How has the evolution of social stigmas surrounding the makeup industry affect teenagers from a conservative society?

Teenagers and The Makeup Stigma

The mere concept of human existence may not be flawed but it is ironic. Living in a close knit community to defy their fear of isolation, humans have an overwhelming tendency of isolating anything that does not reflect their definition of normality. This contradiction in human existence is one of the many effects that social stigmas have given birth to. Various variations in the definition of what social stigma entails can all be summed up by author Goffman’s definition, which in mentioned in article ‘Conceptualizing stigma’; “attribute that is deeply discrediting[…] from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Link 3). Therefore, it includes anything that fluctuates from societal norms and, is thus labelled as ‘wrong’ by the majority and earns the honor of facing society’s disproval. Gay marriages, tattoos, women’s voting rights and mental illnesses, have all suffered the burden of being a social stigma and, to some extent, have been successful in removing this tag and thus we can conclude that social stigmas are dynamic in nature. Every culture and society have their own norms and as those norms change, so do social stigmas. Living in today’s world where women are contending for equal pay, a fight for their basic voting rights seems surreal, however, that fight did take place because there was once a time when society disproved of women being opinionated. Russell in the article ‘How
Anticipated and Experienced Stigma Can Contribute to Self-Stigma’ talks about how social stigmas promote the culture of "otherisation" by isolating the unusual and gives birth to issues like discrimination and racism (2). It is highly essential for a society’s cohesiveness that these delinquents and misfits of the society are removed from the bane of being taboo issues and, are widely discussed and accepted. One of these social stigmas is the usage and implications of makeup in a conservative society; a society that loathes change and believes in the ‘working’ of the traditional methods. In this dynamic world, where new innovative means of expressing one’s self are being constantly developed, there are still some societies that consider the use of makeup corrupt and ward their kin from it. Although make up, throughout history, has been used as a security blanket, nevertheless, it is the disability of the society to accept change that generated social stigmas such as makeup being sexual, gender specific and an advocate for double standards.

Call it sin or call it art, makeup has been a part of this world since early Egyptians invented eye makeup. Like every form of art, it has immensely flourished through history and like every form of sin, it has been immensely tarnished through history. During the medieval period, which accounts for 5th century to 15th century, makeup was deemed as a sin of vanity by churches. It was a period where applying makeup was not contemplated on as a ‘respectable’ act and only ill women were allowed to wear it so that their husbands find them attractive. Following this, the Elizabethan Era consisting of the 16th century told a completely opposite story. In this time period, the Queen Elizabethan travelled a lot and adopted several makeup tactics. Following her suit, the nobility started practicing the art of makeup. However, when the plague dug its claws, upper class women used it to cover their scars and hence associating makeup with disease. This association made makeup, once again, unpopular but to only a limited
extend as women regardless of the accusation, still used it. Progressing to the 17th century, the perception about makeup relapsed. As makeup was being used to hide leftovers of illnesses, the church once again started protesting against it, calling it the ‘devil’s work.’ The church and other religious entities banned makeup and called it a tool of witchcraft used to seduce men. According to Ogilvie in her article, ‘Why women wear lipstick’, the British parliament banned the usage of lipstick in the 17th century (2). Hence, makeup was sexualized and deemed inappropriate. In the 18th century, transportation links developed and the age of enlightenment started. Makeup during this time period flourished but quickly became unpopular when lead poisoning took lives. Lead was used to make these make up products. At the very end, only actresses and prostitutes were availing the use of heavy makeup, further increasing the trend of relating makeup with sexual behavior whereas the rest opted for a more natural makeup look. It was not until 20th century that the social stigmas surrounding makeup reduced. During the 20th century, makeup trends rapidly changed and so did the social stigmas attached to those trends. Even though makeup was no longer bounded by the constraints of class or religion, people still viewed it with mixed feelings of admiration and disgust. Today, according to a report presented by Nguyen in ‘Infographic: The Global Cosmetics Market’ using statistics provided by IBIS World and a report represented by IBIS World, the makeup industry accounted for 313 million dollars and provided employment to around 1,044,000 people. In the 21st century, makeup has been able to integrate itself into the economy of different countries and maintained a strong hold so that it does not, once again, relapse.

The Butterfly effect states the small incidents and accidents lead to much larger incidents or accidents. These small incidents may appear trivial on their own but, unknowingly, they are contributing towards change. That is the relationship of makeup and the patriarchal system that
dominates the world. History played its part in women oppression through restricting the use of makeup, which on its own, may seem insignificant but has led to the successful operation of the system. It is, this system that the conservative societies attempt to preserve when they claim that makeup promotes sexual behavior and thus form a social stigma that usage of makeup violates. As mentioned by Thomas, in ‘The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability,’ that “Critics of cosmetics associated their use with women's ability to deceive men and take their money” (18). It articulated the assumption that women wear makeup to impress men. However, what the conservative society fails to understand is that makeup is seen by women to empower themselves. It gives them confidence and a way to express themselves as an individual. This is explained by Lisa Eldridge who is quoted in an article ‘Why do girls wear makeup?’ written by Cosslett; “After 20 years working as a makeup artist I can say quite confidently that women wear makeup for themselves. There are many different roles makeup can play in a woman’s life. There’s the playful and creative aspect – who doesn’t enjoy swirling a brush in a palette of colour? Then there’s the confidence-building aspect – why not cover a huge red blemish on your nose, if you can? Finally, there is an element of war paint and tribalism. Makeup can make you feel more powerful and ready to face any situation.” The second assumption this social stigma entails is that heavy makeup is worn by women of ‘questionable’ character. The stigma justifies that wearing makeup is somehow an indication by girls that they want or have sexual relationships. Hence, this is used to call girls profound language such as ‘slut’ or ‘whore’ because she committed the crime of wearing makeup. Thomas points out this flaw by mentioning how a marketing report focused on women and makeup, claimed that continuous use of makeup evokes “unfavorable comment” and the content of these comments is described by Thomas as “impugned the woman's sexual morality and class standing” (19).
Moreover, another social stigma that the conservative society has attached to makeup is that it is gender specific. This ideology promotes one of the most important issue in today’s world; gender discrimination. If makeup is considered a mean of expression then it is everyone’s basic right to use it, even males. Even though this right is granted through written and unwritten constitutions and is embedded into legal systems, the society is still able to deprive a whole gender from this right just by defining one word. This social stigma was formed when ‘masculinity’ was defined as ‘traditional’ traits that a man possesses. Courtenay in ‘Constructions of masculinity’ quotes “men and boys who attempt to engage in social action that demonstrates feminine norms of gender risk being relegated to the subordinated masculinity of ‘wimp’ or ‘sissy’” (5). Society, yet again, fails to comprehend the pressure these words put on a male and how it kills his individuality in order to maintain ‘gender roles’. Ironically, makeup was first invented for men and has been used by royalty however, according to traditions, men do not wear makeup. Even though we proclaim to live in a free world, yet, we are enslaved by narrow ideologies and concepts. Men, rebels, defied this societal norm and started not only to apply makeup on others as a profession but also started to apply it on themselves. The only issue with this new development is that instead of the society accepting this change as a gateway to break creativity bounds with open arms, these men were ridiculed and harassed. Therefore, even though the sail has been set, however, they are still miles away from living in a free world as the world has not yet fully accepted the fact that creativity has no bounds.

Staring at those ‘perfect’ faces and admiring them and, yet denying the use of makeup to enhance beauty has led to our society attaining double standards. The entire concept of the word natural is using an objective term to describe a subjective world and,
therefore, the word loses its objectivity. People widely have an opinion of what natural looks like; rosy pink cheeks and lips with clear skin. This prospection is heavily supported media which uses compliments to describe celebrities and criticizing them if they do not use makeup to match those unrealistic beauty standards. However, the roles are reserved in a conservative society. People widely criticize women near them for wearing makeup by labelling them as ‘fake’ and at the same time rejects their flaws as if their imperfections and differences existed because they do not truly desire ‘beauty’. Katharine T. Bartlett adequately explains in her article ‘Only Girls Wear Barrettes’: “She must not distract others with her sexiness, and thus must be wrapped tight and inaccessible, but she cannot be too independent, and thus should be appropriately exposed […]” (8). Their disapproval, however, does not stomp their requirement for a women to always appear presentable. As long as they, the society, cannot identify the existence of makeup on a woman’s skin, she escapes the contradiction in their ideology and expectations. A recent study mentioned in the article ‘Cosmetics as a Feature of the Extended Human Phenotype,’ done by a group of experts with authentic afflictions proves the existing double standards in our society. The study comprised of 149 adults, which consisted of 61 men and 88 women, all belonging from diverse backgrounds. In the study, women were applied three different modes of makeup; natural, professional and glamorous. The results proved that even though professional and glamorous looks ranked the same as natural looks in terms of attractiveness, however, natural looks were given more points for ‘likability’ and ‘trustworthiness’ (8). Millard, expressing the same view, quotes Richens in her article; “It is widely known that, among other factors, advertising heavily influences beauty standards and that women in particular compare themselves with models despite the gap between
retoothed perfection and reality” (Performing Beauty: Dove’s “Real Beauty” Campaign 147)

Makeup makes feminism tangible. Of the many roots feminism stands on, falsifying societal pressure on women to behave as society deems ‘appropriate’ can be vigorously achieved by makeup. Putting on that dash of red wax on a person lips holds promise of achieving even the impossible and this sudden boast of confidence can also be identified by the rest of the community. Thus, the society’s assumption about makeup being used as a protective gear is correct however it is the negativity they attach to this assumption that gives birth to it being viewed as a social stigma. The only contradiction makeup holds; it protects one from the society therefore one is hiding behind it even though it often argued as a means to express oneself through. In a recent case study conducted by Buckinghamshire Chilterns University paired up a leading brand of makeup; L’Oréal, shows exactly why the community perceives makeup as a security blanket. The study was done through a questionnaire online that consisted of 323 responses out of whom 171 claimed to be women and 152 claimed to be men. These participants were shown two photographers of the same women, one with makeup application and one without it. The results showed that pictures with makeup application were perceived as more healthy and confident with higher salaries than those without makeup on their faces. It was further concluded that that women with makeup on were assumed to be of ‘high’ and ‘average’ social standing whereas women without it were of ‘low’ social standing. Therefore, makeup seems to build an aura of impenetrability around women. Before understanding this aspect it is first essential to understand that makeup does not give its applicant a new face, it simply enhances their existing facial features and makes their face appear more
symmetrical. This concept is the framework on which women explore. Knowing that cosmetics only does wonder to these faces because of the canvas provided by their features stimulates a positive image of themselves in their minds. Schweitzer mentions in his article ‘The Mad Search for Beauty’ that “Every woman could be beautiful if she devoted herself to consumption. Physical appearance was no longer a direct reflection of a woman’s interior life but was rather something she could alter to express her individuality” (27). Therefore, in a world where quantity is slowly triumphing quality, it is essential for everyone to maintain their differences and uniqueness and, to express it through any form of express they choose. One does hide behind the layers of makeup and that’s a given however the mere application of it is expressing one’s personality.

Adolescence is often extremely similar to wet clay. It is molded, remolded and reshaped until it dries out and there is no way to change it without returning it to its original form; wet clay. Teenagers are the same. They are being constantly reshaped and molded by the society, their personal experiences, families and other external elements until they reach adulthood. However, unlike wet clay, adults cannot go back to their original form; children. Therefore, their exposure to everything becomes critical. Social Stigmas tend to very permanent and deep effects on the minds of teenagers. Firstly, they limit a teenager’s capacity to form individual opinions. Society often makes social stigmas taboo to talk about and therefore it puts boundaries to the exposure that teenagers can experience. Boys, in a conservative society, will always be under the impression that girls wear makeup to impress them and that usage of makeup is against the terms of ‘masculinity’ and they wouldn’t dare to research and form their own opinions about it in fear of being shunned by their relatives and friends. This fear of isolation leads to mental issues such as depression
and social anxiety. Hatzenbueh mentions in ‘How Does Stigma "Get Under the Skin"?’ article that “more recently, the fields of clinical psychology and public begun to link stigma-related stressors to adverse mental and behavioral health outcomes across several stigmatized groups […]” (2). Secondly, they degrade a teenager’s self-esteem for being different. Girls, in a conservative society, will always be under the impression that usage of makeup or any form of self-expression will earn them labels such as ‘floozy’ and ‘fake’ and, they wouldn’t dare oppose or accuse the society for being discriminating because there is a reason traditional ways have prevailed so far. As Crocker mentions in ‘Social Stigma and Self-Esteem’ article that “Many classic analyses of stigmatization assume that negative images and stereotypes are internalized, resulting in stable low self-esteem in the stigmatized across many situations” (1). Hence, they are too afraid of being themselves and in the process they often forget their self-worth and start accepting the worth the community around them ‘bestows’ upon them.

Let’s envision a brave new world where gender does not decide your salary, where tolerance is not just a law and where social stigmas do not develop our future generations. In order to be a part of such a world it is important for us and our future generations to realize that having opinions and personal preferences, which do not go in line with those of others, is perfectly acceptable. As Martin Luther King, Jr. mentions in his speech ‘I Have a Dream’ that, “This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism” (1), time is essence and if voice against these social stigmas is not raised then it will remain to dominate our societal interactions. It is essential for creativity and innovation that people understand that discussion can be constructive and differences can be celebrated. It is through these future implications that the evolution
social stigmas surrounding the makeup industry can finally come to its end. Even though make up is used as a shield, it is also used as a tool of expression. Usage of creativity does not always have to be sexual and gender specific and the societal double standards can ease when a bridge between ideology and expectations can be built. Overthrowing this scorching heat of social judgments and stigmas, the brave new world will give birth to the oasis of uniqueness and in that oasis, the usage of makeup will no longer be criticized for promoting individuality.
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'Practice makes perfect'. There is a great likelihood that most of the children on this planet have heard this phrase at least once in their lifetimes, if not in the English language then their own unique indigenous tongues. Perfection is a concept that has been sought after since time immemorial throughout our planet’s history. Regardless of who they are or where they live, human beings have all made some attempt or the other to achieve perfection in something, regardless of how small or insignificant that something may be. Parents have urged their children to constantly aim for the top seat, the highest score, the best personality and the biggest dreams. But one must ask the question why. Why is it that perfection has been sought after so tirelessly? Why have common folk and world leaders alike been so captivated by the idea of achieving this perfect position in their lifetime? To understand this perhaps it is important to define what perfection truly is. Perfection in a broad and general sense would be a state of flawlessness. It is not surprising then that people of ancient societies and those of relatively recent ones have been so mesmerized by the prospect of achieving this state of being. From the time of Plato and his works of the Perfect Utopian Society to the attempts of Adolf Hitler and his urge to demonstrate the perfection of the German race, people in all times have been inspired to reach the pinnacle that is perfection. And yet another question arises in the backs of everyone’s mind. A question which they perhaps fear to consider or are terrified
Does perfection truly exist? And if it does should it even be pursued? Lucilio Vanini, a famous Italian free thinker, created a paradox of perfection and once said “the greatest perfection is imperfection” due to the simple fact that no matter how hard one tries to achieve perfection they will always find a flaw. Although it may be claimed by theology that perfection does indeed exist, if one was to look at perfection from several different angles such as a perfect society, ideology, race and even being, it would appear that perfection does not exist and should not in any manner be pursued as the consequences of achieving this unachievable state may not be as utopian as they appear.

When approaching the topic of a perfect society the first thing that comes to mind is Plato’s Utopian Society. Plato, a famous ancient Greek Philosopher wrote several writings and although little is known about his life due to a lack of surviving records it is unanimously agreed that he was one of the most influential figures in the development of philosophy in the Western tradition. In his book “The Republic” Plato writes about the ideal human society where justice prevails and there is equality and egalitarianism among the people. This society is devoid of any crimes, any injustice and is a world where one can enjoy peace and happiness without the worry or fear of oppression of any kind. Plato went on to write how such a society would be governed in the form of a hierarchy in which at the topmost position would be the “philosopher kings” who would maintain equality and ensure that every decision they make is in the best interests of society (1228, bk. 6). Their sole purpose would be to guard the people and their perfect society in every way possible. However realistically speaking if any society has a hierarchy of any kind it means that it is not truly equal. This is because one person or group of people holds more power than the rest of the masses. If this is the case then equality is not
achieved and egalitarianism cannot be realized. These so called “philosopher kings” hold
crucial amounts of power in this apparently utopian society and hence there would
need to be certain checks and balances to ensure that they do not misuse their power. But
no such checks and balances were provided in Plato’s Republic as it would mean an
unjust restriction on the society’s guardians. In his article “But Who Will Guard the
Guardians”, Leonid Hurwicz quotes Glaucon, a character in Plato’s Republic, who says
“It would be absurd that a guardian should need a guard”(577). And yet, throughout the
article, Hurwicz explains that the guardians do indeed need a type of “guard” who needs
to ensure that they do not abuse their powers and falter from their path. Hurwicz does this
using certain theories from economics such as Game Theory to explain that typical
human nature always makes one favor the side which brings the most personal benefit to
oneself even if it is at the expense of others. He writes in his article that if all other people
in a certain game have told the truth about their preferences “you will in general gain by
misrepresenting your preferences”(579). Taken in the context of a utopian society this
means that if the philosopher kings were to manipulate or deceive the local masses they
would be able to make a personal benefit of any kind by extorting the masses in a way
that makes it appear that their actions are in the interest of the public good when in reality
they are merely for personal gain. In such a scenario, Utopia cannot exist as there will
always be the possibility of an unjust use of power. If the philosopher kings are allowed
to do as they please they will have the option to abuse their rights but if their power is
curtailed that will also be an unjust implementation of the power of the masses. Hence the
idea of a hierarchal utopian society is paradoxical in the sense that in every case there
will always be an unjust use of power. A real life example of this situation appeared
during the French Revolution of 1789 led by Maximilien Robespierre. The French Revolution was initiated to overthrow the monarchy in France during that time to establish a perfect society for the masses which would have equality in rights, justice and opportunity. It was meant to achieve a state of egalitarianism based on merit in which even the poor would be able to achieve a worthy position in society if they had the skill for it and the rich would no longer be able to hide their crimes behind their wealth. (Doyle, 115). George L. Mosse describes the Revolution in his article as “the politicization of the masses” where “for the first time in modern history they functioned as a pressure group”(7), one which effectively overthrew the monarchy and led by their leader Robespierre, initiated the creation of the perfect society. However during the technical phases of this society’s creation Robespierre put himself in a place of power and promised to establish a system where there would be 20 other candidates for his seat who would rotate and have their own moments to take his place. This rotation never came to pass. Robespierre held his position maliciously and ensured that his power never left his side. In his article Mosse goes on to explain how all “fascisms shared the utopianism which was said to have inspired the masses during the French revolution”(7). This means that according to Mosse all revolutions so far which have been determined to achieve the perfect utopian society have been fascist and dictator-like in nature, far from the original ideal of what a utopian society should look like. Indeed the French Revolution started with the idea of achieving a perfect country but fell severely short of its objective as it entered a terrible period of time called the Reign of Terror. It is therefore evident that historically speaking the perfect society has failed to be achieved. This failure may also be due to the existence of a certain paradox in the idea of a perfect society. A perfect
society is one which has everything and is independent. It does not require any outside intervention to function. And yet a famous philosopher named Al-Farabi introduced a certain error in this definition of a perfect society. He claimed that Plato’s utopia is heavily reliant on other people. The masses will depend on the philosopher kings and the philosopher kings will depend on the masses. It will be a society where everybody is dependent on every other person. As long as this dependence exists, a society cannot be considered perfect as it has the limitation of the virtuousness of its people (228). Apart from this limitation he also mentioned another paradox at work. Any society cannot logically have everything. This is because if it has everything then it must also have innovation, development and progress. And yet if it has these three processes it would mean that there are still things which the society has not discovered, that there is still room for improvement. This contradicts its original statement that the perfect society has everything. Hence logically speaking the perfect society cannot exist due to the existence of this paradox.

Another angle from which the idea of perfection can be observed would be in terms of ideology. The perfect ideology has desperately been sought by world leaders throughout history. The first example of the perfect ideology starts with capitalism after the industrial era, where a class of intellectuals which Karl Marx referred to as the Bourgeoisie rose with the help of a free market system which Adam Smith claimed was influenced by an “invisible hand” (157). Capitalism gave these intellectuals the means to achieve great success in society but although it empowered the Bourgeoisie it left the working class, who could only make use of their physical labor, in a dire state. Capitalism was later seen as too cold a system which oppressed the masses for the benefit of a select
few and therefore could not be considered to be the perfect ideological system. Realizing
the horrors of capitalism rose Karl Marx who introduced a new ideology, that of
communism, to the world. He envisioned this to be the perfect ideology which would
create the perfect society. He also envisioned that the working class or rather the
proletariat shall rise and overthrow the Bourgeoisie to establish a government of the
masses. This vision reached the public through his writing of the Communist Manifesto
which spoke of his dream society and concluded with inspiring words like “let the ruling
classes tremble at a Communist Revolution” and “working men of all countries
unite”(66). Unfortunately this revolution was never initiated by the proletariat like Marx
had envisioned. The working men did not unite against the ruling class and failed to bring
Marx’s perfect ideology to life. Other leaders were however inspired by his writing to
create the perfect ideology of Communism. Leaders like Lenin during the Russian
Revolution wished to create a socialist society which would ensure equality and
egalitarianism for everyone in the country similar to what Marx had attempted. He placed
the Bolshevik Party in a position of power to make them responsible for distributing
equality. This party was called the Vanguard Party and was supposed to act like the
“philosopher king” in Plato’s Republic. Galian Golan explained in his article the
responsibilities of the Vanguard Party which were to” predominate over the mass
organizations and unions and represent the progressive classes and social groups of the
country” (599). However, when this party stayed in power for too long it became corrupt
and misused its abilities to ensure that the higher officials of the party make a personal
gain at the cost of the general public. They stepped beyond their power and rights to
abuse the rights of others. The party failed to “represent the…social groups of the
country” like it was supposed to and instead became more of a totalitarian and dictator-like entity. This was in no way the perfectly egalitarian world Marx had envisioned and it proved that the perfect ideology did not truly exist as it had failed to implement itself effectively. If this ideology was as perfect and egalitarian as it had claimed to be there would have been no convolution in its implementation.

The next angle of perfection to be analyzed is slightly more personal to humans in general as it deals with perfection in oneself and not our thoughts, philosophies and ideologies. Taking perfection in terms of the perfect person can be considered as a difficult topic to approach as different people may have different views of what the perfect person should be. For example there have been distinctions made between what Germany led by Hitler during the Second World War and what colonial powers such as Britain thought were the perfect race. Hitler’s Germany was inspired by a newfound love for Aryanism; the idea of the German people being the “master race” in the world. Whereas in Britain the British were considered to be superior than other races due to their enhanced education and civil behavior. These were two different race of people who considered themselves to be perfect based on different features. In Hitler’s Germany anyone who was not blond haired, blue eyed, tall, skinny but strong was considered a failure and an inferior member of the German race. As a result of imposing the dominance of his so called master race upon the world Hitler initiated genocide against the Jews who he considered to be the “enemies from within”. Apart from the Jews any person who was born with a disability was seen as a liability to the perseverance of the perfect Aryan race. Liabilities who he believed should be dealt with. Hence he initiated the Holocaust against the Jews and sent several disabled people to their deaths along with
them. (Friedlander, 667). This was the cost at which Hitler chased perfection. He believed that the dominance and victorious character of the Aryans must be displayed. Ironically Hitler was not victorious in the war and therefore the so called perfect dominance of his master race which had already cost the lives of millions of people seemed to be nothing but an imagination. A similar situation occurred with the British colonists. Despite the fact that they believed their education, morals, dignity and status was above that of all their colonies they could not hold these colonies for long. They wished to share their culture with the colonial states believing that these states wished for their perfect system of rule. Unfortunately the colonies did not believe in this perfect system and most of them eventually revolted until they were granted independence. Hence we see a failure in the idea of the perfect race. Neither the British nor the Germans among other races were able to maintain their apparently perfect racial superiority which only leads to the possibility that a perfect race does not exist. It can be supposed that perfection does not lie in such macro terms such as society, or race but instead can lie in micro situations such as in an individual or a person. The perfect person may be considered to be someone who is all good. Somebody who does nothing wrong and lets no evil affect his decisions. But this raises the question; what is good? In another of Plato’s works named “Euthyphro” the questions “what is holiness? What is sin? (5)” is addressed. Euthyphro’s dilemma is explained by Panos Dimas in his article when he says that if something is “loved by the gods….Socrates characterizes it as something that happens to it and therefore presupposes that the pious has already been constituted” (2). What this means is that we cannot be sure of what is good or bad because we do not know the real essence of what piety is. The basic question of the dilemma is: are morals
considered ethical because the gods say so or do the gods say morals are ethical because they actually are? It is impossible to answer this question as the essence of what constitutes as good, bad, ethical and unethical is uncertain at best. Therefore it is impossible to say what good and bad really are. Hence a perfect person cannot truly be all good because we do not know what constitutes as good.

The schools of theology may disagree with the idea that perfection does not exist by claiming that God is the proof of perfection. However this claim is highly controversial in the sense that the existence of God itself is a highly disputed topic. An ancient philosopher named Averroes created one of the most intriguing paradoxes of philosophy: The Omnipotence Paradox. In his article Douglas Walton uses the classic example of the rock to explain the paradox by asking the question “can an omnipotent being create a stone too heavy for him to lift?”(705). In Walton’s article the logic behind omnipotence is questioned by stating that an omnipotent being cannot possibly do everything. By creating a rock that is so heavy that even the being itself cannot lift it the omnipotent entity has created a situation where there is something he cannot do. For example if the being did create such a rock then it would mean that lifting the rock is a task that is impossible for him. At the same time however if he can manage to lift the rock it would mean that he has failed to create a rock too heavy for him to lift. In both cases the being finds that he is unable to perform one action or the other and hence his power is logically restricted. If any such restriction exists then the omnipotence of the being ceases to exist and hence logically speaking the idea of God itself seems illogical. This counters the argument of the theologians who claim that God must be a perfect
being due to his omnipotence because realistically omnipotence itself does not seem to exist.

After evaluating perfection from a series of different angles through history, logic and philosophy it appears that perfection does not exist at all and is in no way achievable. All attempts to achieve perfection throughout history have had severe costs such as the lives of millions and have ultimately failed to meet their goal even after such atrocious acts had been undertaken. Ideologies have failed to achieve perfect unity and equality among the masses and the perfect society has never once throughout history’s several revolutions come to pass. Evidently it seems that it is best to not pursue perfection at all. No matter how hard we may try to achieve a perfect society, ideology or being we will never reach this perfect standard because quite frankly this standard is paradoxical and non-existent. It is not right to spend the lives of millions of innocents in the name of revolutions that aim to achieve a goal which isn’t real. It is not wise to try to achieve the dream of a perfect person which does not even exist. Imperfections and flaws are what make people human. They are therefore necessary and must not be frowned upon. Lucilio Vanini’s paradox of perfection appears to be a part of us. It is a paradox that exists and always will exist alongside people. Historically people have tried to try to overcome it but perhaps it is about time they stop trying.
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Music Therapy for Children with Autism

Half a century ago, a Philadelphia born musician, Paul Nordoff, sat down to play for an unlikely audience; Johnny was a boy with special learning and behavioral needs who struggled to connect with people. But, when Nordoff began to play, something changed. The two were soon engaged in a dialogue through music. At the end of the session, Johnny wept openly. He was lively and exuberant. Johnny’s encounter with music changed his life and resulted in improvements that awed all those who worked with him (Reynolds). Music Therapy is a form of expressive therapy which uses music to enhance and maintain the physical, psychological and social well-being of individuals (“Music Therapy”). It is being used worldwide due to the impressive results it yields. It has not only touched the lives of those undergoing the therapy but also of those who administer it, as the metamorphosis it brings about in its patients is astonishing. It is no challenge to find stories illustrating the success of music therapy, however, the challenge lies in conveying through mere words the transformations it has brought about in people. One specific audience among whom music therapy has been exceptionally remarkable is children with autism. Autism spectrum disorders are characterized by “social interaction difficulties, communication challenges and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors” (“Symptoms”). Music Therapy has helped children with autism overcome these physiological and physical impediments and encouraged them to communicate, connect and gain confidence in
themselves ("Music and Autism Research"). The astonishing and inconceivable ways in which
music has influenced these children within short timeframes has made it one of the most popular
and widely used methods for therapy. Although many doctors favor medicinal remedies for
autistic children, music therapy has proven to be more effective because it improves behavior,
facilitates communication and encourages social interaction; furthermore, children with autism
have a profound connection with music.

Music therapy has proven to be an invaluable tool in improving the behaviors of children
with autism. Autistic children are generally prone to anxiety and frustration. They become easily
irritated and act out even upon the slightest discomfort or change in routine. Children with
autism generally have sensory sensitivities, meaning they are either hypersensitive or
hyposensitive ("Sensory Sensitivities"). Both these opposing conditions can elicit acute
responses from individuals. Hyposensitivity can result in a delayed response to injuries whereas
hyposensitivity can cause children to overreact to minor ones ("Sensory Sensitivities"). Children
may even eat foods of only certain textures ("Sensory Sensitivities"). In a situation where these
delicate sensitivities are disrupted, autistic children would respond negatively. Children with
autism are also prone to following rituals. They will consider it absolutely necessary for a certain
object to be in a certain place, to go to bed at a certain time or even to follow a specific route
when going to a certain location ("Obsessive Behaviour"). They interact with certain people on a
daily basis and deal with scenarios that are a part of their daily lives. If autistic children are faced
with a situation or required to adopt a skill set they are not familiar with, they become frustrated.
Even slight changes in their schedule such as a different setting to their room or a different route
being taken on their way to school can trigger severe outbursts. These outbursts can range from
crying and screaming to throwing tantrums and can get as alarming as triggering self-harm. Self-
harm is a behavioral issue that exists in under 30% of the children suffering from autism, which constitutes actions like hand-biting, head-banging, punching, excessive picking and scratching ("The Facts: Autism and Self-Harm"). Music can assist in preventing such emotional outbursts due to the effect it has on the psychology of people. Listening to music of a certain pitch can release hormones, such as dopamine, resulting in a feeling of euphoria and tranquility (Bergland). Music also affects the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which is the part of the brain responsible for managing extreme impulses and emotions ("How Music Changes Your Mood").

A research experiment conducted at the Universiti Putra Malaysia studied the effect of music in improving behavioral issues in autistic children. Forty-one children were divided into two age categories: between the age of 2 to 10 and 11 to 22. Music therapy sessions were carried out weekly, for a period of 10 months. A “Target Behavior Checklist”, designed to determine the results of the experiment, was used to evaluate the children’s behavior once a month by parents, teachers and music therapists. The findings exhibited that music therapy did indeed benefit the children by improving restlessness, temper tantrums and fidgety and inattentive behavior (C.M.). Moreover, a study conducted by the Journal of Music Therapy deduced that songs can create an emotional understanding in autistic children. The study aimed to convey different emotions using different songs. For example, the song “Happy” by Pharell Williams was used to convey feelings of joy and jubilation whereas a composition by Beethoven was used to convey feelings of sadness and melancholy (Goldstein). Similarly, different tunes and melodies can be used to arouse different emotions among children with autism, thus channeling their responses to different situations. A case proving this is one in which an autistic child experienced explosive outbursts and had to be physically contained to prevent him from harming himself. Continued sessions of music therapy enabled the child to control his reactions and allowed him to return to
his school and attend classes (Reynolds). Thus, music therapy can improve the behavior of autistic children by encouraging them to conduct themselves in a dignified manner and control any potential outbursts.

Moreover, music helps to overcome communication barriers that children with autism generally face. Up to 25% of autistic children are unable to communicate both verbally and non-verbally. Due to smaller amounts of gray matter and increased cortical thickness in regions of the brain such as the posterior cingulate and the precuneus region which are important for social cognition and speech development, communication barriers develop within children with autism (Schlaug). Many autistic children are unable to speak. Others may be able to pronounce words but are incapable of forming sentences or conducting a dialogue. Autistic children may suffer from a condition called “echolalia” in which they will repeat the same words they have heard over and over again ("Autism Spectrum Disorder"). If asked a question, they will simply repeat that question rather than replying with an answer. These children may even have uneven language development ("Autism Spectrum Disorder"). As a result they may be able to read words but will not comprehend what they have read or, if called upon, will not respond to their own names. In addition to impairments in verbal communication, children with autism are generally unable to decipher the meaning of various hand gestures or facial expressions. Fortunately, these communication obstacles can be overcome by music therapy. The human brain is capable of restructuring itself if provided with the correct stimuli (Schlaug). Music has been very successful in studying this brain plasticity. Research has shown that music-based speech therapy can increase fiber number and volume in the frontal-temporal tract that is responsible for many of the communication deficiencies in autistic children (Schlaug). As a result, interventions such as “auditory-motor mapping training”, also known as AMMT, are
being employed to improve both verbal and non-verbal communication. AMMT is an intervention which uses singing, motor activity and imitation to produce a speech output (Schlaug). It involves using drums to allow for the physical activity of both hands while singing. The movements of the hands engage a sensory motor network that employs articulatory movements in speech. Simultaneously, singing and imitation facilitate learning and increase responsiveness (Schlaug). The success of this intervention can be illustrated by a research experiment involving six non-verbal, autistic children, between the ages of 5-9, who underwent 40 sessions of treatment. The children showed remarkable improvements in speech production and displayed these improvements even several weeks after the sessions discontinued (Wan). Hence, music therapy has proven to be immensely beneficial in developing communication skills among children with autism.

Music therapy encourages social interaction among children with autism. The term autism itself is derived from the Greek word “autos” meaning self, thus implying that autism is a state in which a person is self-absorbed and creates a world for themselves in which they do not interact or communicate with outsiders ("Autism Spectrum Disorder"). This stems from the fact that autistic children have a smaller amount of brain tissue in the superior temporal and the temperoparietal cortex, regions of the brain affiliated with the processing of socially relevant information, in particular the ability to understand people’s minds and take into account different perspectives (Szalavitz). Consequently, children with autism develop certain social deficiencies. For example, these children lack the attention span required to relate to things and events around them. They will lose focus and will either not respond or will respond inadequately when being called upon. Over time, their peers will realize that they are not being acknowledged and will therefore disengage any social interaction. Children with autism are also at times unable to
express their emotions or understand the perspectives and feelings of other people ("Why Social Behaviour"). When put in a situation they are unfamiliar with and cannot comprehend or are unable to convey how they feel, they will withdraw and seclude themselves from the situation. Autistic children sometimes may even feel that they are different from others and that others cannot relate to them. They may be treated differently which will result in a feeling of non-conformity, inciting them to evade social settings. Music can help overcome this feeling of social inadequacy and encourage them to partake in social interactions. In a research experiment conducted by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information, a group of 27 children were divided into two groups: experiment and control. The social skill set of both groups was measured and recorded according to the “social skills rating system scale”. The experiment group underwent 12 sessions of music therapy spanning over 45 days. Analysis of the results showed that the experiment group displayed a significant increase in social skills’ scores as compared to those of the control group. Furthermore, these results remained persistent up to the follow-up phase (Ghasemtabar et al.). Alan Turry, a music therapist, said that although a child with autism may seem isolated and self-absorbed, this behavior usually emanates from a lack of motivation to engage (Reynolds). Music helps give them the motivation that they require to put themselves out there and interact and express inspite of their inherent limitations. A child Turry once worked with referred to music therapy as a “sanctuary” for himself. He said, “In music therapy I feel accepted and out of danger. It has made me more musical, more vibrant, and more understanding” (Reynolds). Music also helped him grieve over the loss of his uncle who passed away. Similarly, another child with autism, Ethan Jones, felt that music made him a more confident, adventurous and happy person. He said that music helped him “appreciate his unique qualities and that it motivated him to tackle the “feelings of being an outsider in the harsh social
environment of middle and high school” (Reynolds). Furthermore, John Lubbock, the founder of the charity, Music for Autism, shares his experience working with autistic children as he watches a group of children with behavioral issues transform as they eagerly anticipate an opportunity to perform (Salter). Music galvanizes within these children the spirit to participate in social activities and encourages them to become integrated members of society.

Music therapy has played a significant role in improving the lives of autistic children due to the profound connection that they have with music. Although music may affect all of us, it strikes a deeper chord in children with autism. In 1989, Uta Frith, a psychologist working at University College London proposed the weak central coherence theory (“Cognitive Theories”). According to this theory, autistic children are able to discern details but cannot comprehend information as a whole. In music, these children are able to focus on every tone involved in a melody rather than process the song as whole, resulting in a more radical musical experience. In addition to this, parts of the brain associated with sensory perception take precedence over other brain features in autism. As a result, music creates a greater impact on the minds of autistic children as compared to other verbal or visual stimuli. A British study concluded that children with autism “were exceptionally sensitive to changes in pitch contours as compared to other children” (Sarris). Author Marina Sarris who works in the “Interactive Autism Network” has referred to music as “autism’s rare gift.” The manifestations of this rare gift can be seen in the life of David Heiligman, a child with autism, who from a very young age held a fascination for his father’s harp, keyboards and sing-along videos (Sarris). At the mere age of four, David reproduced the sound of a leaf blower on his piano (Sarris). Another inspiring story is that of Brandon Beck, a youngster who could “decode a song with one finger” and could play songs that were sung to him without any sheet music or lessons (Sarris). The neural uniqueness that causes
autistic children to possess such musical capabilities, enables them to display such significant transformations when undergoing music therapy. Music is a universal language for autistic children. It gets through to them when words and emotions become perplexing. Music can tap into the minds of these children and can overcome all obstacles, whether neurological or psychological, and can leave its footprints on their minds and their hearts. This deep rooted attachment that autistic children have with music has made it one of the most popular, widespread and effective remedies among them.

However, many pediatricians and psychiatrists believe that medicinal drugs serve as better remedies in helping children with autism overcome their symptoms. Dr. Mary Gleason, an assistant professor at Tulane University and a child psychiatrist reckons that the lack of specialists competent enough to work with autistic children, implies that the “only available treatment is pharmacological” (Arky). In addition to that, many parents feel exhausted or overwhelmed by the behavioral problems and lack of communication their children face (Arky). The inability to find a specialist who will tend to a young child with such symptoms adds to their exasperation. Hence, they resort to medicines, assuming that it will be a “quicker solution and will require fewer appointments, less time off from work, and overall less energy” (Arky). Antianxiety medication such as benzodiazepines, target receptors for certain neurotransmitters that inhibit brain-wave activity (Maron). This makes excitatory neurons, which are generally over-active in autistic children, less potent (Maron). Such drugs suppress violent behavior among children. Shannon Rosa, the mother of an autistic child, administered an antipsychotic, Risperdal, to her son (Arky). The medication managed to “help him keep control over his aggressive impulses” (Arky). Similarly, another such child, Jack, who had been unable to attend school or visit family due to his agitation was given Adderall, an anti-anxiety drug, which made
him calm and relaxed. His mother also shared that usage of the drug “made parenting easier and less stressful, which does change his life” (Arky). Furthermore, one in four children with autism also suffers from seizures (“Medications for Autism”). The life threatening nature of some of these seizures incites many parents to resort to medication fearing that the condition may aggravate or the consequences may be dire if the seizures are not immediately subdued. In such cases, anticonvulsants such as Topamax and Depakote are administered, which may not eliminate seizures, but are effective in reducing their number (“Medications for Autism”). Nevertheless, music therapy remains a more effective method of curtailing the symptoms of autism. Medicinal drugs, irrespective of their benefits, carry various side effects such as weight gain, lethargy, sedation, muscle stiffness and abnormal movements (“Medications for Autism”). Such side effects can negatively impact the health of the patients and can also aggravate irritability in them. Furthermore, in order to curb these side effects, children are given more medication (Arky). Thus, when taking a single medicine to control a particular symptom, patients end up taking several medicines, trapping them in this vicious cycle and making them completely dependent on medication. Moreover, drugs affect children with autism differently as compared to other children. Many psychiatrists have admitted that choosing the right medicine for a child with autism eventually comes down to “trial and error” (Arky). Shannon Rosa gave her son Abilify, an antipsychotic found to reduce irritability and aggression, to control his violent behavior (Arky). The drug only served to increase his anxiety and aggression and made him “a different child” (Arky). It was Risperdal which eventually worked on him. The dosage to be administered to a certain child is also something that can only be ascertained by testing (Maron). Linmarie Sikich, the director of a research program at the University of North Carolina said that at high doses anti-anxiety drugs may bind to receptors that they are not meant to bind to (Maron).
The consequences could be disastrous. Dr. Glen Elliott, a child psychiatrist, also shared that the main concern of parents whose children are under medication is that “their child is not going to be the person they’re used to” (Arky). An incorrect medicine or dosage could make them “zombified” or “zeroed out of their emotional response” (Arky). In contrast, music therapy has no side effects and can, in no way, harm patients undergoing it (Dvorsky). The results of music therapy are not only positive but are also long lasting and aim to channel the children’s inner spirit rather than suppress it. Landon Bryce, a former teacher for autistic children, rightly said, “You are talking about giving children meds to make them more manageable, you are talking about making them stupider — I never taught a kid who did not feel that way about his med — in the hope of helping them learn more. That is stupid.” Music aims to help integrate children with autism as actively functioning members of society, not bind them to a lifelong dependence on medication as a “patient” (Arky).

The autistic mind is one of the most beautiful creations of God. It is the complexity and artistry it possesses that enables music to have such an overpowering effect on it. Music has brought about some of the most stunning transformations in children with autism. The amazement in their eyes upon hearing a note, the excitement they feel when asked to perform, the calming effect it has on them when they are on the verge of an outburst, never ceases to amaze others. Many people may look upon autism as an “illness” which needs to be cured by medication, but those who understand the unique connection that autistic children have with music, the way it evoke positive emotions within them and helps them connect and communicate with the world around them, can comprehend the potential of music therapy as a means of unleashing the true potential within children with autism.

(3095 words)
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Erasing Bad Memories – Should Such A Drastic Step Be Taken?

“When I was 20 years old, I was in a near-fatal car crash while living 10,000 miles away from my family, on the North Island of New Zealand. I went head-first through the front windshield of a car at high speed and, as I later came to describe it, spent the next nine hours fighting for my life, and the next 18 months fighting for my sanity.” This anecdote describes a turning point in the life of a pilot and adventure writer, Lane Wallace. The car accident not only caused her to lose her friends but it also affected her productive abilities. So much so that her psychologist was forced to be a phone-call away to prevent Wallace from injuring herself due to the memories that haunted her in the form of nightmares and flashbacks (Wallace). Just like Wallace, everyone has their share of painful and disturbing memories with up to 84% of people undergoing a traumatic incident at least once in their lives (Horn, Charney and Feder 120). Whether it be an accident, the death of a beloved, domestic or sexual abuse or even a failed relationship, bad memories of any form and shape constitute a part of people’s lives and they come back time and again triggering pain and anxiety. At times the resultant suffering can become unbearable and individuals may be tempted to manipulate their memories if given the chance.
While memory manipulation such as their enhancement, deletion or insertion, was once the sole domain of science fiction movies like “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”, “Inception” and “Total Recall”, recent studies show that memory tampering, in particular, the erasure of memories is now turning into a reality (Spiers and Bendor 5). A study published in an issue of the Journal of NeuroScience states that scientists were able to erase the long-term memory of marine snails by inhibiting the activity of a protein-kinase called PKM (Cai et al. 6430). Similarly, using light pulses, a group of researchers at the University of California at San Diego were able to delete specific memories in mice (Redondo et al. 426). Other than animal testing, methods have also been tested on humans including the administration of a drug called propranolol that removed the fear of spiders in a group of 45 individuals (Elsey and Kindt 227-228) and induction of seizures through electric-convulsive therapy (ECT) bursts which removed memories of traumatic slideshow narratives shown to 42 people (Kroes et al. 204). While this newly opened realm of possibilities seems attractive and exciting, it also raises some ethical and legal concerns. Although erasure of painful memories can be a probable cure for patients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), scientific processes to delete memories should not be employed because they pose a threat to a person’s identity, cause unintentional and unhealthy side effects and can be potentially misused.

Bad memories are the building blocks of an individual’s identity and their erasure equals the erasure of the experience, wisdom and courage gained through them. Painful and disturbing memories fall under a category known as “autobiographical memories” which are defined as “the memories of significant personal events and experiences from an individual’s life” (Wang et al.). A recent research study explored the functions of autobiographical memory dividing them into three main categories: firstly, the “self” in which individuals recall past events to define who
they are; secondly, the “directive” in which they use their memories to gain lessons and get guidance and lastly, the “social” in which memories act as tools for communicating and building relationships with other people (Harris, Rasmussen and Berntsen 560). For Lane Wallace, her recollections of the car accident serve all three purposes. Having seen death so closely, she credits them for transforming her into who she is today, for directing her to make career choices that brought inner satisfaction instead of money and for allowing her to empathize with others in distress. Despite the pain and suffering, Wallace believes in keeping her memory of the incident intact saying, “I would not be who I am today if it weren’t for that accident. So to take it away would be to take away not only its shadows but an important part of myself” (Wallace). The importance of extracting meaning from “emotionally evocative memories” is also highlighted in a case study presented by Jefferson A. Singer. It demonstrates how William, a 45-year old divorced man, developed a defense mechanism to fight against others’ harsh attitudes by remembering his own helplessness during his parents’ fierce arguments and his sister’s untimely death. Thus, through his memories, he prevented himself from self-harm by recognizing the importance of connecting his feelings to his actions (577). Unpleasant memories not only help the individual comprehend the complexities of life and face them with determination but they also serve as a source of courage and wisdom for others around them, in some cases, even extending to the next generations. Listening to the horrifying stories of the 1947 partition between India and Pakistan is a source of inspiration for the younger generation of Pakistan. The descriptions narrated by the elders of ripping apart of their families, of abandoning their homes and of seeing their loved ones being brutally murdered in front of their eyes, instills courage among the people. The heroic tales make them realize the sacrifices made by their ancestors for their freedom, they propel them to work for the betterment of their country and urge them to not
let the blood of the martyrs go to waste. An entire nation’s history is written in the memories of its people. Its identity is engrained within the memories of its ancestors. Had the survivors of partition chosen to get their painful memories erased, a country’s history and the nation’s identity and source of motivation and courage would have been wiped out too. Thus, while some memories store pain and grief within them, they are also the carriers of wisdom and valor. They play a significant role in shaping people’s personalities and act as stepping stones for their future journey.

In addition to damaging a person’s sense of self, removing memories can negatively impact an individual’s health and result in unintended consequences. One of the potential methods to remove memories is electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) which makes use of an electrically induced temporary seizure. Although it has been used for a long time to treat depression, it is often used as the last resort to treat severe mental illnesses due to its associated risks. Short-term effects of ECT are common and include headaches, muscle aches and nausea while the long-term effects of ECT including both medical and cognitive effects, vary from person to person. For patients with pre-existing heart diseases, cardiovascular disorders such as congestive heart failure due to the fluctuations in blood pressure and heart rate can occur. In addition, epileptic patients are at a threat of prolonged seizures and continuing attacks of epilepsy that can lead to brain damage known as “epilepticus”. Cognitive effects include a state of confusion immediately afterwards the treatment and “anterograde amnesia” for a few weeks which refers to the “impairment of new memory retention” (Agronin and Maleta 229). Similarly, the drug propranolol can significantly reduce the blood pressure, cause breathing problems and trouble in sleeping. For diabetic patients, a serious concern is the risk of “hypoglycemia” which results in abnormally low blood sugar levels (de Graar et al. 325-326).
Apart from the side effects of the treatments, there is a chance of deleting memories other than the target one or affecting other linked memories. Many experts consider the possibility of disrupting the wrong memory by accident to be a major cause of concern (Dennis and Perrotti 119). Furthermore, since a specific memory of an individual is not stored separately from other memories rather it is part of a huge network of memories, removing a single memory will affect the other memories that are linked with it. As Dr. Judy Illes, professor of neurology and Canada research chair in neuoroethics at the University of British Columbia states, “When you pull one brick out of the wall of memories, many other memories go with it. Memories are incredibly interlocked with one another” (qtd. in Delistraty). Although greater research in this field and advanced technological techniques might reduce the chances of removing or interfering with the other precious memories, there will still be a probability of the unintended happening. Even if the risk factors are not considered and it is assumed that one day, the erasure of memories will be a reliable step, individuals will readily remove all their unwanted memories which will distance them from reality. Having no recollection of the difficulties they faced in life, their perception of life will be different from those around them. Andrea Lavazza aptly mentions that only a person living in a forest, free from all forms of interactions and relationships with other people can have full control of his/her memory (6). Thus, people need to decide whether erasing their memories is worth the risk involved in it or not.

The power of memory erasing techniques not only affects the individuals involved but also the society they belong to because of its probable misuse especially in issues pertaining to law. Many of the traumatic memories that an individual possesses hold importance in legal matters. In such circumstances, they are not the sole property of the individual but also a means of eradicating evil from the society and raising voice against the criminals. Culprits can force the
victims and witnesses to have their memories deleted to escape their punishment. Moreover, they can have their own memories of the crime erased to eliminate the guilt that might have prevented them from committing another heinous act. With no evidence against the criminal and no feeling of shame in the criminal, justice cannot be granted and crime rates cannot be decreased. This sensitive issue was highlighted by a jurist, Adam Kolber using an example of a real-life incident quoted by Dr. Scott Haig. A woman was given the drug propofol by her anesthesiologist when she started freaking out after accidentally hearing that she was diagnosed with cancer. The woman was undergoing a bone biopsy under local anesthesia and agreed to go for a general anesthesia only if the need arose. When she woke up a few minutes later, she had no recollection of what had happened to her as the drug erased few of her memories preceding the injection which allowed Dr. Haig to mentally prepare her before giving her the dreadful news. However, the patient was never told of the incident that occurred and although the anesthesiologist could have given her the drug to prevent a mental breakdown and ease her trauma, he nevertheless did it without the patient’s consent and potentially erased evidence that could have been used against him in a legal ruling (145-146). The same argument can be extended to more serious crimes such as rape or murder allowing the perpetrators to walk away freely as there would be no trace of the crime they committed. On the other hand, if the victims are not forced to have their memories removed, rather they do it out of free will, they would no longer have the incentive to fight against injustice. Giving the example of an abused woman who takes a drug to remove her memories of a sexual or domestic abuse, Lavazza points out the potential consequences by warning that “the sexist system will get even stronger, as the drug will make any attempt to protest even more unlikely” (5). Thus, with both forced and voluntary erasure of traumatic incidents, there is a likelihood of injustice prevailing in the society.
Although many people believe that memory erasure can serve as a cure for patients suffering from PTSD, it is essential to reduce the fear that accompanies their memories instead of taking away their strength of hope and survival. Two common categories of people that end up suffering from PTSD are the veterans returning from war and victims of sexual abuse. While some people believe that soldiers sent to war with the knowledge that their painful memories can be removed may not go into battle with the same ardour and determination (Caplan), others like Tara Mc Kelvey quote veterans who are against the use of memory erasing tools and believe that “problems have to be dealt with”. One such veteran is Barry Roma, a survivor of PTSD, who helps other veterans combat their issues and gives talks regarding war to high-school students, a work which he says, “comes from remembering the pain and dealing with it – not from trying to forget it” (The American Prospect). It is important to realize that for these soldiers to live a normal and healthy life, they need to be rid of the emotions of guilt and fear that reside in their minds through various forms of therapy instead of ridding them of the memories that remind them of what they have been through and of what they are capable of surviving. Effective treatments for PTSD as listed by the National Center for PTSD include psychotherapy or talk therapy in which sharing of incidents alleviate the emotional burden of patients, pharmacotherapy which helps reduce depression and anxiety and restores sleeping patterns through medication and cognitive behavioral therapy which focuses on learning to cope up with the fear and distress through cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy (Hamblen 1-2). A recent study described how three sessions of exposure therapy given to trauma victims, involving the retelling of the incident to help them gain control of their emotions, proved successful in reducing posttraumatic stress reactions (PTSR), especially in rape victims (Rothbaum et al. 957). Just like the war soldiers, survivors of sexual assault can also use their memories to remind
themselves of the strength and courage they possess, propelling them to face the difficulties of 
life with bravery and resolution. In addition, it allows them to raise voice against the wrong, to 
fight for their rights and to help those who undergo a similar fate. In an interview with David 
Letterman, Oprah Winfrey, an American philanthropist shared that being molested repeatedly as 
a child helped her develop a deep compassion for other people. She admitted, “Everyone is 
looking for that validation. I know what it feels like to not be wanted... you can use it as a 
stepping stone to build great empathy for people” (Saunders). It is the responsibility of the 
society to facilitate those undergoing post-traumatic stress by understanding their issues, hearing 
their troubles and helping them cope with their ordeals so that they may in turn serve as a beacon 
of hope for other survivors.

In conclusion, a person’s bitter and stressful memories are an extremely powerful tool. 
Instead of erasing them in an attempt to run away from life’s harsh realities, people should use 
them to benefit themselves and others around them. Recollections of painful events can help 
them transform into stronger human beings, cope up with the obstacles that come their way and 
serve as a driving force for others in pain. The deletion of these memories will firstly, take away 
an integral part of themselves that is the wisdom and strength they acquired from these 
memories. Secondly, it will not only adversely affect their health due to the side effects of the 
devised methods but will also impact their relationships with other people as they would not be 
able to connect to the realities of life that others around them would be experiencing. Thirdly, the 
abuse of such a technology by playing with the memories of criminals, victims and witnesses can 
wreak havoc in a society’s law and order system. Lastly, those suffering from PTSD require 
therapeutic exercises to combat their fear and anxiety instead of removing the images that give 
them the strength to survive. With scientists and researchers all over the world busy with
exploring and testing new ways to erase memories, it is imperative to understand the ethical and legal implications such advancements carry before a devastating tool is made available for public use. Let us accept our painful memories instead of obliterating them because as Louisa May Alcott said, “Painful as it may be, a significant emotional event can be the catalyst for choosing a direction that serves us - and those around us - more effectively. Look for the learning” (qtd. in Avery).
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Effects of Sexual Content in Cartoons on Impressionable Children

The litany of *Let It Go* still reverberates in the minds of children. For most of the children, Elsa was the best friend, a role model, a confidante really. Others are smitten with *The Lion King*, even after twenty-three years of its release. The rest are on the rescue mission of *Finding Nemo*. This effect of infatuation with cartoons is pronounced even more in children from age six to thirteen, who are in the process of growing not just physically, but mentally as well, and are seeking assistance from cartoons that they so admire to help shape them. They try emulating what they see in the cartoons in their life, as children are not yet able to tell the fictional cartoons apart from the reality (qtd. in İvrendi and Özdemir 2562). This shows that for most children, cartoons are an integral part of their life. However, trouble looms when these seemingly innocuous cartoons harbor content that is sexual in nature and has detrimental potential impacts on the impressionable children. Due to the misconception that persists in the minds of many adults that the cartoons are harmless and untainted, they are neither filtered by the censoring authorities nor the parents and thus the children are exposed to many aspects that have very unhealthy manifestations in them. Although cartoons are a great form of entertainment for not just children, for adults as well, however, some are laden with inappropriate sexual content,
because of which children are made to endure serious consequences like premature sexualisation, body image complexes, and early maturity.

Perhaps the greatest damage done by the sexual content in the cartoons is causing premature sexualization. According to the American Psychological Association, sexualization has multiple meanings; a person’s value lies only in their sex appeal and the rest of the person’s attributes are not deemed worthy of consideration, the attractiveness of the person lies only in their being sexy, sexual objectification which precludes any form of independent will (American Psychological Association 1). Unfortunately, many cartoons are guilty of having content that advertises sexuality, in any of the aforementioned forms. Examples include Ms. Bellum, Mayor’s secretary from *The Powerpuff Girls*; throughout the series Ms. Bellum’s face was very often not shown, and she was given very few dialogues in the whole series. The only thing that was seen was her voluptuous figure, which was revealed due to her inappropriate attire. In an episode in which the Power Puff girls are reenacting the other characters, the most noticeable feature the girls could conjure of Ms. Bellum was her figure, which one of the girls emulates by stuffing toys in her shirt, wearing heels and speaking in a seductive voice (Garis). This indeed gives the impression that the only worth Ms. Bellum had was her physical attributes, and her provocative attitude trumped all her other qualities. She was the mayor’s secretary; surely there were other qualities to her that could have been amplified. It implies to the young gullible audience that the only worth to have is physical attractiveness. Likewise is the case in *Tarzan*, in which the only aspect of Tarzan-the hero- the female protagonist found impressive were his physical feature, which she summed by saying he was *girlhood fantasy* (IMDb). This wrongly conveys the impression to young boys that their mannerisms and personalities are certainly not as significant as their muscular physique, and the message passed to the girls is to judge the other gender by
Another example is the famous cartoons *Johnny Bravo*; although having a rating of seven plus (contrary to the above mentioned cartoons that all had G-rating), the show still is too explicit for even seven-year-old crowd. The character of Johnny Bravo is a very stereotypical, a burly blond womanizing man, and his pursuits to find a girl, who too is very curvy and wearing skimpy clothes. If that is not objectification enough, the dialogues are very derogatory towards women; when flirting with a disinterested woman, he says “Hey Foxy Mama. You smell kinda pretty. Wanna smell me?” (IMDb). Such examples show how the merely because of good looks can one get away with using derogatory language for women. This corrupts the mind of the young audience who are deluded into treating this as acceptable. As children are still mentally and physically growing, they are not able to distinguish between what is wrongly imposed on them and is ethically wrong, from what is right. Taking what they see to heart, they fall victim to premature sexualization and thus start placing their worth only in their physical features. It also has especially detrimental impact on girls as they are the ones who are more often objectified, who then start to act in a sexual manner as they think that the sum of their attributes is their good looks. Consequently, the children, upon internalizing these messages, end up self-objectifying, along with placing others’ worth based on the merit of merely looks (Klein and Shiffman 354). This also leads to confusion in the minds of children as to what is their role in the society; most male characters are sexually aggressive and dominant whilst the female ones are damsel in distress—especially in fairy tale cartoons—, always at the mercy of their male counterparts, who they impress only with their good looks (Albert and JPorter 189). When children act on these stereotypes, they end up hurting themselves not just physically but are mentally traumatized as well. Girls get obsessed with looking good, and associate their success with their attractiveness, which has ramifications as it causes mental damage like cognitive
impairment; research has shown that sexualization negatively affects logical reasoning and ability to understand mathematics (American Psychological Association 3). Moreover, since cartoons are nothing more than drawings of active imagination, and mostly are not realistic, the little girls get depressed when they do not look the same as the cartoon characters, leading to low self-opinion, dissatisfaction and desire for plastic surgery. Furthermore, as the girls place their worth only in their sexuality, their idea of success goes awry; they are not ambitious about having careers and being independent, but rather being as “kept women.” This imposed sexuality is shown to have manifestations in teenage pregnancy, sexual kinks and sexually transmitted diseases (American Psychological Association 4).

Another grave impact on the children is the body image complexes. Many of the cartoons depict the characters with rather unnatural body proportions, and since they want to imitate the cartoon characters and be like them, they want to adopt not just their habits but have similar physical attributes as well. Every girl wants to look like Barbie, with a tall, skinny figure, perfect hair and delicate ballerina feet. However, according to Daily Mail, Barbie has unrealistic body proportions, and not cognizant of any healthy female body (Golgowski). Other instances show the heroine having a very voluptuous figure; like Esmeralda from Hunch Back of the Notre Dame, Meg from Hercules, etc. (Disney Villains/Heroin.es). Boys too are forced to follow in the footsteps of very muscular and attractive heroes like John Smith from Pocahontas, Captain Lee Shang from Mulan, etc. (Torgerson). Although both boys and girls are affected by this idealization, however, research has shown girls are more vulnerable to insecurities about their body than boys are (Rauscher et al. 211). Hence, they end up feeling very self-conscious, especially since many still have yet to grow into their bodies. Consequently, their feelings morph into self-loath and they fall prey to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression (Taylor). In
order to get rid of the baby fat, many develop eating disorders like anorexia, which is characterized by starving oneself, and bulimia, in which a person binge eats and purges the consumed food by way of either vomiting or use of laxatives. Both scenarios are very serious, and can, in severe cases, result in death. They also have a detrimental impact on health in general as well. However, these effects are heightened in children as they are growing and have a greater need for nutrients. Eating disorders cause not just physical diseases but are emotionally taxing as well, and many times result in depression for which anti-psychotic drugs have to be used that are known to cause suicidal urges (Southammakosane and Schmitz). Moreover, since the children are dissatisfied by their looks, they develop low self-esteem. Many times popularity and likeness of the character are linked to their physical appearance, and so girls start believing that they do not look like the “perfect girl,” and are not appealing enough. Psychologists Graf and Schweiger discuss in their book how girls idealize thin figure and consider “fat” and “ugly” as synonymous (162). This also makes them resort to medicines or surgery to get rid of the fat or to get implants. Another possible consequence of complexes about body image is depression, for which many require anti-depressants. However, since most drugs are not FDA approved for children, there is hence a dearth of an appropriate form of medication, posing yet another problem for these children. Also, in the case of available treatment, namely Prozac, a lot of side effects are involved, including nervousness, agitation, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts (National Institute of Mental Health). Such far-reaching are the consequences of portraying characters in a very stereotypical manner. Therefore, one cannot discount the influence of cartoon characters on the children.

Yet another probable outcome of the subliminal messages of the cartoons is early maturity. Many times cartoons give glimpses of either adult world or show explicit images. In
Dreamworks famous series *Shrek*, Magic Mirror says about Snow White “Although she lives with seven other men, she’s not easy” (IMDb). In *Aladdin*, Genie says “I thought the earth wasn’t supposed to move until the honeymoon” (Schreiber). Another example is the scene from *Johnny Bravo*: after incessantly harassing a female character even though she said she already had a boyfriend, Bravo says “Well, you look like the girl that could use two” (How to Pick up Chicks Johnny Bravo Style). Not only through the dialogues are the children exposed to adult content, but many also have sexually explicit images in them. For example, in the famous Disney cartoons *The Rescuers*, there is a picture of a topless woman in the background (Bradley). Unfortunately, such placement of pornographic imagery is not an isolated incident; Nickelodeon’s *Oggy and the Cockroaches* displayed a topless woman’s picture in an episode as well (Gajewski). When children come across such lewd content, they subconsciously internalize these messages. These ideas are not processed rationally by the children, as they are not sexually active yet, and are thus unable to make sense of all the sexual messages. Hence, they try acting out on the ill-formed ideas in head, which leads to emotional distress. According to Canadian Pediatric Society, after internalizing these messages, children try to act on these lines which promotes risky behavior as they try experimenting with especially their age fellows (301). This problematic behavior is in it of itself very upsetting, add to the fact the subsequent peer pressure and the confusion that persist in the child’s mind, lays the ground for emotional distress, and problems in future. Moreover, scenes like those from *Johnny Bravo* perplex the children, as they are forced to think of such forbidden lines by treating infidelity very casually. This causes the loss of innocence and also perpetuates distrust in relationships, and has the potential to cause trust issues, especially in relationships later in life. It also increases the child’s acceptance of similar morally unacceptable behavior. Furthermore, as they come across the pornographic
images, they are exposed to the idea of the existence of further similar images. Having inquisitive nature, they have an urge to look further into the matter. In this age of internet, and sophisticated gadgets, it is not difficult to search for things. Hence there exists a great likelihood that children can, because of the gentle urging by the cartoons, come across a lot of adult content. This wealth of information and their inability to understand the mature nuances overwhelms the children and robs them of carefree, innocent childhood. Another potential impact of such explicit content is early puberty; Professors Bjorklund and Blasi in their book have stated that there is a link between early onset of puberty in girls and their exposure to sexual content(155).

The defense presented by the opposing counsel is that cartoons are a great form of entertainment, for children and adult audiences alike and so need to have content that caters to both. However, in light of the odds involved, it is not enough justification for the inclusion of subliminal messages. The rating of almost all Disney, Pixar, DreamWorks etc. cartoons is G-suitable for all audience. By virtue of this logic, the content should be free from any explicit or implicit sexual content. However, as proven per the previous examples, that is not the case. Moreover, it should be realized that children are very gullible; many cannot even tell the cartoons apart from the reality, and content like stereotypical gender roles in cartoons can have negative affect on their lives, and therefore the rationalization for the sake of entertainment seems insufficient of an excuse (Arma an Gökçearslan 5203). Tom Sito, Disney animator, in his interview to Huffington Post admitted to the presence of the sexual content and chalked it up to “inside jokes”(Bradley). One has to realize the future posterity is at stake; the probable ramifications of the sexual subtext of the cartoons are very serious indeed and cannot be treated as lightly. They range from mental disorders to physical distress, and either scenario is very difficult to treat and ruins not just childhood, but impacts the quality of life as well. It thus
poses a lot of problems for the parents as well, who not only have to see their child suffer, but are taxed with the extra monetary burden too. Some even say that the idea of adding entertainment for the adult audience in the form of lewd imagery and innuendoes is to have a greater fan base, thereby thickening the profit margin. Also, since most of the parents are saddled with the children in cinemas in watching the cartoon, so in order to make it more endurable for the parents, some bits of sexual content is strewn here and there. However, there are multiple ways to engage the audience, other than the cheap ploy of adding lecherous content. Disney’s animator Sito very nonchalantly called looking for sexual content as “something to do on a rainy day,” which is very disturbing considering his casual outlook regarding such a serious matter and indirectly propagating a perverted mindset (Bradley).

Children are budding, inquisitive, innocent minds that have so much potential. They are still figuring out the nuances of life and are seeking help from any medium available to shape their ideas and attitude. Since most are infatuated with the cartoons and idealize the cartoon characters, hence emulate what they see. Others subconsciously internalize these messages when are exposed to cartoons a lot many times. Therefore, cartoons can be deemed as a very important educator. However, all the negative aspects are also assimilated by the young fertile minds who cannot tell apart these negative connotations from the right ones, so treat the anomalous behavior present in the cartoons as the norm and act out accordingly. Since that is certainly not the case, no healthy person has Barbie-like body proportions, no one can achieve success from merely kiss of love, a person’s worth does not lie merely in their sex appeal, children are set up for a lifetime of ill-formed beliefs that are very difficult to get rid of. By the time rationalization takes place, a lot of damage has been done; many have already fallen victim to the lies perpetuated, leading to misshapen ideas about sexuality and the subsequent behavioral expectations, eating disorders,
low self-esteem, depression, emotional distress, etc. Neither of the probable outcomes can be treated as lightly, children are more delicate and their issues need to be dealt with the same finesse. In some cases like mental problems, the greater range of complexities is involved as the anti-psychotic drugs available are limited, and their side effects severe. For in the case of physical problems like anorexia, not only children development is in peril, but in severe cases life as well. These children are the future leaders, engineers, doctors, artists; they have so much potential, so many dreams, and aspirations, and to have any shot down because of the ideas endorsed in the cartoons seems grossly unfair to the children who are robbed of their latent talents, because they were entrapped by the very thing they implicitly trusted to show them the ropes of how the world worked, the cartoons. Therefore, considering the stakes involved, it is an open-shut case; anything that puts the future of children at stake, and compromises their quality of life, should be excluded from their lives.
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Moby Dick, written by Herman Melville in 1851, is a difficult read. It is a vast, unbounded journey through perilous seas as one starts to read and leaves much to be answered by the end. Much like its constant fluctuation between plot/action chapters to cetology chapters, Moby Dick invites a lot of polarized opinions and varying thoughts. However, there is no debate about the fact that at first blush, Moby Dick appears to be a ‘Man’s Book’. It starts off with a greeting from the first-person male narrator: “Call me, Ishmael” (Melville 1). From that point onwards, a reader enters into a world that seems to be completely devoid of women (other than fleeting mentions, as of Ahab’s wife and children). After the initial few chapters on land, the story unfolds aboard the Pequod, amongst an all-male crew, weathering the precarious seas and hunting the treacherous great whale, Moby Dick. The book becomes a revenge tale, an adventure novel, a tragedy, an ethnography of the whaling industry, even an analogy for the grander religious reflections and philosophical speculations—all with men at the center. However, this overtly masculine tale must not be taken as the mere erasure of women and similarly, of any gender commentary by Melville—rather, this paper will argue that Moby Dick disturbs the categories of gender by showing how masculinity is still tampered by questions of race, class and ethnicity on the Pequod creating a structure of inequalities and hierarchies similar to that on land (which women may be subject to).

To explore this idea further, we must first delineate the concept of masculinity in
nineteenth-century American society and literature to understand Moby Dick’s cultural origins and the ideas it borrowed from it. In American literature, firstly, masculinity was defined by resisting the threat of becoming ‘feminized’. The feminine was defined by a space of “constraints and responsibility” where mothers first curbed boyish waywardness, and later, wives presented the pressure of jobs, maintaining lively hoods and supporting the family (Kimmel 19). Hence, most American fiction of that time period, both imagined and based off reality, chronicled men’s escape— they found themselves “kidnapped or abandoned on desert islands, gone west, or…run off to an all-male retreat” (Kimmel 20). This threat of emasculation was also perceived through the idea of the 19th-century middle class home that was defined by well-mannered children, decorated houses, stable careers and like-minded, amiable guests. The confining, isolating domestic was the women’s province, escape from which became the definition of manhood. However, the place that these men escape to is also largely relevant to this notion of masculinity: restoring “manly vigor and vitality” entailed escaping to spaces with homo-social undercurrents “where men could be men without female interference” (Kimmel 21). These spaces often (not always) took the form of “going West” to the vast, explored, rough landscape and was also accompanied by a rise in masculine fashion dictated by beards and moustaches.

Another important aspect of 19th-century American society’s idea of masculinity, which was also reflected in literature (as we will later see with Ahab), was the fixation with physical prowess. Physical education and exercise began to be advocated as an important part of self-improvement and was later added to school curriculum. Hence, in such a time, “physical degeneration was seen as a spiritual as well as a medical and physiological problem” (Park 8). Other than looking at bodily disability as a spiritual crisis, there was also the merger of mind and
body with the prevalent idea that “the action of one influenced the other” (Park 14). Hence, if one degenerated, the other would likely follow. On the flip side, however, this merger of mind and body could also mean that strengthening of the body could lead to the strengthening of mind. The mind was increasingly seen as the seat of the will of a man and this will was defined as a predominantly masculine feature where the self-made man was decisive, strong willed and driven. Lastly, there was a sharp move away from thin bodies to mesomorphic bodies and a strong connection established between spirituality, mental health and physicality that led to the idea that a masculine body was contingent on the way it was seen, it served as a “symbol—or icon—for communicating customs, role expectations and perceived relationships to nature” (Mangan and Walvin 11). Hence, the mesomorphic body, free will and escape to women-less spaces were some of the pivotal features of the 19th-century American ideal of masculinity.

In an attempt to place Moby Dick’s idea of masculinity in place, let us first look at the workings of this homosocial space that served as an escape for the threatened man. Ishmael and Queequeg’s relationship blurred the lines of any clear gender or sexuality based demarcations. At a point, in the beginning of their relationship, the narrator states that “there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends” further drawing a parallel with their relationship and that between a “man and wife” who lay “in [their] hearts’ honeymoon – a cosy, loving pair” (54). This relationship fell squarely into the recurrent trope of 19th-century American literature of the male hero/protagonist encountering another man (usually of another race) who acted as a “spiritual guide in this world without women” (Kimmel 26). Melville complicates this relationship further, however, by introducing Queequeq, a cannibal of another race with skin of a “dark, purplish, yellow colour” that was tattooed “with large blackish looking squares” (20). This black man who followed some strange amalgamation of religions was portrayed as a pivotal
character in Ishmael and the Pequod’s narrative and formed an “asexual counter-marriage” with Ishmael, a white man, during a time when racism and homophobia were the defining features of society (Kimmel 26). Perhaps this can be seen as Melville’s attempt at complicating the way manhood was perceived and played out in society. The discomfort of a white man seeking solace and friendship (often very physically defined) with a black man in a fraternal bond seemed to be a conscious decision by Melville, however, it is important to note that this passion was not ever alluded to be of equals. While, the idea of masculinity is complicated with the placement of a nonwhite, clearly physically superior male, the race divide still dictates the “noble savage” of sorts to be a mere guide, while the Christian white man is allotted the place of a moral instructor, bettering and teaching the savage.

Another interesting analysis of Melville’s crafting of his male bond is that it is set on a far off on a ship, in a vast, unknown sea where the reaches of civilization and the structures of hierarchies as present on land would not be present. For this male bond to be based on equality and companionship regardless of the differences between the men, it needs to be situated away from the system of cultural hierarchies (as present on land). However, Melville constructs a system aboard the Pequod that illustrates no matter “how far the fraternity goes, it cannot escape, because it depends ideologically upon the hierarchy within all patriarchal relations: sexual difference” (Weigman 735). In the cultural hierarchies constructed on land, the constant separation and the otherness of the feminine space and similarly, of women themselves lends the masculine its cultural power and simultaneously, helps it define itself. Hence, with the absence of women, this vacuum is filled by “hierarchies of race, sexuality, class and ethnicity” creating a similar system of power relations on which the masculine energies may thrive (736). Lastly, very relevant to the idea of the male body and its place as a visible, seen symbol, is the way Melville
uses the male body as metaphor for the idea that even in all all-male setting, inequality in a male bond is based off the 19th-century cultural obsession with the visibly superior, visibly white and visibly male.

Deeply embedded in the workings of the male bond and the homo-social space is the place of race in the hierarchies of masculinity, as hinted towards in the analysis above. Aboard the Pequod is a community of men from diverse racial identifications. If mesomorphic bodies are the definition of ideal manhood, the harpooners seem to be far superior to the other men. Daggoo, for example is described as a “gaint coal-black negro-savage, with a lion-like tread… and a white man standing before him seemed a white flag come to beg truce of a fortress” (Melville chap 27. 9). Melville even adds the detail that Daggoo was the squire of “little Flask, who looked like a chess-man beside him” (9). Other than the obvious physical disparity between the white and the other men of different races, it was also established that each of the colored members of the crew are highly skilled and imperative to the working of the Pequod. The harpooners Queegqueg, Daggoo and Tashtego, for example, are all described as men who left their home countries in search of adventure and learnt superior skills in the process. Moreover, Melville establishes the codependence of each man onto the other, as in the chapter “Monkey Rope”, for example, where Ishmael notes, him and Queequeg were “wedded” as the robes were tied around their waists making Queequeg, Ishmael’s “own inseparable twin brother; nor could [he] any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed” (329). The idea of fraternities also enters this equation, naturally, as we see a strange sexually charged scene between the crew as they squeezed the sperm from Stubb’s whale “unwittingly squeezing [their] co-laborers’ hands in it” (428). There seems to be a move towards replacing the inequalities and hierarchies of the culture on land by a democratic system of fraternities and codependence
between different races. Yet, this idea does not seem to come to fruition, as we note the constant demarcation between the men in almost all activities performed on the ship. The harpooners, even though equal in the work they do, eat after all the white crew has eaten, for example. A question then arises, in the democratic, supposedly egalitarian model of the Pequod, how are some men inferior to others? An interesting critique can be offered at this point that aligns the idea of “blackness” or racial difference “with the feminine” (Weigman 54). The idea that is put forth is that in the absence of women, there is no longer the cultural hierarchies that dictate the asymmetry of power relations between men and women, hence someone must “become the woman” (54). To put this into context, one can also view the survival of Ishmael on Queequeq’s coffin as a sacrifice that was perhaps reminiscent of the feminine spirit of affection and self-sacrifice. Interesting, the coffin was literally scripted with “the signs borne of [Queequeq’s] body”, carved with his identity—the white man literally survived on the sacrifice of the lesser race. No matter how far the Pequod sails from land and its inequalities, the hierarchies that dictate inferiority and superiority follow the men aboard the Pequod.

A clear idea comes to fruition at this point about how some men are clearly more men than others. There is good reason to claim that in this hierarchal structure of masculinity and male prowess, Ahab seems to appear on top of the pyramid. He is so grand and awe inspiring a figure that the first time Ishmael sees him “so powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect [him]… that for the first few moments [he] hardly noted that not a little of this overbearing grimness was owing to the barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood” (Melville 109). However, according to the 19th-century American society’s masculine ideals Ahab is flawed: he is marred physically and similarly, is also is also self-aware of being entirely mad: “I’m demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that’s only calm to comprehend itself!”
(Melville 143). In such a situation, we notice how Ahab is an inherently contradictory figure. He is physically flawed and mentally unstable, yet he is the epitome of masculinity aboard the Pequod. In all the ways Melville has subverted the masculine, this seems to be the most significant example. What appears to be the case is that Ahab’s hyper-masculinity is connected to him encapsulating the idea of “will.” His monomaniacal obsession with revenge, at the cost of the crew’s lives and their fragmentary ideas of free will, raises him as the prime example of this ‘self-made’ man that was embedded in the masculine ethos of the time. Moreover, by taking this trope of the hyper-masculine man, Melville is also able to delineate the crisis of masculinity. It may be argued that Ahab’s madness and his restless drive for revenge is that of “a man obsessed with avenging his shattered manhood” (Kimmel 28). According to William Baurecht in his essay “The Masculine Mystique in Moby-Dick”, Ahab “is a symbol of male will” constructed as a response to Melville’s idea of imposing, obligatory manhood and “the problem of the free will in extremes” (54). This idea of masculinity was also fronted by the American industrial society itself, with its overreliance on men who are individualistic, assertive, uncompromising and self-sustaining. Ahab becomes the emblem of this individual—a vision of what “a man is destined “to be,” i.e., “does”-his work (54). Hence, losing his leg on his work propelled Ahab into a monomaniacal rage to regain his lost masculine identity and overcompensate for it by projecting a hyper-masculine external image, because, as Melville writes, he not only associates Moby Dick with “his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations” (Melville 156).

Moreover, another interesting lens to explore is the notion of what makes a masculine pursuit. There seem to be two opposing pursuits: Ahab’s tragic quest of hunting the whale, while Ishmael’s writing about it. It may be argued that there is a sort of contest between “Ahab as gladiator and Ishmael as a commentator” (Baurecht 53). Ishmael is introduced to the reader with
A sketchy past; who he is, where he is from and why he is going on the Pequod on a sort of suicide quest are all unanswered questions. This much can be said that there seems to be an orphan-like quality to him not having a family or home and his fleeing to the sea may be seen as a desperate attempt to flee from society. As the 19th-century masculine ideal goes, Ishmael is escaping to an all-male space but rather than escaping from the restrictive home, he seems to be escaping from the restrictive masculinity found on land where men spent “of week days pent up in lath and plaster-tied to counters, nailed to benches and clinched to desks” (Melville 12). Perhaps it can be argued that “Ishmael is in quest of manhood” (Baurecht 56). He has been put off from the masculine mystique on land and hence looks to the sea for “an everlasting itch for things remote” (Melville 16). It seems then, that Ishmael’s reconciliation with his masculinity literally saves him, while Ahab’s destroys him. Ishmael is on a quest to discover, to learn, to document, while Ahab is subsumed in his role as the alpha male. He is defined by his work, as aforementioned and he is always striving to conquer. Ahab is introduced to the reader by this same monolithic vision in his “fixed and fearless, forward dedication of… glance. Not a word he spoke...” (Melville 110). Ahab shows no sympathy or has any connections expect fleetingly with Pip, whom he perhaps forms a male- bond with, more on the basis of mutual madness than sympathy. He does emerge as a father figure for Pip, though but as the archetypal father, the male is expected to encapsulate the savior-protector dichotomy—he is the protector of conventional institutions, of women and of innocence. Ahab seems to pervert all these ideas, being a self-reliant deviant who denies convention, he has seems to have abandoned his wide and only partially becomes the protector of innocence with Pip. However, even as a father, a leader or a Captain, he is a figure who only serves himself (Baurecht 58). Perhaps then it would suffice to say that Ahab represents the collapse of this self-made man, market-place masculinity, while
Ishmael represents the survival of a voyaging mind with a capacity for change and the withdrawal from this market-place conventional idea of manhood.

To conclude, it may be interesting to note what Moby Dick does for a modern reader and what implications this idea of masculinity has in the recent times. As this paper has attempted to prove, *Moby Dick* destabilizes masculinity or the conventional portrayal of masculinity by perverting the male bond to undercut it with sexual connotations and race-based connections, similarly, it also comments heavily on the place of race in the hierarchies of masculinity claiming “better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian”, and lastly, it grounds the market-place, conventional masculinity as destructive by painting Ahab (the hunter) as the tragic hero while the more fluid and accepting Ishmael (the writer) as the survivor (Melville 23). Now more than ever, these ideas of gendered, coded ideals that are imposed on men and women are becoming important. Modern audience may understand that gender needs to be put on a spectrum, rather than a binary—it is impressive to see that Melville, though subtly, was already attempting to do that in the 19th century. This constructed-ness of gender roles (and masculinity) may be seen as a modern concept but Moby dick *does* disturb these categories by establishing how some men are less men than others just on the basis of race, sexuality, ethnicity etc. even under the ‘democratic’ system of the Pequod, recreating the hierarchies subjected to men and especially women on land. Lastly, perhaps it can also be argued that Moby Dick is usually seen as “inimical to feminism and feminism to Moby-Dick” (Savage 92). While it’s a very valid point of contention to say that Melville could have commenting on gender and imposition by including women in the text, as some critics argue (for example Robyn Weigman), however, it does not take away from what he has implied about gender even in the absence of women. Studying Moby Dick as a Modern Reader also helps us understand that it isn’t a question of “us vs. them”
that tends to paint literary theory in academia or some niche feminist theory as well. Some critics even argue that parts of Moby Dick can fall under Queer theory which “attends to…the fluidity of gender and sexuality” (Savage 93). Wherever one places Moby Dick in the larger scheme of theories, genres and perspectives, its place in the reconstruction of American identity through disturbing categories of “gender and race and through the delicate handling of transgressive behavior” cannot be denied (97). It helps us understand the performativity involved with attempting to fill the gendered roles imposed on men and women alike and what added hierarchies we fall prey to in trying to conform to this cultural system.
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“We Think Back Through Our Mothers”: Common Experiences of Feminine Spaces

The experience of first reading Sappho in twenty-first-century Pakistan is unsettling. It is unsettling because, as a child, you heard of the Greeks and the Romans, Homer and Virgil— the ‘Classics’ were foisted upon you by enthusiastic English teachers and kindly relatives who wanted to guide your reading habit— but you never heard of Sappho. There was no mention of her in your colorful encyclopedias, no trace of her in your illustrated compendium of Greek mythology, and the boarding-school girls in your Enid Blyton books complained about the lines of Homer and Virgil they had to learn for Prep, but never Sappho. So you grew up with your abridged edition of *The Odyssey*, and a firm belief in the inviolability of the ‘Classics’— just like that, with their stature invested in that capital C. You read about men and their manly adventures until you got to Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, and concluded, subconsciously, that women must have been invented during the Victorian era. That is, they did exist in Ancient Greece, but only just: only as Helen of Troy, and patient Penelope, only to be written about. To discover Sappho, then, at twenty-two, in your last year of college, was decidedly unsettling.
Of course, when I say discover, I really mean re-discover. Before I finally read Sappho in this class on the Western Canon, I knew of her, at least in passing. I knew she was a poetess; I knew she lived not long after Homer; most importantly, I knew what the word ‘sapphic’ meant, and so, I knew Sappho as the ‘Original Lesbian’. For me the first step in coming to terms with her involved coming to terms with my pre-existing ideas of her: the vague but persistent notion of something unpleasant, something lewd, something very much on the fringes of a literary tradition. Reading Sappho, especially reading her after *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, I realized that she was certainly on a fringe, that she did write about the sexual and the sensual, and she did write about women, and did so evocatively. And yet, I did not find her lewd or unpleasant, nor did I find that she was solely, or even overly, concerned with sex. Yes, Sappho, as I read her, portrayed feminine sexuality and desire in a way that was completely alien to the epics we had previously encountered. But she also portrayed the existence and importance of a sense of community amongst women.

What brought Sappho’s poems startlingly close to me, was their preoccupation with the security, strength, comfort, and pleasure that women can find in the company of other women. Anne Carson’s translations maintain the work in its fragmented form—the gaps and omissions that pepper fragments, otherwise so simply and explicitly worded, leave an impression that is at once deep and hauntingly incomplete. The urgent, though broken, narration almost forcibly reminds me of my own recollections of the communities of women who make up my past and my present. Sappho’s fragments describe the tragedy of marriage, as well as its celebration, they describe lament, and communicate wisdom, and through them I recall the shared experiences of femininity in my past, and try and reconstruct how they have been expressed in conversation, memory, and even song.
Growing up Pukhtun meant growing up in a community that was, till recently, almost completely segregated, and even now, remains largely so. A result of this is that most of my childhood memories are of women. Weddings, funerals, births, every occasion to gather was an opportunity to revisit the time when my grandmother was alive and gatherings were a daily affair. Though there is seldom quite the same mix of people now, I find that certain interactions hold the same quality, and perhaps, that Sappho’s poetry would not be misplaced there. In one fragment, she refers to the departure of a young woman, and the sorrow it brings her. It begins with the words “I simply want to be dead” and goes on to describe the tearful parting of the two and the invocation of a past spent together (94.1). It is unclear whether the wish to die is Sappho’s or the young woman’s, but it is that very ambiguity that draws me to this particular poem. Even we refrain from assuming that the young woman is a bride leaving her home to be married, the departure itself, and the strange mixture of feelings it gives rise to, is at least analogous to the situation in which a woman leaves her home in marriage. Though the poem becomes implicitly sexual later on, and seems to lament the loss of a freedom of desire and sexuality that can now only be remembered, it also expresses grief for a communal loss. Through tears, the departing woman says that it is “against my will” to leave, and Sappho, even as she tells her to “rejoice” also begs that she “remember”, saying, “you know how we cherished you” (94.5-7). The use of the collective “we” persists throughout the poem, and seems fluid in its referent: it sometimes appears to be Sappho and the departing woman, sometimes the group of women that she is leaving behind, and sometimes the collective unit that existed before she left. The overwhelming impression that is created by that fluidity, is that the loss too is fluid, felt by each, and all, of those “we”s.
Although the general tone of the poem is one of regret, it intermingles with the sanctity of a ritual celebration and, I believe, a trepidation that stems from an uncertain future. This mixture of fear and longing is, I believe, the conflict that characterizes the poem, and also what tailors it to fit the conversations that I hear every day in Pashto, in spaces that are as purely feminine, but otherwise completely different. In my experience, a significant portion of the lives of ordinary Pathan women are consumed by the idea of marriage. Marriages are both anticipated and celebrated, and not only are the rituals and concerns surrounding them an almost exclusively feminine affair, as a topic of conversation, they are to be found wherever there are two or more women. I mention this apparent preoccupation with marriage, not as an allusion to the allegedly repressive female spaces of segregated Pathan society—though there may be room for such a critique—but because I believe it makes up the undercurrent of a shared feminine experience that binds the conversations and poetry of Pathan women today to these fragments of Sappho that were composed millennia ago. For them, in ways that women of my generation are only now learning to renegotiate, marriage is the central point of their lives: it the only conceivable repository of desire and longing, it is the single most significant aspect of what defines their places within their communities, and the rites and celebrations that surround it are integral to the social interactions that make up their lives. In Tappa, arguably the most popular form of verse in the Pashto language, one associated particularly with feminine expression, these sentiments are indicated in a manner that is as reminiscent of Sappho as of the conversations I have grown up hearing (Samina et al. 1).

The social norms that govern even our intimate spaces prohibit an explicit discussion of a particular type of sexuality. I am tempted to believe, in fact, that language itself is a barrier to that—I cannot, for instance, imagine the Pashto for “let loose your longing” being used even in
the most private of conversations (94.23). But I find that, in some instances, *tappay* don’t fall too shy of such expression. In one the speaker says: “*Tar neeme shpe me okatana/yar me ranaghe pa balakht khula lagawoma*” (I waited into the middle of the night/biting my pillow for my beloved did not come) (Samina et al. 19). The deeply physical nature of the desire that comes across in this verse seems to hold the same quality as that in Sappho’s poems. If we look at the fragment that begins “He seems to me equal…” there is a far more physical representation of desire in the lines that follow, and once again, I find that it is not without parallel in the *tappa*. In a couplet that is rather surprising both in its sensuality and the flippancy with which it deals with religion in the face of that sensuality, a woman tells her lover “*Da sahar munz pa tayamum okrha/Che da sro shundo khwand de khula ke pate sheena*” (Pray, this morning, with *tayammum*/That the taste of red lips may linger in your mouth) (Samina et al. 20). It must be admitted that I have never had access to these songs in their original form—“*Classics*” and *tappay* are unlikely to be found coexisting under one roof—however, it occurs to me that in their discussions of men and marriage, in their interactions with each other, these women articulate a similar sensuality.

I remember the massive open air communal kitchen that my grandmother ran in the village house until just before she passed away. It was attached to a sort of courtyard that had *charpais* and chairs concentrated loosely in the center, and it was always thronged by women: her daughters, daughters-in-law, granddaughters, nieces, maids, really just any women from the village who felt inclined to be there. And in retrospect, the intimacy and frankness of those interactions and conversations reflect a space that is as deeply feminine and secure as the one implied by Sappho’s poetry. The discussion of potentially marriageable youths was almost crudely physical in detail, and humorously snide and deprecatory. But more remarkable than that was the physical closeness of these women, the complete lack of inhibition when it came to there
bodies. Someone was always having their legs massaged with oil and my grandmother seemed to forever be having her hair combed and oiled, then combed and braided. Dupattas were askew, if not cast aside entirely; I remember watching with avid fascination as the woman who made the rotis pulled down her neckline to expose her breast and feed her little son, right there in the open, in front of all those women as if it was the most natural thing in the world. And so it was.

There is a fragment of Sappho’s that reads like a prayer of sorts, a single line that says, simply, “may you sleep on the breast of your delicate friend” (126). Anne Carson in a not to this fragment says that the word used for friend here means “a close female companion or intimate friend in a relationship that may be sexual but is not commoditized” (Carson 378). The female relationships I witnessed in my childhood, were fundamentally characterized by a similar closeness, a complete lack of inhibition. And though marriage was seen as a fortunate inevitability, there was always an anxiety that belied the purity of the celebrations, an anxiety that I earlier mentioned I was reminded of by Sappho’s poetry. The tearful lament of the departing woman who leaves against her will, “Oh how badly things have turned out for us” is a fear that is echoed in many tappay mourning the lack of ownership women have of themselves. In one, the speaker says “Surat zama wak yi da noro/ Raba ta wakhli da bi waka suratona” (The body is mine, though ruled by others/Lord take away these bonded bodies) (Samina et al. 7). In another, a married woman complains of her husband’s cruelty for not only beating her but also forbidding her from crying (Samina et al. 12). Though certainly the celebration of marriage occurs because it carries the promise to fulfill desire and purpose (it is almost inconceivable for a Pathan woman to never marry), there remains the dread that it could end in grief, and the recognition that far more is at stake for the woman than for the man. The fear comes from the prospect of leaving the safe, the familiar, the known space of the purely feminine, to enter a
world that must be negotiated on male terms. I remember listening, one Eid, to an older woman from the village explain how she was looking for a new wife for her husband to “share the burden”. He didn’t used to be as violent before, but now that she was older, she knew he wanted another woman and more sons, and she couldn’t afford to give him up entirely because her daughters were still unmarried. She was acting to save their marital prospects, but she saw only bleak futures for them even if she succeeded. And so, though brides are dressed and perfumed and “girls/all night long/might sing of the love between you and the bride/with violets in her lap”, the departure is always crowned by tears (30).

And yet, women marry and meet their fates, and build new communities around the new facts of their life. I have seen no space more exclusively, jealously feminine than the one surrounding the cradle of a newborn. Generations of women gather around the new mother and the conversation resumes its regular turn: there is a return of that intimacy and familiarity. In one of the most tender fragments moments, Sappho describes to her daughter her mother’s headdress, and wishes for her child “crowns of blooming flowers” (98A). As I fit the pieces of Sappho that I have newly found together with the couplets of tappay I only lately discovered and lives of the women I have always known, I am reminded of Virginia Woolf and the extraordinarily true statement she made in A Room of One’s Own: “we think through our mothers if we are women” (Section 4). We think through our mothers and our sisters, and somehow, we find that there is something of a shared experience of femininity and feminine space that has persisted through millennia. We find, somehow, that our mothers and sisters in their longings and vulnerabilities are not altogether different from Sappho of Lesbos and her community of women.
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Tracing the Defects of Human Nature to Society- A non-essentialist approach to Lord of the Flies

William Golding is widely seen as a fabulist and his novels as allegorical mythical constructions leaning more towards "meaning" than realistic depiction (Oldsey 93). There is more a focus on truth rather than detail and as such, his work has largely been read through the lens of symbolism and allegory rather than as a self-contained self-referential text. Lord of the Flies is one such text that has been seen as a fable about the human condition written partly as a subversive response to R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island - an adventure text about English boys "surviving violent encounters with cannibalistic natives and bloodthirsty pirates" on an island in the absence of adults (Singh 207) and in Golding's own words, "the theme is to attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature" with the moral being that "the shape of society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable" (Spitz 22). Right at the outset, Golding seems to preclude a reading that would not admit the concept of human nature but if authorial intention is to be disregarded, the text offers up various instances of reinforcing a reading that does not reduce to an essentialist ahistorical approach to human beings but allows for a reading that chooses to see the boys very much as products of a society rather than causes of it. This essay argues that despite being largely seen as a comment on the 'tragic flaw of being human', the
'savagery' the boys in *Lord of the Flies* descend into is largely a result of their social conditioning and their attempts at imitating the civilization they come from. This is evidenced by their exploitative and acquisitive attitude towards the natural environment, their attempts at emulating culturally constructed roles of power-hungry masculinity and by their self-destructive fear of the "unmappable" which they ultimately apprehend as "The Beastie".

From the beginning of the novel, the exploitative approach to land socially conditioned into the boys is apparent even from the very language used to talk about the natural environment. This is evident when Ralph climbs on the granite platform that is said to "interrupt" the landscape and where no tree grows to much height. On this platform, Ralph seats himself on a trunk described as "convenient" (Golding 17). The fact that the beginnings of the narrative of these human inhabitants is facilitated by the "interruption" of natural growth can perhaps be seen as a foreshadowing of the narrative of human "civilization" at the expense of the natural environment. One of the first interactions of the boys with nature is when Ralph and Piggy eye a shell in the distance and attempt to retrieve it from the weeds, Ralph "tore out" a stem and "began to poke it about in the water while the brilliant fish flicked this way and that." (Golding 21). He then uses the stem to push the shell to a position where it could be "grabbed" by Piggy. The implications of such a manoeuvre as an aggressive intrusion into the natural life of the island is obvious. The fact that they immediately start ascribing value to the shell as “ever so expensive”” (Golding 22) highlights the persevering conditioning of ascribing arbitrary exchange or monetary value to products of the natural environment and how the boys have internalized such a view of ordering the world around them. A little further on in the novel, Simon, Jack and Ralph encounter some bushes which Simon identifies as "candle bushes". Jack slashes them almost instinctively and Ralph informs him "You can't light them. They just look like candles"
(Golding 40). Jack is further disdainful of them because he claims they cannot eat them either. The politics and implications of naming and categorizing and the results of such categorizations is important at this juncture. Simon calls them candle bushes because he knows that that is what they are known as in England. They are named as such because of the resemblance they bear to an artificial instrument which can be seen as an attempt at ordering nature to further familiarize it in anthropocentric terms. The expectations such a naming engenders in Jack and his contempt for the bushes when they seem to serve no material end for him highlight the antagonism bred in the boys as a result of their social conditioning which privileges rational inquiry and utility-oriented modes of action and assessment. Ironically enough, it is exactly this disinterested post-Enlightenment approach towards the environment that is championed in "Coral Island". (Singh 207). It is also interesting to note that the novel's dominant images of evil consist of "natural imagery" such as the "The Beast" and 'The Lord of the Flies' which is the pig's head-all redolent with the notion of "nasty animality" (O'HARA 416). However, it is interesting to note how this very association is subverted in the novel through “Piggy”. Piggy, like the pigs on the island, is the hunted, the victim and ultimately, equally harmless. The Lord of the flies, Golding shows, is not an animal- It is a "pig's head on a stick": "an emblem of man's sadistic cruelty to natural things and of his ignorant attempts to placate a falsely externalized evil" (O’HARA 416). Whilst Golding would insist that this cruelty is innate, this essay would argue that it is conditioned into the boys as general disdain for the natural, including natural human processes. An example of this occurs in the text when Simon asks the other boys what they think the dirtiest thing is and their answer is 'excrement' (O’HARA 415). This tendency to see natural processes as somehow evil and repulsive is characteristic of the "civilization" these boys emerge from, one that shames the acceptance of the 'natural' and hence, the reconciliation of human beings with "nature".
A substantial influence on the behavior and choices of the boys on the island is the cultural script of masculinity the conformity to which, this essay argues, is a significant factor in the decadence and violence that characterizes the result of the boys' attempt at emulating 20th century English civilization. 'Lord of the Flies' has been described as a 'self-conscious culmination of a long line of boys' adventure stories beginning with 'Treasure Island' but as stated before, is more particularly a parody of sorts of Coral Island (Singh 206). The fact that these boys are conscious of this literary male-dominated narrative of exploration, civilization and 'discovering' islands is obvious in the very language they employ to talk about the new land. At one point, Ralph explicitly states "it's like in a book" (Golding 45) upon first regarding the island. A similar exclamation "We're explorers!" (Golding 33) is an example of how they learn to identify themselves according to remembered societal constructs and conditioning. Having assigned themselves a role according to a recognizable script, they then proceed to conform this role of adventurous exploration and the inherent violence that this glorified fantasy entails. The island is described as "the imagined but never fully realized place leaping into real life" (Golding 21) drawing attention to its “pre-existence” in cultural and particularly, the boys' consciousness. This fantasy is realized and these children can be expected to behave as their “heroes” did. The "masculine" and very colonial trope of establishing authority/dominance is instantly evident along with the parallels with Coral Island. "Both texts equate good government with the containment and defeat of savagery and both characterize savagery as the absence of a restraining law" (Singh 208). However, this notion is perverted by Golding's depiction of the containment itself as inherently savage. The idea of government immediately introduces a hierarchy and an unresolvable dialectic and rivalry between Ralph and Jack that can at best hang in a delicate balance. Both play out a "masculine" urge to be
in charge and to chart uncharted territory as when Ralph states "We ought to draw a map" (Golding 35). This conflict of interest acts as a catalyst to the fatal violence the novel ends with. According to Frederick Karl "When the boys on the island struggle for supremacy, they re-enact a ritual of the adult world" (Oldsey 96). The mimetic nature of the arrangement of government is even explicit in the childlike enthusiasm of suggesting having "hands-up like at school" (Golding 43) culminating in the usage of the conch as a symbol of authorization to speak. This emulation of democracy is contrasted with Jack's authoritarianism-who, already being leader of the choir boys retains a predilection for supremacy and unquestioned control which ultimately leads to the setting up of an alternative totalitarian 'order'. At one point, he viciously declares "We'll have rules! Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks 'em__" (Golding 44). The borrowed quality of this rhetoric, particularly the idea of rules as ideological commodities (with its attendant consequence of punishment) that they retain from their civilized past further reinforces the idea of their notions of governance as purely an attempt at imitation of adulthood, particularly the adults at "school". Their establishment of authority turns the island into a "divided" one tying in with the notion of masculine territoriality. Their consciousness of being seen by grown-ups and their desire to behave in a way that adheres to what is expected of them as "male" directs their actions in ways which perhaps they would have been hesitant to go through with otherwise. An extremely telling instance of this is when the boys first encounter a pig and Jack raises his knife to stick it but hesitates -"the pause was only long enough for them to understand what an enormity the downward stroke would be"(Golding 40). The notion that the response to stick the knife into the pig was an 'acquired' one is evidenced in Ralph's exclamation "You should stick a pig. They always talk about sticking a pig" (Golding 41). The boys' consciousness of the "They" and the pressure to conform to "Their narrative" even in their discourse on this remote island further illustrates that their behavior cannot
be isolated as in a vacuum and has to be assessed as a product of social forces rather than a cause. Their ideas of hunting, exploring and mapping are all attempts at playing out a pre-established narrative, not a deviance from it. The novel criticizes the narrative more than the persons attempting to fit into it. The performative (and hence, scripted) nature of the behavior of the children on the island is established externally by the very vocabulary of the officer who arrives to their rescue at the end. He says “I should have thought that a pack of British boys—you’re all British, aren’t you?—would have been able to put up a better show than that—I mean—". The tragedy of the ending lies in the fact that when the boys finally transcend 'their show' of masculinity to be vulnerable enough to break into sobs, the officer turns away 'embarrassed' to allow them time to "pull themselves together" (Golding 248).

The fear of the “Beastie” that eventually leads to the ruin of the boys' 'civilization' can be traced to the fear of the “unmappable” or that which resists definition and signification in anthropocentric terms or that which is particularly non-conformable to Western European urban city-scape ideals. One of the first (conditioned) impulses the boys express with respect to the land is when Ralph claims "We ought to draw a map" showing the colonial impulse to go where no one has gone before and to claim and order it according to one's own aesthetics (Golding 35). The inability to apprehend the land on its own terms and the turmoil of communication and cognition it causes amongst the children is a running motif in the novel. The first mention of the 'Beastie' occurs when one of the "littluns" states that it came in the dark. Immediately, the contrast between "daylight sanity" (Golding 227) and the irrationality and horror the fear of the dark (irrational, unknowable) engenders in the boys is established and developed throughout the novel. Ralph himself, whilst insistent that there is no beast is flustered as he is described as feeling as though he was "facing something ungraspable" (Golding 48). This inability of Ralph's to fully apprehend his
reality culminates in frequent "verbal blackouts" where he is about to say something but then a "shutter comes down" (Golding 175) and he loses it entirely, even if the matter is of great import. This calls attention the insufficiency of logocentric language to represent land that seems to seek definition only on its own terms. At several instances in the novel, the very language used to talk about the land and particularly, the forest, highlights this "communication gap" as when Jack is said to scan the "uncommunicative forest" (Golding 62) and creepers are defined as "inscrutable". Similar instances of the land being described as "uncompromising and impossible" further illustrates the frustration the boys face when they try to superimpose their acquired framework of order on a land that refuses to oblige. The very idea of mirage and the land as "illusion" occurs in chapter four when Golding describes at length the various features of these visual tricks and then goes on to state that the boys "ignored them" (Golding 74). Unable to fully understand something, they either dismiss it or fear it. The sea, too, is described as illusive in this context. However, it is interesting to note that later, a boy Percival, claims that the "beast comes out of the sea" (Golding 109). The obvious correlation between that cannot be fully controlled or apprehended is conflated with the terror and the amorphous catch-all label of "the Beast". An extreme instance of the desperation to hold on to the "civilized world order" is embodied in Percival Wemys Madison who clings to his full name and address (and tries to recall his telephone number) "Percival Wemys Madison, of the Vicarage, Harcourt St. Anthony, Hants, telephone, telephone, tele-" (Golding 108). Eventually he forgets more and more of this incantation and can be argued to have devolved to a 'reduced existence' when he cannot even remember his name (Oldsey 96) until the ambiguous end of chapter five where it is stated that this incantation was "powerless to help him" (Golding 117). The illustration is powerful. None of the methods of identification and navigation are relevant on this island and failure to realize that leads to an end like that of Percival. He had
Shah

memorized this "incantation" as a means for him to be returned home if ever lost but he is transported to a place where this information is meaningless data. The ritual quality of incantation also highlights the learned, acquired and arbitrary quality of one's identity in the urban civilized world. Confronted with the uncompromising wild, all such systems are rendered useless and this antagonism is rationalized at best as a confrontation of the human vs the 'Beast' with the latter being no other than that which is inapprehensible.

'Lord of the Flies' whilst largely seen as (and even criticized) as a fable on the human condition and written out of a deep cynicism regarding the 'essential nature' of human beings manages more to be a comment on society rather than any "universalizable" conception of individuals. Golding expressly stated that "The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable" (Spitz 22). As a fable with a moral, the Golding attempts to strip of it historical specificity and thus, make its relevance timeless and universal. However, Golding's comment on human nature is not possible with isolating human nature from societal influences. Whilst Golding claims that that is precisely what the novel has done, Spitz, in his article “Power and Authority: An Interpretation of Golding's ‘Lord of the Flies’.” argues that it remains obvious that the boys do not "spring, full blown", in a vacuum but were "carefully chosen products of an already established middle class society" (29) and a "microcosm of 20th century English civilization" or "what fragments of it they could remember" (29). The memory of where they came from and the attempts to approximate that life characterize the various interactions the boys have with the land and each other. The specific Western European origin cannot be discredited entirely. The impact of the Enlightenment looms large as does the history of War, nuclear war, colonization and fear of the 'Reds' which can easily stand for communism in the abstract but obviously Cold War context of
the novel. As Spitz states in his article, "There are differences of kind as well as of intensity among evils, and among societies in which evils abound" (33). He then draws attention to the difference between racism in America and Hitler's genocide and how they are two different degrees of evil. The very idea that some societies are in fact, less evil than others makes a historically and socially contextualized reading of the novel necessary. Golding has not isolated human nature in Lord of the Flies but rather the essence of Western European civilization with its attendant traits of colonialism, rational masculinity and a furiously incontinent instinct to map, possess and control.

Word Count: 3050
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One is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one.
-Simone de Beauvoir

What does it mean to be a woman in postcolonial Mozambique? Paulina Chiziane answers that there is no one definition. Her novel, *The First Wife: A Story of Polygamy*, explores a woman’s struggle for identity amongst the multiplicity of competing, contesting notions of womanhood in Mozambique. Through the struggles of her protagonist, Rami, we understand the position of women in a society where the contradictory values of tradition and modernity exist simultaneously to create contradictory ideals for women to uphold. Rami, wife to Tony, a senior police officer in Maputo, goes into a crisis when she finds out that her husband has been cheating on her and supporting four other households throughout their twenty year old marriage. Emotionally conflicted and desperate, she decides to confront his mistresses, one by one. Each mistress is from a different part of Mozambique, from a different class and social position, and so, each mistress represents a different type of Mozambican woman. Rami falls into a crisis of her own womanhood after clashing with each rival’s conception of what a woman should be. She begins to rework her definition of womanhood once she becomes aware that no one definition is valid.

Judith Butler, in her acclaimed study, *Gender Trouble*, coins a term “gender performativity”, which, I believe, is useful for analyzing Rami’s engagement with and
redefinition of her identity as a woman. Gender, she argues, is not an essential, biological notion, but one that is culturally presupposed. She states that:

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being as an on-going discursive practice; it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an incessant and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by various forces that police the social appearance of gender” (Butler, 45).

Using Butler’s theory on the performativity of gender, I wish to argue, in my essay, that the novel depicts the process of Rami “intervening” and “re-signifying” the manner in which she stylizes and performs her gender. As a consequence of the crisis of her husband’s infidelity, she unwittingly, through self-reflection and social critique, begins to construct a “genealogy of gender ontologies” that allows her to deconstruct her own “substantive” appearance of gender into its “constitutive acts” and locate them among the multiplicity of scripts that perform reified definitions of gender within Mozambican culture. With these, she ultimately loses her assurance that her performance is the only one which is valid and is able, by her own sense of agency, construct a new way of being.

The first chapter of the novel signals the beginning of the process of Rami’s intervention and re-signification of her femininity. Frustrated by her husband’s constant absence, she questions herself in an attempt to understand why he no longer gives her the attention she feels she deserves. She asks:

“How can Tony despise me like this if there is nothing wrong with me? When it came to obeying I always obeyed him. I always did what he wanted. I always looked after him. I even put up with his craziness…Modesty apart; I’m the most perfect woman in the world. I made him into the man he is now. I gave him love, I gave him children so could gain the esteem of others in life. I sacrificed my dreams for his. I gave him my youth, my life.
That’s why I say, and I say it again, that there’s no other woman like me in his life!” (Chiziane 17)

This is her first examination of the manner in which she performs her gender. At this point her examination is not yet critical – it is more an attempt to understand where her performance of womanhood is failing. The passage demonstrates what her conception of a “perfect woman” is. She is self-sacrificial and dutiful – a child-rearing house-wife with all her energies devoted to her husband and home. Tony is the observer who validates her performance of gender. Patriarchy, the “regulatory frame” that “polices the social appearance of gender” has its representative here in the form of her husband who she is aiming to please. The woman’s performance is something that is aiming to please and satisfy the requirements of patriarchy itself, and she cannot comprehend why she is failing when, in her understanding, she is performing her gender in the exact way in which the patriarchy urges her to act. She considers herself as a perfect woman and if there is nothing wrong in the manner in which she performed her role, then how can Tony “despise” her so? This confusion leads her down the path to further introspection, which eventually leads to a slow yet steady dissolution and reconstruction of her conception of what a woman should be.

In confusion, she goes to the mirror to look at herself in an attempt to discern what is “wrong” with her. After lamenting how ill she looks, she says “with this sad mask I look like a ghost, the person here just isn’t me” (17). The word “mask” implies that she has become aware, to a certain degree, of the constructedness of the manner in which she acts, and now she understands that this way of acting no longer suits her, no longer works for her. She searches for something real and true behind her mask. She thinks of her past - of song – “when it comes to singing, I know my roots. I’m from people who sing” (17). She hearkens back for something
intrinsic inside her. She sings and she weeps, and revels in the catharsis – “I savor the tears that flow and feel the greatest pleasure in the world. Ah, how this crying makes me feel free!”

Scholars have interpreted this scene as Rami’s moment of self-discovery, of her identity resurging, of her coming to consciousness. Butler, however, does not believe in the notion of an identity behind gender performance. She states that “gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler 25). In this sense, we understand that Rami’s identity up to now has been a progression of socially sanctioned developments in the manner with which she performed her gender. If this scene is analyzed from Butler’s perspective, she would say that Rami is hearkening back to a time when she did not have to perform gender the way she does at this moment, when her performance is failing her, and her husband refuses to appreciate her.

This scene inaugurates, if analyzed from Butler’s lens, the awakening of her sense of agency – the faculty that enables her to be able to look at her performance objectively and look for alternative ways of being. It enables her to have a discursive engagement with her conception of femininity and allow her to deconstruct her notions of femininity and reformulate it in the manner that she chooses. For Butler, agency is the primary means through which the possibility of “interventions” and “re-inscriptions” of our gendered performances are made possible. If gender is a “repeated stylization of the body”, it is possible to “repeat ones gender differently” and alter the script or style by which one performs it, through choice – enabled by one’s own sense of agency.

Rami’s negotiation with herself, her sense of agency, throughout the novel, is symbolized by her conversations with her alter-ego that exists within her mirror. She presents
herself to Rami at this moment when, for the first time, she attempts to look behind the “mask” for alternate modes of performance. The woman in the mirror calls herself Rami’s twin – which can be interpreted as her presenting herself as the woman Rami would be if used her agency to define what woman she wants to be. At this point, Rami has been constructed by her society and her upbringing, and dismissive and hostile to the alternatives available to her. That is why she, her mirror twin, repeats twice, “you’re blind, dear twin” (18). Rami is blindly following the script she has been given. Her anguish is caused by the fact that it no longer works, it no longer serves her.

Her mirror twin tells Rami to dance upon “life and death” and “sadness and loneliness”. A dance in itself is a performance. It is a thing choreographed, scripted – but the dancer can choose which dance to perform amongst the scripts available. The dancer can choose which dance to perform according to which suits them best. Likewise in life – agency gives you the power to choose, amongst the scripts available for you to perform, the one that suits you best. This is the philosophy she is trying to advise Rami to follow. The mirror tells her that by dancing: “I am celebrating love and life…I celebrate life while waiting for death”. Life can only be lived scripted – choose the “dance” or script that gives you the best experience of life that is available within the bounds of society. There is no total freedom – the scripts, the restrictions will only be removed in death. That’s why she waits. Rami is enraptured by the vision her mirror makes. She can sense the possibility – the freedom her making use of her agency will allow her. This is the first time it has awoken. “My revealing mirror,” Rami thinks, “we have lived together ever since I got married. Why are you now revealing your power?” It is now because, for the first time, Rami truly questioned herself.
From this point in the novel, Rami attempts to modify the way she stylizes and performs her gender specifically to win Tony back, not to live life better for herself. Her desires are all, at this point, focused on Tony, she wants his love – thus, despite the advice of her mirror-twin to change the way she lives for the better for herself, she tries to transform the way she acts to attract Tony. As referenced earlier, she is confused as to why Tony is cheating on her when she performs the ideal of the wife that he desires. This confusion becomes compounded after her meeting with Julieta, his first mistress. Before this meeting, she consistently believes “the women of the world are stealing [her] Tony away” (Chiziane 19). Tony, in her eyes, is deceived by the tricks of other women – deep down she tells herself that it is her who he truly loves. After their meeting, she is forced to acknowledge that Tony ascribes on her ideals that make her less attractive. When she confronts Julieta, there is a moment where, after fighting and arguing with each other, they face each other. Rami is struck by the way she dresses.

“I take her in. She has neat, painted nails. Well-kept, uncrimped hair, things I never had. Tony forbids me from wearing any embellishments or artificial adornments. He wants me just as God put me on in the world. The clothes she wears were made by a carefully chosen dressmaker while I only wear factory-made or secondhand clothes. I rummage through bundles of used clothes in the market on the corner in order to dress the whole family decently and save money. She has an audaciously plunging neckline, with her armpits on show, while Tony wants me dressed and buttoned up like a nun. What is forbidden for me, the other woman is allowed. I am offended by this contradiction.” (Chiziane 28)

The way in which Rami’s femininity is stylized is much more restrictive, modest. She is the wife – the tools and props of her specific performance are consistent with her role. Rami is fascinated, almost covetous of the things that Julieta is permitted and she is not. The contradiction offends her in that it is clear that Tony does not mind Julieta’s immodest mode of dressing, indeed, he must appreciate it enough to build her a house and father children with her. It is clear that social validity is what is at stake when he validated her performance of femininity
in the past. His absence, to her, is sign that social validation is no longer enough to keep him satisfied at home, thus, she begins to try to perform her femininity differently. As I referenced in my thesis statement, this launches her into an exploration of the many modes of existing as a woman in Mozambique to be able to discern which way of acting would appeal to him more. In the process she constructs a “genealogy of gender ontologies” in the cultural context of Mozambique that teach eventually teach her that there is no right way to perform her gender, and ultimately, she will take her mirror’s advice to live, to “dance” in the manner that pleases her the most.

It is in chapter four where she begins to catalogue and contextualize society’s opinions on gender performance - when she goes in for an interview with a love counselor. In this chapter the theme of gender as a social construction, too, is made apparent. The love doctor, coming from a different part of Mozambique, tells Rami that she is not a woman, but a child, because she was never taught about sexual love before her marriage. Rami, in response “looked at her with surprise. Suddenly, I recall that famous assertion, *no one is born a woman, you become one*” (47). Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion, which was foundational for Butler’s theory of gender performativity, is the premise on which the chapter’s exploration into the multiplicity of cultural definitions of being a woman begins on. These definitions are socially and culturally determined.

“We spend our time comparing the cultural habits of the north and the south…Women in the south think those from the north are easy, free, deceitful. Northern women think those in the south are feeble and frigid. In some regions in the north, the man says: my dear friend, to honor our friendship and to strengthen our ties of kinship, sleep with my wife tonight. In the south, the man says: Woman is my cattle, my fortune. She must be led to pasture with a cane. In the north, women adorn themselves like flowers, make themselves beautiful, look after themselves. In the south, a woman is a source of light and should be the source of the world” (48).

This passage contextualizes Rami’s mode of practicing her femininity into the wider context of her being a modern woman from the south. Her initial belief that other women were to blame for
her husband leaving her is premised on the way her society taught her to view other modes of expressing and performing femininity. It’s a marker of difference. She does not dress like women from the South who are more traditional and resents them for emphasizing her beauty, and Tony’s focus on social validation is consequence of how he too has been taught to see gender. Rami, her conversation with the love doctor, is able to see her feelings and responses contextualized within the culture that she is in, so she learns that they have been instilled on her from without. The cultural traditions have, through repetition, stylized the southern woman’s body within a regulatory framework to make it seem to Rami as if her manner of being a woman is the natural, correct one. By conversing with the love doctor, she is becoming aware of the importance of history and context. This is further emphasized when she highlights how she was the daughter of an “out-and-out Christian” and the colonial regime, which banned African traditional practices such as initiation rites and bride prices, was much stronger in the south. These factors influenced the way her gender was constructed and therefore performed. Gramsci states that “the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is…as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. It is important, therefore, to make an inventory” (Gramsci 324). This is what Rami becomes engaged in with her meetings with the love doctor. In their treatment and analysis of the culture of Mozambique, they “do not spare any tradition. African and non-African traditions, both constituting integral parts of the postcolonial Mozambique nation, are displayed as traditions with long-lasting habits that ‘forge’ women as subaltern subjects” (Marquez, 134).

Her first attempt to deviate from her assigned script occurs after her meeting with the love doctor. She changed her style of dressing to one that is more provocative in order to attract
Toni but he shoots her attempt down. “What inspired you to such gaudy tastes?” he says, despite the fact that his other mistress Julieta dresses in a similar fashion. This teaches Rami that the manner in which he views her cannot be divorced from the social context from which she emerged. She is to be the wife; any performance of gender by her which deviates from the script she has been assigned will not be met with approval from his end. But by conforming and submitting to this regulation, she will not get what she wants, which is his undivided love. She learns this lesson when she goes to confront his second mistress, Lu. In arguing with Lu, she tries to convince her of how socially unacceptable their relationship is. She responds to shatter Rami’s illusions.

“You’re not institutionally married, while I am. You’re the concubine and I’m the spouse. You’re secret and I’m acknowledged. I’ve got right to security, the right to inherit, and you don’t have the right to anything. I’ve got a marriage certificate and a ring on my finger. ‘But I’m the one who’s got all the pleasure; I receive all your husband’s love and his salary. I experience the joy of living. Do you consider that so unimportant?’”.

It is the love and the pleasure that Rami wants, and having understood that by conforming to his requirements, she will not get what she wants. She continues to struggle with this idea, she recourses to magic and tattoos to desperately conjure her husband’s affections. When they backfire, she falls into a state of depression. Eventually comes to the conclusion that the advice her mirror was giving was right – she might as well live and act the way she likes. Either way her husband will not give her the response, the affection, the love she wants, but at least she can behave in the manner that makes her personally happy.

The first true instance of her violating her assigned script in a serious fashion was when she slept with Lu’s lover, Vito. She was intoxicated, and she would not have perhaps committed the act of violation if she weren’t, but she had wanted it and enjoyed it. Waking up, she realizes that in having committed this act she has, “pulled down the pillars that held up [her] values.”
[She] couldn’t resist” (115). Lu convinces her that she did not commit something wrong, and finally settles into the joy of living according to her own desires. She describes how “Vito starts being the mysterious shadow that pursues my own. The moon that gleams through the cracks in my window” (128). Her relationship with him is her first act of deviation from her ascribed gender role, the one that is done to please her and not anyone else. This moment in the text is where Rami truly is able to wield her power of agency to make choices on what type of woman she wants to be, to do things that please her as opposed to fitting a script that no longer serves her.

Thus, we can see the stages of the process by which she makes an intervention into her performance of gender and recreates it in the image that suits her. It is done by discovering the power of her own agency in choosing how to behave, and making a genealogy, an inventory, of all the ways a woman is told to act, is expected to act, to be able to understand how her own inherited definition of femininity is as valid as the others, and so, acting in whichever way pleases you is valid in itself. After this point in the novel, Rami is able to manipulate both the script that she has been ascribed to by society and the script she is developing herself, to political, subversive ends.
Works Cited


