+Alt+Supr de las relaciones" ["Menstruation = The excuse to tell your boyfriend what you have kept to yourself for 28 days. Menstruation is the Control+Alt+Sup of relationships"]

options are true. Therefore, next time you witness an injustice, not only sexism, but any discriminatory act against any person, remember the myth of Plato's cave.

I presume you are familiarized with the Myth of the Cavern by our beloved Greek philosopher Plato. If you do, then you will notice that the end of my story is a little bit different, but bear with me and allow me to make my point clear: as you remember, a man manages to get out of the cave where he and his fellows have been confined since birth. The outside world is so rich in light and colour, once he gets used to the powerful light of the sun, that he decides to return to the cave where his friends are still living in order to share this new marvellous space with them. Nevertheless, his friends don't believe him. They can't understand a world like that. The cave is all they know. They haven't worn the 'rose-tinted glasses', I mean, they haven't been exposed to the light of the sun. The outside world does not exist for them. Of course, this makes our man distressed. He just wanted his fellow cave-dweller to stop being miserable in this horrid place, but in return he has just received rejection. Logically, his sadness turns into rage. Naturally, he loses his patience, decides to leave them in the cave to rot. And once surrounded by sunlight he, understandably, cracks his fingers and gets ready to tell all of them (in 280 characters) how little capacity their brains have.

This would be a great mistake, though. I know it is extremely difficult, I know it is almost impossible, but we need to relax. If we aren't able to do so, we only will discredit the image of Feminism. We are not entitled to insult or laugh at people who are still in the cave just because we have managed to get out. We have to bear in mind that even if our cause is the fairest of them all, it is extremely dangerous to assume it is fair just because we think it is. Even if it is. We must always remember our arguments and be prepared to enlighten anyone who behaves in a discriminatory way. And above all, we cannot allow anyone to tell a girl that she is not a feminist because she has decided to stay at home and not to work. We cannot allow our boys to be ashamed of themselves just to be accepted in the feminist circle. We cannot allow any kind of discrimination, not in the name of Feminism.

Nowadays I can call myself a Feminist, but I had to wait 21 years in the cave until someone came to rescue me. My parents are still there and believe me when I say that I am not going to convince them to change by getting furious at them. Nor can I forget about them, since we are all part of society and society has to change. This is why we need to relax. We have to inform others because disinformation is the basis of all bad decisions. We have to be flexible, remember what is actually important, because each word is a label (I love how Spanish uses the same word for gender and for genre, like literary genres, for they are only a reference) and should never be the end in itself. We have to be patient and strong for we—Feminists, anti-patriarchal people, people who seeks equality, you name it—are the lighthouses of the world.

SEE ALSO

HeforShe (UN Women Campaign), <http://www.heforshe.org/en>
Women against Feminism, <http://womenagainstfeminism.com/>

Paola Nicolás Flores, Gender Roles Can Be Over (If You Want!)

I can see why some 21st century citizens take a step back when it comes to understanding all these new concepts that are coming up nowadays. Queer, asexual, polyamorous, gender roles... What does that even mean? It looks weird and confusing. Or maybe we have reduced the huge amount of possibilities and diversities of humankind to just a couple of silly rules... I think I will go in this direction.

Apart from all the issues which are currently taking place when it comes to certain groups of individuals (some of them mentioned above), I consider that it is worth paying special attention to gender roles, simply because this is the first thing which is imposed onto us when we are born: our gender and how we are expected to behave according to it. The deeper I think about it, the sillier this imposition looks. Everyone is aware of certain gender conventions which surround us everyday: pink and dolls for girls and blue and football for boys. However, how arbitrary is that? What is the reasoning behind it? As silly as it is, these artificial boundaries created by us, humans, are still taking its toll to 21st century children and we need to realize this.

These ideas and differences between men and women are still very much alive because of the little progress that has been made. From my personal experience, I can still see how while I am teaching in the classroom my little boys reject pink simply because it is a 'colour for girls'. I could also see a boy with long hair wearing a headband while a little girl asked: "Why are you wearing a headband? That's not for boys!" And that makes me think: are we as progressive as we think we are?

Related to this, I must mention how the singer Adele was on the news in 2016 precisely because of her breaking conventions. Her son, who was 3 years old back then, told her that he wanted to dress as a princess in their trip to Disneyland. Adele was not bothered by his request and simply decided to buy a princess dress for her little boy. While some people endorsed her decision, unfortunately I also read comments on the social media like: "If my son asked for that I would punch him in the face so that he comes back to reality". Sad. I am pretty sure that the only thing that matters when it comes to our children is health and love.

These distinctions made for men and women could be acceptable if only two types of human beings existed, but it looks like that is not the case. Fortunately, we are all diverse and different from each other and such old-fashioned conventions simply do not have a place in our society anymore. This is indeed relevant because these gender role conventions condition us as human beings. We can all solve this problem if we start working on it from the very beginning with our children.

On the face of it, this seems nothing major. It is not a big deal that Barbies and kitchens are designed for girls. It is not a big deal that boys are the ones who are encouraged to become strong and athletic. Nevertheless, later in the future, as they grow up, this really happens to be a big deal. By using and maintaining these conventions we are only helping to support this system which portrays boys and girls differently. In addition, these stereotypes which are still accepted by people represent men and women in an absolutely wrong manner.

Girls should not be supposed to enjoy cooking, like pink, love dolls, be oversensitive, or be keen on shopping. Boys should not be supposed to like football, be athletic and not show their real feelings towards people. We must stop separating all these ideas and making them gender exclusive. Let human beings pick and choose, let them become the authentic version of themselves. Men can wear make up and women can be professional leaders without being called 'bossy'.

All in all, as I have tried to argue in this essay, I firmly believe that there must be a change when it comes to educating our children in their personal growth and their role in society. This is our job. The older generations are the ones who should lead the way towards progress and change. We can all make this happen if we start showing our children that differences between ourselves do not exist. Let children like what they want and live their lives authentically without these old-fashioned nonsensical stereotypes.

SEE ALSO

Becker, Hollee Ackman. "Adele Hits Disneyland With Her Son Dressed as Anna from *Frozen*". *Parents.com* February 2016. <http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/everything-kids/adele-hits-disneyland-with-her-son-dressed-as-anna-from-frozen/>

Michelson, Noah. "Disney Sends Beautiful Message With First 'Boy Princess', Complete With Chest Hair". *The Huffington Post* 22 November 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/star-vs-forces-of-evil-boy-princess_us_5a15907ae4b03dec8249695b

Alicia Baines, Why does the gender binary continue to exist?

“In this binary thinking male and female are understood as ‘opposites’, who, despite their differences, complement one another”
(Richardson 2007: 4).

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new way to understand gender began to emerge. Displacing the essentialist theories that prioritised ‘natural’ and ‘biological’ explanations, “social constructionist accounts” (Richardson: 5) focused instead on the role of cultural factors in defining gender. The idea of fundamental ‘sex differences’ and their direct impact on a person’s gender began to be undermined. The concepts ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ were separated: the first relating to the biological differences between men and women (such as reproductive organs) and the latter referring to where an individual feels they exist in relation to the spectrum of masculinity and femininity. Men and women were no longer considered as necessarily ‘opposites’ that ‘complement one another’.

The majority of the population will agree that they are made up of a mixture of traits and preferences, some typically associated with our social construction of what is ‘masculine’ or what it is ‘to be a man’, and likewise what is ‘feminine’, and what it is ‘to be a woman’. For example, I love the colour pink, having painted nails, wearing high heels and chatting with my friends for hours on end. I also enjoy watching rugby, playing lacrosse, wearing jeans and I am ambitious in my work. The gender binary is dangerous and oppressive because it dictates how people should think, feel, act and dress; regardless of their character and preferences.

As Christmas approaches, we see numerous adverts for Barbie dolls, handbags and makeup aimed specifically at little girls. While for boys, we see cars, guns, building bricks and plastic tools. There is nothing in our biological makeup that determines whether we will like dolls more than cars; it is merely social and cultural pressures that influence (or rather force) us to behave in certain ways. Why can’t all toys come under the category of ‘children’s toys’? Why can’t we choose the colour we like most, rather than be automatically segregated into pink or blue? When a pregnant woman has a scan why can’t we exclaim that ‘it’s a baby!’ instead of labelling it ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ (and lump it with all the associations that come with those titles) before it has even arrived?

My question is this: why has the gender binary not been entirely rejected and eradicated by 2017? It is an outdated, scientifically disproven concept that restricts everyone. We need to do away with the human compulsion to categorise everything and start allowing individuals to be individuals. Those who have privileged directly from gender binaries (for example, white men who benefit from patriarchal society) might be reluctant to make the transition towards understanding a gender spectrum in the fear of sacrificing some of their advantage. Furthermore, solutions such as genderless bathrooms are controversial and complicated ideas that cannot be solved nor implemented overnight. However; ignorance, laziness and out-of-date attitudes are no longer acceptable excuses for advocating gender binaries that restrict and repress our society.

Dissolving gender binaries benefits everyone. It gives autonomy to anyone who feels somewhere in the middle of 'masculine' and 'feminine', or 'man' and 'woman'. We should be asking children: would you rather wear trousers or a skirt to school? Would you rather play netball or football? Would you rather have long hair or short? Breaking down the binary expands our decisions and choices in life, giving us freedom of gender expression and the ability to be individuals. The body you are in born should not have the power to dictate your choice of activities, relationships or lifestyle choices.

SEE ALSO

Richardson, Diane. "Conceptualizing Gender". Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2007. 3-19.

Sophie Keyword, Children Doing Gender

“Sex role theory, claimed that through various learning processes and agencies of socialization, children learn the social meanings, values, norms and expectations associated with ‘being a girl’ or ‘being a boy’ and thereby learn to develop ways of behaving and personality characteristics considered appropriate (or not) for being a woman or a man”
(Richardson 2007: 9)

How do the ideals of this theory reinforce hegemonic gender roles in children? In the video “Inspiring the future—redraw the balance” children are asked to draw what they think a firefighter, a surgeon and a fighter pilot look like. All children draw the job roles as male characters with male names. When they are shown the real-life females who represent these careers, the children exclaim that they are “fake” and “dressed up”. From their reaction, we can see that society has enforced the ideals of ‘masculine’ job roles on these children, thus affecting their outlook on hegemonic gender roles. It shows how the social expectations of male and female roles throughout life develops in children from their surroundings.

The video states that “gender stereotypes are defined between the age of five and seven”. This quote implies the ideals that children develop individual personality characteristics and behaviours that are appropriate to them becoming a man or a woman. However, the video shows the children embracing the reality of the women in these job roles with role play and women replacing the men in their drawings. This illustrates the versatility, adaptability and open-mindedness of children and how their surroundings mould them. If something is seen in the eyes of society as ‘acceptable’ then children will meet the expectations and develop in the ‘appropriate’ way, therefore enhancing how society can mould what children consider as socially normative. In addition to this, social constructionism believes that reality is socially constructed and our experiences are interpreted through the language we use. It considers how social phenomena are developed and institutionalised to create societal norms. It suggests that hegemonic gender roles are as result of social construction and what we consider as ‘normal’ is just a by-product of what society has created.

Furthermore, gender performativity holds the idea that children are ‘defined’ by their gender before they even enter the world; with modern technology determining the sex of the baby in the womb and society defining boys’ and girls’ gender with blue and pink in preparation of the birth. Society has pre-empted who these children are going to be and how they are going to behave. So, when children are subject to an environment where there are influencers i.e. school, they are more focused on ‘fitting in’ and meeting the societal gender norms of their peers. They are made aware of the behaviour that is accepted in society, and this is where sex role theory considers the idea that children develop behaviour and personality characteristics that are appropriate to their gender, associated with ‘being a girl’ or ‘being a boy’. Here Linda Tarr supports the idea that external surroundings can affect the stereotypical gender roles developed in children:

In developmental stage theory ego and cognitive aspects of sex role are closely related and develop concurrently. In the present study sex-role identity is used to represent the ego aspects of sex role, and sex-role attitudes are used to represent the cognitive aspects of sex role. The author predicts that adolescents who accept cross-sex characteristics and interests into their sex-role identity are more likely to hold flexible sex-role attitudes than traditionally masculine males and feminine females. (1978: 808)

Sex role theory suggests that children learn social meanings, values, norms and expectations associated with being a boy or a girl and this has an adverse effect on their development into their adult life as a man or a woman.

Here is a personal account of a little boy 'breaking the mould': In the hustle and bustle of Plaça Catalunya train station the nucleus of one of the most popular cities in the world, I saw a little boy. A little boy with his mother and father. This particular little boy happened to be carrying a Barbie doll which he seemed very fond of. He was so content with his parents, holding his father's hand and on his other side clutching Barbie of which his mother held the other hand. Yes, people stared, laughed and took pictures, but he didn't even notice, chatting away with his parents who wholeheartedly embraced Barbie in their life together. I was so overwhelmed by the love shared between this family, the little boy is clearly completely contented with his life (probably with or without Barbie) but the point is his parents are allowing him to be the person he wants to be, play with the toys he wants to play with despite what society categorises as 'normal'. Everything and everyone is conditioned, confined and imprisoned by our captivating societal norms and I am dreading the day (for him and his parents) that he takes his Barbie to school and is ridiculed by his peers. It breaks my heart. Maybe he will be strong and continue to be the person he wants to be or maybe he will cave in like so many of us and just 'fit in' because actually it is just easier to conform.

So, in conclusion, the ideals of sex role theory reinforces hegemonic gender roles by instilling the characteristics of gender into children from a young age, to which they develop and grow into. But with children being so adaptable, if the learning processes and agencies of socialisation were to increase the fluidity of gender roles then we could 'redraw the balance' and erase gender stereotypes.

SEE ALSO

"Inspiring the Future—Redraw the Balance". *MullenLowe London* 15 March 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA&t=2s>

Richardson, Diane. "Conceptualizing Gender". Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds.), *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Palgrave, 2007. 3-19.

Tarr, Linda Haas. "Developmental Sex-role Theory and Sex-role Attitudes in Late Adolescents". *Psychological Reports* 42.3 (1978): 807-814.

Lola Martín Pons, *Petites coses (de gran valor)/Little Things (of Great Value)*

És la nostra una societat sense masclisme? Simplement és el que nosaltres creiem, però no és així. Des de petits, amb els dibuixos animats, amb les pel·lícules infantils, amb els llibres i d'altres textos, ens han posat al cervell petites coses de les què no ens adonem, coses que després ens faran actuar d'una manera masclista. No és res voluntari però hi és. Són diminutes idees que si no deixen de posar-se als cervells dels nens petits, no podran canviar els seus actes futurs.

El que realment fa que a les nenes els agradi més el rosa i als nens més el blau és el fet de que els pares, la televisió, els contes i un seguit de petites coses més els hi posen al cap aquests pensaments. Exactament igual que la gran pregunta: amb què juguen els nens i amb què juguen les nenes? La resposta és ben senzilla: no hi ha jocs de nens i jocs de nenes. Però per molt que tots en siguem conscients, no actuem en conseqüència. Si de sempre el color de les nenes hagués estat el verd (per exemple), és repetiria la situació de la mateixa manera.

Després tenim el típic cas, nens als que els atrauen més els jocs 'de nenes' i nenes que prefereixen els jocs 'de nens'. Això la societat encara no ho entén. Hi ha molts casos de *bullying* contra aquestes persones i això no s'aturarà sol. L'objectiu ha de ser que els nens des que neixen han de poder veure tot això, les preferències personals, com una cosa normal. Hi ha moltes maneres, però qui més influencia els petits són els pares i els germans. Si veu o nota que els pares sovint fan gestos masclistes, el nen o nena també els farà. Els familiars afecten molt el nostre comportament i mai ningú serà intolerant al masclisme si a casa l'ha viscut per part dels seus pares. Bé, això fins que et fas gran, quan ja has crescut, i penses, i decideixes si allò que feien els teus progenitors era correcte o no. En altres paraules: et busques una opinió personal.

Tot i que majoritàriament tendim a pensar com els pares en aquests aspectes, és com si formés part de l'educació que ens donen. A l'Institut tenim nens petits de 3 a 5 anys. Aquests no tenen molt criteri al jugar amb algú. De fet n'hi ha que juguen amb nens, n'hi ha que juguen amb nenes i n'hi ha que amb els dos. Entrant en un altre tema, tots juguen amb tots siguin com siguin físicament. No jutgen per l'aspecte o per la manera de ser, encara que, probablement, quan siguin més grans tots ho faran. Per què acabo de dir això? Com pot ser que jo ja estigui segura de que la majoria, per no dir tots, de grans criticaran aquests aspectes d'altres persones? Això és precisament el que no pot passar, no podem saber de ben segur que aquests nens faran coses així i no fer-hi res.

Fa poc vàrem fer una activitat amb els mes petits, els de 3 anys. L'activitat consistia en fer un rètol amb el nom de cada nen, els grans l'havíem de fer i decorar. A mi em va tocar un nen que es deia Pol. Li vaig demanar al Pol quin color volia per al seu nom, ell em va contestar que el volia rosa i lila. Jo sense donar-li cap importància a aquella resposta vaig fer el rètol. Una nena (de 12 anys) de la meva classe que passava per allà, quan va veure el nom tot de color rosa i lila em va criticar: "què fas posant-li aquests colors a un nen?" Si ho analitzem bé, arribarem a pensar el que jo vaig pensar:

“m'està dient que als nens no els pot agradar el rosa o el lila”. Que pensem això és més que un problema...

Al meu curs també hi ha un nen que es diu Tomàs. Aquest nen per mi és una persona molt valenta. Us preguntareu què fa que aquest nen sigui tant genial per mi. Resulta que en Tomàs no se sentia bé amb el seu cos, el destí no va fer el correcte. Ell va néixer amb un cos amb el que no s'identificava i ha decidit fer un canvi. Ara el cos li correspon amb la ment i és una persona molt més alegre. En una societat com aquesta és molt difícil fer aquest pas i s'ha de ser atrevit i tenir molt de coratge per fer-lo. Però, de fet, és el correcte. No et quedaràs tota la vida fingint ser qui no ets en realitat... D'altra banda, crec que un cas com aquest no l'hauríem de veure com una cas especial, poc comú, diferent; simplement, l'hauríem de normalitzar i veure'l com si res. Si des que naixem aprenem a veure casos de transsexualitat, homosexualitat, asexualitat, bisexualitat i molts més, amb normalitat, tot serà més fàcil per tothom i faríem un pas endavant en la societat.

L'orientació sexual també és un tema delicat en aquest àmbit. Resulta que tenim uns camins ja traçats i si aquests camins no ens agraden i agafem una altra ruta la societat ens exclou. En altres paraules, només veiem correctament (en general) les parelles heterosexuales. Realment es al·lucinant perquè segueixen sent persones encara que tinguin una orientació sexual diferent o que simplement no tinguin cap atracció. Fins i tot hi ha països on no ser heterosexual està il·legalitzat! Hem de ser capaços de detectar actes masclistes per mol petits que siguin, i així, ajudar a tot el que puguem fer progressar. El problema hi és quan coses que ens omplen dia a dia que són masclistes, i per el simple fet de viure-ho diàriament no els fem cas, les deixem igual. Un exemple molt clar és l'esport. Per què només s'emeta l'esport masculí i ningú no hi fa res?

Arribem al punt en el que no és només el fet d'acceptar les persones 'diferents', sinó que en puguem normalitzar la seva existència. El moment en el que vegem a tothom igual serà el moment en el que realment la societat haurà canviat. Ja ho he dit abans, només són petites idees, però tenen un gran valor.

English version

Is ours a society without sexism? This is simply what we believe but not at all the truth. From an early age, with cartoons, with children's films, with books and other texts, they feed our brains with little things we miss, things that later will make us act in sexist ways. It's not something we do willingly but it's there. These are tiny ideas but, unless they stop getting into little children's brains, they will result in the same future actions.

What makes little girls prefer pink and little boys blue is that parents, television, fairy tales and many other little things put these thoughts in their minds. Just as it happens with the big question: what do boys and girls play with? This is easy to answer: there are no games for boys and games for girls. We may be aware of this but we hardly act in consequence. If girls had been assigned, for instance, green as their colour, the situation would still be the same one.

Then, we have the typical case: boys attracted by so-called girls' games and girls that prefer boys' games. This is something society still can't understand. There are many cases of bullying against these persons and this will not stop by itself. Our aim must be to have children see, from birth, all these personal preferences as something

normal. There are many ways, but the one with a greater influence on children are parents and siblings. A boy or a girl who notices parents making sexist gestures will do the same. Family members have much effect on our behaviour; none will be intolerant to sexism if this is what they have lived at home with their parents. Well, until you grow up, and think and decide for yourself whether what your parents did was correct or not. In other words: you find your personal opinion.

Even though we mostly tend to think like our parents in these aspects, all this is also part of the education we receive. In my school we have very young children, aged 3 to 5. They don't follow any criteria to play with others. Some plays with boys, others with girls, some with both. Considering another issue, all play with everybody else regardless of physical appearance. They don't judge others by their looks or behaviour, though all will probably do so when they grow up. Why do I say this? How can I be sure that the majority, most likely all of them, will later criticize other persons' traits? Well, this is precisely what should not happen; we can't know for sure what these children will do and do nothing.

A while ago we did an activity with the little ones, the 3-year-olds. The activity consisted of writing a sign with each child's name, which the older students then had to decorate. I was paired with a boy called Pol. I asked Pol what colour he wanted for his name and he replied pink and light purple. I made the sign, never thinking his answer might be a problem. One of my classmates (a 12-year-old girl), just passing through, saw the name in pink and purple and criticised me: "what are you doing, using these colours for a boy?" If we analyze this, we might think what I thought: "she's telling me that boys cannot like pink or purple". That we think this is already more than a problem...

In my class there is also a boy called Tomàs. This boy is for me a very brave person. You might ask what makes this boy so awesome for me. It turns out that Tomàs didn't feel right with his body; fate had not done what was right. He was born with a body he couldn't identify with and decided to change. Now his body fits his mind and he is a much happier person. In a society like ours, it is difficult to take this step; you need to be bold and have the courage to take it. But then, you can't spend your whole life pretending to be someone else... On the other hand, we shouldn't see his case as something special, uncommon, different; we just should normalize it and just accept it. If, from day one, we learn to see with normality cases of transsexuality, homosexuality, asexuality, bisexuality, and many others, everything will be easier for everyone and we would take a step forward in society.

Sexual orientation is also a delicate issue in this area. As happens, we have roads already drawn for us and if we don't like them, and we take another route, then society excludes us. In other words, we (generally) only see correctly heterosexual couples. This is really baffling as whether you have a different sexual orientation, or simply does not feel any attraction, you're still a person. To think that in some countries not being heterosexual is illegal! We need to be able to detect sexist acts no matter how small and, thus, help everyone to progress. The problem is that many everyday things that please us are sexist and just because we live like this every day we pay no attention, we let them be. A clear example are sports. Why do they show on TV only men's sports, and nobody does anything?

Let's reach the stage when this is not just about accepting 'different' people but when we can normalize their existence. The time when we see everyone as equals will

be a time when society will have really changed. As I said before, these might be just small ideas but of great value.

Emma Adriaansz, Doing Gender in Heterosexual Couples

“In their domestic practices, heterosexual couples are both ‘doing gender’ and ‘doing heterosexuality’”
(Van Every 1996)

How are domestic practices establishing gender and heterosexuality in heterosexual couples? To explain what is meant by ‘doing gender’, I would like to refer to Judith Butler. She argues that gender is a form of performativity. We use gender to make others believe that we are a man or a woman. However, there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender. We assume that a person behaves in a certain way because he/she is a man or a woman. These performances bring into being gendered subjects. They produce gender.

‘Doing heterosexuality’ is explained by Monique Wittig in her example of the heterosexual contract. She argues that a heterosexual relationship is a contract which is based on both a sexual and work relationship, founded upon the appropriation of women’s bodies in labour. By this, Wittig means that when you get in a heterosexual relationship, this is automatically accompanied by an unequal division of labour in which the woman carries most of the burden for domestic practices.

The private sphere, the family, has always been dominated by men in Western families and is therefore patriarchal. By the ‘natural family’ we mean a breadwinning husband and a homemaking wife who takes care of the children. This natural family is not really applicable to today’s families since more and more women are entering the labour market. Now we speak of one and a half breadwinner family because most women work part time. Even though women are now largely entered to the labour market, the biggest part of domestic chores is still done by women.

“Those tasks that have been traditionally thought of as ‘women’s work’ (for example, cooking, laundry, housecleaning) are performed primarily by women, and ‘male’ tasks such as yard work and auto maintenance are done primarily by men’ (Greenstein 1996: 586). Not only is gender and heterosexuality produced by the fact that women do most of the domestic tasks, like in the traditional family, also the type of chores is segregated by gender. Women do chores that are ‘typical’ for women, and men do the chores that are ‘typical’ for men. By doing these gender specific tasks, men and women in a heterosexual couple perform their gender.

Another way in which we can see the performance of gender by domestic practices is in children’s toys. Toys for girls are often baby dolls, toy vacuum cleaners or model kitchens. These toys learn girls from a young age to perform their gender by doing these tasks. In this way, society learns children that being a woman is related to domestic practices. This shows how the traditional family is highly institutionalized. As Greenstein claims, “The traditional husband does gender by not contributing significantly to the completion of household tasks because not doing housework is consistent with his gender ideology. (...) Traditional wives do gender by doing most of the housework and by not allowing their husbands to contribute” (1996: 588). Greenstein also argues that the doing of gender in heterosexual couples is an effect of

the gender ideology. The gender ideology consists of the elements one uses to make up the definition of their genders' identity. The traditional family has influenced gender identities enormously in that the division of labour unequally is now used as a gender ideology. This is expressed by the quote.

To conclude, doing gender and heterosexuality are highly expressed by the type of domestic tasks a man or a woman does in the house, but also in the division of labour. These gender-related domestic practices are highly influenced by the constant reproduction of the traditional family. The type of tasks and the amount of tasks performed, produce gender because they are naturally related to gender ideology.

SEE ALSO

Greenstein, Theodore N. "Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labor: Interactive Effects of Wives' and Husbands' Gender Ideologies". *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58:3 (1996): 585-595.

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Ana Martínez Soto, Changing Families

“The early 21st century is a time of uncertainty and much public debate about the meaning and consequences of changes in the family life. There is a general agreement that new forms of family life are associated with shifts in relations between men and women”.
(Jackson 2008: 125)

Would you say that these changes in family life have to do with the shifts in women’s roles in the domestic sphere? The focus of family life has historically been on women’s lives, at least in Western societies. This notion of family is that of the traditional heterosexual couple of working husband and stay-at-home wife and their children. However, this traditional view of the family has been changing due to feminism and the changes in women’s roles. In this essay I intend to demonstrate how these changes regarding family life go hand in hand with the changes of women’s attitudes on the matter.

In the 20th century the traditional notion of the family was the one I mentioned before, but in the late 1970s there was an increasing attention paid to the changes regarding the relationships between men and women in households. Women were increasingly seen as active participants of the labour market, and the image of the husband being the only one putting food on the table has become old-fashioned. On the other hand, despite the fact that women were increasingly becoming work-driven persons they still did not make the same money men do, even if they both worked in the same position. Sadly, this is something that is still present nowadays.

However, although women have become more and more independent in terms of financial status and have gained a somewhat equal position to men in this respect, they are still the members of the couple who take care of the home and the children. Regardless of working part-time or full time, women still find themselves with little support from their partners when it comes to the responsibilities that come along with having a house and/or children, and I think it is extremely unfair for women to go to work every day and then have to deal with the tasks having a house entails while their partners, who do exactly the same working hours, do not help when they share the same living space.

Jane Lewis (2002) carried out a study in which she compared the attitudes and practices of older and younger couples and what she found was that the older couples did not question the gendered division of family life, whereas the younger couples did, and the men in these younger couples claimed the injustice and gendered discrimination women had to face in their everyday lives, whether at work or at home. However, this did not mean that men helped much more, and while it is a positive thing that younger men are starting to realise that there is something clearly wrong in the system, I believe they should make a bigger effort to try and change things instead of just criticising them, starting by sharing the responsibilities when having a home and/or children to look after.

It may not seem like it sometimes, but family life is not what it once was. Women no longer aspire to be housewives, they want to go to work and be independent. For a long time now, they have been trying to get rid of these gendered divisions on the home which make them the ones cleaning or cooking and the men doing absolutely nothing. Why should women take all the responsibilities when men also live there?

In conclusion, it is pretty safe to say that family life has indeed changed (and continues to do so), especially thanks to the recognition of women's rights and the changes in their (imposed) roles, and although it is still a long way to go until women and men are completely equal in every respect, we are starting to change this imposed patriarchy that has been present for generations, and I cannot wait to see the day when practices defined as feminine or masculine disappear, especially those in the home.

SEE ALSO

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Ivana Nikolaeva Boyanska, Conceptualizing Domestic Labour

“Delphy and Leonard (1992) have argued that the fact that most married and cohabiting women are now employed—and still doing most of the domestic work—indicates that their exploitation is intensifying”.
(Jackson 2007: 137)

Why has domestic labour not changed more over the years and reached equality? Gender inequality is still often associated to heterosexual family relationships and domestic labour, due to the fact that plenty of women continue doing most of the housework in heterosexual relationships. Although there are many more couples who share the housework nowadays, there is still a high percentage of those who think that domestic labour is the responsibility of women and, in relation to that, couples act accordingly to this patriarchal assumption. There have been some significant changes over the last few decades in Western countries, as women have become more self-conscious about their role in society and the family; however this is not the case of all adult female citizens.

As a starting point, housework has no job descriptions, boundaries, limits or fixed hours (Jackson 2007: 136), thus initially it cannot be considered as a job with real conditions or satisfactory payment, because there are no boundaries established between employers and employees. Traditionally, it was believed that women had to be the ones who had to take care of the domestic labour because they did not have a proper job outside home, as the breadwinners were their husbands. This social rule, however, was challenged during and at the end and after Second World War, when women were given jobs equal to men, even though not always equally paid (as it is known to still happen nowadays in big companies). Since the end of Second World War, the relations within domestic labour have been changing slowly, as women have become more independent financially and domestic labour is becoming more prevalent (Jackson: 136). Even though significant for women’s life, these changes have not reached their ideal point of equality, in which the running of the home in heterosexual relationships is communal.

It is still the case that many men refuse to have democratized relationships and prefer arrangements in which women take care of most of the housework; cleaning and taking care of the children, among others. It seems that when this view is not shared with women from Western countries, instead of revaluing their patriarchal way of thinking, they reach out to global match-making organizations in which they find women from poorer countries looking for an opportunity to improve their financial status by marrying men in richer nations. These men hope to “fulfil their nostalgia for a pre-feminist family romance by marrying foreign women in the (often false) expectation that they will be subservient” (Lan in Jackson: 202)

Another challenge that total equality has been facing in recent years is the fact that married women with good financial possibilities opt for hiring poorer women, normally migrants in need of money. Because married women do not cope with all of

the housework at home, receiving no help from their partners, their first and easiest option is to find other women willing to do it. The employees in this case do not only have to do domestic labour in their homes but also at their jobs. Moreover, women who employ such workers exert a high degree of control on the women working for them while their conditions of work are often harsh and exploitative, especially when it comes to migrant workers.

The law is yet another factor that blocks the progress of the equality at home, since it does not take into account the responsibility of the two sexes in a household with children. When a couple faces the process of getting a divorce, normally the responsibility to take care of the children is left to the mother, while the father is only expected to provide the financial costs for the children. In such cases, the mothers are forced to work, to take care of the household as well as to look after the children, with no expected help from the fathers, required by authorities.

In conclusion, we have still not reached equality in domestic labour in heterosexual relationships because there are many men who still adapt to the patriarchal conduct as a way of living. Simultaneously, there are women who are forced to live under such conditions often because of their disadvantaged positions, looking for better economic opportunities. Most importantly, however, governments do not put pressure on patriarchal behaviour when it comes to relationships and, simply by not changing the laws in order to improve conditions for women, they stand behind patriarchy and its praxis. Even though much has changed in the last few decades and women, as well as men are more self-conscious about their positioning in society as well as at home, there is still a long way to go to, ideally, reach equality in domestic labour. One of the first steps towards victory would be the gaining of consciousness by all women that domestic labour should not fall only on them, and that it should be communal: a logical response to it would be separating and assigning responsibilities to both partners, rather than exploiting other more disadvantaged women.

SEE ALSO

Jackson, Stevie. "Families, Domesticity and Intimacy: Changing Relationships in Changing Times". Diane Richardson & Victoria Robinson (eds.). *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2007. 125-143.

Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín, An Insight into 21st Century Domesticity: Finances and Autonomy in Western Young Heterosexual Couples

After the drastic increase of women joining the working sphere in the 1960s—due to the women rights movement—financial arrangements between couples have diversified in a wide spectrum. As Jackson notes: “there is a general agreement that new forms of family life are associated with shifts in relations between men and women” (2008: 125). The fact that women have their own earnings has increased their autonomy and has initiated a transformation of intimacy, meaning that women now have a say in domesticity and power relations. The urge to marry in order to have economic and social stability has decreased and consequently women are less likely to consent sexism from their partners and are willing to consider divorce as a measure for inequality. For this reason marriages in the Western societies have decreased, being replaced by cohabitation, and marriage rates have increased in the US due to people tend to marry twice during their lives. There has been a shift from special person to special relationship, which should not be interpreted as lack of commitment between couples.

It is not only that women wish for autonomy but that it cannot be stopped because of flexible economy, which makes impossible to have only a breadwinner in the family unit. However, the ability to work outside the house has not only been favourable for women: women tend to be hired more as part-time workers and their salary is lower than men’s in global terms. In fact, “Research uncovered economic inequalities within families produced by women’s dependence on men suggesting, for example, that ‘while sharing a common address, family members do not always share the same standard of living’” (Graham in Jackson: 127). This is fundamental to understand the ‘joint’ approach to finances young heterosexual couples have, and although the purpose is to treat fairly both members of the relationship, this is not always achieved.

Additionally, women tend to do the housework in heterosexual couples, even if there is a mutual understanding that the work should not be only hers, and tend to occupy the ‘nurturing’ position with the children. This is even more the case if the woman has a part-time job, which is an excuse to point that the woman should do unlimited hours of non-paid tasks to compensate. Moreover, it is important to note that even if a house worker is hired (who has better conditions than the regular part-housewife) the woman in the relationship gives her directions, perpetuating her attachment to the home. Thus, the fact that women have both paid and unpaid jobs increases their exploitation in relation to earlier times. “If women are now earning their own keep, they are no longer exchanging domestic labour for maintenance: they are clearly doing it for nothing” (Jackson 2008: 137). For this reason it can be said that the legacy of the ‘traditional’—Western and heterosexual couples where women have a subordinate role—family still shapes many women’s lives today.

In relation to the previous point, there is a need to mention how the globalised concept of the ‘traditional’ family—where only a minority fits—represents an opposition

to queer families: lone parents, gay couples, step-families, etc., face marginalization from society and paucity of public services. This dissolution of 'traditional' values has encouraged global hypergamy, where men seek for passive women and women from poorer countries exchange subordination for a higher social and economic status, although this is not necessarily a fair trade. It is important to note that women's social location (in terms of race and class) affect their lives. For instance, fulltime housewives—typically a choice and a constraint of white women from higher social structures; women of African descent tend to have a higher rate as lone parents—not really their choice; and Asian women tend to divorce less than in other cultures due to Asians raise women to be more submissive and dependent on their male partner.

Due to this instability in present day families, women feel the need to maintain separate bank account even in a long-term relationship, as it is an attempt to defend themselves from injustices in the future. There is a limitation in all these 'joint' but 'separated' bank accounts, and it is that there is no light shed on where the line is traced. Men probably feel more entitled to the money if their earnings are bigger, and depending on the description of each bank account (e.g. savings and mortgage for the man's versus monthly expenses for the woman's, even if the two have access to both accounts) it can cause a major headache in case of divorce.

SEE ALSO

Jackson, Stevie. "Families, Domesticity and Intimacy: Changing Relationships in Changing Times". Diane Richardson & Victoria Robinson (eds.). *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2007. 125-143.

Arantxa González Blanco, First Dates: Who Should Pay?

First dates can be frightening and even more when the waiter comes with the check. That uncomfortable moment when both of you look at each other thinking: *“Who is going to pay? Should I offer to pay or let the other pay?”* can be even more awkward than the date itself.

“Men should always pay” I heard people say, saw in a romantic movie or listened in a cheesy pop song on the radio. But, why? It seems that men often see themselves as the provider, the protector of women and that is why they feel the obligation to pay in the first date. Some women even feel offended if a man does not offer to pay and some men feel that by paying they will make a good impression on their dates, because if he really likes you, he will try to impress you. Sometimes, you can actually see women insisting on paying the tab in vain because the man will take the check in a chivalrous movement and pay with an accomplished smile on his face. Or women, who do not intend to pay, but reach their purses and start acting just waiting for the man to take care of the bill. But those are just assumptions and preconceptions that the majority has on the topic.

The fact of matter is that nowadays the topic of who pays in a first date depends on many aspects. Now that the gender roles have drastically changed, it depends deeply on the situation. It surely feels good when your partner offers to pay the bill because it would mean that he or she is really interested in you and does not mind paying. Or, similarly, if you had fun with that person during the date, you pay as in a way to show your gratitude for them spending it with you. There is even the option to split the tab between the two of you, no strings attached. Each of you pay for what you have eaten or drunk. Though, this situation sometimes has a negative connotation: we split the bill because I did not like this date and I do not want to owe you anything.

However, first dates can come as an uncomfortable time and I feel that many men pay because they think that it will ruin the date if they do not pay since *“they are supposed to”*—which is just an excuse to, again, make a good impression on the girl and leave that date feeling like a gentleman who scored ten points. Reversely, when the woman demands the man to pay because she has been spending her precious time with him and it was a time-consuming effort to get absolutely beautiful and stunning for this date, I feel this is not sufficiently justified. In the worst of cases, the person paying might have a hidden agenda and it is paying as an excuse to demand *“something more”*; this, of course, is usually linked with men scheming over how they paid for the woman’s food, drink and taxi to get them to have a second date or to sleep with them.

From another point of view, who pays in a first date and who pays in long relationships changes. There are no more feelings of discomfort nor a need to impress anybody and usually the couple does not mind if it is the man or the woman paying. In my experience, there is always the situation of *“I am paying tonight’s meal and you will get the next one, no problem”* without making a fuss about it because it is not an issue anymore.

What about gay couples, then? Where does this type of couples leave the “*men should always pay*”? Picture two men or two women enjoying their first date and thinking about who is going to pay the check. I have done a demolition job attacking the mentality of those old-fashioned people that think that it is supposed to be the man, that handsome gentleman who won't let his beautiful woman dirty her hands with the tab, who always pays in the first date. But then again, these conservative individuals probably would not even acknowledge a different type of couples. I have been researching about the topic and found out that it is not an issue for the gay community because they do not care about these assumptions and preconceptions. I feel that they are more concerned about other important issues rather than who is going to pay today's date. Then again, they stick to the idea of “*I have invited you, I pay*” or split the bill unless someone offers to pay because they just feel like it.

Lastly, my personal opinion is that the best way to deal with this problem in the first date is to simply split the bill. There should not be an obligation from either of the parts involved to pay for the full date. There should not be any kind of assumptions and preconceptions involving this activity. Neither should the man always pay nor the woman expect it. I am particularly fond of the idea of “*I invited you, I pay*” but then, again, it seems usual that most of the time is the man who invited the woman, which lead us yet again to the man always paying. Another problem that I find interesting involving this topic, despite not being experienced in this type of dates, is that nowadays first dates are often a product of Tinder swaps and this can make it both uncomfortable and messier when paying the tab. In these situation in which you are in a date with a complete stranger whom you have just met, I feel it is probably awkward to negotiate with your date on who is going to pay. But I stand firm at my opinion about splitting the bill, which I still feel is the best approach.

In conclusion, remember that this is just a first date. Do not let conventions get the better of you. Enjoy the date and split the bill. There will be plenty of opportunities to pay for other things when you are in a relationship.

SEE ALSO

Greene, Amanda. “7 Things Women Expect on a First Date”. *AskMen* 7 July 2017. https://uk.askmen.com/dating/heidi_100/108_dating_girl.html

Hollywood, John. “10 Red Flags That Gay Men Can't Ignore on a First Date”. *Paired Life* 10 June 2017. <https://pairedlife.com/dating/Gay-Men-10-Red-Flags-on-a-First-Date-That-You-Cant-Ignore>

Daniel Schneider, White Western Feminism and the Voice of the Other Women

“The irony was that feminism aimed to develop knowledge that was supposed to rest on inclusion and equality, but actually was itself exclusionary and inequitable”.
(Reed 2007: 93).

Can Western feminism help to give women of colour their own voice, and more importantly, should it even try to do so? The answer to the question above seems easy—yes, it should. However, I will argue that it has failed to do so and executed its inclusionary principles poorly, using the example of the treatment of Muslim feminists and women on a whole in today’s Europe. Ultimately, Western feminism is making the same mistake again that it made earlier, namely, as Mohanty (1988) put it, that they are assuming that women from developing countries (here: Muslim women) can be summarized within a single category and that they experience the same kind of patriarchal oppression.

With regard to the ban of burqas in various European countries, it might very well be argued that this kind of clothing is a sign of patriarchal oppression. And there are most certainly Muslim women that are forced to wear the by men in their families. However, if European governments ban wearing them, it is simply another manifestation of patriarchy deciding what women are allowed to wear and what not. Consequently, by condoning such a ban, Muslim women are stripped of their agency to decide for themselves even further, as, once again, it is assumed that this law would be in the interest of every Muslim woman, without even asking them. The thought that women might wear any form of headwear and do not consider it as oppressive becomes unimaginable. Consequently, a Muslim woman donning a headscarf and calling herself a feminist is being laughed at.

Another one of its principles that Western feminism seems to have forgotten in its attempt to help Muslim women is intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) uses the term to describe how class, gender and race are connected to each other and how they collectively contribute to the oppression women of colour face. When politicians all over Europe hardened their stance on immigration of mostly Muslim people, the outcry against it has been far to silent. Consequently, the treatment of Muslim women has worsened drastically. For example, the number of hate crimes against Muslim people in Britain has increased by about 50% in the wake of Brexit, which in itself is a concerning number; the number of hate crimes against women has risen by 300%. They are targeted because of their gender, their skin colour, their religion as well as their status as immigrants, and that is silently accepted. As this is happening in one of the countries that was a pioneer in developing what today is understood as Feminism, what does that say about the movement? Feminism seems to be afraid of either being ostracized as a traitor of what is understood as their values of an enlightened and humanist Europe when they defend Muslim women’s rights, or of falling back into its

habit of colonization that happened throughout its development. As a result, there is silence.

To conclude, Western feminism should actively try to provide marginalized women with a platform to share their own views, because these women must not be stripped of the agency to speak on their own behalf. However, it seems to fail to do so as it apparently has failed to challenge patriarchy in these own societies to an extent where these societies could treat these women in an open, non-sexist and non-racist way. Western feminism needs to overcome its own existing problems in what some naively consider to be a post-feminist society before it can understand and help with the problems that other women are facing.

SEE ALSO

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Sara Arenas Contreras, I Am a Man, I Do not Cry: Feminism and Toxic Masculinities

Some days ago, I was having dinner with a friend. At some point of the conversation, he said: "It is usually easier for women to get over bad feelings". I got a bit upset. Then, I replied: "Why do you say that?" And he said: "Because you are allowed to cry when things go wrong". I have to admit that I have been thinking about this for a while. At first, I was outraged. How could he say that? He must have been generalising, obviously. Women have to go through lots of traumatic events during their lives and, often, our voices are not even heard. We are not allowed to give opinions in certain fields, precisely because we are considered 'emotional beings' and, therefore, cannot 'be reasonable'. However, as I was mulling it over, I started to empathise with what he had said.

I can still recall the first time I saw my father cry. I was only a child but I felt completely devastated. I wanted him to stop. I must have been five years old and my brother was still just a toddler. I remember my brother getting really upset, so he was soon sobbing. There is something powerful about that memory. I knew without really knowing that my dad was crossing a line. That was not acceptable. It was obvious to two children like us that men do not cry. Or, at least, they do not cry in front of other people. And why is that? When somebody cries, we can see the most emotional part in that person. The tendency, within our social system, is to interpret that as a weakness. Therefore, emotion becomes secondary when the priority is to find what is reasonable and logical. Emotions are not reasonable because they make us vulnerable in front of other people. In our patriarchal system in which traditional masculine values are the rule, there are few spaces for men to express their feelings and emotions.

It is clear that within the patriarchal system a set of toxic behaviours are constantly recreated. These behaviours have been socially accepted in the past and men still see them as acceptable. For example, men are supposed to be strong and free, that is, it is often implied that they should actually be careless and selfish; whereas women are usually taught that they should look after the people they love and act as nurturers. The coldness some men show to the world is meant to give them the authority that being caring would never give them. Thus, most men act in consequence, which is also damaging for them; since it cancels out all the spaces for them to express their feelings and emotions. The question here would be: why do men keep on acting within the system without questioning it? I think the answer lies in the fact that patriarchy grants them privilege. However, privilege can be damaging for the evolution of the self, since the individual only achieves a certain level of comfort but does not go beyond that.

I have always considered myself a feminist. That's why I always try to raise awareness amongst as many people as possible into what feminism is. An essential part of it for me is to include men into feminist debates so that they can realize in which way they can become allies to women and other non-privileged groups. I think that this has definitely been a brilliant strategy, because more and more men start questioning privilege in new ways. Examples of this can be found in articles published

very recently in newspapers. On 23rd October 2017, *The Guardian* published an opinion article by Jordan Stephens, member of the British duo Rizzle Kicks. In this article, Stephens offers his perspective on the extent to which repressing his emotions and acting following a patriarchal behaviour limited him: “The abuse of power is a plaster for sadness and it prevents self-compassion”. The reflection is quite interesting, especially because he admits having played an essential role in “self-destruction [which] led to a breakdown of trust in people I cared for and in myself. I had been wounded by the patriarchy in thinking even for one second that this behaviour was acceptable”. There is a consideration in the article of the toxicity of traditional masculine values. Stephens is aware of his own behaviour in the past and talks about it in public, which proves that through questioning his own privilege and exposing himself, there is a way toward improvement.

In a different social context, but in very similar lines, *La Directa* published another article about masculinity. In this case, the journalist Ciro Morales also addresses the question of toxicity in traditional masculine behaviour. In his articles not only emotions are discussed but also the power which men have within the world of sexuality. At the end of his article, Morales even suggests men to grab pen and paper and start re-thinking themselves. This article, published less than a month away from the previously mentioned—on 13th November 2017—uses a more urgent tone about the need to change patriarchal masculine values and to apply all these new, healthier principles to men’s lives. As a feminist, I could not be happier to see that these kind of opinions are being made public. On the one hand, these are highly personal statements; on the other hand, they are turning personal experience into something political. And, as far as I am concerned, this is highly needed in the times we live in. Owing to examples like these, at some point my friend is going to stop finding that situations are bigger than him, and will discover that through exploring his emotions he will be able to cope with life in a better way.

Recently, my brother told me that his best friend had tried to cheat on his girlfriend. He thought that this was very unfair for the girl, so he decided to talk to both the girlfriend and the girl whom his best friend tried to cheat on with. My brother met the two girls and told them everything he knew, so that they had the power and space to choose what to do. He used his privilege to communicate the situation and then transferred the power of choice to the girls. As he put it to me when he told me about it: “I am not going to cover up for what my friend did. He might be my best friend, but he is not acting right. That kind of things should not be hidden by men”. This is my eighteen-year-old brother and I am really proud that he can speak up for what he thinks is right. This is the kind of situation in which we should encourage men to act against what is not fair on women and other non-privileged groups. This is how toxic masculinity could potentially be erased, having men-allies that know the exact moment to speak up and tell about what is wrong; letting men know that it is okay for them to express their emotions through words. And the only possible way I know to achieve that is feminism and gender equality.

SEE ALSO

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Alicia Baines, Notes on the Harvey Weinstein Scandal

The moment I started planning this essay I was struck by a problem. I began by listing ideas in answer to the question ‘what worries me most about gender?’, and before long I had a list of 29 bullet points. From abortion laws to street harassment. From female grooming to the gender pay gap. From double standards concerning sex to domestic violence. I was concerned not only by the ease with which I composed this extensive list, but also by the constraint of a 1000-word count in which I had to write.

The recent revelations of Harvey Weinstein, the prolific Hollywood film producer, gave me direction for my essay. In recent weeks, over 50 women have come forward with distressing stories revealing Weinstein as a rapist and sexual predator. These stories are repeatedly peppered with details of ‘hotel rooms’, ‘private auditions’, ‘bath robes’ and ‘massages’. For me, this unveiling of a man who was until recently respected and admired in a number of artistic industries represents a central component of what worries me most about gender. *How* could a sexual predator as famous as Weinstein have got away with such atrocities for so many decades? The answer, I have found, is an alarming cocktail of complicity from leading players in Hollywood, ignorance of the industry, the women in question fearing for their careers and blatant denial from many who should have helped.

Despite some initial shock, it seems to me that the revelation of Weinstein’s behaviour was generally met with a notable lack of surprise. This is not so much attributed to the producer himself, but to a repetitive pattern that is continually emerging. Too often people prioritise the words of powerful men over younger, more vulnerable women, frequently because of the negative impact these powerful men can have on their career. What *The New York Times* deems a “basic and familiar pattern” happens not only in Hollywood, but everywhere. The rage that I experienced when I read the heart-wrenching accounts of so many abused women was displaced by fear when I thought of the much wider scale problem that the Weinstein scandal is pointing to. In the 21st century the problem persists that prolific, powerful men can take advantage of vulnerable women (whether sexually or emotionally) and people will turn a blind eye if there is a monetary or professional incentive. Women are still sexual commodities who can be used and abused like parts of a chess game if people fear you enough. For me, these are two very good reasons why we still need feminism today.

The fashion designer, Donna Karan, came to the defence of Harvey (an old friend of hers) in an interview, maintaining that he is still a “wonderful” man who has done “amazing things” during his life time. Not only do I disagree with this general mentality that ‘amazing things’ can to any extent cancel out terrible things (did we excuse Jimmy Saville?) but she also went on to utilise elements of the ‘she was asking for it’ argument; a line of reasoning that has been largely denounced as victim blaming. Karan posed the questions “How do we display ourselves? How do we present ourselves as women? What are we asking? Are we asking for it by presenting all the sensuality and all the sexuality?” I agree that we *as people* (not only women, but men also) should consider how we present ourselves, as this constitutes a lot of what it means to be conscientious, caring human beings. However, if a woman wears a

mini-skirt on the bus and a man can't keep his hands to himself, does it take a genius to work out where the problem lies? I also found it quite amusing to keep Karan's questions about 'presenting sensuality' in mind while scrolling through Google images of 'Karan Donna dresses', as these figure-hugging, chest-baring clothes (many of which I like and would probably wear) do in many ways undercut her authority to tell women to consider how they display themselves. It seems slightly ironic that the clothes worn by actresses such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Ashley Judd that might have been 'asking' Weinstein for something could as well have been designed by Donna herself.

Is the revelation of Weinstein as a manipulative abuser going to spark a major change in the world's sexual culture? Does the unveiling of leading players such as Bill Cosby, Roger Ailes, Bill O'Reilly mark a turning point in which powerful men can no longer get away with harassing, assaulting and demeaning women? More likely, perhaps, this case will ward off potential attackers in the fear that if someone so powerful can be exposed, no sexual predator is safe. I very much respect the array of people, including many celebrities, who have publically condemned Harvey Weinstein and his behaviour. It is always a gentle reassurance when people unite together, even if a number of them should have said something sooner. However, I grow increasingly frustrated by a phrase that punctuates a number of these speeches. Matt Damon, among other prolific celebrities, begins his condemnation of Weinstein by saying "as a father of daughters...". It would seem he does so in an attempt to quantify the extent of his shock, rage and disgust at the accounts of sexual abuse. However, why can't women be considered as *just women*? Why must we always be daughters, mothers, wives or sisters? Why can't we equal, autonomous, self-sufficient human beings, like the men making these speeches? Women are too often unconsciously portrayed as weaker counterparts for men who need to be protected. A message to men: yes, *please* do continue to care for us, just like us women will continue to care for you. But, as Hunter Harris writes for *Vulture*, please don't let fathering a daughter be a necessary requirement for internalising problems of working within a sexist industry: after all, "your wives gave birth to a baby girl, not a moral compass".

There is a long way still to go for feminism. There will be plenty more twists and turns, peaks and troughs, progress and set-backs. I like to think that Harvey Weinstein represents a kind of patriarchal behaviour that most people will no longer tolerate, regardless of money, fame or reputation; however, I am not entirely sure this is yet the case.

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Daniel Schneider, Discussions on Gender and Feminism on the Internet: A Fruitless Endeavour?

The question of whether the internet, and all the different means of communication it brought with it, is positive or negative for feminism can simply not be answered clearly. What is clear, however, is that it has opened up infinitely more possibilities for discourse. One of the most recent examples is the Twitter hashtag #metoo, referring to women who have experienced some sort of sexual harassment and were afraid to speak out about it previously. While this is clearly a positive example of how social media can influence discourse, I feel that the internet still is a place that fosters misogyny more than it promotes feminist goals.

Firstly, the comment sections of online forums of any sort are still male-dominated. Ask yourself while browsing a forum in which the username does not reveal the user's gender instantly: do you think of them as male or female? Just like in many languages the pronoun we use for random persons is male, the assumed gender of people on the internet is male. Sadly, the assumption is right most of the time, since female comments are underrepresented heavily. Even in the online versions of papers like *The New York Times*, where almost half the readership is female, only a quarter of the comments are written by women. What are the reasons for this? For once, this situation mirrors the real world, where men are more likely to express their opinions as well (see the article by Emma Pierson). Moreover, women are as disproportionately abused worse online as they are in real life. The anonymity of the internet allows male commenters to be indecent, threatening, bullying and harassing as they wish to be, without facing any consequences. The patriarchal entitlement by which men define what can be said and what not, and also allows men to be the ones that are mainly heard, could therefore very well be enforced rather than undermined by the internet to some extent.

The most dangerous part of discussing a topic like feminism online is that opinions are often taken up without reflecting on them, since the people that one is discussing with are very likely to be of the same opinion as you. That is described by the phenomenon of the so-called filter bubble, or echo chamber. As a result, the discussion about feminism online loses its gray area—one is either a feminist or radically against it. In these places, the effects of the public discourse are basically reversed; if a sexist or misogynist post goes online, there is no one who speaks up against it, and those who do are stigmatized as crazy “social justice warriors”. I do not know what the underlying problem exactly is; it might be the fact that the internet's main purpose is considered to be a place to find entertainment, and not serious discussion.

Another major problem that poisons the online discourse about feminism is the treatment of these so-called memes, which are usually pictures with text that are designed to be funny. Unsurprisingly, there exists a large number of memes that perpetuate gender stereotypes, are sexist or violent (see the article by Kim Siever). Moreover, they dumb down any discourse that is to be had online. If we take the term ‘privilege’, for example, and use it in offline discourse, the meaning of the term and its

complexity is—most likely—known to the participants. Online, on the other hand, it is simply used as a buzz word that has lost its meaning. The phrase “check your privilege”, usually combined with the picture of angry women, is thrown around as a means of devaluing the opinion of those trying to hold a discussion about it, making it seem as if that was all these people could say. However, the existence of the memes themselves is not the main problem, but, rather, what happens when a commenter criticizes them. The reactions are usually among the lines of “it’s just a joke” or “don’t be so dense”. Of course, it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between fun humour and jokes that go too far; nevertheless, it should always be possible to participate in a discussion about it without being branded as “unfun”. The spread of these memes goes also hand in hand with the spread of fake news which is plaguing internet discourse nowadays. The reasons for this is that many of these memes make statements regarding women and society, claiming, for example, that the wage gap does not exist (it is interesting how well and easily conspiracy theories spread over the internet, but that is a different topic), and because of the reasons mentioned above, such a meme will either go unchallenged or will be downplayed as just a joke, while still influencing the opinions of its viewers.

So how can one try and break this superficial, misogynist and patriarchal discourse that is held in many online forums? First off, you need to be aware of where you stand; by this I mean that you need to be ready to be ridiculed for criticizing memes, for speaking up against stupid jokes and to be harassed in arguments that are about sensitive topics like gender. You need to be ready to start from scratch in any discussion, to explain concepts that seem evident to you from the very start. I think many people forget that behind a random username on the internet there is still a person who has a reason for how they think and act (I am straight out ignoring so-called trolls in this essay, since their motivation is simply to disrupt). As a result of this, it can be very easy to lose your temper in particularly exhausting discussions, to give up on discussing heavy topics with people who want an easy and fast answer—therefore I think it is also important to be aware yourself and try to make others aware that talking about gender and feminism will never be easy and that you cannot be done with it in five minutes while you watch a movie in the background.

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Tomasso Vaccarini, Undoing the Damage Done by TV: Sharing New Ideas

Some days ago something overwhelming happened. I was scrolling the Facebook home page and I saw that a friend of mine had written a post in capital letters. She usually publishes posts on Facebook but this one was different from the others. She was describing her embarrassment, caused by an interview she had seen on TV (she offered a link to the Facebook page of the show in question). I checked it get some information and I found a video, publicly shared by this page, in which a woman, called Marina Ripa di Meana, was talking about Asia Argento, the Italian actress (and director). Argento had recently stated that when she was about twenty years old she was sexually assaulted by an important American film producer, Harvey Weinstein—who, now we know, also assaulted many other women. I was angry (but not that surprised) to hear that woman in the video saying that she was disappointed by Asia because “saying that she was raped was such a slip-up for her”, for she just “did it to catch attention” as she’s on the cover of the magazines now. “Film producers” this Marina woman added, “don’t rape any women and also you have to take it into account that someone may invite you for that purpose. [...] You must be thankful for being there with a famous film producer”. I was very angry to hear such strong things said in such a careless way, as if it was just a fashion critique. To make the situation even more complicated there was a man on the TV show wearing a t-shirt with the “100% macho” slogan printed on it. That’s why my friend, a girl from the same city where that man came from, was so upset and angry.

This episode made me think about how, today, women’s situation is still not completely equal to man’s. In Italy one often hears stories about young women being morally condemned by their entire village because they were sexually assaulted by a group of boys. There is still an old conception of the woman who ‘must stay at home’, be good and loyal to her man and avoid performing her sexuality. This old-style way of thinking tends to accept and condone men’s bad behaviour (such as being unfaithful to women and performing a hypersexualized identity), while condemning women when they do as well.

I think it is important to teach the concept of feminism and Gender Studies in general to prevent such strong and violent thoughts from being so often shared in the media; also because there is a lot of misunderstanding about these issues. You could talk with strong women who are not going to accept men’s dominance, but still they don’t identify themselves as feminists because they see it as something against men. When people think about feminism they usually think about the rebellious 1970s period in which some feminists were against men, but actually today even feminism condemns this radical behaviour.

The situation is even worse if we talk about ‘gender’. In my country there is a great fear of a supposed ‘gender conspiracy’; therefore, many people think that Gender Theory is part of an evil conspiracy that aims at creating confusion in children’s mind so that they will not be able to distinguish what is for men and what is for women. They are scared that all boys will start dressing like women and that all girls

will want to do men's works (such as driving trucks or similar). But this conception of Gender Theory is, of course, totally wrong because actually Gender Studies in general invite to accept oneself, avoiding typical gender obligations: the aim is not destroying classic gender identities and nobody is against women and men living as such. Again there is a misunderstanding probably simply caused by narrow-mindedness because these people do not usually accept different variations in gender identities (such as different sexual orientations for example).

It seems to me that this way of thinking is supported by old media such as TV and newspapers. TV shows try to attract viewers through strong content that sometimes is immoral (such as the example I described before). They don't think about the consequences of the message they spread, their only aim is to attract viewers and to earn as much money as possible. Thus, just some weeks ago a man was disqualified from the Italian *Big Brother* because he swore to God, while nobody complained against the homophobic comments that were offered in two occasions by different competitors. Evidently, in this conservative show God was considered a more important issue than homophobia.

Luckily today you can find some places where you can learn about feminism and gender issues: the new media, such as YouTube and Facebook, are really helping this cause by spreading a more positive idea of these topics, but also sharing different points of view and different ways of being yourself. In the last years, thanks to YouTube many different lifestyles are getting known by the general public, so many stereotypes and taboos are being knocked down. Let's think about some channels opened by teenagers who talk about their life experiences and break some taboos that are common in our society. These people are (consciously or unconsciously) helping the feminist cause and normalizing divergent ways of living, breaking the typical 'phobias' like racism, homophobia, xenophobia and patriarchy.

But also let's take into consideration some web and Facebook pages that create innovative content sharing new ideas about living your life. Some Italian Facebook pages (such as Freeda and Alpha Woman) share motivational support throughout videos and pictures of great women (but also men) who helped the feminist cause. They are also trying to normalize women's everyday life (usually in a funny but charming way), for instance by accepting every kind of female body. Moreover, they talk about some other topics that may seem banal (like talking with best friends, deciding which dress to put on) but that in the end are part of the a feminine identity and are not usually taken into consideration by the general public. And this helps to undo some of the damage done by the TV shows...

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Marc Baltà Lupi3n, Young Boys and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Compulsory heterosexuality or heteronormativity is understood as the belief that heterosexuality is the only accepted sexual orientation or the only norm among the established gender binary (male and female). Therefore, heteronormativity involves an alignment between biological sex, sexuality, gender and gender roles. Gender is culturally determined and we become gendered through socialization into gender roles, also called 'sex roles'.

Heteronormativity begins as a process of imitating and modelling. Children observe how those around them behave (their parents or their teachers, for instance) and copy them. That is when children learn what is socially associated with 'being a boy' or 'being a girl' and so they learn how to behave in an appropriate way in order to fit in the labels 'men' or 'women'. Boys grow up in an environment in where hegemonic forms of masculinity are cultivated and implicated with the regimes of compulsory heterosexuality. Therefore, the problem is that masculinity seems to have been built as the necessary equivalent of heterosexuality. However, there is a need to differentiate and estate the existence of different masculinities. In this essay, I mainly focalize in the masculinity sustained by the patriarchy that it does not necessary belong to the hegemonic one as Sara Martin estates: "Se trata as3 pnes prioritariamente de distinguir entre lo masculino y lo patriarcal, incidiendo en el hecho de que el patriarcado es una construcci3n espec3fica de un tipo de masculinidad heterosexista, hom3foba, racista y machista que no tiene por qu3 ser la hegem3nica" (2007: 90). Yet, boys do not have another choice than following what society has chosen for them. Consequently, if a boy does not fit in this "mould" he has been given "becomes understood as different".

One of the things that can happen is that "boys find themselves forced to assert their masculinity", and therefore, forced to show their most patriarchal behaviours. Many boys end up wearing a mask and hiding their real selves from the world in order to not be excluded from the hegemonic collective. Their fragility and naivety makes them do whatever is necessary to survive. In order to survive. In addition, they are unable to fully "explore and test the boundaries of their sexuality" because they know that doing so would be going against "the system".

On the contrary, some boys are automatically labelled as gay, normally because their behaviour does not match the heteronormative model of boy. Those boys end up growing up in a society that imposes them not only heterosexuality but homosexuality as well. Although many of them may end up identifying themselves as gay, bisexual or queer, their process of sexual exploration has also been affected and therefore conditioned. In the novel *Call Me by Your Name* by Andr3 Aciman, Elliot, a 17-year-old boy falls in love with a 24-year-old called Oliver. Through the first Chapter of the novel he shows how conscious he is of being deeply sexually and mentally attracted towards him. However, at the same time he mentions how in a few years, when being married to a woman and having children, will remember a man named Oliver. Even after their first kiss Elliot denies the possibility of that happening again and says: "I'll be with a girl

and he will be with a girl". He obviously knows that this reality he would to pursue does not fit in the clearly heteronormative 1980s Italy of the moment.

As a conclusion, I strongly believe we all need to work to create a system in which children are not labelled the moment they are born. They should be free to choose who they what to love and who they want to be, away from the sexual and the gender binary. As a teacher, I think we should be the first ones to stop assuming that all students are going to be heterosexual. We should to teach them beyond the boundaries of heterosexuality, so that they can actually enjoy the process of sexual discovery.

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Marc Baltà Lupi3n, 'Avoiding the Unavoidable': The Experience of Being a Boy Growing Up in a Heteronormative Society

It is hard to talk about what I am about to tell you. It is hard to remember certain things that happened to me in the past. It is hard to acknowledge how cruel people and society can be when they face something they do not understand. But it is even harder to acknowledge that sometimes it is not a question of understanding but automatically hating and condemning what escapes from the idea of *normal*. Now it is me who understands that the problem is not a matter of understanding. It is a problem of deep fear, which drives to immediate rejection without questioning the possible consequences of such behaviour.

I was three years old when I first experienced bullying. I was in the first year of primary school. It was Christmas time. While we were doing a Christmas craft, the teacher asked us what we were going to ask for Christmas that year. Then, we all told the rest of the class what we had asked for, one by one. My turn arrived and I said: "I want a Darth Vader costume and a Barbie doll". Nobody said anything then, everyone seemed fine with that. No kid in the room felt shocked with what I said. A couple of days after, however, something happened. I was in the playground, playing and eating breakfast, when a group of boys in my class came to me and said: "You are a *faggot* because you have asked for a Barbie doll for Christmas". My first reaction to that was: What does 'being a faggot' mean? And what does this have to do with wanting a Barbie doll for Christmas? The answer to my question still makes me feel sick: "I told my parents what you said in class and they told me you were a faggot"—truly disgusting. When my mum came to pick from school I asked her what 'being a faggot' mean. I remember her not answering but replying with a question: "Who has told you that?" I could feel that she was not happy. I explained to her what had happened and she told me: "*Faggot* is just a bad word. An insult".

Years passed and I continued growing up. In this process, it became clear that I was not like the other kids. I did not mind dressing up as a witch, a princess or a queen, as I did not mind dressing up as Darth Vader, a king or a knight. From a very young age I discovered that acting was the thing I loved most. I just loved being able to become anybody I wanted to. I still remember that in my own reality *boy-things* and *girl-things* did not exist. I just played with anything that made me feel happy. The problem was it did matter to the rest. Apparently, it was not okay being a boy and liking what it was supposed to be 'girlish'. For those surrounding me I had all the ingredients to become a gay man one day.

Gay. Another word I did not understand at the time. My mum explained to me that being gay meant being a boy who liked boys. A person who likes people of the same sex. I was six or seven by the time and I remember asking myself: Am I gay? However, I did not feel any particular attraction for boys. Neither for girls. I just did not care, to be honest. I was seven years old and the only thing that I cared about was studying, playing and being 'happy'. That certainly was a moment of inflection in my life. Asking myself such a question at a very young age was one of the hardest moments I can recall. As a consequence, I started being overwhelmed with a lot of

information I was not ready to deal with. Nevertheless, the message was loud, tough and clear:

*Being gay is wrong. Liking dolls is wrong. Liking anything girlish is wrong. You are a boy. Boys play football. Boys like cars. Boys like girls. Boys do not cry. Crying is for faggots. **You are a faggot.***

I felt completely lost. I did not understand what was going on. I just had the feeling that I was somehow a mistake. And I felt that, no matter what, that would be always like that.

I am not sure if growing up in the era of technology (I was born in 1996), while I was dealing with this situation, helped me or not. Internet was becoming a very accessible tool for everyone by that time. What I am sure about is that it really gave us the power of knowing anything we wanted just by typing a word on Google and pressing 'search'. As easy as that.

One day at school, at the age of eleven, me and my classmates were in the locker room after a P.E. class. Most of them were footballers in the same team and they were talking about girls and sex. Suddenly, this boy took out his mobile phone and showed us a porn video. I remember being petrified, honestly. I was not ready for that. I believe my innocence was very much affected by that. Notwithstanding, what surprised me the most was not the fact that they were all watching the video but the conversation that followed. The boys started narrating quite private experiences: some of them started talking about that day they started masturbating all together after the football training. Another boy talked about him and a friend secretly taking two condoms from his older brother's stash and masturbating, just for fun. "And I am the gay one, huh?"—I thought.

After that experience, I could not help looking up the word *gay* on the Internet. I remember seeing lots of pictures of men kissing, videos on YouTube etc. I did it several times and then I stopped. I believe that I was testing myself. I was waiting for a reaction and I got one: I did not dislike what I was seeing.

Then, adolescence began. One of the hardest periods of my life. New school, new people, new troubles. Then, the raw bullying began. Since the day when I wanted to go to the bathroom and a group of boys pushed me out, brutally, saying: "This is not your bathroom, you faggot"—meaning, of course, that my bathroom was the girls'. Or the day when one of my *girlfriends* was sitting on my lap and from the other side of the playground a boy shouted: "Get off him! He is not going to feel anything! Come with us!" Everyone around stared at me. Maybe there were a hundred people. It felt as if they were a million. Experiences as such as those (and worse) became routine. At the time, I just felt society was imposing homosexuality on me. And at the same time, they were imposing heterosexuality on me as well. As if being straight was the way out of the problem. I was living in a society that was constantly contradicting itself. And they were driving me to the deepest place I have ever been.

Fortunately, after some years of doing my best to avoid the pain and letting people get tired of insulting and bullying me, things changed. Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen I felt hugely attracted by certain girls. But I always knew there was something about boys that I did not dislike as well. However, as a consequence of all those years of bullying, I was profoundly afraid and confused about my feelings.

Nevertheless, when I started what we in Catalonia call *Batxillerat* (or secondary school) everything changed. This is a two-year specialization course in which students choose what they want to study before going to University. I chose the course on Performing Arts. It changed my life. From then on, I met incredible people. I started going out at night. It was the period of my sexual awakening. I started kissing and making out with both boys and girls and I realized it did not matter at all. I was hugely lucky to become part of a group of people who believed love went beyond ones' genitalia. And I honestly could not feel happier.

The main purpose of my essay has been to give a realistic approach to what it meant for me to grow up in a society in which heterosexuality was compulsory, and yet at the same time, forcing on me a different sexual condition. My conclusion would be that we need to let children grow up free. They need to be able to choose and discover what they like without any condition or imposition. Away from the gender and the sexual binary. We must teach children that there are no *boy-things* or *girl-things*. We need to work to let them grow in an environment away from patriarchy and the heteronormative boundaries. Nevertheless, there is still a huge amount of work to be done. After many years of incomprehension, fear and pain, I am finally the person I have chosen to be. My sexual orientation? Who cares? Now, I am in love with a wonderful boy and I could not be happier. I have learnt that love is not black or white. That children are innocent and delicate. That is the reason why both of them should always remain **free**.

SEE ALSO

Being Gay is OK, <http://www.bgiok.org.uk/>

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Montserrat Pons, *The Lavender Room: Framing the Lives of Women Dating Women*

My girlfriend and I had a recurrent argument when we were sixteen. I had told her many times that I did not feel loved by her. She argued every time that it was impossible to show affection if we were supposed to pose as friends in school. We intended to carefully keep our relationship secret but our efforts were never enough. Our Literature teacher asked us once to meet her in an empty classroom. She said that there were rumours about us in the staffroom and told us that our behaviour was compromising the values of the school. My group of friends had gathered that day during break in the toilet and my girlfriend and I had joined them for a few minutes. My girlfriend and I stood next to each other during this time; my arm resting on her shoulder, her hand lazily paused on my waist. We tried to be more discreet after this event but yet, it was not enough. It was a cold winter morning when I slipped my girlfriend's hands inside my huge coat's sleeves in an attempt to warm her cool fingers. Immediately, a nun that I had never seen before started yelling at us with her cheeks burning red with shame. As a result of this episode, my girlfriend widened the distance between us. The nun had threatened to call our families to inform them about our misbehaviour but my girlfriend's parents did not know yet that we were dating.

My girlfriend finally admitted during these arguments that she was being reserved in school but she also accused me of acting coldly when we were on the street. She was certainly right but most of the efforts that I did at the time to manage my shyness seemed unsuccessful. I tried to be less afraid of expressing my love for her in public; I did want to hold her hand, rest my head on her shoulder, or hug her. However, when I could gather my courage to accomplish these gestures, we usually ended up confronting giggles and insults. Some men would stare at us for five or ten minutes if we stayed in the same spot, sitting for example on a bank. A few of them would leave for a while and come back afterwards to keep watching us until we left the place. On one occasion, we were waiting to catch a bus when a man hidden behind a rubbish container masturbated while observing us. I remember this period of my life as a time of feeling fear and guilt. I have been told many times that the first years of a relationship are the smoothest and most romantic. I guess that if we had had some space to freely show what we felt, we would have enjoyed more those first moments of our relationship. The reality is that we were on the verge of splitting up many times. I have told these stories years afterwards and there are people who still listen to them with disbelief. We are supposed to be an accepting modern society, right?

We began to sense how bliss tasted after we finished high school. I believe that we had integrated harassment and silence as a common matter in our lives, and this toxic perception had prevented us from seeing that most of our relationship problems were caused by external factors. We realised that the more space we had to be ourselves the happier we were as a couple. Thus, we craved for a room of our own where we could love each other freely. Although our dependency on adults had made us vulnerable, we strived to survive long enough to become grown up people who

could create their own space and privacy. These moments of intimacy have become very dear to me.

We are no different than any other couples; we snuggle on the sofa to watch television and call each other silly cheesy names. I have got used to show affection to her and thus, there are habits that I cannot—nor I want to—hide any longer. I like to stare at her eyes and smile until she smiles back. I love to see in her greenish-brownish eyes that she is wondering in those moments why the two of us are foolishly grinning. We have been told several times by friends and relatives that even if we just stand next to each other without stating that we are a couple, there is something between us that makes our relationship obvious. It might be the way we smile, look or express ourselves; I do not know. However, I guess that this unknown phenomenon might have been the reason that made the high school staffroom angry at us and concerned with our situation.

We might not have lived an idyllic romantic beginning but I feel that the experiences that we have endured have given us a strengthened understanding of our relationship. In the same way, we have also grown to appreciate the little details that we share as a couple. These little details might be the silliest and most unnoticeable events in someone's life but when trying to balance negative and positive experiences, they become essential. I was standing at the restaurant's bar of my sister's wedding when the maître approached me to ask if I had a boyfriend that I would like to marry. I assured him that I did, and told him that my girlfriend was attending the wedding; she was a lovely young girl in a pink dress. The maître was certain that he had not seen her during the ceremony. Thus, I proceeded to try to spot her through the crowd on the dance floor that was swinging animatedly along with the music. Suddenly, a man beside us moved away and revealed my girlfriend behind him. She was standing right next to us, with her elbow resting on the bar and her head tiredly laying on her hand: "Here she is!" I exclaimed excitedly. I had pointed at my girlfriend with my arm extended so close to her that I could have touched her nose. She looked puzzled in return, maybe trying to figure out why I was pointing at her with a smile from ear to ear. Sincerely, I do not know why I was that enthusiastic to introduce her. I guess that I was overjoyed at being able to freely acknowledge something that I had unwillingly hidden in multiple occasions. Nevertheless, I remember feeling happy for having her beside me.

This kind of happiness that I experienced in my sister's wedding is mainly the result of the unconditional support that my relatives and friends have always given me. However, I also had contributed to this felicity by choosing amiable environments that I believed that would not discriminate me. Thus, the fact that I face less discrimination than before is not the consequence of a social change in society. Experience has taught me that it is unsafe to show affection to my girlfriend on the streets as it is morally detrimental to daily coexist with people that do not accept who I am. My girlfriend and I craved for a room of our own because as dependent teenagers, it was the only way to be ourselves and stay together. Indeed, this space has definitely brought us happiness. However, I have also realised with the years that this room has also made our world a little smaller. What I believed to be choices were in fact restrictions and impositions. We might have succeeded in improving our situation but the world outside our room has not changed much the last ten years. This is why I believe that there is still a long

path to walk and I sincerely hope that someday rooms and closets will no longer be needed.

By the way, the maître left when we convinced him that we would not be marrying soon in his restaurant. We took our drinks from the bar and went back to the dance floor. While we were dancing I smiled at my girlfriend until she smiled back. “Why do you smile?” she asked. And then I smiled even a wider smile.

SEE ALSO

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Alba Pareja Comajuan, Binarism and Bisexuality

We are living in the 21st century, yet we still believe in thoughts and ideals already dealt with by our ancestors' one hundred years ago. Our patriarchal society is heavily biased by irrational and prejudiced ideas that are still harming a huge number of individuals in this world, who are not treated as they should: as human beings. Individuals who are considered 'different' are pre-destined to face an everlasting fight to overcome the repression generated against them. Because it is like a plague, this patriarchal system needs to be urgently eradicated.

Questions such as in which ways is heterosexuality different from homosexuality as regards love and sex? are a regular topic among the few who fight patriarchal tyranny. Two main points need to be made in this regard. Firstly, there is no real difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality as regards love and sex: heterosexual and homosexual people are not absolutely different from each other, although the individual marks the boundaries in each case. Every single person is a whole world, which is why we need to consider individual experiences. Second, and this is crucial, the gender binarism repeatedly imposed on sexuality and gender by patriarchy does not really function as such in real life. Otherwise, bisexuality would not exist.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* describes bisexual as persons "sexually attracted to both men and women". At first sight, this definition is more than sufficient. If heterosexuality means that you are attracted to the opposite sex and homosexuality means that you are attracted to your own sex, bisexuality means that you are attracted to both. It can be easily understood. Nevertheless, this furthers the problem of binarism. Apparently, we are all currently aware that sex and gender are not the same, yet it is also vital to understand that the numbers of genders is not limited to two, masculinity and femininity. The individuals using labels such as gender-fluid, non-binary, etc. are fighting to be recognized as 'normal' human beings, too.

Bisexuals are often unfairly accused of being transphobic, which is plain prejudice. Not only are bisexuals attracted to cis men and women, but also to transgender people. Of course, this depends on the individual and perhaps what is being described here is pansexuality, which might well be the core of bisexuality. Another problem resulting in the invisibility of bisexuality is the denial that bisexuality is a valid sexual identity. This binary society considers bisexuals—alongside with asexuals—a threat against both heterosexuality and homosexuality, identities with far less defined limits than we assume. Due to this, many maintain that bisexuality is not a real sexual identity and should be erased, a trend growing today. This is a claim that I base on my own experience as a bisexual woman, though it is important to bear in mind that no generalization is intended.

As I know first-hand, heterosexual cis men and women show deep prejudice against anyone beyond the ideals of heteropatriarchy. To begin with, heterosexual cis men have more difficulties to understand what it really means to be bisexual. When facing a bisexual woman, like myself, their first reaction is to be caring and understanding; however, this does not mean they are displaying a genuine

understanding. In fact, their patriarchal attitude remains the same and does not go beyond their constantly perpetuated phallocentrism. Often, heterosexual cis men connect meeting a bisexual woman with having the opportunity to fulfil the sexual fantasy of practising a 'threesome'. Bisexual women are seen by them, then, as convenient sexual objects to please men, and are assumed to be available to satisfy their sexual whims. Heterosexual cis women, in contrast, react as if they were being overtly attacked. They widely believe that since bisexuals are also attracted to women, they are going to approach them, as if bisexuals were attracted to every single person in the whole earth. This is why many cis women treat bisexual women differently from other women and end up excluding them from all kind of activities. Actually, prejudiced heterosexual cis women treat homosexual and bisexual women as badly as patriarchal heterosexual men. Finally, homosexual cis men and women also maintain some prejudiced ideas regarding bisexuality. Homosexual people depict bisexuality as a stage in the transition from being heterosexual to being homosexual; they believe that bisexuals eventually end up choosing one sexuality or another. Their bias against bisexuality is slightly different from that of heterosexual people, yet it remains absolutely harmful in both cases.

The essence of sexuality, however, does not lie with a group but in the individual. Every single person marks their boundaries and their differences, concerning thoughts, beliefs and desires. It is essential to realize that generalizing should be avoided, alongside binarism in both sexuality and gender. Love and sex reside in one's personality and intimacy, and thus should be respected. Furthermore, in order to live in a more egalitarian society, all identities should be visible and taken into consideration, far from patriarchal normativity—for identity resides in the individual's will. Plainly, transgender people, heterosexuals, bisexuals, pansexuals, asexuals, demisexuals, etc., have the right to be treated as full human beings.

SEE ALSO

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Bisexual Resource Centre, <https://biresource.org/>

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Paola Nicolás Flores, Sex is not (Trans)Gender

“Most folks would define a man by the presence of a penis or some form of penis. Some would define a woman by the presence of a vagina or some form of vagina. It’s not that simple though. I know several women in San Francisco who have penises. Many wonderful men in my life have vaginas. And there are quite a few people whose genitals falls somewhere between penises and vaginas. What are they?”
(Bornstein 1994: 56-7)

One of the main and most representative subjects when it comes to the relationship between gender and sex is indeed Transgender Studies. Over the last decades more research and theories have emerged in order to create more awareness and recognition regarding this subject matter.

First, it is important to discuss the notions of gender and sex separately. The gender theorist Judith Butler addressed this topic through the term gender performativity. According to Butler (1990), gender is a social construction which consists of different behaviours depending on whether you are a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’. Therefore, Butler defends that gender is indeed artificial and not inherent in a human’s nature. On the other hand, we find the notion of ‘sex’. This refers to the genitalia that a person is born with and traditionally, it has a correlation with gender. In other words, if you are born with a penis you are expected to perform as a ‘man’ and if you are born with a vagina you should behave like a ‘woman’.

Apparently, this seems pretty easy and straightforward. However, transgender people prove this traditional correlation wrong. Transgender individuals claim to not feel identified with the gender that they are expected to perform. Related to this, it is also crucial to have a look at the term ‘transsexual’. Hines mentions the sex theorist Prosser, for whom “transsexualism is the outcome of being born in the ‘wrong body’. Transsexuality, then, is a state whereby self-gender identity and the body are at odds. Gender reconstructive surgery thus enables the two to correlate” (Hines 2015: 30). Transgender individuals simply do not feel identified with their ‘assigned’ gender while transsexuals are in the same position with the necessity of sex reassignment surgery.

Inevitably, we must place the notion of the ‘body’ at the centre of this discussion. Are transsexuals favouring this tight correlation between gender and sex by undergoing surgery? The gender theorist Kate Bornstein presents a very interesting term which happens to be an alternative to ‘being born in the wrong body’: “In articulating herself not in the ‘wrong body’ but as a ‘gender outlaw’ Bornstein explicitly challenges a sex/gender binary and troubles presumptions of fixed gender categories” (Hines 2015: 31). With this term, Bornstein simply presents another possibility which clearly favours Butler’s theory about gender performativity.

Following the same line, it is also important to mention the case of Miquel Missé, a former UAB student and a female-to-male transsexual. In an interview with the Catalan newspaper *Ara* Missé discusses trans theories; when talking about surgery as an apparent ‘must’, the journalist asks him if he could have been able to live his life as a very masculine woman without undergoing surgery. Missé responds: “With a

different social response that celebrates diversity in which it is OK for you to not choose, maybe yes” (Bonilla 2016: online). Thus, with his declarations Missé (like Bornstein) also challenges this sex/gender binary which seems to be almost compulsory for transgender people.

Overall, there seems to exist an undeniable fact: gender is in fact a social construction which does not need to fit with the sex definitions that society dictates. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this traditional correspondence between sex and gender is still very much present in our society. With awareness, recognition and education this bond can become less tight little by little. Perhaps, one of the possible outcomes of this is that fewer people will feel the necessity of sex reassignment surgery. Against this compulsory correlation between sex and gender, everyone should be the in charge of their own identity despite the multiple existing labels. The only thing we really need as a society is respect and better social awareness of the necessarily huge variety of human beings that exist.

SEE ALSO

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Yvette Damas Herrera, From the Trans Glamour of Gucci to the Trenches of El Raval or How my Feminism Was Bombed

To C. and all the Goddesses of my life

It was a cold unexpected morning in November. C. and I were about to begin one of our stimulating promenades in the city. A lot had been happening in the last month and we both were in the middle of our activist struggles, so different and at the same time so equally moved by the passion we promised each other we will never deprive our lives of. I told C. about my latest experience of working with a group of transsexual women in Barcelona and sharing my thoughts on gender, and more precisely, womanhood when C. said, “Well, what is a woman?”, I answered “Well, I know I am one, but really, the more I learn about trans femininity, the less certain I am about my own womanhood or femininity”. C. looked me in the eye and said “Let’s assume you are a woman. I know you are a feminist, hence a womanist, now, what do you think is the next stage in the feminist struggle? What should we feminists aim at?” I always have the feeling C. already has the answer for the question just shot. A feminist like me—please notice the sarcasm—had, of course, done the homework and had attended Angela Davis’s talk at CCCB (2017) where, after repeatedly referring to the trans* issue, she concluded that

Any kind of feminism that privileges these who already have privilege is bound to be irrelevant to [poor-working class-trans* -colour] women. If the standards for feminism are created by those who are already ascended economically hierarchies and are attempting to make the last climb to the top, how is this relevant to women who are at the very bottom?

Davis’s words resonated deeply as I thought of the group of trans women I have been meeting once a week for the last four months. I have been an LGBTQ advocate of as far as I can remember, but little I knew how these women would constantly, and in such an unconsciously harsh way, put in question not only my feminist postulates, but also my femininity and womanhood.

The project I am part of offers a number of sessions aiming to empower a group of migrated trans women who these days practice prostitution in El Raval and Les Corts areas. The courses and people involved in the project aim to offer these women a comfortable environment where to share and reflect on their experiences on gender, transsexuality and any form of gender violence they might be intersected by. Hopefully, by the end of the next training course they will be able to give educational workshops in high schools to raise awareness of transsexuality and transphobia among the youngest sectors of society by sharing both their professional and life experience.

In the last years, trans* representation in the mainstream, and more precisely in fashion and TV shows have provided both cisgender and trans* people with mirrors through which to examine the female and male constructs of the binary system and the possibility of other corporealities. Hari Nef, trans actress and model, has become a regular in Gucci’s campaigns. A lot has been said about trans* becoming mainstream

and the glamorous and exotic appeal of the trans identity in the fashion, a field where the normative gender constructs are artistically disarmed. The increase of trans* representation in the mainstream, together with the election of two trans women to hold seats—Andrea Jenkins and Danica Roem—in the latest American elections and the passing of LGBTQ laws announces a promising, yet not downhill, future for the trans* issue.

Here, the LGTBQ law 11/2014, recently passed in Catalunya—autonomous region which has proven to be pioneer in the implementation of these kind of laws, as well as in the creation of a depathologizing healthcare plan for trans* people, Trànsit*—can leave us with the unrealistic idea of an apparent respect to sexual and gender diversity. This is not such the case yet, especially when we look at the labour market. The harsh reality is that when a trans person, and more precisely a trans woman, enrolls in the search of work soon realizes that the assigned track where to compete is full of mines from the start. These women's bodies and gender performances are judged by cisgender people in privileged positions, who automatically move the focus from their capacities to their transsexuality and their pre or post reassignment surgery situation—ignoring that a lot of trans* people do not necessarily want to undergo the surgery. One of the most common obstacles trans* people encounter is the fact of being either not employed or fired because of the permissions needed at the different stages in the transition they might need. If the person transitioning already has a job in a company, again this is especially true for trans women, they experience an immediate loss of privileges in her workplace and, in most cases, are eventually fired.

Nowadays, it is estimated that the 80% of trans women in Barcelona are unemployed. Although there are no official figures it is not surprising that a high number of these women end up in the streets, making of prostitution their main source of income. The legal limbo where prostitution exists is, of course, extremely damaging to these women, who are overtly exposed to not only, transphobic physical violence, but also to the abuse of power of the client in the negotiation of the rates or the practices of risk of the service. Among the most common ones there are the use of drugs, or the non-use of condoms, which may end up in the spread of HVI and other sexual diseases. It seems ironic that although the most transphobic attitudes come from straight hypermasculine men, these are too the kind of clients these women have. Of course, they always claim to be straight, regardless the active or passive role they have in the sexual intercourse. Aware of the situation, Ajuntament de Barcelona recently presented the Programa Carolinas, which in the first trimester of 2018 will launch a plan to enhance the employment of trans women who exercise prostitution and support them in the process to consider other working options.

It was not until these women shared their stories that my queer feminism woke up from the queer trans* collective fantasy and conviction that the trans* subject is a category with enough potential to transcend the binary model. I do remember being annoyed by some comments any of them would make such as “honey, you should wear heels” or “why don't you paint your nails? Women look more feminine when they do so”. I was not aware then that my annoyance came from a place of privilege. The privilege of not having to constantly prove my femininity or womanhood at the risk of being beaten or worse. I have seen their anger, which has become my own, when walking on the street with them I have seen how shamelessly and viciously men

look at them or shouting transmisogynist comments, or when finding out that sometimes young boys go to the El Campo and shoot at them with pellet guns. There is no glamour in the trenches of el Raval, where these gender warriors become soldiers in the firing line of the most hostile land. Their bodies become empty shields and the only resource to win another battle—never the war—against the patriarchal cisheteronormative society, which condemns them to live in the margins.

Never was I more aware of my privilege than when one of them told me that while for cis women there is a glass ceiling, for trans woman there is a concrete ceiling. Never was I more disenchanted with Feminism than the day I realized most of these women had interiorised not only radically transphobic, but also transmisogynist, attitudes towards themselves or other trans women. I listened to them, I tightly bounded with some and understood that although I see no difference in the legitimacy of their womanhood and femininity, I must not forget that our trajectories have been different. I see how restlessly they work to be seen and treated as the woman they are. Some of them even imprinting their skin not to forget that ‘you were born to be real, not perfect’ in a world that refuse to see them, to make them visible, hence subjects.

Even though there are legal mechanisms to protect trans* people, one has the feeling that as long as the measures to enhance the employment involve economic benefits for the employer rather than the valuing of the trans*identity, it will not translate into a real social and working integration. The normalization of the trans* issue in the working place will not happen until they are visible in shops, schools, hospitals, etc. Although I am convinced that the trans* issue has yet a long battle to fight, I have a feeling that more allies will wake up in the next few years. I am certain that we all, but especially gender conforming people, who are privileged in cisheteronormative societies, have the huge responsibility of not only valuing the trans* identity, but also actively supporting it. I have heard this pack of women roar, often tired, most of the times angry, sometimes free enough to be themselves. I have seen the fierce look in their eyes when injustice, transphobia or discrimination showed up. I have seen them and admired the strength and determination to always stand up one more time. I love these women because I know them, and I look up to them. Had not it been for their generosity and love they have offered me I would not have had the chance to become more of a woman and a better ally.

Earlier today I wrote to C. and told her that the time has come for feminists to go beyond the hashtag #yositecreo or #metoo. I thought I was a feminist, but it was not until now that I am constructing myself as one. The question now is, are we, feminists, ready to revise the idea of Womanhood and rewrite it as many times as needed for Feminism to be inclusive enough to succeed? From now on, Feminism will be Transfeminist or else it won't be.

SEE ALSO

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Dian Moschini Izquierdo, Feminazis, Bitches and Crazy Teenagers: Psychological Abuse in a Domestic Environment and its Consequences

I am a survivor of domestic violence and it is the first time that I admit this publicly. Until I was sixteen, for me domestic violence or gender violence was just some kind of urban legend, one of those things that you hear on TV and that you mostly ignore as something improbable to happen in your life. From February 2006 to March 2013 I had to continuously suffer this kind of violence between the walls of my own house.

To begin with, I would like to say that there are many kinds of violence. I stress this because, sadly, there are many people that do not believe that psychological, emotional and mental abuse is real violence. Some types of violence are more noticeable than others but now I know something for certain: it was violence nonetheless.

Admittedly, one of the greatest problems in our society is that there is too much tolerance regarding patriarchal forms of violence to the point that some forms of it are assimilated seen as something 'normal'. Clearly, this is one of the most outstanding political and social flaws of our culture yet it goes almost completely overlooked. Just to name an example, even if you share your experiences with the people you trust most you take the risk of not being believed. When I explained what had happened to me I chose the only people I could trust at the time, my friends. Most of them did not believe me. That may sound impossible; however, this is a common reaction in our society... unless an obvious black eye can offer proof of your claim.

In fact, only two of all the friends that I had then believed me, and that was because they were in a very similar situation. One of them was my (male) best friend and he also had been suffering physical and psychological abuse since he was just a child, firstly by his biological father and more recently by his mother's second husband. Our cases were so similar that this made us even closer. We have been friends for ten years now. Unfortunately, he is not the only (male) friend of mine that has suffered patriarchal violence. I feel the need to mention this because people often forget that patriarchal violence not only affects females or people with female bodies, but males as well.

I would like to comment that patriarchy is, in general and by definition, a belief system which favours and promotes bringing up individuals that have an absolute lack of empathy. Curiously (or not so curiously), it is not a strange thing to find, for instance, that those executive sharks in positions of power, used to stomping on everyone, to exploiting their workers or to lying unscrupulously, are characterised by an absolute lack of morality and empathy. Patriarchal society rewards sociopathic behaviours, even actually sees them as the manliest way to be a man; when those behaviours are not stopped the men in question end up becoming abusers.

Sadly, this situation is also reflected in the role models that young people choose to follow. For instance, consider the case of the notorious DalasReview, a famous youtuber followed mostly by children between aged 12-18, who was charged

with committing sexual and gender violence against many under-aged girls, including his ex-girlfriend Miare. When she started talking about how Dalas abused her, he tried to silence her by just declaring that “You are a bitch, you are useless”. The worst of all is that the social reaction to these girls’ reports, and to their bravely forming a united front, was negative—very, very negative. Curiously, or not so curiously, only when two men (one, a former friend of Dalas, the other the youtuber Wismichu) denounced Dalas’ behaviour, did his followers start to believe the girls’ claims. Surely, it is disappointing in many senses that the girls were only believed when a man decided to speak against their abuser. Yet, at the same time, I would like to point out that at least some men have started reacting against patriarchy, even though it took two years to do so in the particular case of Wismichu.

As one of the social workers I spoke to told me, proving the existence of patriarchal violence is very difficult—if not impossible—and, even if you manage to offer evidence of it, the possibility of getting a firm sentence is a remote one. The majority of our society at large thinks that we no longer need feminism. And this is one of the main issues that any patriarchal violence victim finds, in any possible form: bullying, online cyberbullying or domestic violence. Simply, society is built in a way in which the victims’ experiences are omitted or filed away in legal cases which actually disrespect justice. Many people affected by this violence never recover and this affects each and every one of the relationships they will have along their lives, their way of expressing themselves and their behaviour. The truth is that we still live in a profoundly patriarchal society which is not truly worried about ending the endemic virus that pollutes it; worst of all is that the current socioeconomic system, namely neoliberalism, simply intends to leave things the way they are. However, I think that, since I have always been an optimist by nature—which is why I refer to myself not as a victim but as a survivor—, if society at large is able to understand all this, talk about it and break the silence, just as I did, then there still may be hope for salvation.

We need to change the laws in order for abuse to be taken more seriously and also change our society, so it does not continue to be the way it is now: a permissive society which celebrates sociopathic behaviour as something almost desirable in a man, when abuse is in fact an aberration. Every time a man insults a woman calling her “bitch”, “feminazi” or plain “crazy” he is protecting his patriarchal territory. This is why we must unite, both men and women, in order to prevent my story (and all the stories I carry on my shoulders for having witnessed them) from being just a bit of sand in the middle of the desert of indifference.

SEE ALSO

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Sophie Keywood, “... Just a Waitress in a Skirt”: Discussing Rape, Sexual Abuse and the Oppression of Women in the Work Place (with Reference to my Own Experience)

“Placing his sword against her, Sextus woke Lucretia with a low voice and declared his love for her. After begging, threatening and exhausting every method of seducing Lucretia, who would rather die than submit to him, Sextus finally said, ‘when I have killed you, I will put next to you the body of a nude slave. Everyone will say that you were killed during a dishonourable act of adultery’. With this final threat, Sextus succeeded. After he raped Lucretia, he left”.

(Fisher 2016: online)

This account of Lucretia’s rape dates back to 508 BC and it begs the question of how many Lucretias pepper those two and a half thousand years and how many more will society accept before something is done? More recently one woman has come out about her experience, encouraging further revelations by numerous victims uncovering the extent of Harvey Weinstein’s catalogue of offences. This has prompted other women across the globe in similar situations to expose other acts of indecency, and in turn has provoked my thoughts towards rape, sexual abuse and general violation within women (and men) in the work place. This is my own account...

I’m 17. It’s late. It’s cold. And it’s dark outside. We are the only two left working. A top end restaurant. I am humming to myself and thinking about all the food I am going to stuff in my face when I get home. I’m wiping down all the tables and putting the chairs up. He’s having a cigarette. I glance up. Meet his eyes. I look away. My white shirt suddenly feels transparent. He steps inside, makes a joke about my white shirt and my bra. I laugh it off. I should have told him then. I should have stood up for myself. But I had only been working there for a week, I’m new, nervous, young and I haven’t been broken in yet. So I just continue. Bending and lifting while he stares. He is by my side. “Come downstairs Sophie, I need to speak to you about service”. Tentatively. I follow him. I sit down, cross my legs, fold my arms, in defence of any possible advancements. He comes close. Slides his hand up my leg. He’s old enough to be my father. I tell him no. He declares his love for me. Says we should run away together. I’m 17. He’s 47. Married. Wife. 2 children. Boys. They love him. He loves them. He loves the idea of me. I stumble over my words. A single bead of sweat drops from my neck. His fingers follow the line of my skirt. Why didn’t I wear trousers today? I desperately clutch at words in my head. But none of them reach my mouth. Speechless. I let him touch me. I let him say his words. I let them fill my brain. Guilty. Paralysed. I know I need to run. But where? And what if I lose my job? I’ve only just started. My boss is a celebrity. I got this job for my skills as a waitress. Didn’t I? I question myself. Maybe I didn’t get this job for my skills? His face is close to mine now. I push him away. He is surprised. The devil flashes through his eyes. He is up for a fight. I can see my bag on the hook. My phone. The outside world. I find my words. I tell him he can’t have these thoughts about me. He can’t act upon them. He has to think of his

family and not me. I give him a solid push. He trips backwards. I jump and run. Bag swinging from my shoulder. I run. I keep running. I run and run and run. Until I can't breathe through my lungs or see through the tears burning down my face. I cry and cry and cry. And then I'm angry and alone. I call my mum. Say nothing. Silent for months. Unbearable guilt. Eating me up from the inside out. His touch burning through my skin. I try to scratch him off me. As I sit here and write this I can feel his fingers on me. I tell my mum. She sits quietly and lets me talk. I see her pain. She hugs me. Tells me I'm beautiful. She gives me hope and makes me brave. I tell someone at work, but they brush it off and tell me I'm making it up. "He wouldn't do that, he's a good guy with a family. You are **just** a 17-year-old waitress in a skirt". I tell my boss. Ha! No one is listening to me. Silenced. I work for another two years with him by my side. His hands on my waist. His eyes taking off my clothes. Drinking me in. Thirsty for my innocence. His sexual innuendos. Everybody laughing. I laugh. I cry. I resign. He wins.

Every single day, all around the world, women, and men are abused. From rape to inappropriate touching and demeaning words, the spectrum is huge. Some are involved in sex trafficking and prostitution, some die, some are infected with aids and disease, some are impregnated. Shunned, silenced, alone and in pain, we suffer. The abusers hold the power. They exploit our weaknesses. Leave us fearful of the consequences that standing up and speaking out might bring. Often saying no and rising to fight the oppression, seems hopeless. But from Lucretia and through all those who have found the courage to speak up and make a stand, we can begin to unite. In this unity we find support, compassion, understanding and hope. Our awareness as a society is growing. This gives strength to the victims and promotes change and advancements in policies, judgements and laws. Now more than ever the power is shifting, people are beginning to listen. But the war is not yet won, only some of its battles. We must remain vigilant, brave and true.

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Paula Crespillo Arriaza, How Feminism Saved My Life

There was once a little girl who wanted to be a little boy. It was not that she knew she had been assigned a wrong gender at birth. She knew she was a little girl, whether she wanted it or not. And she didn't.

She had nothing against women, she would often think to herself. She had female friends, a mother, a sister, aunts, cousins, grandmas, whom she loved. She just did not want to be one herself. The reason was simple, although she was not actually aware of it: she did not want to be weak. This lovely little girl had grown up ('grown up'—she was six years old) with a recurrent subliminal message. Woman means weak. Woman means submission. Woman means silence, quiet, obedience, turning the other cheek. Woman means existing to please others. Woman means skinny, pretty, but not too superficial; means purity, but just do not be a prude; woman means you must try, but make it look like you are not trying. Men don't like it when a woman is too eager. Men don't like women that seem desperate. Men don't like women who use make up, but please do put some make up on, you must look beautiful. Perfect. No mistakes allowed.

Her answer was to start hating everything traditionally associated to her gender. She hated the colour pink. She hated dresses, skirts, make up. Just thinking of going shopping for clothes made her feel sick. And the worst part was the answer she received. It was so enormously positive. Her father praised her, being proud of her for not liking that "girly stuff", because "you are not like other girls". She started to have more male friends and it made her feel good, better, as if her value was proved because they accepted her as their own. She was pleased by pleasing them. She existed to please others. How ironic is that?

This positive answer to her change made her think that what she was doing was good. However, it was not. It was very much toxic to herself. She did not genuinely hate, not even dislike, all those things she said she did. She was repressing an important and very big part of herself, she learnt that loathing herself was necessary to be worthy. "Worthy of what?" She now asks herself. "Worthy for whom?"

She grew up (this time without quotation marks) by following this pattern. And as she got older, she added more prohibitions to the list. Do not have crushes on celebrities. Do not listen to pop music. Do not enjoy romantic comedies, nor romance in general. Use dark humour as a shield. Unfortunately, by hating and repressing her gender, she started to hate her body. Do not take photos. Do not let others take photos of you. Do not go to the beach or the swimming pool. Do not show your body. Her body had changed in puberty, making it impossible for her not to be aware of it. She had the body of a woman. She knew she was a woman. It did not matter how many times she tried to deny it—deep down she knew, she had always known, that no amount of repression would change that.

She crashed down. Her whole world had been turned upside down. Several other awful and harmful events had been happening to her at the same time, including the death of a family member that she loved with her whole heart and whom she had let down. She cracked. First came the guilt. Crying at night. Anxiety. Depression. Hating

herself—her body, her face, her personality. She hid in her room, in a computer. Behind a screen they cannot harm her. Behind a screen she is safe and nobody knows her, and nobody can see her ugly face. Nobody can see what a fraud she is. Nobody will be able to see how much she wants to simply disappear from the world.

Then, she found feminism by accident. She found girls talking about sisterhood and patriarchy and intersectionality. She found girls from different places, with different backgrounds, different ethnicity, age, sexuality, race, religion. All of them valid. All of them united against one single enemy. Not men. Patriarchy. It was such a revolution for her. She saw so many different types of women standing up for each other. She saw people from other genders condemning this same enemy. ‘Anti-patriarchal men’ was such an amazing concept for her.

Things did not get better automatically. Things are still not right. She has been hurt by patriarchy many times. Catcalled. Followed home. Sexually abused. This time, however, she knows it is not her fault for being a woman. She is not weak, she is not to blame, she is a victim. Those who misbehave are the ones who should be held accountable for what they did to her. She now wears dresses in the summer and sometimes, in winter, she ventures with a skirt. The walls of her bedroom are painted a very soft pastel pink. She never leaves home without wearing lipstick. She also loves videogames. She enjoys watching sports on TV. She still hates shopping for shoes. This time, nevertheless, she knows that this does not make her better or worse than others, it does not make her more or less of a woman.

She now knows that when someone says: “you’re not like other girls”, this is not a compliment. Other women are not her competition. They stand together and fight together. She is now starting to accept that some things that happened to her are not her fault. She does not need to feel shame. She does not need to be scared. She wants others to feel the same way as she does now and destroy the patriarchy until not even its ashes remain. Feminism was her lifesaver when she was drowning and she wields it like a weapon. Her gender is her shield. Her sisters are her strength.

The fight is far from over, but she will not give up. It may save a life, like it saved hers. Like it saved mine.

SEE ALSO

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Alba Sepúlveda Rodríguez-Marín, A Testimony of Self-objectification: The Legacy that Needs to Stop

Last Tuesday I was walking with my partner to our weekly swing lessons, discussing our long-term future together, when he said something that I found quite striking: “If we have a girl we must teach her not to objectify herself”. It was then when I started thinking about my past, about what exactly had contributed to my own self-objectifying myself at a young age, and if anything could have been done at the time. In short, if there was actually a way to avoid the story from repeating itself.

The first memory I can recall that induced me to self-objectification is placed at some point during my first two years at elementary school, when I was about seven years old. The boy I liked back then announced that he liked a certain girl in the classroom, and when the rest of the children asked him the reason why he liked this girl, his answer was “because she has the longest hair of all”. This was the reason why I asked my mother to let me grow my hair long for the first time. At this early age there was another recurrent situation far more innocent that also influenced my thoughts, and it was the “she looks so pretty” comments from grown-ups to my parents. At first, these commentaries were awkward to hear, but eventually I started to wish for them. At the same time, my relatives bombarded my brother with comments relating to his intelligence due to his love of technology, and these were observations that I secretly desired too but were never directed to me.

Later, puberty hit me, and the girls at my school started to attach much importance to their appearance. TV shows and books targeting adolescents centred on friendship and love, and the protagonists were absolutely gorgeous every single time. Having a very beautiful mother, as my classmates had constantly let me know during primary school, only made it worse. My mother has always loved to dress elegantly; she straightens her hair on a daily basis and uses make-up like a professional, and thus when I asked her for help she taught me everything she knew about how to look my best. Years passed by, and my male-classmates started to feel entitled to comment on girls, say dirty words to them and grab their ass at school. The girls, far from feeling harassed or authorised to feel harassed, only laughed and scolded them half joking. It is horrifying to think how unconcerned were the adults regarding this issue, as I recall that during a trip to Carcassonne my friends and I were chased at night by some stranger teenage boys and when we ran to our teacher he dismissed our words.

Catcalling was at its worst during these years; I recall being called “red riding hood” every morning on my way to school by a security guard because I wore a red hair band, and being stopped in the street to be asked inappropriate questions when I was not even wearing anything revealing. The objectification of our bodies amplified our self-objectification. My parents would make comments that they considered innocent but that would affect me more than they could see, comments such as “do not eat so much chocolate or you will gain weight” or “you do not walk like a girl because you do not move your hips as much as the rest”. Even when my brother got permanent braces I got removable ones to be used only at night because my mother did not want them to affect my image during the day. Every situation affected my self-

confidence, and I soon was displeased with the appearance of my hair at all times. When it was short I wanted it long, when it was long I wanted it short, when I saw a brunette I wanted her hair and when I saw a blonde I got highlights. It worked the same way with make-up and clothes. At eighteen, I got acne, and there were days I did not even want to leave my house because I felt utterly ugly.

In the present, I can say it has been a long journey to this point where I feel happy with myself almost every day. It took time to meet the right people that showed me to feel less pressured about my physical aspect with their easy-going mood. Now, I leave my house without a cat-eye wing and braless instead of wearing a push-up bra, with baggy tops and comfortable clothes that make me feel more confident than ever. My hair is not its natural colour and I still use make-up, but I like it the way it is. Having a partner also relieved a lot of this pressure, as I do not feel the need to impress the whole male population anymore and I know that our relationship is based on far more than mere superficialities. It is important to stress that at present, after having stopped to put so much effort in improving my appearance, I am less the target of catcallers and of other females' distrust or rivalry. Rivalry among women is ruthless and surely a wrong understanding of the world. In conclusion, it can be said that objectification and self-objectification seem to be a vicious cycle that needs to be broken somehow by women. I will not be able to stop my hypothetical daughter's self-objectification, but I will surely not contribute to it and will protect her from other folks' objectification as much as I can.

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Emma Adriaansz, The Role of Gender in Geography Studies? Nonexistent

As a Geography student, I have had little knowledge about feminism and Gender Studies so far. This class made me start to think about the role of gender in my area of studies, which is human geography. I started investigating the role of gender in Geography and many academic articles about this topic came up. I was surprised that in my two completed years of human geography, I could only remember reading about feminism in Geography a few times. Feminism is still a hardly discussed topic in human geography, which is strange since the object being studied is human beings. Then why is this important aspect of human beings, gender, being overlooked all the time? In this short essay I'm going to present some studies that are based on the role of gender in relation to Geography.

In the previous paragraph I say that gender is an important aspect of human beings. I would like to stress the fact that I don't agree with gender being so weighty for a person's identity. I find the way that privileges or disadvantages are connected to gender is not ideal at all. However, it's good to face the fact that this is happening right now. It's a social question that has been going on forever. If you say that gender is not important in this society, you're ignoring the problem.

In my search, I came across the paper called "Gendered Geographies of Power" written by Sarah J. Mahler & Patricia R. Pessar (2001). They discuss how gender operates at multiple spatial and social scales at the same time. Gender seems to be a major cause for human actions. As locations around the world differ in how they respect human rights in terms of gender, this can be a reason to leave the country. However, hierarchies of gender are not only present on the national scale. Smaller scales, such as communities also construct their own hierarchy of gender that can affect individuals in a certain way.

The fact that migration is caused by unequal rights with respect to gender is surprising me. The only forms of migration discussed in Geography are said to be caused by the search for a better economic situation, or fleeing because of war. What came to the fore in this article is how gender is a highly under-researched topic in Geography. The fact that I didn't know that a major reason for the migration of women is unequal rights shows how biased our society is in terms of gender. Human geography however, is all about the relation between humans and space. It's about the use of space and how this can cause power relationships. And since gender is highly related to power due to patriarchy, it surprises me how such an important aspect of power relationships is overlooked in Geography. As Mahler and Pessar note, this link between female disadvantages and patriarchy is clear enough: "Yet while being female carries disadvantages, this 'liability' is modulated by geographical and social location—that is, where social actors are situated within a gendered geography of power" (2001: online).

Not only is the role of gender highly under-investigated in Geography, the influence women have on research in this area is also minimal. All the narratives and hegemonic theories in Geography are mainly created by men. This is regrettably not

only the case for the science of Geography. In the following passage, Caroline Desbiens expresses how women are still suppressed in geographical research, especially when it's about the role of gender in Geography:

In Geography, examples of this critical reworking from within are numerous: from analyses of public space, domestic life or occupational segregation, much feminist work has directed its focus on the patriarchal environments in which male and female subjectivities are formed and maintained, in order to present these spaces a new from a non-sexist perspective. Without casting women as victims, feminist geographers cannot downplay the fact that gender boundaries are at times difficult to cross because they are still being policed. (1999: 181).

An example of repression in geographical research is the case of Jane Jacobs (1916-2006). She was the first woman we learned about in my studies and the author of the seminal volume *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Her story inspired me because, even though she has had many setbacks during the process, she carried on with introducing her ideas to the reluctant authorities of her time both in the United States and in Canada. She has had an enormous influence on urban planning due to her radical visions of how cities should be rebuilt. Her ideas were severely criticized by men, yet Jacobs' influence is still visible in today's urban planning: "She was in favour of diversity, dynamism and mixture—arguing that neighbourhoods worked best when they were a mix of rich and poor, residents and businesses, cultural and economic" (penguinunearthed 2011: online).

Human mobility is an important topic of research in Geography. Women are extremely limited in their transnational activities compared to men. I think this has not only to do with differences in rights, but also with the prevalent nuclear family stereotype. Men are still today the breadwinners for the family who travel for work. Many women still stay at home, take care of the household and the children. Mahler & Pessar describe how these unequal roles are maintained: "Time and again people who strive to act transnationally—principally women—are controlled by forces largely outside their control. That is, in many cases this is not discipline in the Foucauldian, internalized sense, but rather in its direct, repressive manifestation" (2001: online).

To sum up, the role of gender is largely under-investigated. There are many topics in Geography that are related to gender. Power relationships are created in social spaces, which are the object of research in this discipline. These power relationships are loaded with gendered issues and manifestations. The patriarchy that is still ruling these days is largely visible in the science of Geography. Not only is the suppression of women more or less ignored, also the influence of women creating new theories in Geography is very low. With this essay I wanted to show how the hierarchy of power is largely related to gender, and also how this is deeply rooted in our contemporary society. I hope it has shown how the influence of women in science in general needs to improve. I hope to inspire women to stand up for their values and try to create hegemonic theories, as Jane Jacobs did.

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Cristina Montes Venegas, 'That's for Women': (Gendered) Consumption and Hegemonic Masculinity Confirmed

Along history, one can clearly observe the many changes the advertising and the marketing industry have been through. From the appearance of department stores, shopping malls to online buying one thing is still clear: consumption and commodities are still gendered. This is not something casual, for capitalism and our patriarchal society go hand in hand in regards to consumption thanks to hegemonic masculinity, of course. However, shopping has challenged hegemonic masculinity by adapting itself to contemporary and modern capitalist demands and needs and by adapting to social and cultural changes.

Shopping malls, especially, were seen by Marxists as “temples of consumption designed for the worship of commodities” (Holliday 2008: 192). In this sense, as well and following the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, men are seen as the breadwinners and providers of the family—according to the Marxist discourse they are seen as the workers and producers—and women are seen as the selfish consumers who spend all their husbands’ money. However, Holliday (192) states that, because of this conundrum, (especially white) rich men are able to prove their wealth and power by means of spending it on “young, beautiful [and] fashionable women” (192) and are able to prove that they can maintain their partners’ and/or lovers’ demands—another proof of their wealth and power.

Moreover, something we do also need to take into consideration is the figure of the bachelor. Considered a man in the age to marry but who has not done so yet, the bachelor was thought to be irresponsible and without limits at the eyes of society—at least regarding his luxurious expenditure and consumption. This outdated belief, thus, made him “not a proper man” (193) because, as stated before, consumption was (and still is) related with femininity.

Despite this and according to Holliday (2008: 190), markets have had to adapt to other social and cultural changes: feminism. When such a social and cultural change erupts, it is impossible to deny its existence and ignore it. Now, because of this fact, the intermingle of patriarchy and capitalism—and especially capitalism—decide to make money out of something that may be able to undermine or destroy their power one day and in this way the patriarchal and capitalist status quo is still maintained for their benefit. This is what Holliday argues that Goldman states as ‘commodity feminism’, in which “one can now be a feminist by consuming certain kinds of products” (190).

Finally, what can be clearly stated and observed is how the influence of capitalism, patriarchy and, therefore, hegemonic masculinity still plays a major role not only to gender but also to how we consume and commodities are produced: in a binary, patriarchal and hegemonic way. It is true that hegemonic masculinity has been challenged due to the inevitability and undeniability of social and cultural changes but the reminder that patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity still exist reminds us that there is still a long way to go for us to achieve complete equality between men and women and, more importantly, between human beings.

SEE ALSO

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Belén González Gómez, Turning Advertising into a Tool to End Patriarchy

“Women (...) are doubly disadvantaged since big businesses are not just run by capitalists but by capitalists men. Women are therefore at the mercy of both capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. Media and advertising images continuously display idealised version of women”.

(Holliday 2015: 234)

Our society is surrounded by advertising. Throughout the whole day, we are harassed by images, slogans and ideas. Thousands of brands try to make us identify with the protagonists of their ads in order to make us believe that their products are the most suitable for us. If only feminists could take over advertising, if only we could use its astonishing wide reach, we could spread feminists ideals and portray fair and positive gender representations. Nevertheless, it would be almost impossible to do so. At least in a direct manner.

We need to bear in mind that “big businesses are not just run by capitalists but by capitalists men”. It is difficult for women to get a main role in the advertisement world. Moreover, even though she could achieve that position (as some have achieved nowadays) she would be “at the mercy of both capitalists and patriarchal ideologies”. In other words, this female boss could not preserve other women’s rights on the grounds that of that she would be restricted by the rules of capitalisms: if stereotypical gender roles are popular among the brand’s target audience, the marketing boss would keep perpetuating them. Although advertising cannot be changed directly from inside, yet we can use it in favour of feminism. We can approach this indirectly and from the outside: We are able to modify advertisement using feminist criticism.

There are many brands that had to refocus their campaigns due to feminist criticism. From blogs on the internet to legal complaints, Feminists are defending fair representation in ads. Dolce & Gabbana’s “Gang rape” campaign was banned in Italy, Spain and U.S since their authorities considered it to be denigrating for women. Dove’s “Real beauty” received several complains for its celebration of realistic beauty in an anti-cellulite ad. (If you are celebrating real beauty don’t sell products against real beauty. Don’t use feminist thoughts of free body shape in a anti-cellulite ad.)

A great example of how feminist critics actually can modify advertising indirectly is the brand Axe. Axe (Lynx in some countries) is a men’s grooming brand that used its world-famous slogan “the Axe Effect” from 1998 to 2015. Over more that 15 years, Axe ads used women to lure its male clients. Not only did they depict women as sexual objects subjected to the scent of their deodorant, but also they showed men as creepy stalkers such as “even angels will fall” or “Stop Being a Friends and Start Being a Man” (quite descriptive) were highly criticized. In 2003, Axe received 153 formal complains (FACUA among them) for the sexist nature of its advertisement.

In 2015, however, something changed. Axe took its first step towards gender equality with its campaign “Find your Magic”. For the first time, Axe didn’t resort to 27 unrealistic females in order to enhance the man’s (toxic) masculinity. The protagonists

of “Find your Magic” were more concerned about finding their own qualities than pursuing girls. This year Axe almost has achieved perfection. “Is it ok for a guy...” is a marvellous campaign that deals with real questions that real men search for in Google every day. “Is it ok for a guy to be a virgin?”, “Is it ok for a guy to be the little spoon?” “Is it ok for a guy to experiment with other guys?” are some of the questions that Axe has answered with a huge “Yes, it is. Stop being ‘a man’ and just be you”.

I need to pinpoint that Axe’s improvement is not because they feel they need to use the wide reach of adverting for the good, but because of feminist criticism. As they have claimed: “this reposition responds to our desire to update the image of the brand to adapt itself to the social tendencies of today”. Advertising is a core tool for representation and feminists can access it by highlighting any sexist (and discriminating) advertising as we are doing.

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Neele Heite-Meissner, Market Segmentation and Children's Toys

“Why do all the girls have to buy pink stuff and all the boys have to buy different coloured stuff?” asks five-year-old Riley standing in the overly pink and purple aisle of a toy store (dbarry1917 2011: video). Over five million viewers watched Riley’s outrage on YouTube and this is because she is making a very important observation. People tend to assume that in a post-feminist era, gender inequality and stereotyping are not a problem anymore. But is that true? The world of advertisement and marketing suggests otherwise. This essay will take a closer look at market segmentation and its effects on gender and work. It is my aim to discuss whether gender-targeted advertisement reinforces stereotypes and ultimately affects the career and life choices of both females and males.

In order to do so one has to understand what market segmentation is. Market segmentation is a sales strategy which divides consumers into smaller, closer defined groups. That way a company can sell more versions of the same product, avoid competing with itself and also drive up the product prices. One of the most frequently used factors for this strategy is, of course, gender, which results in the labelling of even the smallest everyday life product like shampoo ‘for men’ or ‘for women’. Segmentation, however, does not stop there: the product packaging and, consequently, advertising is affected as well. Everything that is light and flowery with smooth edges and soft lines is directed at females, while everything dark and square with hard lines and science-related motives is directed at males (The Checkout 2014: video). The problem with this is that the way these products are presented in the media through commercials can teach an uncritical audience like children what they can or cannot do in their lives.

Merskin (2008) writes that young children are unable to distinguish between TV programmes and commercials, which also means they do not understand that the commercial is trying to sell something to them. This, in combination with their not yet developed critical skills, results in children taking what they see on TV at face value and believing it to be true. The big problem with this is that gender targeting plays off using stereotypes. Hence, it aims at encouraging girls to play subdued games directed at “beauty, domesticity and nurturing” (Sweet 2012: online) while encouraging boys to play active games directed at building and inventing, using often strength and violence.

A good example for this is Lego. The “Lego Galaxy Squad Hive Crawler Commercial” (X Soft 2013: video) is very fast paced, comes almost entirely in shades of blue, gray and green, has a male voice over, and dramatic background sounds. The ad shows a space battle between human Lego figures and an insect-type alien, and includes the building of a Vehicle labelled “The powerful galactic Titan”. The strongest indicators showing that this commercial is indeed aimed at boys are the male voice over and the colour code. This is made evident when looking at a Lego commercial specifically aimed at girls, like that for Lego Friends of 2012. In this video one can see a Lego village called Heart Lake City, decorated entirely in shades of pink and yellow; the ad has a female voice over, soft pop music and sparkle sounds. It shows a group of girls

going to a cafe, coming from life-style themed activities such styling at a beauty shop or redecorating a house (Lego Club TV 2011: video). Everything in this commercial is clearly aimed at girls.

Studies claim that on average children between two and eleven years old spend 150-200 hours per month watching TV, “seeing 30-40000 commercials a year” (Merskin 2008: online). Since children learn a great deal about socialising from watching and mimicking, TV is no doubt a major teacher in social behaviour for them. But that is not all they learn from TV ads. They also learn what they can expect of others and, even more important, what others expect of them. Consequently, the severe stereotyping in commercials is currently teaching children that girls should like pink and be interested in household and beauty, whereas boys should be active and sometimes even violent to be accepted in society. This can also affect a child’s later career choice (see the web *Let Toys Be Toys*). A girl that has been showered with dolls, pink clothes and beauty articles is less likely to pursue a career as a scientist or athlete because no one ever encouraged her to hone her skills in those areas. The same goes for boys; a boy that has always been pushed to build things and do sports is less likely to pursue a career in the creative branches or stay at home to mind the children.

The campaign *Let Toys Be Toys* has addressed this issue. They are campaigning for retailers to stop sorting their toys after gender lines and start categorizing them after common themes. They hope that this will help parents to buy toys useful to develop as many skills of their children as possible instead of buying only ‘girl’s toys’ or ‘boy’s toys’. It has been proven that it is crucial for the development of a child to be presented with a wide range of toys because every toy enhances a special skill (Fine 2014: online). If the children are deprived of part of this range then they cannot develop all their skills and might even end up in a stereotypical job that does not make them happy (as *Let Toys Be Toys* warns). As social-learning theory explains, what we learn about social structures, race and gender in childhood sets the basis for our opinions, actions and perception of ourselves and others later on (Merskin 2008: online).

Turning now to commercials for an older audience one will notice that the stereotyping that is created through gender targeting does not lessen just because the critical skills of the audience are better developed. A research study by Bartsch et al. concludes, unsurprisingly, that “90% of the time, there is a greater use of female product representatives for domestic products” (2010), while male actors dominate most other product advertisements. So one has to acknowledge that the extreme gender targeting achieved through voice over and colour coding in children’s advertisement persists into the adult advertisements through only marginally more subtle means.

Another aspect of adult commercials that ties into stereotyping is the concept of ‘sex sells’. This concept is mostly used to target young man and usually objectifies women. A commercial using ‘sex sells’ suggests that through consumption of the object of the commercial the consumer will get rewarded by young attractive women, leading the audience to believe that they somehow obtain a right to sex with young women through consuming the advertised object. Critics stress that this particular sales strategy not only promotes stereotypes but also supports rape culture.

The campaign *The Representation Project* addresses this misrepresentation of gender in the media through creating their own media. They operate under the slogan

“You can’t be what you can’t see” and host screenings of their two documentary films *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In*. The first movie is concerned with the misrepresentation of women in the media, while the second discusses the media male stereotypes and the toll their use takes on boys and young men. Contrary to popular belief, male stereotyping is just as bad as female stereotyping. According to *The Mask You Live In* male stereotypes lead to many high school boys’ feeling alone and misunderstood because the heteronormative media tells them that if they want to be a man they cannot show emotions, nor ask for help. This emotional and social isolation can lead to mental health issues or anger management problems.

All in all, one can say that gender-targeting in advertisement does reinforce stereotypes and, consequently, affects career and life choices of both males and females. The messages issued by the heavily stereotyped commercials for toys influence our worldview from an incredibly young age and build the foundation for our later lives. If we do not get to play with all the toy types we want to play with, we cannot develop all our skills and our full potential; we might even miss out on career opportunities in fields which we could never explore due to the gender-targeted toys and commercials. We carry for the rest of our lives our early development and this only gets enhanced by continuous stereotypes imprinted in almost every commercial on TV. It is important to note that stereotyping is bad for females as well as for males, who, let’s not forget, have to put up with a constant challenge to their masculinity whenever they reject traditional gender roles.

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Ana Martínez Soto, Trendy Feminism: The Taylor Swift Effect

Back in 2014 Taylor Swift declared herself a feminist after actress Lena Durham helped her to understand what feminism is really about. However, ever since she admitted to being a feminist, Swift has done nothing but use this ideology for her own benefit as an artist. In this essay I intend to expose what we might call Taylor Swift's self-serving feminism and explain how fake and problematic her definition of the ideology is.

First of all I would like to expand a bit on what 'trendy feminism' is. I did some research because I had never heard this expression before and what I found out is that trendy feminism is a marketing tool which some celebrities use in order to broaden the scope of their success so that their product can reach more people. People who exercise trendy feminism do so for popularity rather than ideological reasons, which is exactly what Taylor Swift seems to be doing.

Now let me draw your attention to another concept I came across when doing some digging on this subject: the 'Taylor Swift Effect'. From what I understood, this refers to the way her actions are seen by her audience, who usually defend her no matter what she says or does. I think it is amazing how she has created and developed a loyal fan base. However, this is what annoys me most: the fact that she has a huge platform to promote ideals such as female empowerment, gender equality, human rights, or any important current and movement that can help humankind, and, yet, how she uses it incorrectly and for all the wrong reasons.

Most of her fans are impressionable young persons below 16 ready to believe everything she says, including her opinion on feminism. If Swift thinks of herself as a feminist then her fans will do so, too. This could be a very good, positive development if only the definition of feminism which she is promoting was accurate. What I have seen so far in her descriptions of this ideology is that Swift confuses the notions of feminism and (personal) female empowerment, and in her doing so she creates an image for both which is completely wrong.

Let me give you an example. About two years ago she released a music video called "Bad Blood" (2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcIy9NiNbmo>), a song that was supposed to promote girl power and female empowerment but in reality was about tearing another woman down. At first I loved the music video because it featured a lot of strong, powerful women who were depicted as warriors, as opposed to fragile beings as we are often described. However, once I had paid attention to the lyrics, I understood that the purpose of the song was not to enhance female empowerment at all but quite the opposite.

I will not discuss what Swift does in her private life because that is none of my (or anybody else's) business but what I wish to stress how she uses the ideas of feminism and girl empowerment as a self-serving prop and how she portrays these two ideas in a way that is just not right. The kind of feminism she seems to exercise is that of white feminism based on a (fake) idea of women empowerment. If you take a look at her group of girlfriends, often referred to as her "girl squad", you will see that there is no diversity whatsoever among the members. Her exclusive little group is

made up of white, model-thin women who have been specifically chosen by Swift in order to promote the ultimate idea of girl power, an idea that does not include diversity of colour, body shape or body size.

When I say that Swift uses feminism as a self-serving prop I mean that she only comes forward as a feminist when this happens to be convenient for her. She bragged (and I say brag because that is the impression that I got) about being a feminist when she received a Grammy for best album of the year, but where was she when pussy-grabbing Donald Trump was elected President of the United States of America? Where was she during the Women's March to oppose his election? She did tweet in support of the march but this was not enough, and her absence was, therefore, much criticized. If Swift wants to be seen as a feminist, she should have attended the march as many celebrities did, for if she ever comes out as a feminist this is only when a situation affects her or one of her friends. Never have I seen her defending, or at least speaking out for, women who form part of a marginalized minority.

Actually, the only time when I have seen Swift advocating for feminism and women's rights was during her own sexual assault trial.⁵ Do not get me wrong, I think what she did was very brave of her, but this cannot be the only occasion in which she actually backed up feminism's beliefs. She also donated money to cover Kesha's expenses for her own trial of sexual assault, but it would not surprise anyone if the motives behind her doing so were for her own benefit.

There is a huge difference between calling yourself a feminist and actually being one. Feminism is much more than just supporting your group of girlfriends or uttering catch phrases like "there is a special place in hell for women who fail to support each other". Feminism is a political and social movement that has been going on for many decades now, and I think that if the women who initiated this movement saw what some people, including Taylor Swift, are doing with their lives' hard work, they would be absolutely appalled.

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⁵ DJ David Mueller sued Swift for having caused him to lose his job unfairly with comments on his alleged misbehaviour to her. She sued back accusing Mueller of groping her during a 2013 backstage meet-and-greet, and won the two cases. Mueller was condemned to paying Swift a symbolic 1\$ as she had requested, intending his sentence to be exemplary rather than the source of economic gain for her. In contrast, Kesha is still entangled in a series of lawsuits against her former record producer, Dr Luke, whom he accused of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Judge Shirley Kornreich dismissed her case in 2016, ruling that Kesha's rape accusations against Dr Luke had prescribed. He sued Kesha for breach of contract.

PART TWO: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Neele Heite-Meissner, The Male Gaze and Women's Representation in Contemporary Superhero Movies

“Women, on the other hand, simply look good and embody ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’”.
(Holiday 2015: 234)

Superhero movies are widely popular these days. Marvel studios alone have produced seventeen superhero movies in the last ten years and they show no sign of slowing down. Their biggest competitor DC is not far behind with twelve movies. Earlier this year DC was responsible for the movie *Wonder Woman* which is the first superhero movie directed by a woman (Patty Jenkins). Critics and fans alike praised the movie for its respectful treatment of women. However, the changes made both to *Wonder Woman* and the Amazons (a female warrior tribe) in DC's newest movie *Justice League*, directed once more by a man (Zack Snyder), has sent a cry of outrage through the fan community. Looking at this example of *Wonder Woman* and the Amazons I am going to argue that the male gaze influences the representation of woman in comic-based movies negatively, changing them from sexy to sexualized.

To make this argument it is crucial to understand the difference between sexy and sexualized. The first step towards understanding that is to realize who the target audience is. In comic-based movies this will be a male audience which is why most male heroes are sexy but not sexualized. The target audience is meant to identify with the male hero, to aspire to be him. So of course the hero is attractive because society tells us, that is what we want to be. The real difference between sexy and sexualized lies in presentation. The male hero for the male audience is always positioned in power poses, heroic and in full control of the situation, essentially a male power fantasy. The female hero as presented to a male target audience, however, is not there to be identified with. The female hero is the reward, the one the audience is meant to want to have romantic interactions with. She is there to “simply look good” as Holiday puts it (244). This results in sexualized costumes and poses that do not make sense in the context of the action of the movie because if the male hero is a male power fantasy then the female hero is a male sex fantasy which is where sexy turns into sexualized. This can be seen wonderfully in the differences between the *Wonder Woman* and Amazons of *Wonder Woman* and *Justice League*.

The main point of outrage currently is the change in costumes of the Amazons. Lindy Hemming's costumes for *Wonder Woman* were no doubt sexy but they were also practical. The Amazons are warriors so they are wearing armour. This armour to make any practical sense has to protect all vital organs as it did in *Wonder Woman*. In *Justice League* however this costume design was overturned in favour of something that looks like leather bikinis which protects neither the heart nor anything else. This change is doubly significant because not only it shows the difference between the male and the

female gaze as well as sexy and sexualized, it also shows though what length patriarchal men will go to sexualize women. In order to put the Amazons into these new sexualized costumes they had to scrape the ones they already had and put a lot of time and money into designing and sewing new ones.

Another difference that has been marked between the two movies are the camera angles. *Justice League* has significantly more frames filmed from below up which conveniently gives the audience glimpses up Wonder Woman's skirt. Some might argue that this is unavoidable with a skirt as short as Wonder Woman's but one only has to take a look at her title movie where there is not one frame exposing her naked behind even though she has a lot more screen time.

All in all one can say that the male gaze does impact women's representation in comic-based movies negatively. The example of the costumes of the Amazons shows that patriarchal men will actively sexualize women even at the expense of more time and money, revoking decisions previously made by women. The added point of the different camera angles underlines the impact positioning has on representation and shows that while Wonder Woman as directed by a woman is sexy, Wonder Woman as directed by a man is sexualized.

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Mònica Suy Morcillo, Hypocritical Queerbaiting on TV

We live in a heteronormative patriarchal society where the LGBTQ+ community and women have little representation (if any, especially in the case of LGBTQ+ people). However, LGBTQ+ audiences have been demanding characters belonging to the community for years and the response was horrifying: “queerbaiting”. This is defined by Wikipedia as “the practice to hint at, but then not actually depict a potential same-sex romantic relationship between fictional characters. The potential romance may be ignored, explicitly rejected or made fun of”. It is used to get LGBTQ+ audiences who may not be interested in that kind of content if made explicit.

The case in particular that I am going to (superficially) discuss is the BBC’s adaptation of Sherlock Holmes, the TV series *Sherlock* (2010-). The series presents Holmes and Watson in present day London, which is the main difference with other adaptations. Nevertheless, there is another major difference. *Sherlock* gives a huge amount of hints towards the idea that both Holmes and Watson are queer, despite the latter’s many verbal protests that he is not gay throughout the series. In the first episode, two people confuse their newly-formed friendship for a romantic relationship: Mrs. Hudson, their landlady, and the waiter of the restaurant they have dinner in. Not only that, but in this scene restaurant Sherlock’s sexuality is discussed and he assumes Watson is trying to ask him out. To this, he responds that he is “married to [his] work and [is] flattered by his interest”, which is a completely different response to a woman’s (Molly) later advances. There is also the fact that the episode is called *A Study in Pink* instead of *A Study in Scarlet*, which is interesting because pink is a colour traditionally associated with homosexuality.

In *A Scandal in Belgravia*, John’s own girlfriend tells him that he is “a great boyfriend” and adds that “Sherlock Holmes is a lucky man”. Again, the show implies that there is a romantic attraction between Holmes and Watson. What is more, in that same episode, Irene Adler, presented as a female mirror image of Sherlock and, therefore, a great reader of people, tells Watson that they are a couple and/or that he is jealous of her (the scene is quite ambiguous). She then proceeds to compare John and herself, implying that they both have an intimate bond with Sherlock Holmes in common.

The show has no problem in portraying LGBTQ+ characters, from John’s own sister to, indeed, Irene Adler. Why then, does it seem so reluctant to make a same-sex romantic relationship happen between its protagonists? It could be building their relationship slowly so it does not shock the non-LGBTQ+ audience or the fact that they are queerbaiting their audience. The LGBTQ+ community has shown great interest in this potential relationship and they may not want to lose that audience.

The third option is that they could all be coincidences and that the LGBTQ+ community is reading too much into it, but in the words of the show itself in *The Sign of Three*: “What do we say about coincidences? The universe is rarely so lazy”.

To sum up, there are many shows and films like *Sherlock* which queerbait (e.g. *Supernatural* or *Pitch Perfect*) and it is our responsibility to call those shows/films out

on it. Nowadays, it would be rare that the LGBTQ+ community was actually reading too much into a straight character, so the only explanation is that it is done on purpose.

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Mònica Suy Morcillo, Gender, Feminism and Racism on TV shows: *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*

My favourite genre to watch on TV are sitcoms. I have watched *Friends* (1994-2004) and *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014) at least a hundred times. However, somewhat problematic characters like Ross or Barney, and jokes about minorities (and especially about women) can often be found in those shows, which now makes me cringe quite a lot. That is why when I started watching a show called *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* it felt like a breath of fresh air. I will try to comment on the show's feminism, diversity and treatment of serious issues while offering the minimum possible spoilers— but if anyone wants to watch the show, I would recommend that they first do so and then come read my essay.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine, created by Daniel J. Goor and Michael Schur, is a show that started being broadcast in 2013; it focuses on what goes on in the NYPD 99th precinct in Brooklyn after a change of captain. Captain Ray Holt is a black, openly gay man who is very much determined to change the dynamics of the precinct in order to improve the performance of the detectives. In contrast, Jake Peralta, the best detective in the precinct does not like the changes much since he is actually very laid-back and disorganised. Throughout the seasons, the Captain becomes a father figure for Jake and the development of their relationship is truly beautiful to watch. There are also two Latina women Detectives (Amy Santiago and Rosa Díaz), a black Sergeant (Terry Jeffers), Detective Charles Boyle who is a bit eccentric but often defies gender roles, and the secretary, Gina Linetti, who is even weirder but also a role model for all women who aspire to be self-confident.

Captain Raymond Holt is out and proud since episode one; he has a little gay flag on his desk and openly discusses the struggles he has faced in the NYPD throughout his career. He exposes both the homophobia and the racism present in the police force when he was young and proves that despite all that he did manage to make his dream of running a precinct come true. The fact that the man in charge at the 99th is a non-white, non-straight man is already a big win towards a variety of representation that I usually do not see in other shows.

Latina Detective Amy Santiago is presented in the first episode as competitive and ambitious, a result of growing up with seven brothers. She is proven to be a strong, intelligent woman who will not let any man step over her (see the Halloween episode in Season three and *Mr. Santiago*, specially in Season four especially). She is easily the second best Detective in the precinct (if not the best one), as everyone knows. Santiago is considered a bit of a 'teacher's pet' because of her bonding well with Captain Holt, but that only shows her desperate need to learn and improve so that she can also become Captain one day. In this way, Amy Santiago offers an amazing role model for women because she sends a positive message: work to fulfil your dreams, even if the position is usually occupied by men. To make it even better, she is played by a Latina actor, Melissa Fumero, which is another win for the show in terms of diversity.

Another interesting aspect of the show in terms of feminism is the relationship between Jake and Amy. From the first episode you can tell they are going to be the main romantic relationship in the show. The first scene of the show presents them working a case: they bet that if Amy loses, she has to go on a the worst date ever with Jake; if Jake loses, Amy gets to destroy his beloved car. Nevertheless, the show develops the relationship slowly and gradually and when they finally get together, theirs proves to be a really healthy relationship. Jake has the upmost respect and adoration for her, both personally and professionally, and even tells her that he has always known she is going to be his boss someday. The only time when he shows a sexist attitude (see the episode *Mr. Santiago* 4.7), he is called out and learns from his errors. What I love most about his relationship with Amy is that, unlike other shows, the characters still function as individuals and their plot does not consist only of their relationship.

The development of the friendship between the women in the precinct, Amy, Rosa and Gina, is also worth highlighting. They are all very different women. Amy is ambitious and smart, Rosa is intimidating and mysterious and Gina is eccentric and self-confident. At first, the three of them do not seem to get along that much. Gina is a self-declared bully and makes fun of Amy's clothes all the time; Amy is intimidated by Rosa being the other female Detective in the squad and Rosa does not really care about either of them. Nevertheless, the show develops the relationship between those three characters: Gina's teasing gradually becomes less offensive, and Amy and Rosa begin working together and covering each other's backs. This gets to the point when Gina and Amy (along with Detective Charles Boyle) organise Rosa's bachelorette party. The fact that the show brings them together as friends instead of presenting women pitted against each other, which would not be difficult since they are co-workers, is a big feminist win.

Also, apart from Captain Holt's condemnation of the racism he has suffered in the NYPD, there is a whole episode dedicated to racism in the USA, especially focusing on police violence towards black people: *Moo Moo* (4.16). It is an incredible, very important episode and while humour is still present (always with respect and never at the expense of black people), it has a serious tone to it which makes clear that an important issue is being treated. The plot shows the different approaches to fighting racism that Captain Holt and Sergeant Terry Jeffords have, how they decide to deal with the issue at hand, and how the consequences of their decisions proves that racism is still very much a part of the Western world.

I could go on and on about how extraordinary a show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is but I am going to stop here for now. I hope I have encouraged you to start watching it and that you find, as I do, that a wonderful TV show can also be feminist and respectful towards the minorities.

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Albert Muñoz Varela, Alternative Gender Representations in Tite Kubo's *Bleach* Manga: An Exploration of Power and Influence through Popular Culture

Even though Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) or Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) are two of the most important and influent books about feminism and Queer Theory, their real impact on society as a whole is far less notable than the effect that certain silly TV series such as *Aquí no hay quien viva* (2003-6) have had in Spain. It goes without saying that within the academic world those two books are little less than a watershed moment in feminist literature. Nonetheless, they have failed to reach the wide, real audience: all those men and women who know nothing about feminism, Queer Theory and completely ignore names such as Monique Wittig or Michael Foucault. Everyday people, in Spain, do know—in contrast—characters such as Mauri and Bea, a gay and a lesbian who won the audience's affection and respect in *Aquí no hay quien viva* in a country in which—as unfortunately happens virtually around the world—homophobia is still an issue at stake. These two characters helped to normalise homosexuality in Spain, lending it a much more potent voice than any important LGTBI+ scholar has ever been granted. Sad but true, Mauri and Bea showed to the Spanish public (the real bulk of working-class people, mainly) that they were not lustful, disordered little monsters, but ordinary people whose sexual orientation was different from the hegemonic one shown on TV and society. Plain and simple.

My objective is far from denying the importance of academic feminism (or any other kind of fight for social justice); rather, it is to acknowledge its limitation outside universities, workshops and the circles of highly cultivated people, as well as to claim the massive importance that popular culture has nowadays. Whether this is or not a good scenario for society is not to be discussed in this brief paper.

In this sense, I think it is imperative to take a close, critical look at how popular culture deals with gender representations, since popular books, manga and anime, TV series and popstars are likely to heavily influence their audience, most remarkably when they are young boys and girls, whether children or teenagers. Precisely because we do not tend to analyse manga, I think it would be an excellent, fruitful idea to do so.

Bleach, written and illustrated by Tite Kubo, is a highly popular manga published in *Shonen-Jump* (a Japanese magazine aimed mainly at male teenagers, but also read by adults). It tells the story of Kurosaki Ichigo, a male teenager, who happens to acquire *shinigami* (or God of Death) powers and, in a nutshell, has to save the world. The story per se is full of (Japanese) clichés, but at the same times it offers different masculinity and femininity models through four of its main characters: Ichigo and Chad, Orihime and Tatsuki.

Ichigo, the main character, is the quintessential representation of masculinity (according to the heteropatriarchal model): he is strong, his will is unbreakable, he is the active saviour, the knight. He has a deep sense of justice and will not doubt to put his life in danger to save anyone who deserves it. Ichigo is stubborn and he is always willing to join in a fight so as to become stronger as a result. When Rukia, the

shinigami who unlocked his spiritual powers, is kidnapped and sentenced to death, Ichigo does not hesitate to go after her and save her. Again, we see the template/sequence of the heroic male active saviour and the female passive captive (just like it happens in the Westerns, in *Super Mario*, etc.).

On the other hand, there is Chad, the alternative man. Although Chad is big and strong, he never attacks anyone, even if he is being bullied. Chad is also very quiet, and unlike Ichigo or other male characters he does not need to show off, to shout or to impose his presence verbally. When Rukia is kidnapped, he does not play the role of the male active saviour, but that of a friend. He does not utter a word, but joins the main character to save Rukia. He does so simply because he thinks this is the correct path to walk, not because he has to (re)affirm his masculinity, as it was the case with Ichigo. Hence, Chad is a very interesting character that combines the appearance of 'the all-male macho' with a non-gendered mentality: he is presented (psychologically) neither as masculine nor feminine. He is very sensitive (he protects a parakeet, in which a soul of a young boy lives, risking his own life) and at the same time really brave and strong: if he has to protect someone, he will not hesitate fighting.

Femininity is also fundamental in the main characters. Orihime, Ichigo's classmate and friend, is the heteropatriarchal projection of what a perfect woman should be like. She is very nice, gorgeous, sensual (though not a whore...), but also a healer who can forgive and forget offenses. Although extremely important in terms of plot, Orihime was also created as fan-service (see the aesthetics of her character design, very beautiful and most often with big breasts) and as comic relief. Interestingly enough, Orihime's powers are not exactly her own powers: they consist of six little fairies that perform different functions (such as protection, healing and attack). Not only are her abilities dependent on these external agents, the fairies, but they are summoned by a hairpin which her dead brother gave her as a present. Thus, she is not strong but counts with the assistance of strong allies. She is dis-empowered so as to make her appear nicer and more feminine.

Tatsuki is Orihime's best friend and a not-so-important-character. She does not have spiritual powers like Orihime, but she is a really strong woman. She practices karate and she is always participating and winning contests. Her personality is really strong, determined and unwilling to accept others' orders. Her hair is somewhat short and her face looks rather harsh and masculine. Tatsuki certainly resists the concept of 'feminine' as understood by the heteropatriarchy, while at the same time avoiding the butch lesbian cliché. There is a lesbian, by the way, among Orihime's circle of friends who is madly in love with her, as there is a man who really loves patchwork.

To sum up with, scholars' work and research on the field of feminism is basic and of a huge importance, although its content often has problems reaching the general public. Popular culture, on the other hand, has an enormous effect on society and hence the messages that are sent through it are widely accepted at grassroots level, generating mainstream ideology. Just as Foucault pointed out, power normalises ideas, behaviours, roles within society, etc. and that is why I have chosen to analyse four main characters in Tite Kubo's *Bleach* manga: to show that in a widely known work (also available on TV as anime) there are both heteropatriarchal normative models (Ichigo and Orihime) and non-heteropatriarchal characters (Chad and Tatsuki). This paper has no more room to provide further examples, either within the same manga, or taking a look at another such as Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece*—probably the most

popular nowadays—in which there are plenty of strong, really important transsexual characters who are massively celebrated among the readers (such as Mr.2 or Ivankov). These mangas help to articulate a discourse in which cisheteronormativity is deconstructed, being not the only valid option, but just one among many.

To finish with, I would like to state that academic work on feminism (or communism, human rights, etc.) is extremely important but that we all should be aware of the limitation of books such as Foucault's *The History of Madness* when addressing the bulk of society who have never gone to university, or who are not interested in these topics. Popular culture sends stronger, clearer messages for everyone to understand—such as Lady Gaga's song "Do What U Want", in which she encourages people to be freer about their bodies and sexualities, but more restrictive about their minds, speeches, freedom and ideas.

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Ana Sáez Garrido, Peeta Mellark: The Alternative Man in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2008-10) portrays the dystopian society of Panem, in which the population is divided into 12 districts, each of them isolated from the rest. Every year, the national celebration of the Hunger Games gathers two tributes from each district, a boy and a girl, to fight for their own survival. In this context, Peeta Mellark and Katniss Everdeen become the tributes of District 12. Since the publication of Collins' trilogy, much research has been carried out about Peeta Mellark's gender construction. Nevertheless, former studies, mostly based on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, seem to reach the same conclusion: Peeta allegedly embodies prototypically feminine traits. Focusing on the three novels of the trilogy, this essay⁶ aims to replace the previous readings of Mellark's gender, denying his apparent feminine performativity. I argue that Collins seems to offer in Peeta an alternative model of masculinity that differs from the one that has always been hegemonically accepted.

Peeta Mellark, initially a sixteen-year-old youngster, is the main male protagonist of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Although former readings claim that Peeta is feminine because he is not a hegemonic man and because his life is based on the constant necessity to "be in the position of the one caring" (Vandenberg 2016: 42), I aim to defend that he is not a feminine character. Thus, if Peeta is not a hegemonic man, what kind of masculinity does he embody? Is he atypical or alternative? Peeta cannot be an atypical man, as this would imply that his masculinity is anomalous. Instead, he is an alternative man that embodies a successful model of masculinity.

The first time that the readers acknowledge Peeta is through Katniss' memoirs. Although she has never spoken to Peeta before, she knows who he is: the son of the baker is the boy that once showed Katniss the existence of hope, as he gave her some bread when she was starving and trying to help her mother and her sister Prim after her father's death. Thus, from the very beginning, Peeta stands out as the embodiment of human nurture and the reader becomes aware that this caring condition has accompanied him since the very early stages of his life. Nevertheless, Katniss starts seeing Peeta as a potential enemy when they reach the Capitol. There, Peeta shows himself as a likable and assertive boy and she starts thinking that he has a plan forming. Therefore, for Katniss Peeta is simply playing a game and she decides to constantly remind herself that "*the more likeable he is, the more deadly he is*" (THG: 83).

At the same time, Peeta publicly shows his inability to fight in front of the other tributes and he openly manifests that the only skills he has are related to cakes' decoration and patisserie. As he says, "I don't have any secret skill (...) I can't do

⁶ The information included in this essay comes from my BA Thesis (TFG): *Discourses of Masculinity in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games Trilogy: Defending the Alternative Man, Peeta Mellark*. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017. <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/180064>

anything unless you count baking bread" (*THG*, 102). According to Swenson "his skill is feminized" (2014: 44) and as Vandenberg adds "the ways he chooses to act are not in line with traditional ideas of masculinity" (2016: 44) because "the abilities to decorate cakes does not seem like a skill that would be useful during the battle of the games" (Vandenberg: 50). Thus, previous readings on Mellark's skills consider that baking and patisserie are mainly feminine skills. Nevertheless, although it seems quite naïve to associate Peeta with bread to defend him as an alternative man, it is thanks to his ability to bake that Peeta is able to exhibit his sensitivity and his nurturing attitude. In addition, Peeta's ability regarding cakes' decoration ultimately saves his life during the first Games; after he is wounded, he uses some camouflage techniques that allow him to hide from the Careers (or semi-professional Tributes) until Katniss finally finds him. Nonetheless, Katniss is the one that makes the readers acknowledge that Peeta has some skills that he has overlooked: he is very strong and he can also wrestle. Thus, Peeta underestimates his abilities because he is unassuming, proving that he is alternative as he neither needs nor wishes to prove his masculinity.

Although Katniss praises his strength, she also complains about Peeta being constantly crying and she believes that he is performing the role of a coward. Hence, the main problem that arises from Katniss' unreliable narration is that she is the one that is constantly questioning Peeta for not being the model of man he is expected to be (or that she wants him to be). For this reason, Katniss is also influenced by the patriarchal and hegemonic ideological basis of Panem's policies. Yet, the inner truth is that Peeta is not following any strategy at all: his feelings are genuine.

Katniss is also in charge of describing Peeta physically. Although his physical description is plain and simple, as she only highlights the images of Peeta's height, hair and hands, Katniss focuses on Peeta's psychology thanks to the bread anecdote. Therefore, for Katniss, Peeta's masculinity is primarily associated to his mind-set and not to his body, which also proves that he is an alternative man. Indeed, Katniss' description of him attests to how the best way to prove that Peeta is not a hegemonic man is through the analysis of his central morality and values, based on sensitivity towards the surrounding environment and on a nurturing attitude towards the rest of the characters.

Testing the validity of Peeta as an alternative man also becomes an important issue in Collins' trilogy. In *The Hunger Games*, Peeta loses one of his legs after he is attacked by a pack of mutant wolves and the Capitol amputates it. This compromises his masculine identity from a physical perspective. Nevertheless, despite being crippled, Peeta demonstrates that he is a born fighter because he survives and he persists in his personal aim of unconditionally helping Katniss. Thus, his new condition as a crippled man deeply reinforces and asserts his alternative masculinity. Indeed, the amputation of Peeta's leg is a kind of symbolic castration of his masculinity, but also a test on his manhood that he passes successfully. Moreover, the amputation of Peeta's leg has become a topic of interest amongst scholars of the Disability Studies field, which examines disabilities and their social meanings. In their paper "The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity", Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson argue that,

Framing their research on Disabled Masculinity Studies within Connell's general conceptual schema, Gerschick and Miller developed a typology of three types of relational responses to hegemonic masculinity—reliance, reformulation and rejection (...) Gerschick and Miller concluded that some disabled men continue to

rely on hegemonic masculine ideals (...) some reformulate these ideals with their limitations and others reject hegemonic masculinity, formulating instead an alternate masculinity for themselves. (2012: 177).

Peeta fits within the group of disabled men that reject hegemonic masculinity. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that Peeta does not reject this model after losing his leg, but he has always done so. Consequently, Peeta has formulated an alternative masculine for himself since the very beginning. Nevertheless, his masculinity is not only tested physically, but also psychologically. In *Mockingjay* (2010), the Capitol kidnaps Peeta with the aim to brainwash him and turn him into a weapon against Katniss. However, this process backfires against the Capitol because although Peeta is tortured to act against Katniss, he is instinctively aware of the manipulation of the Capitol and he wants to keep protecting Katniss at all costs. Peeta, simply, will not be used.

Another issue that needs to be analysed when dealing with Peeta's masculine identity is the ending of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Guanio-Uluru has defended that "through Peeta, the rhetoric of gender in *The Hunger Games* coincides with the series' masculine ideal in the sense that Peeta, the morally better man, eventually emerges victorious in the competition for Katniss' love" (2016: 215). But, how does the "morally better man" differ from the "hegemonic man"? The "morally better man" is that who wants to maintain the purity of his self against all odds, and as it has been proved, Peeta successfully curbs all the Capitol's trials to turn him into someone he is not.

However, although Peeta is the "morally better man", Katniss does not finally choose him because of genuine love and desire but because he has firstly rejected Gale after her sister Prim dies in an attack against the Capitol that he was commanding. For Katniss, Gale is guilty of her sister's assassination and it precisely the death of the youngest of the Everdeen siblings the excuse that both Suzanne Collins' and Katniss adopt to finally reject Gale and choose Peeta. Sadly, neither Katniss nor Collins believe in Peeta's alternative model and his masculinity is simply a rhetorical device used by Collins in order to explore the limitations of the masculine discourse. Thus, *The Hunger Games* is a very conservative saga when it comes to the analysis of gender roles and gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, and to conclude, I firmly believe that Peeta is the most genuine character of this trilogy and that thanks to characters like him, masculinity is becoming, systematically, a more democratic issue.

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Cristina Montes Venegas, Survival of the Fittest: Gendered Capitalism in Suzanne Collins' Saga *The Hunger Games*

Strength and self-improvement are funny though central concepts to take into account if we regard everyone's personal experiences and more so if they are traumatic ones. There is no denying that those who have gone through (extremely) traumatic events and have lived to tell them certainly possess a certain knowledge and experience about what really matters in life and, certainly, *The Hunger Games* succeeds in showing that. The main characters of the saga, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, survive the first Hunger Games alongside other twenty-two more tributes from the twelve different districts that exist in Panem in order not only to entertain the whole country but to especially entertain the upper social classes that inhabit the Capitol—needless to say, the Capitol citizens do not participate in the Hunger Games; they survive them the second time with twice the number of tributes, only this time with professionally trained ones.

Alongside the trauma that supposes having to live with such horrendous experiences, we cannot forget something extremely important that shapes our modern contemporary society's history towards survival: capitalism and gender performance. They are both concepts that go hand by hand if the end towards survival is a specific (patriarchal) gender performance, something clearly observed in how the tributes are treated during the Hunger Games, and especially in Katniss and Finnick as well. Many seem to see Suzanne Collins' saga, though, as an empowering novel for women and as a critique of capitalism (with Panem as an anti-capitalist society) when, actually, the opposite can be read using evidence from the whole saga. Panem's patriarchal pro-capitalist society, thus, can be regarded as an ambivalent one due to the beautification processes and the sexual objectification Katniss goes through in order to survive, leaving her almost unable to self-reflect on the subject of her own (gender) identity.

Firstly, the established gender performance roles that stem from a patriarchal social imposition are central to determine and shape the kind of economic results one may individually benefit from. However, since capitalism is the type of ideology that does not mind imposing its perspective with its harmful laws, destroying whatever may step on its way, disempowerment and voicelessness are the key. Institutionalised powerlessness and disempowerment become central but, linked with gendered capitalism and being female, the lack of autonomy and lack of voice that Katniss faces throughout the whole trilogy is blatant and, therefore, she is forced to comply—even more than her male tribute counterparts—with whatever she is forced to do in order to survive: perform the stereotypically feminised role of a fashion-obsessed girl who is deeply in love with Peeta even if she struggles in doing so. As she reports:

Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall.

"Who cares? It's all a big show. It's all how you're perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you're a heartbreaker. Oh, oh, oh, how

the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors?" (Collins *HG*: 134)

Regarding disempowerment, not only does Katniss feel disempowered and that she has no voice in the matter of deciding whether she wishes to have a love relationship with Peeta or not, but in the matter of how she is physically represented due to the beautification processes she undergoes. Make-up, fashion and hair removal sessions, among many others, reinforce the belief that the only way for women to achieve power is through the improvement of their looks according to a patriarchal beauty canon perspective and, in this sense, through the sexualisation of their bodies. However, Katniss and her style team soon realise that she will be unable to carry out the role of a stereotypically sexualised female and decide to go for a more secure option in the second book of the trilogy. In her own words:

Soon my brows are stinging, my hair's smooth and silky, and my nails are ready to be painted. Apparently they've been given instruction to prepare only my hands and face, probably because everything else will be covered in the cold weather. (...) I can see by the palette Cinna has assigned that we're going for girlish, not sexy.

Good. I'll never convince anyone of anything if I'm trying to be provocative. (Collins *CF*: 19)

Cinna here plays an important part in the shaping of Katniss's public persona, as he is her personal chief stylist. Being aware of his power, Cinna uses fashion and make-up as a tool in order to secretly oppose the Capitol. This can be exemplified in the artificial flames Cinna places on Katniss's and Peeta's costumes in their first pre-Games appearance in which, when the artificial fire on their costumes ignites, the Capitol citizens start chanting Katniss's name (Collins *HG*: 76-83). According to Hansen, Cinna's addition of the artificial fire to Katniss's outfit "allows the districts to associate her with the metaphorically incendiary spirit of revolution and vengeance" (2015: 167). Cinna's importance in the novel is then confirmed since he secretly opposes the Capitol through Katniss's attire and is responsible for slowly turning her into a rebellion symbol, though at the same time he "tries to protect her by limiting her knowledge of what he is doing" (Hansen 2015: 167). This appears to be ambivalent, since Katniss is being shaped as a (hidden) rebellion symbol and at the same time as a non-threatening tribute for the other tributes, for the sponsors in the Hunger Games and, especially, for the Capitol. However, she struggles in trying to portray this stereotyped female role imposed on her and does not even consider on acting weak in order to survive as Johanna does:

To appear weak and frightened, to reassure the other tributes that he is no competition at all, and then come out fighting. This worked very well for a girl, Johanna Mason, from District 7 a few years back. She seemed like such a sniveling, cowardly fool that no one bothered about her until there were only a handful of contestants left. It turned out she could kill viciously. Pretty clever, the way she played it. (Collins *HG*: 47)

Instead, what Katniss wishes to be is her usual "sullen and hostile" (Collins, *HG*: 135) self and also strong like Thresh, although she is unable to comprehend that she

cannot behave in this way not only because she is not as big as he is (Collins, *HG*: 146) but also because as a male he is allowed to be, thanks to patriarchal masculinity, as he wishes—Katniss as a female does not have that privilege (Acker 2004: 20). It is interesting, though, to note that after Peeta’s declaration of love for Katniss in the pre-Games interviews Katniss believes that she will now appear weak in front of everyone (Collins *HG*: 157) even though that is not the case—this can be accounted as an example of Katniss considering traditional femininity as a weakness (Hansen 2015: 168).

As mentioned before, Katniss’s process of beautification by Cinna is surrounded by a certain ambivalence as a means to survival but also as a means of Cinna’s own hidden opposition to the Capitol and Katniss’s slow change towards a symbol of the rebellion as well. This will continue to be so, even after Katniss survives the first Hunger Games and the second ones for the Quarter Quell, with her actually being a symbol of the rebellion in *Mockingjay*. Even though it seems she can stop performing the stereotypical girlish and sweet female role, we can see that Katniss has not only been commodified for the entertainment of the Capitol citizens but for the rebellion as well; leaving her, thus, confused by having tried to prove herself as a stereotyped female, pretending to have a love relationship with Peeta and by being now compelled to respond to the rebels’ demands regarding her (rebel) public persona: the Mockingjay. As she explains:

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn’t enough, what I’ve done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. [...] They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances—as if that doesn’t sound horribly familiar—and all I have to do is play my part. (Collins *MJ*: 11-2)

Although Katniss is seen as a symbol of rebellion and empowerment, Holliday (2008: 190) states what Goldman argued as ‘commodity feminism’, in which “advertisers have appropriated feminism to such an extent that one can now be a feminist by consuming certain kinds of products”—which is how Katniss becomes a product for the benefit of the rebellion. As Peter adds,

[...] [C]apitalism commodifies women and feminist issues for financial gain. Although the *Hunger Games* series does not explicitly address a gender division, the exchange of bodies for the possibility of profit is a central theme of the novels. Moreover, the *Hunger Games* series has been interpreted by many as a critique of capitalism, but given the political and economic structure of Panem, a more critical reading becomes necessary. (2013: 36)

Lastly, an extremely important example that can illustrate this concept of ‘commodity feminism’ is the case of Finnick Odair. At first, Finnick is presented to us as this awfully beautiful and gorgeous young man who enchants everyone with his looks:

Tall, athletic, with golden skin and bronze-colored hair and those incredible eyes. [...] Because of his youth, they couldn’t really touch him for the first year or two. But ever since he turned sixteen, he’s spent his time at the Games being dogged

by those desperately in love with him. No one retains his favor for long. He can go through four or five in his annual visit. Old or young, lovely or plain, rich or very rich, he'll keep them company and take their extravagant gifts, but he never stays, and once he's gone he never comes back. (Collins *CF*: 235-6)

Of course, we later discover in *Mockingjay* that the reason why these rumours started is because of Finnick's past, as he was used by Panem's President Snow as a male prostitute (Collins *MJ*: 190-3). In spite of this, the "exchange of bodies for the possibility of profit" that Peters discusses is what ironically Finnick, despite having no agency and being disempowered and voiceless like Katniss, will eventually benefit from—for, in return for his body, something much more important than money is gained: secrets about the citizens of the Capitol and, more importantly, of President Snow. As Finnick discloses in revenge:

"Such a young man when he rose to power. (...) How, you must ask yourself, did he do it? One word. (...) Poison". Finnick goes back to Snow's political ascension (...) and works his way up to the present, pointing out case after case of the mysterious deaths of Snow's adversaries or (...) his allies who had the potential to become threats. (...) Snow drinking from the poisoned cup himself to deflect suspicion. But antidotes don't always work. They say that's why he wears the roses that reek of perfume [that] it's to cover the scent of blood from the mouth sores that will never heal. (Collins *MJ*: 192)

In a sense, Finnick has regained through this exchange some of the power he lost due to being sexually objectified and commodified by spilling out President Snow's secrets that could ruin his presidency and life—nonetheless, this will be later usurped by District 13 in order to intensify the existent hostility against the Capitol. On account of this, we can appreciate how the (patriarchal) gender roles are reversed: Finnick is turned into a commodity used to sexually satisfy the citizens of the Capitol instead of him, as a male, be the one who commodifies himself or others.

Finally, to conclude, what we can clearly state is how the anti-capitalist and empowerment propaganda in *The Hunger Games* saga is overthrown on the grounds of its being a product characteristic of a 'commodified feminism'. Moreover, the lack of agency that all the tributes, and especially Katniss as the main protagonist and Finnick, experience turns out to be transparent and disempowering. It results in an unavoidable reaffirmation and reinforcement of a (patriarchal) and social imposition on gender performance that threatens to end not only women's rights, their agency and their future but men's as well. Survival is eventually at stake and it is this what motivates the tributes who do not possess the privilege of being able to perform the way a patriarchal and pro-capitalist society demands to put on a façade—to perform something they are not and never will be.

In the end, this can be a reminder of who is the true enemy not only in *The Hunger Games* saga but in our society as well. Patriarchy, binary gender division and capitalism are quite toxic concepts by themselves but become even more toxic and hold a stronger power if they merge together. Of course, if by themselves these pernicious beliefs and ideologies pose a threat, as a result of this merge more damage will be caused and the risk of losing innate human rights will become more present by the day. Nevertheless, the belief that reversion to an actual egalitarian world still may be possible if we fully compromise to the challenge that this raises and, in order to do

so, not only do we need to respect each other, survive in the process and teach the next generations about morality, justice, empathy and respect, but actually do it. This is 'do or die'.

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Mònica Suy Morcillo, The Girl Who Lost Her Flame: Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*

Katniss Everdeen, the main character of the series *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, is, from the first moment, established as a girl who is different from the rest of her district's population: even at her young age, she single-handedly takes care of her mother and sister, she escapes the district borders to hunt for them and sells some of what she hunts in an illegal market. She is presented as a strong woman who has learned how to survive in times of hardship. However, I would like to argue that she is not the feminist role model for young women that she may apparently seem but rather a teenager who struggles to survive.

Collins presents us with a main character easily influenced by the people around her, especially men, as she is part of a society which is still heavily patriarchal and divided by social class. She is born and raised in poverty and she barely survives after her father dies. It is Peeta who encourages her to find a way to live on by throwing burned bread at her and it is her father who teaches her to use her bow and arrow before his death. She basically survives her childhood thanks to the influence of two men and while she is politically aware, as Linstrom (2014) points out, she does nothing to change her reality:

She is often described as an independent character, but she admits in the first chapter of the book that she submits to the rules of the community without a fight. This idea of Katniss as an independent female is also challenged by the relationships she has with the male characters in the novel. (2014: 9)

As Linstrom argues, then, Katniss is influenced by many men in her life starting with her father, then Peeta and Gale, Cinna and Haymitch when she goes to the games and even President Snow. There is no doubt that she hardly is independent and that her decisions are bound to be inspired by what the men in her life tell her. They all have power over her in one way or another: her father has authority over her, Peeta's family is richer than hers, Gale is older and acts like a protective figure for her, Cinna has the power to change whatever he wants in her body and appearance and Haymitch is her instructor and counsellor who gives her orders on how to behave.

Katniss is still a teenager, aged 15, when she volunteers for the Hunger Games, which makes her even more vulnerable to being influenced. Her appearance is changed by Cinna and his team once she gets there and she is told to change her personality to make her more likeable. She is made to hide herself and perform a completely different person in front of the people in order to be able to survive the Games:

My face is relatively clear of makeup, just a bit of highlighting here and there. My hair has been brushed out and then braided down my back in my usual style. "I want the audience to recognize you when you're in the arena", says Cinna dreamily. "Katniss, the girl who was on fire". (Collins, *HG*: 67)

“Katniss, the girl who was on fire” is the manufactured image that Cinna designs for Katniss. She stops being Katniss Everdeen and she becomes “the girl on fire” for the audience. Later, she will be manipulated into becoming the Mockingjay and used as an instrument to encourage the people to rebel: “We had to save you because you’re the Mockingjay, Katniss”, says Plutarch. “While you live, the revolution lives”. The bird, the pin, the song, the berries, the watch, the cracker, the dress that burst into flames. I am the mockingjay” (Collins, *CF*: 403). Katniss Everdeen gets lost somewhere in between her many images throughout the trilogy and she becomes passive. She only exists to survive.

One of her only decisions, eating the berries to save Peeta and herself, makes her existence more complicated than what she expected. It binds her to Peeta and the love story they created in order to protect themselves. It throws her into a tour around the districts and it transforms her into the revolution leader. It helps people see that the Capitol can be challenged and live to tell the tale. She does not want to leave again and her agency is once again taken away from her so as to maintain her public image and, therefore, survive. She becomes Peeta’s other half to the public’s eye and her feelings and opinions are dismissed in order to keep up that façade, as we see in this conversation with Haymitch:

“Do you think he hurt you? That boy just gave you something you could never achieve on your own”.

“He made me look weak!” I say.

“He made you look desirable! And let’s face it, you can use all the help you can get in that department. You were about as romantic as dirt until he said he wanted you. Now they all do. You’re all they’re talking about. The star-crossed lovers from District Twelve!” says Haymitch. (Collins, *HG*: 149)

She is objectified and even though she is completely against the image being imposed on her, the men in her life do not let her change it. It is Peeta, in this case, who makes Katniss desirable. In the eyes of the Capitol, Katniss was only interesting from the moment there was a romance between her and Peeta and, thus, all her worth depends on Peeta, a man. This is tragic for an acclaimed feminist icon and shows how often women are usually objectified and given worth because of their relation with men. Katniss has no other choice than to accept the role of Peeta’s lover against her will in order to survive.

Considered a strong, independent character Katniss is linked to the way she performs gender. She performs masculinity rather than femininity and that is probably why so many readers identify her as a strong character, because she acts and does things that would be more typical of a boy:

Appearing first to the reader as a character who confesses to having attempted to drown her sister’s cat, and as a hunter “cleaning a kill” and donning her hunting boots, trousers, shirt and cap, it is only her “long dark braid” that initially links Katniss Everdeen to traditional femininity in *The Hunger Games’* opening pages. (Guanio-Uluru 2016: 217).

Katniss challenges the idea of traditional femininity in her district by being the one who supports her family, by her closed-off, almost rude personality to everyone except her sister, and by her hunting:

Katniss is leaving the house to hunt outside the boundaries of the district, an act that does not simply challenge norms of femininity but challenges the very laws enforced by the Capitol. The way that Katniss's character traverses gender and challenges both the rule of the Capitol and norms of femininity in these early scenes is representative of her character as a whole. However, (...) this is not the same thing as saying that gender is no longer an organizing system. (Burke and Kelly 2015: 65)

It is obvious that Katniss does not represent femininity in her society but this is not what matters in her description. What matters is the effect that her gender performance feeds the image we get of Katniss as a rebel from the very first moment. She rebels from the way femininity is expressed and from the rules of her country which say that it is illegal to go to the woods and hunt. What Collins is foreshadowing already is that she will be a crucial part of the rebellion, but challenging femininity is just a side-effect of that, not the centre of the character.

Is Katniss, then, a strong feminist character at all, or are we just fooled by her performance of gender? She is strong because she has been fighting to survive since she was eleven and has been put through hell. The question then, is rather if she has any agency throughout the trilogy. She had little agency to begin with, since she was responsible for the care of her family and any action she makes may affect them directly:

If he's made the journey all the way from his city, it can only mean one thing. I'm in serious trouble. And if I am, so is my family. A shiver goes through me when I think of the proximity of my mother and my sister to this man who despises me. Who will always despise me. (Collins, *CF*: 27)

The little agency she had when she was still in District 12 ended when she volunteered for tribute. After that, she went from tribute to symbol of rebellion and through being used and manipulated. Her impulsive actions are all that is left of her potential agency, i.e. her decision to eat the berries or to kill Coin at the end of the trilogy.

What Katniss Everdeen represents is not feminism but survival, both hers and the survival of the people she cares about. She is very accurately described as "the one who survived despite the Capitol's plans" (Collins, *CF*: 403). She finds a way to save her family from starvation by hunting, she volunteers as tribute for the Games, saves both herself and Peeta in the Games, becomes the Mockingjay to save Peeta, etc. She manages to survive and overcome all the obstacles life puts in front of her but she never does it in order to succeed herself or end with the patriarchal society in which she lives. *The Hunger Games* is more about destroying a system and ending with a heavily divided society where the 1% have the privilege and live comfortably where the rest are starving and basically dying to survive. The emphasis is on social class rather than patriarchy.

Some may argue that President Snow was the symbol for the patriarchal society Katniss lived in and, therefore, wanting to kill him could be interpreted as her wanting to end patriarchy. Nevertheless, this was presented more as resentment and rage towards him based on personal offences. It was never about the bigger picture for her, she had a very specific reason to want to kill President Snow. Katniss is perfectly

aware of the political situation in Panem from the very beginning. She is aware that the games are an instrument of fear so that the population will not rebel:

In the novel, Collins (2008) gives Katniss a political consciousness. She knows that regardless of how the Games are presented, underneath all the glitz and glamor “the real message is clear” (p. 19): rebel against the authorities and, like District 13, you will be destroyed. (Shepard and Wojcik-Andrews 2014: 195-196)

However, this does not mean that she wants to be a part of that revolution, let alone lead it: “All I was doing was trying to keep Peeta and myself alive. Any act of rebellion was purely coincidental” (Collins, *CF*: 27). Her desperate need for survival is used against her and she is manipulated into becoming the Mockingjay.

Furthermore, other people might argue that Katniss is still a transcendental and feminist character if we take into account the type of patriarchal, oppressed society she lives in. They have a point to a certain extent in that it would be unrealistic to have a character break completely from the norms and be able to avoid all influence by the men surrounding her in a society such as hers:

This protagonist is an autonomous agent who has assumed responsibilities far beyond the norm for her age, and who does not succumb to the romantic myth (it is indeed an innovation that in this story, aimed at a young audience, romance is merely a strategic ploy) or to the traditional standards of femininity. (Menéndez and Fernández 2015: 98)

Nevertheless, she would still not be the main feminist icon in the trilogy, as I would consider Johanna Mason to be much more politically aware and empowered than Katniss. She is not ashamed of her body, she knows what the right thing to fight for is, she supports Katniss (albeit in her own particular way) and she breaks societal rules in many ways (in both actions and words), which constantly shocks Katniss at first. Therefore, Katniss has a lot to learn before being called a feminist icon for young women.

It is true that she mentions many times not having time to think about her feelings for Peeta and Gale, but that does not mean she “does not succumb to the romantic myth”. She does not throughout the trilogy but the ending disappoints in that aspect:

They play in the Meadow. The dancing girl with the dark hair and blue eyes. The boy with blond curls and gray eyes, struggling to keep up with her on his chubby toddler legs. It took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly. (Collins, *MJ*: 419)

The Mockingjay, the girl on fire, the one who has never conformed to society or its standards and has been presented as a rebel from the beginning, decides to form a very much traditional family with Peeta:

At the start of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is depicted as an independent, strong and resourceful hunter, the main breadwinner of her family through drawing on the hunting lessons of her father. At the close of the narrative, in *Mockingjay* (2014 [2010]), Katniss has settled down as a wife and mother, renouncing the “fire, kindled with rage and hatred” that [...] is also associated, within global

popular culture, with the performance of hegemonic masculinity. (Guanio-Uluru 2016: 214-215)

It is fascinating to see the contrast between the Katniss we meet at the beginning of the book, who is presented as a strong, independent girl who ignores the law, does not want to have children and challenges femininity and the Katniss at the end, who is passive, performs the traditional role of being a wife and a mother, stops challenging the authorities and embraces the traditional femininity she had always rejected.

To sum up, Katniss is a complex character who grows up in a patriarchal society and while she is supposed to be the rebel in the story, she is just the weapon the rebels use to end with President Snow. She has practically no agency even though she is an impulsive character and she is manipulated time and time again by the Capitol and by the rebels. Unfortunately, in the end she settles down with Peeta and has the traditional family she never wanted to have in the first book. She is not a feminist character because she is never truly empowered, she is struggling for her survival throughout the trilogy.

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Emma Adriaansz, *The Non-Patriarchal Family: Family Structures on a Lesbian Planet in Nicola Griffith's Ammonite*

Introduction

Imagine a society in which only women exist. If men are absent, there's no hierarchy in gender possible. This is the case for planet Jeep in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992). "Lesbians and gay men are thought of as individuals, but not as family members", Allen & Demo write. "This reflects the society-wide belief that 'gayness' and family are mutually exclusive concepts, a belief that prevails because 'the same-sex family', more than any other form, challenges fundamental patriarchal notions of family and gender relationships" (Allen & Demo 1995: 112). I have quoted this passage because it describes exactly what this novel is about: Jeep is an experimental stage of a single-gender society with only same-sex families and, therefore, it challenges 'fundamental patriarchal notions of family and gender relationships'. This novel is thus an interesting attempt to portray a society in which gender subordination does not exist.

After different waves of colonization reached planet Jeep, they were struck by a virus which killed all men and a large part of the female population. The remaining part of this female population survived but they were also genetically adapted by the virus. Their senses not only became stronger and their memory exceptionally good, the most peculiar change was the way of reproduction. These women became able to reproduce through a trance called 'deepsearch'. In this trance, women visualize their ova and control cell division. These women are only able to produce daughters called 'soestre'. The female society is divided into different tribes.

In the novel, this society is mainly described through the experiences of one character: Marguerite Angelica Taishan, also known as Marghe. As a cultural anthropologist, Marghe wants to do research on the unique female society on planet Jeep. She gets sent by the leading organisation on Earth, 'Company', to test the effectiveness of the FN-17 vaccine. This vaccine should kill the virus and could offer a chance of survival on Jeep for all earthly people, including men. Company aims to use planet Jeep as a source of exploitation which makes the result of the experiment highly important. During her research, Marghe gets captured by the tribe members of Echraide. However, Marghe escapes and survives a journey through the freezing snow. A member of another tribe, Ollfoss, finds her and takes Marghe to the camp. Here Marghe gets to know a healer, Thenike. She tells Marghe to stop taking the vaccine because it contains poison. After Marghe stops medication, she gets struck by the virus and transforms into a native of planet Jeep. She gets involved in deepsearch with Thenike and becomes pregnant with a soestre.

The virus plays a prominent role in the creation of Griffith's single-gendered society. The population of Jeep is used to living with only women which creates interesting family structures. In the absence of men and therefore masculine patriarchy, non-gender related hierarchies are created. In this paper, I aim to focus on the family structures on planet Jeep that have developed as an effect of the existence of only one gender and the accompanying absence of masculine patriarchy.

1. Defining Concepts

Here I will use the concepts 'gender', 'sex' and 'masculine patriarchy' multiple times. In order to understand my topic, namely family structures, it is important to clarify what these terms mean.

Gender is the outcome of a social hierarchy where one class of the people (men) have power and privilege over another class of people (women) (Wittig 1981/1992 in Richardson & Robinson 2008). It is performativity enacted, constituted out of attempts to compel belief in others that we are 'really' a woman or a man. This is a process of continuous construction that produces the effect (an illusion) of being natural and stable through gender performances that make us 'women' and 'men' (Butler, 1990, in Richardson & Robinson 2008). These performances of gender are constructed by hierarchal patterns and therefore create privileges for men. We need the other gender to construct what being a man or being a woman is about. This also counts for the society of Jeep. Griffith herself (2017) argues that Jeep:

(...) is not a 'world of women' because without men, without even the memory of men, there can be no biological gender; there can be no women. Without women there are no lesbians. It is a world of people who do not feel second-class by reason of sex or sexual orientation. (12)

Sex can be seen as a social construction. The body undergoes social interpretation constantly. How we interpret and create meanings for differences in these bodies is dependent on how we understand gender. Sex is therefore not something that someone has or is. Without gender, differences in sex would not exist. Gender defines the categories of meaning for us to interpret how a body appears to us as sexed. These interpretations change over time. Gender and sex are inseparable in this theory (Delphy 1984 & Butler 1990 in Richardson & Robinson 2008).

Masculine patriarchy is a term which is used to describe the domination by men in society. It is a general structure of power where men claim the largest part of this power. Women are dependent on the superior male in this power structure. These power structures can be found in public and private spheres such as the family, on which I will focus in this paper (Waters 1996). It is important to point out that in this paper I will discuss masculine patriarchy, not patriarchy in general. Patriarchy is often directly linked to men, however this does not always have to be the case. Patriarchal power relations do exist on planet Jeep, even if it's a society with only women. However, I will not discuss these patriarchal power relations in this paper.

2. Family structures on Jeep Concepts

Before discussing the effect of the absence of masculine patriarchy on family structures on Jeep, I would first like to define several family-related concepts that exist on the planet. Since it is an alien society, these families use family terms that are strange to earthly families.

The way in which the women reproduce contributes largely to the way the family structures are created. In a multi-gendered society, in which we live now, women and men are dependent on each other when it comes to reproduction. Men need women's ova and women need men's semen. The narrator is doing away with

this interdependency in *Ammonite*. On Jeep, reproduction is directly related to the virus. Those who are infected with the virus, can reproduce through deepsearch, a trance in which two women are entirely connected physically and mentally. They can visualize each other's ova and develop an embryo. During this trance, women can go back in time to the memories of their ancestors. In the following quotation the narrator describes how Marghe experiences deepsearch and the development of her 'soestre':

The virus had altered everything. She saw how she could change the chromosomes, how she could rearrange the pairs of alleles on each one. If she reached in and touched this, enfolded that, the cell would begin to divide. And she could control it; she and Thenike could control it. (283)

The children (only daughters) on planet Jeep are called 'soestre'. The specific meaning of the word soestre does not become 100% clear in the novel: "Soestre: those children, two or sometimes—rarely—more, born at the same time to different mothers who shared the same yurti; though not all children born this way were named soestre. The concept of soestre held a special significance which she had not yet been able to unravel" (111). Female empowerment and the ability to control their own sexuality and choice over pregnancy vibes from this quote.

Family structures on planet Jeep

As discussed earlier, the way of reproduction and the accompanying interdependency is highly important for family structures. Especially in the 19th century where arguably the most important role of a woman was reproduction (Martín Alegre 2017). Only women can bear children, though with the dependency on men's semen. This makes women dependent on men for their most important duty in life (according to this discourse). In this way, men control women in their duty. This creates a masculine patriarchal power structure in families in which women are subordinate. On planet Jeep however, this patriarchal structure does not exist. Women are dependent upon other women to reproduce and do not need the other 'controlling' gender to fulfil this 'duty'. The virus has taken away this hierarchy in gender and power. This gives the women on planet Jeep an agency that does not exist in a multi-gendered society. In a multi-gendered society, also lesbian women depend on men if they want to have children. On Jeep on the other hand, women can choose anyone on the planet to reproduce. This broadens their agency compared to the earthly society in which women depend on men.

The private sphere, the family, has always been dominated by men in Western families and is therefore patriarchal. The 'nuclear family' is known for its specific role division between men and women: a breadwinning husband and a home-making wife who takes care of the children (Richardson & Robinson 2008: 129). Often, this nuclear family comes with an unequal division of labour within the household. Waters (1996) argues that patriarchy is constituted in a domestic mode of production in which female domestic labour is appropriated by men and by means of which women are oppressed by men. On planet Jeep this nuclear family and role division does not exist because there's no breadwinning husband. The word father is not even known by the natives:

One of Wenn's knees cracked as she stood up. She held out her arms to Marghe, who scrambled to her feet. 'Welcome Marghe, daughter of...?' 'Aquila and John', she added, 'my father.' They did not understand the word; there was no word for father in Ollfoss dialect. She did not want to use the approximation, sire; it did not mean the same thing at all. (225)

Griffith argues: "The planets Whileaway (Russ) and Jeep (Griffith) are populated entirely by women who know nothing of men and consequently nothing of gender roles: women fill all the roles" (2017: 10). The society of Jeep consists of tribes which in turn consist of multiple families. The division of domestic labour is equally distributed among the family members. Marghe becomes responsible for gardening, Thenike is a healer and gathers food, Leifin is specialized in hunting and carving, etcetera. Thus, "The absence of a gender-based division of labour eliminates an institutionalized pattern of social interaction that functionalists view as necessary for integrating personality systems and culture to the social systems and culture into the social systems" (Allen & Demo 1996: 424). This institutionalized pattern of social interaction is the way in which masculine patriarchy is constantly reproduced in multi-gendered societies. At Jeep, all tasks are all done by women which means that gender cannot be produced by domestic tasks and division of labour, like in multi-gendered societies.

In heterosexual couples, gender is often pronounced by the type of domestic tasks the man and the woman do. This is a performance of gender as referred to in the definition of gender in the previous section of the paper. Not only the amount of work men and women produce is divided by gender, but also the nature of the task is segregated by gender. In this way, "Those tasks that have been traditionally thought of as "women's work" (for example, cooking, laundry, housecleaning) are performed primarily by women, and "male" tasks such as yard work and auto maintenance are done primarily by men" (Greenstein 1996: 586). Furthermore, Allen & Demo (1996) argue that in the nuclear family, the husband is assigned instrumental activities and responsibilities and his wife is assigned expressive activities. Carving, hunting and gardening performed by women in *Ammonite* are seen as male, 'instrumental' activities in a nuclear family. Therefore, these norms do not apply for families on Jeep. As said earlier there exists patriarchal power structures among the family members in age, however not in gender. In the tribe Echraide, there's a 'Levarch' which is the leader of the tribe. Since the romantic relationships on the planet are all same-sex relationships, there is no dominance of a man as is common in various heterosexual relationships: "A consistent finding regarding gender similarities is that lesbian and gay male couples tend to follow more closely an ethic of equality in their partnerships and to relate each other more than best friends" (Allen & Demo 1996: 417). Gay and lesbian relationships are freed from the norms and assumptions that count for heterosexual couples. They tend to be more egalitarian and adaptive with little role playing and more flexibility (Lynch 2000: 89). Furthermore, Richardson and Robinson (2008) argue how lesbian and gay households have greater commitment to financial equity compared to heterosexual ones. This can be seen in the fact that all human resources are shared evenly among not only women in a relationship but all the tribe members. For example, food, medicines and clothes (furs): "We will feed you, and clothe you, share everything that's ours with you, without reservation, without condition. In your turn you must do the same. Will you do that?" (225).

There are only two romantic relationships described in the novel: the relationship of Marghe and Thenike, which is an egalitarian one, and the relationship of Aiofe and Uaithne which is more unequal. Uaithne is mentally disturbed and therefore dangerous, which gives her power over Aiofe. This is a failed relationship. This is an exception of the theory. In same-sex relationships patriarchy can exist too, if one of the spouses claims more power (Martín Alegre 2017).

Conclusion

In this paper I have focused on the family structures on planet Jeep in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*. The absence of men has affected the way in which family structures evolved on the planet. This can be seen in the way in which women are not dependent on men for reproduction. Furthermore, it can be seen in the way domestic labour is distributed among the tribe members. The division is more equal than in patriarchal societies and the type of tasks are not segregated by gender. In addition, the relationships between the women on planet Jeep tend to be more egalitarian since male domination is not possible.

The overall effect of the absence of masculine patriarchy on the family structures on planet Jeep, is the creation of a family with more equal relationships in the sense of agency, power, labour-distribution and distribution of goods. According to this, Jeep can be seen as utopia.

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Ivana Nikolaeva Boyanska, A Reading of Nicola Griffith's Ammonite: The Gender Binary as a Social Construction in a Female Utopian Society

Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) is a feminist science fiction novel set in a Utopian female society in which gender is suppressed as men have been wiped out by a virus. The neglect of gender in the book is an attempt to prove that the gender binary is a social construction imposed by society rather than a natural trait of humans. What is more, the focus of the story falls on the natural need of humans to find a person with whom to connect, to share their experience, to create a family and to spend the rest of their life with. By placing the protagonist of the story on a distant planet called Jeep, inhabited only by women, Griffith presents a Utopian society on a genderless basis, consequently with its limitations.

The story is based on the arrival of Marghe, the protagonist of the book, on planet Jeep, colonized some years before by people sent by the Company, a very powerful corporation that does not receive any specific name in the book. The aim of the Company had been for the group of people to settle and to study its resources so as to make it habitable for a larger group of humans in the future and to gain profits from it. However, due to a planetary virus, the male colonists die as well as 20% of the women. As Thomas notes, "In Griffith's *Ammonite*, in which the virus is (...) extraterrestrial, the benefits of infection are clear-cut—if one is a woman, that is. (...)" (2000: 151).

The women from the Company who survive have to remain on the planet because the corporation they work for will not take the risk of sending them back to Earth, since they have had contact with the virus and their mission at that moment is to find a vaccine for it. Marghe is aware of the risk she is taking by visiting the planet; moreover, she knows that there is a chance that she will not be able to go back home if a cure of the vaccine she is testing on herself is not mass-produced. When she lands, she clearly observes that the women that had been living there for the last five years, who were initially sent on a temporary mission, are showing the initial signs of a willingness to settle down, together with the native women, rather than maintain their faith on going back to Earth. It does not take her a long time to also see what the effects of the virus are, which gives a logical explanation of how women have survived and have been living there for years by reproducing themselves: "The agent of infection takes centre stage, bestowing upon its female survivors heightened sensory sensitivity, the ability to access ancestral memories, an improved facility with language, rapid recuperative powers, and the ability to reproduce by recombining their DNA" (Thomas 2000: 151).

The virus, actually, is seen as a positive factor among the inhabitants of the planet, who are, of course, all women, as without it, they would not have been able to reproduce: "Reproduction in *Ammonite* is directly related to the virus. That is, the virus enables those infected to visualize their ova and to encourage the cell division necessary for embryo development. Without the virus, the women on Jeep cannot reproduce" (Thomas 2000: 151). Thus, the virus is just an initial sign that the male

population on the planet is not needed, so the question of gender will not be present throughout the story, as the problem with reproduction is solved and, therefore, there is no real need for the existence of a second gender on Jeep. Hence, by suppressing the need for a gender binary and not including it in the book, Griffith suggests that there is no actual necessity of it in the real world and proposes the story of integration of Marghe in the female society .

The reader does not really know Marghe's sexual inclinations on Earth and/or her previous sexual or romantic encounters, if any. She is aware of the gender binary present on Earth, but she never really reflects on it. It is very convenient for Griffith not to include any previous sexual or romantic inclinations of the protagonist, as by doing so she would raise the question of the gender binary, when what she really aims to do is to suppress it in a Utopian society, where only one gender, in this case the female one, is able to survive on its own.

Science fiction permits the author to project an alternative society, very different from ours, so as for readers to realize that the gender binary and its consequent sexual inclinations is not something that humans inherit but something that society imposes on us. This analysis is not an arbitrary one, as Postmodernist feminists denied any natural or essential self, following Gayle Rubin's system, (1975) which "delineated a more complicated 'sex/gender system". Feminists began to "recognize gender as unnatural and constructed, not inherent, and to theorize diversity at the levels of subjectivity, sexuality and society" (Bould, Butler, Roberts & Vint 2009: 220) Therefore, it is understandable why Griffith would like to project a genderless Utopia, where there is just a natural instinct to find a partner in life, without taking gender into account, because it does not exist on Jeep. Using science fiction lets her suggest a 'novum', the virus, and to trace "A spectrum or spread of literary subject matter which extends from the ideal extreme of exact recreation of the author's empirical environment to exclusive interest in a strange newness" (Suvin in Baker 2014: 16, original italics).

Ammonite can be considered a female Utopia according to the definition assigned by Suvin:

Utopia is a literary genre or verbal construction whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized on a more perfect principle than the author's community, this construction begin based on estrangement rising our of an alternative historical hypothesis. (Suvin in Baker 2014: 17)

Nevertheless, if we analyze the writing more precisely, *Ammonite* can be also seen as a critical Utopia, since its patterns present the female Utopia's limitations:

A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the Utopian traditions. (...) The novels focus on the continuous presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (Moylan in Baker 2014: 112)

Some of the problems present in the Utopian science fiction story are the fact that women live on a pastoral basis and in many different tribes which, most of the time,

are in conflict because of different beliefs and positions. Some authors place Jeep's tribes in the remote past: "In *Ammonite*, the surviving (female) colonists of extra-solar planet Jeep break the bounds of science fiction by reverting to Bronze Age matriarchy" (Bould, Butler, Roberts & Vint 2009: 486). Also, their social structuring, as is the choosing of leaders of some of the tribes, is based on non-empirical reasons. Thus, excluding a male population on the planet does not prevent the abuse of power and the patriarchal structure: "And while Jeep itself is not an unproblematic separatist lesbian utopia—heavy interbreeding causes problems among some of the indigenous 'tribes'—the societies there are clearly preferable to the colonists' patriarchal one" (Thomas 2000: 152). As some authors have pointed out, it is not enough to just eliminate a gender so as to abolish social conducts that impose themselves on a gender basis: "The inversion of patriarchy as a political and imaginative framework in some feminist SF—particularly those that imagine a women's world in which men are entirely excluded—is not enough, and risks reproducing the structures of oppression in another form, maintaining rather than challenging gender binary" (Lenafu in Baker 2014: 124). This raises the question of whether Griffith's attempt to prove that gender binary is a social construction by totally excluding and avoiding talking about the male gender is enough to suggest that a world with only one gender would be better managed and organized.

Even though the female Utopia faces some problems that clearly indicate that the social and political organization on the planet Jeep are far from perfect, Griffith, nonetheless, manages to make a strong point about the gender binary and human's natural conduct with Marghe and Thenike's relationship. Initially, when the female protagonist meets Thenike, a free-spirit woman that takes care of her after Marghe has been mistreated in another tribe, there are no signs that their relationship will develop into a very strong and romantic attachment. Nevertheless, because of the effects of the virus and mostly, because of Marghe's need not to feel alone and excluded, they fall in love. Without taking gender into account, Marghe falls for the person she connects with best, both physically as well as mentally. She chooses to establish a life with a partner she feels she can share anything in their daily life, and mostly because Thenike's personality complements her in many ways:

As much as possible, they did everything together: walked, ate, cooked, bathed. They slept next to each other in the same bed; sometimes Marghe lay awake listening to their matched breath, and sometimes she fell asleep immediately, knowing that Thenike listened. Day after day, night after night they spent together, and Marghe began to feel a fierce energy building between them, heating and shrinking, pulling them in, like a star about to go nova. (261)

It is her natural need to share her life experiences as well as to have a partner in life that prompt her into having a relationship with Thenike that goes beyond friendship. The following passage indicates Marghe's fear of loneliness on a planet which is not hers, having a life she would never have expected she would have to lead:

Because I'm afraid, she wanted to say. (...) afraid that there was nothing left inside her but empty space. To face the virus, she needed to be able to put down one taproot, to be able to say: there, it would matter to these people if I died. She needed to know that she belonged somewhere (...). She needed and was afraid of

needing, because if she was refused now, she might never get the chance to try again. (222)

Whether Marghe and Thenike's relationship comes as a surprise for the reader, they know that Marghe has a previous knowledge of gender since she has lived on Earth until her adulthood. Nonetheless, when she gets to live on a planet where there is no gender binary, she does not express any concern about that fact. What is more, she naturally interacts with all of the natives and, consequently, falls in love and gets pregnant together with Thenike, undergoing the whole reproduction process after being infected with the virus. Marghe also feels a sexual desire towards Thenike, which indicates that it is not only her need to socialize and not to feel lonely that makes her choose to have a life with her. Her sexual desire can be seen in the following passage from the book:

(...) Thenike's legs were naked alongside hers; this time, she felt Thenike's breasts touching the skin just below her shoulder blades. This time, there was no mistaking the slow, heavy wave of desire that rose and sank through her guts. (...) Desire wrapped its arms around her and held her still, helpless, able only to breath. (243)

Thus, by establishing herself on Jeep and not minding being a part of a single-gendered society, she proves that humans adapt to different conditions, gender being no exception. Then, Marghe's fate indicates the fact that the Earth population is separated into male and female society is not a natural segregation, but a social one that bases its differentiation on sex and bodies, which do not necessarily express or concord with gender. Hence, gender is not innate but it is socially imposed: "Gender is an accomplishment that is generated, reproduced, and recognized in interaction embedded in a context of gender ideals specific to place and historical period" (Morgan 2016: 257-258) In accordance, feminists have long questioned essentialism when it comes to gender:

Feminist theorizing has, for a long time, sought to challenge essentialist assumptions about gender and sexuality, proposing that both are socially constructed rather than innate traits to be read off fixed, biological and 'sexed' bodies, either female or male. (...) Within this model, sexuality is assumed to be what follows 'naturally' from two 'opposite sexed' bodies and as such, heterosexuality is foregrounded and naturalized in this fixing equation and same-sex desire is marginalized, if not medicalized and demonized. (Richardson and Robinson 2007: 107)

Concluding, Griffith succeeds at creating a one-gendered female Utopian society where women can reproduce on their own, but where there are still issues that must be improved, patriarchal leadership and social construction being the first one to consider. Even though her Utopia faces a lot of limitations, Griffith manages to prove with the support of feminism that gender is a social construction that does not necessarily depend on sex. What is more, it is suggested that gender does not have to be taken into account when choosing a partner in life, as humans need the company and support of a person, which does not imply that the partner has to be from the opposed sex. That is to say, people should not be classified through binary but they

should be recognized as humans that have the need to share their life experiences with a partner, no matter what their sex or gender is.

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Ana Martínez Soto, Feminist Science Fiction: The Representation of Alieness in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*

The presence of women in Science Fiction became more apparent in the late 1960s and in the 1970s thanks to second-wave feminism, which was concerned with femininity and women's rights, particularly to their own bodies. Back then, female science-fiction writers used the genre as a way of reconstructing the representation of women, which up until then, was stereotyped in male narratives. These female writers employed the concept of the 'alien' to account for women's 'otherness' to men. This essay seeks to explore how the changes in science fiction are reflected in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*, and how the notion of alieness is presented in the novel, and I will do so by analysing the novel's characters with especial emphasis on Marghe, as well as the novel's setting .

First of all, let me draw attention to the changes undergone by science fiction in the 1960s as a result of its interjection with second-wave feminism. Up until the 1950s science fiction was "concerned with speculation about the division of geopolitical space" but from the 1960s onwards, the genre became increasingly concerned with "aspects other than science" (Podtar 2013: 78). Science fiction has historically been considered to be a "male and technological realm", with most of the authors being men, and women appearing (if they appeared at all) as "sexual and/or decorative creatures that further glorify men" (Podtar: 140). The plots from these kinds of narratives were technology-oriented, which were regarded as "masculine concerns", given the fact that women were "effectively denied access to these areas" (Podtar: 140).

However, the science fiction of the 1960s took an interesting turn regarding its content and its producers, becoming "more and more involved in using its themes to experiment with theoretical and cultural perspectives" (Podtar 2013: 80) while losing its interest in technology. A major development in the 1960s was the increasing number of female science-fiction writers, who "became bold about explicit sexual references and more sympathetic to reconsiderations of gender roles" (Podtar: 87). They began to include feminist discourse, as well as radicalism and social consciousness to "voice their concerns against patriarchy" (147).

These women were highly influenced by second-wave feminism's concerns of femininity, and they used science fiction as a means by which to "interrogate and critique contemporary constructions of gender" (Podtar 2013: 120), as well as investigating "how technology affected women's bodies" (184). Female science-fiction writers soon began to create what is called feminist science fiction, in which they used the imaginary domain to "assert that women, deprived of civil rights in the real world, are fully capable of governance" and to demonstrate that if the world were to be ruled by women "it would be a much pleasant, peaceable and ethical state" (Jones 2009: 484).

It is pretty clear that with the arrival of female science-fiction writers, science lost its importance within the genre, but its little presence was still used by feminist writers as a device to "speculate their world free from the patriarchal exploitation",

and the genre proved useful as a “space to construct female subjectivity” which further emphasized its reaction to “stereotypical representation of women” (Podtar 2013: 147-148). What is more, they saw that science fiction writing could “forecast potential futures with the absence of socially constructed images and values associated with ideas of masculinity and femininity” (Wheeler 2013: 209).

Finally, the major project for most feminist science-fiction writers was to raise awareness about the fact that gender is a social construct and to question the patriarchal ideas that “posit pervasive belief in essential differences which permanently distinguish men from women and which invariably render women as passive and inferior” (Wheeler 2013: 213). They used the genre as a means of exploring women’s “new possibilities and new ways of being” (Wheeler: 214).

It is important to cast some light on the term ‘alien’ in science fiction, a term that, since it is going to be used throughout the essay, needs proper introduction. In order to do so, the question we must ask ourselves is: why does the genre need the concept of the alien? This question seems to have a very simple answer, and, as Attar and Podtar explain in their article, the presence of the alien in science fiction “allows us to study ourselves” (Attar & Podtar 2012: 6). They expand on this a bit more by saying that the existence of aliens has been “of significant help in advancing our knowledge and understanding of human nature” (6). In essence, the worlds and its inhabitants present in science fiction “offer a new point of view in dealing with the real world” (7).

Moreover, as Brian Baker (2014) argues, the term ‘alien’ suggests “otherness and difference”, and that the aliens in science fiction are “always imagined through reference to familiar human groups” (27). It is also worth mentioning that alienness has historically been used to refer to “extra-terrestrial beings” (27). Following this line of interpretation, all the representations of aliens in science fiction “must function as a version of our human otherness” (Rogan 2004: 443).

Science fiction explains the representation of aliens through its encounter with human beings and, as Freud says, the alien encounter with Human is “the effect of the uncanny” (Freud 1919: 825). According to Freud, the uncanny is the act of “arresting strangeness, astonishment, and shock” (825), and he proposes the uncanny as an approach to define “whatever that is unfamiliar, foreign or alien” (825). Moreover, the alien positions itself between what is familiar and what is considered ‘other’, thus combining “something familiar with something unfamiliar” (Podtar 2013: 50).

However, for our discussion of the alien, we need to focus on 1960s science fiction, since it saw a change in the “recognition of difference” (Podtar 2013: 75) based on gender as well as race and ethnicity. As I previously mentioned, the 1960s saw an increasing number of female writers, and what they did with the alien theme was to “create their own idea of the gendered space” and to “reinvent woman as the greatest alien in civilization” (Podtar: 87). With this they were able to give voice to the “marginal experience of women” (Podtar: 81), and with this diversity of what it means to be alien, the science fiction of the 1960s called “the identity of human beings” into question (90).

Furthermore, the science fiction written during this period of time employed the alien as a way to reflect on “contemporary issues” (Podtar 2013: 140), and they did so by “examining the human conditions through the ‘defamiliarised’ world of the alien universe”, given the fact that humans “learn and react to new situations through the

process of familiarisation” (140). We will later see how this processes of ‘defamiliarisation’ and familiarisation are depicted in *Ammonite*, although the novel actually belongs to a later period (it was published in 1992).

Now that we have seen how the genre of science fiction and the term of alien have been affected by second-wave feminism, it is time to see how this is reflected upon Nicola Griffith’s *Ammonite*. What Griffith does in the novel is to explore feminist ideas to imagine social realities which “are familiar for feminist understanding but unfamiliar for patriarchy”, which means that *Ammonite* is not only a response to patriarchy but also to “negative representations of women that exist in contemporary society” (Podtar 2013: 179). Having said that, one could argue that Griffith’s use of the alien theme and the genre of science fiction is a way to imagine “positive representations of women” which challenge the “existing social roles” (Podtar: 180), as well as a means to “explore social relations” (Attar & Podtar 2012: 11).

One of the most dominant alien features in the novel is the encounter between the alien figure and the human being, or, as Podtar puts it, “the confrontation between the representative from Earth (Marghe) and the representatives from Jeep (the natives)” (Podtar 2013: 174). What happens in such an encounter is that Marghe initially feels estranged and then experiences a process of “defamiliarisation” when she spends time with the natives, to the point where she becomes one of them, a process coined as “refamiliarisation”, which is “an artistic technique which removes an object from habitualisation and presenting it in an estranged manner” (Podtar: 174).

We will first be focusing on the setting of the novel, which can be regarded as alien given the fact that it is not planet Earth but another planet called Jeep. One of the most useful techniques by which to establish alienness is by creating some other atmosphere(s) which are not familiar to the readers, which is exactly what Griffith does in *Ammonite*. By using the planet Jeep, Griffith “creates a mood of unfamiliarity”, which can be shown in the following passage, in which Marghe compares the two worlds she has ever known: “A wirrel shrieked. Marghe went very still. This was not Earth; this was Jeep, a planet of alien spaces, a place where the human template of dual sexes had been torn to shreds and throws away” (69).

Discussing the alien setting in *Ammonite* proves useful because it creates the alien mood that this sort of novel is aiming for, and both the inhabitants of Earth and those of Jeep “become a point to refer to while creating unfamiliarity” (Podtar 2013: 69). In order to create unfamiliarity, Griffith uses the genre’s devices that have to do with science, which are the setting (the spaceship at the beginning of the novel), the (technological) language used by the Mirrors, Sara Hiam and Marghe herself, as well as technology (for example the FN-17 vaccine). The beginning scene is the “key role” in the narrative, as it is “set in the scientific facts” (Podtar: 168).

One of the useful ways to examine the alienness of a place is to compare it to the other places one has set foot on, which is exactly what Marghe does. However, once she understands that Jeep is nothing like Earth, she “experiences this different world in the light of her experience on Earth”, which allows her to get rid of this feeling of strangeness:

This was something new. She knew these people had evolved cultures resting on bases very differently from those of any Earth people; she did not know whether that made these women human or something entirely other (...) She shook herself. The question, what was humanity? Was as old as the species, one she

never expected to answer. She resumed her walk through the trees, but more slowly, thinking and occasionally making notes. (69)

As I have mentioned before, Marghe undergoes the processes of defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation once she makes contact with the natives and with the environment. By creating this imaginary (and alien) territory, Griffith emphasises “the reader’s recognition of the world as we know it” by transposing our world with the foreign world of Jeep which at first “seems radically discontinuous of it in both time and space” (Podtar 2013: 14).

Now that I have discussed the alien setting in the novel, it is time to expand on the notion of alienness presented in the characters. Marghe, the main protagonist of the novel, decides to go to Jeep because it is “the most fabulous opportunity for an anthropologist (...) since the nineteenth century” (Griffith: 11), and in this sense, “Jeep for Marghe becomes a space to get alienated from her own reality” (Podtar 2013: 173).

Griffith creates a female-only world to emphasise how the lack of men is not an issue, and she does so by “populating the world of Jeep with women who are humane in entirety” (Attar & Podtar 2012: 18). Therefore, the alienness in *Ammonite* is not “a figure that leads to an existence separate from humankind” but a critical reflection “on the inner self of the human and the collective anxieties of contemporary women” (Attar & Podtar: 19). So, we should not consider the women in Jeep as aliens because they serve as a “mirror for human beings to reflect in contemporary concerns of gender”, and this is exactly how Commander Danner feels about them:

(...) It was the first time she [Danner] had really, deep down, thought of the indigenous population of Jeep as women. Not aliens, or natives, or beings to be taken into consideration from a humanitarian point of view, but women like her, like Marghe, like Teng or Vincio or Letitia Dogias. Like us. Women who lit fires against the cold and made soup for their loved ones. (93)

Griffith rejects the gender division by excluding men from her narrative so that the readers understand that our behaviour as men or women is fixed by patriarchy. What I mean to say is that *Ammonite* explores “what bodies can do when the genitalia become irrelevant, which is Griffith’s foundation in the construction of aliens” (Attar & Podtar 2012: 18). The characters of the novel are “not women embodying male narrative space, doing masculine tasks and exhibiting masculine attributes or qualities”, and what Griffith does with her female characters is to give them “new attributes as an act of creating aliens” (Attar & Podtar, 18) and by doing so, she proposes a new model of women outside the sex/gender binary:

Commander Danner is not ‘masculine’ in her approach toward the issues of command nor is she ‘feminine’ in her uncertainty about whether or not she does a good job; Aoife is not ‘masculine’ when she beats Marghe into obedience, nor is she ‘feminine’ when she patiently teaches Marghe the ways of the tribe; Marghe is not ‘masculine’ when she stands as strong in front of Danner at their first meeting, nor is she ‘feminine’ when she cries because her snow encrusted glove cracks open her mouth and makes it bleed. (Attar & Podtar 2012: 19)

These characters are all human in their similarities and differences, as is any human group. The same happens with the native inhabitants of Jeep, but they are perceived as aliens because of the traditional conception that “any being that lives outside planet Earth is considered an alien” (Podtar 2013: 183). The attributes given to the women in the novel are not “hierarchical oppositions but physical, mental and emotional responses specific to the context of the events they are engaged in” (Attar & Podtar 2012: 18).

In this essay I have explained the changes that the genre of science fiction went through during the 1960s and how these changes are reflected in Nicola Griffith’s *Ammonite*. Moreover, I have demonstrated how these changes go hand in hand with second-wave feminism, a movement primarily concerned with femininity and, consequently, with women’s representation in the genre, in its transition to 1990s third wave. I have also expanded on what it means to be alien and how this notion of alienness is depicted in the novel’s setting and the novel’s characters, and I showed how Griffith uses the term ‘alien’ to refer to women’s otherness in the sense that they do not display masculine traits. Finally, it is worth highlighting how all characters, both those of Earth and those of Jeep, are subjects in their own ways, despite being women or being considered aliens.

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Alicia Baines, Failing to Resist the Gilead Regime: Offred's Complicity and Complacency in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Margaret Atwood depicts a dystopian society in which freedom and rights are oppressed by religious fundamentalists. This oppression is called the 'Gilead Regime', and this is where the novel's protagonist, Offred, finds herself trying to survive as a 'handmaid'. A problematic aspect of the novel is how and where the reader should align themselves with Offred and her thoughts and feelings. Should we applaud her as a feminist hero? Should we admire her as a valiant rebel? Or should we denounce her as a cowardly weakling whose complicity and complacency contributes to the formation and continuation of the totalitarian regime? Whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwittingly, Offred's behaviour and passivity has contributed to the desperate situation in which she now finds herself. For this reason, Offred is not entirely blameless, and thus we should not necessarily pity her as a powerless, innocent victim. A number of critics and readers misinterpret her occasional rebellious acts (such as her love affair with Nick or playing Scrabble with her 'Commander', Fred) as attempts to undermine the patriarchal society. However, upon closer examination, one can see that these acts are done to appease her own personal needs and desires and never with the intention of a greater good.

Atwood has set *The Handmaid's Tale* in a world where environmental damage (namely acid rain and toxic waste) has caused a dramatic drop in the population's fertility. In this 'Republic of Gilead', women who are still able to conceive are trained to serve as 'handmaids' for couples of a higher rank who cannot reproduce. Each month, when the handmaid is ovulating, the handmaid takes part in a 'ceremony', in which she lies between the legs of her mistress and has sexual intercourse with the Commander of the house, in an attempt to conceive, carry and give birth to a baby on their behalf. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a particularly personal and harrowing work of fiction because Atwood has chosen to use a first-person narration. This allows the reader to experience the sufferings of Offred at a most closer and more invasive proximity, creating an intimate relationship between Offred and the reader. However, *The Handmaid's Tale* merits a more complicated analysis than a dichotomous view that the religious fundamentalists represent the oppressors, and Offred represents the oppressed. In truth, the novel is far more dynamic than a simple helpless heroine vs. gothic villain type narrative. In his critical essay, Weiss argues that Offred "takes no overt action" (2009: 1) in *The Handmaid's Tale*. She exhibits total passivity when at the mercy of the totalitarian regime, and therefore is less of a heroine than the reader might initially think. Weiss continues to argue that Offred prefers "freedom from pain and acceptance of paternalistic domination over dangerous political commitment" (2). Although she might seem feisty to the reader as we experience her internal thoughts, her lack of overt action undermines her role as a valiant rebel.

The narrative structure of *The Handmaid's Tale* is framed as a series of tape recordings by Offred, in which she describes her ordeal within the 'Gilead Republic'. The critic, Carol L. Beran, argues that "Offred's power is language" (1990: 1), meaning

that by retelling her story, Offred is challenging those who deprived her of a voice as well as attempting to reconstruct her past identity. However, this line of argument is flawed on a number of levels. Firstly, handmaids are prohibited from reading and writing within the Gilead Regime. While this act of retelling might appear rebellious, it is significant that Offred is not writing down her experiences, and instead speaking orally into a tape recorder. This suggests she is still to an extent conforming to Gilead law, perhaps in fear of punishment. Secondly, it is significant that Offred speaks out about her ordeal after it has taken place. What the reader is offered in the novel is a reconstruction of past events in the form of fragmented audio clips. If Offred was a true subversive feminist hero, she would have kept some sort of current diary as events unfolded. Lastly, Beran fails to consider how much power Offred is able to harness through the use of language. One can argue that despite the cacophony of rebellion within her own head, Offred's internal revolt does nothing to resolve or alleviate her current situation. Although the expression is clichéd and hackneyed, Offred's silence speaks volumes to the reader. Tomc makes an interesting (and quite concerning) note that the passivity exhibited by Offred marks an uncomfortable similarity with stereotypes of female behaviour that persist in the 21st century (1993: 73). Perhaps Atwood is trying to encourage her readers to note this parallel in an attempt to spark action against the gendered injustices that exist today.

Arguably, the crux of Offred's culpability lies in her failure to rebel before the Gilead Regime was implemented to full effect. This idea of losing control is a common denominator among dystopian literature. Dopp writes that "by definition, a dystopian tale takes place in a world in which it is 'too late' to act, a world in which there is no longer a possibility of resistance (...) The idea is to shock the reader by the horror of what might follow if action is not taken now" (in Weiss 2009: 5). Atwood makes it clear that Offred failed to defend or assert her rights as a free woman before the fundamentalists took control of society, and it is this failure to act that makes her somewhat responsible for the atrocities of the Gilead Regime. When she is forced to leave her job (as a result of being a woman) she remarks "What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?" (186). This idea of feeling like they "deserve" such treatment draws another uncomfortable parallel with gender inequalities today, such as the significant gender pay gap, in which women are paid less simply because they are women. Weiss furthers this argument by writing that "it was easy for the fundamentalists to take away her freedoms because she never truly valued them" (2009: 8). Offred herself confesses that she was more complacent than she would like to admit: "I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia" (279). The obvious counterargument to this idea is that even if Offred had tried to be more active and resist the oppressive forces of the religious fundamentalist, her efforts would have been fruitless. Had Atwood chosen to make Offred more resilient and forthcoming (generally a bit more like the character of Moira, who some critics argue represents Offred's feminist alter-ego), *The Handmaid's Tale* might tell a very different story with a very different protagonist.

A number of critics view Offred as not only a complacent onlooker, but an active participant in the 'Gilead Regime'. Offred makes a key distinction herself when she says that "We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it" (66). The novel's protagonist acknowledges that it was not

ignorance that prevented her from speaking out, as she was aware of the restrictions being gradually put in place to deprive women of their freedom. She admits that she ignored these developments; refusing to take notice either because she underestimated how far it might go or because she wanted to pretend it was not happening and focus all her attention on her family. What is more, even when firmly within the clasps of Gilead society, Offred continues to exhibit a tendency to ignore what is in front of her. During one of her Scrabble 'dates' with Fred, she considers asking him what is going on in the outside world. She admits: "Maybe I don't really want to know what's going on. Maybe I'd rather not know. Maybe I couldn't bear to know. The Fall was a fall from innocence to knowledge" (205). Not only does this illustrate her tendency to ignore, but it seems she is successfully being indoctrinated by religious dogma by suggesting that 'The Fall' that they have experienced can be seen in a positive light: they may no longer have "innocence", but at least they have "knowledge". Interestingly, Offred's honesty in admitting her failure to act encourages the reader to sympathise with her and her negligence. Dodson supports this idea, writing that "the Handmaid ultimately confesses her own contribution to the dystopian situation in Gilead" (1997: 80). This idea that those who ignore warning signs around them are equally guilty for the results of that complacency is a reoccurring theme in dystopian literature. Weiss attributes the contribution of dystopian regimes on the "acquiescence of a complacent citizenry that accepts and may even enjoy its comforting oppression" (2009: 5).

It is concerning how easily Offred accepts Gilead's protective embrace in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Before the regime, Atwood writes that there was a significant peak in abuse towards women, as well as the environmental issues affecting fertility. During handmaid training, Aunt Lydia (one of the women responsible for indoctrinating the handmaids) delivers a long list of rules which will govern the lives of women in Gilead, including the prohibition of reading, writing, revealing their bodies and keeping their original name. Aunt Lydia concludes this list by stating: "There is more than one kind of freedom (...) Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (34). Offred chooses freedom from pain over freedom from oppression. Rather than rebel and risk punishment (when Moira attempts an escape her feet are whipped with a metal cable) Offred would rather quietly survive by abiding to the rules. There is evident transformation in the novel concerning Offred's frame of mind. For example, at the beginning of *The Handmaid's Tale*, she refers to her bedroom as "the room where I stay" (59). However, when she finds out that her room has been searched by Serena Joy (her Commander's wife) she exclaims "Was she in my room?" (59). What is more, she herself notes this change: "I called [the room] mine" (59). This shows that she is astutely aware that she is slowly embracing her new way of life, and yet doing little to resist it. A more extreme example is when Offred chants "her fault, her fault, her fault" and "crybaby, crybaby, crybaby" (82) with the other handmaids, blaming Janine for being raped at the age of fourteen and shaming her for what happened. Again, Offred acknowledges her guilt: "I used to think well of myself. I didn't then" (82); however, regardless of her admittance, she is participating in the violent and destructive rituals of the 'Gilead Republic' and this involvement makes the reader feel uncomfortable.

Offred only exhibits courage when appeasing her own needs and desires. Ofglen (the handmaid with whom Offred walks to the shops) reveals that she is a

member of May Day (a secret organisation attempting to overcome Gilead) and asks Offred to spy on her Commander for the sake of the revolution. At first, Offred expresses a desire to help; however, as her romance with Nick progresses, she loses interest and starts making excuses. She says, “the commander is no longer of immediate interest to me” and “anyway, I’d be no good at that, I’d get caught” (282). Yet again, Offred admits the truth behind such excuses: “The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him” (283). Offred prioritises her base desires and realistic goals instead of attempting to resurrect the larger scale problem at hand, portraying herself as a helpless defeatist who only cares for herself. She refers to the “compensation” (283) that Nick represents within Gilead, remarking that it is “truly amazing what people can get used to” (283) if such compensations exist. This complacency to surrender to her new conditions and embrace the routine which she has been given, as well as her willingness to engage in a sexual relationship with someone who is not her husband, Luke, makes the reader interpret her as a selfish coward. And yet, her honesty (for example when she admits that she would be useless at keeping information under torture) draws our attention back to her, making her a relatable and realistic fictional character. Weiss summarises this idea, writing that when confronted with a stark choice dystopian characters often demonstrate a “desire for happiness over freedom” (2009: 10). Arguably, Offred lacks the agency and autonomy to rebel against authority, and who are we to judge her for attempting to stay alive when she knows her daughter is still alive and perhaps her husband is too.

The obvious counter-argument to this essay is that Offred could not do anything to change the totalitarian regime even if she wanted to, and therefore the reader cannot blame her for her passivity. After all, the violence exhibited by the Aunts and guards of Gilead allude to their ruthless and barbaric methods of dealing with those who resist. Mohr tidily concludes that Offred’s behaviour should not be “so easily and self-righteously dismissed as cowardliness from the safe distance of being snuggled into an armchair” (2006: 256). Gottlieb similarly concurs that it is “unfair to single out Offred for blame” (in Weiss 2009: 140) when very few of us would, or could, do any better. However, Weiss argues that “this is precisely Atwood’s point: totalitarian regimes arise because people are too complacent or afraid to resist them, or actually welcome them. Our own cowardice or selfishness does not excuse Offred’s; instead, her cowardice and complicity convict us all, because we share it” (2009: 11). Every individual is a part of a whole, and if everyone had the same defeatist acceptance of events as Offred, then Gilead would never be overcome and the oppression would reign on.

To conclude, Offred is not the idealistic, feminist heroine that readers might initially think when reading *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Despite the loud rebellion within her own mind, where she threatens to burn down her Commander’s house, stab Serena Joy with gardening shears or hang herself in her wardrobe, she exhibits no rebellious nor truly subversive acts that are fuelled by anything more than personal motive. Offred gradually accepts the totalitarian rule, accustoming herself to the oppression and laws that govern her life as a handmaid. Nevertheless, the situation in which she finds herself is entirely incomprehensible, and thus as Mohr and Gottlieb argue, it is inappropriate to criticise Offred for her passivity when her rebellion would probably fail anyway/ Furthermore, it is easy for us, as readers, to pass judgement on Offred

from the comfort of democracy and freedom. Atwood's literary work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a multifaceted dystopian novel that explores oppression, female identity, complicity, complacency and guilt; creating an enthralling, thought-provoking text that definitely merits a second read. Although one might initially interpret Offred as the feminist heroine of the book, upon closer examination it becomes clear that her role in the 'Gilead Regime' is not so straightforward.

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Lorena Lozano Ortega, Rightful Mothers: A Critical Approach on Surrogacy in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid Tale*

The Handmaid Tale is a science-fiction, dystopian feminist novel written by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. Despite having been published in 1985, it has gained great popularity in 2017 thanks to its television adaptation (there was also a film in 1990). The question that arises is why this novel is now in its heyday and not thirty years ago when it was published. The truth is that, despite being a very harsh novel, in which women are completely submitted to the power of the white patriarchal men, this novel deals with issues that are very current today, in our supposedly post-feminist times.

One of the topics present in *The Handmaid Tale* that has been discussed the least (perhaps because it is the most controversial topic nowadays) is surrogate maternity. This novel creates a world in which most women are sterile. Far from having a privileged status, the Handmaids (the only women who can bear children) are in a very low position in Gilead's society. This is because the approach of the social hierarchy in Gilead is based on the income of the man in charge (the Commander). In this novel, in which the woman is in the worst imaginable situation, powerful men seek the commodification of women either through prostitution (the Jezebels) or through surrogacy.

It is my aim to prove that in the novel surrogacy is the key to the exploitation of working-class women. For this purpose, I will first analyze the term 'surrogacy' and how surrogacy is performed in Gilead. After that, I will explain why surrogated motherhood poses a class problem.

What is surrogacy and how is it performed in Gilead?

Surrogacy is "a method or agreement whereby a woman agrees to carry a pregnancy for another person or persons, who will become the newborn child's parent(s) after birth" (Wikipedia 2017). In Gilead there is a whole system of "surrogacy" based on religion. The sacred scriptures narrate that:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children; Rachel envied her sister;
And said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.
And Jacobs anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead,
who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?
And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my
knees, that I may also have children by her. (Genesis 30: 1-3)

Hence, following the ruling of the scriptures, the Wives who cannot bear children, take a Handmaid to have them for her. There is a whole ritual called the 'Ceremony' for the insemination of the maid, which is also ruled by the laws of religion and which dehumanizes and violates women's rights, forcing them to have sexual intercourse with the Commander.

The Ceremony begins after the Commander reads some passages of the Bible. In the reading of the scriptures all the inhabitants of the house, who represent each

one of the social status, are present: “One kneeling woman in red, one seated woman in blue, two in green standing, a solitary man, thin-faced, in the back ground” (65). The Ceremony is almost a theatrical act whose protagonist is the Wife. She is present during all the Ceremony. Offred (June) describes the act like this:

The Ceremony goes as usual. I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers. (...) Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed. My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers (...) My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. (94)

The next part of the process of surrogacy is pregnancy. The first case of a pregnant Handmaid that we see in the novel is that of Ofwarren (Janine). The last part is delivery, childbirth is another ritual. For the birth all the Handmaids must go to the house where the pregnant woman is to deliver her baby. All the Wives are there to assist the Wife, too. The Wives’ taking an active part both during sexual intercourse and the labour process is used to legitimize the property of the baby that has just been born: “What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product” (94). When the baby passes the breastfeeding period, the biological mother is assigned to another family, where she will be forced to become a surrogate mother again.

Why does surrogate motherhood pose a class problem?

Many reproductive activists such as Rosalind Petchesky have claimed that motherhood is a social practice. Hence, the process of surrogacy can be seen as a mere transaction. The scholar Alys Weinbaum proposes a reformulation of reproduction as production, warning that: “when, as feminists, we think of reproduction as (re)productive, we lose the ability to articulate women’s concerns from specifically gendered space” (105). In the novel, however, none of the women offers voluntarily surrogacy. According to Weinbaum and following the line of Marxism, the Handmaids would be forced to do ‘forced labour’ when they are obliged to (re)produce.

The question that arises, then, is why the Handmaids are submitted in this way. Offred says during the Ceremony that “Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven’t signed up for” (94). The truth is that they have two options: being Handmaids or going to the Colonies, to be overworked there. In this way they are forced to do a job “for the community” or else they will probably die: “I’d treated it as a job, an unpleasant job to be gone through as fast as possible so it could be over with” (160). The class problem that this implies is that the majority of women who are fertile and become Handmaids are working-class people. The Wives may also have worked previously, like Serena Joy who worked on television, but after the creation of Gilead the Wives have a social status in which they are not able to work. The Handmaids, on the other hand, all become working-class whatever they were before since they are forced to produce: “the labor power, like other commodities, is reduced to and expressed as a quantity of abstract human labor in the process of exchange” (Weinbaum 1994: 103).

Another reason why I affirm that Atwood intends to criticize surrogacy as a method to exploit women is the symbolism of colours. The Handmaids wear red, a

colour associated with communism and workers' struggles, while the Wives wear blue, a colour often associated with conservatism.

Conclusion

To conclude, *The Handmaid's Tale* can, then, be read as a critique of surrogate motherhood as alienated labour. Atwood confers to the entire process of surrogacy a dehumanizing tone that implies the violation of human rights. The Handmaids are forced to follow a process to (re)produce. Following the line of thinking of Marxism, this process of production turns them into working-class women. The difference, in this sense, between Wives and Handmaids is reflected in social status rather than in just their reproductive abilities.

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Sophie Keyword, Women Closing their Eyes to Patriarchal Oppression in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: The influence of Aunt Lydia

In response to Margaret Atwood's comment questioning that her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is a feminist dystopia, I will argue here the thesis that Aunt Lydia is at the pivotal root of implementing the totalitarian rule upon the Handmaids and how, significantly, the Gilead regime uses women.

Margaret Atwood has created in her novel an all-male totalitarian government that operates under a highly structured and strict hierarchy, delivered according to male views and gender roles stereotypes. Its policies are based entirely on the subjugation of women, who have been stripped of all power, had their bank accounts frozen and been removed from their jobs and professions. They have been ranked and placed into specific roles based not on their intellect, skills or characteristics, but purely on their marital status and ability to reproduce. Young women are tested for fertility and, if viable, they are forced to become breeders for the men of the ruling classes. Even the most privileged females, the Commanders' Wives, who are the highest-ranking women in Gilead, are made to take part in the 'Ceremony' of intercourse between their husband and the Handmaids. They are then rewarded for their deference with Marthas who are put in place to carry out all the household chores. The individuality of women in Gilead has been completely eradicated and they have been reduced to purely functional components of a finely tuned patriarchal machine. Offred expresses her lack of identity:

My name isn't Offred, I have another name which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others, but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name, like something hidden, some treasure ill come back to dig up, one day (...) like an amulet, shining in the dark. (94)

This passage shows the indispensable, poignant effect of the society on the Handmaids as individuals, explicitly highlighting the stripping of identity and merging of oneness.

Atwood made a very clear and conscious decision to create a dystopian patriarchy that was based on examples which she had drawn from history but also from the very time when she was writing *The Handmaid's Tale*. She began writing the book in the key Orwellian year of 1984 whilst living in West Berlin. She was profoundly influenced by despots such as Hitler, the German leader (1933-45) that renamed the nation 'The Fatherland' and who stated that "It must be considered reprehensible conduct to refrain from giving healthy children to the nation" (in Williamson 2016: 257). One of his first official acts included declaring abortion a crime against the state in 1933; this was followed by the openly natalist policies of his regime, aimed at increasing the 'Aryan' population. Atwood also drew on more recent history in Romania, where Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (1967-89) declared that "Anyone who avoids having children is a deserter" and "the foetus is the property of

the entire society” (in Steavenson 2014: online), only two decades after Hitler’s demise. In 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini became the supreme leader of Iran, replacing the Shah. His radical Islamist regime (he ruled until 1989) was absolutely patriarchal: women were dismissed from their jobs and lost their professional roles, a harsh Hijab dress code was enforced, polygamy was allowed to men. In the novel’s closing pages, and through the vehicle of the supposed “Historical Notes”, Atwood drives home her final and lasting warning to guard against the constant cycle of History repeating itself. Dictatorships evolve, run their course and are overthrown, but societies soon become complacent again and look upon the past as though it were an historical artefact. Instead, History should be the lesson which informs the future and the guardian which protects from inertia and indifference.

Atwood herself comments on the fundamental, underlying attributes of each hierarchy that piece together the jigsaw of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, referring to the dictatorship of the society and the pecking order of men and women:

The Handmaid’s Tale has often been called a “feminist dystopia”, but that term is not strictly accurate. In a feminist dystopia, all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women (...) But Gilead is the usual kind of dictatorship: shaped like a pyramid, with the powerful of both sexes at the apex, the men generally outranking the women at the same level; then descending levels of power and status with men and women in each. (2012: online)

This passage shows the social positions of the men and women in Gilead, suggesting that a feminist dystopia would involve a wholly male dictatorship with no female rights at all, whereas Gilead allows for some female power exploited through the role of the Aunts. To ensure continued compliance and perpetuate obedience, the roles of the women have been cleverly engineered so that the women throughout the social infrastructure police each other in order to survive. This is most apparent through the Aunts who train and indoctrinate new handmaids and then constantly reappear to lead all public events from Birth Days to Prayvaganzas and Particutions to Salvagings. Alongside this, the government in Gilead use fear, censorship and propaganda to control its people and reinforce conformation. Atwood’s use of capital letters when naming key roles such as Angels, Guardians, Aunts, Commanders’ Wives and major events is highly significant as it magnifies to the reader the impact that these have on Gilead’s functioning, whilst at the same time reinforcing the idea that people have become prototypes instead of individual.

Atwood’s reasoning for creating the Aunts in Gilead (specifically Aunt Lydia) is, then, vital in the understanding of their place in the dystopian society for she intentionally created the Aunts as powerful, though subordinated, females. In a radio conversation with fellow writer Victor-Levy Beaulieu, Atwood declared that the character of Aunt Lydia “is based on the history of imperialisms. For example, the British in India raised an army of Indians to control the rest of the Indians (...) So, if you want to control women, you have to grant some women a tiny bit more power so that they’ll control the others” (1996: 78). This statement shows her manipulation in the creation of the Aunts to control the Handmaids with real-life imperialism. Atwood’s use of colonialism in India as an example of her method to implement the power of the Aunts among their own sex, shows the basis of her dystopia and the relationship between real-life and the more than possible Gilead.

It could be argued that Aunt Lydia is a 'matryoshka doll' construct representing and clinging to the memories of these empirical occurrences of the History in our own society, revealing layer by layer each historical event that has taken place and its consequential result. Subconsciously, Aunt Lydia uses these layers that Atwood has created to control the Handmaids and manipulate them as 'her own', for, as Offred reports:

"a thing is valued", she says, "only if it is rare and hard to get. We want you to be valued, girls. Think of yourselves as pearls. We, sitting in our rows, eyes down, we make her salivate morally. We are hers to define, we must suffer her adjectives. I think about pearls. Pearls are congealed oyster spit". (124)

This shows the impact that Aunt Lydia has on the Handmaids, how she utilizes, to full extent, the small amount of power she has been given to control the Handmaids, the way the state enforces. Rubenstein argues that "the Aunts only retain power in the puritanical state through their role as indoctrinators of the Handmaids" (1988: 104). This stresses the ultimate naivety of Aunt Lydia: the state exploits her as a front-line puppet on a string to employ their own creations of the society; so, although Aunt Lydia is given the illusion that she holds actual power, she is in the end just a mechanism in the workings of the (male) totalitarian state.

When the Commander gives a speech to the Handmaids and the Aunts at one of their 'social' events he specifically states the 'place' of women in society:

"I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel", he says, "with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

"But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

"Let the women learn in silence with *all* subjection". Here he looks us over. "All", he repeats.

"But I suffer not a woman to teach, not to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve". (233, original emphasis)

This passage shows the equivalence of the Handmaids and the Aunts because despite the fact that the Aunts are considered in control of the Handmaids, they are seen as equal purely based on biology. With the Commander emphasizing 'all' women it shows the exploitation of the Aunts as fundamentally they are female, and with the patriarchal society men are always above women. As Steinem observes, the reason for the existence of patriarchy in *The Handmaid's Tale* is "to make sure that the patriarchal family keeps right on normalizing other hierarchies—all require controlling women's bodies. The bottom line is that men have to control the one thing they don't have: wombs" (2015: online).

Before the rise of the totalitarian state, Offred's mother states that "A man is just a woman's strategy for making other women. They're permanently absent minded, like they can't quite remember who they are. They are better at fixing cars and playing football, just what we need for the improvement of the human race, right?" (131) Shortly after this, and the new regime has been implanted, she is banished to work on the nuclear waste plant as an 'Unwoman' because she is unable to reproduce, and is not married. For the state women are only considered women if they have the biological ability to reproduce. Atwood's displacing of Offred's mother is

strategic because we are aware of her extremely outspoken manner and her views on the strength of independent women, and she is punished as a result of this. We hear nothing else of her rebelliousness; Atwood kills her off stage to enhance the terrible consequences she faces as a 'degenerate', 'fallen woman' in Gilead's society.

The Aunts replace mothers like Offred's and are also an instrument of self-defeating indoctrination and, so, they have the Handmaids recite "Oh God, King of the universe, thank you for not creating me a man. Oh God make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh, that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled (...) The ecstasy of abasement" (204). According to this pseudo-religious hymn being a Handmaid is a duty to God, a condition used to reinforce the supposed appreciation of the Handmaids for their role in society, which also fuels the power of the Aunts. They are, so to speak, un-updated versions of the Victorian mothers commanding newly-wed daughters to "Lie back and think of England", a instruction passed down through generations of women who saw sex as a duty that must be endured for reproduction and the progress of the nation.

Surprisingly, some researchers argue that "the Aunts were created by Atwood and portrayed in such a manner as to suggest that they have as much if not more power as the Commanders have" (Johnson 2004: 68), as well as suggesting that "while the Aunts may be victims of a male hierarchy, they certainly choose to utilize the power that they have over other women" (70). This responds to Atwood's comment that *The Handmaid's Tale* has often been called a "feminist dystopia", but that term is not strictly accurate because it shows the extent of the power the Aunts are willing to exert over the Handmaids. Johnson specifies that there is a 'choice' involved in the Aunts' dictatorship, noting that although the Aunts are victims they choose to reinforce their power over other the female victims in Gilead. This, however, is a limited choice, for there are no alternatives really.

Most critics do see the Aunts for the instruments they are. For Kormali they are "probably the most guilty of enforcing this patriarchal/totalitarian rule on the members of their own sex" (1996: 75). Bouson exposes how "the brutal re-education of the Handmaids, who are coerced by the Aunts to forego the ideology of women's liberation" is used "to revert to the 'traditional' values of a male-dominated system" (1993: 141). This male-dominated society, where women are expected to live within the boundaries of strict patriarchy, could not, then, work without female complicity, that of the Aunts. Thus, Atwood warns us about what may be happening in real-life society and unveils the excruciatingly obvious oppression of women by other women, which is, most often, overlooked. Atwood, then, blurs the lines of normality and of 'normativity', in Judith Butler's definition, by which

(...) normativity refers to the process of normalisation, the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal 'men' and 'women'. And in this second sense, we see that norms are what govern 'intelligible' life, 'real' men and 'real' women. And that when we defy these norms, it is unclear whether we are still living, or ought to be whether our lives are valuable, or can be made to be, whether our genders are real, or even regarded as such. (2004: 206)

This passage explains Margaret Atwood's warped distortion of 'normality' in Gilead, which is also a highly accurate representation of our own society; by blurring the lines

of reality with her dystopia, Atwood questions our own reliance on the trustworthiness of societal norms and normality.

To conclude, although Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is popularly considered a feminist dystopia it is in fact an accurate depiction of how male domination utilizes the power of one group of women over another. Aunt Lydia, although also a marginalized woman, is at the very core of the mechanism implementing the totalitarian rule upon the Handmaids, who consider her more powerful than any male in their society. There is no distinct rational reason for the supremacy of Aunt Lydia and her treatment of the Handmaids, but her personal behaviour is also a result of the overruling male domination, which makes her feel somehow 'chosen' and privileged above her fellow female victims. Gilead, as a society, is the apex of the individualist struggle for survival and of the maxim 'nolite te bastardes carborundorum'.

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Dian Moschini Izquierdo, The Shape of Power: Failing Notions of Feminist Utopia and Dystopia in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*

The Power by Naomi Alderman is a remarkably popular novel, and the winner of the Baileys Prize for Women's Fiction. Many critics and readers see it as the 2016 answer to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) as well as a fourth-wave feminism dystopian novel. This piece of speculative fiction explores the shape of power in patriarchy using a singular premise by which women all around the planet get as an evolutionary accident a new organ in the collarbone—the skein—that produces electric discharges. Obtaining this power enables women to start challenging the power dynamics of patriarchy. *The Power* is presented as a historical novel written by (fictional) author Neil Adam Armon, who narrates the events as they supposedly occurred thousands of years ago (it is, then, alternate history, too). As a prologue explains, this man has sent his novel to famous fellow novelist Naomi Alderman to get her feedback, which acts as a summary of the aftermath of the conflict portrayed *The Power*.

To narrate the effects of this evolutionary accident that primarily affects young women (to be later expanded to all women) and explore the huge world reactions that this new electric ability unleashes, Alderman follows four main characters: Allie, a victim of abuse who renames herself as Mother Eve; Roxy, the daughter of a London crime boss and eventually Allie's most loyal soldier; Margot, a rather ambitious American politician and a man, Tunde, a Nigerian journalist. The way in which women use (or misuse) their newly acquired shocking electric power provokes a reversal of the classic gender roles. The author uses this reversal to identify the behaviours that are more problematic in the male physical dominance of female freedom and constructs an apparently functional alternative materialized, above all, in the Eastern European feminist republic of Bessapara.

Even though *The Power* would appear to be an example of a new manner of understanding feminist dystopia and utopia, I argue that, in the use of the gender roles reversal, the lack of references to the principal trends in the current feminist wave, along with the rather simplistic dynamics of oppression, *The Power* fails to build a feasible feminist utopia, creating as well a feminist dystopia.

It is important to remark that dystopian and utopian feminist texts have always presented characteristics of their own that seem to have evolved along with postmodernism, and that are now taking an interesting and complicated shift. After the onset of postmodernism there was an intense hybridization of genres, which is why it is common to find a utopia inside a dystopia; more frequently, an initial dystopia is transformed into a new society that, at least, tries to dismantle the previous one using feminist ideas. As Mohr suggests:

Postmodern dystopias initially present a dystopian world, and then move on to a point of transition where we catch glimpses of the historical processes that lead from dystopia to utopia. However, in contrast to a classical utopian narrative and like the 'critical utopias', they resist narrative closure (perfection). Without ever narrating or exactly defining utopia, these new feminist dystopias map not a

single path but rather several motions and changes that may lead to a potentially better future. (2007: 9)

Initially, then, we may identify Alderman's text as a modern feminist dystopia; the novel opens with a modern society, a mirror image of our present one, in which the very same patriarchal discourses and abuses are played out. With many of the characters such as Allie, for example, systematic sexual abuse is displayed succinctly to illustrate the initial dystopian state of the world. With this, Alderman merely comments on the current state of affairs, observing that we already live in a modern dystopia for women if we centre our attention on the various grievances that are still not addressed. Feminist critical dystopias, precisely, describe patriarchal grand narratives in profundity to dismantle them, proposing a myriad of freshly polished visions of alternative social constructions. They often also criticize the omission by meta-narrative of the marginalization of women in terms of class, race, sexual orientation as well as matters of femininity or pregnancy among many others.

Hence, what is important is to try to point out a distinctive social or political oppression strategy and elaborate an alternative discourse. Wistfully, Alderman only describes what is evident repeatedly, forgetting more subtle ways in which patriarchy may influence the current state of affairs. Furthermore, Alderman fails to propose a convincing reformation in politics and ethics leaving an incomplete discourse in which only the oppression of North American women of Anglo-Saxon origin—and one English woman—is explored from the inside, giving voice (only) externally throughout the narration to black, Slavic and Indian women. This, oddly, is done through Tunde's perspective, the only main male character, and travelling witness of the new revolution.

As regards traces of utopia inside modern critical feminist dystopia, we can initially identify them in Allie's project, in which one way or another the rest of the female protagonists participate. We must bear in mind that:

Contemporary feminist utopianism is transformative, proposing radically different ways of being and living together. In this sense, feminist utopianism functions as a politicizing agent, revealing new forms of democracy and values pluralism. These utopian visions can be a compass or guide, presenting new alternatives in democratic processes for tackling real-life issues today. (De Geus in Griffiths 2005: 17)

Besides, "[u]topianism is also didactic, proving an opportunity for learning how social and political issues might be resolved" (Griffiths 2005: 17). Thus, we draw the conclusion that a contemporary feminist utopia must envision a society capable of ending gender oppression as well as propose alternative politics that overturn the patriarchal social and economic organization. Notwithstanding, Bessapara fails to be the contemporary feminist utopia that we may expect, as no new forms of democracy are shown but, rather, a mere tyrannical theocracy. Other problems such as the economic distinctions between social classes are not discussed either and only the actions in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are shown.

Perhaps if we centre our attention on other definitions of utopianism one may inquire whether it is true that Alderman's prose contains "the impulse of the desire for a better way of being" (Levitas 1990: 8). Naomi Alderman seems to understand utopia

in the same unhelpful way since the desire for something different is exposed but never accomplished. Besides Bessapara, another example of this shortcoming is the closure of the novel, in which society has completely overturned gender dominance, with women now in charge. Neil Adam Armon comments at the end of the novel in one of many letters that, in his view, women “can be better than this” (329). Unfortunately, Neil’s timid comment proves to be insufficient as a wish for change and exposes nothing but disillusion: something should be done but we are left in the dark about what this may be.

A novel that supposedly protests against patriarchy but that is built on the basis of binary oppositions, as *The Power* is, will always be a source of trouble. Gilarek comments on the peril that using binary concepts posits in a narrative meant to subvert imposed roles:

However, despite the fact that the texts are aimed at subversion, transgression and deconstruction of binary notions, especially those related to gender, they do make use of binary oppositions which go along the following division lines: dystopia/utopia, patriarchy/matriarchy, male/female, subjugation/freedom and injustice/equality. Thus, maleness is identified as the source of social ills which invariably situate the woman in the position of the victimized other. (2012: 235)

The subversion of binary notions should be the beginning of a true deconstruction because without denying the negative values inherent in binarism we normalize them, hence, the utopian oppositional impulse remains incomplete. The conclusion that we reach is, then, that by accepting that gender roles have a function, as Alderman does, we affirm their validity.

In addition, Alderman uses role reversal to signal inequalities in the dynamics of power in modern society; noticeably, this argumentation carries some problematic points as Laura Tindall notices in her analysis of *The Power*:

Alderman seems to me to be interested in the power that men hold over women as a biological sex class. In other words, she’s concerned less with socially constructed ideas about gender, and more about the physical reality of the average man’s physical superiority over the average woman. The unreality of gender norms is demonstrated by the ease with which ‘female’ characteristics—such as emotional behaviour, caring personalities and the sexual double standard—are handed over to men once they are subjugated by women. (2017: online)

The reversal of roles, and its consequent dismantlement with women’s total empowerment, is sometimes used in feminist utopianism to show an innovative way to redraw the relationships between men and women and to erase the patriarchal dynamics of subjugation. Yet, regrettably, the only way the author contemplates equality among men and women, as in the brief truce between Tunde and Roxy, is when both are powerless, destroyed by major forces around them. What I find most problematic, indeed, is the fact that no possible alliance between men and women is presented throughout the novel. It is even claimed that during sex men fancy the electricity that their partners are willing to shock them with. Men’s submission is often presented as desirable equality; likewise, the use of clothes is subverted but only to carry the same binary implications they hold before the Power manifests itself.

Furthermore, the failure of binary oppositions is transferred to the political and economic organization. For instance, when Moldova—a country whose economy is said to be based on women’s enslavement for prostitution—is liberated, it eventually becomes an economy based on the war industry. Replacing one economic system for the other does not constitute a change that will improve the life of their citizens, as it is demonstrated when many of them are killed or prosecuted. The defective democracies, including the one in the United States, are neither reformed in their structure nor in the way they operate worldwide. The fault of their failure is placed on the voters, who decide to interpret ambitious Margo’s violent attack against one of her male political opponents as an act of supremacy. No alternative political organization is proposed as all patriarchal institutions and the economic system are left intact, without any reformation or criticism. In fact, it is specified that men were simply bad operators to be replaced by much more efficient women. Liberal thinking is not challenged, then, in any way as the reversal of roles leaves them unchallenged. We see many examples of this, the same political corruptions are played out, only this time they are committed by women, whereas the superfluous advertising aesthetics are reproduced but with the roles changed, showing the same wrong assumptions or inequalities.

Other problematic aspects that *The Power* examines include rape culture. The depiction of the revenge acts that women assaulted in Moldova perform is also particularly tricky, since Alderman offers them as a supposedly satisfying way to deconstruct rape culture. The raped women proceed to rape men and practice “curbing”, a type of torture which renders men incapable of achieving erection without electrical stimulation. Disturbingly, the male narrator seems excited: “It had been months since Tunde had held a woman, or been held by one. He began to yearn to climb down from his perch, to walk into the centre of the rock circle, to allow himself to be used as those men were used” (2017: 261). This is particularly controversial as, in fact, it reproduces the male fantasy that women really want to be raped and feel sexually aroused by the possibility. It is, besides, implausible that a man, who like Tunde, has gone through a savage sexual aggression by a woman has interiorized sexual violence to the point that he wants to be sexually abused again.

The lack of rigor in the portrayal of rape culture produces a sense of uneasiness that does not transform into valid argumentation, as it seems to suggest that it is monstrous madness, inherent in every human being, caused by empowerment. One may fail to discern what is the justification for showing patriarchal abuse when the raped women who become assaulters face serious psychological risks: if given power, some victims may even become mentally unstable assaulters. Curiously, the only two men in the narrative that seem not to be plagued with predatory or dominant thoughts are the ones punished in a psychological way.

A deficient understanding of feminism can lead to the wrong claim that for feminism all men are potential rapists, as they are inherently inclined to sexually assault women because their nature is predatory. Likewise, affirming that giving someone more power releases innate, essential instincts or reactions is the same as arguing that some abuses are normal. Normalizing abuse with the excuse of the physical power shift is revisiting rape culture and, in general, abuse all over again.

The current feminist wave has intersectionality as one of the most important pillars, as manifested in the demonstration against Donald Trump in Washington DC in

January 2017. Precisely, “[t]he march’s policy platform (...) called Unity Principles (...) includes the belief that ‘gender justice is racial justice is economic justice’” (Dastagir 2017). Thus, when Mohr affirms that “a postmodern view of utopia values heterogeneity, diversity and difference being these concepts key to destabilize the present to reconfirm a utopian impulse” (2007: 8), he is clearly referring to the concept of intersectionality. In this sense, then, the postmodern view of feminist utopia seems to aim at intersectionality as a central point, which Alderman simply consigns to oblivion. As Abigail Nussbaum points out in her *Strange Horizons* review:

It’s never suggested (...) that the new gender dynamics of the post-Power world are informed by preexisting racial tensions. (...) Neither do Tunde, a black African, or Allie, a biracial American, have very much to say about the role of race in their lives either pre- or post-Power. By the same token, (...)—the existence of transgender and intersex people is completely ignored (...). (2017)

Another critic and scholar, Victoria Hoyles, identifies the source of problems regarding the absence of intersectionality in Alderman’s text:

[T]here are no overt LGBTQ characters in the book. There are anomalies in how the Power exhibits. (...) Some readings have adopted these as analogies for variations in sexuality or transgendered identities but I don’t find this particularly convincing. First because it’s unnecessary to have analogies when you could just have LGBTQ characters; and second because this plays into a biological reading of sexuality and trans identity as a deviancy or illness (...). (2017)

The way in which a novel that exhorts the subversion of a system of power, patriarchy, forgets the majority that suffer it is certainly unsettling. Many scholars have pointed out the importance of utopianism’s diversity and plurality values considering that the late models of utopianism, concretely the ones that are informed by feminist ideals, are in need of exploration and should ideally result in the construction of inventive fiction forms. Alderman fails to address other issues also present in patriarchal domination as ageism or ableism—there is only one scene in which an old woman is given the Power in order to get revenge for an entire life of invisibility and abuse. Disabled women are not mentioned.

Another usual matter that prevails in feminist writing is the notion of sisterhood or the construction of a cooperative relationship between women to overcome patriarchy. The subject of sisterhood does appear in *The Power* but in a residual manner that mimics patriarchal brotherhood: a relationship based on hierarchies—who has the biggest skein...—as we see in the new matriarchal religion created by Mother Eve:

“It’s not for us to worry about the men”, she says. “Let them please themselves, as they always have. If they want to war with each other and to wander, let them go. We have each other. Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, my sisters”. (109)

The profound bonds between women are not explored beyond the common opposition against men. Eventually, the friendship between Roxy—possessor of one of the strongest skeins—and Allie fails precisely because they cannot bond emotionally

apart from their shared interest in a total role. Women betray each other even more than men do: Mother Eve plans to assassinate Bessapara's ruler Tatiana Moskalev and Margo manipulates her daughter Jocelyn to undo the girl's attempts to establish new alliances between men and women. This creates the palpable impression that collaborative models of coexistence or alternative social organizations among women are impossible.

Alderman also seems to overturn topics common in the third-wave feminist agenda, as her writing suggests that the way feminism acts by means of cultural expression, political protest and social planning against patriarchy is insufficient, for men hold material and physical power. Remarkable, too, is the way in which Alderman refers to third-wave feminism in negative terms, pointing out its inefficiency for instance in a fragment which refers to one of the Indian protestors, remembering a demonstration before the revolution in India:

She had been here for the protests three years earlier; yes, she had held up her banner and shouted and signed her petitions.

"It was like being part of a wave of water", she says. "A wave of spray from the ocean feels powerful, but it is only there for a moment, the sun dries the puddles and the water is gone. Then you feel maybe it never happened. That is how it was with us. The only wave that changes anything is a tsunami. You have to tear down the houses and destroy the land if you want to be sure no one will forget you".

(133)

Alderman uses the metaphor of the wave quite intentionally to express her negative views on the efforts made by third-wave feminism in terms of visibility and protest. Her critique, however, is limited and fails to name social or political alternatives beyond the use of brute force.

Admittedly, one of the most problematic issues in this novel is the reductive insight on power, by which physical force is repeatedly presented as the centre of the difference between the sexes: "Blokes have got a thing they can do: they're strong. Women have got a thing now, too" (107). The actual shape of power is something much more complicated than simply the imposition of the physicality of men's muscles and of sexual abuse. It can be argued, as other feminist critical dystopias and utopias have done, that patriarchal power is about lack of education, imposed belief systems, centuries of subjugation, psychological campaigns against liberation processes, economic systems that systematically oppress certain groups of people—for reasons of race, gender or sexual orientation—along with the criminalization of certain practices like abortion. Not just brute force, as Alderman suggests.

At the end of the novel, the voice inside Allie is revealed to be the voice of power asking to create a new order of subjugation. Consequently, the power is presented as a temptation, or some type of demonic voice from a Judeo-Christian point of view, as a negative product that maintains dominance, violence and obedience by means of fear, abuse and physical force. Thus, Alderman concludes that what makes the system fail is the physical power that one sex has against the other and that what is evil is the desire to dominate, which is what she, in the end, calls 'power'. The manner in which Alderman describes empowerment or how to hold onto power is, by logic, ideologically patriarchal—a way of understanding empowerment that is diametrically opposed to the ideology defended by fourth-wave feminism. A world in

which feminist empowerment has been accomplished by means of a patriarchal use of power cannot, then, result in a feminist utopia but in a dystopia that does not represent feminist ideals. The deconstruction of patriarchy is limited to a critique of the most obvious manifestations but fails to offer the complex exploration of alternative social narratives that feminist dystopia can unfold.

As a utopian text, *The Power* fails, above all, to explicitly or implicitly propose a resolution of the conflict between the sexes, as Alderman presents gender in a clearly patriarchal way. In the end, the alliances between men and women have been erased, even those in current patriarchy. *The Power* lacks, thus, a resolution or even hope for a real change or a future that brings a feminist utopia as fourth-wave feminism may conceive it: an intersectional, plural, equal society that presents multiplicity, openness and hope.

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Belén González Gómez, The Force of the Female Monster: Feminine Fantasy and its Function in C.L Moore's "Shambleau"

C.L. (Catherine Lucille) Moore (1911-77), one of the most significant early female science-fiction authors, portrayed in her first professional sale, the story "Shambleau" (*Weird Tales*, 1933), a mythical monster that catapulted her to stardom. The Shambleau of the title is an intergalactic vampiric medusa, and a precursor of the *femme fatale* of 1940s film noir. Extremely sensual, mysterious and dangerous, the Martian Shambleau tries to feed on the protagonist of the story, macho Northwest Smith, and almost turns the man into a shadow of himself. This story about the destruction of a man's spirit by a *femme fatale* need not be necessarily regarded as a feminist tale, and, indeed, many critics consider Moore a non-feminist writer (Bredehofht 1997: 370). Nevertheless, Shambleau contains some feminist traits: although Moore sends no anti-patriarchal message with her female character, she does question somehow masculinity and offers a subtle criticism against the role of women in society, both stances pioneering at her time. Shambleau is then, in this sense, a feminist tale, if not overtly so.

"Shambleau! Ha... Shambleau!" The wild hysteria of the mob" (37, original ellipsis) is all that can be heard in the streets of Lakkdarol. A red, light figure flees promptly from the crowd "dodging like a hunted hare"(38). Helpless, fragile, scared: an archetypal lady in distress. Smuggler Northwest Smith, the main character of this story and also the protagonist of many others by Moore published in subsequent years, comes to the rescue. He cannot comprehend, nor does the reader, how a woman so inoffensive that she even faints at the feet of our protagonist can elicit that amount of rage and repulsion. However, the mob is determined to kill her, driven by the knowledge of something that is only an intuition for the reader and that Smith does not even recognize. The furious crowd seems to know the end of this story, and they are terrified. Not Smith, not yet.

The Shambleau embodies the masculine fears of femininity, for in her converge the symbols of many female monstrosities. Her long locks made of red worms, and the clear association the author makes in the preface of her history, suggest that the Shambleau is the origin of the myth of the Medusa. As a Gorgon, She is the ultimate *femme fatale* and her hypnotizing look is remarkable: "he felt the eyes upon him, and something was crying insistently in his brain to lower that shielding arm" (60). As a vampire, she is urged by the need to feed on the vital energy of human beings and possesses a wisdom that Smith misses, "that look of the beast which sees more than man" (42). As a *femme fatale*, she flaunts the sensuality of her walk, her enormous attractiveness and her nature as a seductress in order to achieve her ends, beguiling the man with "the murmur swelling seductive and caressing in his innermost brain—promising, compelling, sweeter than sweet" (56). Similar to all the great female monsters in history, the Shambleau is characterized by a charming horror: she repels and attracts Northwest evenly.

Nevertheless, her function in the story differs from the function of her mythical predecessors in an essential point: she is not a male fantasy to be destroyed. The

original myth of Medusa tells the story of her own murder, which is not seen as such, but rather as a victory of the hero against evil. Perseus not only manages to kill the Gorgon, but also takes her head as a trophy and as a weapon. That is the basic story of the confrontation between female monsters and male heroes: at the end of the narrative, the man destroys the vampire and crowns himself a hero, or is seduced and tainted by the *femme fatale* and fails as a man. In “Shambleau” this happens a bit differently. Northwest Smith cannot eliminate the Shambleau, he does not even try. It is his adventure companion Yarol, who using Perseus’ mirroring trick, saves him from evil. Or so he thinks:

“Promise me (...) that if you ever should meet a Shambleau again—ever, anywhere—you’ll draw your gun and burn it to hell the instant you realize what it is. Will you promise me that?”

There was a long silence. (...) Once more Yarol was staring into blankness that hid nameless things. The room was very still. The gray tide ebbed. Smith’s eyes, pale and resolute as steel, met Yarol’s levelly.

“I’ll—try”, he said. And his voice wavered. (67)

As we can appreciate from the passage above, in Moore’s work the hero does not manage to destroy the beast, it is the beast that changes the hero. Northwest is unable to promise that in the future he will not fall in the same trap if a Shambleau crosses his path. Our hero could not even join the mob if it pursued a Shambleau again. After the encounter with the Shambleau, all the macho arrogance that Northwest presents at the beginning of the story has disappeared. Northwest no longer can be identified with the archetype man, with the hegemonic masculinity:

At the end, Yarol assigns to the dead Shambleau the status of a non-symbolic, non-linguistic, animal or vegetable entity. From Yarol’s perspective within the symbolic, the Shambleau’s death leaves him free to redefine her (...). Smith, on the other hand, clearly resists Yarol’s version of things: his inability to promise to kill (and simultaneously redefine) any Shambleau he might encounter in the future indicates his unwillingness to join the masculine community which encompasses both Yarol and the mob. (Bredehoft 1997: 383)

In addition to this revised, alternative masculinity, an essential element of feminist literature, we find in Shambleau another component: a subtle reflection of the atrocious sexism in American society in the early 1930s and women’s resistance to this situation. The following passage illuminates this matter. After the murder of Shambleau, Northwest asks Yarol to explain what that being was:

“But—what are they?”

“God knows. Not human, though they have the human form. Or that may be only an illusion... or maybe I’m crazy. I don’t know. They’re a species of the vampire—or maybe the vampire is a species of—of them. Their normal form must be that—that mass, and in that form they draw nourishment from the—I suppose the life-forces of men. And they take some form—usually a woman form”. (63-64, original ellipsis)

Although it is evident that Yarol does not have a great deal of information about the specimen that lies dead in the living room of his companion’s house, one of his

deductions is disturbing. Previously, the hero faced the monster because it was evil and the monster was a woman because all the women were, in the end, monsters. Femininity was an intrinsic part of the beast that the hero faced:

At the opening of the new [20th] century, biology and medicine set out to prove that nature had given all women a basic instinct that made them into predators, destroyers, witches- evil sisters. (...) The deadly sexist evolutionary dreams of turn-of-the-century culture fed the masochistic middle-class fantasy in which the godlike Greek, the führer, the lordly executioner, would kill the vampire and bring on a millennium of pure blood, evolving genes, and men who were men. (Dijkstra 1996: 3-4)

However, what Yarol implies in his answer is quite the opposite: the Shambleau, a metamorphic monster that can change its form as it pleases, usually *chooses the shape of a woman*. This small gesture completely disassociates evil from femininity and points out that in the society where Northwest Smith lives, an alien predator is more likely to hunt men with a female form than with a male form. The problem is not that woman is essentially evil, but that the patriarchal society creates the fantasy that she is so (and the alien exploits it). The Shambleau, superior in every respect to humanity, only plays the game of patriarchy to achieve its own benefit. If the woman is in Lankkdarol's society bait, then the Shambleau will take the form of that bait.

These patent revisions of masculinity and of the patriarchal models of women only take root if we review the time that Moore lived: "Shambleau" was born in the midst of the Great Depression, in the balcony of the bank where Catherine Lucille Moore was currently working, given that a couple of years ago she had to leave university due to the 1929 financial crash. She was one of the many women who could no longer depend solely on the male salary, since many companies were ruined and many men were fired: "While women seemed willing to accept their new role (...), the majority of the population was not ready to accept this new facet of female identity, which created to many questions about female independence and sexuality" (Lancaster 2012: 13). This terrible economic situation caused a large part of the male collective to develop a grudge against the rights that women had earned during the first wave of feminism: if there was no work for men it was because women occupied the jobs. They disguised this resentment and this sexism with chivalry and promulgated a discourse of positive discrimination, declaring that a woman would be very happy at home, able to enjoy a life of leisure and, therefore, if she worked it was only because she was a great mother who did not want her children to go hungry (single girls were presumed to marry sooner or later). Hence, many scholars regard the Great Depression as a period of feminist interregnum. Some even propose that during the Great Depression feminism died.

Moore's generation was complicated for women. She witnessed the victory of women's suffrage when she was nine years old; the vote was granted to US women in 1920. Her childhood and her youth developed in a hopeful period for feminism. It is true that the Shambleau cannot be seen as an alternative femininity or as a positive role model for women, since she is a woman who uses her sexuality to exploit men and one of the only models that patriarchy offered (the Angel and the Seductress). Be that as it may, the character does not imply in any case the patriarchal nature of the author. In "Footnote to Shambleau... and Others" she states: "I realize now that,

unconsciously, no doubt, both [Shambleau and Jirel, the protagonist of the other Moore's main saga] were a version of the self I'd like to have been" (Moore 1976: 368). This statement when contrasted with the following paragraph of Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* speaks for itself. The Shambleau is not a feminist figure, but a feminine fantasy of empowerment: "In a visual world populated by images of women with faintly flickering or already extinguished eyes, the sexual woman, with her malevolent but spirited glance actually comes as a relief (...). In an oblique manner, images of this kind returned to women a quality of force" (1986: 252).

The last aspect we need to revise regarding the time when "Shambleau" was written in order to fully understand the arguments exposed above is the fact that Moore debuted in *Weird Tales*, a pulp fiction magazine. Trying to compensate for the aftermath of the 1929 crisis, the male characters of the pulps used to exaggerate the masculine qualities that society considered most desirable. They were the archetype of the macho man, and this what Moore daringly adapted to suit her own authorial needs:

The Northwest Smith stories tended to follow a pattern in which the roguish hero would find himself helpless and at the mercy of (often female) alien forces. In many ways, Northwest Smith can be seen as a distillation of male pulp heroes; he carries shades of the Western's wandering gunslinger and the *noir* amoral antihero. (...) But all that strength and ability is rendered meaningless by his helplessness in the face of the cosmically powerful threats he faced, from which he usually needed some rescue from without. (Helland 2015: 197)

In conclusion, "Shambleau" deals with the concerns of feminism despite having been written at a time when feminism was hardly present. The author's questioning of the evil nature of women through her metamorphic alien, the representation of the Shambleau as a feminine fantasy of empowerment that forces the hero to revise his masculinity, and the fact that Northwest Smith is not afraid to show his vulnerability and accept help from others, demonstrate the feminist connotations of Moore's enticing tale.

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Víctor Federico Pasarín Perea, Patriarchy Without Women: Analyzing Athosian Masculinity in Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos*

Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos* (1986) rewards the feminist reader with characters and situations which are very much ahead of its time. The novel is the third instalment in one of the most widely-known sagas in the subgenre of space opera, the Vorkosigan Saga (1986-), a series that combines military science fiction, space opera and detective fiction among other sub-genres. In the Vorkosigan Saga, Bujold speculates about the future of human politics, societies and wars, mainly through the life of Miles Vorkosigan, a disabled man, in a still colonialist human society that has expanded in space. In the line of the author's unique list of protagonists, which includes many female heroes, Ethan from planet Athos is a gay man from a male-exclusive planet where homosexuality is not only widely accepted but the norm. As readers, however, we should not assume that Bujold's description of humanity on Athos is meant to show a utopian reality, not even a feminist one. There are too many issues that make both Athos and Kline Station just as morally backward as the author's own society and socio-cultural context.

Space opera developed as a sub-genre of science fiction during the early 20th century and became extremely popular by the 1990s thanks to the a wide variety of space opera films and television series, and also post-modern renovators like Iain M. Banks. The term had been first used by William Tucker in 1941 in an article for *Le Zombie*, a science-fiction magazine, to describe a typically cheap, clichéd, risky adventure in space. The idea for the term came in relation to both melodramatic soap operas (radio programs sponsored by soap manufacturers) and, what is most interesting, horse operas or Westerns (Martín 2015), a genre which has lent space opera many structural features, such as character types. Some of these are to some extent maintained in Bujold's novel, including an innocent but fundamentally honest hero (Ethan), a fierce and skilful warrior (mercenary Ellie Quinn) and an attractive 'damsel in distress' who is either kidnapped or escaping from the main antagonist(s) (the post-human mutant Terrence Cee).

McMaster Bujold's decision not only to switch the gender roles (the attractive fleeing prisoner is a man, the skilful warrior is an atypical woman and the protagonist is an atypical, homosexual man) for types based on stigmatized ideas of masculinity and femininity, but also to deconstruct them, suggests that her novel responds to previous gender formulas in 'opera' sub-genres and to some extent in all fiction. However, an insight into these characters' environments might lead us to argue that Bujold's imaginary doesn't really depict a more feminist humanity, but actually suggests that humans will not changed a bit hundreds of years into the future, as the people of Athos arguably show.

A first look at interplanetary Kline Station and at Ethan's misadventures on it is enough for the reader to appreciate how highly ethical and well-educated the society of Athos is in relation to the outside world, where violence is widely accepted if "justified", mercenaries and dangerous agents from secret organizations are around

the corner, and wars, conspiracies and criminality are the stations' bread and butter. On Athos, a planet without women, however, men have been relieved of the "Sink of Sin" (14) which apparently makes all societies go wrong, Athosians have for two hundred years been creating a culture based on discipline, social duty and justice, and social peace. Although it is true that Athosian society can be credited to be much more just and stable than Bujold's own American historical context, that cannot be attributed to the absence of women, and this is evidenced by the fact that the planet is still, in most respects, a clearly patriarchal and hierarchical society. A good example of this is seen during the emergency session in the Population Council on the urgent problem of how to find viable ovaries for artificial reproduction, and specially in Ethan's subordination to his superior Desroches. When Ethan tries to protest vocally about the sabotage he is "motioned (...) down", "pulled (...) firmly back into his seat", with Desroches's hand falling "firmly to Ethan's shoulder" (17-22).

If we accept that the relations of unequal power that have dominated human societies for centuries are based on traditional gender relations, as Richardson argues (2015), and on the dominance of men over women, then we could argue that all forms of social inequality would disappear in a world where there is only one gender. However, this is not what happens on Athos: "Patriarchal thinking (...) actually promotes sadomasochist relations between men, in so far as it equates masculinity with power and requires constant proof of the possession of power/masculinity in relation to and for the benefit of other men" (Kane 1999: 181). Thus, on this planet, power relations are evidently present, as well as subordination from less masculine to more masculine characters. Violence, and even gendered violence is present, at least as a fantasy. Even the peaceful Ethan addresses his rebellious lover Janos in this way, desperate that they will never become parents:

"I swear you've been going backwards ever since you got out of the damned army! (...)" A red urge to take Janos and bash his head into the wall shook him, restrained only by the terrible effort required to stand up again. "I can't leave a baby with you all day if you're going to go on like this!" (31)

The relationship between Ethan and Janos puts into question the very notion of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity, since both show characteristics that in our time and era would be considered to belong to hegemonic masculinity. In this context, perhaps the notion of "Athosian" masculinity might be more appropriate, with Ethan being the normative model for it that Janos resists. The debate over how to define masculinities is still open and indeed central to Masculinities Studies:

The specific concept of 'masculism' recognizes hierarchical forms of masculinity as powerful and privileged in various settings and contexts, including the way heterosexual men are advantaged (...) hegemonic masculinity can be viewed as how dominant male sexual practices are used to generate a naturalized view of the world, (...) so ingrained in dominant culture that it appears natural, or as 'common sense'. (...) indeed, hegemonic masculinities are premised on masculinity being defined as femininity's opposite. (Robinson 2015: 58)

Masculinity and femininity remain, therefore, central to the structures of power both on Earth and in Bujold's universe. And this extends to many other layers (class, ethnicity sexuality... and species) as long as the subordinate subject is identified as

feminine or at least “less masculine”. Therefore, we could to some extent relate the Athosians’ fiercely negative view of the outside world (and its women) with Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde, both sides of the “border between the world of the good, white, upper-class male ruler of the Earth and the world of the bad, dark, degenerate, probably foreign and female lower orders” (Kane 1999: 18).

In this context, identifying Cetagandan Ghem-Colonel Millisor as the patriarchal antagonist in the novel, since most of his actions (kidnapping, murder, torture, hegemonic rule...) match behaviour promoted by patriarchy, would set Ethan, Eli Quinn and Terence Cee as atypical heroes against hegemonic masculinity. This idea may be encouraged by the way the author deconstructs, through their personalities, the clichéd formulas for the types that these characters would otherwise represent. The first exchange between Ethan and Ellie Quinn sets the latter as a quick-witted, seductive and imaginative kind of person, neither a typical woman, nor a typical warrior. Terrence’s mixture of toughness and vulnerability paves the road for the exploration of a certain alternative masculinity. Ethan’s own masculinity and protagonism does not mean he takes the lead, and he leaves the decisions to face risky action in Quinn’s hands in an intertwined, double plot: in Athos sub-plot, Ethan is the main character but in the sub-plot of the Cetagandans’ business at Kline Station he is a mere observer, and Ellie the hero. These anti-patriarchal heroes, however, are not in any way conscious of their mission nor do they seem to have succeeded.

Atypical as they might be, both Ethan and Terrence, but most specially, Quinn, are in constant reaffirmation of their masculinity (even she) since that is the only way they can succeed in a galaxy where hegemonic masculinity is the rule. In fact, the absence of femininity in the book, only to be seen in minor characters, like the homophobic Helda, is a major proof of how little progress feminism has made in so many centuries of expansion. On Kline Station, Quinn relies on her paradoxical female masculinity to be taken seriously, as she is one of the few female soldiers. Back on Athos, where all men are atypical for the simple fact that heteronormativity does not exist, patriarchal masculinity is nonetheless encouraged through obligatory military duties. The refined, caring Athosians lack a feminine side, which contradicts what many film critics have observed in movies where there is a male-exclusive cast of man soldiers:

Una vez reducida la feminidad a una figura menospreciable y seductora, asociada al enemigo, (...) [se crea] en un territorio de excepción donde no hay lugar para el *boy beats girl*. Toda la carga emotiva se centra, entonces, en el clima sentimental que rige las relaciones entre soldados: una reagrupación fraternal que toma como modelo abstracto la familia, y que hace inevitable la asunción de roles habitualmente femeninos por parte de alguno de sus componentes. (Bou & Pérez 2000: 132)

Most likely, Bujold did not wish to write about the triumph of feminism but rather to criticize its failure. That is why Ethan, although he experiences an important evolution, is never fully rid of Athosian misogyny. His mistrust and devaluation of women is most clearly evidenced right after his quarrel with Quinn when he leaves a safe hideout which she has provided for him:

Had the last word really what he'd wanted? And yet-he'd rather face Millisor, Rau and Okita's ghost together than crawl back into his prison and apologize to Quinn. Determination, Decision, Action. That was the way to solve problems. Not running away and hiding. He would seek out and confront Millisor face-to-face. (100)

However, Ethan comes not only to accept Quinn 's company but to admire her in some way, and the time he spends on Kline Station open his mind up to a certain extent. Even though his actions don't always prove it (as he, like most men in the novel including the unseen Miles Vorkosigan, takes advantage of Quinn from the beginning to the end) the way he sees women has changed.

Bujold seems to provide an insight on how far we are from gender equality, but not in order to leave her readers with a pessimist message. Rather she means for them to consider how hard societies need to work in order to accomplish this equality. Speculating over what would happen in a world inhabited exclusively by homosexual men is a mental exercise which highlights key problems that arise in the quest for feminism. As Connell (2005) argues in her book, our best option is to look for multiculturalism in gender, to expand our mental umbrella about masculinities, femininities and (I would add), gender, instead of narrowing it down as Athosians do. In Hurd's opinion, "Not historically fixed or based on biology, masculinity is a dynamic progression that projects male identity as constantly changing through its contacts with various institutions and ideologies" and so "the potential for change in male identity (...) exists naturally in the day-to-day lives of individuals, families and communities" (2013: online).

Bujold's *Ethan of Athos* provides feminist ideas and situations that are very much ahead of its time, including a homosexual planet at a time when gay marriage was illegal in all countries in the world. However, a close examination of its characters' portrayal and social environment, specially on Athos, reminds us that Bujold's feminism in this book is not to be identified in the solutions she provides but rather in the problems she diagnoses in the current and future fight to achieve the fulfilment of feminism. Ethan's development throughout the novel proves that change is possible, as he ends up acknowledging that women are necessary, too: "The very bones of Athos were moulded to her pattern. His bones. 'Salute, Mother' Ethan whispered" (237), but it comes at a too slow pace and through big struggle.

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Siobhan Dooley, Negotiating Terms in Pamela and Fifty Shades of Grey: The Sexual-Social Contract and Female Fantasies of Control in a Mr B-Harvey Weinstein World

“Readers remain thoroughly enchanted by narratives in which a woman’s virtue alone overcomes sexual aggression and transforms male desire into middle-class love, the stuff that modern families are made of”.
(Armstrong 1987: 6)

As I write this article, multiple news headlines have proclaimed that Hollywood is in the midst of a ‘sexual-harassment epidemic’, with fifty-seven women in total reporting Weinstein sexually harassed or assaulted them (see Fernandez 2017; Gibbs, 2017; Hesse 2017; Lee 2017; White 2017, to name just a few). The number is shocking, but the media’s use of the word ‘epidemic’ should be equally, if not more, disturbing to us. The word itself suggests a sudden onset, almost as if sexually aggressive male behaviour was a plague that has appeared out of nowhere, as if it has no history. To describe it as such is to confine these women’s stories to the alleged sexual deviancy of one man at a particular moment in history, rather than a widespread systematic abuse of power across centuries, cultures and continents.

Allow me as a woman first, and an academic second, to state unequivocally that sexual harassment is not an epidemic; it has been endemic to our society since time immemorial (D’Cruze 1992). To refute this notion, this article first establishes parallels between female experiences of sexual harassment and assault in the eighteenth century and the experience of those who have come forward in the Harvey Weinstein scandal today. One of the parallels is the use of contracts by men to control women, contracts that Carole Pateman (1988) argues are the product of the “original sexual-social contract”, which enabled “men to take charge of women’s bodies and women’s lives” (16). Such a parallel compels us to question how far we have really come as a society as far as institutional gender power imbalances are concerned. It also compels us to ask ourselves why the women in our culture have been quick to revile Harvey Weinstein and his recourse to such contracts (with good reason), but largely still revere his better-looking fictional doppelgänger, Christian Grey. The answer I believe lies in the eighteenth century, and another novel, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), a fairytale story of transformation in which the eponymous heroine turns a sexually aggressive man into marriage material (Armstrong 1987: 6), just as Anastasia Steele similarly does in E.L. James’s novels *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed* (both 2012). This article contends that both novel and trilogy have been immensely popular with female readers precisely because the contract(s) men use to control them in life, become the means by which both female characters negotiate their way out of danger in the world of the novel, something the female reader cannot assuredly do.

Re-Reading *Pamela* after the Harvey Weinstein Scandal

In “Putting Rape Research in Context”, Alexandra Rutherford (2011) states “sexual violence, or the threat thereof, has been an omnipresent part of women’s lives throughout history” (342). As young women, we live in the shadow of this threat, avoiding behaviour that would make the ‘monster’ emerge full-blooded, full-bodied and human. We are told we shouldn’t dress as if we were ‘asking for it’. Drinking excessively is best avoided altogether, as it might give men the wrong impression. We should never lose control of ourselves, or put ourselves in positions where we are alone, whether walking home in the dark or with a man in a room. Rutherford argues that the feminist movement in the 1970s alerted the public to the “alarming normalcy” of sexual violence in society (342). I would argue that, in 2017, the Harvey Weinstein scandal has had the same effect, recreating an environment in which women have felt empowered to make their private experiences of sexual harassment public. One instance of this would be the use of the hashtag #metoo, which has drawn public attention to the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment and assault across multiple industries, and institutions (Gilbert 2017). It is often said we’ve come a long way, but the structure of our society, which still privileges men over women, has not fundamentally changed. Consider Regan Shelton’s account of indentured female servants in America during the eighteenth century:

[They] faced gender and sexual discrimination as bound labourers in colonial America. The rape of a servant by a master was difficult to prove in court, and many cases probably went unreported due to a servant’s fear of the master’s reprisals. Most female servants had left their families in Europe and had few relatives and friends who could provide protection for them in America. Even if a woman pursued her case in courts, judges and juries could interpret cases of sexual assault and rape as consensual relationships, privileging a master’s version of the event. (2004: 107)

This account not only mirrors the situation women face today in general, but is also eerily similar to the specific stories of the women who have accused Weinstein of sexual harassment and assault. Ashley Judd, for instance, left Kentucky, to make it in Hollywood, leaving her friends and family behind, as many other women did (ABC News 2017), only to be threatened later in her successful career by Weinstein. Women who were allegedly abused by Weinstein similarly did not speak out because they too feared ‘reprisals’. Asia Argento did not come forward until now as she feared he would ‘crush’ her, as she believes he has done to others (Farrow 2017a). Judd likewise didn’t report the harassment, thinking no one at the time would believe her; even when she recently chose to speak out with others against Weinstein, she was still not sure if their stories would be taken seriously (ABC News 2017).

However, the use of the word ‘bound’ in the above-quoted passage is striking, and makes for an astounding parallel for just as female servants were contractually bound to their masters I would argue that the women who were harassed and assaulted by Weinstein were similarly bound. In all of the cases, there was an unspoken contract, the one that stated that if they complied with his sexual demands, he would use his power to act as their protector and provider in the show-business world. Failure to comply meant their careers would be ruined before they even began. He allegedly told Heather Kerr, Lupita Nyong’o and countless others that this is ‘how

Hollywood worked' and how award-winning actresses were made (Davies and Khomami 2017). Sometimes, these contracts materialised as actual physical documents. He is said to have offered Mylene Klass a sex contract during the Cannes film festival in 2010 (Davies and Khomami 2017). Other allegations against Weinstein suggest written contracts were used more frequently to silence women who might make sexual harassment claims. This suggestion is supported by his own contract, written in 2015, which allegedly states "the board of his film company could not terminate his employment over sexual harassment claims if he paid off women to silence them" (Bird and Alexander 2017).

All of these actual contracts are arguably reflections of what Carole Pateman calls "the original contract", the 'sexual-social pact' that assures 'men's freedom, and women's subjugation' (2). She argues that this 'original contract', the brain child of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, on which our modern society is founded and modern patriarchy originates from, gives men control over women, and their bodies (2, 16). It is perhaps not surprising then that Richardson's Mr B, a Weinsteinesque character, similarly makes use of contracts in *Pamela*, to which the essay now turns its focus.

Pamela, written in epistolary form, is in a sense, the eighteenth-century fictional equivalent of the personal essay denouncing Weinstein published by Lupita Nyong'o in *The New York Times*. Its first volume recounts a young woman's desperate efforts to refuse a powerful man's attempts at seduction, and assault. Interestingly, the novel's reception mirrors the experiences of actual sexual assault victims today, as Anti-Pamelist responses such as Fielding's spoof *Shamela* called into question Pamela's version of events as well as her virtue (Font 2017). As Natalie Roxburgh (2012) points out, Richardson ensured that the same does not happen with his second heroine, Clarissa, as her story is corroborated through others' letters (403). Harvey Weinstein's accusers employed the same strategy by corroborating each other's stories to overpower their own seducer-rake figure. The story of a single woman may not be sufficient evidence for a court of law, but let us for a moment give Ms. Pamela Andrews the opportunity to share her story, without feeling the need to ask her why she chose to dress in such a way as to attract Mr B's attention on the day when the second assault occurred (Please refer to Letter XXIV, which the defence would have submitted for evidence if this were a real trial).

Pamela's 'relationship' with Mr B begins when he singles her out of all the servants at the behest of his mother, promising to be a "friend to her" and offering her a job (Richardson, Volume 1, Letter I, 43). Although her parents view all of his offers with suspicion, Pamela sees the clothes he gives both her and Mrs Jervis as an indication of his goodness, and not as the beginnings of an unspoken contract negotiation with her physical body on the table (Volume 1, Letter VI, 49). She first becomes uncomfortable, behaving "awkwardly", when he isolates her in her "late lady's closet", and gives her even "more fine things", including "silk stockings"—the risqué lingerie of the eighteenth century:

'Your poor lady, Pamela', said he, 'was finely shaped, though in years, and very slender'. I was quite astonished and unable to speak for a while; but yet, I was inwardly ashamed to take the stockings [...] I believe I received them awkwardly; for he smiled at my awkwardness, and said, 'Don't blush, Pamela: dost think I don't know pretty maids wear shoes and stockings?' (Volume 1, Letter VII, 50-51)

The inappropriateness of the above situation would have been felt by contemporary readers, just as a modern reader would be scandalised if a retail manager were to corner a young sixteen year-old clerk in a changing room and force her to accept several pairs of panties. It is a clear abuse of power. The modern reader is perhaps also just as shocked as Pamela at Mr B's assessment of his mother, described as "finely shaped", getting on a bit, but still "very slender". There is no mention of his relationship to her, pointing to a society that has, and continues to teach men, to reduce women to mere bodies. His knowledge of women is intimately physical, which perhaps goes over Pamela's head at the time as she is too busy blushing from the first scandalous remark, but leaves the reader with the disturbing thought that there have been other "pretty maids" who have received gifts of "shoes and stockings".

Soon after giving her these gifts, Mr B attempts to seduce Pamela, calling her "my girl" and suggesting he is "resolved to do" something for her, if [she] continue[s] faithful and obliging" (Volume 1, Letter XI, 55). Initially struck silent with fear by Mr B's patriarchal language of ownership and exchange, she somehow manages to express her preference to serve Lady Davers. However, he cuts her off, as Weinstein did to Lupita Nyong'o in her own account, and belittles her preference by calling her "a little fool", who does not know "what's good for [her]". Mr B's promise "to make a gentlewoman of [her], if [she] is obliging, and [doesn't] stand in [her] own light" precedes Pamela's assault. She informs the reader that "he kissed me two or three times with frightful eagerness" while she struggled, and tries to escape. When she does, he locks her in; her refusal to comply is met with anger, and then derision. The first attempt at assault ends with him putting gold in her hands "to make amends for the fright [he] has put her in", "charg[ing]" her "to say nothing" (Volume 1, Letter XI, 56). The language used here is reminiscent of the financial settlements Weinstein made with his own real-life Pamelas, like Rose McGowan, giving them money in exchange for their silence.

Moreover, like Weinstein, Mr B also suppresses information, employing his network of household spies to steal Pamela's letters as Weinstein did (Farrow 2017b). We know this because Pamela, writing to her parents, tells them that the account they hold in their hands of Mr B's unwanted sexual advances is her second attempt to report her experiences because the first letter was stolen (Volume 1, Letter X, 53). As the novel progresses, he isolates her, physically moving her to a place where family and friends cannot help her. Once isolated, and after several more unsuccessful assaults, he offers her a proposal, offering her money, clothing and jewels, so he can keep her as his mistress (Volume 1, 'Twelve o'Clock, Saturday Noon', 227). This is a contract in which she must exchange her body for wealth and "reputation"; the alternative is to be penniless, and ruined.

Richardson's decision then to strikingly lay Pamela's answers against Mr B's proposals, marks the novel's shift from depicting reality to fabricating fantasy. Pamela is made to appear as if she is fully in control, in spite of her circumstances, negotiating with the master as an equal (227-231; 'Twelve o'Clock, Saturday Noon'). In the real world of masters and female servants, the sexual-social contract allowed for no such negotiations. Female readers of the novel, a good many who were, like Pamela, "literate and leisured waiting maids" (Watt 2001: 47) would have applauded her virtuosic abilities to negotiate her way out of servanthood and sexual ruin into a marriage with a man of wealth and status who loved her. For them, it was the stuff of

fantasy, an escape from a world which contractually bound them to their masters until they were of age, or married with their permission (Watt 2001) . It was also an escape from the all-too real story of a master's sexual desire for a servant girl, a story that seldom had a happy ending, if ever.

A Dark Contemporary Fantasy: *Fifty Shades of Grey*

If Pamela was an eighteenth-century female fantasy, *Fifty Shades of Grey* is ours. Both female protagonists are presented with contracts by their male pursuers/seducers, and by virtue of who they are (and because they are 'virtuous' virgins), they manage to negotiate their way out of the bedroom (or red room) into respectable/vanilla marriages by the third volume. What's more, to echo James Turner (1994), reception is indeed "too mild a word" to describe the crazes that ensued following the publications of these stories (70). Both stories have inspired fierce support, and intense hatred, been translated into multiple languages and sparked innumerable parodies. In the eighteenth century, there were Pamela tea-cups and fans (Doody 1985); today, we have an Ann Summers's line of *Fifty Shades*-inspired lingerie and sex toys.

The similarities are uncanny, but the one that shocks (and outrages) many is that both have been predominantly read and enjoyed by women. As feminists we can explain how an eighteenth-century female readership might have enjoyed a novel that set a woman character centre-stage, and allowed her to rise above her social station through marriage, but how do we even begin to rationalise Christian Grey's sex symbol status in today's day and age? But this is perhaps our mistake, because as this essay, and the Harvey Weinstein scandal, are showing, the sexual-social pact—"the means through which patriarchy [was] constituted" (Pateman: 2)—is as powerful today as it was in the mid eighteenth century.

At the beginning of this article, I quoted from Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. Armstrong (1987) doesn't specify the gender of the readers she is referring to, so I will here. Female readers are the ones "enchanted by narratives in which a woman's virtue alone overcomes sexual aggression and transforms male desire into middle-class love" (6). I would suggest we love them because they are our escape from a world of Weinsteins, where sexually aggressive male desire is not something we can control. This is why we love fairy stories, where Beauty is able to transform the Beast, a story-turned-film that I might add was a major hit at the box office this year again, just months before the Weinstein scandal broke. Moreover, given that Weinstein allegedly lured many women under the guise of business meetings, it should perhaps not be surprising that we also love stories where female protagonists appear to negotiate on equal terms with a powerful male figure. In the *Fifty Shades* film, the "business meeting is given particular prominence, as Anastasia Steel is portrayed as sitting at the head of a conference table, directly opposite Christian Grey, confidently commanding her meeting and striking out what displeases her" (Youtube 2015). Admittedly, this is only an illusion of control, and a dangerous one at that, as the business meeting is a negotiation of his access to her body. Similarly, the marriages with which Pamela and Anastasia are rewarded, and women get misty-eyed over, are also ultimately contracts that tie them to less-than-savoury men (Pateman 1988: 4).

In order to conclude, I would like you, the reader, to consider the stories of Ashley Judd and Asia Argento. Trapped with Harvey Weinstein, Ashley Judd managed to negotiate her way out by making a 'deal': if she won an Oscar, she would sleep with him (ABC News 2017). It was hardly a fair negotiation; he had all the power, and she had none, but she used 'business talk' to gain control, and escape. Asia Argento, who was not as successful in escaping, wrote and starred in a movie scene in which the character she plays is trapped in a room with a man who tries to sexually assault her, but manages to run away (Argento in Hooton 2017). In light of these two stories, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that this is all that *Pamela* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* are: fictions that allow women who cannot negotiate on equal terms in the 'business meetings' of a Weinstein world to temporarily escape into a fantasy where they can. Of course, it is an illusion, and the 'deals' Judd, Pamela and Anastasia make are far from ideal. But when you consider the all-too-real alternative, can you really blame the women who run into whatever way they can?

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Laura Gutiérrez González, A Gendered Approach to Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets: Mariamu's Identity*

From the criticism on *The Book of Secrets* (1994) one can realize that this novel by M.G. Vassanji was written to meticulously depict the cultural and political discomfort in Africa in the Post-colonial period. Thus, it mainly deals with racial and class issues, but this does not mean that these two aspects are the only ones that can be found within the novel. The representation of femininity—or gender issues in general—is also latent within this story, particularly through Mariamu, the main female protagonist. From my own understanding of the novel and literature, I found this female representation to be a correlation of the traditional view of unknown and wild places as virgin feminized land. These territories have been seen as feminine because they are something men can own, conquer and rule (and this does not only mean the land but the native women within it) and because both Africa and African women have been seen as wild, dangerous and difficult to master. As Ojwang claims in his article “The pleasures of knowing: Images of “African” in East African Asian Literature”, “Africa is feminized at those instances when a rationale is needed for its exploitation” (2000: 61).

Now, essentially we need to look at a more specific African community. This is the case of the Shamsis, the hybrid Indian community (it has both Islam and Hindu patterns in its religious background) to which Mariamu belongs and also the central community of the novel. I mention the word “hybrid” because Africans and Indians are not seen in the same way. African women are seen as highly sexualized, wild, exotic; while Indian women are, rather, connected with protection and the cult of domesticity—to take care and protect the family unit and the home. Within the Shamsis, as it is mainly an Indian community, the family unit protected by the mother is central: the women have to keep not only their homes but the whole community unviolated. In fact, the Shamsi women are worried about the purity of its race (they care as much as racist whites), which is why they must protect the community from shame. Thus, the role of women in this community has to be taken into account since it is not so far at all from the British Empire tradition of women keeping the home under control.

The importance of this Shamsi hybridity lies in the fact that Mariamu is as hybrid as her community. She is daughter of an Indian man and a non-Indian woman, which makes her be characterized as a “chotara”. As it has been previously mentioned, the character of Mariamu plays an essential role in this novel. Not only because her figure is a metaphor for the conquered Africa, but because she is a kind of pivotal point for the gendered relations, as well as the most mysterious and intriguing person in the novel, for both the characters and the reader. We see her in this way because she is silenced, voiceless, and thus, we are unable to get information from her (in fact, probably this silence is what makes her mysterious). All what we know about Mariamu is from others’ perspective; thus, Corbin describes her as “strikingly beautiful, a half-cast of partly Arab or Indian blood, partly African” (22), with “[e]yes large, black, and deep, on her lips an indifferent even arrogant smile. Her features were markedly

distinct from other women's, so that she seemed an outsider of some sort: tall and thin, fair, with long face, pronounced nose, full lips" (48).

The fact that Mariamu does not talk too much through the novel could be seen, from my point of view, in two different ways. On the one hand, it could be a marginalization of the character. Leaving her without a voice would mean that she is oppressed by others who speak for her, so people around her diminish Mariamu to stunt her personality. This not only happens with the men she meets, Corbin or her husband Pipa (who, in fact, treated her dreadfully a few times), but also with her community. Mariamu's strangeness, which even led the Shamis to attempt to exorcise her, is such that her people often reject her; she is silenced, perhaps, rather than silent. On the other hand, her voicelessness could be an act of rebelliousness, a premeditated action which prevents others from controlling her voice. Which one, then, is the real Mariamu?

Before making a decision, we need to bear in mind that, as a ghost after she is raped and murdered, Mariamu actually has a voice—at least a more powerful one—which she uses to communicate with Pipa (this post-mortem voice could be a reason to think that she was previously silenced). Whether her silences are forced on her or not, it is undeniable that the depth of Mariamu's character is out of reach for most since, silenced or silent, she has a very strong attitude and conduct. In fact, there is a moment in the book when Corbin is so disturbed by her "bipolar" behaviour that he does not know what to think about her:

[t]he impetuous girl who walked in past my askari and spoke directly to me, then the silent girl who left chapattis for me on Thursday, the girl humiliated by the maalik's switch, the proud girl holding her uncovered head high and staring directly at me, and now the quiet and shy housekeeper. Which is the real one? (86)

This is the main question of the whole book and the deepest secret: who is Mariamu, what is she actually like? Although the answer to this question is not provided in the book and, thus, it is difficult to narrow down, we cannot forget that almost everything we get about her is from a masculine perspective: she is always filtered through a male narrative voice and a male gaze. In those times, the 1910s, (and unfortunately not only then), females—and more specifically non-white women—were seen as inferior creatures that could be penetrated, subdued and explained away. Yet, it could also be the case that the information we get about Mariamu is based on misinterpretations by the men who describe her and, thus, be wrong.

Tightly related to this idea of male gaze is the representation of the body, in this case, not only any woman's body, but Mariamu's body. In fact, the very first times we read Corbin describing Mariamu this is done through her body, with a certain erotic interest (when he presents her as a seductress, due to her dancing), although apparently Corbin harbours no romantic feelings towards her. The body of this female protagonist not only appears in Corbin's words, but also several times through Pipa's narrative. About their wedding night, when Pipa is about to possess her, we read: "Tonight I'll be the teacher, he thought, recalling an analogy given [to] him earlier that evening. I'll be the teacher, and teach by inflicting a little pain. This is how it has to be, how it always is" (104-105). Later, a humbled Pipa calls into question Mariamu's virginity and raises the suspicion that their grey-eyed, pale-skinned son Ali might be

actually Corbin's. Years later, when Ali requests a drawing of his mother, by then dead, Pipa again remembers his wife through her physical appearance.

The representation of Mariamu's body is connected, thus, with her virginity, which is, of course, also related with the virginity of the land. Although this is never really clarified, Mariamu may have been firstly conquered and uprooted by a white man (Corbin), instead of being deflowered by a member of her society, Pipa. Thus, despite her strangeness, Mariamu as a whole, with her attitude and her body, psychologically and physically, is a great metaphor for the Indian-African lands and their inhabitants.

Finally, I would like to point out the relation between Mariamu and Corbin's diary, "the book of secrets" referenced in the novel's title. Again, we find questions with no answers, the reason why she stole the book remains unknown and so do all the issues that surround this mystery, such the relation between Mariamu and Corbin (of which, of course, we have too few details). But the truth is that, at the end of the novel, the reader can connect the diary with Mariamu's spirit, as Pipa does, because it seems he has a closer connection with her when she is dead than when she was alive. It is as if Mariamu's bodiless essence would satisfy Pipa far more than a physical Mariamu, who could never really be controlled or known.

The identity of Mariamu is, and remains, a mystery for everyone. Her silences—forced or chosen—and her distance from the people that surround her reinforce the impossibility of discovering the unknowable. As Pipa once notes, "To him she would always be a mystery" (146). Thus, this enigma of Mariamu's character as a whole, poses a challenge to all the great white notions about white colonization, for the colonized woman remains both silent and unknown. And, thus, unconquered.

SEE ALSO

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