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What Do Women Want? The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness

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What Do Women Want?
The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for

Honors in the Departments of Political Science and Gender, Sexuality, Women's Studies

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ABSTRACT

ELLEN, HANNAH *The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness: An Analysis of Feminist and Freudian Theories of Individualistic and Communalistic Pleasure and Joy*

ADVISOR: Professor Lori J. Marso

“What do Women Want?” My thesis asks whether women can genuinely seek freedom while also hoping for happiness. I look closely at how male theorists define happiness and liberty for themselves and for others, and in particular for feminized others. My two central chapters focus on theories of individual happiness, happiness sought through another or others, and the ways feminist thinkers reimagine happiness in relationship to women’s freedom. I apply feminist critiques to the concept of psychodynamic therapy as an anti-revolutionary tool designed to isolate and silence women into believing that coping with oppression is equivalent to genuine happiness. I argue that internal mental readjustment is a result of male-designed structures which force women to be happy with what makes men happy. Throughout, I engage the work of thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Shulamith Firestone, Emma Goldman, Sarah Ahmed, Virginia Woolf, and Simone de Beauvoir.

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Introduction

In the U.S., happiness has been presented as an ideal, a goal so elusive, so magical that one was truly successful and free if they were happy. Thomas Jefferson's inclusion of the pursuit of happiness as one of the three most significant inalienable rights in our Constitution shows the link between freedom and happiness and just how important happiness is for those fighting for political progression. But what about the unhappy? The ones who are still unhappy even after they have tried or acquired everything that is promised to make one happy? They go to therapy. Freud's famous question, "What do women want?" reflects a male ignorance and shallow question. Feminist authors such as Shulamith Firestone, Sarah Ahmed, and Jill Filipovic look into how men are not perplexed by the complexity of women's needs; they just never cared enough to simply ask what could be done or changed to make women happier.

In psychodynamic therapy, women are stripped from their own concepts of individual happiness and unhappiness as they are encouraged to find ways to turn their unhappiness into superficial happiness so as to cope *within* the existing patriarchal society. This internal readjustment may be temporarily satisfying but causes the female psychoanalysis patient to become distracted from the root of her unhappiness; societal inequality stemming from familial inequality. Clinical psychoanalysis also alienates women from their fellow feminists, preventing women from engaging in communal consciousness raising about the ways in which patriarchy limits each of their pursuits of genuine happiness in similar ways. By depoliticizing this matter in a one on one setting with a psychotherapist, the woman is made to question why she cannot be happy with what she should be happy with and her inability to do so is formulated as her own fault. Sarah Ahmed discusses this as happiness alienation. Additionally, clinical psychotherapy pulls the female patient towards a concept of societally shared happiness, one which should

please all the people in her life as well as herself but in reality, is a brand approved by men which does not truly represent nor prioritize women's needs.

By placing Shulamith Firestone into conversation with Sigmund Freud, with supporting evidence from the works of Jill Filopovic and Sarah Ahmed, I will discuss the role of the feminist pursuit of happiness within the opposing forces of Freudianism and feminism. In the 1940s, Freudianism succeeded in overpowering feminism because of its alienating isolation of women from each other, its counterrevolutionary clinical solutions to feminist pursuits of individual happiness, and its appeal as an objective and legitimate applied science in comparison to feminism as a subjective political movement. Firestone purports that Freudian psychotherapy is a systemic subjugation of women's individual pursuit of genuine happiness but is framed as a solution for both unhappy feminists and threatened men. In addition to an introduction on the relationship between happiness sought within feminism and an alleviation to unhappiness sought within Freudianism, the question of happiness will be approached in two sections.

The first will analyze how women seek happiness on their own and how psychotherapy and education are presented as more viable, sustainable, and legitimate pathways than feminist political engagement. For this section, collective happiness will be looked at as a patriarchal construction which is framed as that which must be protected from those who are not happy with this exclusionary happiness. The second section will be on how women seek happiness through others in both a Freudian and feminist perspective. By looking at love, marriage, sex, and motherhood, the ways in which women resign to Freudianism as a solution, become participants in their own oppression, and sacrifice their happiness for others will be analyzed. The third and final section will be on how women seek happiness in a feminist manner. By analyzing female friendship, feminist revolution, and a rejection of Freudianism, collective happiness will be

redefined as a way to fight for the happiness for all marginalized people. This genuine happiness can only be acquired through revolution of the current system. By killing concepts of patriarchal collective joy, the concept of the feminist killjoy will no longer exist.

Individualistic Pursuit of and Promise of Happiness

Originally, Freudian theory focused on the freedom of the individual through internal investigation of trauma through psychoanalysis. Shulamith Firestone argues that in order to be widely adopted as a viable alternative to feminism, which was rising with popularity at a threatening rate, Freudianism was modified into an anti-revolutionary clinical solution to women's pursuit of individual happiness through feminism. Ahmed's concept of societally shared happiness which pleases men closely resembles the anti-revolutionary alternative to feminism which Freud's modified psychoanalysis aimed to preserve. In essence, clinical psychoanalysis served as a tool to subdue the masses of unhappy women who were left high, dry, and confused about where to go next following the granting of the vote, via the nineteenth amendment.

Firestone explains how "Freudianism subsumed the place of feminism as the lesser of two evils [despite the fact that] ... both at once were responses to centuries of increasing privatization of family life, its extreme subjugation of women, and the sex repressions and subsequent neuroses this causes" (56). While both feminism and Freudianism presented theories which fundamentally criticized mainstream societal structure, feminism, in its political promise, left women dissatisfied when they were unable to also make broader sociopolitical and personal progressions in addition to securing voting rights. Firestone explains, "Following the...granting of the vote, came the era of the flappers, an era ...[of]... pseudo-liberated sexuality" in that

women became ignited with hope for equality on all fronts but were merely granted the limited right to vote in a political system created and controlled by men who were still able to intimidate and suppress women in all aspects of public and private life (57). Legal guarantee of rights did not do much in terms of de facto sex discrimination and the biggest offender; female dependency as a result of their lack of control over birth. “They were told then as we are still told now, ‘You’ve got civil rights, short skirts, and sexual liberty. You’ve won your revolution. What more do you want?’ But the ‘revolution’ had been won within a system organized around the patriarchal nuclear family” and these achievements were strategically granted to quell women for the time being (Firestone 57).

The danger now for this group of women who “no longer had a political direction for their frustration” was that they were now vulnerable to male gas lighting, as well as what would soon come; psychoanalysis to make the driven yet misguided girl both smiley *and* marriage material (57). Women were incredibly confused about where to go next given the fact that feminists had been using similar vernacular weaponized by patriarchal institutions and clinically applied Freudianism. Second Wave feminism focused on what Ahmed calls in “Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness,” “happy objects” or objects promised to grant not only an alleviation to suffering but also access to what men had; the happiness and contentment that comes with full freedom to act and make decisions which impact society for the greater good. The vote represents an abstract happy object but when women were not granted immediate happiness as a result, the confused, disturbed, lost, and disappointed feeling that followed would fall into what Ahmed calls the experience of “happiness alienation.” Women’s demand for a single item, something they could all agree on, was used by men as grounds for making women feel insane and radical for still wanting more.

Firestone introduces the theories of Herbert Marcuse to demonstrate how despite promises that certain objects, processes, or relationships may grant joy, true happiness and sexual freedom for women are in fact impossible within an oppressive system. She holds that they are only falsely granted to exploit and capitalize off of the marginalized. Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* explains “Repressive de-sublimation...[whereas]...In a repressive society, individual happiness and productive development are in contradiction to society; if they are defined as values to be realized within the society, they become themselves repressive” (Marcuse cited in Firestone 57). Within a patriarchal society, which represses the rights of women and feminized individuals (i.e. children and queer folk), true individual happiness for *everyone* is neither possible nor a true goal of this society. In other words, the inclusion of all, for the sake of progressive political development, is not actually key to the preservation of this type of society.

In a polis like the United States, in which the pursuit of happiness is not only defined as a key value but as a right, individual happiness can become something repressive, something granted to some and falsely advertised as a viable option to the less fortunate. Furthermore, the expectation itself that all strive for happiness is repressive in that despite happiness being more difficult to achieve by marginalized classes, races, and women, the illusion of social mobility punishes the unhappy for not trying hard enough and guilt’s them into cooperation and accommodation to appear non-threatening to the ruling class. In order for individual happiness, a goal of feminism, to exist within our society *without* disassembling any of its exploitative systems or structures, Freudianism was applied in a clinical setting to train women to be happy *enough* with patriarchal collective happiness and their own oppression. Collective happiness is defined as being an ideal which men believe brings joy to all simply because it brings joy to them. This privileged position dictates one’s perspective and limits it to being one which is so

exclusive, narcissistic, and dominant, that the reality of other's pain at the expense of their happiness is unthinkable.

Moreover, Firestone presents Marcuse's theory on happiness within a repressive society to show how women's individual pursuit of happiness is a threat because it does not always match men's expectations of women want nor what men want for women. This disconnect between women's unhappiness and men's frustration with women not being happy with the little they had been given played a large role in the development of psychoanalytic therapy. Sarah Ahmed describes in "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness" the way in which "Beauvoir shows us how description can become a defense: you describe as happy a situation that you wish to defend. Happiness translates its wish into a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that demands that others live according to a wish. When a happiness wish is deposited, a social norm becomes a social good" (572). Men defended what made them happy by extending it to all. They expected others to accommodate their needs and because our society is built on the individual pursuit of happiness as a God-given rights, personal needs which hurt others are allowed and protected if presented as required components of one's happiness quest. What men describe as good for them has been wrongfully taken as good for all. Happiness is considered sacred in our history, described by philosophers throughout time as what "gives meaning, purpose, and order to human existence" yet is difficult to secure, given its unpredictable nature, originating from the word "hap, suggesting chance" or "luck" (Ahmed 572, 574). Due to the fact that happiness is so coveted because no one can concretely identify it, control or preserve it, once a situation or object has led to happiness, people desperately protect and defend this situation or object believed to grant happiness. More specifically, white men are frequently the ones making

decisions about collective good and which institutions to protect due to the fact that they grant the privileged members of society consistent joy.

Ahmed cites Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* as evidence of the oppressive aspects of the institution of marriage, propagated by men as one which made women happy, with oppressive, male-serving duties framed as the women's pleasure to fulfill. When women admitted that housewifery was a prison, men were shocked because the false reality they had believed in, which had been upheld by women's cooperation, was burst and when happiness is spoiled, the spoiler becomes the faulted in the eyes of the suddenly unhappy. Ahmed writes, "The happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness. The claim that...this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labor not as products of nature, law, or duty, but as expressions of a collective wish and desire" (573). This very framework places the responsibility behind the unequal gendered makeup not in the hands of sexist husbands nor a sexist capitalist workforce which benefits off of women's unpaid labor but in the hands of women. It makes the point that women aren't just happy and content with their oppression as housewives but that they wished for it or even begged for it to begin with. As will be discussed in latter part of this piece, women are promised that the happiness of their families, which is dependent on their adequate servitude, will in turn make them happy. This is partially true on the surface in that an unhappy and unsatisfied husband may become a violent and punishing husband. This subliminally instructs women to keep their husbands happy in order to avoid a beating and to preserve the housing and income they receive from their husband. The tangible and social securities granted in exchange for sacrificial happiness is advertised as the key to women's individual happiness but ignores true substantial existential happiness.

The Unhappy Housewife: Happiness and Freedom

Ahmed, Friedan, and Firestone discuss domestic servitude as the root of female unhappiness and to some degree, they are correct, but only on a superficial level. When women are forced to stay at home and are forbidden from going outside, yes, a deep unhappiness can arise from feelings of imprisonment. Alternately, Stockholm syndrome effects can lead women to find pleasure in their domestic condition and fulfill a sort of pseudo-masochistic dynamic. Feminists such as Friedan and Ahmed will argue that this is a false happiness, that no woman can be happy so long as she is not free. Some hold that a woman must realize that she is a caged bird singing but others like Firestone will argue that unhappiness will persist until women have true freedom from the very root of their domesticity and dependency on male bread-winners; uncontrolled fertility. Providing women choices and alternatives to restrictive structures is a righteous cause but naming happiness and not freedom as the end result of such procedures is not entirely accurate. Additionally, naming happiness as a byproduct of freedom is also not completely correct either. Relief from pain and suffering may come from liberation but it is not certain whether deep existential joy follows or if liberation and education even bring such alleviations.

In *The H-Spot The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness*, Filipovic explains the disconnect between what women were promised and how they were sorely disappointed. She writes, “The shift among whites to the independent nuclear suburban family...relied on a promise that this new model would make both women and men happy-and that, for women especially, the work they put into the home would pay emotional dividends” (Filipovic 25). Women were promised that they would find personal fulfillment through the gratitude her family would feel for her if

she sacrificed everything for them. However, not only was this the dream of men who reap the benefits of unpaid labor repainted as something women crave more than men but women became disoriented and alienated when they in fact did not end up deriving happiness from this submissive lifestyle.

As will be later discussed, Ahmed holds that increased freedom to see the horrible unjust truths of the world, while worthwhile, may actually lead to more unhappiness once the veil of blissful ignorance is lifted. However, I will first discuss the interaction between pieces which acknowledge the complex and ambiguous relationship between freedom and happiness. I will demonstrate hidden and abstract forms of freedom and happiness often ignored by patriarchal structures and many feminists by exploring Beauvoir's analysis of how women find happiness in the home, Chantal Akerman's film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels*, and Marso's "Freedom's Poses."

Akerman's film is titled the name of the main character, Jeanne, and her address, considering about ninety-nine percent of the film takes place behind the closed doors of her apartment, where she reigns sovereign. Akerman's depiction of the active yet obsessive-compulsive and potentially pathological homemaker reveals what Beauvoir discusses as the home as the woman's oasis from the harsh and chaotic male outside world and what Marso discusses as spaces in which people are neither free nor entirely oppressed. As will be discussed further on in this piece, uninhibited lasting individual happiness as a result of liberation may be a construct defined by men who are able to think of themselves and themselves alone. What the case of Jeanne displays is that housewives which many feminist authors would call patriarchy's prisoners are neither entirely unhappy nor happy. In fact, such radical feminist theories which state that all housewives exist in a constant state of misery ignore the dynamic between complex

and interwoven bursts of exuberant joy, violent anguish, and all of the emotions which exist on the spectrum in between.

Feminist films, especially Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*, serve as valuable tools through which viewers can perceive the subtle and mundane ways in which women exercise little pieces of freedom and happiness through limited control within their constricted spaces. Women are able to discover these forms of subculture and miniature sub-society within their homes and domestic spaces, which do more than just mimic the outside world but rather open doors to new, exciting, satisfying, and even joyous tasks. One may ask, have we taken too lightly the caged bird's song because we see the cage from the outside? Feminist film provides an unobtrusive peak *inside* the cage so that we may find the little *genuine* joys and why the caged bird may sing for herself, even when no one is around to listen.

In the case of Jeanne, she keeps herself painstakingly occupied for what feels like an eternity to the viewer as she completes feminized activities, cooking, cleaning, and receiving sex to fill her time in a cyclical nature. In other words, nothing is permanently completed and as one task for her son or male Johns is completed, another needs to be done and the same exact tasks need to be done multiple times a day, every day. Her inactive activity shows the women's work that happens behind the scenes in the imminent realm, in order for men to do things in the transcendent realm. Akerman gives the audience the woman's or child's perspective in that it shows boring, insignificant, and incredibly time-consuming invisible tasks whose processes are never displayed in mainstream time and space but only in feminine time and space. Her neurotic obsession with order, cleanliness, and perfection gives her a sense of personal accomplishment and control but her inner world, the one which exists in her apartment, is threatened by the chaotic world outside. Her almost superstitious routines which cleanse her feminine space of

disruptive male energy maintain her sanity. Despite the fact that she operates in a male world, in accordance with male time, either waiting for her son to return to school or for her clients to arrive for their appointments, when her own time schedule is thrown off by a man and another man disrupts her space, she lashes out and destroys a representative from the outer world to bring balance to her little oasis.

Beauvoir discusses how woman are consistently in the position of passively waiting in colonized time and space which they will never own. She describes the way in which women do not have agency to change anything in reality, in the male dominated world so are left in the realm of being imminent, or powerless in terms of making lasting impacts on their external environment or humankind. Beauvoir writes, “Man’s truth is in the houses he builds, the forests he clears, the patients he cures: not being able to accomplish herself in projects and aims, woman attempts to grasp herself in the imminence of her person...It is because they are nothing that many women fiercely limit their interests to their self alone, so that their self becomes hypertrophied so as to be confounded with All” (667).

Her deliberate nature as well as the fact that she prefers solitude and is not actually the pitiable lonely housewife that Friedan and Beauvoir discuss is revealed by her interaction with a female friend. In fact, the viewer becomes increasingly aware of the fact that she finds deep meditative serenity in completing her domestic tasks in solitude, uninterrupted by the outside world. In “Freedom’s Poses,” Marso discusses how the dynamic between the home as a space devoid of freedom and the outside world as representing true freedom ignores the complex freedom found in domestic or imminent spaces and the concept that freedom and lack of freedom can be found in unexpected ways. Marso writes, “I worry that to highlight walking as freedom’s preferred pose hovers too close to the replication of the posture (and maybe the perspective too?)

of the masculine self...what happens to other poses, postures, and activities when we single out walking as...freedom's path" (2). Akerman's film and feminist films which focus on the hidden ways in which women participate in transcendence in unorthodox ways show that there is a creative aspect to making and molding objects in a space traditionally viewed as restrictive, without having to transcend time and space in the typically male construction of the idea.

The housewives Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 2011) describes in *The Second Sex* are confined in tight domestic spaces (sometimes, though, they are too expansive—think of suburban kitchens), their bodies contorted into postures and poses that do not look at all like freedom on the face of it. And yet Beauvoir notices that housework makes women “grapple with matter” (Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, 472) and that housework can even be a sensual experience: “In her fingertips she feels the freedom and power that the brilliant image from the scrubbed cast iron reflects back to her,” (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). (Marso 3).

We see Jeanne's satisfaction as she completes a task and gains satisfaction and pride in having done so. She is a master of the home arts and does not appear to want assistance or company. Flitterman-Lewis discusses how Akerman's positioning of the camera “allows viewers to occupy a position so close to a film's characters that it replicates the process of subjective identification...this involves what is known as the ‘point of view’ system” (31). Because her camera is a “static, distanced camera,” the experience of the viewer is simultaneously formal and impersonal because of the distance but also because you get this inside looks at private actions that are usually not portrayed in modern Hollywood films because the majority of such works are directed through the male gaze and therefore do not place emphasis on domestic tasks seen as insignificant.

It is clear that Akerman's camera has a quiet yet recognizable presence in that there is nothing sneaky or forbidden about it. Instead of following the exploitative patriarchal perspective

of peaking at women dressing or bathing to bring the voyeur pleasure, Akerman displays the mundane tasks that have been hidden not because they are forbidden but because they're usually considered not worth watching. Flitterman-Lewis quotes Akerman saying, "The camera was not voyeuristic in the commercial way because you always knew where I was. You know, it wasn't shot through the keyhole" (32). The viewer has the perspective of an ally and given the opportunity to empathize with Jeanne, to analyze her actions as a means of understanding her motivations.

In the film, Jeanne periodically babysits an acquaintance's infant as a favor and had always been able to do her other tasks such as preparing dinner while the baby was at her apartment because the baby was cooperative and well behaved. Upon the mother's return to pick up her child, she confides in Jeanne in a desperate rant about the struggles of being a busy mother and this woman's imposter syndrome and general uncertainty. She tells Jeanne she does not know what to cook for her husband and kids and talks about watching other women to see what to order at the butcher and mimics their meat orders and actions because she is so unsure of herself. While this could have been a perfect opportunity for unity and sisterhood or for the much more confident Jeanne to give this new and frazzled mother soothing advice and consolation, she just nods, offers nothing to the conversation, and eagerly closes the door so as to get back to her routine. The viewer is given the impression that Jeanne, a domestic expert, cannot empathize with this woman or that this woman shows weakness and chaos which makes Jeanne nervous by association.

The audience can first see Jeanne's obsessive tendencies after her first prostitution client leaves after their session. Jeanne sits in the bathtub and painstakingly scrubs every single inch of her body, seemingly ridding herself of the touch of the men she serviced so as to regain

autonomy of her own being and be both physically and psychically thoroughly cleansed of the men who could have lasting effects on her, therefore risking disrupting her routine, if their trace remains on her skin. I saw a parallel between the way she was compulsively scrubbing her body and the way Lady MacBeth ferociously washes her hands to regain control and purity and rid herself of the guilt associated with the blood on her hands. Even though Lady MacBeth's hands were physically clean, the scrubbing seemed to be an attempt to ease her mind. The same could be said with Jeanne's need to clean behind her ears, in addition to everything else, when the odds of her client dirtying her ears are slim.

After cleaning her person, the stationary camera shows Jeanne then bending over and painstakingly scrubbing down the bathtub after she uses it to reclaim her home as her domain. It first appear as though she was cleaning so as to please a man, whether that be her son or the remnants of what her late husband expected. But it soon becomes apparent that these domestic tasks are not burdensome tasks given by patriarchal pressures and in fact bring her ease. Beauvoir writes, "Daily cooking teaches her patience and passivity; it is alchemy; one must obey fire, water... To obtain a certain result, she will follow certain time-tested rites. It is easy to understand why she is ruled by routine; time has no dimension of novelty for her... because she is doomed to repetition, she does not see in the future anything but a duplication of the past" (639-640). Here, Beauvoir describes how women are unable to control time or have a lasting effect and she is not allowed to change her future so as a result, she finds comfort in repetition because it is all she will ever know so long as a glass ceiling exists. Beauvoir grapples with the ambiguity of happiness and freedom in constricted areas in that she recognizes that women can be both powerless to and powerful over the objects in their home and that theory solely looking at domestic life as oppressive misses the gray area. Marso writes,

Beauvoir...is willing to see something unexpected: housewives learn practices of freedom in the tightest and most unlikely spaces. They conform their bodies to spaces in ways that limit free movement but teach important lessons about practicing freedom...subject to disabling...repetitive and often boring processes, Beauvoir's housewives squeeze freedom out of these postures and processes, sometimes successfully transforming them into creative and artistic encounters where they (and we) learn about compromised conditions of agency... Inside, staying put, moving in cramped spaces, Beauvoir does not only see lack of freedom. Instead, she sees how activities, locations, and perspectives that are determined by relationships of oppression might teach women a new form of freedom, one that eschews transcendence, overcoming, moving out and away from the home... This is... a freedom that does not align with transcendence, with will, or with overcoming (3).

Marso analyzes the way in which women's lessons about freedom are very dissimilar from the way in which men and therefore mainstream theories of freedom are taught. Due to expectations that women stay in the home and look after food for others, children, and a home which does not even entirely belong to themselves, their theory of freedom is not as individualistic as it is for men. Because women are responsible for boring tasks which require patience and submission, women find alternate ways of being free, given their circumstances. Marso acknowledges how Beauvoir reveals the complex dynamics in which everyone can be free and unfree, transcendent and imminent. To view women inside the home as solely imminent ignores all that they create and to view those outside of the home as transcendent ignores that which limits and dominates them. Feminists similar to Freidan focus on will as the determining factor in levels of freedom and therefore opportunities to choose to do whatever makes them happy. It is not so much that Beauvoir disagrees with points made by Freidan but rather than Beauvoir recognizes more expansive conceptualizations of freedom and happiness and that looking at freedom and the right to happiness solely from a male perspective discredits varied emotions which occur in a multitude of spaces. We see how Jeanne is happy with her world and has little to no desire to escape the confines of her apartment by the way in which she quickly retreats to it following necessary excursions for errands.

Later, I discuss Shulamith Firestone's claims about the false state of nature defined by men in pursuit of individualistic freedom and personal happiness, regardless of the harms such pursuits may bring the less fortunate. Marso discusses Beauvoir's take on this concept in relation to transcendence and imminence. Marso writes,

Transcendence is a false form of freedom made possible for certain men only because their power allows them to force the non-white, the non-powerful, the non-male to do the repetitive and back breaking tasks that reproduce the conditions necessary for living. But here is a key insight of Beauvoir's: it is only *in situations of encounters with others, with objects, with situations where we experience a lack of transcendence that we can learn about how freedom actually works* (4).

Most men hold that being free means being able to act alone, to do whatever one's heart desires, and impact the world in exciting ways easily, because the boring tasks needed for the maintenance and sustenance of daily life are taken care of by the imminent. Beauvoir and Marso hold that this does not constitute a complex nor realistic mastery and practice of freedom as a concept. A feminine freedom, not necessarily a feminist freedom, is defined by navigation around other immovable beings and objects, which teaches early and often about the limitations one must experience if one is to justly interact with their earthly cohabitants. Fearful tiptoeing around everything which has power over you gives lessons about toxic power. Furthermore, healthfully acknowledging that absolute individual freedom is not worth potential happiness if stepping over others is involved gives way to more mutually respectful constructions of society.

Only those who are first coerced into or expected to follow traditionally imminent lifestyles, usually women, are then able to find happiness in powerlessness or in circumstances of limited power; a lesson which is compatible with real life which involves not always getting what one wants. Perhaps patriarchal constructions of the pursuit of happiness, the promise that one can achieve absolute personal joy, set individuals up for disappointment. We see this

gendered difference between Jeanne's son, Sylvaine, and Jeanne. Sylvaine is unaware of the labor his mother does while he is at school and becomes incredibly impatient and rude when he suddenly comes home to only half of dinner completed. He is able to lash out because he feels as though her job is easy, because he never witnesses the grueling actions which occur behind closed doors. Because Jeanne is so busy remaking the potatoes she ruined so that Sylvaine could have a perfect meal according to plan, she is not there to get his coat and hat at the door like she always does. He notices because he is so used to seeing her with everything in order and tells her, "Your hair's a mess" and "You're missing a button." Despite her having labored intensively to please him, she is expected to have hidden all of her hard work behind closed doors so that the finished product looks like it was a pleasure to create, because after all, women are expected to be naturals in the home arts. In contrast, when things do not go Jeanne's way, she internalizes her frustration and only in the very end, once the border between the transcendent world and her own is torn down does she lash out in a masculine way, violently punishing he who upset her. Marso writes,

Beauvoir says of cooking that, 'working the dough [the housewife] experiences her power' (472). She doesn't mean this ironically-she is not simply marking false consciousness, although she well knows that 'working the dough' is not truly power. What she means is that women often get pleasure and even experience freedom and creativity in housework. This is a kind of freedom that is much less dangerous than men's misguided and adolescent belief in their unmitigated sovereignty and power. Stooped toward others and stooped over objects, learning the *limits to transcendence*, women experience a different kind of freedom, and *this is the kind of freedom we want to replicate in the world* (4).

A feminine power respects the autonomy of other members in society and finds non-invasive means of finding personal pleasure.

Maintaining domestic order with dignity is what gives Jeanne a sense of confidence and even if she does not gain positive emotions from such actions, she might be doing them in order

to ward off the bad emotions she knows would come if she allowed her person and environment to lose order and be messy or not on schedule. She keeps a tight schedule for herself not only to make sure that she has full control over everything but because with downtime, her idle body leaves her with a busy mind, and with a busy mind comes existential panic and maybe the realization of her dissatisfaction. Or perhaps, when she is not actively busy, the control over the situation is not in her hands and she is rather, on the receiving end of chance, on whatever may happen *to* her instead of what she is doing. The viewer may perceive Jeanne's constant physical activity to be oppressive but also evasive of the nagging thoughts which chase the mind. Her fear of inactivity is what restricts her. Marso interprets Arendt's argument in *Responsibility and Judgment* and says, "Arendt worries explicitly about not stopping...She warns us about...processes that move so well, so efficiently, so smoothly, that no one stops to question where they are going, who they serve, what damage they might do and to whom" (5). We see later in Akerman's film the way in which Jeanne's postponement of stopping to reassess the breach of her oasis- and what this rush of sensation meant to her- culminates into a radical release of emotions which had been repressed for the sake of productivity.

Jeanne's deliberate yet obsessive manner is almost soothing to watch, as if it is choreographed to maximize efficiency. Flitterman-Lewis describes the "obsession-tinged serenity" that exists for Jeanne and the viewer who has entered her space (33). She folds her son's and her clothing with one sweep, crisply cleans every single inch of the house but does not do more than needed, turns off the lights, closes the door/pot/window to each room before she leaves said room in order to essentially check that task off the list even if she is going to enter the room again in a little bit. To leave open ends so to speak might mean that that task could nag on her mind and occupy it with anxiety and uncertainty. Marso discusses in "Perverse Protests:

Simone de Beauvoir on Pleasure and Danger, Resistance, and Female Violence in Film” how Jeanne’s domestic labor is not as much of a burden than some might originally assume it to be and that her experience is far more complex. Marso writes, “...viewers come to see her tasks and her relationship to them not only as mandated and determined by oppression...but also as providing pleasure (they are ritualistic, aesthetic, bodily, and even sensual)... viewers do not get the feeling that she wholly resents maintaining her home, or serving her son and servicing her clients” (875). There is a simultaneously anxiety-producing and soothing experience of watching Jeanne maintain her house. Akerman creates an experience of feminized time and space by placing the camera in a position in which it does not interact or interfere with Jeanne’s daily tasks. We are powerless help her but we are also comforted watching her do exactly what will ensure that she is prepared with dinner for when her son comes home and with a clean and made bed for when her clients arrive.

Flitterman-Lewis describes how the perspective of the camera is one “that is both shared and intimate, one that is taken from daily life and childhood memory...the position of looking evokes a generalized childhood view of a mother’s actions, reasserting the regularity of these repetitive tasks” (33). What is unique about the child’s perspective is that the viewer gets an unobtrusive, non-exploitative inside look into a woman’s world, one in which the viewer is aware of the *time* it takes to do tasks, one as if you are watching your mother prepare for the man of the house to come home for dinner.

Beauvoir discusses how women define their homes as their own safe spaces, over which they have dominion and from which they can be protected from the threats of the outside world that rejected them. Beauvoir writes, “...to find a home in oneself, one must first have realized oneself in works or acts” (470). She discusses how in order to exist happily with the domestic

world she has been relegated to, she almost has to trick herself into believing that the home is real and the outside world isn't, which is essentially the opposite of what patriarchal values hold. Beauvoir writes, "She has to change this prison into a kingdom...by becoming prey, she liberates herself by abdicating; by renouncing the world, she means to conquer a world" (471). Jeanne appears to gain confidence, control, and power over the domestic realm both in her home and at the butcher in that she is a master in the home arts and with certainty in this, she avoids the existential derail involved in feeling like she is on the outside looking in or in the case of the unhappy housewife, on the inside looking out. Beauvoir explains, "The home becomes the center of the world and even its own one truth; as Bachelard appropriately notes, it is 'a sort of counter- or exclusionary universe'; refuge...womb, it protects against outside dangers; it is this confused exteriority that becomes unreal" (471). In the case of Jeanne, what ultimately leads to her deterioration is the violation of the border between the world she has control over and the world over which she does not.

One of her most important compulsive tasks is her need to place a clean towel down on top of her neatly made and fluffed bed for when she takes clients and then her need to remove the towel and clean it after each use. Because it is so important to preserve her space, she feels the need to control who enters her space, who messes it up, and who brings remnants of chaos from outside into her orderly home. By placing the towel down, she is able to prevent the smells and other messy effects of sex to remain in her space following the client's departure back out into the disorderly world. She repeats this step after each of her different clients that are scheduled for a day a week, every week. The certainty of this crucial step however sets her up to later feel desperately under attack when this action as well as the others is foiled by unavoidable chaotic mishaps, causing her to lash out. Beauvoir writes, "Although she might close the doors

and cover the windows, the woman does not find absolute security in her home; this masculine universe that she respects from afar without daring to venture into it involves her; and because she is not able to grasp it...she feels...surrounded with dangerous mysteries” (645). Jeanne’s obsessive cleaning after her male clients leave demonstrates a need to cleanse her space of all remnants of the male world. The threats of this unknown space make her uneasy and as long as she is able to benefit from it in a way the male world allows, through the use of her body for sexual satisfaction, she would like to have as much control over every other aspect of what she comes in contact with since she will never be able to impact the world outside her apartment.

In the first stage of the film, Jeanne has complete control over timing but following a mishap where she has an accidental orgasm with one of her clients, her timing becomes skewed and she is left waiting inactively which drives her mad. The orgasm was destabilizing because it forced her out of the bubble of numbness and controlled emotions through her tedious and repetitive tasks. Jeanne did not get to choose when or how she was going to have the orgasm. The rage she felt towards the last man and her murder of him is more understandable if the viewer looks at the way in which her entire stabilizing routine began to fall apart after the first orgasm with the second client. Marso writes,

the orgasm, which sets Jeanne on the path to murder. It is as if she were so used to unfeeling, to the deadening and deadened effects of her small and straightened life, or to the small bit of control that she had over her tasks, that this deadness and illusion of control kept danger away... Thus, pleasure portends danger.

Unbridled joy and euphoria is not an emotion we witness on her face frequently. One could argue that Jeanne is more a slave to her fear of disorder than she is to her optimism about order. Instead of feeling a baseline contentment in states of chaos and happiness in response to order, Jeanne feels contentment in perfect order and discontentment in anything less.

Entirely used to her identical, repetitive, and cyclical routine, the viewer can easily spot the mistake Jeanne makes with every single task following this surprise orgasm. Her key moments of miserable inactive waiting are outside the shoe repair shop with her son's loafers because she arrives too early, in her kitchen as she anxiously stares at the wall while waiting for the second pot of coffee to boil after spoiling the first, and waiting impatiently for her final client of the day. This inactivity is a reminder of her imminence and disruptions from the world over which she has no control threaten the oasis she has constructed for herself. The times when she does have control in the outside world-at the butcher, shoe repair shop, and button shop- it is apparent that she does not extend these journeys outside for longer than absolutely necessary.

Additionally, these are micro-oases in that they contain provisions for her domestic life, objects to be used at home in her dominion and not in the patriarchal world. These objects do not make a lasting influence on mankind and society but rather facilitate the maintenance of impermanent components of life; meals which will give men energy to contribute to history and shoes so that men can move upward and onward with ease. Jeanne is usually able to master these outer spaces and balance them with her own but the barrier between these two worlds has been broken following the destabilizing orgasm. What ultimately leads to her deterioration is the violation of this very border between the world she has control over and the world over which she does not. We see this as the baby she watches cries inconsolably so she cannot work, she can't find a button the right size to replace her missing one at any store, someone has taken her routine seat at the café and her favorite waitress is out for the day.

Previously, each time a client arrived, Jeanne would take him to another room and the stationary zoomed out camera would see the door closed. This time, once her final client arrives, the camera gets an up close shot of her face while her client is on top of her. She looks visibly

disheveled and upset and appears to be desperately miserable that an orgasm, something that never happens, is happening *to her* and that she has no control over it. Finally, once he finishes and she attempts to get dressed crisply and reclaim control, she sees in the mirror that her client has pulled the towel out from underneath him and now his bare body is laying on her bed. Horrified, frustrated, and desperate, she calmly walks over and efficiently murders him in one swift stab to the neck with sewing scissors, a possible representation of either her domestic servitude perceived by some or more accurately, a weapon native to her universe. Marso writes, “Reading the film with Beauvoir, we can see that Jeanne is trapped somewhere in the murky in-between of thwarted agency and too obvious, easily condemned, cliché’d violence as she murders her John with a pair of scissors, the second-most-quintessential feminine weapon after knitting needles” (881). Yes, she did murder this man out of her own volition but Akerman’s decision to arm her with sewing scissors serves as a reminder of her limited circumstances. During the murder, Jeanne entirely let go of all of the obsessive control she used to have but following the murder, she simply acknowledging what she had done and she almost appears relieved in a sense. Jeanne’s transformative process was marked by intense anxiety but she reclaimed a sense of control by choosing to go with the flow instead of frantically preparing dinner for her son nor clean up the bloody mess she made.

This final scene leaves the viewer with a number of choices to make in terms of their interpretation of the murder. Some feminists like Freidan and possibly Ahmed might argue that Jeanne’s murder of the John could be viewed as the final culmination of built-up resentment towards those who forced her into domestic servitude. This stance is not entirely grounded in the evidence found in the film given the fact that Jeanne clearly appeared to genuinely enjoy having the opportunity to participate in sex work from home so that she could remain in *her* sacred

space. She also finds pleasure in perfecting her craft and preserving her home, her palace, through the labor of love she puts into that which makes her happy. Alternately, if unable to justify her attack on another with an explanation on the original patriarchal attack on her, we are left with the equally radical alternative perspective; she is insane and murdered out of selfish impulse. Theorists such as Beauvoir and Marso acknowledge that her actions rather fit into a category separate from these two options; one far more ambiguously acknowledging of the complex woman's condition as neither solely a victim nor assailant. Additionally, I will argue that although Ahmed's theory of the feminist killjoy in its traditional construction-which does not acknowledge ambiguity as adeptly as Beauvoir or Marso- may not have originally be written to include cases such as that of Jeanne's, Jeanne could actually clearly be classified as a killjoy. While not overtly political, Jeanne Dielman kills the joy of the viewers who are forced to watch her obsessive behaviors and also quite literally kills a man.

The Unhappy as the Objects of a Modern Witch Hunt

In order to understand the need for Freudian psychotherapy to preserve patriarchal dominance both privately and publicly, one must analyze the concept of the feminist killjoy and how her unhappiness, viewed as pathological, threatens the very foundation on which patriarchy stands.

With the maintenance of the patriarchal concept that women are happy with what men are happy with comes the blame of women when they express the desire to pull out of what men perceived as a mutual agreement. Ahmed writes, "We cannot always close the gap between how we feel and how we think we should feel. To feel the gap might be to feel a sense of disappointment. Such disappointment can also involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (Why

am I not made happy by this? What is wrong with me?) or a narrative of rage, where the object that is supposed to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment” (581). In both cases, women are expected to believe that it is these internal faults which have spoiled the joy instead of appropriately directing the disappointment towards the system rigged against them to begin with. Ahmed writes how “situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists rather than about what feminists are unhappy about” (583). By reading feminists as unhappy, one can distract from systemic problems that need fixing and rather insinuate that this unhappiness, an ugly, inappropriate and subversive emotional condition is inherent to the feminist.

The claims by patriarchal society about the innate characteristics of feminists and women in general provide the basis for the argument that neither feminists nor women are incapable of ever being pleased so there is no point in trying. This very concept also provides the basis for society to accept the Freudian theory of female pathology as the root of their unhappiness rather than legitimate oppression. Women who challenge the dominant culture are discredited as mentally unstable so that their concerns not only are then taken as internally constructed as opposed to real reflections of external injustices but also so that they can be prevented from gaining support from other dissatisfied women who must not take the risk of ostracization by association. But why is an inability to be made happy by what society expects one to be happy with so threatening? Why is it not simply regarded as a matter of preference and why does something as personal as individual happiness become so political, a female issue so problematic that an entire school of thought needed to be altered and deployed in order to solve it? What is the root of this anxiety? Is it fear that one will never actually find happiness since they were unable to find it in what they thought they could or is it the fear of being seen as no fun, a killjoy.

Ahmed writes, “The feminist is an affect alien, estranged by happiness...The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of other; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness...feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared” (581-582). This is exactly where feminism and its critique of gender inequality is viewed as a call to abolish that which does not benefit those complaining but does benefit those maintaining such conditions. While solving inequality only helps the marginalized and does not necessarily injure the privileged but rather redistributes resources, the privileged feel attacked by the concept that what makes them happy is not universally applicable.

The unchallenged narcissism of man feeds the perception of woman as their less-than mirrors. Women are seen as less deserving of higher standards and they confirmed this for years by settling for less. The result is shock when women purport that what men want for women and even for themselves may not even be what makes women happy. This disorientating realization is thus rejected and the killer of joy is punished or outcast. But how is happiness shared? Ahmed writes, “Feminists...disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. To kill a fantasy can still kill a feeling. It is not just that feminists might not be happily affected by the objects that are supposed to cause happiness but that the failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others” (582). The issue at hand is that feminists do not simply state their unhappiness as independent from the happiness of others. The feminist unhappiness is accompanied by a demand that the happy reconsider the entire system and perhaps redistribute that which gives them joy when selfishly owned. Jeanne is a perfect example of refusing to find happiness in places which are expected of her.

Jeanne satisfies neither patriarchal figures nor feminists and does something new and consequently political; she does what she wants. Marso writes, “Akerman’s formal choices and narrative frame refuse a simple reading of her heroine’s life that would show housework only as drudgery and the female protagonist as patriarchy’s victim” (875). Jeanne disrupts the feminist fantasy that happiness will be found in the outside world of action; the realm of transcendence, beyond domestic oppression and pointless, grueling, and cyclical tasks. The commitment she makes to cooking and cleaning- although the nature of the fruits of her labor are meant to be destroyed and redone-demonstrates the fact that this routine and the protection she gains from being in her home bring her peace. Many feminists are left with the impression that Jeanne’s behavior is pathological due to the fact that they are unable to understand why she would be genuinely content with and thrive in conditions of oppression. The feminist’s joy is in turn killed by Jeanne’s alternative conception of joy.

In contrast, more traditionalist viewers who believe in the domestic relegation of women may also find immense dissatisfaction in viewing Jeanne in that her happiness surrounding her labor is for her own mastery rather than out of the vicarious joy a housewife is expected to feel through preparation of meals and clean spaces for the loved males in their lives. Jeanne does not grin with pride as her son eats and rather appears to resent him for consuming and destroying her productions. While feminists may view her final murder of the John as satisfying and proof of Jeanne’s little bit of rationale in that it serves their concept of justice, patriarchal viewers may perceive everything but the murder as sane. In this case, the murder is viewed as proof of her unhinging and rejection of normative femininity; one which nurtures and protects men.

While it may be counterintuitive to diagnose Jeanne’s rather violent behavior, attempting to put a name to it offers the possibility to explore her motivations and affect. Her murder of the

John could be proof of what Berlant calls “cruel optimism.” Jeanne’s obsessive lifestyle could be viewed as unsustainable, one which set her up for immense dissatisfaction following a disruption to the fragile balance in her mind reflected by the perfect order in her home. Jeanne is optimistic that she will be able to keep everything in her home perfectly kept, despite the invasion of men from the outside world. While she is able to preserve the other parts of her home, the place where she services her Johns, the bed, becomes the location at which she angrily retaliates once the order is lost. Berlant writes, “When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us...Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in advance of its loss” (20-21). Jeanne is attached to a problematic object; perfection in her environment. She is optimistic that she can uphold this but this optimistic is cruel because it is bound to fall apart. Berlant writes,

What is cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world (21).

Jeanne clearly does not endure the loss of the cleanliness and sense of control over her environment once the John removes the towel and places his filthy bare body on her bed. Her obsession with order threatens her well-being in that it places her at great risk of destruction in the event of its disruption. However, she cannot function without this order and it may be centrally linked to Beauvoir’s points about her entire world existing within her home and that by exerting control over the objects in her home, she thrives.

While Jeanne may find a sense of calm in these tasks, her experience with them is more

than just that of a victim or a liberated woman who has reclaimed the joys of domesticity. Akerman shows that feminine domesticity is not simply passive and that there are bubbling desires and complex needs of women as subjects and this can enable the reader to see Jeanne's murder of her client in the end as more than just a psychotic break. Marso writes in "Perverse Protests", "Creating order in her day, and subsequently in her life, by tending to these jobs may keep more dangerous emotions and disorderly thoughts and feelings in check" (875). These dangerous emotions are not simply based on vengeance which an oppressed and abused housewife may seek but are based on both rational and irrational desires which challenge the idea that women are solely objects or the other and rather can be the subject, object, and as Beauvoir details, everything in between. Marso writes, "With Beauvoir, we can see how women's seemingly pathological feelings and acts of violence, produced in isolation and conditions of oppression, might be read as signs of resistance. They also signal the need for feminist collectivity and solidarity..." It is too simple to view Jeanne's behavior as pathological. Given her limited circumstances, it could be argued that the only way for her to exert power and maintain sanity in such unnatural conditions was to act equally unnaturally. Marso discusses the "various ways individual isolated women exceed the limits of feminine identity and its mandated behaviors to resist oppression in perverted yet discernible ways." By going beyond what is expected of polite, docile, cooperative, and gentle housewives and acting out of character-resembling the violence acted out by men-the sudden break in character is viewed as psychotic. When looked at it through the lens of Beauvoir and Marso however, the perverse action can be seen as a premeditated protest reflecting a rational preservation of one's needs. Furthermore, Marso invites us to challenge our concepts of appropriate political protest. After all, isn't the whole purpose of protest to upset the status quo, disturb and upset the ruling class, and achieve

freedom however is possible given your individual limitations to full agency. She writes,

Seeing the heroines as motivated by a complex range of feelings and as enacting perverse forms of protest unsettles the equation of political action with sovereign agency and forces us to rethink any too easy equation of female violence with insanity or excessive female sexual desire... Beauvoir alerts us to the insight that even the tasks and situations that bind women to conditions of unfreedom provide surprising openings for agency, if in perverted form, to emerge.

Jeanne did follow her happiness. She did what she felt was necessary to protect that which ensured her contentment, even though it had a price for others. However, had she had entirely uninhibited control over her surroundings, she would not have been in a position of desire. What is unique here is that unlike external factors which some women face such as an abusive husband who forces his wife to cook and clean, these conditions were created by Jeanne herself given the limited options she had as a woman.

Furthermore, the very act of viewing Akerman's Jeanne is one riddled with discomfort. As Ahmed describes, the feminist killjoy sabotages the happiness of others by being unhappy with what they are expected to find pleasure from. Jeanne makes almost all viewers uncomfortable because we are forced to look at that which is private, not meant to be seen, is obsessive, and spoils our ability to enjoy the products of her painstaking labor. Watching Jeanne strenuously prepare meals, tidy rooms, do laundry, bathe and sew ruins the joy of coming home to a clean apartment, with a hot homemade meal made, a clean and beautiful mother and wife, and freshly washed and tucked sheets. We are made to feel guilty for even wanting the end result of this effort. Our joy is killed by the private being made public in an unusually long, detailed, and unabridged cut of domestic labor most adults who are not housewives are blind to. Our joy is killed when we are given the message that nobody deserves the public result given the labor which makes it possible. In other words, everyone wants a happy wife but cannot have this without a slave. Akerman's piece presents the hypocrisy of happiness paradigms as well as the

unfairly polarized expectations from the right and the left regarding what is guaranteed to bring women joy.

Ahmed discusses how the political aspect of feminism or any justice oriented political movement is that the happiness of a ruling class is built off of the backs of the unhappy working class. What makes feminism, a political movement backed by feminized individuals, so central to happiness is that patriarchy expects a pleasing disposition from women. Women are expected to nurture not only their children but their male spouses, parents, and everyone in their community. The sacrifice women are expected to make in terms of their own happiness and wellbeing will be further explored in the latter sections. Ahmed presents the question, “Does she [the killjoy] expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy...[she] exposes how happiness is sustained, by erasing the signs of not getting along” (582). The refusal to act happy so that oppressors do not have to come face to face with their hypocritical concepts of rights to happiness is revolutionary. Akerman does just this by bringing to public light that which, through erasure, upholds the happiness of the ruling class. This very concept of shared happiness, the myth of public agreement that certain objects make *everyone* happy and are neither problematic nor oppressive in any way, is what is called into question by many feminists. The unwillingness to participate in this façade and the refusal to pretend that one is satisfied presents the statement; I’m not changing my mind, so what are you going to do to create external circumstances that I can be happy with.

Bend or Break-Freudianism to the Rescue

An unwillingness to adjust is central to Freudianism’s opposition to feminism. Firestone explains how Freudianism acted as a “reactionary” force in the 1940s used to combat growing

“pseudo-liberation” amongst women which was facilitated by the absence of men who were away at war. Firestone writes,

Emphasis had shifted from the original psychoanalytic theory to clinical practice...Marcuse discusses...the contradiction between Freud’s ideas and the possibility of any effective ‘therapy’ based on them...The term that best characterizes this Neo-Freudian revisionism is ‘adjustment’...The underlying assumption is that one must accept the reality in which one finds oneself...one must also ‘adjust’ to the specific racism or sexism that limits one’s potential from the very beginning. One must abandon all attempts at self-definition or determination. Thus, in Marcuse’s view, the process of therapy becomes merely ‘a course in resignation’ (58-59).

The process adjusted away from self-defined happiness and also asked patients to reorient their concepts of satisfaction and rather lower their standards to what their oppressors were willing to do, if anything, essentially learning to be happier with less. The concept of psychological adjustment is linked to the concept of the feminist killjoy, Ahmed writes, “To be oppressed requires that you show signs of happiness, signs of being or having been adjusted” (582). It is an expectation of the oppressed that they thank their oppressors for the little that they have and make it clear, despite it being a lie told so many times it begins to feel true, that it is their pleasure to be treated like a dog.

This double edged sword of happiness is exactly what keeps marginalized groups subjugated for so long. If they act as though they are happy to avoid punishment, it is assumed they are more than content with their position and if they reveal any unhappiness, they are pushed even further down than was thought possible in order to be reminded of their place. Ahmed cites Marilyn Frye’s *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, “It is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signify our docility and our acquiescence in our situation...anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous” (2). That being said, compromise in both directions is necessary for the unhappy victim in order to be accepted as a cooperative member

of society. These unspoken societal expectations resemble Rousseau's *The Social Contract* in that if one is to be a part of a society and reap its benefits, they must remain silent about their discontents and keep their criticisms to themselves. The alternative is banishment. This black and white thinking leaves no room for external political adjustment and rejects opportunities for complaints by the oppressed to be seriously considered. Charles W. Mills details this hypocrisy in "The Racial Contract" in which he describes how the social contract in society only actually includes the subjects who dominate others considered to be objects. Mills writes,

...in a 'state of nature,' it suggests that they then decide to establish civil society and government... on the popular consent of individuals taken as equals. But the peculiar contract to which I am referring...is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people') ... apparent racist violations of the terms of the contract in fact *uphold* the terms of the Racial Contract (3).

In this model, the subjects who consented to the standards to which those included in the society must consent to are white people but these individuals could be any hegemonic group such as men, or even more specifically, white men who defined and formed the original social contract known in modern Western society. The issue of consent is at the forefront of the racial contract in that it points out that white people are under the impression that the objects consented to the contract as soon as they were included after the fact. Allowing women to vote on laws predominantly not formed with the purpose of protecting and fostering female happiness is not equivalent to including women as subjects equal to men in the social contract. Women and people of color did not consent to the norms, laws, and standards which formed Western society so to punish these populations for violating the social contract is hypocritical.

The unhappy woman is not allowed the systemic privileges that happy men are given yet are punished more severely than men are when expressing discontent with the existing exclusive

standards. Interestingly enough, when men who are considered subjects, disagree with the agreed upon rules and regulations of a given society, they are civilly asked to leave. They are given the choice to leave and exist as a subject in another patriarchal society which may serve their desires more sufficiently. In contrast, no woman is considered a full subject in any patriarchal society so a dissatisfied woman is branded as undeserving of any privileges and is ostracized simply for challenging the status quo and insulting its founders. This lack of respect for what Mills calls “the remaining subset of humans” is not only just and legal but upholds the very contract in that “the moral and juridical rules normally regulating the behavior of whites in their dealings with one another...do not apply at all in dealings with nonwhites” (11). Fundamental concepts of equality, peace, respect, and free-choice which serve as the basis for concepts of human rights then are not relevant to “bothered” groups even though hegemonic members of society may argue that subgroups are treated as fairly as dominant groups are treated.

The risk of being exiled, branded as a witch, of being marked as the type of person who wanted their cake and to eat it too is largely what has kept dissatisfied women from publicly voicing their concerns in a society which shames the unhappy. To proclaim unhappiness in this system would be to insult those who believe their system is perfect for all since it is perfect for them. This very concept of how the unhappy individual is viewed as an outsider is analyzed by Ahmed. She explains how the meaning of the word unhappy was gradually adjusted from “‘causing misfortune’... to ‘miserable...or wretched in mind’...[which] comes from *wretch*, referring to a stranger, exile, or banished person...and even a ‘vile...or despicable person’” (573). This etymological history reveals the public shame associated with being unable to find happiness in what most in society are able to. Additionally, the transition from unhappiness being the result of unlucky or hapless external forces to it being defined as something which is

the fault of “a poor hapless being” facilitated victimization and increased diagnosis of the unhappy as pathological. Those who are unable to adjust to the status quo nor the oppressive standards of happiness are described not only as incurable but as dangerous based on the assumption that their discontent is contagious. Women’s private pursuit of happiness through psychotherapy became patriarchal society’s solution to brewing collective melancholy and an alternative to being socially ostracized unhappy women. Firestone cites Marcuse in *Eros in Civilization* as accurately describing the

reactionary...shift, showing how the contradiction between Freud’s ideas and the possibility of any ‘therapy’ based on them-psychoanalysis cannot effect individual happiness in a society the structure of which can tolerate no more than severely controlled individual happiness-finally caused the assimilation of the theory to suit the practice (58).

The search for individual happiness is seen as a right in American society. Instead of outwardly admitting that rejection of women’s demands for external improvements is a rejection of individual rights, this energy was redirected towards quickly finding a way for women to *feel* as though they still had an outlet; an alternative avenue towards what the ruling class had. Marcuse writes,

The most speculative and ‘metaphysical’ concepts not subject to clinical verification...were minimized and discarded altogether...Freud’s...concepts...[including] id and the ego, the function of the unconscious, and the scope and significance of sexuality...were redefined in such a way that their explosive content was all but eliminated (Firestone 58).

Anything which allowed for the patient to question one’s own place in society was removed from clinical applications of Freudian theory to prevent women from coming to terms with their deepest frustrations and therefore making decisions which would disrupt the existing social order. Firestone cites Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria* to explicate the goals of therapy and Freudianism’s perception of the destructive tolls feminism took on the psyche. His is quoted as

saying at the beginning of a session “[A great deal will be gained if we succeed in therapy in] transforming your hysterical misery into everyday unhappiness” (Freud as cited in Firestone 59). There is explicit acknowledgement given by Freud that the oppressed and melancholy female patient will not reach true happiness through therapy, this could only be achieved through the destruction of external oppressive barriers. Additionally, a misguided and anti-hegemonic woman’s misery was seen as more pathological than the unhappiness experienced in a more traditional and yielding role. The everyday unhappiness experienced by the unhappy housewife described by Friedan is considered manageable by Freudianism in that in this case, there is a glass ceiling to her goals. She may want to be a little less unhappy within her marriage but must still consider her own self-improvement *within* the context of her oppressive marriage.

Those instituting psychoanalysis knew that nothing political would drastically change and if anything, a conservative anti-feminist push-back was on the precipices. Therefore, they had to diagnose those, including feminists, who were deeply disappointed with their quality of life in the current system as pathologically sad and attached to unrealistic hopes. In Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” he defines mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” and describes it as non-pathological due to the fact that the individual is entirely conscious of who or what he has lost (243, 245). However, in the case of melancholia, which is considered pathological, the patient “knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him” and is therefore not entirely experiencing a conscious loss (Freud 245). To extend this to the concept of feminism as pathological in the eyes of Freudianism, the unhappy feminist killjoy could be described as melancholy in that she is considered unrealistically and irrationally sad. Instead of losing an object, she is viewed as losing sense of reality or forgetting

her place considering Freud describes melancholia as “pointing to a loss in regard to his ego” (247). The feminist’s search for self-defined happiness, freedom, and independence are seen as misguided. The unhappiness Firestone described amongst aimless feminists following halts to women’s rights progressions is best as melancholia, intrinsic to the unsatisfiable woman, by Freud. Ahmed’s concept of the banishment of the unhappy woman, the wretch, can be closely related to Freud’s melancholic patient:

In mourning, it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished (Freud 246).

In other words, the melancholic person is viewed as self-destructive and is considered ungrateful for biting the hand that fed him. This diagnosis allows the oppressor a justification and rids those responsible of any accountability. Because what women and feminists want is seen as outrageous, the mourning of her rights and happiness is viewed instead as unreasonable by patriarchal hegemony. Ahmed’s history of unhappiness describes the patriarchal etymological evolution of the word in order to make sociopolitical commentary on those who are incapable of achieving happiness and therefore, are beyond help. Freud’s description of the melancholic patient frames these criticisms of the individual’s morals and innate faults as placed on *oneself*. In this case, the poor unhappy individual is depicted as desperate to be included back into society, to be fixed, adjusted, or cured by a psychoanalyst. The melancholic person described as detached from society is blamed for making up these conceptions for themselves. The idea that those who are melancholic and isolated due to oppression and exclusion is not allowed within this categorization. Mourning on the other hand, is characterized by rational sadness in response to that which is considered externally legitimate by patriarchal society. It is expected that the marginalized in society mourn that which has been taken from them speedily and readily in order

to be considered healthy and nonthreatening. Grudges are key to remaining unhappily aware of those who wronged you. Remembering, despite how painful it may be, is key to the feminist fight.

The Right to Unhappiness

I have addressed how unhappiness is viewed as dangerous to repressive governments and patriarchal structures but we must also ask; is unhappiness also an ideal which feminists and women seek to escape and/or does unhappiness come with many of the goals of feminism; clarity, revelation, and increased awareness? Education is frequently presented by feminist scholars as a route to success, empowerment, and therefore a necessary right in order to be *as* happy as men. However, are education and happiness linked? Rather, are education and the unhappiness that comes with awareness linked? Firestone and Ahmed would say so. The right to unhappiness is a concept which arose out of the pursuit of something more sustainable and meaningful than mainstream happiness and basic contentment. While Ahmed argues that unhappiness comes with pursuits of justice and knowledge, feminist thinkers such as Virginia Woolf look more closely at truth and prioritize knowledge as a means of being able to best describe the world in order to evoke all feelings including joy and sadness.

Ahmed discusses the way in which education or rather expansive imagination and awareness through any means becomes not only a more sustainable alternative to happiness but happiness becomes irrelevant once women are shown revolutionary frameworks in which being happy is no longer the absolute best thing someone can amount to. She writes, “Imagination is what makes women look beyond the script of happiness to a different fate...if we do not assume that happiness is what is good, then we can read the link between female imagination and

unhappiness differently” (585). A common notion for centuries was that education would make women and any uneducated and oppressed mass population forget their place in the hierarchical structure. Scare tactics framed women who got educations became riddled with misery because it distracted them from that which could only bring women genuine joy; their husband, children, and home. Many think that one can have the freedom of mind that comes from an expanded awareness of one’s condition *and* happiness as an end goal but Ahmed challenges the concept that happiness is the emotion which fills the soul in ways others cannot. She continues, “We might want girls to read the books that enable them to be overwhelmed with grief. Feminism involves political consciousness of what women are asked to give up for happiness. Indeed, in even becoming conscious of happiness as loss, feminists have already refused to give up desire, imagination, and curiosity for happiness” (585). Perhaps one is best able to feel alive, fulfilled, most herself or on the right track towards living her truth when inconsolably miserable. The depth that one is able to feel or explore in this state or even during the process from sadness to happiness and back to sadness holds more meaning and potential than a desperate cling to constant happiness does.

Woolf begins *A Room of One’s Own* by searching a library full of works by men on the history of women in order to find the clarity about women’s experience. She argues that if women had access to formal education comparable to that accessible by men, they would be able to produce better, influential, androgynous work through which women’s relative poverty and oppression would not be detectable. Woolf writes, “One must strain off what was personal and accidental in all these impressions and so reach the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth.” Because women have been unable to escape their oppression, their work has suffered and they have been unable to produce what Woolf describes as pure and genius fiction. Instead of focusing on the

individual happiness women could achieve by having delicious meals and fine lessons in literature, she focuses instead on genius as the goal. For Woolf, genius means having the ability to describe the world in a way which gives materiality to the indescribable. Instead of writing on the misery that comes with learning more about women's misfortune, she discusses education as a route through which women could contribute to a history of women's experiences so that the complexity of female characters, the happy and unhappy, beautiful and hideous, can be shared with readers. Since men have been the main contributors to works on women, Woolf is more angered by the lack of truth resulting from this injustice than the injustice itself. Her preoccupation with fiction, while predominantly apolitical, resembles Beauvoir's argument that women are unable to act in a transcendent nature by making lasting impacts on the world and the history of humankind. Beautiful fiction outlasts its authors and women should be able to live beyond a pitiful life of dependency. With education, women could then have the opportunity to read and write about other women and move beyond their own impoverished position which limits them to illiteracy and dependency and subsequent marriage and childrearing.

Turning to education is one approach to female aimlessness but education on male defined doctrines may further frustrate women. Women's internal pursuit of solutions to their unhappiness and confusion were sought both through therapy as well as through their own education on the matter. Firestone writes how, "Mass confusion sent them in droves to the psychoanalysts" due to the fact that women... "were neither insulated and protected from the larger world as before, nor were they equipped to deal with it" (62). Women were incredibly disoriented following the temporary pseudo-liberation they experienced following the granting of the vote but were then harshly cut off from ever again tasting something they could now never forget. While women were certain that they had been deprived, they were uncertain about how to

cope with this loss. Firestone writes, “Their frustration often took hysterical forms, complicated by the fact that they were despised the world over for even the little false liberation they had received” (62). Despite psychoanalysts’ such as Freud and Reik’s insistence that women’s frustrations were subconscious, women were aware of the patronizing angle they were met with in therapy yet remained with hopes that they would discover something useful given the fact that this was one of the only options. “It is not that these women were unaware of their situation: on the contrary, they were in Reik’s office because of this awareness. There was no other way to handle their frustration because there is no way to handle it, short of revolution” (Firestone 61). With increased clarity about of one’s devastatingly mired situation, comes emotional turmoil, frustration, and desperate attempts to alleviate this pain. While it was not only women going to therapy, almost all members of society who were in therapy, including men, flooded in because of the fight against feminism and the attempt to reign women back into traditional family roles.

Curiosity about how to seek inner peace and closure was a large factor which drew women into the study of psychology. The psychology studied by women was strictly clinical as it occurred following the institution of adjusted neo-Freudianism. Firestone writes, “Masses of searching women studied psychology with a passion in the hope of finding a solution to their ‘hang ups’” (62). An awareness of one’s “hang ups” reveals that they know they are unable to move past their specific frustration, but that they consider it something that must be fixed, a nuisance, something which compromises others’ happiness, because of how patriarchal society views their grievances. Instead of analyzing their own lack of desire to sleep with their husbands, which could be explained by the husband’s oppressive and threatening behavior, women’s anxiety is instead read as a hang up, something they must get under control so as to function normatively within existing systems. The goal is to effectively become happy with what they are

told will make them happy. “Psychology departments became half-way houses to send women scurrying back ‘adjusted’ to their traditional roles as wives and mothers... Often the only difference between the modern college-educated housewife and her traditional prototype was the jargon she used in describing her marital hell” (Firestone 63). In essence, this education in clinical psychology simply provided the words to better describe the problem but no tools to solve it. Even if women did not resign to what they were told in psychotherapy, their investment in the field of psychology, in an attempt to find the key to happiness, gave further legitimacy to a school of thought based on the opinions and perspectives of men.

By mastering psychology within its patriarchal confines and contributing to clinical applications of oppressive phenomena, women supported the very institution which was preventing them from reaching genuine, self-defined happiness. Firestone writes, “Those women who persisted in demanding careers became in turn instruments of the repressive educational system, their new-found psychological ‘insight’... serving to keep a fresh generation of women and children down” (62). Women were encouraged to succeed academically and professionally within this field and this served as yet another false liberation in that these women were not allowed to bring their own personal insights to their work but were rather rewarded for mastery of a repressive framework. In their attempt to seek objective truths about happiness for themselves, much like Woolf attempted by reading established works on women’s condition written by men in *A Room of One’s Own*, they supported pseudo-science. While women were finally being included into higher academia, they were still being designated to social sciences based on unchecked male theories while men were allowed to thrive in hard sciences. At the root of STEM disciplines is the scientific method, which allows the studier the opportunity to entirely reject hypotheses which stand on no logical ground. In contrast, clinical applications of social

sciences do not make space for bogus hypotheses based on sexist biases to be nulled. Firestone explains the purpose of this divide, "...social science became 'functional', studying the operation of institutions only within the given value system, thus promoting acceptance of the status quo" (63). Purely observational, there was little allowance for intervention and in the attempt to seek clarity, women became more estranged from their true desires.

Similar to how women were told to not whine about anything else after being included in legal frameworks of rights, women's minor yet significant inclusion in academia was accompanied by expectations of contentment. The issue with this however is that blissful ignorance and education are contradictory. Happiness became even more difficult with the increase of knowledge and consciousness about women's own poor condition and the factors which contributed to it. Ahmed writes, "If the world does not allow you to embrace the possibilities that are opened up by education, then you become even more aware of the injustice of such limitations...expanding one's horizons can thus mean becoming more conscious of just how much there is to be unhappy about" (584). Women's education frequently led them to dead ends since they were discriminated against in the workforce and pushed back into the home to be a smart yet miserable housewife and mother. Furthermore, with awareness of injustice does not come freedom. If anything, one feels more trapped by their circumstances. While this section focuses on how women seek consciousness, Ahmed discusses how even communal consciousness raising does not necessarily lead to happy sisterhood. She writes, "Consciousness-raising does not turn unhappy housewives into happy feminists" because there are so many barriers in place which keep women from escaping and even if they were to physically escape, they would not be able to rid themselves of the guilt society places on the wretch who shirks her responsibilities as a woman (584). Moreover, women are pressured to be happy so that others do

not have to worry about them disgracing the community. Consequently, women may internalize this pursuit of happiness as their own goal and may even prioritize their own happiness over fighting for what is just. Ahmed provides commentary on Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, saying, "The freedom to be happy can be translated into a freedom to avoid proximity to whatever compromises one's happiness...that our first responsibility is to our own happiness is what allows us to look away" (590). While therapy and education can be presented as liberating, both opportunities for women to become their best selves and strive for happiness, they support the patriarchal construction that unhappiness is pathological and damaging to both the individual and the community.

Unhappiness comes with being awake in an unjust system. The goal of fighting for what is right even if it entails exposure to tragedy is more expansive than the goal of personal happiness. It is also more dangerous to governments who so generously grant civil rights in order to propagate the ideal of individual happiness so as to encourage its citizens to turn blind eyes to destruction. Ahmed's proposition of the "freedom to be unhappy" reveals the repressive pressures both patriarchal government and clinical psychotherapy place on marginalized people to put on a happy face so the oppressors do not have to come to terms with the damage they have caused.

The State of Nature and Its Promises for The Happy Few

I have discussed whether individual happiness is a worthwhile pursuit, why happiness ideals exclude women and oppressed minorities, and whether freedom over happiness should be a goal of our society. In order to understand theories of communal happiness and the happiness that individuals achieve through others by means of companionship, romantic love, or parenting,

we must first understand why Western civilization prioritizes individual happiness, even if it means the violation of liberty and joy of the less privileged. Happiness is framed as an individual emotion in that it is a male ideal grounded in major U.S. political theory. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson focused on theories of individual freedom in the state of nature as opposed to more expansive concepts of relative freedom. Looking at the individualistic state of nature theories which largely formed our governments and norm systems gives us insight into why happiness is not looked at in a holistic or mutualistic manner. Feminist theorists such as Firestone, Goldman, and Weiss provide insight into new frameworks of the state of nature from a feminine perspective and therefore give alternative solutions to unhappiness and lack of freedom in society.

Thomas Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the declaration of Independence includes, "We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness" (Jefferson 1760 cited in Boyd 1950). While in concept, this political framework appears to promise egalitarian rights for all, it really only does give these rights to white, land-owning, men. In exchange, it exploits the concept that these rights are given by God to justify an omnipotent government which infringes on the rights of those not included in such theories. In this construction of a state of nature, everyone is vicious and miserable due to fear of violence committed by others. However, this induces fear amongst the uneducated masses and then justifies the placement of a leviathan which upholds the powerful at the expense of the impoverished. Feminist scholars such as Firestone and Goldman hold that nature from a feminine perspective is more benign and these theorists have more faith in humankind.

In addition to Hobbes' theory of the leviathan and the concept that everyone is selfish is destructive, his bizarre idea that men are born as fully formed intellectually superior humans erases the physical and emotional collaborative labor women and mothers put into raising boys into men. He writes that " men emerged from the earth like mushrooms and grown up without any obligation to each other..." Rather, as Firestone holds, men are raised to have no obligation to one another because they do are not aware of all of the unhappiness that occurs behind the scenes amongst women which makes their happiness possible. She argues that women have a more heightened and expansive concept of communalism and an awareness of the need to protect those who are vulnerable and dependent due to greater biological vulnerability.

This includes women who are weak from menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and menopause and therefore are dependent on aid and collaboration for survival. Because of this, women are aware that they cannot simply think for themselves and fight for their needs alone. This experience within the family contributes to their stances on politics and contrasts greatly with those of Hobbes'. Shulamith firestone accredits the inequality in today's society to the biological differentiations between the sexes and argues that such separations in reproductive functionality, in turn, create the first means of class hierarchy which inevitably turn into inequality. She essentially holds that all pathology in society, whether it be pertaining to sex, class, race, is rooted in the biological nuclear family that exists in a patriarchal society. Firestone essentially argues that sexism predates racism and that the original industry is the biological family.

While her theory does open up the possibility for manipulation of this biologically defined weakness and differences between the sexes, I think it almost takes the social definitions about female's weaknesses based on biology and turns them on their heads by essentially arguing

that this biological difference was exploited to begin with in order to create an unequal power structure and that in order to change this perverse power structure, we have to go back to the beginning and eliminate or reduce these the debilitating and impairing effects of such biological differences through technology such as birth control (p. 9). By using biological definition, Firestone is reclaiming the very weapons used against women in the sexist struggle for years. Instead of shying away from biological definitions and rejecting them entirely because they were exploited by men, Firestone bravely redefines these biological bases and tries her best to articulate their limitations.

Firestone writes, “The need for power leading to the development of classes arises from the psychosexual formation of each individual according to this basic [reproductive] imbalance, rather than, as Freud...and others have...postulated, some irreducible conflict” (9). She breaks down this biological imbalance into four “fundamental-if not immutable-facts” including the first, “that women...before the advent of birth control were at the continual mercy of their biology...which made them dependent on males...for physical survival” (9). She also includes the fact that “human infants take an even longer time to grow up than animals, and thus are helpless...and dependent on adults,” “that a basic mother/child interdependency has existed,” and “that the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labor at the origins of class” (9). Firestone cites Beauvoir in order to make her claim that unlike in a Hobbesian state of nature, we are not mere slaves to the worst of our urges because of nature but that modern human society should transcend biological inequalities. Firestone writes,

And the kingdom of nature does not reign absolute. As Simone de Beauvoir herself admits: ‘The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some important truths. Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an antiphysis-in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes

over the control of nature on its own behalf.’...Thus the ‘natural’ is not necessarily a ‘human value’ (10).

She acknowledges that if society is to progress, community and equality must be the priority and highlights the fact that concepts of pathology in Freudian psychotherapy are based on the concept that social inequality was natural and that people’s frustrations were inner issues meant to be “cured” (14).

Just as Firestone holds that the patriarchal nuclear family is a restrictive and isolating force for women, Valerie Solanas introduces the idea, in her piece, “S.C.U.M Manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men),” the way in which women are prevented from uniting politically for the greater good by men’s isolation of women from each other out of fear and jealousy of women’s strength if unified. Similar to the way in which Firestone argues that the family unit is the root of all pathology and oppression of women, Solanas presents her theory about why men contribute to the privatization of women and how this gets in the way of societal progress. Solanas writes,

Our society is not a community, but merely a collection of isolated family units. Desperately insecure, fearing his woman will leave him if she is exposed to other men or anything resembling life, the male seeks to isolate her from other men and from what little civilization there is, so he moves her out to the suburbs...Isolation enables him to try to maintain his pretense of being an individual...equating no-cooperation and solitariness with individuality (5).

Essentially, Solanas argues that this domination is simply an attempt to achieve women’s coveted true individuality but men fail, only accomplish isolation, and keep women from their potential, which is “vibing” with other powerful and inspiring women who want to achieve “a true community consist[ing] of individuals” (6). Because of women’s isolation from one another, consciousness raising becomes more difficult. Solanas explains how even in circumstances in which the man appears to be liberal, egalitarian, and sympathetic to the woman’s need for independence, so long as there is a greedy man in charge of a structure which has not been separated from the marriage model, it is bound to be hierarchical and exploitative of women. She

explains the instance of the “hippy,” a man who claims to be more ethically oriented than the men in mainstream society. Solanas explains how even in an alternative communal patriarchal setting, women are silenced so long as they are isolated. She writes, “In the name of sharing and cooperation, he forms a commune or tribe, which, for all its togetherness and partly because of it, (the commune, being an extended family, is an extended violation of the female’s rights, privacy and sanity) is no more a community than normal ‘society’” (5). The family structure, regardless of its multiple variations and alternative models, is a basic way to control girls and women and make them feel responsible for their own suffering, which in turn, silences them and prevents them from revealing private “family business” to strangers.

Emma Goldman, a democratic Socialist and anarchist holds that people’s baseline urges without government are benevolent in contrast with Hobbes’ which is far more individualistic and treacherous. Goldman demonstrates her faith in humans to naturally unite as opposed to turning against one another, writing, “Only in freedom will he learn to think and move, and give the very best in him. Only in freedom will he realize the true force of the social bonds which knit men together, and which are the true foundation of a normal social life” (Goldman 72-73). Her concept of normal is classified by that which is nondestructive, healthy, non-pathological, and granting of happiness for everyone, created by the people. Goldman holds that without government’s toxic oppression and corruption of man’s pure intentions, people will form their own small groups to organize society in a way that benefits all. She recognizes the claim to power by those who rule by a Hobbesian fear model and her anarchism is rooted in a belief that people are able to protect one another. While Firestone is less suspicious of government in that she wants the government to improve on the condition of women by helping the seize the means of reproduction, Goldman believes that a supportive village model, which she witnesses among

women, separate from government, is the key to mutual respect and happiness. Despite briefly dabbling in communism, Goldman loves individuality not patriarchal individualism and holds that people can only truly find their own happiness when loved and supported by a community.

Mutual Dependency Versus Sacrificial Love

Marso discusses in “A Feminist Search for Love: Emma Goldman on the Politics of Love, Sexuality and the Feminine,” how despite Goldman’s rejection of “marriage and the conventional nuclear family” like Firestone, “she neither rejects nor condemns romantic love; she places intimate connections with others as central to her life and her politics” (306). Unlike the patriarchal model of happiness through one-sided sexual consumption of women, Goldman advocates for “sexual freedom and revolutionary love [which] offer a radical critique of intimacy” (306). Goldman looks at the relationship between women’s political stances and personal desires which are often subconscious reflections of men’s desires simply internalized and reclaimed by women.

While Goldman firmly opposes marriage as an intrusive political construct, she holds a belief shared by Firestone as well as many others; that you cannot truly be happy or free if you go home and sleep with the enemy at the end of the day. Marso writes, “Her life experience had made it clear that no true freedom for women could exist without a fundamental revolution at the intimate level between human beings in their relationships of love and sexuality” (307). She holds that anarchism can only succeed if people liberate themselves from companionship but that women are also entitled to choose what satisfies them, so long as it does not oppress them. Marso cites Goldman as saying, “Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee every

human being free access to...full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations” (1969:62) (Marso 307). Theorists such as Andrea Long Chu have consistently presented the important argument that people must investigate their sexual and romantic desires to see if they are politically destructive and exclusive but should ultimately be free to love or make love with whoever makes them happy. Chu writes “...nothing good comes of forcing desire to conform to political principle...This does not mean that politics has no part to play in desire” (10). She argues that judging individuals on their politics based on their personal bedroom behaviors runs the risk of breeding authoritarianism but that people should still voluntarily investigate the insidious ways in which hierarchical power dynamics have influenced people’s personal preferences. Similarly, Srinivasan argues that you cannot police people’s desires, nor can they control their own, but you can make people aware of problematic patterns of behavior that are both influenced by the patriarchy and are potentially discriminatory. Srinivasan explains how modern feminism, including Willis’ works, and its emphasis on sex-positivity and protecting people’s personal preferences and desires, so long as mutual consent is agreed to, overlooks political feminist intersectionality by removing such actions entirely from the public, political realm, which is somewhat impossible. She writes, “the sex-positive gaze, unmoored from Willis’s call to ambivalence, threatens to neutralize these facts, treating them as pre-political givens. In other words, the sex-positive gaze risks covering not only for misogyny, but for racism, ableism, transphobia, and every other oppressive system that makes its way into the bedroom through the seemingly innocuous mechanism of ‘personal preference’” (6).

As we saw in the case of Jeanne, love for one’s children and husband are complex in that many do find pockets of happiness even if the majority of their happiness was being sacrificed for their loved ones. Marso writes how Du Bois and Gordon “note the contradictions women

lived; 'what was conceived as women's greatest virtue, their passionate and self-sacrificing commitment to their children, their capacity for love itself, was a leading factor in their victimization' (1983: 12)" (308). It is interesting however to look at the ways in which love, even genuine love which fills the heart and soul with boundless happiness, is criticized as being at odds with freedom. The question once again is; must a woman give up on the mutual possession associated with a loving relationship in order to find a deeper happiness which comes from within her or is there a compromise between the two which reflects feminine awareness of and respect for dependency and the harmless and often unconditional love which comes with it. According to Goldman, "her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from her and through herself" (Goldman cited in Marso 310). In this context, Goldman is arguing that free sex, free love, free and varied companionship are the only means through which women can fulfil their fantasies and desires. This framework however does not take into consideration reciprocal accountability to another and freedom within healthy monogamous romantic relationships. Marso inquires, "...The choice of true freedom involves difficult sacrifices... Can 'sexual varietism' satisfy a person's emotional desires, one's need to have an intimate confidante ...? Does one have to completely give up on emotional commitment and/or mutual dependency in order to be truly free?" (310). In other words, does one have to sacrifice happiness for freedom if happiness is achieved through a committed mutually dependent loving relationship which the woman enters out of her own volition? Goldman does acknowledge that true, equally expressed and felt love, separate from the exploitative forces of marriage, is actually a central part of living life fully and the happiest one can be. Marso writes, "...it is clear that Goldman was trying to reconcile sexual and individual freedom with the demands of love and reciprocity" (312). The feminist claim that pure masculine independence without emotional accountability to another is

enough for women to be satisfied and fulfilled overlooks the strength in vulnerable mutual dependency, and solely focuses on the weakness of it perceived by a patriarchal audience.

Goldman consistently expressed her discontent with romantic loneliness in pursuit of a concept of freedom which would not quite fit her soul, no matter how adamantly she tried. Marso writes, “Telling Berkman that she [Goldman] longs to express ‘love and affection for some human being of [her] own’, Goldman suggests a break with the philosophy of anarchist feminists who argue that sexual freedom necessarily implies a rejection of emotional possession” (314). Intimacy, which can bring immense fulfillment and gives many peace, happiness, and an alleviation from solitary unhappiness, can actually bolster one’s ability to feel free so long as there is open communication within said relationship. While heterosexual monogamy frequently internalizes toxic lessons from patriarchy, such as jealousy and oppressive possession, Goldman’s revolutionary stance gives women the individual choice to reform their relationships instead of solely suggesting polyamorous love as the only egalitarian solution, which is easier said politically than practiced personally.

Focusing on jealousy, Marso discusses how feminist theorist Cleyre claimed that “To be jealous of possessive was to make a claim to private property” but that Goldman recognized the individuality that is the happiness experience and that jealousy as a natural emotion should not be punished but investigated with patience (314). Marso explains how Goldman “...tempers her condemnation [of jealousy] by acknowledging that the ‘two worlds’ of ‘two human beings, of different temperament, feelings, and emotions’, must meet in ‘freedom and equality’ if they are to conquer the ‘green-eyed monster’ (Goldman, 1998: 221, 216 cited in Marso 314). Jealousy, while clearly upheld by the patriarchal nuclear family unit norm, is characterized by an inability to be happy for another if they’re happiness takes away from yours. Jealous girlfriends and

snooping wives in Western civilization and culture are built up to be a monstrous pathological digression away from the ideal model of the selfless woman, wife, and mother, praised for her ability to nurture and create joy for others and not kill it, even if it kills her in the process. Is sacrificial happiness even a worthwhile, let alone realistic or feasible construct or is it based on folklore?

A Case Study in Dependency and Unnecessary Sacrifice

We can look to the movie, *The Hours*, and its portrayal of Virginia Woolf and female characters who represent the characters she wrote in her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, for insight on the ways in which expectations of sacrificial happiness as a normative component of true love impact women similarly across different circumstance and generations. In *The Hours*, the three women, Clarissa Vaughn (2001), Laura Brown (1950s), and Virginia Woolf's (1920s) lives are interconnected by Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. We follow Woolf's process as she writes the film to reflect her revelations about sacrificial love and dependency and both Laura and Clarissa find inspiration from the book written by Woolf. The parallels between the three women are as follows: Leonard fears Virginia will kill herself if she is not made to be happy, Clarissa fears Richard will kill himself for the same reason, and young Richard (Richie) fears that Laura, his mother, will kill herself if she is not able to be happy solely by making her husband happy.

We first learn that Richard calls Clarissa, his ex-lover, Mrs. Dalloway because she distracts herself from her own life and what she wants out of it by preoccupying herself with making him happy and swearing this makes her happy. Richard calls her this because Mrs. Dalloway also distracts herself from addressing what she needs out of life by focusing her attention onto making the male character feel cared for and valued. Clarissa feels as though

Richard is dependent on him but in reality, Clarissa is dependent on feeling needed. We see Clarissa bringing Richard flowers, a direct reflection of Leonard's attempt to cheer Virginia up, and Richard tells Clarissa that people only admire him for barely surviving AIDS. He tells her, "I think I'm only staying alive to satisfy you" after asking, "Would you be mad if I died?" In an attempt to remind her that she has not been living for herself, he says, "Just wait 'till I die, then you'll have to think of yourself." We learn that in the book which he is famous for writing, his mother, Laura kills herself but that he created this reality out of spite towards his mother who we learn was unable to sacrifice her happiness to be the mother he needed.

Ahmed's description of the way in which people attribute happiness to trivial items directly relates to the way in which both Laura and Clarissa aim to bring joy to their partners. Each ultimately end up in a state of debilitating disappointment, insecurity, and existential fear about having no control over happiness when the thing they expected to bring them happiness failed to do so. Ahmed writes, "To follow the paths of happiness is to inherit the elimination of the hap" meaning to secure one's fate as determined is to seize control over happiness by following that which "promises" happiness or increases the probability of happiness as opposed to leaving it to chance (581). Ahmed adds, "Your rage might be directed against the object that fails to deliver its promise or it may spill out toward those who promised you happiness through the elevation of some things as good" (581). In the case of Laura Brown, set in the 1950s with young Richie, her son, (the same Richard seen in Clarissa's modern story) the trivial object which she believes will make her husband happy, and in turn will make her happy, is the birthday cake for her husband's birthday. The elaborate cake plan represents domestic mastery which is something that Laura struggles with. She tells another housewife in the neighborhood, Kitty, "Our husband's came home from the war. They deserve all this." Kitty laughs at Laura for

being stressed and miserable about making the cake but it quickly becomes apparent that while Kitty can bake and clean, she physically cannot birth children like Laura can and this distresses her. She tells Laura, “I’ve always been able to do everything except the one thing I wanted” meaning being able to conceive and the viewer begins to wonder if it is what she truly wants or if she feels shame and anger towards herself as a deficient woman for not being able to bear children for her husband.

Even though Kitty tells Laura that her husband will love the cake no matter how it comes out, Laura desperately tries to prove her worth and also prove to herself that she can be happy with this life that was chosen for her by tossing her first attempt and beginning a second, more perfect cake after telling Richie, “We have to show Daddy we love him.” In response to Richie’s question, “He won’t know we love him unless we make the cake?” she answers, “yes.” In the context of Ahmed’s analysis of our association between objects and happiness, Laura first becomes disappointed with the cake for not being perfect for fear that it will not guarantee her husband happiness and therefore will not guarantee her happiness. Next, she becomes disappointed with herself for being inadequate as a housewife and seriously contemplates suicide. She expresses feeling like an imposter, as if the person she was before being a housewife and truly still is, is in a distant universe, inaccessible so long as she exists in this one. Ahmed writes,

Feminist archives are thus full of housewives becoming conscious of unhappiness as a mood that seems to surround them: think of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*... ‘this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing-...She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen... this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.’...Becoming Mrs. Dalloway is itself a form of disappearance following the paths of life (marriage, reproduction) so that you feel that what is before you is a kind of solemn progress, as if you are living somebody else’s life...If happiness is what allows us to reach certain points, it is not necessarily how we feel when we get there...The point of reaching these points...[is] a loss of possibility (585).

Laura becomes disappointed with her husband for talking about how he “discovered” her as a nerdy reader and made a housewife out of her. She does not show him her sadness because the joy she displays in servicing his joy, brings him joy and this gap makes her panic that she sacrificed everything in the pursuit of what Ahmed calls “alignment” (580). Laura looks around the kitchen, at her pristine home full of kitchen appliances she never wanted, at her own unsteady hands clearly made for holding books and not decorating cakes as if she is living a nightmare. This end goal, a life of luxury, having a roof and cooking supplies provided to her by a husband was promised to bring her more happiness than loneliness. However, she feels trapped now, static in a life she was promised she would grow accustomed to but realizes it is never what she wanted. According to Ahmed, not only do “we become alienated when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good” but also, “the failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others” (580, 582). As previously discussed in the context of the killjoy, Ahmed’s idea of the “shared atmosphere,” which would be the happy home that Laura’s husband imagines he has gallantly provided for her, would be ruined by Laura challenging the existence and applicability of one model of joy by pointing to its faults or her inability to be happy with this lifestyle (582). Immensely overwhelmed by the birthday party preparations and what her failure to be happy about it represents, Laura comes incredibly close to killing herself but chooses not to because Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway gets a second chance at life once she finds her own self-defined joy.

Ahmed relates this anti-feminist suppression of a woman’s aspirations towards her own definition of happiness and her right to something other than what will directly bring happiness to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile*. The passage Ahmed pulls reveals that the seemingly good-intentioned expectation that one’s loved-one will find happiness is actually coercive and

burdensome. In *Emile*, Sophy's father tells her, "We [Sophy's parents] want you to be happy, for our sakes as well as yours, for our happiness depends on yours. A good girl finds her own happiness in the happiness of a good man" (Rousseau 434 as cited in Ahmed 579). Just as Laura's husband chose what he thought would make her happiest, which was pulling her away from a lonely life spent reading and truth-seeking, Virginia tells her husband Leonard that her life was "stolen" from her and that in his attempt to make her happy and calm by isolating her from London, she has felt trapped and drained of her ability to write in the countryside. While London represents freedom and less supervision, it also represents raw truth and chaos. Even if it brings her unhappiness, she expresses feeling that this unhappiness would be worth the meaning she finds in the stimulus and the awakening. Just as Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own* that genius comes from grasping the whole moment truly, no matter how ugly it may be, she is portrayed in *The Hours* as having finally tapped into her genius once she decides to take a trivial object, flowers, -usually utilized by men to bring women happiness-and reclaim its power. She writes her first sentence of *Mrs. Dalloway*: "Mrs. Dalloway decided to buy the flowers herself" and subsequently lifts the burden off of Leonard so that he does not have to solely buy them for her so that she won't kill herself and cease to bring him happiness.

It can be questioned whether or not men even buy flowers to make women truly happy or whether they are commonly given as an apology; a means of saying "I upset you but since I am unwilling to change my ways to avoid upsetting you again in the future, please tell me these multicolor weeds make you happy-since women are supposed to like them- so that I can feel better about myself." In this scenario, if a woman is still unhappy after the gift of flowers, she is ungrateful and pathological since she does not find joy from an object that is supposed to bring her joy. This way, her dissatisfaction can be no fault but her own if she is supposedly incapable

of doing what is expected of her. In order to appease her and bring her health, considering Virginia tried to kill herself in London, Leonard brings her flowers, maids, luxury, and a quiet space to write, -all things he thinks a sane woman wants- despite her wanting none of it. Leonard calls Virginia ungrateful for all he has sacrificed in order to bring her peace and health but feeling like he sees her best interests as merely a reflection of his, she writes, “My life has been stolen from me. Only I can understand my own condition. This is my life. If I should choose between Richmond [the countryside] and death, I choose death.” Woolf writes in *A Room of One’s Own* how when men write about women’s lives, they do not resemble women’s lives whatsoever and rather have a deeply fantastical approach to what they believe makes them happy. Ahmed writes, “Feminists... disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places” that being a domestic life for Laura imagined by her husband, a peaceful country home for Virginia imagined by Leonard and a celebratory party for Richard imagined by Clarissa (582).

For all three women, it becomes apparent to the viewer that happiness is a critique of the world rather than a pathology of the self. We see that this is not just a dated experience for women when Clarissa’s own struggles with happiness in 2001 greatly reflect those of her sisters’ from decades prior. In addition to bringing the flowers to Richard, the object which Clarissa believes will bring Richard happiness and therefore her happiness is “the crab thing” which he apparently likes. Just as Laura becomes enraged at the cake, Clarissa becomes visibly furious at how difficult the crab dish is to make, despite her being the one who decided to make it. Immensely overwhelmed by the party preparations, she breaks down in tears, displaying the fact that all of this effort is for Richard and that it is ultimately futile because she cannot make him happy, only she can make him happy, and that this party is not what he wants but is rather what

she thinks he wants. Richard does not show up to Clarissa's party and when she goes to his apartment, he lovingly tells her she needs to be freed then jumps out the window before her eyes.

In the end, Virginia chose to live and die her way, not according to how Leonard thinks will make her happiest. She chooses to kill herself so that Leonard can live fully without sacrificing his happiness to make her happy in the way he thinks is best. She ultimately sacrifices herself in order to make him happy. Virginia was alienated from happiness and could not make Leonard happy being herself but ended up having to die in order to free him. In the end of Clarissa's story, she chooses to go home to her girlfriend and live in the present instead of distracting herself constantly. She feels similarly to how Richard's ex-lover felt once he left Richard in that both of them expressed no longer feeling the burden of sacrificing their lives to desperately attempt to keep Richard happy. Additionally, Richard kills himself in the end so that Clarissa could live fully and so that he could no longer serve as an excuse for her to falsely describe this one-sided relationship as sacrificial love. Like Virginia, Richard was alienated from happiness because he could not make Clarissa happy by being himself. Both Leonard and Clarissa had expectations of their respective partners and were dependent on the happiness of the other. Unlike both of their tales however, Laura's did not end in tragedy, at least not for her. Laura ultimately chooses to live without her family to free her husband from the burden of attempting to make her happy when she knew that she would never be happy in a domestic lifestyle. Inspired by Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, she chooses to create her own happiness and follow her love of books. She later explains her decision to Clarissa, following her son Richard's suicide, "What does it mean to regret when you have no choice? It [housewifery and motherhood] was death. I chose life." Her ultimate decision, which could be characterized as a what Marso calls a perverse protest, demonstrates freedom within restrictive circumstances and

points to the concept that without full freedom, any grasp for individual happiness would be perceived as threatening to the ruling class. A classic killjoy, Laura is ultimately successful in escaping the mutual dependency of marriage and motherhood so as to follow imagination as a librarian, which in turn, brought her immense joy.

The image of the sacrificing mother not only objectifies the woman but punishes her for her individuality the moment she creates another human. Haraway writes,

MacKinnon argues that feminism [looked at] the structure of sex/gender and its generative relationship, men's constitution and appropriation of women sexually. Ironically, MacKinnon's ontology constructs a non-subject, a non-being. Another's desire, not the self's labor, is the origin or 'woman.' She...enforces what can count as 'women's experience-anything that names sexual violation ... (6)

Haraway sees this construction of the woman as a self-less object as hazardous to female self-actualization. She feels that to argue for this definition of the woman as exploited is to say that she was always an object to begin with. That being said, it is incorrect to argue that sexual appropriation is alienation from the rightful ownership of her product, her sexuality, in the same way that class exploitation is alienation of the worker from his labor. She essentially is saying that Marx's theory of the class struggle is no longer comparable to this feminism's theory of sex/gender in that "a woman is not simply alienated from her product, but in a deep sense does not exist as a subject, or even potential subject, since she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation. To be constituted by another's desire is not the same things as to be alienated in the violent separation of the laborer from his product" (6). Haraway argues that building a collective or even individual consciousness based on this definition of feminism is inherently self-victimizing and self-objectifying.

Similarly, Firestone discusses how idealization and romanticization of mothers as perfect beings due to their sacrificial selflessness not only punishes women who want to have sex and

live for themselves but also punishes mothers who deviate from this restrictive model. She discusses how the incest taboo, which was constructed in order to reinforce development within the family structure, actually leads to “an unnatural psychological dichotomy [between] ...good/bad women” (54). This enables the development of the Madonna-whore complex in which those that resemble one’s mother is deserving of love and respect whereas those that do not are undeserving of this type of adoration but rather are deserving of lowly treatment as a means of reinforcing that these women will never be loved like the individual loves the mother. Firestone writes, “If the child is to gain his mother’s love he must separate out the sexual from his other feelings...mothers are ‘good’...those unlike the mother...are sexual, and therefore ‘bad.’ Whole classes of people e.g. prostitutes, pay with their lives for this dichotomy” (54). This refusal to devote emotion and adoration to women who are unlike one’s mother is based on the fear that if one puts energy and faith into another woman again, after the mother, he will be rejected once again, like he was when his mother chose his father.

When a mother expresses happiness needs which are at odds with the happiness needs of the child, especially at junctions of growth, change, and consequent detachment, the mother is villainized until the child becomes an adult and becomes able to see their mother as a fully formed humans with her own emotional needs beyond those of the child.

The Mother Daughter Relationship According to Akerman: From Sacrificial to Mutual Love

Both of Akerman’s films *News from Home* and *No Home Movie* highlight the contrast between separation and connection, anonymity with personal closeness, activity with inactivity, the foreign with the familiar, and isolation with closeness. There is also an overarching theme of

happiness in both films and the relationship between mother and daughter evolves from a sacrificial, one-sided one in *News from Home* to a more reciprocal happiness in which the mother does not have to be unhappy for her daughter to be happy nor does the mother only gain happiness from her daughter's happiness. Chantal expresses the tension in her own relationship with her mother in these films and shows the growth the two of them experience in which Chantal, the daughter, becomes better able to resent her mother less for having happiness needs which were dependent on Chantal's happiness and the two women become better able to see each other as equals.

News from Home begins with the camera's and therefore the viewer's perspective at New York City street level which elicits a feeling of anxiety which parallels the emotions conveyed through Chantal's mother's letters. The view is one which could represent a frantic search for Chantal, a desperate attempt to reconnect despite the sprawling landscape of the city streets and all of its anonymous inhabitants. The shots are solely of abandoned, run-down alleyways filled with trash and busy crowds of people who are all simultaneously preoccupied with their own lives. This feeling of anonymity in crowds is starkly contrasted with the constant voice-overs of Chantal's mother's worried letters, read by Chantal, which emphasize the mother's pull home from a person who knows her own daughter so well. Despite her mother's constant attempts to get an answer from Chantal about when she is returning home, it becomes apparent that she chooses this separation because of the opportunity and thrill associated with it. It appears to maintain more appeal to Chantal as her mother's letters progress that the personal closeness that her mother describes as needing for her sanity, Chantal does not need at this stage in her life.

The viewer begins to get the feeling that her mother's means of persuasion-explaining how everyone in the hometown asks about her, loves her, and has known her since she was a

child-may actually be pushing this evolving young woman further and further away from a place that may be beginning to feel less and less like home. Jennifer Barker discusses how “Akerman bypasses the well-known picture-postcard sites and landmarks, and instead seeks out and inhabits the ‘lived’ spaces of everyday life, with which the city’s residents would be more intimately familiar” (42). Akerman’s choice to show “the city’s more “anonymous spaces” offers an interesting commentary on the concept of home (42). Shots of massive apartment buildings with hundreds of windows, each home to families, friends, mothers, daughters, and struggling artists just like Chantal give the viewer a look into what Chantal is seeing and what she may be feeling as a result. Some viewers may feel comforted by being surrounded by densely populated spaces but others may feel incredibly isolated and lost by such images. Barker considers how Akerman’s “attention paid to urban space and the act of dwelling leads to a discovery of ‘home’ within what appears to be ‘homelessness’” (42). Despite knowing from her mother’s letters that Chantal has moved a number of times, which gets in the way of her mother’s ability to literally send her mail and symbolically keep tabs on her baby, the viewer has an uncertain idea about *who* Chantal is, by her own definition, by not knowing where she is. Additionally, with this separation, both Chantal feels homeless as she tears herself from the home she always known and her mother becomes homeless when the very thing that *first* defined her identity as a mother, Chantal, is torn from her. Barker writes, “That Akerman speaks her mother’s words in English is a sign of the distance between the child and the mother, but Akerman’s strong Belgian accent reinforces a shared loneliness. Her mother is, in a sense, ‘homeless’ in the Brussels family home after the departure of her daughter; Akerman is ‘homeless’ in Manhattan” (44). This strong connection is displayed through the ambiguity of self and speaker that comes from the mother’s

words being spoken by Akerman who is in fact, Chantal considering these letters were actually sent to her in 1972.

The difficult reality of New York City and its images, which would probably send Chantal's mother into a panicked frenzy, strongly contrast with her mother's expectations for her daughter's happiness. In reality, Chantal's mother is incapable of being unhappy unless she knows her daughter is happy, even if it means their separation, but it becomes clear that this sacrificial motherly ideal is actually quite difficult for her mother to achieve. This is displayed by her mother's frustration and anger towards her daughter when Chantal does not fulfill her mother's needs by meeting her expectations of closeness whether that be writing frequently, answering questions about her quality of life, or making plans to come home. A voiceover of her mother's letter reading, "We hope you become famous. We're not mad you left without notice. We're happy you're getting along so well" is contrasted with images of poverty stricken New York streets, showing that Chantal may not be telling her mother about her difficulty with achieving success and luxury synonymous to what she would receive at home so as not to upset her. Her mother's façade of sacrificial happiness *for* her daughter is not entirely believed considering almost every letter also includes mention of how the whole family is in poor health, is miserable without her, or is in frightening economic decline. It is almost as if the mother subconsciously wants her daughter to feel guilty for not being there for the mother after everything the mother has done for her. The letters in the beginning mention things such as how concerned the mother is that her daughter has not written back and how Chantal wrote so frequently when she first left and now only writes once a week. The detachment between the two is tangibly felt by the viewer as it grows with each passing day and with less and less communication. Also, the fact that Akerman only reads the mother's letters out loud in the film

and we never hear any of Chantal's response letters shows how much more energy the mother is putting into maintaining this threatened connection than Chantal is and it also shows that despite the frequency and content of Chantal's responses, nothing will ever be enough to satisfy her mother who truly just wants her home in her arms.

We hear the ways in which the distance has taken a toll on the family's body and psyche and Chantal's mother does not hold back in describing the consequences her lack of letters has on her family's health. Her mother writes, "My exhaustion and fatigue are getting worse," repeatedly writes on different occasions, "You know I live for your letters. I'm so lonely... Write more, it's all I have left" and also mentions how her sister Sylviane has dreams that Chantal comes home and how Chantal's father had a nightmare that she came home then left again and "woke up anxiously" and was depressed the whole next day. It almost seems as if Chantal's mother expects that these mentions of their poor condition will cause her to write more but she does not and this elicits a bipolar response in the mother. We hear her struggling, frequently within the same letter to be honest about how terribly she feels that her daughter isn't taking time to write her and respect her wishes and also to eagerly apologize, be sweet, and make sure she does not push Chantal away even further.

She writes things that are nagging and resemble a lecture then gives the little money and energy she has left to Chantal to make sure she is okay and mentions how she is being a good mother so as to make sure Chantal does not resent her. Her mother writes, "Don't go out alone at night, New York is dangerous... Write more" but then sends summer clothes and money accompanying a letter saying, "anxiously awaiting your letter, tell me when you get the money... What matters most is that you're happy." We really see the conflict within the mother towards the end of the film when we hear Akerman reading her mother's letter, still voiced-over

ragged city streets of New York. We hear her write, “For the umpteenth time, did you get the twenty dollars I sent last week? You never answer my questions and it’s bothering me... You’re going to miss Sylviane’s birthday party but I’d rather you stay then come and regret it. I don’t expect to see you anytime soon.” Despite the increasingly depressed, passive aggressive, and cynical tone in her letters, she always finishes each letter by saying that her, “Daddy,” and Sylviane love her and then writes a letter later saying “I won’t be sad even if you don’t come home soon. I want you to be happy and don’t want to be a selfish mother.” We hear the mother self-correcting to act like a better mother or the type of mother she feels is worthy of respect even if she is struggling desperately to fit this sacrificial ideal. The viewer is made to feel the mother’s desperation as we wait, impatiently, throughout the whole movie to finally see Chantal on screen or even hear her voice in a return letter but never do. We know that she is returning her mother’s letters but because we are only fed one side, her mother’s, the viewer cannot help but become frustrated with Chantal too and find ourselves asking, “Would it kill you to ease your poor mother’s nerves?” Beauvoir discusses this expectation society holds of mothers to be sacrificially happy for their children but also how mothers are expected to be happy when they have children because their child’s transcendence, ability to outlive them, is the closest to transcendence and purpose a woman will come. Beauvoir writes, “The fetus...encapsulates the whole future, and in carrying it, she feels as vast as the world...A new existence is going to manifest itself and justify her own existence” (538). Chantal’s mother wants her daughter to succeed. She is thrilled that her daughter has gone further than she could have. Her mother is too terrified of leaving her family to pursue her dreams beyond fear the way Chantal does but her mother is able to live vicariously through her daughter even if the separation breaks her.

We do not know what Chantal is going through and the viewer is forced to project their own regrets, frustrations, and pangs of heartache associated with their own mothers onto the relationship between Chantal and her mother. The viewer begins to wonder if Chantal was keeping her mother in the dark because the truth would break her mother's heart. Just as a child's happiness is a mother's happiness, a child's pain and suffering is enough to drive a mother mad, especially if she is too far away to do anything to help *and* even if her involvement is the last thing a growing child wants. We see bustling active city streets, packed train cars, and buses and cabs whizzing by in the Summer heat and hear Chantal's mother mentioning how she knows that the heat makes Chantal depressed. This shows a contrast between the exciting yet isolating *anonymity* of the city who does not know about how temperature regulation personally affects her mood and her mother's *personal* reminders that no one will ever know Chantal, or at least who she used to be, as well as her own mother. Barker writes how "The roar of street traffic and the rattling of the subway at times overwhelm the filmmaker's voice and the content of the letters" (45). Barker cites Margulies statement that "Random weaving of attention bolsters Akerman's subversion of a fixed locus for the 'I', as well as threatening the continuity of space, as New York's noise battles with Belgium's maternal words" (45). Chantal's voice and that of her mother's become one and their separate yet conjoined place in the world becomes confused by the external sounds of the two different homes.

Perhaps to admit to her mother that she is overheated and overwhelmed will mean defeat and will signify a failure to live independently, a win for her mother who benefits from Chantal's emotional dependence on her. Because she has always been around her mother, she takes this closeness for granted because it does not hold the exciting promise of new beginnings and is a reminder of a part of her that she needs to distance herself from in order to grow. Additionally, in

terms of Chantal's success with finding jobs, her mother complains, "You never write about how you're really doing" but the viewer can't help but wonder, without ever being given an answer, why Chantal is doing so. Is it because the truth about her failures would destroy her already emotionally fragile mother? Would her failure be enough for her mother to demand she returns home immediately where things would be easier? Just like in Akerman's *La Captive*, we get very little insight into the inner workings of the female character's minds and they occupy the gray area between victim and villain. Is Chantal subject to an overbearing, unreasonable mother? Is she a rotten and ungrateful daughter? Is she both or neither?

The anxieties we are, or at least I was left with following the sorrowful view of Chantal's isolation from New York as she finally departs on a ship to go home in *News from Home* are somewhat soothed by the evolved and more reciprocal relationship between Chantal Akerman and her mother in *No Home Movie*. Additionally, the upsetting reality of our own mothers' mortality may act as a grounding factor in *No Home Movie* in that Chantal's mother is elderly and ill. This growing realization may have contributed to a more reciprocal and close relationship between the two in that their collective happiness is prioritized by both parties who behave more like equals.

With age, Chantal begins to see her mother as less of a myth and as more of a relatable human and with age the daughter becomes someone that the mother does not have to lecture, scold, or hold high expectations of but rather becomes a respected friend, someone worth hanging out with. In *No Home Movie*, both Akerman and her mother are shown in the documentary, and as Barker discusses, it is framed as a love letter to her mother, as are almost all of Akerman's female-focused avant-garde films. Perhaps *No Home Movie* is an apology to her mother for how she was when she was younger, as shown in *News from Home*, maybe it is a love

letter to make up for her lack thereof and regret for not doing so, or maybe it's just a love letter marking their relationship as it is, at this stage in their lives. Barker cites Brenda Longfellow saying that Akerman's films are "love letters to the mother. Desire in these films circulate around the maternal body, around the variable presence and absence of the mother...the films [act] both as a mode of reparation and as evidence of an irreparable divide" (Barker 44). In *No Home Movie*, it is clear from the beginning that this adult Chantal works tirelessly to reassure her mother, who is not as worried, that Chantal will call, write, and visit very soon and gives a concrete date for her mother to look forward to. Watching *News from Home* before watching *No Home Movie* definitely gave me a concept of linear chronological progression but if *News from Home* had not been watched by the viewer of *No Home Movie*, the viewer might have always assumed that their relationship had always been this strong.

No Home Movie opens with the stationary camera shooting Chantal sitting with her mom in her mom's kitchen with Chantal's back to the camera. Her elderly mother bluntly and jokingly tells her to eat more because the chicken will give her muscles. In another shot, Chantal is skyping her mother in Brussels from Oklahoma and her mom asks, "Why are you filming me?" to which Chantal responds, "Because I want to show that there is no distance in the world...Look there is no more distance!" You get the feeling that Akerman is filming her conversations with her mother and them laughing and saying loving things to each other as a way of preserving these moments forever because it is clear her elderly mother will not be around forever. Chantal gives her mother a firm date over Skype about when she will visit next and her mother is happy and relaxed because she is able to see Chantal and is not worried or wondering about her daughter. Her mother may also be less worried because she now knows that Chantal is a successful filmmaker, is financially independent, and therefore, her mother does not need to

worry about her wellbeing as much. Another time when they are on Skype, Chantal's mother says, "You're the one who visits the most" and when Chantal says, "I have to go. Call you later," her mother responds with, "You don't have to explain. We say goodbye that's it. The last thing I want to do is bug you. I want us to enjoy our conversations." With this shortened distance courtesy of internet and increased communication comes less pressure from her mother to contact her more frequently and less annoyance in Chantal.

When Chantal next visits, she asks her mother about her mother and tells her mother, "Your mother was a feminist ahead of her time." The appreciation and adoration Akerman has for the mothers in this film starkly contrasts with the way Chantal behaved in *News from Home* and you get the feeling that Akerman really wants to document the beautifully healthy arrival to this current phase. Wanting to remember the good parts of the past and reminisce with one of the only other people who were actually there during the hilarious and bizarre moments, they laugh about how her mother's father was so gentle that he had to have his wife spank the kids, how her mother would complain that the prayers were in old Ashkenazi Hebrew and not modern Hebrew, and would joke nostalgically about how Chantal was as a kid. Her mother teases Chantal for never eating enough and Chantal explains that she couldn't eat a lot when she went to Nanny's because the meatballs got stuck in her throat because she was so nervous as a result of her Nanny's crazy hair scaring her. The joy overflowed at the kitchen table as the two older women laugh over specific memories that manage to unite the generations.

Both Chantal and her mother are looking back with the perspective of older women and because Chantal is no longer her baby, instead of her mother forcing her to eat despite her fear, her mother can laugh in agreement and explain that her mother looked like that because of female ills. Menopause, diabetes, the trauma from fleeing the Holocaust were mentioned but the

subjective experience is still lovingly honored. Chantal says, “A child sees what a child sees” and her mother nostalgically smiles and nods in agreement. Beauvoir discusses how a woman’s child represents a continuation of her through the generations and writes, “The separation woman suffered from in the past during her weaning is compensated for; it is submerged again in the current of life, reintegrated into the whole, a link in the endless chain of generations, flesh that exists for and through another flesh” (539). The separation between the generations we saw in *News from Home* appears to be repaired by Chantal’s transcendence, which gives her elderly mother relief knowing that she can depart this earth having done her job as a mother and that a piece of her lineage will remain in the form of Chantal and Chantal’s work.

Just as in Jeanne, Akerman’s filming of all of the mundane actions her mother does around the house in *No Home Movie* show not only life through a female perspective but also how each action is a protest and triumph accomplished by a Holocaust survivor. This film is a love letter in that it displays all of the little things her mother says and does that Akerman respects so much, especially with an increased understanding of her mother with age. When discussing how Chantal was raised, she recalls how her socialist father made them stop celebrating Shabbat and attending Hebrew school but that as Jews, “we say you don’t have to love your parents, but respect them.” Openly discussing the cultural elements that played a role in her upbringing appears to be therapeutic and reconciliatory for both Chantal and her mother and discussing the war definitely helps Chantal understand where her mom must have been coming from with her irrational actions and worries.

The final shot of *No Home Movie* shows Chantal’s mother coughing as she falls asleep. This feels intrusive for the viewer. When Chantal’s younger sister tries to wake her sleeping mother up to tell a story, Chantal explains how their mother’s parents were in Poland and how

“that’s why she’s [Chantal’s mother] is like this [so tired].” Even in her mother’s final moments, Chantal understands her mother, justifies her actions, and not only defends but proudly displays her mother in her most natural form. The viewer is able to experience the development of their relationship surrounding sacrificial and mutual love and happiness by catching glimpses of the most intimate and imperfect aspects of their lives as they pull apart then reconnect with age, thanks to Akerman’s genius filmmaking style.

In Conclusion

Is happiness a trap? Is it even real? Pleasure, contentment, bursts of joy; these are emotions which are felt periodically and for good reason but is the pursuit of happiness keeping the marginalized, the unhappy, from allowing themselves to feel deeply even if it means killing both their joy and the joy of those in their vicinity. I explored theories of both individualistic and communalistic happiness and liberty. It is worth considering whether the U.S. constitution’s “protection” of “everyone’s” right to the pursuit of happiness is really just a con altogether, designed to give the impression that the system we exist in was designed to sustain long-term happiness for anyone but solely those in control of the means through which even basic contentment can be achieved. As Beauvoir and Marso in particular have explained the gray area between freedom and entrapment and between joyous happiness and absolute misery, we have been better able to acknowledge the gray area between these polarized experiences.

By appropriately recognizing the happiness which exists in places of restriction, individuals become so much more than the object of extremist theory. We can learn a lot from small, sudden, perverse, bittersweet, silent and mundane happiness expressions which occur in all of the hidden feminine spaces normally not investigated by mainstream patriarchal society.

By looking at key films in which women are shown experiencing a whole range of varying forms of happiness, we are given an alternative perspective on what joy truly looks like, separate from what old white rich male theorists claimed it to be.

If anything, I hope this piece provides the reader with not only an existential reanalysis of what happiness means and feels like for them but also reassurance that there are other models to consider. We might have to experience the pain of unhappiness in order to truly learn who we are behind the façade of grinning-or gritting- our way through life so as to reassure those around us that we are not insane. I invite everyone to be a feminist killjoy or at least unapologetically kill joy where joy acts as a barrier to justice and truth. Perhaps this work has provided more questions than answers but I find that where there is consistent curiosity, there is progression beyond expectations both we and others have always created for ourselves. Even if the generation to follow has access to more liberty and sustained happiness than we could have ever dreamed of, the historic female experience, one of pain, sorrow, happiness, and ecstasy, and everything in between will always need to be remembered and documented as such. Yes, women want to be happy but they want the choice to define what happiness means for them and if it is even a priority to begin with. I hold that all individuals should have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of any form of happiness or unhappiness which their heart desires. In response to Sigmund Freud's famous question "What do women want?" I answer: Well, we want everything.

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