

Incorrigible: resisting heteropatriarchy, the purity of girls, and the epitome of ‘woman’

by Amber Crook

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Supervisor: Dr Nadia Sanger

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Declaration

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Abstract

A study of girlhood in conjunction with the mother-daughter relationship offers a unique lens through which to analyse what it means to be a girl child in certain modern societies, and how a girl child's becoming is regulated by various heteropatriarchal structures and institutions, including the institution of motherhood. There is necessity in acknowledging the way in which girls are socially conditioned and primed to become women, and that they are essentially entangled with their maternal figures, but likewise that they have agency to choose for and position themselves. Moreover, there is increased urgency to recognise the racial, class and individual differences amongst girls and women in order to challenge 'ideal' femininity as a totalising group discourse that seeks to subordinate and control these bodily experiences. Through examining three literary texts – Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides*, Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects*, and Sandra Charles's *Eve* – this dissertation ultimately concludes that despite the conditioning of girls and women to maintain motherhood as the archetype of femininity by way of the socially and discursively constructed category 'woman', there are various ways of being both a 'woman' and a mother. Thus, the agency and diversity of girls and women is made palpable in their ability to 'take up' and fulfil multiple subject positions, or put differently, to both survive and resist heteropatriarchy and its ideals.

Opsomming

‘n Studie van meisie-wees tesame met die moeder-dogterverhouding, bied ‘n unieke lens waardeur geanaliseer kan word wat dit beteken om ‘n dogter-kind in sekere moderne gemeenskappe te wees, en hoe ‘n dogter-kind se menswees gereguleer word deur verskeie heteropatriargale strukture en instellings, insluitende die instelling van moederskap. Daar is noodsaaklikheid in die erkenning van die manier waarop meisies sosiaal gekondisioneer en voorberei word om vrou te word, en dat hulle essensieel verstrengel is met hul moeder-figure, maar enersyds dat hulle agentskap het om vir hulself te kies en hulself te posisioneer. Origens is daar ‘n toenemende dringendheid om die rasse-, klas- en individuele verskille onder meisies en vroue te herken, ten einde ‘ideale’ vroulikheid as ‘n totaliserende groepsdiskoers wat daarna vra om hierdie liggaamlike ervarings ondergeskik te maak en te beheer, uit te daag. Deur die ondersoek van drie literêre tekste – Jeffrey Eugenides se *The Virgin Suicides*, Gillian Flynn se *Sharp Objects* en Sandra Charles se *Eve* – bereik hierdie verhandeling die uiteindelijke slotsom dat, ten spyte van die kondisionering van meisies en vroue om moederskap as die argetipe van vroulikheid by wyse van die sosiale en diskursief gekonstrueerde kategorie ‘vrou’ te handhaaf, daar verskeie maniere is om beide ‘n ‘vrou’ en ‘n moeder te wees. Dus word die agentskap en diversiteit van meisies en vroue tasbaar gemaak deur hul vermoë om veelvoudige subjek-posisies op te neem, of anders gestel, om heteropatriargie en sy ideale beide te oorleef en teen te staan.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER ONE: ‘BECOMING-WOMAN’	14
GENDER AND ‘IDEAL’ FEMININITY AS PRETENCE	14
HETEROPATRIARCHAL NORMS AND CONSUMERISM	20
ADMINISTERING SEXUAL SUBORDINATION AND NONCONFORMITY	28
CROSS-CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.....	30
CHAPTER TWO: MELANCHOLIC [S]MOTHERING	38
‘MOTHERLESS CHILDREN’	38
‘MOTHER’ IS A BEHAVIOUR	40
‘MATRESCENCE’ AND THE DIVINITY OF WOMEN.....	49
MELANCHOLIA AND THE ‘EMOTIONAL ARCHIVE’	54
MUNCHAUSEN SYNDROME BY PROXY (MSBP)	59
CHAPTER THREE: ‘[IN]DEPENDENT BEINGS’	68
FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY AND IN/DEPENDENCE.....	68
MOTHER AND HER ‘EMOTIONAL ARCHIVE’	69
WHITE SUBURBIA AND ‘COLLECTIVE MALAISE’ IN <i>THE VIRGIN SUICIDES</i>	72
‘MOTHERS OF MONSTROUS CHILDREN’ IN <i>SHARP OBJECTS</i>	80
‘MORAL STANDING’ AND <i>ORDENTLIKHEID</i> IN <i>EVE</i>	88
CHAPTER FOUR: ‘THE FAILED CHILDREN’	98
THE ENTANGLEMENT AND AUTONOMY OF GIRLS	98
THE ‘WAYWARD’ GIRLS IN <i>THE VIRGIN SUICIDES</i>	101
THE ‘MONSTROUS’ GIRL IN <i>SHARP OBJECTS</i>	107
THE ‘LUSTFUL’ GIRL IN <i>EVE</i>	112
CONCLUSION.....	118
REFERENCES.....	121

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to illustrate the various ways in which girls and women are socially conditioned to submit to heteropatriarchy¹ and the discursively constructed category ‘woman’. Through a close reading of Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* (2006), and Sandra Charles’s novel *Eve* (2011), I aim to explore the idealisation of girls as ‘pure’ and innocent beings during girlhood. In the context of this dissertation, I define girlhood as a period in which a girl child is socialised and conditioned by heteropatriarchal societies in “a complex process of becoming” to desire motherhood as “the epitome of femininity”. There are various reasons for this, depending on the feminised behaviours and “decorum” insisted upon within particular settings (Allen 216; M. Hirsch 11; Salo 350; Jones 159). Furthermore, I seek to demonstrate the potency of learned mothering behaviours within cross-cultural mother-daughter relationships, as well as the impact of “intergenerational emotional archives” upon subsequent generations of women (Kenway and Fahey 639). By framing this study within what Marianne Hirsch refers to as “motherless children” at the hands of “terrible and absent, or silent mothers”, I intend to focus on the so-called “unchartered terrain” of girlhood while exploring motherhood as “a repository of society’s idealism” (50; Patel 61; Badinter 180).

In order to pave the way for the mother-daughter relationship as an important topic of discussion throughout this dissertation, as well as to explore its remarkable influence upon daughters and their “becoming-woman”, I will begin by exploring girlhood as a “process of apprenticeship” to mothers (M. Hirsch 11, 19). Indeed, within many heteropatriarchal societies, girls are primed and conditioned to uphold motherhood as the feminine supreme. Therefore, a study of girlhood raises many questions about what it means to be a girl child in societies today, and how a girl child’s identity formation or “process of *becoming*” is policed by various patriarchal structures and institutions, including the institution of motherhood (Allen 216, emphasis added). Additionally, since two of my primary texts are set within the global North,

¹ According to Nadia Sanger, “Heteropatriarchy suggests an institutionalised system of male domination over women within a heteronormative society. This system legitimises the subjugation of women and has been naturalised within most cultural, economic, and social and religious spaces including the media” (“‘There’s got to be a man in there’” 289).

and one in the South, it is important to consider class differences alongside race and gender. I accordingly consider it crucial to examine the intersection of race, class, and gender in order to account for the differences between girls and women, particularly when discussing constructed feminine ideals and the diversity of girl experience.

First, in order to convey the complexity of the category ‘woman’, as well as to effectively discuss contemporary concerns of labelling and signification in terms of language, it is essential to understand that the category ‘woman’ is a social construct designed by heteropatriarchy (see Chapter One). Moreover, the feminine characteristics encapsulated by this category are essentially based on whiteness as “the unmarked, uncritiqued norm” and therefore *does not* account for race, gender and class differences amongst women (Sanger, “New women, old messages?” 140). I discuss this category in much further detail in my first chapter, since this lack of recognition for the differences amongst women presents a perspective that inevitably excludes women who do not conform to its notions of ‘ideal femininity’. Thus, the word ‘woman’ used here is limiting in effect because it considers only white, heterosexual and cisgendered persons as ‘ideally feminine’. Black, transgender and genderqueer persons, let alone an alternative sexuality, are not taken into account, largely because ‘woman’ as a heteropatriarchal and socially constructed category considers these variations *undesirable*. Of course, following Elaine Salo, Nadia Sanger and Pumla Dineo Gqola, I use the term ‘black’ in the Biko sense (unless otherwise stipulated) to refer to people of colour i.e. “the collective people of African and South Asian descent” (Gqola 4).

Second, following Judith Butler’s theory of “Performative Agency”, it is essential to note that in the context of this study I argue that discourse produces the subject and therefore engages the social construction of becoming (148). According to Butler, “heterosexually *ideal* genders are performed and naturalised” by societies because gender is assigned and allocated to bodies based on their biological sex alone (“Gender as Performance” 32, emphasis added). For this reason, I have chosen to use the term ‘woman’ when I refer specifically to the cisgendered and heteronormative category that comprises ideals and expectations that have been constructed and are regulated by heteropatriarchal systems and institutions. Finally, in instances where I speak of biological sex for the purpose of dominant scientific discourses and reproductive research, I specifically use the term ‘female’.

Although I had originally considered making use of the term ‘womxn’ when exploring gender as socially constructed and performed (in an attempt to prevent from excluding black, transgender, and genderqueer persons in particular discussions of womanhood), I found that this term began to read as somewhat prejudicial. The term ‘womxn’ has a variation of spellings (e.g. ‘wimmin’ from the early 1900s, and ‘womyn’ from the 1970s) and is contemporarily utilised as an all-encompassing term to take into account those who are traditionally excluded from the socially and discursively constructed category ‘woman’ (Kerr, *The New York Times* 2019). In fact, there are numerous feminist and queer activists who make use of this particular term, and for different reasons. For instance, Eli Erlick, who is an internationally-known transgender activist from the University of California, is said to embrace the term ‘womxn’ because she believes that it allows transgender and genderqueer persons to define themselves “outside of the context of being men” as well as “to recognise that there are different ways to be a woman” (qtd. in Kerr, *The New York Times* 2019). However, although I understand this position, and despite the term’s merits in certain contexts, ‘womxn’ has likewise been heavily critiqued by a number of people. Breena Kerr, for instance, notes that recently, a museum and library in London named *Wellcome Collection* posted a tweet that made use of the term ‘womxn’ as a means of inclusion; however, “in response, hundreds of followers, including many women, tweeted back with complaints” (*The New York Times* 2019). Jess Phillips, a British politician and Member of Parliament, was one such objector who subsequently tweeted, “I’ve never met a trans woman who was offended by the word woman being used, so I’m not sure why this keeps happening” (qtd. in Topping, *The Guardian* 2018).

This is a point that makes sense to me, because although the term can be useful at times (since the ‘x’ essentially becomes a place holder for different kinds of gender and sex categories), ‘womxn’ began to read as detrimental to my research. Alongside the term ‘woman’, the ‘x’ in ‘womxn’ proceeds to mark gender and sex variants as considerably *other* within certain discussions. For instance, following considerations of scientific metaphors in medical jargon as examples of the category ‘woman’ and its discursive construction, the word ‘womxn’ started to read as *those who are considered undesirable*, or rather *those who are not and cannot be considered ideally feminine*. And so, while this position may be prevalent in the eyes of heteropatriarchy, it is not one to which I wish to contribute. I maintain that while the category ‘woman’ seeks to exclude black, transgender, and genderqueer persons, it still attempts to control

and regulate their bodily experiences and gender expression (see Chapter One). Therefore, black and transgender women need to be considered as such – women – because the socially and discursively constructed category attempts to exert power over their lived experiences and performance of femininity too. Furthermore, in the light of these contrasting attitudes, ‘womxn’ could likewise be viewed as a term that appeals mostly to liberal circles and to those within feminist and/or academic, gentrified spaces that tend to overlook race and class differences. More so, if and when considering spaces that are not as Westernised, the term ‘womxn’ could be said to have less socio-cultural traction².

Significantly, while I do believe that the gendered norms demanded and controlled by the category ‘woman’ have a considerable influence upon transgender and genderqueer persons, as in instances such as *passing* (see Nicolazzo 2016), there are certain processes of becoming on which I am unable to comment, given my cisgendered positionality. For this reason, I feel that there are more knowledgeable researchers who can successfully discuss these processes, and so my discussion of the socialisation of girls into womanhood focuses predominantly upon the expectation of heteronormative, cisgendered experiences as the categorical *norm* in dominant discourses. In my view, girlhood essentially prepares for motherhood in many heteropatriarchal contexts, and despite the agentic capacity of girls to choose (which I will shortly discuss), this “process of apprenticeship” to their mothers by means of socialisation and the dominant discourses it involves, requires deep analysis in the light of contemporary feminism (M. Hirsch 19). Therefore, for the purpose of my research, and in order to discuss the way in which gendered categories have been socially and culturally constructed by means of heteropatriarchal norms, it is vital that I view girls in the light of what they are essentially *taught* (not choose) to become: ‘woman’.

As aforementioned, girls are socially conditioned within numerous heteropatriarchal contexts to desire and uphold motherhood as the feminine supreme. Nicole Cocuy illustrates an instance of this social conditioning in her research on gender-specific toys; she contends that toys such as these “introduce children to harmful gender stereotypes and prevent them from reaching their full potential” (*University Wire* 2014). This is because, since gender-specific toys associate certain activities with particular genders, harmful gender norms and stereotypes are established

² This particular point was brought to my attention within an informal conversation with my colleagues at Stellenbosch University, namely Maria Geustyn and Jarryd La Kay.

that act to constrain gender expression. Moreover, toys such as baby dolls not only “socialise girls to be women, to be mothers” but they also play a role in socialising women as “the primary carer for any children” (Wall 798; Stone 169). And while girls are heteronormatively socialised “to feed, change and soothe a crying baby doll”, boys are socialised to become active beings instead, who “save the world and fight crime with superhero action figures” (Cocuy, *University Wire* 2014). Cocuy therefore demonstrates that heteronormative socialisation is not only limited to girls, and so this socialisation perpetuates is a persistent gender system. In light of this, some scholars maintain that all children are effectively socialised into appropriate gender roles: girls as mothers, and boys as *not necessarily* fathers (Sanger, “Scripts of Western Heteronormativity” 1; Read et al. 18; Stone 169).

There is a distinct difference here between the ways in which boys and girls are socialised; however, this process remains part of a gender system because it ensures that this binary not only remains intact but also that the espousing of ‘appropriate’ gender norms and regulations remain prevalent. As Nigerian award-winning author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie maintains, young males and females “are undeniably different biologically, but socialization exaggerates the differences [in damaging ways], and then starts a self-fulfilling process” (15). Debbie Epstein’s research, for instance, demonstrates that “compulsory heterosexuality” is introduced to girls at an early age through discourse, thus they begin to “construct themselves as ‘heterosexually feminized beings’” by way of games such as playing the bride and “kiss chase” or *kissing-catchers* as I once called it (qtd. in Morris-Roberts 239). Therefore, in light of this socialisation and its exaggeration of binary norms, Adichie maintains that the child’s ability and their interest rather than their gender ought to be the primary focus when raising them (15). Of course, this is sometimes easier said than done since it involves learned mothering behaviours that have been passed down through generations of women; I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two.

As articulated by Alison Jones, the relationship between “feminist scholarship and post-structuralist³ thought” offers more intricate and nuanced ways of considering the socialisation and/or ‘production’ of girls which surpasses viewing them as “primarily as ‘disadvantaged’ and socialised within oppressive patriarchal structures” (157). As an alternative, this relationship acknowledges the *differences* among girls, a vital consideration in accounting for the

³ According to Alison Jones, post-structuralism centres on “the differences/complexities within girls’ experiences” and is therefore useful in understanding certain “shifts within academic theory” regarding the voices and authority of women (158).

“complexities” in their lived experience as well as “the divisions amongst girls” (Jones 158). Following Jones, what it means to be a girl child, “to develop feminine subjectivities”, differs across contexts, depending on the specific “feminine decorum” that the setting emphasises in its understanding of girls (159). In essence, what this particular acknowledgement does is to challenge the term ‘girls’ as “a single category” or as a totalising notion (Yates 40; Jones 158).

Similarly, Jones argues that the same may be said for the term ‘woman’ since the meaning of the term considerably “shifts within various discursive contexts” (159). And what this shift highlights is the capacity of girls (and women) to not only “engage several meanings or positionings simultaneously” but also to ‘take up’ or to procure certain positionings that may be contradictory (Jones 159). A girl child may be confident at home with her siblings, for instance, yet more introverted around strangers. In any event, girls have the agency to “*position themselves*”, and in due course, Jones argues that they “become ‘girls’ by participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices – discourses – which define them as girls” (159, emphasis in original).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while the term ‘girls’ may have “totalising effects” at times, Jones further explains that the term cannot be easily rejected (158). In fact, she clarifies that like the term ‘woman’, ‘girls’ essentially “forms the basis of our political and conceptual work as feminists in education”, and so it becomes useful to both “use *and* reject it” (Jones 158, emphasis in original). And this is what I have chosen to do; by constantly accounting for the differences between girls and women, these terms as totalising notions are actively challenged throughout my research. Furthermore, I am aware that feminist scholars have highlighted the implications of patriarchal organisation on lived girl experience as incorporating a research area that is understudied, requiring focused feminist enquiry. For instance, Vasu Reddy critiques scholars who have “overprioritised and overdetermined ‘gender’ at the expense of ‘girl experience’” (80). However, some points of contention remain within this perspective.

Let us first consider Reddy’s argument that there has been a tendency to categorise girls and their ‘process of becoming’ *within* the subject of womanhood, or rather, and more specifically, to categorise girlhood as *a mere component* of womanhood (80; Patel 62). Hence, in response to this categorisation, to call a girl child a ‘young woman’ is a phrase that has been heavily critiqued because, as Nafisa Patel contends, it fails to regard girls as “knowing and active agents” by viewing them instead as “incomplete or ‘not yet’ versions of what they might become or grow

up to be” i.e. women or other (63). And as a result, scholars such as Reddy and Patel consider calling a girl child a ‘young woman’ to be a total disregard of her agency to situate herself in adulthood, and to ‘take up’ any subject position she prefers (e.g. cisgender, transgender, or genderqueer). According to Reddy, “what constitutes being a boy and a girl are ultimately about the gendered effects of living in heteronormativity” (79). Similarly, feminist classroom researcher Bronwyn Davies maintains that “as children learn the discursive practices of their society they learn to correctly position themselves as male or female” (5). Thus, the perspective offered here is that people are not “passively shaped by active others” but rather, that they “actively take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped” (Davies and Banks qtd. in Jones 158). Following these arguments, I furthermore contend that girls and boys have the agency to position themselves and “can no longer be seen as simply socialised into their appropriate gender roles” (Jones 159; Allen 216).

Thus, while I maintain that girls are to a large extent socially conditioned by traditional heteropatriarchal structures and dominant discourses to become a particular kind of ‘woman’, this does not mean that I do not recognise their agency. On the contrary, I believe that “discourses make available particular subject positions” which girls then have the agentic capacity to either ‘take up’ for themselves or to *resist*; as Michel Foucault maintains, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (qtd. in Allen 216). Nevertheless, while scholars such as Reddy and Patel have emphasised the necessity of viewing girls in their own right, as ‘knowing and active agents’ *separate* from their socialisation into womanhood, I tend to disagree with this position. Indeed, it is necessary to acknowledge the agency of girls as I have mentioned; however, the notion that a girl child should not to be viewed in light of what she is being socialised and/or primed to become, or to actively avoid categorising girlhood as a component of womanhood, is counterproductive for the purpose of my research. This socialisation is ever-present and is therefore unavoidable. And while girls may be viewed “as multiply located, and not unambiguously powerless”, there is an “*unevenness* of power” that still remains (Jones 160, emphasis in original). For example, research done in New Zealand primary school classrooms (see Lise Bird, 1992) highlights that while girls are presented with multiple subject positions to choose from, “they are still inevitably inflected with wider gendered power relations” (Jones 161). Consequently, as Jones highlights, “the dominant gender narratives, and the processes of

learning ‘the usual’ gender-differentiated positions, are clearly not interrupted” since gendered and/or heteropatriarchal spaces are inescapable (161).

Louisa Allen largely encapsulates Jones’s notion, with which I agree, that the “process of ‘taking up’ positions is not simply a cognitive choice, but rather a complex process of becoming that involves being subject/ed *to*, and subject *of* discourse” (216, emphasis in original). And in the same way, Julia Nentwich and colleagues offer a similar position in their summary of Butler’s theory of Performative Agency; as active agents, “constituting the very norms that bring the subject into being”, it is within the same “process of subjectivation” that agency lies (240). Significantly, this process is said to be “two-sided” because it requires the individual to both submit and refer “to specific discourses in order to become a subject” (Nentwich et al. 240). Consequently, as Butler’s theory stipulates, “by making changes in the repetitive performances of subjectivity”, gendered norms may be subverted and thereby displaced, enabling “new practices” and perhaps even new ways of being (Nentwich et al. 240). The social agency of girls, therefore, arguably lays within their ability to *simultaneously* “‘consent to’ and dissent from ‘femininity’” (de Lauretis qtd. in M. Hirsch 11). In my view, this ability is profound and significantly relates to David Muggleton’s notion of “distinctive individuality” within groups of individuals. As explicated by Kathryn Morris-Roberts:

Muggleton argues that many young men and women make sense of their shared collective identities through ‘distinctive individuality’. He suggests in his study that young men and women distance themselves from ‘Others’, who they argue are involved in collective practices of sameness. But at the same time they also distance themselves from affiliation with a shared subcultural style within their group. (241)

Admittedly, Muggleton’s theory has some glaring oversights, such as its failure to explore the differences between individuals in terms of race, class, gender and/or sexuality; it is thought-provoking for one particular detail: its two-sided nature (Morris-Roberts 241).

In my view, within this bilateral nature, agency is present and is discernible through a girl child’s liminal capacity. What I mean by this is, specifically, the girl child’s ability, as Jones contends, “to engage several meanings or positionings simultaneously” (159). As I have previously discussed, girls are largely socialised into ‘taking up’ certain subject positions for themselves; however, they are still able to occupy additional positions of their own choice, and even some that may significantly contradict already existing subject positions. Furthermore, as

elucidated by Allen, since “the constitutive force of discourse produces an (inherent) agency for the subject”, the power of dominant discourses cannot be absolute because of an ever-present “potential for resistance” (217). In fact, Jones maintains that it is within the fissures opened by the aforementioned ‘unevenness of power’ that resistance and change are made possible (161). Girls can therefore simultaneously conform and resist within both the public and private spheres, and it is here that we may view their agentic capacity. Ultimately, my argument is that at some point in their maturity they become able to *recognise* their own social conditioning and priming as pertaining to particular gender roles, and then choose to conform or to effect change, and sometimes both.

This agentic capacity in the context of motherhood as the feminine supreme brings important issues to light. Once girls acknowledge that mothering (as an expected gender role) has essentially been ‘set up’ by a society that will reject them if they fail to adhere to the requirements of motherhood, their agency as girls (who *choose* to become women in adulthood) becomes discernible in their ability to make a decision – to resist the dominant discourses of ideal femininity (if this is their desire) and risk alienation as a result, or to become celebrated mothers. Irrespective of which decision they make, their agentic capacity lies within the choice to either ‘take up’ or to reject certain positions that pertain to dominant constructions of femininity. And of course, a large number of girls are less likely to resist for various reasons; traditional family structures and religious beliefs are but two examples of discourses that have tremendous power over the experiences of girls and women. However, this is not to say that these dominant discourses exert power over *all* girls and women but rather that these discourses are interesting to consider alongside the *availability* of certain subject positions. As Allen’s research on the “(hetero)sexual⁴ subjectivities” of young people in Western contexts has found, the agentic capacity of individuals was in some settings regulated as a result of particular circumstances (217). For this reason, it is important to bear in mind that “discursive shifts” or “the transformation and multiplication of discourses” may effectively alter available feminine subject positions and practices (Jones 164).

In order to effectively explore a girl child’s process of ‘becoming-woman’, and the various restrictions placed upon her and her gendered expression, the sum of the category ‘woman’ and

⁴ Louisa Allen brackets the prefix ‘hetero’ in what she refers to as “an attempt to decentre the notion of (hetero)sexual as the ‘norm’” (233).

the way in which it regulates bodily experiences will be discussed in Chapter One. Critically exploring the ways in which dominant discourses essentially produce the subject by way of this socially constructed category, reveal the subject positions made available to girls and women, as well as the subsequent resistance to what Sanger refers as “the unmarked, uncritiqued norm” of heteropatriarchal societies (“New women, old messages?” 140).

In Chapter Two, I consider mothering as a *learned* behaviour that is inherited from previous, and passed down to subsequent, generations of women. In essence, this chapter seeks to discuss the influence that melancholia and the “intergenerational emotional archives” of women can have upon respective mothering behaviours, as well as its effect upon the mother-daughter relationship (Kenway and Fahey 639). Additionally, I use this chapter as a point of departure for exploring melancholic mothers who are capable of violence, both direct and indirect.

Chapter Three introduces female subjectivity and the emergence of asymmetrical dependence on maternal figures. This dependency and its influence upon the mother-daughter relationship is significant, and so this chapter seeks to explore the dominant perception that “mothers are primarily [and unfairly] responsible for the failed children” (M. Hirsch 48). In order to do so, Chapters Three and Four make use of Jay Belsky’s (1984) theory of the Determinants of Parenting to account for the influence that melancholic mothers have upon their daughters. Essentially, by acknowledging mothers and their daughters as in/dependent beings, I argue that the mothers of my primary texts cannot be held primarily responsible for the actions of their incorrigible daughters.

And finally, Chapter Four focuses on daughters as agentic beings despite the dependency and entanglement that they experience with their mothers. The daughters of my primary texts are, for various reasons, what heteropatriarchy would define as ‘the failed children’ and this chapter therefore seeks to consider *why* that is and *how* these girls behave as in/dependent individuals. Belsky’s theory offers the (girl) child’s individuality as a crucial factor to take into consideration when deliberating mothering behaviours as in/effective. Therefore, my discussion of the behaviour of these girls seeks to provide further evidence that mothers are not solely to blame for the resistance encountered in the process of girls’ ‘becoming-woman’.

With this dissertation, I ultimately seek to highlight the influence of heteropatriarchy upon the lived experience of girls and women through examining three literary texts. As mentioned, where there is power, the prospect of resistance is ever-present. The agency of girls and women is

therefore remarkable because it affords them the ability to both conform and resist, of both surviving and excelling within the push and pull of heteropatriarchal norms and expectations. This dissertation aims to evidence that there are different ways of being, and that the category ‘woman’ is harmful because it seeks to eradicate the diversity of gendered expression and lived experience. In essence, this category considers *incorrigible* those who choose to resist it, and I attempt to normalise the insurgent behaviours of girls and women in this dissertation as a reality and not a curse.

Chapter one: ‘becoming-woman’

One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

— Simone de Beauvoir

Gender and ‘ideal’ femininity as pretence

Gender is neither natural nor inherent; instead, as Judith Butler maintains, gender is performative. It is a “repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” which shapes bodies so that they may fit neatly into categories according to the assumed gender and relevant expected behaviours (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 43–44). Hence, as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, “woman is not born, but made” (qtd. in Conboy et al. 2). Down to every detail, the category ‘woman’ is socially manufactured by heteropatriarchal ideals, creating a category that labels a very particular *type* of woman. However, due to the exceedingly inflexible ‘regulatory frame’ of this category, its classification of ‘woman’ has, as aforementioned, disastrous consequences because of its gross omission of persons who do not meet these imposed requirements.

Centred on de Beauvoir’s question regarding the perceived characteristics of a woman, Katie Conboy and her colleagues have articulated that throughout history, “women have been determined by their bodies” (1). Thus, Conboy et al. maintain that de Beauvoir’s question “What is a woman?” is really a question about ideology, i.e. the discursive formations of the category ‘woman’ as well as “what is at stake [...] in maintaining or dismissing that category” (1). For this reason, it is imperative that lived bodily experiences are identified as separate from the “cultural meanings inscribed on” the bodies of women, at the same time acknowledging the idealised representations of that body in larger social frameworks (Conboy et al. 1). Scientific metaphors in medical jargon are a testament to the way in which discourse has outlined the category ‘woman’, and to the way in which sexual reproduction is presented as quintessential, organised in particular ways and for very particular means. And while scientific metaphors about the body further reinforce the culturally formulated category ‘woman’, it is imperative to insist that this category is not only entirely constructed, but also unequally so (Conboy et al. 4). In

effect, the “natural group[ing]” of women is disrupted and the disparity of this category’s construction is made evident when race and social class differences are considered (Wittig 309). The rights and privileges of women need to be taken into account because while all women are oppressed in various ways, some are more oppressed than others due to the intersection of race, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability (Conboy et al. 5). Conboy and her colleagues go on to claim that “while it is clear that women have been oppressed as a class [...] every culture also subdivides this class when it elevates as ‘natural’ only certain feminine characteristics” (5). These feminine characteristics are essentially based on whiteness, which Nadia Sanger refers to as “the unmarked, uncritiqued norm” of heteropatriarchal societies (“New women, old messages?” 140). Thus, one may argue that femininity, just like the category ‘woman’, has been culturally and discursively constructed; not all women have been taken into consideration as far as ‘natural’ feminine characteristics are concerned (Conboy et al. 5). This means that some women will inevitably be dismissed because they do not meet the requirements for an ‘ideal’ body or femininity, just as some women will be excluded from the category ‘woman’ since this category fails to account for the differences among women. For this reason, early third-wave feminists such as Monique Wittig argued that the category in question, this idea that women are a “natural group”, needed to be deconstructed and eradicated for it does not encapsulate *all women* (309).

Wittig’s work makes use particularly of the existence of lesbian society as a means of discussing the inefficiency of the constructed category ‘woman’ since the very nature of this category is strictly heteronormative. Wittig argues that a lesbian society “pragmatically reveals” two very important certainties of this constructed category: first, “that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one”, and second, that as women “we have been *ideologically* rebuilt into a ‘natural group’” (309, emphasis added). Additionally, it is important to recognise that while the category ‘woman’ is “a wholly ideological construction”, its power still remains – we see the same power with race as an ideological construction (Wall 798). Wittig goes on to explain that this particular ideological rebuilding has the power to manipulate not only our bodies but our minds too (Wittig 309). Finally, it is made evident that this natural grouping is flawed since it does not account for the differences among women; in fact, this particular kind of grouping considers lesbian women as “a product of society” and not of nature (Wittig 312). While it is arguable that this ideological rebuilding and subsequent manipulation may be evident

through the way in which the bodies of women as well as their behaviours are primed and regulated to maintain a category that was never designed to benefit or even represent *all women*, feminist theory has of course evolved since Wittig's time. For instance, the very existence of transgendered and non-binary or genderqueer persons who identify as such, have caused a shift from Wittig's conceptualisation of a 'woman', formulated many years ago. Contemporary feminist arguments and gender politics concerning what constitutes a 'woman' have considerably changed since more people than ever before are engaging with gender issues. Cross-dressing and/or 'drag' is arguably at an all-time high with "female impersonation as theatre" in popular television shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, bending and blurring the lines of the gender system and increasingly disrupting the male/female dichotomy (Sandoval 100).

According to Roger Baker:

Drag [...] subverts the dress codes that tell us what men and women should look like in our organized society. It creates tension and releases tension, confronts and appeases. It is about role playing and questions the meaning of both gender and sexual identity. It is about anarchy and defiance. (qtd. in Sandoval 100)

When referring to gender politics, Jorge Sandoval explains that "gestures of resistance" have been "culturally attached" to drag, such as in the instance of the 1969 Stonewall Riots; however, in more traditionally theatrical spaces, "drag queen performance or camp¹ expressions" have "served as a platform for the presentation of gender when other possibilities for expression were not socially acceptable" (100). Sandoval further illustrates that drag has been around for centuries in these theatrical spaces; from ancient Greek theatre to Chinese and Japanese theatre, female impersonators have for years attempted to recreate versions of 'ideal' femininity by *performing* gender (101). In a similar vein, Butler maintains that "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" ("Performative Acts" 403). Gender is therefore a socially constructed performance and is "instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*" that are by no means linked to one's biological sex (Butler, "Performative Acts" 402, emphasis in original). In view of this information, the following question is posited: why is it regarded defiant or socially unacceptable to alternate between these acts and thereby cross the lines of gendered performances and/or behaviours? In more contemporary times, when

¹ Susan Sontag defines "the essence of camp" as the "love of the unnatural, of artifice and exaggeration" (qtd. in Labruce 11).

considering the conservative assumption that he who dresses in women's clothing is a homosexual, and in conjunction with "the historically stigmatic position of homosexuality", drag may essentially be thought of as "a strategy for dissent" for men and women, cisgendered or transgendered (Sandoval 101). What this "strategy for dissent" does is it seeks to "normalise" what dominant discourses consider to be "deviant behaviour" and to dismantle the dichotomised constructions of sexuality (Sandoval 101). So, in effect, drag creates a safe space in which men and women may experiment freely with gender performativity. And finally, as Sandoval clarifies, "Whether we use [drag] as a strategy of resistance or as a performance of identity, even camp at its most outrageous level is a social performance" (101). Nevertheless, despite the contemporary deviations and alternatives mentioned regarding gender expression and sexuality, the manipulation identified by Wittig of some women's bodies and minds remains evident within dominant discourses that "have been historically shaped by fields such as religion, medicine, law, media and academic disciplines" (Allen 218). For instance, Butler explains that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" ("Performative Acts" 402). Therefore, shame and/or taboo remain utilised by dominant discourses to regulate and restrain the construction of girls and women in order to ensure that they meet their gendered expectations. Of course, the same may be said for boys and men, but for the purpose of this dissertation I will focus on the former.

Scientific metaphors about the female body play a significant role in further stabilising the culturally and discursively constructed category 'woman'. And in the same way, popular culture and the media such as magazine advertisements illustrate the "positions" as well as the "silences" made available to women which in turn causes them to "regulate their own desires and behaviours within those parameters" (Jones 162). Various scientific metaphors have been used over the years in dominant discourses to speak about bodies and their sexual reproductive systems; however, the metaphor that I am most interested in for the purpose of this discussion is the likening of the human body to that of a machine in production, a machine ultimately responsible for the manufacturing of human life. This metaphor is by no means an anomaly. Bodily cells are often spoken of as small factories in biology; for instance, as Emily Martin points out in her research on medical metaphors, the AIDS virus cells have often been regarded as "manufacturing armoured tanks" (23). And in the same way that machines are in constant production, so too are the bodies of biological males. With reference to male reproduction, there

is considerable power behind the way in which texts describe male productive physiology and their bodies' ability to *constantly* produce sperm. Positive terminologies are used to describe and celebrate this process, such as “remarkable” and “amazing”, specifically when referring to the “sheer magnitude” of spermatogenesis and the male body’s ability to “manufacture several hundred million sperm per day” (Vander qtd. in Martin 31). At the same time, the same cannot be said for female reproduction. Indeed, discourse produces the subject, but it also has the power to shape and discursively construct our realities; as Martin elucidates, “unacknowledged cultural attitudes can seep into scientific writing through evaluated words” (31). As previously mentioned, it is believed within many heteropatriarchal societies that motherhood is the “natural role” women ought to pursue, since it best suits the entirety of the constructed category ‘woman’ (M. Hirsch 14). However, if a female does not reproduce, her body is believed to have essentially failed to fulfil this “natural role,” therefore she is “not continuing the species, not preparing to stay home with the baby, not providing a safe, warm womb to nurture a [male’s] sperm” (Martin 30). This notion of failure is evident within Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2010), a contemporary novel that Fiona Tolan regards as a “critique of second wave feminism” (18). For instance, as Atwood’s protagonist notes: “Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own” (83).

Negative terminologies are thus used to describe the female body and its failure to reproduce or manufacture life; menstruation and menopause are but two examples of this failure, both of which are taboo in open discussions in most male dominated societies today. Descriptions concerning menstruation, for example, include imagery of disintegration with the usage of terminologies such as “degenerate,” “lack,” “ceasing” and “losing” (Mason qtd. in Martin 31). This means that dominant discourses offer a negative construct of menstruation by using terminology such as “a production system that has failed to produce”, or “the idea of production gone awry” (Martin 29). This is ironic since menstruation is also often considered to be a rite of passage, which is problematic for those who cannot menstruate, such as females who have higher levels of testosterone than others and, of course, transgender and genderqueer persons too. The female body is therefore considered to be “of no use” and/or wasteful if and when it has failed to (let alone chosen not to) produce a child. As Martin articulates further, “the negative power behind the image of failure to produce can be considerable when applied metaphorically to

women's bodies" (30). Consequently, and of course this is context specific, most girls are brought up in spaces where menstruation is shamed and restrained due to what Marni Sommer refers to as a "culture of silence" (qtd. in Chikulo 80). Feminist writers and the voices of feminist performance poets have for this very reason endeavoured to disturb this silence by destabilising and disrupting dominant heteropatriarchal discourses that seek to humiliate and shame menstruating bodies (Chrisler 208; Crook, "Blood Warriors" 3). In effect, feminist performance or slam poets have done so by not only naming but also by actively discussing menstruation in the public sphere, generating a new language that celebrates cisgendered women's (largely) innate capability to rid their bodies of that which it no longer requires (Crook, "Blood Warriors" 3). It is hence thought-provoking that dominant discourses choose to disparage the constantly degenerating ovarian follicles (eggs) as opposed to celebrating the fact that, unlike males and their sperm, females need not persistently produce these eggs since they are already born with more than required (Martin 32). Females are nevertheless constantly reminded that their 'biological clocks' are ticking in an attempt to encourage child-bearing, while simultaneously instilling dread regarding menopause, the ultimate trough. This particular discourse stigmatises menopause as the ovaries' "failure" or "ceasing" to produce oestrogen; the notion that menopause could be regarded as "a physiological phenomenon which is protective in nature" (since menopausal females have less oestrogen than required for reproductive function) is, in effect, consequently unacknowledged (Kaufert and Gilbert qtd. in Martin 35).

Nevertheless, as previously discussed, "the power of dominant discourses is not monolithic" (Allen 216). Put differently, and as Michel Foucault maintains, "[...] as soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold" (qtd. in Allen 216). Therefore, it is possible to offer an alternative and more positive construction of menopause by creating new narratives concerning this physiological phenomenon. Menopause, menstruation and miscarriage can be considered as being similar, in so far as all three are instances of the female body acting on behalf of the female herself. All three occurrences are undeniably protective in nature, and it is for this reason that patriarchies' excessive need to control the reproductive capacities of females is simply illogical, "for our bodies inherently *know* what to do" (Crook, "Blood Warriors" 15). Bearing in mind early third-

wave feminist critiques of cultural feminism², such as in the work of Linda Alcoff (1988), Taylor and Rupp (1993) and more recently, Chris Bobel (2006), I contend that female bodies have “intelligent capabilities” that one might never be able to scientifically comprehend (Crook, “Blood Warriors” 15). Nonetheless, despite our capabilities and the power of discursive constructions, “this is not to say that potentially reproducing bodies must do what they are designed to do” or that “it is innate and therefore our obligation”, for “our capabilities do not determine our hard fought-for right to choose within a patriarchy” (Crook, “Blood Warriors” 15). Medical metaphors are significant illustrations of the way in which dominant discourses produce as well as maintain the subject by not only assisting to stabilise the category ‘woman’ but also by essentially organising and regulating sexuality by means of shame. Finally, medical metaphors are effective examples of the ways in which dominant discourses construct female bodies in addition to its *representation* of ‘ideal’ femininity in male dominated societies (Martin 35).

Heteropatriarchal norms and consumerism

Let us further consider the construction and subsequent regulation of the category ‘woman’ under the influence of dominant discourses such as popular culture and the media. Dominant discourses have the power to shape our realities, as well as to socially construct categories based on gender. Thus, the category ‘woman’ is indeed a culturally and discursively formulated social construct since “gender is an assignment” and has no biological basis (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 231). In relation to this, since gender is performative, Butler contends that femininity is not a choice but rather the compulsory “citation of a norm” that requires constant performance in order to qualify women as “viable subjects” (*Bodies That Matter* 232). Similarly, Sandra Lee Bartky illustrates that “femininity as spectacle” is significantly evident in many heteropatriarchal societies; for instance, she explains that “the ‘art’ of make-up is the art of disguise” because within certain male dominated contexts, “the face of the ideally feminine woman must never display the marks of character, wisdom, and experience” (139–140). The ‘ideal’ feminine body allocated to ‘woman’ as a category (while time and culture specific) is likewise constructed in its representation, and for that reason, it is subject to regulation and restriction by dominant heteropatriarchal discourses concerning normalised bodies and behaviours (Bartky 132).

² Cultural feminism is fixated on, as articulated by Chris Bobel, “a particular tradition of body awareness – the cultural feminist celebration of the body, the goddess, and all things natural and earthy” (338).

Currently, the ‘ideal’ feminine body in mainstream Western society, particularly within the fashion industry, resembles the silhouette of “a newly pubescent girl”, and since the dimensions of adult women’s bodies differ, the ‘ideal’ demands rigorous maintenance by means of various methods (Bartky 132). Returning to the ‘spectacle’ of femininity, Bartky’s work identifies the very criteria to which dominant discourses require women to adhere in their pursuit of achieving this ‘ideal’ feminine body. She contends that a feminine body void of hair furthers “the theme of inexperience”; a face without wrinkles has never had a furrowed brow, because it belongs to a head that does not think”; and the more this body resembles that of an adolescent girl’s small and delicate frame, “a body lacking flesh or substance”, the weaker and easier a target she will be (Bartky 141). Of course, the continuous efforts to regulate our bodies in this manner elicit Pumla Dineo Gqola’s sentiments that as women, we are taught to use our “energy to make ourselves smaller so that we have nothing left to fight patriarchy” (39–40). Furthermore, since gender and femininity are understood largely in terms of heteropatriarchal norms, “the existence of women becomes clouded by [discursively] constructed and highly stereotypical gender roles and expectations” (Butler, “Gender as Performance” 32; Crook, “Butler and Gender” 1). For this reason, I am particularly interested in the influence that media representations have on feminine identity as it attempts to effectively construct a new existence for women, separate from their real and lived experiences. Everardo Rocha proposes that the media is “one of the most active voices occupying public spaces in contemporary culture” and that it is “a complex ideological universe formed by [repeated and constructed] representations” of society by means of advertisements, magazines, and so forth (2). Moreover, Rocha explains that as far as feminine identity is concerned, the image projected by the media “does not care for inner selves, subjective characters or multiple faces of the psychological universe” (3). Accordingly, Rocha contends that the feminine identity presented by the media does not take the differences among women into account, which in turn creates a totalising “group discourse” (3). While I do agree with Rocha’s acknowledgement of the media as a powerful and active voice in contemporary culture, responsible for much of the fictitious and constructed representations of women generated to uphold the category ‘woman’, I am hesitant about this generated *group discourse*. Rocha explains that advertisements are “generic” and that the media makes use of what we have in common: “collective representations and social classifications” (3). However, it appears to me that in some instances, advertisements in the media *are* in fact aware of the differences among

women because the regulation it promotes is considerably racialised. Even while the media presents itself as objective, it undeniably caters to a very specific market. Race and capital are irrefutably linked, and white women remain epitomised as the standard of beauty.

According to Sanger, feminist analysts have for decades documented the way in which whiteness functions as the ‘ideal’ of femininity, especially within dominant discourses such as the media (“New women, old messages?” 140). Women have been conditioned, by magazine articles and advertisements, to regulate their own bodies in order to meet this discursively constructed and thus normalised standard of ‘ideal’ femininity by means of various methods (e.g. diets, anti-ageing and makeup) so as to maintain the predictable yet unrealistic Western notions of beauty and allure (Bartky 139; Sanger, “New women, old messages?” 140; Adichie 12). However, this regulation is not homogenous and is, as Sanger suggests, racialised. Sanger has produced significant work on this topic in which she has analysed a selection of popular South African magazines read by black and white women respectively; her findings suggest that white women have been trained to preserve and maintain a state of eternal youthfulness by means of skincare, whereas black women have been trained to control and maintain their natural hair by means of hair relaxants and straightening (“New women, old messages?” 140–144). Whiteness as the norm on which the category ‘woman’ is based therefore excludes black women, since notions of beauty and ‘ideal’ femininity are predominantly “racist Western construct[s]” that do not account for *all women* (Sanger, “New women, old messages?” 143). Furthermore, regarding this embedded racism, the natural hair of black women “has been historically devalued as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin” (Mercer qtd. in Erasmus 381). Therefore, in order to conform to the heteropatriarchal norm of whiteness, and in an attempt to be considered desirable or attractive according to the constructed category ‘woman’, the natural and ‘unruly’ hair of black women requires regulation. As Sanger’s research on South African magazines between 2003 and 2006 illustrates, black women are told in multiple advertisements that their natural hair is “unsightly” and therefore requires “Western science” in order to be considered attractive (“New women, old messages?” 143). Moreover, the representation of black femininity is highlighted as yet another example of the racist discourse embedded within heteropatriarchal society since “black physical bodies have been sexualised and exoticized through colonial obsession with racial difference” (Sanger, ““There’s got to be a man in there”” 277). There is an irony that is then developed here, which Sanger notes: that while black women

are constantly conditioned to conform to whiteness as the discursively constructed norm, “they are simultaneously depicted as alluringly hyper(hetero)sexual” (“New women, old messages?” 144). In order to be considered desirable insofar as this heteropatriarchal male gaze is concerned, black women have been required to conform as best they can to “the norm of white heterofemininity” by way of controlling their “wild” and “excessive” hair (Sanger, “New women, old messages?” 144). According to Sanger, and as illustrated by her research in the South African context, “straightened hair as desirable in women is not limited to adult women” because magazines such as *True Love* encourage black mothers to ‘maintain’ the hair of their little girls too (“Scripts of Western Heteronormativity” 2). This not only indicates that “children cannot easily escape consuming the gendered scripts produced as normative”, but also that girls are primed “to perform ‘appropriate’ and desirable heterosexual femininity” (Sanger, “Scripts of Western Heteronormativity” 1–2).

Correspondingly, Lonnae O’Neal articulates that it is highly probable that by the tender age of four, girls have already internalised messages concerning how successful they are to become, how high they are to reach regarding their goals, “and how little space physically and psychically [they are] encouraged to take up in the world” (*Washington Post* 2016). Disney princess movies are but one manner by which girls are influenced to internalise stereotypical gender roles in Western contexts; for instance, there has been plenty of feminist research done recently on the wildly popular Disney animated film *Frozen*. Research conducted by Liz DePriest has illustrated that a comparison between the amount of dialogue by female animated characters and that of males displays a significant predominance of male dialogue, in spite of an increase in female voices since the late 1990s (O’Neal, *Washington Post* 2016). O’Neal also notes that DePriest found this particularly ironic in the case of *Frozen*; even though the two main characters are sisters, there is still a preponderance of male dialogue throughout the film (O’Neal, *Washington Post* 2016). Essentially, this example indicates to some extent that the common depiction of men as active subjects and women as passive objects or spectacle persists (Ritland 1283). Therefore, as O’Neal contends, mothers “are not the only ones or even the primary ones” informing children about appropriate gender roles to play, and desired ways of being (*Washington Post* 2016). The media is another socialising factor that not only encourages but also sanctions and implements so-called appropriate gender roles among children.

An additional racialised parameter visible within dominant discourses, similar to that of regulating natural hair, concerns skincare in advertising and likewise seeks to maintain the heteropatriarchal norm of whiteness regarding the category 'woman'. As aforementioned, white women are often encouraged to make use of anti-ageing skincare products in order to maintain a state of youthfulness; however, black women on the other hand are encouraged to care for and protect their 'problematic' skin: moisturising and 'even skin tone' creams are but one example, and skin-lightening creams another. The sheer racism embedded within these types of discourses blatantly discounts "the biological fact that dark skin pigmentation has been scientifically proven to be better protected by melanin from the sun and other skin ailments" (Sanger, "New women, old messages?" 144). According to Dr Fatou Fall, a dermatologist from Dakar, "skin complexion matters" since black women are constantly reminded by dominant discourses such as the media and advertisements that whiteness is the standard of beauty (qtd. in A. Hirsch 25). Apart from the shame and insecurity that skin-lightening cream could potentially instil within those who do not make use of it, Afua Hirsch reports that according to dermatologists, skin-lightening creams may have terrible side effects since these products "include steroids such as clobetasol propionate, a cream that should be used for the treatment of severe skin inflammation" in conjunction with other harmful chemicals (25). Consequently, advertisements for skin-lightening creams have received much public scrutiny in recent years, inspiring women to rise up and resist these harmful representations of blackness and the discursive construction of whiteness as the standard of beauty. Aisha Dème from Dakar, for instance, created a resistance campaign that has attracted a large number of supporters, including a group of a few celebrities on Facebook called *Nuul Kukkk*, which means "pitch black" in Wolof, a local language in Senegal, Dakar (A. Hirsch 25). Dème told newspapers that Senegalese women have started to internalise what society and the media tell them about whiteness as the standard of beauty, thus her campaign seeks to illustrate "that dark-skinned women are really beautiful, and that natural black skin should be celebrated" (A. Hirsch 25). Indeed, it is evident that there are racialised differences in the regulation of women's bodies. However, there are women such as Dème, and even South Africa's Zozibini Tunzi (Miss Universe 2019), who are working to construct new ways of speaking about black bodies and beauty, so as to promote a range of feminine subject positions and ways of being that black women might previously have thought unattainable (Jones 162). In addition, while there are certain regulations that are not homogenous (e.g. white youthfulness versus black hair), there

are regulations that do have similarities, predominantly in Western settings (e.g. diets, waxing, and skincare). Arguably, maintaining a hairless body is a regulation that applies to both black and white women, and more increasingly, for men too. However, despite the fact that body hair removal has become less of a gendered practice in recent years, women remain at the centre of “the highly socially policed nature of body hair removal and powerful social pressures” (Braun et al. 479–480). The ways in which women are encouraged to “achieve heteronormative expectations around attractiveness, desirability, and ideal femininity”, by maintaining a hairless body, are moreover enforced “in racialised, classed, and sexualised ways” (Braun et al. 479). According to Virginia Braun and her colleagues, research illustrates that the motives women have provided for hair removal associate hairlessness with “attractiveness, femininity, cleanliness, sensation, others’ preferences, and reasons of conformity to social norms” (479).

The pursuit of conventional social norms once again highlights that “socioculturally [discursively] produced meanings” concerning the ‘ideal’ feminine body “are profoundly influential in constructing individuals’ experiences” and in swaying their personal choices (Braun et al. 478). Of course, this is not meant to diminish the agency of women who are capable of making their own empowered decisions nor to disregard the empowering messages of contemporary feminism, but rather, this is to highlight the power of dominant discourses, “social sanction[s]” and the subsequent stigmatisation of bodies that fail to conform (Braun et al. 479, 488; Chrisler 210; Butler, “Performative Acts” 402). Bartky maintains that if and when a woman deviates from the maintenance that is expected of her, such as maintaining a hairless body, she is shamed and made to believe that “she ought to take better care of herself” (139; Chrisler 208). Research conducted by Braun and her colleagues found similar results regarding shame; women who fail to adhere to the heteropatriarchal norm of hairlessness “experience negative social consequences” such as public scrutiny (“celebrities who fall victim to media spite if spotted with body hair” are but one example), and they are also viewed negatively “as less (sexually) attractive” (Braun et al. 479). Additionally, a woman who refuses to wax or shave her body is shamed by being said to have *let herself go* when she fails to remain hairless – these expectations are, of course, based on Western constructs of femininity (Bartky 139). And of course there are women who deviate from this norm too, women who are ‘dangerous’ to the patriarchy, who actively challenge Western constructs of femininity in order to disrupt the silence that shrouds the bodily experiences of these women. In recent times, as previously touched on, performance

poetry has become “an increasingly powerful and productive tool of patriarchal resistance for feminist writers” so as to expose underlying heteropatriarchal structures that seek to subordinate and control the bodies of women (Crook, “Blood Warriors” 2, 31; Rocha 2). For instance, poetic performance as a feminist method of resistance provides women with “alternative truths and ways of being” by promoting what Janet Sayers and Deborah Jones refer to as an “empowering vision” of embodiment (Crook, “Blood Warriors” 31; 290). The policing of women’s behaviours and bodily experiences are undoubtedly tied to the category ‘woman’, and shame remains a powerful regulatory tool for most; however, this is not to say that contemporary feminists are failing to challenge and combat that shame.

Bartky contends that even in contemporary heteropatriarchal culture, “Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (140). As aforementioned, the male gaze essentially establishes the heterosexual and dominant male as the active subject/, and the female (or rather, the ‘woman’) as the passive object (Ritland 1283). Therefore, women perform femininity “before his gaze and under his judgement” as spectacle (Bartky 140). And while women’s efforts to achieve the ‘ideal’ feminine body will gain some attention and/or admiration, their efforts rarely gain respect, let alone social power (Bartky 141; Gqola 39–40). Nevertheless, women remain encouraged “in a consumerist culture that defines beauty work as part of women’s role” to uphold and maintain methods by which to make the so-called ‘ugly’ reality of their lived experiences appear *invisible* (Chrisler 205). Anti-ageing creams hide the wrinkles, laser treatments hide the hair, diets maintain the adolescent physique, and makeup hides the imperfections. Although the ‘ideal’ shape of the female figure varies across time and space, when it concerns maintaining a particular kind of *femininity*, Bartky makes an important point:

The larger disciplines that construct a ‘feminine’ body out of a female one are by no means race- or class-specific. There is little evidence that women of colour or working-class women are in general less committed to the incarnation of an ideal femininity than their more privileged sisters. This is not to deny the many ways in which factors of race, class, locality, ethnicity, or personal taste can be expressed within the kinds of practices [mentioned]. [...] Both [privileged and underprivileged women] are aiming at the same general result. (139–140)

Now although there are plenty of women who do not possess the means to maintain an ‘ideal’ femininity as constructed by heteropatriarchal norms and who are unable to provide themselves

with things such as a strictly organic diet, let alone laser treatment and frequent pedicures, it is vital to note the creativity of women (working-class and underprivileged) in re-making their own bodies. For example, concerning cosmetics, there are various stores that accommodate less expensive makeup and skincare brands. While a privileged South African woman working as the head of a major corporation may purchase her Lancôme foundation from *Woolworths*, a working-class woman may purchase a *Maybelline* foundation with just as pleasing coverage from *Dischem* at a far less expense. Hence, as Bartky explains, regardless of one's race or class, both women aim for the same result: to maintain the norm in pursuit for perfection. However, this is not to say that women are without options or that they are made to maintain this norm by means of brute force or any other sort of drastic measure. Despite the dominant discourses and disciplines that construct the 'ideal' feminine body, there is a duality to feminine bodily discipline (Bartky 143). One is neither forced to 'take up' the practice of beauty work, nor can one help but "appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of beauty" (Bartky 143). The denigration of women's bodies in male dominant societies and "the general depreciation of everything female" are nonetheless evident in this pursuit, because despite the pressure to maintain a particular standard and their efforts to do so, "women are ridiculed and dismissed for the triviality of their interest in such [frivolous] things as clothes and makeup" (Bartky 141; Chrisler 206). Gqola also comments on this ridicule by claiming that "patriarchy creates an inferiority complex in women that also depends on hatred for the feminine and therefore self-loathing" (39). Ultimately, it "produces a condition of women's unease in their bodies" for as women, we are "socialised to believe that there is something wrong with us" (Gqola 39–40).

As a final point, and as de Beauvoir claims, women are not born but rather they *become* since "woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (qtd. in Butler's *Gender Trouble* 43). For this reason, I contend that the category 'woman' is a social construction geared at achieving a purely heteropatriarchal standard of perfection. As maintained by Bartky, and I agree wholeheartedly, "[t]he disciplinary project of femininity is a 'set-up'" which has been designed for women to fail at miserably because the extent of bodily transformation required is completely unattainable and therefore unrealistic (139). Additionally, as Braun and her colleagues contend, most contemporary "normative meanings around bodies are ones that render the body problematic, particularly for women,

because women's bodies rarely fit these criteria" (479). The category 'woman' was never made to accommodate *all women*, since in the eyes of the patriarchy, bodies that deviate from whiteness and heteronormativity are considered 'undesirable' and therefore, *different* (see Chrisler 206).

Administering sexual subordination and nonconformity

The larger discipline responsible for the category 'woman' and its rigid frame is a system that ultimately seeks to transform women into what Foucault refers to as "docile bodies" (qtd. in Bartky 143). Fundamentally, women are conditioned to be "docile and compliant", subordinate and strictly heterosexual "companions of men" just as the military seeks "to turn its raw recruits into soldiers" (Bartky 143). The category 'woman' therefore leaves "little space to express a different kind of sexuality" in view of the illustrated "overwhelming projection of westernised notions of heterofemininity [...] as normative and ideal" (Sanger, "Scripts of Western Heteronormativity" 4). In fact, Louisa Allen shares similar sentiments: "The dominance of (hetero)sexual identity and discursive practices that support an *active* male and *passive* female sexuality", she explains, "are deeply embedded within social and political participation and perceived as normative" (217–218, emphasis added). In other words, "men act and women appear", therefore women are not regarded as active subjects but rather, they remain sights to be seen (Berger qtd. in Ritland 47, emphasis in original). The notion of women as the subordinate partner "who is 'acted upon', rather than 'acting'" has been "historically shaped" by dominant discourses, and is therefore "historically entrenched" in Western societies (Allen 218). Sexually passive women consequently become the norm, which means that sexually *active* women display behaviour that is deviant, and this deviance requires regulation: slut-shaming³ is a noteworthy example of this regulation (Allen 221). Not only is slut-shaming a social process utilised to ensure that girls and women remain sexually passive, but it is also a method by which to compete with other women for the male gaze "by calling into question whether men can trust a particular woman's capacity to be sexually monogamous" (Allen 221; Chesler 128). For this reason, it is vital to acknowledge the policing of bodies and the shame that is inflicted upon women *by other women*. According to Braun and her colleagues, "a social conformity rationale is more commonly applied to other women rather to one's self" since, as Joan Chrisler explains, the

³ Slut-shaming is a form of bullying and may be defined as "condemnation aimed at *presumably* sexually active females" (Pickel and Gentry 89).

stigmatisation of others “enhances the self-esteem and personal empowerment of the stigmatizers because it promotes favourable social comparisons with outgroups” (479; 208). As articulated by Phyllis Chesler, “Often, we are able to criticise ‘the other’ for what we cannot see in ourselves or in our own familiar culture” (175). Thus, women acknowledge and internalise the male gaze when they “‘survey’ themselves and other women according to male standards” (Berger qtd. in Ritland 1283). Indeed, a measure of shame is utilised by women against other women so as to regulate and to ensure that both parties continue to strive to attain the largely unattainable (Bartky 139). As articulated by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie:

We teach girls shame. *Close your legs. Cover yourself.* We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something. And so girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. Who silence themselves. Who cannot say what they truly think. Who have turned pretence into an art form. (14)

Girls are socialised to become women; conformity is praised and deviance is regulated, not only by men but also by the women who surround them (Chesler 98). But there remains a double standard which cannot be ignored.

Girls have equal sexual agency as boys, and I contend that both are sexually inquisitive at an early age, a reality that is often overlooked (or silenced). Masturbation by girls, for instance, is open to reproach, yet encouraged among boys. Of course, it is useful to bear in mind that within certain religious contexts both girls and boys are prohibited from masturbating. Religious dominant discourses such as in Judeo-Christian cultures, for example, heavily stigmatise masturbation as sinful and ‘impure’, “wicked and wasteful” behaviour, prompting shame and guilt within those who choose to do so (Carvalho and Leal 348; Clayton and Humphreys 244-245). Nevertheless a tendency remains for society to consider masturbation as *necessary* for boys and not for girls (Vause 58). In fact, this perception can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Steven Marcus’s review “of Victorian attitudes towards and writing on masturbation” found that “the intended subject of each discussion is almost overwhelmingly male” (see Clayton and Humphreys 245). What this suggests is that the topic of masturbation was open for discussion regarding men, but rarely when regarding women. And as we know, due to nineteenth century “patriarchal [anxiety] surrounding female sexual autonomy”, women who displayed sexual desire were incarcerated and deemed mad (Clayton and Humphreys 247). Similarly, during early modern Japan, wives were prohibited from becoming “too lusty” during copulation for this

“could lead to uncouth behaviour, bringing shame to the woman and causing the loss of her husband’s affection” (Walthall 14). Janelle Brown attributes the creation of this sexist double standard to a culture that regards girls (and by extension, women) as sexual beings “as threatening or just plain wrong” whereas boys as sexual beings “are treated as a completely natural phenomenon” (qtd. in Vause 58). Science as a dominant discourse also has a role to play in this particular perception. According to Mary Vause, scientific research has proven that regular masturbation has the potential to reduce the threat of prostate cancer in men (58). However, while research exists on the benefits of masturbation for women, these benefits are considerably less discussed. As a consequence, the sexual agency of girls and women is considered deviant behaviour, and slut-shaming as a social process of labelling becomes a form of regulation of those who exhibit sexual desire. For this reason, it is evident that some women are responsible for upholding and enforcing patriarchy; it is imperative that we do not lose sight of this. Women are often encouraged to compete with one another aggressively for the approval of others, and more specifically, for the approval of the male gaze and *his* resources (Chesler 167; Sanger, ““There’s got to be a man in there”” 281).

Cross-cultural representations of mothers and daughters

Let us reflect for a moment upon the ways in which girls are essentially prepared and primed by heteropatriarchal societies in order to regulate the inevitable demands. As previously discussed, ‘woman’ is a category that accounts only for fair-skinned, docile and heterosexual females who are sexually passive and wish to become mothers (Sanger, “New women, old messages?” 140; Rocha 1; Allen 217-218; Wall 798). Likewise, this category has proven to be disastrous for a multiplicity of reasons, primarily due to the fact that it completely fails to acknowledge and account for the differences among women. And yet it remains true that this classification forms part of present dominant discourses, which continue to shape the everyday experiences and existences of many women. Its power remains influential in a number of cases. As Sanger’s research has made clear, magazines are examples of said discourses since these “operate as influential agents of socialisation, privileging and normalising particular types of discourses about gender, sexuality and race” (“New women, old messages?” 138). In the same vein, Angela McRobbie notes that dominant discourses in the media seek to “naturalise and universalise meanings and values which *are* in fact socially constructed” (qtd. in Sanger “Scripts of Western Heteronormativity” 1, emphasis in original). For these specific reasons, I intend to demonstrate

that the conditioning of women to regulate their own bodies and gendered behaviours in womanhood according to the category ‘woman’ begins during girlhood.

Shirley Brice Heath notes that one’s identity-building process “often reflects personal beliefs, cultural practices, and *language*” (qtd. in Rudd 683, emphasis added). Erving Goffman’s study on “the ritualization of femininity” is significant here since his findings illustrate that advertising, as part of dominant discourses, “reveal representations of the woman as kind, docile, and playful, constructing her identity with numerous values and labels such as ‘submissive’ [...] classifying the feminine identity in a subordinate hierarchical place” (see Rocha 1). Identity formation during the ‘process of becoming’ could therefore be affected by dominant discourses such as the media – and earlier during girlhood, by gender-specific toys and identity texts too (see Wohlwend, 2009). From an early age, traditional Western ideology teaches girls that mothering is essentially a “respectable” woman’s duty and is her “natural role”, therefore in certain contexts to be nurturing and selfless as a mother marks “the epitome of femininity” and the pinnacle of womanhood (Read et al. 12; M. Hirsch 14; Salo 350; Herland and Helgeland 47–48). While it has been established that girl experience varies across cultures and contexts, I remain interested in the ways that some girls are socialised to become a certain kind of woman (mothers, more specifically) along with the ways in which they are *monitored* by those around them such as their parents, siblings and peers. Girls are often constructed as a group within a framework of dominant discourses that are largely dependent upon the heteropatriarchal norm within gendered and/or patriarchal spaces; however, as previously stated, this grouping inevitably has a totalising effect. Hence, I feel it necessary to examine and discuss the availability of particular subject positions and practices as race and class specific. According to Alison Jones, working-class and middle-class girls are confronted by “a different constellation of positions [...] as a result of the differing material and discursive conditions within which they exist” (160). For instance, Sarah Evans’s research on working-class girls and higher education argues that “for many working-class girls entry into [higher education] is structured by family ties and loyalties, together with highly instrumental attitudes to university education” (341). This is thought-provoking when considering the “gendered distinction between the working and the middle-class” regarding the positions most commonly available to the one and not the other:

For middle-class women [care work] has traditionally been associated with the employment of working-class women, both inside and outside the home. Thus [higher

education] for middle-class women constitutes a socially available form of the continued distance from this kind of work and a means of maintaining class distance. (Evans 351)

In comparison to the educational objectives of middle-class girls, Evans's research found that higher education was viewed by working-class girls "as a means of investing in the well-being of their present families in ways that would have mutually beneficial consequences" (352). However, while their "decisions about education and future employment are made with respect to present families and expectations of motherhood", these decisions have social consequences, such as limitations regarding "the accrual of particular forms of cultural capital" (Evans 352). The same cannot be confidently said for middle-class girls as their situation differs, a difference that is often overlooked by scholars when discussing 'girls' in totality. In the same way, Jones maintains that the positions made available to girls are likewise considerably race-specific, "reflecting the contradictory conditions within which ethnically different families have been shaped and understood" (160). For instance, Jones explains that Maori girls in rural New Zealand are brought up to be equally as tough as their brothers; this expectation stands firm because to be a girl "is not inflicted with the degree of difference (from men) as it is for Pakeha (white) girls" (160). Therefore, as mature Maori women in adulthood, they are considered powerful and significantly influential figures within their community as teachers and counsellors, which is interesting considering the wider social order that positions these women as "characterised by relative poverty, unemployment, limited education and poor health" (Jones 160).

The necessity to account for class differences in analyses of race and gender is no revelation; intersectional theory has here proven to be vital. For instance, Kimberlé Crenshaw's work has shed immense light on the marginalisation of black women as a result of the intersection between race and sex discrimination (151). In view of this, what I find significant regarding rural Maori women is the remarkable link to Elaine Salo's study of local women in Cape Town's Manenberg township on the Cape Flats. According to Salo, Manenberg was constructed during the apartheid era in accordance with the Group Areas Act (the racial segregation of residential areas) which designated this space as an exclusively 'coloured'⁴ residential area. Moreover, Salo claims that 'coloured' as a "racial category was gendered through the implementation of welfare and

⁴ During South Africa's apartheid era, the racial term 'coloured' did not refer to 'black' in the Biko sense but instead sought to racially classify people who were considered to be of "mixed race" (Adhikari 143). In essence, 'coloureds' have been regarded as a racial hybrid of sorts, as neither black nor white in South African history, but rather as a combination of the two (Adhikari 143).

housing policies that located adult coloured women in unique relation to the apartheid bureaucracy” (349). As she explains:

This gendering process occurred in two ways: first, through the bureaucratic assumptions about family formation that informed the welfare and housing programmes; and, second, through the specific feminization of the industrial workforce in the Western Cape urban economy. (Salo 349)

Significantly, in reference to said “bureaucratic assumptions”, the apartheid government “assumed that all households conformed to the westernized two-parent family norm” and therefore, “child welfare grants were only payable to women as mothers, and public housing was only provided to families with wives and children” (Salo 349–350). What this meant was that within the ‘coloured’ lower- and working-classes, “women held a relatively powerful economic status”, most noticeably “in their roles as mothers”, because “the welfare payments that women received to support their children were the only source of income” in most households (Salo 350). Thus, motherhood became “the epitome of femininity in this context”, and alongside “women’s domestic responsibilities”, the two became regarded as “feminine ideals” (Salo 350, 352). It is important to remember that the conditioning or priming to which many girls are subject during girlhood can also take place at the hands of their own mothers. I digress; mothers may, at times, likewise be held accountable for the traumas that their daughters experience in the male dominated societies where they reside. Nevertheless, as an example of female influence, Salo discusses the way in which the local women of Manenberg township came to act as influential “mothers of the community” during apartheid by policing the “moral standing” of others within the public sphere (351). However, despite their influence and power in this particular context, ‘coloured’ women (and even those who live on the Cape Flats today) were characterised similarly, if not the same, as Maori women in rural New Zealand by the larger social order. Therefore, as Jones contends, “the social order within which femininity is discursively constructed [...] is not seamlessly consistent” across histories and contexts, and so it is within “the gaps opened by this unevenness that the possibilities for resistance and change can be developed” (161). What Jones here suggests is ultimately the possibility of providing alternative constructions of girlhood through the way in which we speak about them; put differently, she suggests offering alternative “discourses on/for girls” that may broaden “the range of subject positions available to them in practice” (162). The primary texts that I have

chosen for the purpose of this dissertation offer considerable alternative constructions of girls that challenge the ways in which girlhood has been depicted by dominant discourses, as well as the role of mothers and their relationships with their daughters. In fact, limited feminist analyses have been conducted on the mother-daughter relationships present in my primary texts, and so my dissertation significantly contributes to a study of “becoming-woman” while entangled with one’s mother (M. Hirsch 11). While Alyson Miller’s article was useful to consider the mother-daughter duo of Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* as liminal beings, I was unsuccessful in locating articles with a similar approach for the other two novels. Moreover, that which I could find written on Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Virgin Suicides* offered scant feminist effort into regarding the mother of this novel and the relationship shared with her suicidal daughters. Finally, while Caryn Jeftha’s dissertation offered an interesting lens through which to consider ‘coloured’ mothers within Sandra Charles’s *Eve*, I could not find additional peer-reviewed literature written on this novel. Therefore, my dissertation contributes to a study of girlhood by offering something new, an emphasis on the importance of considering girlhood *in conjunction with* the mother-daughter relationship and its significant influence on a girl child’s becoming. A detailed analysis of mothering, its influence, and the mother-daughter relationship will follow in Chapter Two. As Marianne Hirsch maintains, one cannot effectively study ‘woman’ in patriarchal culture without considering “female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women” (qtd. in M. Hirsch 19).

Returning to the encouraged competition among girls and women, it appears that the innocence of girls has likewise been socially constructed in an attempt to organise and regulate girl experience. Specifically, the representation of girls as harmless heterosexual beings in the process of “becoming-woman” is to a large extent produced so as to prepare them for the category ‘woman’, a strictly heteropatriarchal and gender normative expectation (M. Hirsch 11). According to Butler, “representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (*Gender Trouble* 3–4). Following this position, the common representation of girlhood as a period marked by ‘purity’ and innocence considerably distorts the reality of the sexual development and curiosity of girls, as well as their capacity for violence. This is made evident by Chesler’s book *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* (2009) in which she discusses the indirect aggression that girls are taught to master in girlhood and adolescence; the reality of women’s capacity for violence and/or

aggression, both direct and indirect, is not 'ideal' and therefore needs to be made invisible. I remain unconvinced by the socially constructed 'purity' and assumed innocence of girlhood because I do not believe that girls (let alone women) are inherently docile. According to anthropologist Victoria Burbank, cross-cultural research has found "acts of physical aggression [among girls and women] [...] in sixty-one percent" of societies and "verbal aggression in eighty-two percent of the societies" studied (qtd. in Chesler 68–69). Chesler goes on to explain that "experimental and cross-cultural studies confirm [...] female infants and toddlers are as physically aggressive as their same-age male counterparts", which means that dominant discourses of larger disciplines such as religion, medicine and the media indeed fashion docile bodies out of feminine ones (90). The idealisation of girls' innocence thereby becomes an expectation of the norm and not a reality, and this gendered expectation in turn becomes regulated through the 'process of becoming' during girlhood. I contend that girls are encouraged to remain passive and less physically active than boys in play situations by means of gender-specific toys, for instance, and this encouragement ultimately leads to the cultural conditioning and/or training of girls and women "to employ indirect methods of aggression" (Cocuy, *University Wire* 2014; Chesler 91). Chesler describes this as "a low-risk approach":

Girls learn that a safe way to attack someone else is behind her back, so that she will not know who started the attack. On the one hand, this policy dooms girls and women to behaviour such as gossip and shunning, which cannot be ritualistically resolved. On the other hand, it also allows girls and women to fight without physically hurting each other.

(91)

Children are socialised by means of gender-specific toys which influence them to mirror certain roles in terms of values and behaviours; for instance, as mentioned earlier, boys are taught to mirror the physical aggression of action figures and pirates, whereas girls are taught in some instances by dolls "to value conventional beauty" in order to be successful (Cocuy, *University Wire* 2014). Thus, instead of learning to fight by means of actions such as pushing or punching, "social manipulation" becomes a primary weapon, a method of indirect aggression which girls ultimately learn "from their female role models: adult women" (Chesler 93-94). Similarly, Anne Campbell maintains that girls learn from an early age that their own aggression is more likely to go unnoticed by caregivers than the aggression of boys; thus, little girls learn that direct aggression is not only "emotionally dangerous" but that it also fails to fulfil their goal (qtd. in

Chesler 94). In other words, as articulated by Chesler, their aggression subsequently becomes “suppressed by being systematically ignored” (94). Girls therefore become substantially less *physically* aggressive than boys and more *indirectly* aggressive as a result, since in most heteropatriarchal contexts, physical aggression is regarded as unacceptable among girls but less so in boys (Chesler 94). Adichie contends that too much time is spent teaching girls to be likable or easily approachable; the same cannot be said for their male counterparts (12). The sexist double standards of socialisation are evident when Adichie argues that boys are not taught to worry themselves with how girls might perceive them and yet girls are to be concerned about how boys view them, as evident in light of previous discussions concerning the male gaze (12). Moreover, too much time is spent teaching girls to restrain their anger or aggression when those very characteristics are praised in boys, or sometimes, even worse, used as justification (Adichie 12). In most heteropatriarchal spaces, girls are to remain innocent, passive, and harmless beings for this is the ‘ideal’ representation and behaviour expected of them. However, in reality, just as women are capable of great damage and hostility towards other women, so too are girls who watch and learn (Chesler 98). As previously mentioned, girl experience varies across cultures and contexts, and while it is important to acknowledge culture specific contexts it is also important to recognise that “culture is constantly changing” (Adichie 18). Adichie makes this point by noting that had her twin nieces been born a century before now in Nigeria, the two girls would have been killed since “a hundred years ago, Igbo culture considered the birth of twins to be an evil omen” (18). This belief has of course changed over time. Nevertheless, while it is possible for culture to transform and for women to resist the norms present in their respective contexts, women unfortunately remain subordinate to men in most settings, a way of being that in many cases becomes *learned behaviour*.

As articulated by M. Hirsch, a “focus on mothers and daughters redefines the notion of difference” since the construction of the category ‘woman’ as “singular, unified” and “transparent” becomes challenged when distinguishing between mother and daughter as two separate “female positions” that may be occupied simultaneously; as a result, the “multiplicity of ‘women’” becomes undeniable (12). Furthermore, Ann Dally argues that while mothers have always been, “motherhood was invented” (qtd. in M. Hirsch 14). This is an interesting perspective in light of the fact that, as M. Hirsch goes on to explain, “motherhood as the ideal of femininity coincides with the institutionalisation of childhood during the eighteenth and

nineteenth century” (14). During this time, within European and American contexts specifically, M. Hirsch notes that:

As the private sphere was isolated from the public under industrial capitalism, and as women became identified with and enclosed within the private sphere, motherhood elevated middle-class and upper-class women into a position of increased personal status, if decreased social power. (14)

Motherhood essentially came to signify “a repository of society’s idealism” within these contexts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because it “became the force of conservation of traditional values” (Badinter qtd. in M. Hirsch 14). In other words, M. Hirsch suggests that motherhood was created in this manner as a means to maintain and preserve the category ‘woman’ and all that it entails, emanating from this perspective a total distortion of what girls have traditionally been taught about what their bodies *are made to do*. For this reason, I remain intrigued by a quote from Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* that “some women aren’t made to be mothers. And some women aren’t made to be daughters” (179). If motherhood or *mothering* can effectively be challenged as “invented”, then so too can the “‘natural’ connection” between mother and child (M. Hirsch 14, 19). In addition, this perspective could in effect have major implications for the age-old debate surrounding nature versus nurture since this viewpoint suggests that women are not genetically predisposed to flourish as *mothers*. The assumed ‘innate’ nurturing capacity of ‘woman’ thereby comes into question since not all women may occupy this nurturing disposition.

The notion that women are made to be mothers and that a ‘natural’ connection between the two issues is worth challenging; this is the intention of the chapter to follow. Specifically, I am concerned that some mothers may have a considerably detrimental influence on their daughters during their formative years and amidst their ‘process of becoming’ (i.e. mothers who do not hold a necessarily *nurturing* disposition, since not all women are ‘made’ as such). More so, I am interested in mothers who are capable of immense violence towards themselves and to others, including their own children. In Chapter Two, I critically analyse the mothering of daughters in traditional and/or potentially damaging ways, alongside ‘mother’ as a learned behaviour passed down from previous to subsequent generations of women. This particular focus allows me to not only investigate the kind of influence that various mothering behaviours have on the mother-daughter relationship, but also to determine what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad’ mothering.

Chapter two: melancholic [s]mothering

There can be no systematic study of woman in patriarchal culture, no theory of woman's oppression, that does not take into account woman's role as a daughter of mothers and as a mother of daughters, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women.

— Marianne Hirsch

'Motherless children'

According to Phyllis Chesler, women are “motherless children in patriarchal society”, and as Adrienne Rich further asserts, women have “neither power nor wealth to hand on to their daughters” (qtd. in M. Hirsch 44). In essence, Rich explains that women are indeed *motherless children* because “the most they can do is teach their daughters the tricks of surviving in the patriarchy by pleasing, and attaching themselves to, powerful and economically viable men” (qtd. in M. Hirsch 44). Although Rich had this to say in her analysis of Charlotte Brontë's nineteenth century novel *Jane Eyre*, and while I do believe that in today's society women no longer need to partner with men to be abundantly successful, I remain interested in the teaching or *mothering* that Rich mentions here. This notion of passing down “tricks” to survive in a heteropatriarchal world from previous to subsequent generations of women is interesting because it means that the traditional ways of mothering daughters upholds not only heteropatriarchy and its accompanying category ‘woman’, but it also deprives the daughter of her own developmental course (Rich qtd. in M. Hirsch 44). The idea here posited is that girls are not taught by their mothers to resist the inequality present within heteropatriarchal spaces, but rather to *survive* it.

And so, a daughter's “process of apprenticeship” to her mother during girlhood is arguably a way of ensuring that girls submit to the demands of the category ‘woman’ and continue to reach for motherhood in adulthood as the epitome of fulfilment, creating a vicious cycle that remains loyal to the support and justification of female subordination (M. Hirsch 19). Put differently, the socialisation as well as mothering of girls are two aspects that work (together at times) to stabilise the category ‘woman’. And as a result, women often remain to a certain extent ‘motherless children’ in a patriarchy. The traditional mothering of daughters aimed at creating a very particular kind of ‘woman’ in adulthood, can thus have exceptionally damaging

consequences not only for the mother-daughter relationship but likewise, and above all, for the daughter herself. For this reason, this chapter is focused on mothering as a learned behaviour.

In most contemporary heteropatriarchal spaces, mothering is a behaviour that is *learned* from one generation and is subsequently *passed down* to another. Indeed, this learned behaviour has been proven by research done on gender-specific toys (see Nicole Cocuy, 2014) but it is also visible in the way that daughters observe and duplicate their mothers' behaviour. Significantly, a consideration of mothering in this particular way – as a learned performance of sorts – offers a unique lens through which to examine the outcome that the “intergenerational emotional archives” of women and also of melancholia can have on respective mother-daughter relationships (Kenway and Fahey 639). According to Jane Kenway and Johannah Fahey, Sigmund Freud defines melancholia as “the enduring attachment of the ego to the lost object” (642–643). Essentially, melancholic subjects undergo a devastating loss that remains unresolved and therefore, they have “a sustained devotion to the lost object” (Kenway and Fahey 643). *Melancholic mothering*, more specifically, is rooted in what Kenway and Fahey refer to as a woman's “archive of emotion” that can manifest itself in several ways “as it relates to violence and loss” (640). Mothers as melancholic subjects therefore require deliberation because it is potentially a mother's “emotional archive” that may be passed down to her daughter, with significant consequences (Kenway and Fahey 640). Furthermore, manifestations of this ‘emotional archive’ may vary across contexts, thus it is central to the acknowledgement of these variations alongside their respective circumstances, several of which are discussed in Chapter Three.

The mother-daughter relationship is a complicated one and has been written about for centuries. For instance, see Luce Irigaray's work on psychoanalytic theory and reconsidering the mother-daughter relationship in Carolyn Sharp (2002), as well as Audre Lorde's biomythography on the Erotic Mother in Bethany Jacobs (2015). There is an intimacy, or rather, a closeness in this relationship that is often unavoidable. As articulated by Barbra Shapiro, “mothers and daughters, no matter how dissimilar and differentiated, recognise that they are also physically like one another” and that at times, “boundaries become so porous that they may feel they are one another” (92–93). Hence, I wish to focus on the closeness or *porous nature* of this relationship by considering the significant influence that various mothering behaviours have on the way in which mothers interact with their daughters. Mothers who are silent, mothers who are

absent, a mother whose word is law, and a mother whose touch is craved – these are several mothering behaviours that have piqued my interest and are evident in all three of my primary texts. For instance, the Lisbon girls of Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Virgin Suicides* have a fiercely protective mother who dictates their ‘process of becoming’ by grooming them to remain ‘pure’ and chaste young Catholic women. Conversely, Camille and Amma, half-sisters in Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects*, experience polar opposite mothering behaviours at the hands of their own mother, Adora – one that deprives Camille of warmth, and another that smothers Amma with care. And finally, Sandra Charles’s *Eve* grows up with little or no personal relationship with her mother, Magdalena, as she comes to abandon the hope of receiving affection and affirmation amidst her multitude of siblings.

Who or what then ultimately determines the way one *ought to* be mothered? What creates a ‘terrible’ mother and what constitutes ‘bad’ mothering? Are daughters better off motherless, or only in certain instances? These are questions positioned at the crux of this chapter, and my aim is to create palpable links between mothers in reality and mothers in fiction as means to highlight the relevance of diverse experiences of motherhood. I have thus chosen to focus this chapter on the lives of two women who have particularly dissimilar experiences of motherhood *before* bringing into discussion the fictional mothers within my primary texts.

‘Mother’ is a behaviour

I recently came across an American podcast called *Motherhood Sessions*, a production of Gimlet Media that is produced by Lauren Silverman, Peter Bresnan, and Molly Donahue. One episode in particular stood out, namely a discussion between reproductive psychiatrist Dr Alexandra Sacks and an anonymous woman (pseudonym Anne) that details the experience of a woman who never aspired to be a mother, yet felt obliged to become one. I was intrigued by this woman’s disinterest in and subsequent dissatisfaction with motherhood because resistance to gendered expectations and motherhood as the epitome of womanhood is what encouraged me to pursue this research topic. Thus, I was grateful to come across a woman who felt confident enough to voice her largely unpopular opinion – namely that to some extent, she was not made to be a mother. However, there was something about this woman’s story that simultaneously troubled me deeply.

Thirty-four-year-old Anne openly expresses her discontent with the archetype of ‘woman’ by confessing that she feels “trapped” and “regretful” as a mother, disappointed for having given in to the pressure to conform, and frustrated by outsiders’ claims that she would change her mind about children once she became a mother herself (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 01:20–03:20). Ultimately, Anne was convinced by those around her that the way she thought about children was *wrong* (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 08:33–09:02). Anne never held motherhood in high regard, and her disinterest in having children did not diminish at the birth of her daughter; on the contrary, she remained steadfast that she would have been “perfectly fine” without a child (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 09:20–09:26). According to Donna Read and her colleagues, research has demonstrated “that misleading women about motherhood is problematic because it perpetuates the myth that having children comes naturally to women and only brings happiness” (18). Consequently, the problem with this *mythology* is that most women are “given an overly optimistic view of motherhood that detracts from their ability to make well informed fertility decisions, thereby contributing to their disempowerment” (Read et al. 18). This is plainly visible in Anne’s case as she goes on to explain that she longs for the life she had before her daughter was born, and most importantly, that she feels disappointed in herself for not standing her ground and “staying true” to herself on the subject of motherhood (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 09:02–09:45).

At this point in the interview, Anne cries; she admits that it is difficult to come to terms with the notion that she has given up what she considered to be her individuality. Her choice to abstain from having children was to her “the ultimate choice”, the very thing that exemplified who she truly is as an individual, as a woman (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 09:49–10:00). Significantly, however, the loss that Anne feels here is not an anomaly. For instance, the maternal figure in Lionel Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), a woman named Eva who gives birth to a son who murders¹ nine people at his school, shares similar sentiments about motherhood and her loss of individuality. As articulated by Alyson Miller:

Eva’s compliance in fulfilling a maternal obligation is [to her] a sacrifice of selfhood, a loss of individuality which she resists through a constant dialogue of discomfort, anger, and grief: “You know in your third trimester they won’t even let you on a plane? And I

¹ “The evil child” as well as the “gendered implication” of this trope in literary fiction will be analysed in Chapter Three. This trope will be discussed in conjunction with mothering behaviours and “parental responsibility” when considering the child’s individuality (Miller 490–491).

hate this whole rectitudinous *thing*, the keeping to a *good* diet and setting a *good* example and finding a *good* school.” (Shriver qtd. in Miller 494, emphasis in original)

Literary fiction has in fact previously presented Anne’s position as a reality, a representation of motherhood that seeks “to unravel a cultural emphasis on the ‘natural’ affiliation between women and maternity” (Miller 492). According to Miller, Sue Thornham makes the observation that “contemporary feminism urges women as ‘individualised subjects [...] to mobility and self-definition [...] as *mothers*’” (495, emphasis in original). She further presents the contrasting view that as mothers, women “are re-embodied and returned to place”, specifically, a place “of submission within the domestic sphere” (Thornham qtd. in Miller 495, emphasis in original; Miller 498). And so, in the instance of Eva, her “attempt to transgress the social order by insisting on a subjectivity independent to motherhood is thus positioned as an aberrance in need of rectifying” (Miller 495). The same may be said for Anne, to some extent, since her “lack of desire for motherhood” is attributed to a process of transition referred to as “matrescence”, to which I will return in the sub-heading to follow (Miller 494).

Furthermore, Anne is repeatedly filled with “an immense amount of sadness” when acknowledging that as a mother – which she feels is an entirely separate being from who she is as a woman – her daughter is her priority now, whom she feels *obligated* to mother and to care for (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 11:05–11:23). This demand to prioritise the needs of one’s child is, of course, not uncommon. As Read and her colleagues have established, this pressure has been proven to contribute towards a variety of struggles that women experience during motherhood, such as failing to connect with maternity as a ‘natural instinct’ because it is largely “a social category” (16; Jacobs 110). Likewise, this acknowledgment of obligation to her daughter successively fuels a deep sense of guilt and shame within Anne when she admits to enjoying time spent away from her child (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 03:45–03:55). According to Bethany Jacobs, Rich argues in her book *Of Woman Born* (1976) “that patriarchal culture extends *maternal obligation* to any person it deems a woman (regardless of gender identification or maternal status), requiring self-sacrifice, nurturance, and, ironically, asexuality” (110, emphasis added). Significantly, in view of self-sacrifice as a maternal requirement, Dr Sacks roots Anne’s guilt in her childhood where she grew up in a single-parent, low-income household with a loving and *selfless* immigrant mother whom Anne idolises as the essence of ‘good’ mothering (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 04:20–05:36). Therefore, in the moments she

relishes alone with her husband, she simultaneously feels “terrible” and blames herself for not emulating the vision of what she believes a ‘good’ mother should be, a vision that she has fashioned for herself, based on her own mother’s self-sacrificial behaviour (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 10:19–12:22).

Anne is overwhelmed by guilt in moments where she acknowledges that her own mother sacrificed all that she had for her children and loved them “unconditionally” – because there are times when Anne does not wish to do the same (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 13:06–13:25). In other words, Anne frequently struggles to emulate her mother’s selfless nature and consequently blames herself for being unable to “[eschew] simplistic binaries of good or bad mothering”, similar to Audre Lorde, who “refuses to treat mothers primarily as resources for others, as women who constantly give of themselves” (Jacobs 110). Anne is therefore the perfect example of the way in which women are taught to emulate their mothers by duplicating their behaviour, even if and when their desires and experiences of womanhood are poles apart. However, this is not to say that duplication is always successful; instead, the attempt to duplicate another’s behaviour can sometimes cause a great deal of stress, such as in Anne’s case. It is at this point in the interview that Dr Sacks reminds Anne that “there is more than one way to have a family”, that there are “alternatives” to the way she was mothered as a child, and that while the conventional way a daughter is mothered is all that she knows and has to learn from, there are additional ways to mother a child (“Not Cut Out For Motherhood” 14:10–14:58).

Anne considers motherhood as comprised of only two categories: the ‘sacrificial’ mother (good) and the ‘negligent’ mother (bad). Of course, this categorisation is not uncommon, since, as Virginia Goldner and colleagues stipulate, ‘good’ mothering essentially upholds “femininity’s ideal of sacrificial caring” and is, therefore, primarily demarcated by the quality of selflessness (qtd. in Bell 133; Herland and Helgeland 47). According to Mari Herland and Ingeborg Helgeland, to mother one’s child “intensively and selflessly” is a practice that is encouraged by contemporary Western ideology as well as the “current normative understanding of good motherhood” to which Sharon Hays refers as “intensive mothering”² (47). Moreover, Herland and Helgeland explain that this particular conceptualisation of ‘good’ mothering “has been *created* through a white, middle-class, heterosexual lens, limiting society’s ability to see the

² Hays’s concept of ‘intensive mothering’ is defined by Mari Herland and Ingeborg Helgeland as “an expert-guided and child-centered approach to motherhood” (47).

diversity of women's lives" (47, emphasis added). Jacobs similarly highlights Rich's argument that the "characteristics and behaviours" required of a self-sacrificial and nurturing mother "prove both womanhood and social value, and their absence condemns the woman in question" (110). In other words, since 'good' mothering is expected to be self-sacrificial and "child-centred", mothers who cannot dedicate themselves to this kind of altruism are unfairly considered to fail at not only upholding femininity's ideal, but are also designated as 'bad' mothers (Herland and Helgeland 47).

This black and white, right or wrong way of thinking is undoubtedly flawed, and yet it is the way we are taught to view our world, because gender is a disciplinary method comprised of a series of performative acts, inflexible categories, and rigid guidelines (Butler 402; "Not Cut Out For Motherhood" 15:02–15:38). As articulated by Herland and Helgeland, and in correlation with this point made, motherhood needs to be problematised "from diverse perspectives, from different groups and from different disciplines because motherhood fits into the shifting landscape of gender, culture and politics" (55). "Gender reality", as Judith Butler contends, "is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (411). Therefore, selflessness is purely an expectation of female caregivers and is not an inherent quality; it is a performative act that mothers are required to uphold in order to be classified as 'good' mothers, and in doing so, the expectation becomes normative – and finally, a falsely depicted gender reality (Herland and Helgeland 47). This normative high expectation for *all mothers* to be perfectly selfless, tender and nurturing female caregivers is completely unrealistic; women are human beings who have and always will be capable of falling short of curated expectations based on sex and gender (Bell 133; Herland and Helgeland 47). Finally, in light of what Dr Sacks has to say about alternative ways of mothering and/or having a family, I would like to bring Gauri Sawant to the forefront for this part of the discussion.

Gauri Sawant, born as Ganesh Sawant in Pune, is a transgender activist from Mumbai whose story of motherhood captivated the world in a *Vick's* 'Generations of Care' advertisement in India that went viral during 2017 with more than thirteen million views³. Binjal Shah writes that this advertisement was momentous not only because it recognises Sawant as an "icon" but also because it proves "that care, love, and a sense of family must go beyond class and gender" (YourStory.com). Sawant, whose mother died when she was around five-years-old, grew up as

³ I have listed the advertisement in my works cited for reference.

the son of a hyper-masculine police officer and while she “did not feel different”, she began to understand that she was unlike her peers when “people tried to put her into a rigid box that her feminine disposition made her too flamboyant” to fit into (Shah, YourStory.com). For Sawant, the rigidity of gender categorisation and her inability to conform to its conventions and expectations caused problems at home with her father. Her “strikingly feminine traits” as a boy caused people to ridicule and alienate her, and consequently her own father came to cast her off, “cowering under the shame” (Shah, YourStory.com). Thus, Shah writes that at the age of seventeen Sawant chose to leave her home and her family behind in order to fully embrace her identity and to escape indignity and scorn from the ones she loved (YourStory.com).

According to Shah, Sawant went on to legally reject “her biological sex” by choosing instead “to transform into a *hijra*” – which, as a landmark ruling by the Indian Supreme Court, has now been recognised as the official third gender, popularly referred to as eunuchs. Biologically, they are neither male nor female” (YourStory.com). Thus, it is yet again palpable, with the cross-cultural existence of alternative genders, that there is more than one way to exist as a human being and that hegemonic categories which seek to organise our experiences are discriminatory and outdated. The category ‘woman’ is severely problematic because it does not account for persons (such as Sawant) who believe that they were born “in the wrong body” and therefore do not identify with their biological sex (“Mein Maa Hoon” 04:00–04:20). In light of these categorical issues, it is interesting that Sawant chose to refrain from formally identifying as a ‘woman’ and instead chose to identify as a *hijra*, for she acknowledges the fact that even in today’s society, “people would not accept [her] and [her] body as that of a woman even if [she] got the painful procedure done” (Shah, YourStory.com). Sawant explains that she has come to an understanding that regardless of her determination, the socially constructed category ‘woman’ will never accommodate or create space for her existence. Hence, she has chosen to formally identify as genderqueer (*hijra*) instead because this particular category is significantly more accommodating than the category ‘woman’.

One of the most meaningful childhood memories for Sawant is a conversation that she had around the age of ten-years with her aunt; when asked what she aspired to be as an adult, Sawant responded, “I want to be a mother” (Shah, YourStory.com). Motherhood, as discussed, has been categorised as the epitome of womanhood. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Sawant was ridiculed for her aspiration and told that she could never become a mother, but that instead, she

could become a *father* (Shah, YourStory.com). This is interesting because it begs the question of what the difference is between mothering and fathering. Essentially, they are both parenting; why then do they become gendered? Nevertheless, despite this categorisation, Sawant went on to become exactly what she had always aspired to be: a mother. During her time working at Humsafar Trust, “one of the oldest LGBTQ organisations in India”, Sawant heard of a motherless child who was soon to be sold into prostitution (Shah, YourStory.com). Gayatri, the five-year-old whose mother had recently passed away, possibly due to AIDS, was taken in by Sawant who believed that this little girl needed “protection and care” (Shah, YourStory.com). And although Sawant lacks the experience of a close relationship with her own mother, having lost hers at a very young age, she trusts and upholds the position that “mother is a behaviour” that goes “beyond a gender” (“Mein Maa Hoon” 00:35–00:43). Likewise, she delineates that to mother is to love unconditionally; that is to say, anybody who has the ability to love has the ability to mother (“Mein Maa Hoon” 00:36–00:39). Of course, this is unfortunately not a widely held popular opinion, including by the Indian Supreme Court; notwithstanding Sawant’s efforts to legally adopt her daughter Gayatri, “the government does not give custody of a child to a member of the LGBT[Q] community” (Shah, YourStory.com). It is indeed astounding that the government would rather the child be sold into prostitution than legally adopted by a *hijra*, but as Shah writes, this has done little to discourage Sawant in her experience as a mother as she continues audaciously to raise Gayatri as her own (YourStory.com).

Reflecting upon the two mothers here discussed, comprehending ‘mother’ as behaviour and not as inherent capability becomes completely inescapable. First, we have Anne, a woman who never aspired to become a mother and who feels that her child has taken something away from who she is as a woman. Then, we have Gauri Sawant, a transgender woman who has always aspired to become a mother and who believes that her child has completed who she is as a woman (Shah, YourStory.com; “Mein Maa Hoon” 02:07–02:20). Anne is preoccupied with achieving perfection in her transition to motherhood, and succumbs to feelings of guilt whenever she fails to meet the impossible standard that she has set for herself. This standard is based on what she has been taught to believe a ‘good’ mother should encompass, as produced by heteropatriarchal gendered expectations, and as Dr Sacks points out, Anne is still learning to recognise that there are different ways effectively to *mother* a child. Sawant, on the other hand, verifies that there are different ways to be a mother and to have a family, ways that the category

‘woman’ does not account for because it does not accommodate women, let alone mothers, who are not cisgendered or even heterosexual.

Despite what society teaches women about gendered behaviour during motherhood, and the common misconception that *all women* have the capacity to nurture and care for others, it is unrealistic to polarise mothers as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Herland and Helgeland 47). This black and white process of categorising mothering behaviours is dangerous; we know this because the category ‘woman’ is inexcusably flawed, and essentially breeds the concept of ‘mother’. Undeniably, the perfect mother does not exist. As emphasised by Herland and Helgeland, “the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ mothering practices are demanding, conflicting and, furthermore, unattainable” (48). Of course, this is not to say that there are no ‘good’ mothers, but rather that mothering should be thought of as positioned on a continuum. Herland and Helgeland explain that “motherhood identity is not inborn but arises during a mother’s experiences with her child” and it is for this reason that sometimes mothers might “evaluate themselves as ‘good’ mothers, while at other times, they may internalise an identity as ‘not very good’ or, at the other end of the continuum, ‘bad’ mothers” (48).

It is useful to pause for a moment to consider the manner in which researchers define the “positive and nurturing” or ‘good’ parenting on which “healthy child development” is crucially dependent (Ateah et al. 3109). According to Christine Ateah and her colleagues:

Such parenting involves sensitive child-rearing practices in which children are carefully monitored in a warm, caring, and responsive environment. Effective parenting also involves discipline and guidance within a nurturing environment to effectively encourage appropriate behaviour. (3109)

In view of what Sawant has to say about mother as “beyond a gender” and the ability that everybody has to mother a child, including “a father”, I would like to bring the discussion back to the question of the difference between mothering and fathering (“Mein Maa Hoon” 00:42–00:50). If they are indeed the same, what then is the purpose of gendering parental behaviours? And in the same vein, why is fatherhood not fashioned as the epitome of manhood in the same way that motherhood is?

I chose the description provided by Ateah and colleagues on effective parenting because it utilises the very word that has, in my understanding, come to encapsulate the chief expectation of a mother: to be *nurturing*. While I have confidence in mothering and fathering as essentially the

same thing – parenting – one cannot disregard that the word ‘nurture’ forces an irrefutable divide between the two parenting behaviours in the consideration of gendered expectations. This is not to say that men cannot be nurturing; it appears that, through gender parameters, men are discouraged from exhibiting this particular kind of behaviour and instead, emphasis is placed on a demonstration of their capacity to protect and provide for their families. As I have noted repeatedly, nurturing is something that girls are encouraged to embrace by means of gender-specific toys and other methods of grooming, whereas boys are generally not encouraged to do the same (see Baker et al., 2016; Nascimento Moreira, 2017; Rosen and Nofziger, 2019). As Alison Jones maintains, following the research of Lise Bird, that while girls have multiple subject positions to choose from, “they are still inevitably inflected with wider gendered power relations as girls take on the ‘available’ subject position of mother/ teacher/nurturer” (161). Mothering and fathering as methods of teaching have different objectives: mothers nurture and fathers provide, two expected and different behaviours that are later passed down to subsequent generations. Moreover, as articulated by Herland and Helgeland, “How women view themselves as mothers is not necessarily how men view themselves as fathers” since women “might more often see themselves failing” as mothers due to the fact that “the expectations towards them are higher” (52). For this reason, parenting has undeniably become a performance produced by gendered expectations.

According to Patricia Bell’s article on gendered parenting roles and the incestuous abuse of children, ‘mother’ is “a defining role for women” and is one which women have for generations “invested a lot in maintaining” as an “area of expertise” (130). She asserts that in the context of her research, “focusing as it did on child abuse within the family”, the very difference between mothering and fathering was evident in the notion that parenting was regarded “as the prerogative of women” and not of men (130). Furthermore, her research illustrates that ‘motherliness’, or rather the development of so-called “‘motherly’ qualities and skills”, functions as a condition for fathers also to attain in order for them to “become more competent in child care” (130). In Carol Hagemann-White’s discussion of gender as socially constructed, it is likewise clarified that “a belief in the ‘motherliness’ of women has had a normative function in constituting the basic difference between men and women” (qtd. in Bell 133). It appears to me that ‘motherliness’ is characterised by two qualities unfairly assumed to be possessed by women only: selflessness, and nurturance. Patriarchal structures are therefore at play once again in the

gendering of parenting, perhaps to ensure that heteropatriarchy remains intact and to ensure that women remain subordinate. And while perhaps it is possible that some mothers might meet all requirements in the abovementioned definition, it is crucial to consider mothering behaviours as dependent on a variety of elements that can greatly influence one's ability to achieve said requirements (Ateah et al. 3110).

'Matrescence' and the divinity of women

Anne's inclination to reduce the categorisation of mothering behaviours to 'simplistic binaries' is damaging for both herself and for her daughter because there is no room for variation; when either she or her daughter deviates from the expectation, feelings of guilt and failure ensue due to the "rigid" guiding principles she has set for herself ("Not Cut Out For Motherhood" 16:19–16:51). Meanwhile, there are nuances in mothering behaviours that need to be acknowledged as well as boosted in order to qualify variations of mothering as not only normal, but also as fundamentally *realistic* insofar as expectations of motherhood are concerned.

Dr Sacks attributes mothering behaviours such as Anne's to be the result of what she calls "matrescence", a term borrowed from late anthropologist Dana Raphael, that refers to the changeover from woman to mother ("A new way to think" 02:45–02:54). During matrescence, a woman is believed to transition from womanhood to motherhood, essentially leaving womanhood behind and moving into a new stage of life. For this reason, according to Dr Sacks, matrescence is comparable to adolescence since "both are times when body morphing and hormone shifting lead to an upheaval in how a person feels emotionally" about themselves as well as their position in the world ("A new way to think" 02:59 – 03:09). Dr Sacks further explains that because matrescence is not an illness, it is consequently omitted from dominant discourses such as medical vocabulary, which means that people are not educated about its existence; therefore, due to this lack of education, matrescence is frequently confused with "a more serious condition called postpartum depression" ("A new way to think" 03:12–03:24). It is plausible that Anne could be experiencing a period of matrescence following the birth of her daughter; however, I am intrigued by these *efforts* to find biomedical and psychological *reason* for her lack of satisfaction in being a mother. Anne's disappointment and dissatisfaction in motherhood is to some extent pathologised by Dr Sacks, and I disagree with this rationale.

I understand that as a therapist Dr Sacks is attempting to offer women such as Anne a way forward; however, my issue with matrescence is its suggestion that who one is as a woman and

who one is as a mother are the same thing. Dr Sack's definition of matrescence emphasises the changeover from woman to mother, thereby encouraging the idea that women lose a sense of self upon becoming mothers. In other words, Dr Sacks to a large extent conflates the two beings, woman and mother, by likening this transition to adolescent development. By the same token, Patrice DiQuinzio argues that women "can be subjects of agency and entitlement only to the extent that they are not mothers, and [...] mothers cannot be subjects of individualist agency and entitlement" (qtd. in Miller 495). In my view, however, conflating the two subject positions (woman and mother) is highly problematic. I believe that it is essential for women to not only be able to, but more importantly, *allowed to*, separate the two beings so as to recognise that being a mother is not one's entire identity or sense of self. That way, women may be encouraged to move more freely between the two subject positions or ways of being without ensuing guilt. Finally, it is reasonable to consider that, as Herland and Helgeland contend, "being a mother is only one part of a woman's life" and that it is the "high expectations" that women are expected to achieve which act as "more or less all-consuming" (54). Being a woman and being a mother are two separate subject positions that bleed into each other, and although the "transition to motherhood typically marks a profound change to one's sense of self and ways of engaging with the world", in my understanding they nevertheless remain two different ways of being that women may always have to manage (Boyer and Spinney 1114). It appears that this is precisely what Anne struggles with – she struggles to manage the two subject positions because she has come to believe that woman loses herself when she becomes mother. And unfortunately, matrescence encourages this potentially harmful pattern of thought to a certain degree.

Anne never aspired to be a mother, and it is for this reason I do not believe that she is experiencing a period of matrescence. I have made it clear that there are different ways to mother a child, and of course, a woman's capacity to 'enjoy' motherhood cannot be the only determining factor when it comes to deciphering whether she is or is not *made* for motherhood. That being said, it appears to me that a strong indication of the latter can be seen in instances whereby women feel that they never wanted to be mothers, and in some cases, that their children have not changed their lives for the better. I am aware that one loses a certain degree of independence when becoming a parent but a particular focus on what has been lost instead of what has been gained is telling (Boyer and Spinney 1127). Anne is an interesting illustration of this because she was never ambiguous about wanting children; she was pressured into becoming something she

was clear about not wanting. And instead of focusing on the relationship of love and care that she has gained with her baby girl, she remains fixated on all that she has lost in becoming a mother. Essentially, it appears that what she has gained does not outweigh that which she has lost. Finally, since the decision to become a mother cannot be revoked in this instance, Dr Sacks as a therapist subsequently manages to find a reason for her lack of satisfaction in order to offer her a way forward. I remain convinced that Anne feels the way that she does about motherhood not because she is experiencing a period of matrescence, but simply because she was not made to fit the role. There should be no shame in the reality of Anne's circumstance. As previously mentioned, she can still learn to mother in different ways. My argument is ultimately that Anne was not made to be a mother, but bearing in mind that there are many variations of mothering behaviours, I do not believe that this automatically makes her a 'bad' mother.

There has to be a way forward for women like Anne who find themselves in this particular predicament. However, this is not to say that in time, all of these women will come to manage the transition to motherhood in the same way; on the contrary, some will manage better than others and for different reasons. It is important to bear in mind Herland and Helgeland's contention that "All mothers, regardless of their class and social background, are sometimes 'good', sometimes 'not so good' and sometimes 'bad'" (55). As it happens, it is considerably more difficult for a woman to fulfil the role of a 'good' mother than of a 'bad' one, an observation that leads me back to the category 'woman' and to thinking through the constant pressures to which women are exposed (i.e. the gendered expectations that pressure us to achieve the unachievable). Furthermore, despite the fact that there are different ways to mother a child, it would be a mistake to assume that all variations are positioned closer to the positive pole ('good' mothering) of the continuum in question. According to Ateah and colleagues, "inappropriate disciplinary responses (such as physical punishment and belittling behaviours) and low nurturance" are considered "parenting behaviours" that are "associated with aspects of child maltreatment" (3109). This means that child maltreatment at the hands of mothers is *a reality*, one that requires extensive research, and attention to more than individual capacity alone. For instance, class differences and access to resources are but two examples of multiple factors that necessitate reflection before blame and accusation may be placed primarily upon mothers. Clinical psychologist Lou-Marié Kruger speaks about child maltreatment at the hands of mothers as a reality in her book *Of Motherhood and Melancholia: Notebook of a Psycho-ethnographer*

(2020) which I will discuss in following paragraphs. Finally, as Belsky's theory highlights, consideration of these multiple factors is vital insofar as making informed conclusions regarding the quality of various mothering behaviours (see Chapter Three).

As a final point on Anne's story, the anxiety that she experiences in trying to duplicate her own mother's practice of motherhood in ways that she deems 'appropriate' and 'correct' is highly significant ("Not Cut Out For Motherhood" 12:40–12:45). It is precisely this anxiety that confirms the necessity to consider "female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women", as well as to analyse the mother-daughter "relationship in the wider *context* in which it takes place: the emotional, economic and symbolic structures of family and society" (M. Hirsch 19, emphasis added). It is important to consider women's genealogy when discussing the category 'woman' alongside "the daughter's process of apprenticeship to the mother" (M. Hirsch 19). And as aforementioned, plenty of instruction is passed down to daughters from one generation to another, including issues like advice offered for survival within heteropatriarchal spaces, guidelines in maintaining the category 'woman', and various mothering behaviours (M. Hirsch 44). Sharp shares similar thoughts on the importance of women's genealogy:

Locating women in relation to those who precede them, to those who surround them and to those who will come after, a genealogy provides the basis of what Winnie Tomm has called 'a centred space within the individual [which] exists in relation to the social milieu and other relational existence'. In denying women such a genealogy, patriarchal culture and religion denies them their relation with the divine, a relation which, according to Irigaray, is the absolute condition for the constitution of women's own identity. (71)

Sharp here argues that women's "relation with the divine" is of great importance because the divine exists within the genealogy of women, particularly within the mother-daughter relationship, and is central to the self-definition of girls (71). However, while this divinity exists in the mother-daughter relationship, it has been undermined and ignored by patriarchy and dominant discourses such as religion. This denial essentially moderates the significance of the mother-daughter relationship, causing injury to the self-development of girls.

In accordance with Luce Irigaray's argument, Sharp illustrates this point further by analysing the religious iconography at the Basilica, highlighting the relationship between Jesus's mother,

Mary⁴, and Mary's own mother, Anne, as illustration (72–73). Within this iconography, very little attention is given to the daughter and/or the relationship that she shares with her mother but instead, emphasis is placed upon the son and the mother-son relationship (73–74). As articulated by Sharp:

The absence of free-standing images of the mother-daughter couple points to the women's own undesired status. At Ste-Anne it is the daughter who is obliterated. While she is present, she is not desired for herself, but for the son who usurps her relation to desire and to the divine. [...] Women's relation to their origins is disrupted by their undesired status and their reduction to an instrumentality which denies worth in and for themselves. (74)

As an aside, while I agree with the notion of the divine brought forward by Irigaray and Sharp as central for girls as well as its denial by patriarchy and dominant discourses, this divinity could nevertheless be a simultaneous source of anxiety for girls since the genealogy of women creates pressure to conform. We see this in the *Motherhood Sessions* podcast and the instance of Anne who experiences a great deal of anxiety in trying to emulate her own selfless mother. Therefore, in order to reflect upon female identity and the self-definition of women as mothers or even as daughters, it is essential to consider the anxiety produced by women's genealogy in tandem with what Kenway and Fahey refer to as the "intergenerational emotional archives" of women (639). For precisely this reason, a *contextual* analysis of mothers and the relationship that they share with their daughters is required. As maintained by Herland and Helgeland:

Mothers from different social backgrounds experience motherhood differently and have dissimilar understandings of what motherhood means, but at the same time, certain commonalities exist in the diverse experiences of mothering because women live in the same society in the same time, and motherhood is socially constructed through common discourses. (47)

The lived experience and setting or circumstances of mothers necessitate special consideration. I contend that subjective experience and individual circumstance are located at the very core of fluctuating mothering behaviours, as well as at the centre of influence that these behaviours may have on mother-daughter interaction and the personal development of daughters.

⁴ Of course, Mary is arguably the epitome of patriarchy's 'perfect mother', specifically when considering the fact that she is a virgin ('pure' and innocent) who gives birth (motherhood as the feminine supreme).

As expressed by Kruger in her book, the “complexity” of mothers as human *individuals* is first and foremost something that deserves far more focused attention within dominant discourses that shape the “societal expectations of mothers”, particularly when considering those who live within “low-resource settings” (Kruger 186, 191). Class differences are predominant in determining setting and circumstance; therefore, when considering the lived experience of mothers from low-income households and within low-resource contexts, “it is important to understand how inequality and domination are ingrained onto the psyche and body and life” of those who exist within them (Kruger 193). Significantly enough, according to Kruger, “A psychiatric diagnosis of depression [i.e. melancholia] does not tell us anything about the *context* or *life circumstances* within which the emotional distress is experienced” (193, emphasis added). This means that context is rarely taken into account when analysing the psychology and various mothering behaviours of women, including their ability to mother effectively or not.

Melancholia and the ‘emotional archive’

In order to properly grasp what Kenway and Fahey refer to as *melancholic mothering*⁵, it is crucial to first comprehend Freud’s concepts of mourning and melancholia. In order to do so, I have chosen to utilise Kenway and Fahey’s interpretation of Freud’s theory, in place of his original paper, to shed light on feminist readings as well as feminist critiques of Freud instead. As articulated by Kenway and Fahey, Freud’s early paper ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ makes a “fundamental distinction” between the two concepts; in essence, mourning “involves the eventual detachment of the mourner from the lost object” whereas melancholia “is the enduring attachment of the ego to the lost object” (642–643). Essentially, “mourning is viewed as a ‘successful’ resolution to loss” whereas, on the contrary, melancholia is viewed as “a failure to resolve loss” (Kenway and Fahey 643). Melancholic subjects therefore have “a sustained devotion to the lost object” (Kenway and Fahey 643).

Melancholic mothering, according to Kenway and Fahey, is rooted in women’s’ “archive of emotion” and can manifest itself in various ways “as it relates to violence and loss” (640). In effect, a mother’s melancholia is activated by her past experience with violence and/or loss –

⁵ I first came across the term *melancholic mothering* when I read Kenway and Fahey’s article “Melancholic Mothering: Mothers, Daughters and Family Violence” (2008), and it was only after this that I attended the book launch for Kruger’s book *Of Motherhood and Melancholia: Notebook of a Psycho-ethnographer* (2020). Upon meeting Kruger, who happens to be the head of Stellenbosch University’s Psychology Department, I asked her in an informal conversation whether she had read Kenway and Fahey’s article, and while she had only heard of it recently, she had not read it herself.

these are experiences that she cannot come to terms with and/or resolve, and therefore, they become part of her “archive of emotion” (Kenway and Fahey 640). This archive is comprised of “an unruly collection of strong feelings and susceptibilities stored over time in the body” as a result of violence and/or loss, which may in turn be directed at loved ones in various ways and perhaps even passed down to subsequent generations (Kenway and Fahey 640). It is for this reason, as Kenway and Fahey ascertain, “theories about different manifestations of melancholia have the potential to enrich understandings of the complex reproduction and disruption of gender, violence and family turmoil across generations of women” (640). Setting and/or circumstance are therefore important to contemplate when analysing melancholic mothers because the two provide insight into the “archive of emotion” that manifests due to this particular state of being and for particular contextual reasons (Kenway and Fahey 640).

Despite the magnitude of Freud’s earlier work on psychoanalytic theory, his claims have attracted plenty of feminist criticism over the years. Kenway and Fahey draw specific attention to Irigaray’s argument as a point of contention that since “women signify ‘lack’ they cannot have an agential relationship to loss” and therefore “are denied the means to represent *themselves* even as melancholics” (643, emphasis in original). In other words, Irigaray argues that “women cannot be melancholics as they are, in effect, excluded from the economy that would give them the means to represent this malady and indeed their full selves” (Kenway and Fahey 644). As a final point, Irigaray heavily critiques Freud’s “psychoanalytic accounts of the constitution of female subjectivity” throughout her work (Kenway and Fahey 644). And while her argument is substantial, I am nonetheless more inclined to align myself with an alternative argument. Kenway and Fahey state that, in contrast to Irigaray’s critique, Kaja Silverman identifies Freud’s Oedipal complex as fundamental to the composition of female subjectivity (644). Silverman theorises that despite the girl’s displacement of desire onto her father, and the subsequent devaluation of her mother, she still experiences “enormous cultural pressure to continue to identify with the mother and it is here that melancholia enters the picture” (qtd. in Kenway and Fahey 644). Thus, this separation is “not always easy” due to “the thick and often conflicted constellations of attachments, likenesses, and identifications spanning the generations of women” (Shapiro 93). The anxiety to both detach from and identify with the mother therefore creates melancholy for daughters, especially for those who cannot manage to become the mother that

they had envisioned themselves becoming – a ‘good’ mother, based on the desire to emulate their own – because of their own developed subjectivity.

Furthermore, according to Silverman:

[...] because melancholia is viewed as an essential part of women’s subjectivity, her representation of it is not neutralised, but rather normalised as a fundamental part of her nature. Thus, if she does experience what could be seen as melancholic symptoms in Freud’s terms, these are instead seen as her own personal failure and as a consequence are viewed as lacking in consequence. (Kenway and Fahey 644)

Returning to Sharp’s emphasis on the significance of women’s “relation with the divine”, as well as the way in which the divinity that exists within the mother-daughter relationship has been undermined and denied by patriarchy and dominant discourses, the devaluation of one’s mother, according to Freud’s exposition of the Oedipal complex, is to a large extent fundamental to the composition of female subjectivity (71). In my view, an Oedipal inclination is created by patriarchy’s denial of women’s “relation with the divine” and this denial subsequently causes the daughter’s anxiety to both devalue as well as identify with her mother; it is here that melancholia essentially “enters the picture” (Sharp 71; Silverman qtd. in Kenway and Fahey 644). Therefore, I contend that the Oedipal complex is indeed fundamental to the composition of female subjectivity, but so too is women’s divinity.

How a woman “subjectively experiences” her world and/or her motherhood is essential in understanding what Kruger refers to as “their affective world” (187-188). In her extensive work with melancholic mothers in the South African context, Kruger notes that her “patient[s]’ shame about feeling angry” is more often than not “worse than the feeling of anger” itself, just as “the anxiety about anxiety is more debilitating for an anxious person” (188). Moreover, Kruger goes on to stipulate that a woman’s subjective experience is highly significant for the reason that “in any person’s experience of herself some salient aspects will be missing, whether the person is aware of it or not” – and it is within these “unacknowledged feelings” that “psychological distress” or anxiety is produced (192). In light of this, it is possible then that mothers such as *Motherhood Sessions*’ Anne, who develop a strong sense of urgency to emulate their own mothers’ experience of motherhood, could suffer debilitating anxiety in their failure to conform to the ideal of ‘selfless motherhood’. This anxiety would then cause one’s anger at being a mother to manifest as shame instead, for ‘selfless mothers’ do not show anger. In fact, this

manifestation of anger caused by shame is evident in the case of Anne, who feels shame and guilt for her dissatisfaction with motherhood, as opposed to pure rage directed at those who coerced her into mothering a child. As articulated by Kruger in her commentary on societal expectations of mothers, “‘Good’ women, ‘good’ mothers, should not experience, much less express, anger. And, certainly, we don’t expect them to act on it” (191).

At this point, it is vital to remind ourselves of two very important facts for the purpose of further discussing societal expectations of mothers. First, women are human beings and are therefore capable of not only expressing anger but also violence. This behaviour is often ignored in the case of fathering; however, as Chesler contends in her book *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* (2009), “we are terrified and outraged when a mother is not only imperfect, but abusive” (239). Secondly, melancholic mothering may present itself differently according to the individual as well as the context within which she finds herself as a mother; therefore, women as mothers who actively express their anger require investigation. Traces of melancholic mothering are evident in all three of my primary texts, and while their circumstances are entirely different, Mrs Lisbon, Adora and Magdalena are three mothers who cannot detach themselves from whom and/or what they have lost. As a result, these melancholic mothers have ‘emotional archives’ that manifest in completely different ways and are subsequently directed at and passed down to their daughters.

It is for this very reason that M. Hirsch specifies the significance of “the wider context” and circumstance within which the mother-daughter relationship exists (19). For instance, both Eugenides’s Mrs Lisbon and Flynn’s Adora experience the brutal loss of a daughter, but under very different circumstances. In the instance of Mrs Lisbon, she loses more than one daughter; she loses five. However, the loss of her youngest daughter arguably activates her melancholia which in turn affects the mothering behaviours that she directs towards her remaining four daughters, causing her to exert more control over their beings than ever before. Adora, on the other hand, exhibits what Kenway and Fahey refer to as an “intergenerational emotional archive” that is rooted in her past relationship with her own mother, Joya (639). This relationship is possibly what activates Adora’s melancholia when she becomes a mother herself; however, her anger does not manifest or disguise itself as shame. Instead, her anger is harshly focused upon her eldest daughter, Camille, and also more subtly upon her two youngest daughters, Marian and

Amma. Once more, context is crucial in the consideration of various mothering behaviours, particularly in the instance of Flynn's Adora.

Flynn's *Sharp Objects* is set in the small Southern town of Wind Gap, Missouri. Described as "a town that demands utmost femininity in its fairer sex", motherhood and social class differences are prominent themes that trace the significance of women's genealogy (23). Adora Crellin (née Preaker) is the only daughter of the Preaker's, Wind Gap's wealthiest family, due to their ownership of the largest hog farm and the town's main source of income (Flynn 317). For this reason, the Preaker's are described as "bootlicked" by the people of Wind Gap, and the family is said to have for many years "called the shots" (Flynn 317). The status that here stems from "old money" is interesting in light of the 'bad' mother stereotypes highlighted by Herland and Helgeland's research; this is because Adora falls pregnant with her first child, Camille, as a teenager. Herland and Helgeland state that 'bad' mother stereotypes, such as "the welfare mother, the teen mother and the career mother", are a mere "few in a long list of mother-blaming categories" (47–48). Nevertheless, Adora remains blameless in the eyes of her community. She is described to have "played [her] pregnancy beautifully" instead, "proud but a little broken, and very secretive" (Flynn 319). Thus, it is unmistakable that in the town of Wind Gap, privilege equates to power.

Let us consider Wind Gap's demand for quintessential femininity and the relationship that Adora shared with her own mother, Joya, as it pertains to melancholic mothering and the importance of context. Significantly, the women of Wind Gap are taught to uphold heteropatriarchal beliefs and gendered expectations through "the social rules of Southern etiquette" alongside Christianity as a dominant discourse (Miller 495). For instance, they are taught to believe that women are made to be mothers, that one is not truly a woman until she has experienced the gift of motherhood, and that any deviation from this norm necessitates a degree of shame (Flynn 214). Camille is, for this reason, effectively cast out from the group of women with whom she grew up and is shamed for not wishing to become a mother and for not valorising motherhood as the epitome of 'woman'. Camille holds a different outlook on motherhood; she believes that "some women aren't made to be mothers. And some women aren't made to be daughters" (Flynn 179). Arguably, 'women' and 'daughters' are likewise socially constructed categories that cannot effectively accommodate all, because some women are *incorrigible* – not all women regulate, and not all women can be regulated. Camille's mother, Adora, and her

mother, Joya, effectively challenge the notion that *all women were made to be mothers* for one particular reason: as mothers, both exhibit extremely abusive mothering behaviours that have lasting effects on their own daughters. In other words, both mothers display a passing down of incredibly harmful ‘emotional archives’ from one generation to the next.

According to Chesler, “mothers who are excessively or routinely cold, cutting (cut off from their own feelings), have the power to wound their daughters deeply” (246). And within the relationship that Adora shares with Joya, as well as within the relationship that she shares with her own daughters, the truth of this suggestion is evident. As a mother, Joya is said to have been “cold” and “distant” towards Adora as well as “smug” (Flynn 236). Jackie, Adora’s childhood friend, confirms this by explaining that although Adora was “overly mothered” by Joya, she never witnessed her “smile at [her daughter] or touch her in a loving way” (Flynn 317). Instead, Joya’s mothering behaviours consisted mostly of excessive grooming as well as absolute control over Adora’s body. Following psychoanalyst Rozsika Parker, Chesler explains that “some mothers experience any daughterly deviation from what her mother desires as ‘an almost physical wound’” because they experience a particular kind of ownership over the bodies of their daughters, almost as though the daughter’s body were her own (241–242; Shapiro 93). This mothering behaviour could in some cases be seen as the manifestation of a mother’s lack of control over her own body for whatever reason (see Rozsika Parker, 1995). Nevertheless, grooming at the hand of a mother such as this (e.g. Joya) therefore becomes a ritualistic practice of control over the daughter (e.g. Adora).

While Adora was exposed to considerably *milder* grooming methods as a child such as the “fixing” of her hair or “tugging” at her clothes, Jackie similarly recalls particular times where Adora was exposed to more extreme and/or physical methods of grooming. For instance, Adora was forced to strip naked in front of her friend so that her mother could “peel the skin off” her sunburn “in long strips” (Flynn 317–318). This degree of physical grooming and the subsequent humiliation is jarring, especially in light of what Chesler has to say about “maternal criticism” and how it “maims the spirit” (245). According to Chesler, maternal criticism “teaches women to deny what is being done to them – and what they, in turn, do to other women” (245). In other words, shame at the hand of one’s mother “becomes confused with being loved” (Chesler 245). Flynn’s character Camille shares similar sentiments while reminiscing over the damaging and

complicated relationships that she and her youngest sister, Amma, respectively share with Adora when she says, “I blame my mother. A child weaned on poison considers harm a comfort” (393).

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSbP)

According to Rebecca Babcock Fenerci and Brian Allen, children whose parents “have survived maltreatment during their own childhood are at an increased risk for not only developing mood and behavioural disorders, but also experiencing maltreatment themselves” (1). Child maltreatment due to sometimes learned, harmful mothering behaviours is therefore not uncommon. In view of this material, since mothering behaviours are learned, and since the significance of women’s genealogy highlights the extent to which ‘emotional archives’ may be passed down from one generation to the next, I feel that it is important to consider melancholic mothers who are responsible for the maltreatment of their daughters – mothers who are capable of violence, both direct and indirect. For the purpose of the next section, I am specifically interested in women who overly [s]mother their children with care to gain attention for themselves.

According to Fiona Raitt and Suzanne Zeedyk, in their study of discourses concerning mothers on trial for cot death, Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSbP) is a psychiatric and paediatric diagnostic term for mothers who are “suspected of deliberately causing harm, including death, to her infant in order to gain attention from the medical profession” (258). The term, as articulated by Raitt and Zeedyk, was “built on the pre-existing term of Munchausen’s Syndrome, in which a patient presents false symptoms to medical personnel in order to gain attention” (259). Hence, attaching “by Proxy” to the original diagnostic term “signified that the illness was induced in a third party (usually a child) [...] in order to gain attention” (Raitt and Zeedyk 259). As a paediatric diagnosis, Raitt and Zeedyk further explain:

MSbP refers to a form of child abuse. It is a medicalised form of abuse, in that the caretaker fabricates or induces illness in a child, and then presents the child for medical attention, denying any knowledge of the symptoms. This can lead to [...] physical or psychological damage to the child, while doctors try to determine the source of a confusing set of medical symptoms. (260)

Chesler writes about mothers who prefer sick children over healthy ones in her book, as well as mothers who pathologise their own healthy daughters for their own gain (i.e. MSbP mothers). Following the acknowledgment of her own mother as a woman who “was at her best when a

child was ill or required care”, Chesler references Christine Ann Lawson who labels these women as “witch mothers” (250–251).

According to Lawson, “witch mothers” are mothers who “denigrate the mental health profession because they fear its power”, although their “greatest fear is of having no control” (qtd. in Chesler 251). Indeed, MSbP mothers are women who are mentally ill and who have the power to “make their children psychologically ill” (Chesler 251). However, I am uncomfortable using the phrase “witch mothers” as my intention here is not to villainise or shame MSbP mothers – I do not find this productive. My intention is to bring MSbP mothers to the forefront instead so that the reality of child maltreatment at the hands of mothers may become part of a larger conversation. More so, I consider it fundamental to take into account the context of the mother-and-child relationship as well as the mothering behaviours to which the mother may have previously been exposed herself before exacting shame. It is useful to consider context when examining the possibility of previously and presently experienced trauma that may impact the ‘emotional archive’ of the mother in question; this is not to excuse her behaviour but rather to better understand the cause of her behaviour.

MSbP first came to my attention in 2015 with the murder of Claudine Blanchard in Springfield, Missouri. Claudine, otherwise known as Dee Dee, was publicly seen as a ‘selfless’ single mother devoted to caring for her sickly daughter, Gypsy Rose. According to Jacqui Goddard for *The Times* British newspaper, Gypsy Rose battled an array of health issues including “leukaemia, muscular dystrophy, asthma, epilepsy, a potentially fatal sugar allergy and vision and hearing defects” (36). Thus, she received aid from numerous sympathisers over the years, including non-profit organisations such as Habitat for Humanity, who provided the mother-daughter duo with a house fully equipped for a differently-abled child following the destruction of their home during Hurricane Katrina (“Gypsy’s Revenge” 01:54–04:55). In light of societal expectations of mothers, it should come as no surprise that Dee Dee was widely praised by the media for being a self-sacrificial mother who devoted her undivided attention to her sickly daughter. It is likewise, for this very reason, that her murder and the information that emerged thereafter came as such a shock to the public. Dee Dee had blatantly lied about her daughter’s condition.

Gypsy Rose was not a sickly 12-year-old; in fact, she was a healthy 17-year-old who had for years suffered at the hand of her mother, manipulated into compliance by means of

psychological and physical abuse to ensure that she would adhere to the elaborate story that her mother had fashioned for the two of them (Goddard 36). Gypsy Rose had orchestrated the murder of her mother by convincing her short-term boyfriend, Nicholas Godejohn, to stab Dee Dee to death in her sleep (Goddard 36). In effect, Gypsy Rose adeptly manipulated her boyfriend for her own benefit; she had learned this skill at the feet of her mother. Chesler's work pertaining to indirect aggression and the dexterity of "social manipulation" that girls are taught to master "from their female role models: adult women" is once again brought to light here, confirming not only the aggression and violence that women are capable of, but likewise, *girls* (Chesler 93-94). And so, as articulated by Goddard, the Blanchards' story became "one of the world's most egregious cases of Munchausen syndrome" – Dee Dee had abused her daughter for her own gain, for the attention and sympathy of others (36). Indeed, she had controlled every aspect of her daughter's life: she demanded medical procedures that Gypsy Rose did not require, she controlled who her daughter could and could not befriend, and she beat her daughter or tied her to her bed if and when she refused to cooperate (see "Gypsy's Revenge", 2019). Gypsy Rose had acted out of desperation, and in an interview she states:

I knew that mom's never going to let me be happy, have friends, fall in love, get married, have kids, have a normal life... and I never wanted any more than that. I got scared and desperate, and the only thing I could think about was 'I want this ideal life of freedom and happiness. How can I get it?' ("Gypsy's Revenge" 01:09:30–01:09:57)

Though Gypsy Rose was sentenced to 10 years in prison for the (indirect) murder of her mother, this caused a good deal of debate as some argued that she deserved psychological treatment instead. I tend to agree, for the system failed Gypsy Rose; it was too distracted by the effervescence of a 'self-sacrificial' mother.

MSbP mothers thrive on attention and sympathy, but most importantly as Raitt and Zeedyk contend, the "core of an MSbP diagnosis is that a mother can love her child and still cause it immense harm" (269). This is evident in the case of Flynn's character, Adora, and the way in which she treats her second child, Marian, in comparison to her eldest daughter, Camille. Adora's mother was undeniably a woman who suffered from the aforementioned fear of losing control; she was a melancholic mother afflicted by MSbP and this is evident from her choice of mothering behaviours. As Jackie recollects, "[Adora] was sick all the time. She was always having tubes and needles and such stuck in her" (Flynn 318). And with the birth of Adora's first

child, Jackie articulates that the baby was “all hers from the beginning. That’s what killed Joya. Her daughter finally had something in her that Joya couldn’t get at” (Flynn 319). Nonetheless, Joya’s abuse (both direct and indirect) is arguably what causes the disconnect between Adora and Camille. According to Babcock Fenerci and Allen, “Research has demonstrated that parents who have experienced child maltreatment”, such as Adora, “[...] are at an increased risk for maltreating their own children” (1). Finally, given Joya’s cold and distant demeanour, it is hard to believe she would be a supportive and attentive grandmother to Camille.

As Adora articulates to Camille later in life:

When I had you inside of me [...] I thought you’d save me. I thought you’d love me. And then my mother would love me. That was a joke. [...] Even from the beginning you disobeyed, wouldn’t eat. Like you were punishing me for being born. Made me look like a fool. Like a child. (Flynn 237)

From this interaction we may infer that as a baby, Camille refused to nurse. This not only disappoints Adora as a new mother but it also embarrasses her under Joya’s watchful eye. Moreover, considering her position as a teenage mother and the rejection that she feels because of her own mother, Adora experiences an overwhelming sense of betrayal when her own child refuses to nurse. Essentially, Adora feels rejected by Camille, a devastating setback, and thus, despite Adora’s assertion that she “*wanted*” to love Camille, she finds herself unable to recover from this injury (Flynn 373, emphasis added). Indeed, this is yet another example of indirect aggression, to which Chesler refers as attacking by means of “a low-risk approach” (91). Adora verbally lashes out at her daughter so as to punish and emotionally wound her, a wound that cuts deeper than physical violence ever could. Adora is hence a woman capable of both physical violence (direct aggression, by means of MSbP as we come to discover) as well as emotional violence (indirect aggression), and these are both behaviours she has learned from her own mother. It is ultimately Joya’s coldness and lack of love for Adora that maims her daughter’s spirit, adding to the ‘emotional archive’ that she will in turn pass down to her own daughters (Chesler 245; Babcock Fenerci and Allen 9). As a child, Adora was not only physically but also emotionally abused by Joya; for instance, she was regularly reminded by her mother that she was not cared for, let alone loved. In point of fact, Adora acknowledges that her mother never loved her when she recalls a time Joya took her into the woods as a little girl and abandoned her, telling her “not to follow” (Flynn 373). Upon returning home, her feet “ripped into strips”, her mother

“just looked up at [her] from the evening paper, and went to her room” (Flynn 373). And as a final instance, Adora’s husband also attests to the abuse that she suffered, coming to her defence when Camille accuses her mother of being a liar. Alan reminds Camille that her mother has “had a hard life”, and reveals that Joya enjoyed pinching her little girl while she slept. “She said it was because she was worried Adora would die in her sleep. I think it was because she just liked to hurt her” (Flynn 260–261).

It is for this reason that Adora admits she can never love Camille. This is made palpable when Adora tells her eldest daughter that she reminds her of her mother, Joya, asserting that, “My mother never loved me, either. And if you girls⁶ won’t love me, I won’t love you” (Flynn 236). Adora’s love and attention is therefore conditional; she expects reciprocation, something in return, namely the full cooperation of her daughters as she reacts to her own MSbP. As the conditional nature of Adora’s love and her expectation of a reciprocal relationship with her daughters escalate, Camille rejects her once again as a mother when she refuses to be prodded with “ointments and oils, homemade remedies and homeopathic nonsense” as a child (Flynn 94). Significantly enough, as illustrated by Babcock Fenerci and Allen’s research:

According to BTT [Betrayal Trauma Theory], when a child is abused by a parent or caregiver, he/she experiences a high degree of betrayal in that the adult he/she is supposed to depend on for physical and emotional care and protection is instead a source of harm and distress. In this maltreatment context, the child is more likely to use certain strategies like dissociation or amnesia to remain unaware or ‘blind’ to the abuse in order to maintain a more effective attachment to the abuse caregiver [...]. (2)

However, what is most interesting here is that Babcock Fenerci and Allen go on to highlight more recent research that has underscored “cognitive strategies such as blaming oneself for maltreatment experiences and idealisation of the abusive caregiver [...] as other potential mechanisms that a child may use to remain blind to abuse by a caregiver” (2). Wendy D’Andrea and her colleagues share similar sentiments as they maintain that children who encounter “interpersonal trauma” are more likely to experience “distorted attributions about themselves”, and therefore are more inclined to “self-blame” as a result of “poor self-worth” (190).

⁶ It is important to note Adora’s use of the words “you girls” in this instance because she is not only speaking of Camille but also of Amma, her youngest. In essence, Adora here admits to neither loving Camille nor Amma, an important detail to bear in mind as this will be discussed further on.

This particular cognitive strategy is evident in Camille as she blames herself at times for the distant relationship that she has with Adora, and perhaps even for the death of her sister, Marian. Camille acknowledges that the time prior to Marian's terrible illness (and subsequent death at the hand of their mother) had been the very last time that she had occupied Adora's "full attention as a mother" despite her consistent rejection of "all those syrups and tablets [Adora] proffered" (Flynn 94). Marian's illness, followed by her untimely death, was precisely what Adora required as a melancholic MSbP mother. Camille was no longer of use to her. It is within these brief moments that she contemplates whether she should have given in to Adora's care; she abruptly finds herself wishing that she had been "easier" (Flynn 94). Camille's rejection of Adora's [s]mothering had consequently caused her own brutal rejection. As Adora maintains in conversation with Camille, "You were always so willful, never sweet. [...] And now you come back [here to visit] and all I can think of is 'Why Marian and not her?'" (Flynn 236–237). Adora's consideration of Camille as *willful* is interesting here because it echoes Sara Ahmed's discussion of "Willful Girls" in her book, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). According to Ahmed, "wilfulness is used as an explanation of disobedience: a child disobeys because she is willful, when she is not willing to do what her mother wills her to do" (67). Moreover, since "[d]isobedience is not given content" and we are scarcely told of "what it was that the child was not willing to do", Ahmed contends that disobedience therefore "becomes a fault: the child must do whatever her mother wishes" (67). And in this context, Camille at times uses blaming herself as a strategy "to remain unaware or 'blind' to the abuse" of her mother "in order to maintain a more effective attachment to" Adora (Babcock Fenerci and Allen 2).

Adora's childhood friend remarks that Adora and her mother "never really had time to establish an adult relationship", and so it is for this reason that Camille to some extent understands the distance between herself and Adora: "She had no practice" (Flynn 134). Adora effectively learns to duplicate the abusive mothering behaviours to which she was exposed as a child, and in consequence, maims the spirits of her own daughters. By means of the harmful mothering behaviours that she has learned from Joya, Adora's 'emotional archive' becomes directed at her own daughters who go on to display an "assemblage of different emotional manifestations of loss" in their own unique ways (Kenway and Fahey 640). Camille, for instance, receives little to no "positive and nurturing" mothering, attributable to the harmful behaviours learned and duplicated by Adora, as well as the trauma experienced within Adora's

relationship with Joya (Ateah et al. 3109). Consequently, Camille resorts to excessive self-harm as a means of coping with her maimed spirit. Of course, Adora's 'emotional archive' has graver consequences for Marian. She essentially becomes consumed by her eagerness to coddle and care for the child, perhaps in ways that her own mother never did, yet her intentions are saturated by this 'emotional archive' and her MSbP. And in due course, Adora becomes responsible for the death of Marian as she essentially smothers her daughter with nurturance and care. Marian's spirit is not maimed, it is snuffed out.

It appears that the loss Adora experiences as a result of her mother's rejection and lack of affection, coupled with the rejection she feels she receives from her baby, is ultimately what activates her melancholia. As these two instances collide – Joya's watchful eye for failure and Camille's assumed willfulness in refusing to nurse – Adora suffers a twofold defeat, from which she can never recover. And so, with the loss of her most compliant child, Marian, and due to her largely inherited MSbP, Adora's melancholia intensifies as she becomes completely consumed by her grief. Most notably, Adora is unable to move past Marian's death and as a result, her 'emotional archive' manifests alarmingly at the expense of Camille and Amma (as evident in the aforementioned example of Adora's disappointment in losing Marian instead of Camille). Both are left to compete with Marian's memory, and in Camille's words, "It's impossible to compete with the dead. I wished I could stop trying" (Flynn 103). As a melancholic mother, Adora effectively distances herself further from Camille, resenting her life as she contemplates the death of her beloved Marian. It is for this specific reason I am convinced that Marian is the only daughter out of the three that Adora ever truly loved – Marian complied, fulfilling Adora's "need to both adore and be adored", and sustained the ideal reciprocal relationship according to Adora's vision (Miller 495).

As clarified by Miller, "Adora's monstrosity [as a mother] is trapped within an equally warped dialectic of harm and care" (495). This 'warped dialectic', as well as Adora's 'need to both adore and be adored', is particularly evident in a passage of her personal diary discovered at the end of the novel:

I've decided today to stop caring for Camille and focus on Marian. Camille has never become a good patient – being sick only makes her angry and spiteful. She doesn't like me to touch her. [...] Marian is such a doll when she's ill, she dotes on me terribly [...]. I love wiping away her tears. (Flynn 379)

Once more, as Raitt and Zeedyk maintain, it is possible for an MSbP mother to “love her child and still cause it immense harm” (269). And as previously mentioned, MSbP mothers thrive on the attention and sympathy of others; therefore, Adora’s deep need for attention is sustained by her loss of a child, and so the lines become blurry – it is as though she refuses to move past this loss for it is such a profound source of attention, and this severely impacts the personal development of her youngest daughter, Amma.

The chapter to follow seeks to examine the development of female subjectivity and the way in which mothers are essentially *entangled* with their daughters. Specifically, this chapter utilises Belsky’s theory of the Determinants of Parenting to account for race and class differences that need to be acknowledged in the deliberation of various mothering behaviours. I am particularly interested in the policing and shame exacted upon both mothers and their daughters who are in a ‘process of becoming’, so as to maintain and uphold the category ‘woman’ for generations to come. In essence, Chapter Three seeks to challenge the heteropatriarchal notion that “mothers are primarily [and unfairly] responsible for the failed children” (M. Hirsch 48).

Chapter three: ‘[in]dependent beings’

Eventually, when your mother asks
 where you have left the things she gave you
 you will want to say, I am unlearning them.
 — Koleka Putuma, “Graduation”

Female subjectivity and in/dependence

In a comprehensive summary of the “five features of subjectivity” highlighted by Christine Battersby in her book *The Phenomenal Woman* (1988), Alison Stone elucidates that “because we are natal¹,” (the first feature of subjectivity) “we are dependent beings” (the second feature of subjectivity); in other words, as natal we begin our lives “dependent on our first carers” (168). While this dependency is apparent, it is important to recognise, as Stone explains, that although the first carer may not be one’s *biological* mother, a strong tendency remains for women to be allocated the role of primary carers, be it as mothers or as matriarchal figures (169). This is most evident within heteropatriarchal settings and in its socialisation of girls; as previously discussed, ‘mother’ is a behaviour that is predominantly taught to and learned by generations of women. Stone explains that this is because the “maternal role” has been predominantly “socially and culturally” allotted to “female occupants” (169). Thus, since “the woman is socialized as the primary carer for any children”, it is imperative to acknowledge the consequent *asymmetry* of this dependence (Battersby qtd. in Stone 169).

As underscored by Stone, “subjects as natal beings emerge in asymmetrical dependence upon their mothers in particular” and as a result, “[p]ower-laden relationships with our mothers [...] are generally the primary matrix [...] out of which we come to individuation” (169). Mothers and daughters are therefore entangled, particularly when considering the significance of women’s genealogy. I elaborate further on *entanglement* and the additional features of subjectivity in Chapter Four. However, for the purpose of this discussion and in light of women’s genealogy, I would like to discuss the fifth and final feature of subjectivity here: according to Stone, “the self is ‘monstrous’, in a productive rather than horrific sense – crossing over and blurring the

¹ In other words, and more specifically, as human beings we are *born* and therefore “do not appear in the world out of nowhere but *from* the bodies of our mothers” (Stone 168, emphasis in original).

boundaries between autonomy and dependence, self-containment and relationality, agency and passivity, mind and body” (168). In this final feature of subjectivity, the ability of the self to ‘take up’ multiple as well as contradictory positions is significant. In terms of mothering, the self – as ‘monstrous’ in its ability to warp and slip between different positions of being – echoes earlier sentiments on the duality of being both ‘woman’ and ‘mother’, two positions that are separate yet interdependent (see Chapter Two). Likewise, regardless of the quality of the relationship shared with our primary maternal figures, “A daughter [ultimately] *becomes* what she most fears: her mother” (Chesler 285, emphasis in original). This is because, as daughters, we remain connected to our mothers by inheriting parts of ourselves that we may appreciate and parts of ourselves that we may despise. As Phyllis Chesler explains, this could be something as simple as similar bone structure, or perhaps something more complicated traceable to the ‘intergenerational emotional archive’ of one’s genealogy (285). And so, as mothers and as daughters, and sometimes as both simultaneously, we are in/dependent beings because, despite the asymmetrical dependence we have on our maternal figures, we remain agentic individuals.

As an aside, the self as ‘monstrous’ in its ability to simultaneously acquire different ways of being is a particularly important notion to consider when commenting on the agentic capacity of girls as well. This notion takes us back to research conducted on girls and their subject positions discussed in Chapter One, and this will be applied to the daughters in my primary texts and further discussed in Chapter Four.

Mother and her ‘emotional archive’

While it has been clarified that there are many ways to mother a child, and that shaming mothers sans consideration of their context – such as class and access to resources – is unproductive, the potency of a mother’s ‘intergenerational emotional archive’ remains significant in various mothering behaviours. Specifically, the ‘emotional archive’ of a melancholic mother illustrates a major influence on the way in which she mothers and interacts with her daughters (Kenway and Fahey 639). Melancholic mothering therefore needs to be acknowledged alongside race and class differences, as well as access to resources, such as child support.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Christine Ateah and colleagues define ‘effective’ parenting as that which “involves sensitive child-rearing practices in which children are carefully monitored in a warm, caring, and responsive environment”, but that also “involves discipline and guidance within a nurturing environment to effectively encourage appropriate behaviour” (3109). And

according to Patricia Chamberlain, “behavioural and health problems” during childhood (or for the purpose of this dissertation, girlhood) “are strongly associated with *ineffective* parenting practices” (522, emphasis added). In my view, the requirements for ‘effective’ parenting and the repercussions predicted by ‘ineffective’ parenting cause a great deal of pressure to attain the unattainable, ironically failing to recognise this variation within the category ‘woman’ while at the same time valorising motherhood. Allowing for differences among women when reflecting on various mothering behaviours is crucial, because it offers contextual information to situations where mothers might be blamed, especially for mothering behaviours considered ‘ineffective’, according to unrealistic heteropatriarchal views as listed by Ateah and colleagues. Furthermore, it is equally essential to link class to specific feminised behaviours insisted upon within different settings, as it raises issues of “feminine decorum” (Jones 159).

As an illustration of the abovementioned contextual differences and their significance, two of the mothers in my primary texts, namely Jeffrey Eugenides’s character Mrs Lisbon from *The Virgin Suicides*, and Gillian Flynn’s character Adora Crellin from *Sharp Objects*, are privileged, middle-class white women who reside in the suburbs of the global North. Undeniably, both of these women benefit greatly from their white privilege in the heteropatriarchal and heteronormative contexts within which they exist, as do their daughters, even though both women, as discussed in Chapter Two, are melancholic mothers. However, Sandra Charles’s character, Magdalena Forbes, in *Eve*, has a totally contrasting experience of motherhood, as her narrative takes place during South Africa’s apartheid era. As a result of the Group Areas Act that sought to racially segregate South Africans during this time, Magdalena and her family live in a racially categorised ‘coloured’² township called Kensington³ (Salo 349). Magdalena’s ‘intergenerational emotional archive’ therefore has a history within this context, one that brings both racial discrimination and various forms of systematic violence to the fore. Likewise, her experience as a melancholic mother, coupled with the absence of privilege and her limited access to resources in the township, have profound consequences for her children and, most significantly, for her daughter, Eve. Therefore, given that Magdalena’s experience as a mother in

² I use the term ‘coloured’ when discussing Charles’s novel specifically as the novel is set during South Africa’s apartheid era. During this time, as articulated by Elaine Salo, “Legislation such as the 1950 Population Registration Act 4 forcibly classified people into racial categories, and the 1950 Group Areas Act compelled them to live in racial ghettos” (349). Thus, the racial term ‘coloured’ did not refer to ‘black’ in the Biko sense but instead sought to racially classify people who were considered to be of “‘mixed race’” (Adhikari 143).

³ As articulated by Caryn Jetha, although Kensington “is not grouped [strictly] within the Cape Flats”, this area does exhibit, “within cultural parameters, [...] and moral economy associated with Cape Flats areas” (28).

this low-income, low-resource context has an array of profound influences upon herself and her children, it is essential to take into consideration her capacity to meet the requirements of ‘effective’ mothering as demanded by the ideals of heteropatriarchy, as well as to contemplate the differences between her and the other two mothers, Mrs Lisbon and Adora Crellin. The ability to mother ‘effectively’ in the eyes of heteropatriarchy could in some ways be argued a privilege, but also a fantasy.

In a comparative study on intimate partner violence and the influence it may have on mothering by abused women, Ateah et al. use Jay Belsky’s (1984) theory of the Determinants of Parenting to account for “the interrelationships of three sources of influence on parenting behaviours” (3110). Specifically, the three sources are identified as “(a) the parent’s personal history, psychological resources⁴, and functioning; (b) contextual sources of stress and support; and finally, (c) the child’s characteristics and individuality” (Ateah et al. 3110). Nevertheless, while Belsky’s theory includes both mothers and fathers, I have chosen to omit fathers in this analysis and will focus primarily on the parenting behaviours of mothers. Additionally, in light of female subjectivity and the asymmetrical dependence on maternal figures, I have chosen to discuss only mothering behaviours because, as M. Hirsch contends, “mothers are primarily [and unfairly] responsible for the failed children” (48). And finally, while the expectations for ‘good’ or ‘effective’ parenting listed in Belsky’s theory are unachievable for most women, it should be highlighted that this model does include “the proposition that a deficit in one area may be buffered by strength(s) in another” (Ateah et al. 3110). If there are two parents, it is also important to recognise that the mother's influence over the child/ren would then in some cases shift considerably, due to the parents’ joint sources of influence. Accordingly, while I am aware that this particular theoretical framework cannot possibly serve as an absolute determinant, I trust that, as an alternative, its application will serve as a paradigm to understanding the mothers of my primary texts and their respective mothering behaviours *in context*.

There is urgency, I feel, to comprehend motherhood and mother/ing as influenced by a multitude of additional factors, and an approach such as this one will allow for the differences among women, as well as their individual capacities to act ‘effectively’ as mothers, to be taken

⁴ According to Jamila Bookwala, these may be described “as entities that hold value in their own right for individuals (e.g., a sense of control over one’s life). Control-related constructs are the most commonly studied psychological resources [...] because the extent to which individuals feel in control of their lives can affect the ways in which individuals perceive, react to, and resolve problems” (412).

into consideration. I have thus chosen to apply Belsky's theory in an attempt to account for the contextual differences between various mothering behaviours that may have an effect on a girl child's 'process of becoming'. However, the analysis to follow will not be strictly limited to this theoretical framework for there are nuances within these characters that cannot be placed within a definitive border. Belsky's theory will simply act as a guideline in my endeavour to analyse respective mothering behaviours, exploring the way in which these mothers are induced to utilise motherhood as "a source of power" in order to prime their daughters to embody and exemplify the category 'woman' (Bell 130).

In sum, the ensuing sub-headings will apply the first two factors of Belsky's theory to the mothers of each of my primary texts respectively, whereas the third factor, namely "the child's characteristics and individuality" (Ateah et al. 3110), will be applied to the daughters of all the said mothers in Chapter Four.

White suburbia and 'collective malaise' in *The Virgin Suicides*

As articulated by Bilyana Kostova, Eugenides's novel *The Virgin Suicides* is "a narrative about surviving suicide and collective trauma, while stressing that classic therapeutic notions of trauma theory are not enough to explain human nature" (49). In the novel, Mrs Lisbon and her family, a husband and five daughters, reside in the Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe⁵, Michigan, during the 1970s (Dines 963). Regrettably, the Lisbons' five daughters, between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, take their own lives amidst "the socio-economic depression" and the "collective malaise repressed beneath evasive allusions to life in the [deteriorating] Detroit suburbs" which characterised this particular period (Kostova 49–50).

As readers, we are told the story of the five Lisbon girls in retrospect by a collective male narrative voice comprised of the boys who grew up in the same neighbourhood. These once voyeuristic boys, now middle-aged men with "thinning hair and soft bellies", have agonised obsessively over the girls for many years following their deaths, and by "re-constructing [their] memories of the girls in a narrative that would engage everybody" in their suburb, their

⁵ Significantly, this particular suburb was notorious in the 1960s for its "Grosse Pointe Point System" (Dines 969). As explicated by Dines, "the system was intended to make it more difficult for those of southern or eastern European descent to acquire a mortgage to purchase property in the neighbourhood" (969–970). Furthermore, Dines explains that "[w]hereas no restrictions were placed on would-be residents of northwest European descent, those with Italian, Greek or Polish heritage wishing to move into the area had to achieve certain point scores to win admission" (970). And finally, though most importantly, "Jews were required to achieve the highest scores; blacks and Asians were barred altogether" (Dines 970).

recollection of the suicides befits “a therapeutic attempt to come to terms with [collective] trauma” (Kostova 60). In essence, Kostova claims that the trauma of the collective narrator manifests through their accumulation of the girls’ personal possessions and the retelling of stories from before their deaths, further evidencing their attempt to “[engage] with the dead girls” and cope with the pain of losing them, of losing the girls whom they so dearly loved yet really knew nothing about (Kostova 54; *Eugenides* 210).

The first of the three factors which influences mothering behaviours in Belsky’s theory is “the parent’s personal history, psychological resources, and functioning” (Ateah et al. 3110). While the narrator provides scant information about the personal history of Mrs Lisbon, her psychological resources and functioning are questioned following the suicide of her youngest daughter, Cecilia, aged thirteen. As an austere and devoted Catholic mother, Mrs Lisbon reigns over her home with an iron fist and “a queenly iciness” (*Eugenides* 6). However, her reign is forcibly loosened following Cecilia’s first suicide attempt when her daughter’s psychiatrist, Dr Hornicker, urges her and her husband to “relax their rules” and allow for their youngest daughter to have “a social outlet outside the codification of school, where she can interact with males her own age” (*Eugenides* 19). In addition, the collective narrator notes it is at this point in the novel that the neighbours in their white Detroit suburb begin to blame the girls’ parents; for instance, Mrs Buell remarks, “That girl didn’t want to die, she just wanted out of that house” (15). For the first time, Mrs Lisbon’s capacity to ‘effectively’ mother her children is questioned by those who live within her community. Hence, it is as a result of the first suicide attempt that the Lisbons’ daughters are permitted “to throw the first and only party of their short lives”, albeit chaperoned (*Eugenides* 21, 24). However, this agreement was not shared by both parents. As articulated by the narrator, “[W]hen we met with Mr Lisbon years later, he told us his wife had never agreed with the psychiatrist. ‘She just gave in for a while,’ he said” (*Eugenides* 20). From then on, rules are enforced by Mrs Lisbon, and it is her husband who has to actively convince her to make exceptions, such as the aid of a psychiatrist and the chaperoned party that ensues. At a later stage in the novel, moreover, it is likewise Mr Lisbon who convinces his wife to allow their daughters to attend their school’s Homecoming Dance.

Throughout the novel, Mrs Lisbon is described as far more authoritative and resolute than her husband. Indeed, the collective male narrator uses effeminate terms to describe Mr Lisbon, regarding him as a “thin” man with a “high voice” while in stark comparison describing his wife

as a big woman with “thick legs”, a “great sloping back” and a “big head” (Eugenides 6). The narrator even goes so far as to call Mr Lisbon’s weeping “girlish” and comments that following the death of Cecilia, Mrs Lisbon “took more charge of the house while Mr Lisbon receded into the mist” (Eugenides 6, 58). Mrs Lisbon therefore appears to exhibit a deep psychological compulsion to control and regulate those around her, a characteristic that is evident in the way she functions as a repressing mother. And since Mrs Lisbon’s femininity is rooted in Victorian gender and class principles, her staunch religious beliefs strategically mask her compulsion to mother austerely. According to Bell, within traditional families that maintain a “division of labour within the home, motherhood is the *source of power* which does not challenge traditional female roles” (130, emphasis added). Similarly, feminised behaviours that satisfy a nineteenth century vision of ‘ideal femininity’ include “passivity, silence, and compliance” and are therefore strikingly visible when Mrs Lisbon is expected to remain in a position of subordination to her husband (Miller 495). As articulated by Ann Heilmann and Valerie Sanders, “[t]he consensus among traditionalists” during the nineteenth century, a period of time that has noticeably shaped the construction of ‘ideal’ or ‘appropriate’ femininity in most Western heteropatriarchal contexts, “was that ‘Nature’ designed women to marry, have children, and preside over a happy home” (290). Mrs Lisbon complies. She is a dedicated stay-at-home mother who depends on the morals of the Catholic Church to groom her daughters for a ‘pure’ and chaste womanhood. Mr Lisbon, in contrast, is the household’s breadwinner who teaches high school mathematics and who acts as the head of the household in accordance with the expectations of ‘appropriate’ masculinity advocated by the Church. However, despite Mr Lisbon’s adherence to his role as the mouthpiece for his family, his influence in the domestic sphere remains curtailed.

Motherhood is without a doubt Mrs Lisbon’s ‘source of power’ – as a mother, she has the final say when it comes to their daughters, an immeasurable power that may be exercised at will without challenging traditional gender roles (Bell 130). Moreover, as a woman who exists within a class that insists on particular feminine behaviours traceable back to the nineteenth century, Mrs Lisbon opts to exert her power as a mother to regulate her daughters’ ‘process of becoming’, primarily in order to ensure that they master the performance of ‘appropriate’ femininity. For instance, the collective narrator notes that before church, Mrs Lisbon would inspect “each daughter for signs of makeup before allowing her to get in the car” (Eugenides 6). It is here that

we may view the importance of morality in the middle-class in the way that it echoes nineteenth century 'social purity' movements such as "the Movement the Reformation of Manners, which began in London in the 1690s and lasted into the 1730s" (Hunt 26). According to Margaret Hunt, the central concern of this movement, like most others, "was the 'problem' of uncontrolled and/or deviant sexuality, particularly among the young" (26). For example, when her fifteen-year-old daughter, Lux, returns home from the Homecoming Dance having missed her curfew and smelling of alcohol, Mrs Lisbon removes her and her sisters from school and forces Lux "to destroy her rock records" as punishment, following "a spirited church sermon" (Eugenides 138). Of course, in the eyes of the Church this behaviour would be classified as 'good' or 'effective' mothering because she is essentially guaranteeing that her daughters will not only inhabit and continue to uphold a set of morals linked to 'appropriate' femininity, but likewise, that they will pass these morals down to future generations as expected. Mrs Lisbon does so by the way in which she mothers her daughters, supervising and amending their physical appearance and behaviours, and facilitating their alignment with the expectations of the Church. In effect, she uses the dominant discourse of religion to exercise her power as a mother and to uphold the category 'woman' simultaneously by enforcing and reinforcing the feminised behaviours insisted upon by the middle-class and its gendered expectations (Barton 159–160).

When her youngest daughter, Cecilia, successfully manages to throw herself out of her bedroom window and onto "the murdering fence" that borders their property during the girls' chaperoned party, Mrs Lisbon's mothering behaviours ultimately become challenged (Eugenides 51). It is at this point in the novel that her melancholia is initiated and her 'archive of emotion' begins to manifest for two reasons: first, her inability to control the actions of her daughter, and second, her failure to maintain the Church's definition of a 'good' mother, since suicide is considered "a mortal sin" (Eugenides 34). According to the narrator, "Cecilia's death was listed in church records as an 'accident,' as were the other girls' a year later" (Eugenides 34). And as a consequence, following the death of Cecilia, Mrs Lisbon sinks into melancholia and maintains "a shadowy existence, rarely leaving the house" (Eugenides 108). Significantly enough, as housework and laundry begin to lose priority in the Lisbon residence causing their home to fall into disarray, the narrator notes that "no one objected, and some even sympathised. 'I feel sorriest for the mother,' Mrs Eugene said. 'You always wonder if there was something you could have done'" (Eugenides 108). This sympathy from their community is a seamless example of the

way in which mothers are unfairly considered “*primarily responsible* for the failed children”, in line with the pressure placed on mothers by heteropatriarchal society; significantly, this compassion is intended mainly for Mrs Lisbon and only to a lesser extent for the girls’ father (M. Hirsch 48, emphasis added). Mrs Lisbon is ‘failing’ to “preside over a happy home” and likewise, to align herself with the “neat household skills” expected of and admired in devoted mothers who represent “the ultra-feminine woman” (Heilmann and Sanders 290–291). Moreover, Mrs Eugene’s contention that there was possibly “something [Mrs Lisbon] could have done” to prevent her child’s death suggests the likelihood of a shortcoming or an oversight on the part of the mother (Eugenides 108).

In the same vein, the collective narrator claims that later in life it was *most of all* Mrs Lisbon whom they had wished to interview regarding the motive for the Lisbon girls’ suicides:

[W]e felt that she, being the girls’ mother, understood more than anyone why they had killed themselves. But she said, ‘That’s what’s so frightening. I don’t. Once they’re out of you, they’re different kids, they are. (Eugenides 138)

In my understanding, Mrs Lisbon’s lack of explanation concerning her daughters’ motives confirms that culpability for a child’s actions cannot routinely and solely be ascribed to the mother – there are various additional factors that need to be taken into account when assessing mothering behaviours, such as race and class, the girl child’s agentic capacity, as well as, if present, the other parent’s behaviours which mediate the mother’s. It is for this reason that the second of the three causes of influence listed by Belsky’s theory, namely, the mother’s “contextual sources of stress and support” (Ateah et al. 3110) is so important. Mrs Lisbon’s lack of support and the denunciation that she and her husband experience at the hand of their fellow suburbanites exacerbates her melancholia by further feeding her ‘emotional archive’ with shame, an archive that she inflicts upon her daughters by becoming even more stringent. As a devoted mother, Mrs Lisbon’s community expect her to know what transpires in the minds of her daughters, just as she is expected to control and regulate any nonconformist behaviour. Consequently, following the Homecoming Dance and Lux’s public disobedience (as gossiping neighbours saw her returning home after curfew), Mrs Lisbon responds by removing all four of her daughters from school, entirely obliterating contact and socialisation with children their own age.

Mrs Lisbon is unfairly held responsible and criticised for Lux's rebellious behaviour: drinking alcohol on school property in the company of a teenage boy and returning home after curfew (without her virginity, I might add, though it is unconfirmed whether Mrs Lisbon is aware of this particular detail). And since Mrs Lisbon's mothering behaviours are already under scrutiny following the death of little Cecilia, Lux's rebellion is the last straw. The devastating loss of Cecilia, in conjunction with Mrs Lisbon's lack of control over Lux's behaviour, prompts her to tighten the forceful grip that she has over her family as a mother. It is significant to point out, however, that when Mrs Lisbon is questioned about the purpose of her daughters' isolation, she insists "that her decision was never intended to be punitive" and added that they "needed time to themselves. *A mother knows*" (Eugenides 137, emphasis added). It appears that Mrs Lisbon's claim to know, *as a mother*, how to treat her grieving girls demonstrates how she too has internalised and therefore maintains heteropatriarchy's absurd vision of 'woman', and more specifically, the view that mothers are primarily responsible for their children. Nevertheless, despite this generally held attitude, the lack of support that she receives from her community and the condemnation that she faces as a mother remains the key feature that impels her to take severe action.

Mrs Lisbon elects to withdraw herself and her daughters from the watchful eye of others in order to gain full control of the girls in the privacy of her home and to limit her exposure to public censure of her mothering. And while Mrs Lisbon's melancholia does not go unnoticed by her community, it is left untreated. Her melancholic mothering causes her to not only isolate her daughters but to neglect them as well. For instance, groceries cease to be delivered to their home and the girls are said to lose a substantial amount of weight, "visibly wasting away" as they come to survive on the "abundant supply of canned goods" stored in the family's "bomb shelter" together with "other preparations against nuclear attack" (Eugenides 158). Mrs Lisbon also rejects the psychological counselling offered to her by Dr Hornicker and becomes enraged when questioned about her refusal, asserting that the psychiatrist's intervention is no more than a ploy to blame the girls' suicides on her and her husband (Eugenides 138). Still, despite her avoidance of Dr Hornicker's suspected intentions, blame is directed at the Lisbons' parenting behaviours from multiple sources; parents, teachers, and even the girls' peers. Of course, Mrs Lisbon's stringency and her locking the house shut "in maximum-security" merely serve to fuel this blame (Eugenides 136).

For instance, Lux's Homecoming date and major love interest, Trip Fontaine, notes that while visiting her at home to watch television with the family (a chaperoned date, no less), Mrs Lisbon would first consult "*TV Guide* to judge the program's suitability" before the channel could be changed (Eugenides 80). He then goes on to comment harshly, criticising the severity of the girls' regulation at the hand of their mother, blaming her by stating that "You would have killed yourself just to have something to do" (Eugenides 80). As it happens, the only tangible support that Mrs Lisbon receives from her community is that of her priest, Father Moody, who visits the family regularly. It is interesting that Mrs Lisbon clings to the Catholic Church for support more than to her own family. While she does seek out her own mother for advice following Lux's rebellion, Mrs Lisbon's primary source of support nonetheless remains that of her church. Ironically, though, the narrator claims that following the "suicide free-for-all", Mr and Mrs Lisbon cease to attend church or to answer the door when Father Moody visits (Eugenides 220). The loss of their daughters is intolerable, and the Lisbons finally relinquish any "attempt to lead a normal life" by ending their marriage (Eugenides 220). Without her daughters, Mrs Lisbon loses not only her power as a mother but also her moral purpose as a 'woman'. Thus, as an already melancholic subject, it is plausible that she could never move forward from this immense loss.

As readers, we are unfortunately denied substantial insight into the dynamic of Mrs Lisbon's relationship with her own mother, as well as insight into the support she receives from her in this mother-daughter relationship. However, the reader can infer that their relationship is somewhat distant. Mrs Lisbon's mother, Mrs Lema Crawford, moved from her Detroit home of forty-three years to New Mexico, away from her daughter and granddaughters, stating that the move was the best decision she had ever made for herself (Eugenides 139). While her reasons for moving are uncertain, Mrs Crawford's contact with her five granddaughters thereby becomes limited to posted Christmas gifts and birthday cards, ensuing in scant opportunity for an immediate personal relationship. As a result, Mrs Lisbon is left to brave the elitist Detroit suburb alone, without the presence of any other immediate family. Of course, bearing in mind her privilege as a white heterosexual woman with minimal financial hardship, this should hardly be a struggle. As explicated by Martin Dines, Eugenides's novel is a "suburban gothic" that primarily critiques the "white middle-class dream of home-owning prosperity and security" and "reconstitutes the postwar suburbs as a historical space, a site of conflict undergoing change" (959, 961).

Eugenides makes subtle references to the socio-political context by placing Mrs Lisbon and her family in an elite postwar setting plagued by affluence and social image, debutante balls and homecoming queens (Dines 963–964).

For all intents and purposes, life in the suburbs during the 1970s was characterised by wealth and safety, and was sheltered from contemporary social and ecological dangers (Kostova 52). As articulated by Dines, “the suburbs are more easily characterised as both artificial (they resemble an idealised media image) and oppressive (they are characterised by conservative ‘family values’ and the presumption of white privilege)” (962). Yet despite the ignorance and/or latent passiveness of white suburbia⁶, Eugenides makes understated references to the reality of what Kostova refers to as “the deterioration of suburban space [...] and of industry” throughout the novel (50). Thus, Mrs Lisbon mothers her five daughters within not only a white, middle-class suburban context marked by repression and conformity, but also within an environment threatened by the “impending possibility” of “socio-cultural engagement and responsibility” (Kostova 53). According to Kostova, “life in the suburbs was questioned”, for the people within these spaces “did not join the national fight to eliminate racial segregation and poverty” but instead they “promoted conformity” (55). Furthermore, the conformity in Eugenides’s novel “is underlined by the passiveness of the community of bystanders [...] who seem to see the girls as responsible for their misfortune” (Kostova 55). This is a contextual stressor that I feel ought to be considered in not only Mrs Lisbon’s context as a mother but also in her daughters’ ‘process of becoming’.

The repression and conformity that characterises the Lisbons’ middle-class, white suburb not only demands the obliteration of individuality but it also draws attention to the suburb’s “progressive social dysfunction” (49, 53). Likewise, there appears to be an “absence of true bonds among the neighbours” within this suburban space, and it is for this reason that the collective narrator attempts to create “a discursive union between different members of the community despite the continuing fragmentation of the suburb” in retrospect by restructuring the story of the Lisbon girls (Kostova 56, 58). In consequence, and I do agree with Kostova and her quotation by Laura Miller, “[d]espite the optimal conditions for togetherness, ‘suburbia may actually undermine familial harmony by exacerbating the strain of trying to live up to an

⁶ Dines maintains that “suburban lives are not properly part of American history” for the reason that “[s]uburbanites embody either a refusal to acknowledge the past or a desire to live wholly within it” (963).

essentially unattainable ideal” (54). In light of this, it would appear that Mrs Lisbon is pitted against not one but two unattainable ideals: the perfect mother, and the perfect family. Hence, her chances of failing in the eyes of heteropatriarchy and its expectations are increased twofold.

‘Mothers of monstrous children’ in *Sharp Objects*

As discussed in Chapter Two, Flynn’s novel *Sharp Objects* traces the significance of women’s genealogy in “a town that demands utmost femininity in its fairer sex”, and this is evident in themes such as the “valorisation of motherhood” as the epitome or “ultimate expression of femininity” (23; Miller 495). Set in the small Southern town of Wind Gap, Missouri, the novel is narrated by a journalist named Camille Preaker, who, after a number of years, returns to her hometown to investigate the murder of two young girls, Ann Nash and Natalie Keene. Unbeknown to Camille, these two little girls between the ages of nine and ten have been murdered by her own adolescent half-sister, Amma.

According to Alyson Miller⁷, in its focus upon women’s genealogy or more specifically, “a lineage of disturbed women, *Sharp Objects* exposes the complex rendering of femininity in relation to the social rules of Southern etiquette, a blurred lens through which public performance exists in a perpetual tension with private deviance” (495). For this reason, it is important to recognise that the significance of class is so important in the instance of Adora Crellin (née Preaker) because her position in the upper-class of Wind Gap mediates the way in which she performs femininity. Furthermore, Miller illustrates that the “perpetual tension” that exists between public performance and private deviance is particularly visible in Adora as she evidently passes this behaviour down to her youngest daughter, Amma. Therefore, it is vital that Adora’s ‘emotional archive’ is once more taken into consideration, in tandem with the extensive range of direct and indirect abuse that she experienced at the hand of her mother whilst in her own ‘process of becoming’. To recapitulate, it is largely for this reason that Adora is a melancholic subject; moreover, the abuse she endured has a range of implications for the way in which she learns to mother her own daughters. In truth, Adora is responsible for the maltreatment of her daughters in the private sphere; however, because she is a conspicuous public figure in the small town of Wind Gap, she remains blameless in the public sphere. As the only daughter of the Preakers, an affluent upper-class family of old money in Wind Gap who

⁷ This section of the chapter on Adora, as well as the section in Chapter Four on Amma, will rely quite heavily on Alyson Miller’s article as this is the only academic article on *Sharp Objects* I have been able to locate at this time.

own the town's largest hog butchering farm and is its primary source of income, Adora inherits as well as exudes the power and influence of her privileged family (Flynn 317). Although I have explored a significant portion of Adora's "personal history, psychological resources, and functioning" in Chapter Two, there are some details pertaining to her as a mother within the public and private spheres respectively that need further discussion (Ateah et al. 3110).

First, within the public sphere, Adora deeply values her influence and social status, repeatedly securing this position by means of *performance*. For instance, following the birth of Camille at age seventeen and the loss of both her parents shortly after, Adora opts into marriage as a tactical move to ensure her family's position in a town demarcated by two categories: "Old money and trash" (Flynn 7). As a traditionalist society, Wind Gap and its customs may be traced back to the Antebellum South⁸ before the American Civil War, a society founded on the institution of slavery and class exploitation (Schwalbe 38; see West and Knight, 2017). For instance, late eighteenth century antebellum principles evident in Wind Gap include power as consolidating wealth and whiteness, as well as a woman's place within the private or domestic sphere (Schwalbe 38). In this context, Adora performs as the archetype of a *Southern Belle*, a true "lady" who encapsulates "whiteness and privilege" and whose old money and "elite status had been founded in the oppressions of slavery" (Faust qtd. in Schwalbe 38). Henceforth, as Camille remarks:

The town loved [Adora], she was like a cake topping: the most beautiful, sweet girl Wind Gap had ever [risen]. Her parents, my grandparents, had owned the pig farm and half the houses around it, and kept my mother under the same strict rules they applied to their workers: no drinking, no smoking, no cursing, church service mandatory. (Flynn 119)

It ought to be noted, however, that there is a great deal of irony concerning the segregation of the townsfolk. Those considered "trash" in Wind Gap are people from lower-class, low-income households who are held in contempt by the community for their brutal work in the hog butchering industry (Flynn 80). Hence, the irony here is that those who consolidate "old money" and status in Wind Gap, such as Adora and her family, are the ones who benefit most from this industry, yet they keep their hands clean by having others run the business for them (Flynn 80).

⁸ According to Emily Schwalbe, "Antebellum society was based on a tenuous structure that assigned roles based on biological distinctions, particularly race and gender. Within this hierarchy, power was consolidated among wealthy white men. [...] A society based on the idea that some people are inherently superior to others is difficult to maintain, and relied upon mutual reinforcement of assigned roles" (38).

Therefore, those considered “trash” are in the same line of business as those of “old money”; the only difference between the two groups is class privilege. As the son of the Preakers’ wealthy family friends in Tennessee, Alan Crellin is thus the perfect match for Adora since he likewise has never worked a day in his life, yet inherits “family money” (Flynn 121). And as a result of this union, Adora successfully avoids being categorised as a twenty-year-old orphan and single mother in Wind Gap; instead, she marries into a powerful and influential family much like her own, thereby securing her social virtue and status in the upper-class in a town where “[l]ooks and money get you a long way” (Flynn 179). Of course, this safekeeping of ‘social purity’ and the importance of morals may be traced back to nineteenth century Victorian America, as touched on pertaining to Eugenides’s character, Mrs Lisbon (Hunt 25).

Furthermore, as the archetype of a Southern Belle, Adora seamlessly encapsulates ‘appropriate’ femininity in the upper-class (feminised behaviour that may likewise be rooted in the Victorian era) for she is considered “‘ladylike’ in the sense of being modest, gentle, tasteful and unselfish, though without also being weak and dependent” (Heilmann and Sanders 291). Adora is a mother and she performs this role devotedly for all of Wind Gap to witness. However, unbeknownst to those in the public sphere, she is ultimately responsible for the untimely death of her first child with Alan, little Marian. To evoke Miller, it is important in this regard to acknowledge that as a mother, “Adora insists on *control*” in the private sphere “yet does so in order to ensure a nightmarish vision of the sanctity of motherhood in which she is always central” (495, emphasis added). It is also thought-provoking that in the study of Confederate society and material culture, Emily Schwalbe notes that during the Civil War it became “impracticable for women to *behaviourally* conform to the Southern Belle ideal” since they were required to assume “public roles” while their men were sent off to war; therefore, material goods came to hold an “added significance” (38, 46, emphasis added). According to Schwalbe, it was during this time that material culture became “purposefully used to reaffirm wealthy women’s place in society” and material goods “were used to project a desired image” (46). Ultimately, material culture became “a means for [women] to intentionally control how they are perceived by others” as well as “a way in which [they] could exercise agency without participating in what was considered ‘masculine’ behaviour” (Schwalbe 46, 50). Finally, Schwalbe notes that within this field of study, “historians have recently commented on women’s use of public action in private settings, particularly in cases of violence, to establish control” (46). Henceforth, in

relation to an insistence on control within the private sphere, it is here that Adora's deviance manifests.

As articulated by Miller, "the aberrance of Amma and Adora (the child murderer and the child-murderer to evoke Oates) is repeatedly figured in terms of their liminality, which manifests as a refusal to distinguish between childhood and adulthood states" (495). And as a result, Adora is said to inhabit "a *performative space* in which she is 'Wendy Darling all grown up'" (Miller 495, emphasis added; Flynn qtd. in Miller 495). Consequently, described as "a distorted girl-woman", Adora treats her daughters as though they are dolls in need of adoration and care; yet in order for the child to adore her in return, so as to sustain her need to be needed, she resorts to maltreatment by way of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSbP, Miller 495). Therefore, "Adora's monstrosity is trapped within an equally warped dialectic of harm and care" (Miller 495). As a small yet greatly unsettling instance of this contention, Camille recalls a time in her girlhood where she witnessed her mother bite the cheek of a baby only to cuddle and comfort the child as it wailed in agony (Flynn 156). From this occurrence we may infer that not only does Adora know how to supplement her "need to both adore and be adored", but she likewise relishes the attention received for mothering, especially when the child is *in need* (Miller 495). It is for this reason that Adora chooses to "stop caring for Camille" and dedicates her efforts to Marian instead, a girl child who in contrast to her sister is described as "a doll when she's ill" (Flynn 379).

As previously elucidated, Marian was said to be "a sweet series of diseases", very different from Adora's eldest daughter, Camille, who is described as an incorrigible girl child who has always resisted her mother's care (Flynn 122, 379). Marian therefore becomes the most desired candidate for Adora's "peculiar strain of mothering" because she is compliant, a notable feminised behaviour that is routinely rewarded by Adora (Flynn 348). According to Miller, Adora's pronounced voracity for children significantly establishes her as "a woman whose 'abnormal longing' for maternity manifests in a perverse expression of 'baby hunger'" (495; Renner qtd. in Miller 495). More so, Adora is said to be "a mother who produces a child so as to consume it", an "archaic mother" to quote Julia Kristeva, "defined by a 'fear of her generative power'" (qtd. in Miller 496). Miller's conceptualisation of Adora as an 'archaic mother' is momentous in this regard because she relates Adora's insistence on control as a mother within the private sphere not only to "an inherent sense of violence" but also to the "fear of losing

oneself and one's boundaries" that is inscribed by the 'archaic mother' (Miller 496; Creed qtd. in Miller 496). In light of this connection, I believe that it is imperative to bring Adora's "contextual sources of stress and support" into the discussion together with her "personal history, psychological resources, and functioning", for there are nuances here that cannot sufficiently be understood within the rigidity of one particular frame (Ateah et al. 3110).

Adora "valorises motherhood as the ultimate expression of successful femininity" for it is her "source of power" within the conservative Southern space she inhabits, much like that of Eugenides's character, Mrs Lisbon (Bell 130; Miller 494). Furthermore, it is in Marian's illness that one may observe that the attention Adora receives is an all-consuming need for her under public scrutiny. Marian's paediatrician, for example, dotes on Adora for her sacrificial nature as a mother by calling her "an angel" and expressing that "every child should have a mother like [her]" (Flynn 379–380). The recognition that Adora receives as a result of her public performance as Marian's 'devoted' and 'sacrificial mother' is therefore particularly compelling. Not only is she an MSbP mother, as explained in Chapter Two, but she also performs within a heteropatriarchal space which valorises the 'sacrificial mother' as an illustration of 'good' or 'effective' mothering, as well as 'appropriate' femininity (Bell 133; Heilmann and Sanders 291). Camille highlights this performance of femininity when she admits, "Even I, in public, was a beloved child. [...] When we got home, she'd trail off to her room like an unfinished sentence, and I would sit outside with my face pressed against her door [...] searching for clues to what I'd done to displease her" (Flynn 155). Wind Gap exists as a space in which Southern heteropatriarchal ideologies, founded on antebellum principles and gendered expectations, are maintained by women as well as exacted upon their daughters. The public sphere thereby exists as a performative space, and nonconformity is punished in private.

Adora's performance in the public sphere "exists in a perpetual tension with private deviance" for as a liminal figure, she inhabits "an ambiguous space between appearances of innocence and expressions of knowing" (Miller 495–496). It is from behind the mask of 'devoted mother' that she "manipulates cultural scripts in order to [intensely] regulate [and control] the bodies and behaviours of [her daughters]" (496). And according to Miller, Marian's murder is the result of Adora's intense regulation and subsequent "uncontrollable consumption" for as Adora writes in her diary, "I couldn't stop" (496; Flynn qtd. in Miller 496). Of course, in "a town that demands utmost femininity in its fairer sex", it should come as no surprise that the category 'woman'

remains a gendered expectation in Wind Gap that is not only maintained – and carefully preserved – by its conservative women, most notably within the middle- and upper-classes (Flynn 23). These are women who have for generations learned to perfect and perform ‘appropriate’ femininity “in relation to the social rules of Southern etiquette” and represent the archetype of the Southern Belle (Miller 495). More so, since the ‘social rules’ within this Southern community are, as Camille describes, *demanding*, it is evident that any form of resistance or nonconformity in this public sphere deserves punishment or *regulation* as a result, not only by one’s mother but also by those within the community itself. For instance, the women of Wind Gap are taught to valorise the idea that one’s full potential as a woman cannot be accomplished without experiencing the gift of motherhood (Flynn 214). Motherhood as the epitome of ‘appropriate’ femininity is therefore the norm in Wind Gap, and any deviation from desiring motherhood as ‘ultra-femininity’ is considered nonconformity in need of regulation (Salo 350).

A noteworthy instance of the abovementioned regulation occurs when Camille, upon returning to her hometown, is reunited with the childhood friends she left behind who have all since become mothers themselves; during their rendezvous, she is pointedly confronted by these women who shame her for not having children. Camille’s childhood friend, Katie, comments that “[she] doesn’t have any children” and therefore cannot feel the pain that they do as mothers when contemplating the town’s recent loss of Ann and Natalie (Flynn 213). While this comment appears reasonable at first, a second friend amplifies this statement by expressing that some part of a woman’s “heart can never work” if she does not have children, and it is here that we may observe puritan discourses at play. As Katie replies, “I didn’t really become a woman until I felt [my daughter] inside of me. [...] The Bible says be fruitful and multiply, and science, well, when it all boils down, that’s what women were made for, right? To bear children” (Flynn 214). Camille is shunned by these women for failing to valorise motherhood as they do: “A single woman even a hair over thirty was a queer thing in these parts” (Flynn 71). Clearly, considering the strict morality of the discourses that glorify the devout mother, and in conjunction with Southern ‘social rules’ regarding ‘*appropriate*’ femininity, the women of Wind Gap are emphatically taught to maintain heteropatriarchal gendered expectations of motherhood and normalised feminine behaviour as these pertain to social class. Moreover, they are taught to regulate women who do not conform to heteropatriarchal ideal femininity by means of shame.

As articulated by Kenyan feminist activist Shailja Patel, if and when “you want to understand how power works in any society, watch who is carrying shame and who is doing the shaming” (qtd. in Gqola 38).

As an aside, it is crucial to remember that copulation before marriage is believed depraved behaviour down South; it is immoral for a girl to fall pregnant out of wedlock, and a ‘good’ girl from the middle- or upper-class would never dream of bringing such a scandal upon her family, especially in a town that upholds modesty and decorum as feminised behaviours. This is evident when Adora’s childhood friend, Jackie, divulges to Camille later in life that “having you should have ruined your mother. [...] Any other girl, got knocked up before marriage, here in Wind Gap way back when, it’d be all over for her” (Flynn 318). However, she ends by admitting that in Wind Gap, “a beautiful girl can get away with anything if she plays nice” and that as an upper-class girl in the town’s most affluent family, “Adora played [her] pregnancy beautifully” (Flynn 319). Hence, she remains blameless in the eyes of her community; privilege equates to influence, and influence equates to power. Furthermore, and in the same vein, innocence and sexual ‘purity’ are likewise taught to be of great value to girls in terms of their own social status, since women are “encouraged to openly crave gossip” in Wind Gap (Flynn 136, 316). This means that since girls are taught shame and learn that “the safe way to attack” another is by means of indirect aggression, gossip is utilised as a regulatory tool in the small Southern town to ensure the continuation of women striving to attain the unattainable (Adichie 14; Chesler 91; Bartky 139).

There are multiple further instances in *Sharp Objects* where shame is unmistakably used as a regulatory tool. One of the most distinct examples occurs when Adora forces Camille to try on a series of revealing dresses for an upcoming event at the Crellin’s home, despite her obvious knowledge of Camille’s self-harm. First and foremost, one must know that Adora condemns Camille for investigating the murders of Ann and Natalie for reporting to Chicago’s *Daily Post*. This is evident when she cries: “Aren’t those parents having a difficult enough time without you coming here to copy it all down and spread it to the world? [...] I knew those children, Camille. I’m having a very hard time, as you can imagine. Dead little girls. Who would do that?” (Flynn 41–42). In Adora’s eyes, there is something fundamentally wrong with her daughter for not being as disturbed by the death of two little girls as she and the rest of Wind Gap’s upper-class women are. Camille’s work as a reporter is thereby denigrated by her mother, and her failure to

perform ‘appropriate’ femininity in terms of her appearance and self-determination is considered to be deserving of punishment and shame as a means of regulation. In order to regulate Camille’s body (her first deviation from ideal femininity as she is “a cutter” who severely self-harms) and her autonomous behaviour (her second deviation as she fails to conform to the category ‘woman’ as the “fairer sex”), Adora “manipulates cultural scripts” by publicly performing as a dedicated mother (Flynn 23; Miller 496).

Thus, while it appears that Adora is merely taking her eldest daughter shopping for a dress, she deliberately selects dresses for Camille that will expose her scars in order to shame her. Camille acknowledges this cruelty too: “My mother was punishing me” (Flynn 191). And despite Camille’s urgent plea that the dresses “won’t work” for her, Adora demands that she comply and thereby reveal her scars (Flynn 191). Alas, backed into a corner – literally – Camille is left with no choice but to expose herself to the shame that is to ensue at the hand of her mother who spits, “Look what you’ve done to yourself. [...] I hope you can stand yourself” (Flynn 192). Adora reverts to shaming in an attempt to regulate the body and behaviour of her daughter, shame being the only means of control that she has over Camille, who has always resisted her mother’s care. And although Camille is already a grown woman here, this scene has added significance when taking into consideration the fact that Amma is present to witness her sister’s punishment. Amma is no stranger to the regulation that the category ‘woman’ demands, a category cruelly upheld and enforced by her own mother, the archetype of a Southern Belle.

Returning to Adora’s “uncontrollable consumption” of Marian, Miller contends that based on the Kristevan notion of the ‘archaic mother’, it is ultimately when Adora loses control and murders Marian that the “monstrous [child]” enters the picture – Amma (496). Adora is therefore figured as the “wicked source” of evil whose mothering behaviours are further “rationalised in genealogical terms”, thereby evidencing the common urge to locate women as the source of evil (Miller 496, 492). Adora and Amma are entangled – mother and daughter – “the child murderer and the child-murderer” (Miller 495). It is for this reason that Camille admits: “I blame my mother. A child weaned on poison considers harm a comfort” (Flynn 393). Adora is responsible for Marian’s passing primarily because of her predisposition to MSbP mothering behaviours as a result of her ‘intergenerational emotional archive’. She is consumed by the ideal of the ‘sacrificial’ mother, and she becomes intoxicated by recognition and praise for upholding this archetypal standard in the public sphere. Thus, before addressing Camille’s blaming of her

mother for Amma's deviance, the importance of genealogy and the heteropatriarchal pressures on women to attain the unattainable, need to be deliberated *alongside* the entirety of Amma's behaviour.

Adora is responsible for upholding patriarchal ideals as they pertain to the category 'woman'; however, I contend that she cannot be held solely responsible for the 'failed' or 'evil child' that is Amma. This is because of two vitally important factors often overlooked by those who seek to denounce mothers only: her daughter's complexity as *an individual*, and her *agency* as a girl child (see Chapter Four).

'Moral standing' and *ordentlikheid* in *Eve*

Charles's novel *Eve* is a South African narrative set during the country's apartheid era, a period marked by racial discrimination and systematic violence during the 1960s and 70s. The narrative traces the girlhood of Eve Forbes as she attempts to navigate her 'becoming-woman' and its boundaries in a local township named Kensington, situated on the margins of Cape Town, as well as her own identity formation during an era that has racially classified her as 'coloured'. Eve exists as a girl child 'becoming-woman' in a poverty-stricken household crowded by several siblings, and is regularly policed by "the expected modes of femininity" insisted upon by her mother as well as her close-knit community (Salo 352).

As articulated by Caryn Jeftha, Charles's novel provides us with "a revisionist look at coloured femininity" during this time, particularly because it offers a lens through which to reflect upon the valorisation of motherhood alongside "the traces of slavery that marked coloured bodies as sexually accessible and steeped in shame through association with concepts of miscegenation" (28). As Pumla Dineo Gqola explains, enslaved people "were objects to be used and as such could neither consent or dissent to the manner of their use", and so "the stereotype of the unrapable Black⁹ woman" was produced (46, 50). Ultimately, motherhood as the epitome of womanhood, combined with this traumatic history, fashioned a certain performance of femininity for 'coloured' women that could offer "a respectable trajectory" instead (Jeftha 28). Elaine Salo has produced momentous work on 'ideal' femininity and the valorisation of motherhood in the context of 'coloured' townships during apartheid; indeed, I have discussed the "powerful economic status" that 'coloured' women held during this time in Chapter One (Salo

⁹ Pumla Dineo Gqola utilises 'Black' here with a capital letter "to refer to [...] the collective people of African and South Asian descent" (4).

349). However, these ‘expected modes’ of feminine performance need to be discussed in further detail so as to comment on Eve’s mother, Magdalena, and her performance as a melancholic maternal figure within the ‘coloured’ township of Kensington.

As a mother in this low-resource context, Magdalena’s “personal history, psychological resources, and functioning”, as well as her “contextual sources of stress and support”, contain different emphases to those of the previously discussed Mrs Lisbon and Adora Crellin (Ateah et al. 3110). Magdalena’s position in her local community as a mother of ten children mediates her femininity in ways starkly contrasting to the context of these white women from the global North, so that class becomes a significant factor to consider yet again alongside race and gender. As articulated by Salo, the “relatively privileged economic status” of ‘coloured’ working-class women during this era “was reconfigured to emphasize their social and moral obligation to their own and other households” (350). In other words, ‘coloured’ women came to exemplify “local respectability and morality [...] through the efflorescence of their mothering role beyond the private domain” (Salo 351). Essentially, they became guardians of “moral standing within the community by monitoring young men’s and women’s dress, activities and behavioural codes in public” (Salo 351). This surveillance of public performance and the importance of regulating the behaviour of those around them, most remarkably in the instance of other girls and women, therefore becomes “an insistence on the articulation of feminine behaviours that fulfil gendered stereotypes” in its own right (Miller 495). For instance, and most significantly, a daughter’s display of modesty was considered a reflection of her mother’s “ability to raise her children well and to run a respectable household” (Salo 352). Therefore, mothers in this setting were also solely “primarily [and unfairly] responsible for the failed children”, an important source of influence discussed throughout this section of the chapter (M. Hirsch 48).

The “personal history, psychological resources, and functioning” of Magdalena Forbes need to be discussed alongside her “contextual sources of stress and support” (Ateah et al. 3110). It is useful to reflect on these two sources of influence on Magdalena’s mothering behaviours in conjunction with each other because they are both equally important; they bleed into each other, hence there are significant nuances yet again which cannot be understood within the rigidity of a particular frame or structure of thought. Magdalena was born into “a hard-working and God-fearing family”, to parents who believed for “certain that their daughters’ places were reserved in heaven right next to Mother Mary” (Charles 319). The Christian Church therefore plays a role in

her personal history, alongside a conspicuous priming to uphold *respectability* as the expected mode of ‘feminine decorum’. According to Fiona Ross, respectability or, following Salo’s framework, *ordentlikheid*¹⁰, was traditionally “an important mode of structuring unequal social relations in African colonial worlds” and thus has an “underpinning racial dynamic” (98). This “racial dynamic” exists because respectability was partly founded upon “the distinction between slave and free” yet has considerably “shifted and solidified over the nineteenth century as religion (particularly Christianity) became a core element in the definition of respectability” (Ross 98). Ross contends that ultimately, through the dominant discourse of religion, one’s allocation of respectability “became a central structuring principle in demarcating *social status* and shaping interpersonal relations” (98, emphasis added). Therefore, one’s *moral standing* was based largely upon Christian values, while “in the conduct of social relations”, public performance comprised “caring for appearances (respectability) and caring for persons (decency), moulding relationships so that people will be considered moral beings” (Ross 98–99; see Teppo, 2015).

In this regard, Magdalena was viewed as an *ordentlik*¹¹ or moral ‘coloured’ girl despite her working-class status. However, at age sixteen she suddenly falls pregnant out of wedlock with Tina, her first child with Richard Forbes, and despite her conservative upbringing, “[t]he scandal, the bad reputation would now accompany her on her way” (Charles 320). Arguably, it is at this point in Magdalena’s life that her melancholia is initiated because she loses her status as an *ordentlike* daughter by bringing shame to her family, and in this community shame is an inherited and “pervasive part of coloured identities” that generates irreparable further damage if not avoided (Jeftha 29). Following Zoë Wicomb, Jeftha explains that shame may in this regard be related “to notions of sexual exploitation, hypersexual stereotypes attached to coloured girl bodies, and rampant sexual aggression” perceptible in a burning history of slavery and colonialism (29). Additionally, Jeftha points to a useful quote in Gabebe Baderoon’s book, *Regarding Muslims* (2014): “For the descendants of enslaved people, the memory of surviving slavery is burdened by an almost ontological shame – because of the accusation that [B]lack women were complicit with their own sexual violation” (28). Consequently, a visceral and

¹⁰ As articulated by Salo, “*Ordentlikheid* refers to the intense, lifelong social and physical work that women have to do” in order to maintain “the natural order of the *bos* or the wilderness at bay” (qtd. in Ross 99).

¹¹ *Ordentlik* is an Afrikaans term that connotes “decency, respectability, reasonability, and proper conformity to the social norms of the elite” (Ross 98).

loaded ‘intergenerational emotional archive’ is produced by this history, one that has been subsequently passed down for generations to women such as Magdalena. And so her life begins as a wife forced into an abusive marriage, and as a melancholic mother producing one child after another until there are ten.

It is useful to consider this archive in relation to the woman through whom she inherited it: her mother. While little is shared of Magdalena’s relationship with her mother, we do know that she was forced into a marriage, which she sees as a *deserved* punishment for tarnishing not only her own reputation but by extension, her mother’s as well (Salo 352). It is therefore reasonable to believe that Magdalena highly respects her mother, and aspires to duplicate her behaviour and experience of motherhood. This is evident in her continued devotion to Christianity and her insistence that Eve accompanies her and the family to church, despite Eve’s “dislike for the church and everything connected with it” (Charles 241). Magdalena is entangled with her mother as a result of the ‘emotional archive’ that the two share; this entanglement is even more palpable when taking into consideration the blame that is unfairly placed upon mothers within the context of *ordentlikheid*. To recapitulate, Kaja Silverman argues that melancholia is activated by “an enormous cultural pressure” for a girl child “to continue to identify with her mother” in line with the Oedipal complex and her development of female subjectivity (qtd. in Kenway and Fahey 644). Therefore, given the shame that Magdalena brings to her family amidst her ‘becoming-woman’, along with the subsequent blame brought upon her mother for producing a ‘failed child’, the loss she experiences here is undeniably enough to render her a melancholic subject. Thus, given the contextual source of stress perpetuated by *ordentlikheid*, and the anxiety produced to emulate her mother, Magdalena finds herself trapped in an unhealthy marriage. Furthermore, as a victim of gender-based violence, another significant contextual stressor that has a tremendous effect on the way in which she functions as a mother, her melancholia becomes further entrenched.

In this context, seen through the cultural lens of *ordentlikheid*, a woman’s sexual ‘impurity’ is condemned, creating considerable stress and necessitating an exploration of this impact on a woman’s reputation, particularly when considering Magdalena’s mothering behaviours. This is because the effect that sexual ‘impurity’ has upon a woman’s moral standing highlights not only the significance of ‘coloured’ women’s power as the guardians of morality by means of surveillance, but likewise, the importance of modesty and respectability in one’s performance of

‘appropriate’ femininity. While Magdalena’s teenage pregnancy irreparably damages her reputation as a result of shame, her reputation is significantly *shaded* by her (forced) marriage to the father of her child, Richard, much like the way in which Adora’s reputation is *protected* through her (somewhat arranged) marriage to Alan. In this regard, both women are able to redeem themselves to some extent. However, in a heteropatriarchal context that sustains the category ‘woman’, some remain excluded. According to Salo, it was only within “the context of a small, intimate community” such as Kensington that ‘coloured’ women’s power could be exercised, and this power was notably “shaped through intimacy, *gossip* and visible performance” (351, emphasis added). Similarly, as discussed in Chapter One, deviant behaviour or ‘inappropriate’ femininity often requires regulation by means of shame (often in the form of gossip or slander); policing behaviour is evident throughout Charles’s novel. Specifically, gossip serves as a means of monitoring behaviour and moral standing in the context of *Eve*, as well as regulating deviance and/or nonconformity.

Certainly, an individual’s reputation in an intimate space such as Kensington is largely dependent upon what is being said about one’s character (or lack thereof). Auntie Lynette, Richard’s half-sister, is an ideal example in this illustration of one whose reputation is routinely a topic of discussion, for as Eve notes: “My mother, my sisters, the girls from the road and many other females in the neighbourhood spoke about her [whenever] they got together” (Charles 21). More so, Lynette is the archetype of a woman who has been written off as *sleg* or *rou*¹², and whose reputation therefore cannot be redeemed. According to Eve, Lynette has had an unfavourable “image” since age fifteen for a number of reasons that pertain to her visible or public performance of femininity; first, she was “the only girl in the area who’d organised twist sessions and rock and roll parties”, and second, gossip spread of her sexual ‘impurity’ when “at several of these twist sessions [she] had been seen disappearing into her room with men” (Charles 21). Consequently, in view of these two illustrations, Lynette’s reputation is ruined for not only does she fail to perform *ordentlike* femininity in terms of public appearance but she also fails to remain sexually ‘pure’ before marriage. Additionally, given the predominantly Christian values that *ordentlikheid* espouses, Lynette’s reputation is irredeemably tarnished because she remains sexually active and unbothered by the reputation of sexual ‘impurity’. Lynette is thereby

¹² As articulated by Ross, “people described as *rou* are considered uncultured, undisciplined, not fully incorporated into appropriate modes of comportment and behaviour” (98). Salo utilises the term *sleg* (which translates to “bad”) in the same sense (353).

an interesting example of the insistence upon particular feminine ideas of sexual ‘purity’ in this low-income, working-class context of Kensington in the 50s, especially because of the way in which she is shamed by the women of her community.

Sexually ‘impure’ girls and women such as Lynette are routinely defamed by the guardians of morality – local women – and as a mother in this particular context, Magdalena takes part in the surveillance of Lynette’s ‘inappropriate’ femininity by slut-shaming her on multiple occasions. However, it is vital to remember in these instances that Magdalena has not only inherited these mothering behaviours concerned with reputation and respectability, but also that respectability is an important psychological resource which influences her functioning as a mother. Therefore, *ordentlikheid* is crucial to consider as a unique contextual and cultural influence upon her public performance of ‘appropriate’ femininity, as well as the way in which she functions as a mother to ensure that Eve does the same. Magdalena was taught as a girl child that copulation “is sinful and dirty, and that this information should be passed on to all generations to come” (Charles 320). Thus, upon falling pregnant out of wedlock, an unambiguous indication of sexual ‘impurity’ before marriage, Eve explains that her mother “believed it was God’s will that she had to suffer through her entire married life for not obeying her mother, her grandmothers, her aunts and all other women’s warning words: ‘Don’t mess around with boys’” (Charles 320). Magdalena therefore has personal experience when it comes to the “bad reputation” that accompanies bringing “scandal” to one’s family, specifically within an intimate, “local moral community” such as Kensington (Charles 320; Salo 353). Finally, this experience significantly affects the way in which she functions as a mother.

Modesty is a feminised behaviour insisted upon within this so-called “sphere of purity” and for this reason, Magdalena is particularly austere when it comes to Eve, her most curious and sexually inquisitive child (Salo 353). Our first encounter with Magdalena’s “tough nurturing”, to echo Salo, occurs when Eve is around six years old; while being sexually explorative for the very first time with a little boy named Ivan, Eve is caught by her two older sisters and her mother consequently beats her with a slipper (359; Charles 39). In this instance, Magdalena calls her daughter “a cheap little bitch” and “a disgrace” to their family, and she warns Eve as well: “If you think you’re going to put us all in the eyes you’re mistaken. This yard doesn’t need another slut. Lynette is more than enough” (Charles 39). Finally, Eve responds by telling the reader: “That day [my mother] threw me out of her nest [...]. I realised I must have done something

terribly, terribly wrong” (Charles 39–40). At first glance, one might jump to the conclusion that this is an illustration of ‘bad’ mothering; however, considering Magdalena’s powerful status as a mother, alongside the power that Eve holds as a daughter to obliterate not only her own reputation but also that of her entire family, this urge to criticise Magdalena’s mothering behaviours as ‘bad’ is not fully justifiable.

Considering the power dynamic at play here in the context of *ordentlikheid*, as well as Magdalena’s remaining children and those to come, it is plausible that she would utilise shame as a regulatory tool – a learned mothering behaviour, I contend – to not only reprimand Eve but also to distance herself from a daughter who could potentially ruin her and her family’s status as *ordentlik*. We need to account for Magdalena’s personal experience of shame that accompanies bringing dishonour to one’s family: in this regard, she arguably acts as a guardian of her family’s moral standing by metaphorically throwing Eve “out of her nest” (Charles 40). This is not to say, however, that Magdalena does not care for her daughter. On the contrary, I believe that her stringent policing of Eve’s behaviour is done out of love, but that “tough nurturing” is the norm within low-resource contexts and townships such as Kensington (Salo 359). The “allocation of honour and shame” is regulatory behaviour that has been ingrained and passed down for generations; certainly, shame has the ability to render unavailable the “respectable trajectory” offered to ‘coloured’ South Africans (Jeftha 28). Finally, as Jeftha notes, Magdalena’s reaction to Eve’s sexual deviance echoes internalised hypersexual stereotypes of black women, and also Baderoon’s argument concerning black bodies as primarily “responsible for their own violation” (32; see Chapter Four).

Ordentlikheid is crucial to maintain for it “offers positive imaginative horizons” for ‘coloured’ people such as “escaping or at least envisaging an alternative to the harshness of everyday worlds of poor people in South Africa and the structural violence that shapes them” (Ross 99). However, as Ross contends, significant contradictions exist concerning the insistence upon a certain performance within the public eye of the working-class; the binary of *ordentlik* and *rou* echoes “a pernicious evolutionary ranking system” that sought to separate “the ‘civilizable native’ (subject to recognizable laws) from ‘bushmen’” (99). Thus, Magdalena is a mother who functions within a context rife with psychological warfare and structural violence against people of colour, as well as internalised racism (Adhikari 143). Gqola confirms the latter in her book, *Rape* (2016) when she explains that “[s]lavery and colonialism were rooted in

violence and violation, in the negation of some lives and tearing apart of families, and the ingraining of self-hate” (60). Furthermore, as articulated by Jeftha, following Zimitri Erasmus, some “coloureds have contributed to the maintenance of a racial hierarchy in efforts to aspire to whiteness and reject Africanity, ascribing to Eurocentric thought”, thereby exhibiting their own involvement in maintaining structures of violence and discrimination (29).

As an instance of internalised racism in the novel, Eve is told by an uncle that she cannot visit her Aunt Maggie because her aunt lives in a white area; he tells her that ‘coloured’ people “are gam¹³” (Charles 57). According to Mohamed Adhikari, “vague connotations of a servile past have been attached to Coloured identity through, for example, [...] the use of the pejorative label ‘Gam’ to describe working-class Coloured people” (Adhikari 160). *Ordentlikheid* therefore comprises “the intense, lifelong social and physical work” that women are compelled to perform in order to maintain an ‘appropriate’ femininity as required by the category ‘woman’, a category that fails to account for differences between women and is largely based on whiteness as the ‘ideal’ (Salo qtd. in Ross 99). Although an insistence on *ordentlikheid* had advantages concerning social status in the past, as well as the repositioning of ‘coloured’ identities, it remains a means of conformity based upon racial discrimination and internalised “rules of hierarchy” (Jeftha 29; Ross 99). Therefore, as Jeftha explains, the “contradictions that characterised the identity ‘coloured’ in colonial and public discourse” need to be acknowledged in order to “remap coloured identities within positive parameters” (Gqola qtd. in Jeftha 29). Returning to the violence that characterised this period, the Forbes’ recurring exposure to both psychological (racial discrimination and injustice in the apartheid era) and physical (Richard’s domestic abuse) forms of violence is significant for it highlights Magdalena’s devotion as a mother to “the local code of modesty, interdependence and self-sacrifice” (Salo 353).

First, Magdalena refuses to go to church with bruises on her face – “The thing she valued most in her life was the impression she made on her brothers and sisters at church” – thus, one’s appearance of modesty in the public sphere takes priority (Charles 84). This is, of course, understandable given the contextual stressor of continuously upholding *ordentlikheid*, regardless of circumstance. Second, given her impoverished position and abundance of children, she has the strength to remain faithful to her marriage since “[t]here was no possibility that she could ask a

¹³ As articulated by Adhikari, “‘Gam’ is the Afrikaans word for ‘Ham’, and is a reference to the biblically derived justification for the enslavement of black people” (160). Similarly, Gerald Stone defines ‘gam’ as “descendant of Ham, disreputable, outcast” (qtd. in Mesthrie and Hurst 104).

friend or a relative for help” to separate from Richard; as a family they are interdependent (Charles 89). However, Magdalena remains the primary carer of the children, and Richard’s lack of support and abuse contributes to rendering her mothering ‘ineffective’ in some instances (Herland and Helgeland 52). Furthermore, access to networks of practical support is vital (see Read et. al, 2012) and yet they are limited in this context. Despite the apartheid government’s provision of financial aid for women such as Magdalena, this regime left people of colour in an unfavourable economic position, and so this funding was not sufficient. Support for women who are victims of gender-based violence is also scant as this particular strain of violence was treated as ordinary in Kensington (Charles 209). Finally, despite her children’s fears that one day their father might actually kill her, Magdalena attempts “to soak up [Richard’s] aggression to keep it from [her children]” (Charles 81–82). Evidently, the odds are stacked against her, and yet she remains in many ways an ‘effective’ and ‘self-sacrificial’ mother because she sacrifices not only her time and energy, but also, *her body* for the survival of her family.

As previously mentioned, children in working-class communities provided additional income to the family because “child welfare grants were only payable to women as mothers”, therefore ‘coloured’ women had “privileged access” to a stable source of income (Salo 349, 354). With a husband who is often “jobless” while she has a number of mouths to feed, this funding for which Magdalena is eligible, contributes substantially to the family’s financial survival (Charles 66). Additionally, Magdalena uses her body to safeguard her children from Richard and his “terrible devils” (Charles 81). In this way, she exhibits ‘effective’ mothering behaviours through her self-sacrificial nature; however, she is at the same time distant as a mother, thereby proving the nuances of mothering behaviours commonly unaccounted for by dominant discourses on ‘appropriate’ mothering and theoretical thought on self-sacrifice as a parent. Magdalena’s behaviour evidences that there are different ways of exercising ‘effective’ care. In a low-income, low-resource context such as Kensington, and in post-apartheid marginalised contexts such as Manenberg, ‘tough nurturing’ might be considered ‘effective’ parenting behaviours since these are contexts that economically brutalise and violate people of colour. In view of this, it is also understandable that Magdalena’s melancholy sometimes turns to rage (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, privileged mothers cannot necessarily be said to have ‘more effective’ parenting strategies than underprivileged mothers. Magdalena dedicates her life to her children, and time is rarely taken for herself. This is made evident when Eve contemplates the following:

I'm sure she sometimes wanted to show us more of her true feelings, but I think the circumstances didn't allow her the luxury of showing us her love and affection. All her energy went straight to her bones. Bones that carried her twelve hours a day, cooking, washing, feeding, keeping at bay the germs, trouble, boys and devils. (Charles 88)

Of course, Magdalena's melancholic mothering and her distant demeanour influence the way in which she functions as a mother. However, even as a melancholic mother plagued by economic brutality and various forms of violence, she still manages to push forward for the sake of her family by finding brief moments of joy and laughter in the midst of the pain, and keeping "a big reservoir of affection" for when her children need it most (Charles 85, 88).

To draw on Herland and Helgeland once more, it is vital to bear motherhood in mind as "created through a white, middle-class, heterosexual lens, limiting society's ability to see the diversity of women's lives" and the diversity of 'effective' parenting methods (47). It is also necessary to acknowledge that not only do women criticise themselves as mothers, but they also criticise each other (Herland and Helgeland 49). Charles's novel and the context of *ordentlikheid* illuminate this criticism and exemplify that across contexts and literary representations, "mothers are primarily [and unfairly] responsible for the failed children" (M. Hirsch 48). Indeed, Magdalena's experience of motherhood as compared to Mrs Lisbon's and Adora's, illustrates the diversity of motherhood in literary representations. Furthermore, these respective experiences display factors highlighted by Belsky's theory that substantially influence mothering behaviours and one's capacity to mother 'effectively'. There are a multitude of influences in the lives of women, and so placing blame upon mothers alone becomes ludicrous.

The chapter to follow seeks to deliberate the most disregarded factor of all within Belsky's theory; namely, "the child's characteristics and individuality" (Ateah et al. 3110). In this chapter, I consider 'the failed children' of these mothers as "knowing and active agents" who refuse to conform and noticeably resist the rigid guidelines passed down to them by mothers who have largely internalised patriarchal thought (Patel 63). In essence, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that girls are *individuals* with *agency*; hence, mothers cannot be held solely responsible for their deviant daughters.

Chapter four: ‘the failed children’

This is what most girls are taught — that we should be slender and small. We should not take up space. We should be seen and not heard, and if we are seen, we should be pleasing to men, acceptable to society. And most women know this, that we are supposed to disappear, but [...] we can resist surrendering.
— Roxanne Gay

The entanglement and autonomy of girls

Returning to Alison Stone’s summary of Christine Battersby’s “five features of subjectivity”, I remain interested in the influence that asymmetrical dependence and overt maternal power have on daughters who are in the process of ‘becoming-woman’ (168). According to Stone, “mothers and representatives of the maternal position” exert incredible emotional, affective, and corporeal power over the natal self, and it is because of this “emotional power within early mother-child relations that children tend to react in fear and hostility *against* maternal and female power, and hence come to support and maintain patriarchy” (169, emphasis in original). This is thought-provoking because Stone’s emphasis on maternal power here as a feature of subjectivity, and the hostility that tends to follow, echoes discussions of Freud’s Oedipal complex in Chapter Two.

The theory underpinning the Oedipal Complex posits that during their ‘process of becoming’, the girl child or female subject might “break away from their dependency on their mother” by transferring desire onto their father instead (Stone 169; Kenway and Fahey 644). In other words, for the girl child to “achieve autonomy and separateness” from her mother, she has to commit to what Julia Kristeva refers as ‘matricide’ (Stone 169). However, this detachment is complicated, for as Kaja Silverman theorises, despite the girl child’s decrial of her mother, she remains under “enormous cultural pressure to continue to identify with the mother” (qtd. in Kenway and Fahey 644). Likewise, to echo Stone, ‘matricide’ considerably “privileges the (traditionally) male subject position” since as female subjects, daughters “cannot break from their mothers as sons can, because daughters must continue to identify with their mothers to assume a female identity, as they are expected to do” (169). It is here within the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship that Silverman asserts “melancholia enters the picture”, and so we begin to see the ways in which daughters are essentially *entangled* with their maternal figures (qtd. in Kenway and Fahey 644). Finally, it is important to discuss this entanglement in relation to the girl child’s

subsequent defiance of her mother; examples of which are evident in all three of my primary texts.

Bearing maternal power and entanglement in mind, the third feature of subjectivity, as discussed by Stone, illuminates that because we are born “radically dependent upon and *entwined* with our carers, we only *gradually* become distinct individuals” (168, emphasis added). For this reason, the division between “self” and “other” is indefinite; instead, “each self is in a *continuous* process of emergence from the ‘intersecting force fields’ of its power-laden relations with others (Stone 168, emphasis added). And in consequence, as Stone explains, the self is “embodied” (the fourth feature of subjectivity), emerging specifically “from this field of ‘fleshy continuity’ with others” (168). In this understanding of subjectivity, no definite “self/other division” develops between mother and daughter because “female subjects remain immured in dependency on their mothers” despite the ‘matricide’ that ensues (Stone 168, 170). Of course, this fleshy continuity exists between mothers and sons too, though this is not the focus of my dissertation. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Three, daughters inherit significant parts of themselves from their mothers, blurring this division even further. In light of this, Stone explains that daughters “remain embroiled in a lifelong and irresolvable struggle for autonomy¹, ever preoccupied with conflict with and reliance upon their mothers” (170). It is therefore plausible to maintain that mothers and daughters remain forever entwined and entangled, a relationship that is undeniable when considering the genealogy of women as well as the potency of a mother’s ‘emotional archive’, which brings us to the final feature of subjectivity.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the self is considered ‘monstrous’ in its ability to ‘take up’ and procure various ways of being simultaneously; this is significant when recognising the agency of girls as *individuals*. In fact, this notion takes us back to research conducted on girls and their subject positions discussed in Chapter One. To recapitulate, girlhood is a period of socialisation, an impressionable phase of development in which girls are socially conditioned and primed to observe the conventions suggested by the category ‘woman’ in a “complex process of becoming” (Allen 216). However, despite their socialisation into ‘appropriate’ gender roles, girls as female subjects remain “knowing and active agents” who have the agency to “*position themselves*” (Patel 63; Allen 216; Jones 159, emphasis in original). Indeed, girls may

¹ However, according to Stone, the same cannot be said for sons since she claims that they are significantly able to “break from their mothers” successfully and “move on” (Stone 169–170).

“engage several meanings or positionings simultaneously”, including ones that may appear contradictory, and so the development of “feminine subjectivities” varies significantly across contexts (Allen 216; Jones 159). As articulated by Roxanne Gay in her collection of essays entitled *Bad Feminist* (2014):

Girls have been written and represented in popular culture in many different ways. Most of these representations have been largely unsatisfying because they never get girlhood quite right. It is not possible for girlhood to be represented wholly – girlhood is too vast and too individual an experience. We can only try to represent girlhood in ways that are varied and recognizable. (53)

Therefore, what constitutes being a girl child is “ultimately about the gendered effects of living in heteronormativity” and it is for this very reason I have chosen to discuss three separate experiences of girlhood that are different as much as they are similar (Reddy 79).

Girls have the agency to ‘position themselves’; however, as discussed in Chapter One, the socialisation of girls is ever present, and an “*unevenness* of power” still remains (Jones 160, emphasis in original). Dominant discourses concerning “gender-differentiated positions” still prevail; therefore, spaces unrestricted by gendered and/or heteropatriarchal thinking do not exist, and many girls have to contend with a “process of apprenticeship” to their mothers during girlhood, choosing to deviate only later in life (Jones 161; M. Hirsch 19). However, this deviance is also relevant to girlhood. As Alison Jones explains, it is within “the gaps opened by this unevenness [of power] that the possibilities for resistance and change can be developed” (161). Thus, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the agency of certain girls in literary representations by utilising Jay Belsky’s theory and the influence of “the child’s characteristics and individuality” upon mothering (Ateah et al. 3110). Ultimately, this chapter aims to confirm that the mothers of my primary texts cannot be held primarily responsible for their daughters’ deviance.

According to Alana Barton, and as discussed in Chapter One, women have been exposed to a variety of methods “designed to regulate, control and reform them back to an appropriate standard of femininity” for centuries; this is because traditionally, women have been regarded as ‘deviant’ subjects (158). As Barton explains, the nineteenth century “feminine ideal [...] was based on a [middle-class] construction of virtue that set the standard of behaviour for all women” – essentially, this standard became the foundation of the category ‘woman’ and is noticeably an expectation that mothers pass down to their daughters (159). In fact, Judith Walkowitz refers to

this action of ‘passing down’ as a “‘hierarchal female network’ through which one generation of females socialises the next to adhere to specific domestic and sexual ‘norms’” (qtd. in Barton 160). This ‘network’ has been thoroughly explored in the case of mothering behaviours throughout my dissertation; however, it is now appropriate to turn our attention to the daughters who are subjected to it and the deviance that ensues.

The ‘wayward’ girls in *The Virgin Suicides*

As indicated by Belsky’s theory, the third and final cause of influence on Mrs Lisbon’s mothering behaviours is “the child’s characteristics and individuality” (Ateah et al. 3110). What this factor indicates is not only the Lisbon girls’ entanglement with their mother, but also their own in/dependence. For example, Lux Lisbon’s deviance in the novel has a significant influence upon Mrs Lisbon’s mothering, just as her mother’s melancholia has a significant influence on Lux and her ‘becoming-woman’. Accordingly, in view of the agentic capacity of the Lisbon girls, blame cannot be placed upon Mrs Lisbon alone for the “mortal sin” that Lux and her siblings choose to commit: suicide (Eugenides 34).

As articulated by Bilyana Kostova, suburbia “obliterates individuality by repressing it and replacing it with boredom and conformity” (49–50). And since Lux Lisbon and her sisters are raised by an austere mother in a devoted Catholic household, nestled within the insipid middle-class suburbs of Detroit circa the 1970s, this obliteration and repression is particularly evident in Jeffrey Eugenides’s narration of their lives. The collective male narrator is frequently guilty of eliminating the individuality and subjectivity of the Lisbon girls by conflating the five sisters, envisioning them as identical replicas of Lux alone (Dines 964; Shostak 810). Significantly, Lux is “the only one who [...] radiated health and mischief” in their eyes, and so she becomes the narrator’s primary fixation (Eugenides 24). This is because, as Kostova explains, the boys are “products of suburbia and of its ritualistic banality” and therefore, “resemble this position of the suburban community” (50). And so, as the collective male narrator conflates itself into one voice, so too does it conflate the Lisbon girls into one face, the object of their desire: Lux. Despite the girls’ collective defiance at the novel’s conclusion, Lux is arguably the most deviant or ‘wayward’² of the Lisbon girls because she actively attempts to set herself apart from her sisters on multiple occasions. As a fourteen-year-old and the second youngest of the Lisbon girls,

² Alana Barton lists “‘wayward’ girls in need of protection [i.e. regulation]” among others within “a whole range of deviant women” according to the Lancashire Country Refuge for the Destitute circa the 1800s in Liverpool (161).

Lux is an incorrigible girl child who deviates from the norms of ‘appropriate’ femininity insisted upon by her mother; instead, she chooses to explore her emerging sexuality, as well as her curiosity for that which is considered disobedient and/or prohibited.

Eugenides flags Lux’s flair for deviance from the onset of the novel. As articulated by the narrator, Mrs Lisbon would regularly inspect the appearance of each of her daughters before attending church, “and it was not unusual for her to send Lux back inside to put on a less revealing top” (Eugenides 6). However, it is only following the loss of her youngest sister amidst the deterioration of the suburbs that she begins to engage in risk-taking behaviours (Kostova 50). In a study of risk behaviours among adolescent girls, Eileen Africa and Karel Van Deventer describe “[y]outh risk behaviours” as “undesirable health behaviours adopted in childhood or adolescence” (265). These behaviours include drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, “irresponsible sexual behaviours” and “unhealthy eating habits”, and may occur during adolescence when girls find it difficult to grapple “with life’s complexities” and/or when they exist within unfortunate “socio-economic circumstances” beyond their control (Africa and Van Deventer 265–266). While Lux exhibits all four of these risk behaviours, it is important to acknowledge the shift that takes place on the night of the Homecoming Dance; the one and only dance that the Lisbon girls are allowed to attend, thanks to Trip Fontaine and his fixation on Lux.

Initially, Lux explores her ‘becoming-woman’ and budding sexuality with several boys from school. And since she and her sisters are not allowed to date, these “brief unisons”, involving the sexual act of fingering, are kept secret from her mother (Eugenides 64–65). As discussed in Chapter One, the sexual stimulation of one’s genitals has been traditionally deemed as deviant and ‘impure’ behaviour, particularly prohibited for girls and women (see Carvalheira and Leal 2013). Furthermore, it is significant that Lux is also fingered by Trip on the evening he visits her family in his attempt to win her parents’ approval. At the end of a night sworn to opposite sides of the couch, Lux manages to escape her mother’s house and mounts Trip in his car with “torrid kisses” (Eugenides 82). And as the narrator notes, Trip does what he can to pacify both her mouth and her vagina “struggling to get out of its damp cage” (Eugenides 82). It is plausible to assume that to Lux, Trip would have likewise been one of numerous “brief” sexual encounters (Eugenides 82). However, he manages to convince the Lisbons to allow him to take her and her sisters to the school dance, and so their relationship has an opportunity to progress.

Beside this, it is vital to note that by this time, Lux's socio-economic context is noticeably changing, and this has an influence on her behaviour. For instance, following Cecilia's passing, the media is seen to show an increased concern in suicide as "a national crisis" among adolescents, "just as things were getting back to normal" (Eugenides 92–94). Additionally, Eugenides subtly informs his reader of "the influx of black shoppers" from the city who at this time had begun to infiltrate the predominantly white suburbs; this is because "[t]he city downtown had deteriorated to such a degree that most blacks had no other place to go" (95). Thus, as a result of the increasing racist anxiety and "scrutiny" within the suburbs, the Lisbon girls decide "to keep a low profile" and it is at this point that we are told of Lux's smoking cigarettes at school with Julie Winthrop (Eugenides 97). According to Julie, although the two girls were merely "cig friends", Lux had expressed how much she hated their school and longed to escape the suburbs (Eugenides 97). Julie also recalls a time whereby Lux lay without a word, quietly "hugging herself" and "shaking" as though she were freezing cold (Eugenides 98). Lux begins to exhibit risk-taking behaviours following the terrible loss of her sister, "amidst the socio-economic depression" and "collective malaise" that characterised suburbia during the 1970s, and I contend that it is largely for this reason that she becomes particularly 'wayward' (Kostova 49–50). In essence, Lux is influenced by the anxiety to perform 'appropriate' femininity at home as well as the anxiety of uncertainty generated within the suburbs and its need for conformity; her 'becoming-woman' thereby becomes a melancholic state (Kenway and Fahey 644).

Nevertheless, returning to Trip, he and his friends are permitted to take Lux and her sisters to the Homecoming Dance, and so the peak of the novel occurs at the moment that permanently shifts the lives of the Lisbon girls: namely, Lux's deviance and the girls' subsequent isolation. On the night of the dance, Lux drinks alcohol with Trip on school property and copulates with him for the very first time, crying in the middle and confessing that she "always screws things up" (Eugenides 125, 133). Alas, Lux chooses to miss her curfew and returns home with alcohol on her breath. As a consequence, Mrs Lisbon eliminates her daughters' contact with the outside world by removing all four of them from school (Eugenides 138). While I have discussed this method of discipline in Chapter Three, I remain interested in the girls' shared punishment, as if all four of them are to blame for Lux's deviance. It is evident that just like the narrators, the Lisbons too are guilty of viewing their daughters as a collective, since one rule applies to all –

we see this for certain in the condition that Lux could attend the dance as long as her sisters could attend too (Eugenides 109). The individuality of Lux and her sisters is thus stifled once again.

In her Catholic household, Lux's deviance as a 'wayward' girl is a direct illustration of disobedience; she has failed to honour her mother, and therefore, she has failed to honour the category 'woman'. It is thus plausible that Lux may have come to contemplate the futility of life as a woman pitted against the insistence on unattainable ideals in a visibly waning world (Kostova 49). Consequently, Dr Hornicker suggests that she may have resorted to copulation "with faceless boys and men" as "a substitute for the comfort she needed" following the loss of Cecilia (Eugenides 140, 84). My contention, however, is that while the loss of her sister is undoubtedly painful, the violence she and her sisters experience in the attack on their own individuality and subjectivity is perhaps equally painful. As articulated by Kostova, Lux and her sisters wished "to break away from the oppression represented by suburban life", and so their suicides become "both the symptom and the cause of a collective suburban malaise" (53). Therefore, not only are the girls denied a sense of individuality at home under their mother's watchful eye, but they are also denied individual subjectivity by the collective male narrator (and by extension, their community) who elects to tell their story despite "their deliberate negligence in not getting to know the five sisters or letting them have their own voice" (50; Dines 964). The narrator essentially "does violence" to the Lisbon girls by replacing them with "objects that belonged to them" instead of acknowledging their physical existence; this approach objectifies the girls, and could have a hand in their suicides (Kostova 51, 55; Shostak 814).

Considering this symbolic violence, and in view of Mrs Lisbon's melancholic mothering alongside her daughters' existence within suburbia as "a site of conflict undergoing change", the girls' suicides cannot be blamed on Mrs Lisbon as a mother, nor on the Lisbons as parents (Dines 961). Lux and her sisters are repressed as individuals, and they are also at the same time *silenced* by their mother and their community. Indeed, Debra Shostak contends that "the Lisbon girls are silenced by the *social construction* of their femininity, an imprisonment eventually literalized when they are imprisoned within their own house" (814, emphasis added). Nevertheless, despite this silencing and its link to feminised behaviours, one cannot overlook the fact that as "knowing and active agents", the girls' suicides are primarily "a very personal act" and not necessarily an indication of 'ineffective' mothering/parenting (Patel 63; Kostova 49). And although there is no

direct evidence for *why* the Lisbon girls chose to take their own lives in unison on the anniversary of Cecilia's suicide attempt, their lives within the middle-class remain significant. Dr Hornicker, for example, attributes their suicides to a "combination of many factors", including "family abuse", "genetic predisposition", "historical malaise", and "inevitable momentum" (Eugenides 242). Of course, these factors are important to note; however, I am particularly interested in his use of "inevitable momentum" as a factor succeeding their youngest sister's death, as though the girls followed along blindly. Dr Hornicker justifies his position by stating that "for the sibling of an [adolescent lost to suicide] to act out suicidal behaviour in an attempt to come to grips with their grief" is "not unusual"; and yet, his jotting down of the word "lemmings", referring to people who thoughtlessly follow the masses to conform, is telling (Eugenides 152). Therefore, Dr Hornicker too, as a final beacon of hope, fails to do justice to the memory of the Lisbon girls by neglecting to view each girl child as a 'knowing' and 'active agent' capable of making individual decisions for *herself*.

The girls' personal characteristics and individuality are repressed once again, and while the four remaining girls decide to take their own lives in unison, it is nevertheless arguably an act of agency. As articulated by the collective male narrator:

The essence of the suicides consisted not of sadness or mystery but simple selfishness. [...] What lingered after them was not life, which always overcomes natural death, but the most trivial list of mundane facts [...] and the outrageousness of a human being thinking only of herself. (Eugenides 242)

Thus, regardless of the many theories that attempt to understand their suicides, the main issue is that the Lisbon girls were ultimately aware of their socio-political context, as well as the "homogeneity and artificiality of the time" in which they existed (Kostova 50). Therefore, as 'knowing and active agents' the controversial decision to end their lives could very likely be understood as an act of defiance; they challenge not only the category 'woman' that their mother continuously groomed them to uphold and embody, but also the male gaze of their heteropatriarchal world that viewed them as nothing more than objectified and subordinate *lemmings*.

As the narrator acknowledges in the end, "the tortures tearing the Lisbon girls pointed to a simple reasoned refusal to accept the world as it was *handed down to them*, so full of flaws" (Eugenides 239, emphasis added). Thus, as 'knowing and active agents', the girls prove to the

devoted collective male narrator, and in some sense to their parents as well, that they had never been and never would be truly revealed to them (Eugenides 210). The girls elect to take action against a future of mere *survival* in a heteropatriarchal world by choosing death instead, and ultimately resisting the “tricks” they are handed down by their mother as means to endure (Rich qtd. in M. Hirsch 44). As Judith Butler’s theory of performative agency suggests, agency is embedded in the “process of subjectivation”, and so “by making changes in the repetitive performances of subjectivity”, norms may be effectively subverted and displaced (Nentwich et al. 240). In this regard, and in their suicides as the ultimate sin, the Lisbon girls therefore redirect their lives as governed by the category ‘woman’ and female subordination. Instead, they choose to completely eradicate their own existence, and join their little sister in death as freedom.

I am not convinced that the Lisbon girls are lemmings for two reasons. First, as “*knowing* and active agents”, their collective suicide cannot be regarded as a thoughtless decision (Patel 63, emphasis added). And second, this decision is not impulsive, but rather meticulously planned in advance. In fact, the collective male narrator is invited to their home to bear witness to their plan, albeit under the false pretence that they are to rescue the girls and take them someplace far away (Eugenides 203). In the end, it is not the collective male narrator who is the hero of this story as they had hoped to be, it is the girls who take action together in order to rescue themselves. And so, as the narrator reveals, upon finding Bonnie as she hangs by a rope in the basement:

We had never known her. They had brought us here to find that out. [...] Most likely, Bonnie died while we sat in the living room, dreaming of highways. Mary put her head in the oven shortly thereafter, on hearing Bonnie kick the trunk out from under herself. They were ready to assist one another, if need be. (Eugenides 210)

As for Lux, the narrator adds, “She had *escaped* in the car just as [they] had expected” (Eugenides 211, emphasis added). After first distracting the boys in the living room for a period of time, she proceeds to take her own life in her parents’ car by way of carbon monoxide poisoning. This distraction, as it happens, was merely a way to stall the boys, “so that she and her sisters could die in peace” (Eugenides 211).

Mrs Lisbon cannot be held primarily responsible for the decisions of her daughters because as agentic beings, the Lisbon girls have the ability to ‘position themselves’ based on the subject positions made available to them. As previously mentioned, power cannot be absolute and the “potential for resistance” is ever-present (Allen 217). Therefore, instead of ‘becoming-woman’

by “participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices”, the girls manage to *escape* the confines of the category ‘woman’ by committing suicide as their final resistance (Jones 159). And for that reason, Mrs Lisbon cannot be expected to control the behaviours or actions of her daughters completely; her power as a mother cannot be considered absolute. Consequently, the individual decisions of her daughters need to be considered as such – as individual, and free from possible intervention.

The ‘monstrous’ girl in *Sharp Objects*

Returning to Adora Crellin’s “uncontrollable consumption” (see Chapter Three), Alyson Miller contends that in accordance with the Kristevan notion of the ‘archaic mother’, it is ultimately when Adora loses control and murders her daughter, Marian, that the “monstrous [child]” enters the picture: Amma (496). Amma’s ‘evilness’ is thereby framed as “an inherited, natural force that neither [she] nor society can escape”, and so, her “characteristics and individuality” prove significant when seen in juxtaposition with Adora’s mothering behaviours (Miller 490; Ateah et al. 3110).

In view of Miller’s discussion of child murderers in literary representations, it is a useful point of departure to regard thirteen-year-old Amma Crellin as a ‘monstrous’ child first and foremost, produced by heteropatriarchal discourses:

Able to disrupt a popular imaginary which insists on [the] innocence [of children] despite a persistent mythology of transgression, the evil child is a provocation, yet it is also a figure with the ability to expose *underlying systems of power* which seek to dominate and control the “other.” (492, emphasis added)

Amma as an ‘evil’ or ‘monstrous’ child therefore not only “resists containment” but she also exposes the “compulsion [of these narratives] to locate transgression [or deviance] within the bodies and behaviours of women” (Miller 492). Just as her mother, Amma is “a distorted girl-woman” who displays separate subject positions in the public and private spheres respectively; she and her mother are entangled (Miller 495). However, Amma’s deviance is hidden from Adora as she clandestinely alternates between performing as her mother’s baby doll in the private sphere, and as a deviant adolescent girl in the public sphere where she has great influence and power amongst her peers.

In the HBO television adaption of the novel, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, Amma discusses with Camille the way in which she dresses herself inside, as opposed to outside, of Adora’s

stringent household. Although this scene does not take place in the novel, it is a profound insight since Amma admits to her own wilfulness. In this instance, she acknowledges that at home she is simply Adora's "little doll to dress up", and that while her mother often describes Camille as being an "incorrigible" girl child, she admits: "I'm incorrigible too, only she doesn't know it" ("Vanish" 53:47–54:15). As Camille articulates in the novel, "Amma hurt other people" when she required attention; a trait learned from her MSbP mother (Flynn 241–242). However, she also made use of recreational drugs and copulation as means of coping with Adora's mothering behaviours – of course, these are notable risk behaviours (Eugenides 288). Certainly, Amma is an incorrigible girl child, but for different reasons than her eldest sister; the acme of her private deviance being the respective murders of two little Wind Gap girls who refuse to conform.

Camille describes Amma's victims, Ann and Natalie, as "violent little girls" for she is told by multiple people within the community that these girls had "serious tempers" and were most notably "biters" (Flynn 348, 250). This particular detail speaks volumes as to why the girls' teeth are removed after they are killed, and is a detail that becomes increasingly significant when mindful of Detective Richard Willis' comment that a smile is a girl's best weapon (Flynn 366). It is also worth noting that Ann and Natalie are from different social classes; according to Camille, "Natalie came from a moneyed family, still fairly new to Wind Gap. Ann was on the low end of middle class, and the Nashes had been in Wind Gap for generations" (Flynn 113). The lower-class mentioned here relates to Emily Schwalbe's work on antebellum society and the notion that "it was difficult for those not born into wealthy families to elevate their stations" (38). Regardless, as Camille notes, "Their only connection was a shared viciousness" (Flynn 113). Neither Ann nor Natalie performs 'appropriate' femininity in the eyes of Wind Gap as their violent behaviour is not 'ladylike' (Heilmann and Sanders 291). Amma, on the other hand, is conditioned to perform a certain kind of girlishness when in the presence of her mother, a performance of femininity which acts in direct contrast to the one she performs before her friends and older boys.

Before her mother, Amma is expected to perform as a young 'lady' by way of feminised behaviours mediated by the upper-class; for example displaying modesty, tenderness, and compliance. Conversely, at school and amongst her peers, Amma is in a position of power as the only biological daughter of the Crellin's, Wind Gap's most affluent family. Meredith Wheeler, the eldest sister of one of Amma's closest friends, confirms this power when she voices to

Camille that Amma reigns supreme over her school: “Be a fool that got on her bad side” (Flynn 198). Thus, Amma learns to utilise her power as a tool to manipulate those around her, bragging to Camille that her friends obey her every command because they are afraid of her; it is “Safer to be feared than loved” (Flynn 291–292). Moreover, Amma uses copulation as a weapon; she admits to this when she explains the following to Camille: “Sometimes if you let people do things to do, you’re really doing it to them. [...] If someone wants to do fucked-up things to you, and you let them, you’re making them more fucked-up. Then you have the control” (Flynn 288). Therefore, in this regard, Amma’s compliance sometimes becomes fundamentally deviant. This reflects some of Lux Lisbon’s behaviour because both she and Amma are stifled by conformity and compliance. According to Andrew McCann, “Sexual activity is the primary trope for the attainment of freedom” because “it encompasses the life-engendering and pleasurable elements missing in the sterile suburban world” (qtd. in the abstract of “Decomposing Suburbia: Patrick White’s Perversity”). Furthermore, in view of Amma’s supremacy amongst her peers, her rage and the subsequent murder of Ann and Natalie thus embody “an extreme version of a patriarchal logic that seeks to annihilate [...] the presence of the ‘other’” (Miller 495).

In an interview conducted with Gillian Flynn during the 2018 Chicago Humanities Festival, the significance of childhood trauma was highlighted from the onset of the discussion of *Sharp Objects*, in conjunction with the generational violence of women. Flynn mentioned that in her novel, all three of her primary female characters (Adora, Camille and Amma) learn to internalise female rage³, yet allow it to manifest in different ways. Adora, for instance, is born into a generation that regards female rage as ‘inappropriate’ and unconventional; thus, she internalises this aggression and “uses it to be seen as [the] perfect caregiver” (“Gillian Flynn ‘Sharp Objects’” 15:22–16:06). Similarly, Camille is of a generation that advocates the liberation of women, and yet female rage is still not “fully emancipated” in all spaces; therefore, she “turns that rage inward” by cutting and tending to herself instead (“Gillian Flynn ‘Sharp Objects’” 16:05–16:26). However, Amma has more freedom to exhibit her rage, and she manipulates her friends to assist her in quelling her urge to “hurt” others, an urge she owes to boredom (Flynn 291). Arguably, Amma is a product of both her mother and of society; she learns to master indirect aggression by watching and learning from Adora, yet she likewise comes to the

³ I do believe that rage is inherent; women are human beings, and so we need to make allowance for their rage and aggression. However, more often than not, women’s rage appears to be internalised, and it can manifest itself in various ways such as shame (see Chapter Two).

realisation that in Wind Gap, indirect aggression is a strategy that women need to develop in order to survive. Amma acknowledges the ferocity of girls when she tells Camille that while her friends are submissive, they do not “like” her: “The second I fuck up, the second I do something uncool, they’ll be the first to gang up against me” (Flynn 289). Amma is, as described by Miller, a “borderline subject” who holds the “ability to shift fluidly between states of childlike innocence and adult violence” (498). She exercises her agency at will and frequently rebels against ‘appropriate’ femininity that requires her to remain passive and ‘sweet’ as a girl child ‘becoming-woman’.

According to Miller, “*Sharp Objects* insists on an internalisation of the regulatory practices of patriarchy” by way of Amma, and this internalisation is palpable since “the murders she commits ironically expose an insistence on the articulation of feminine behaviours that fulfil gendered stereotypes of passivity, silence, and compliance” (495). For instance, Detective Willis notes that both of Amma’s victims had been “tended to before they were killed” and that their parents had “noted uncharacteristic details” during the respective autopsies: “Natalie’s fingernails were painted a bright pink. Ann’s legs had been shaved. They both had lipstick applied at some point” (Flynn 366). And so, while it is simplistic to view Amma as Camille does – as a “monstrous double of the mother” – the aberrant behaviour she displays essentially performs “as a complex iteration of the dominant culture” (Thornham qtd. in Miller 495; Miller 495). Put differently, Adora attempts to regulate Ann’s and Natalie’s behaviour by taking them under her wing as a tutor or “mother’s aide at the grade school” they attend, “a coveted, elite position in the school that only women who didn’t work could do” (Flynn 338). Adora performs ‘appropriate’ femininity in the upper-class by being a devoted wife and mother in the private sphere, presenting more feminised behaviours rooted in the Victorian era, while also utilising her influence in the public sphere “to do good to others, rather than to satisfy [her] own personal ambitions” (Heilmann and Sanders 291). Amma, on the other hand, literally and physically enforces “an ultimate expression of femininity” through the murder of those who refuse to conform (Flynn 338; Miller 497).

Therefore, while Camille chooses to cut and tend to herself, Amma chooses to inflict violence upon others only to tend to them afterwards (Flynn 242). Miller encapsulates Amma perfectly by describing her as “an agent of patriarchy tasked with removing the threat posed by [Ann and Natalie]” (497–498). By grooming her victims as her mother has groomed her and her sisters,

Amma renders the bodies of Ann and Natalie as eternally “docile”, returning them to “a place of submission within the domestic sphere” and forcing them “back into line with the ideologies they have so flagrantly transgressed” (Miller 498). Certainly, it is evident that Amma comes from a genealogy of ‘disturbed women’; however, I do not believe that Adora is, as Camille states, primarily to blame for Amma’s deviant behaviour (Flynn 393). Amma has adopted many of her mother’s flawed characteristics passed down to her by means of Adora’s ‘intergenerational emotional archive’, and yet, when acknowledging the wealthy heteropatriarchal context and the pressure placed upon upper-class women to perform femininity in a very particular way, it is clear to see both Adora and Amma’s internalisation of “patriarchal mechanisms of control” (Miller 497). For that reason, while “Amma might be read as a rejection of proscriptive gender norms” as Miller suggests, she is likewise “a nightmare vision of a subject who has not only internalised patriarchal mechanisms of control” but who concomitantly endorses patriarchy’s “most logical conclusion” – to annihilate the ‘other’ (96–497).

Amma is a complex female character who successfully removes those who are willful and assertive from the public sphere, those who refuse to conform in “a patriarchal system that demands to both inhabit and contain the bodies of women” (Miller 494). In this regard, Amma and her ‘process of becoming’ are arguably poisoned by the archetype of the Southern Belle, a gendered performance considered the epitome of ‘woman’. Additionally, since this subject position is made available to her in the South as ‘ideally’ feminine, the resulting poisoning is to an extent inevitable. Nevertheless, as much as Amma attempts to hold others accountable for failing to uphold the category ‘woman’ and its notion of ‘appropriate’ femininity, she simultaneously positions herself as *incorrigible*. As Camille describes, Amma is somewhat Machiavellian⁴ because she admits to enjoying the power she has over her friends to make them cry whenever they choose to challenge her authority. It is, for Amma, “Safer to be feared than loved” (Flynn 290). And so, while she has come to internalise Southern heteropatriarchal expectations, along with the “regulatory practices” attached to upper-class ‘appropriate’ femininity, she simultaneously resists these practices by defying her mother in the world outside

⁴ According to Tamas Bereczkei and colleagues, Machiavellianism may be “defined as a behavior in which an individual uses another person as an instrument for achieving his/her goals” (240). In essence, Machiavellian people are said to “characteristically attribute negative intentions to others and do not expect co-operation from them”; thus, they consider themselves safer as feared by others than adored (Bereczkei et al. 240). Finally, Machiavellian people are described as “cold and manipulative” (Paulhus and Williams 557).

of her home (Miller 495). This is where we may effectively observe her agentic capacity as a liminal being, as a girl child who can at once both submit and resist.

In my view, it is simply impossible to categorically control the body and behaviours of a liminal being such as Amma for she has the ability to access multiple subject positions, including some that are conflicting (Jones 159). Amma essentially has the ability to camouflage herself in particular settings, such as the way in which she dresses and behaves around her mother at home. Consequently, Amma's behaviour becomes difficult to navigate and control when she is out of Adora's sight. Furthermore, since Adora's power is not absolute and resistance is an ever-present possibility, it becomes impossible to maintain complete authority over Amma. Therefore, in view of the various points that I have made above, I maintain that Adora cannot be held primarily responsible for the 'evil child' that is Amma.

The 'lustful' girl in *Eve*

In the context of *ordentlikheid* (see Chapter Three), surveillance is a significant part of Magdalena Forbes's role as a mother in the low-income, low-resource context of Kensington. And as her daughter, Eve Forbes is subjected to a great deal of this mandatory scrutiny. For this reason, Eve's "characteristics and individuality" (Ateah et al. 3110) require deliberation, particularly because she is a sexually curious or 'lustful' girl child whose lived experience during South Africa's apartheid era is determined by allocated shame. And in this context, "meanings of shame and honour" are rooted in a history of colonialism, racial oppression and "the control of slave sexuality" (Gqola 40).

As a 'coloured' girl child within this setting, Eve's 'process of becoming' is demarcated by certain expectations and pressures unexperienced by white girls within the global North or in fact, in the South; the same goes for Magdalena and her learned mothering behaviours. According to Barton, it is important to recognise that the nineteenth century, middle-class 'ideal' of 'appropriate' femininity has gradually "filtered down" to working-class societies, and has been "reinforced through a variety of routes", predominantly through dominant discourses such as religion and education, but also "through more informal channels" (159). Magdalena, for instance, is exposed to ideas of 'appropriate' femininity and *ordentlikheid* primarily through Judeo-Christian teachings. As Caryn Jeftha argues, the advice Magdalena receives from the women around her whilst 'becoming-woman' – "Don't mess around with boys" – accompanied by the strictures imposed on the 'sinful' act of copulation before marriage, is ultimately what

shapes her perception of copulation as taboo (33). And so, as a result of Magdalena's internalised heteropatriarchal thinking, Eve's mother teaches her about the importance of sexual 'purity' from an early age, using shame as a regulatory tool (Jeftha 32–33). We see this when Eve is called "a disgrace" to the family by her mother when she is caught being sexually explorative for the first time at age six. Indeed, she is ostracised by Magdalena in this instance, and she quickly learns that "her sexual behaviours" are to be kept "hidden" and shrouded in silence (Jeftha 31).

Sexual 'purity' is a feminised behaviour routinely insisted upon as 'appropriate' in Eve's girlhood, and she lists common phrases that her mother and other women have engrained into her head, such as "Stay clean"; your virginity is "your most valuable investment"; "You don't want to end up a slut, do you?"; give your "precious" virginity to "the man with a ring"; and finally, "No scandal for the family" (Charles 151). Therefore, Eve is taught by her mother and the women of her community that sexual 'impurity', "non-virgin" girls and "outcasts" are to be strictly shunned (Charles 114). As a striking example of the insistence upon sexual 'purity' in the context of *ordentlikheid*, regardless of circumstance, Eve's "very good friend", Lena, is one such individual who is to be "avoided" as an outcast for being sexually 'impure' (Charles 114). Lena was raped by a member of a notorious gang in Kensington, and Eve's response as well as that of her community is telling:

After the sympathy wore off, the news spread around the street that she was no longer a virgin. Mothers forbade their children to associate with her. Boys thought her to be fair game and covered her with insults. As for us girls, we avoided her, scared that her reputation would spread to us. (Charles 114)

This instance highlights two significant details: first, "sexual violence is an act of warfare"; and second, Lena's resulting sexual 'impurity' and 'bad' reputation are regarded as 'contagious' in the context of *ordentlikheid* (Gqola 41; Salo 353). What's more, the consideration of her body as 'fair game' due to her loss of 'virgin' status is particularly jarring because it evokes Pumla Dineo Gqola's sentiments that in South Africa, "women's bodies are seen as accessible for consumption" (73). Similarly, this position echoes Camille Preaker's sentiments in *Sharp Objects* that "[w]omen get consumed. Not surprising, considering the sheer amount of traffic a woman's body experiences. Tampons and speculums. Cocks, fingers, vibrators and more [...]. Men love to put things inside women, don't they?" (Flynn 321). Thus, the message in this context remains clear: "women, modify your behaviour, and adjust all aspects of your life" so as

to avoid “gender-based violence” (Gqola 73). Girls and women, such as Lena and later Eve, are therefore unfairly regarded as primarily “responsible for their own violation” since they are considered to have rendered themselves “vulnerable to rape” (Jeftha 32; Gqola 86).

The shame that Eve endures throughout the novel is assigned to her for a number of reasons, but most particularly for her failure to perform ‘appropriate’ femininity within a community that is governed by “the local code of modesty, interdependence and self-sacrifice” (Salo 353). From the onset, Eve acts upon a ‘lustful’ desire to explore her body and the bodies of others whenever she experiences feelings of arousal, and so her modesty is frequently in question. However, she finds herself “trapped between innocence and knowing” when her ability to *consent* becomes overlooked by the moral guardians of her community (Miller 490). This is discernible in Eve’s first sexual encounter at age six, and it solidifies at a later stage when Eve at age thirteen initiates an intimate relationship with her art teacher, a relationship that leads to recurrent rape by this man every Saturday for almost two years (Charles 193). As highlighted in Chapter Three, Magdalena’s rebuke of Eve as “a cheap little bitch” following her sexual deviance at age six is striking, and it reveals “questions around agency”, since she is treated as “an adult with the knowledge and insight to ‘know better’” in this instance (Charles 39; Jeftha 32). Consequently, as Jeftha contends, Eve is “taught to internalise marginalisation and punishment in connection with sexual curiosity and violation” (32). And it is within the entrapment between ‘innocence and knowing’, that Gqola’s notion of “the female fear factory” is made visible – as Jeftha further explains, Eve is being socialised “into the fold of the factory that produces female fear and [is] codified in a language of respectability” (33). In effect, she is taught “to fear the repercussions” that could accompany failing to comply with “the script given to girls about safety” and “fearing freedom” (Jeftha 33; Gqola 85–86).

Let us consider Eve as a ‘knowing and active agent’ for a moment. If she were, as a girl child, “a wonderfully hollow category” according to traditional understandings of “children as born into Adamic sin”, her deviance and/or ‘lustful’ behaviour would then be *a consequence* of the society in which she exists (Kincaid qtd. in Miller 490; Miller 489). Put differently, Eve’s deviance would ultimately perform as “a dark mirror” of that which is kept hidden within the fabric of *ordentlikheid*; as a girl child, she will have “become corrupted by society” (Miller 490). Therefore, Simon Bacon and Leo Ruickbie maintain that “childhood becomes a site of ongoing tensions between cultural ideals and collective guilt and repression, producing a fetishized body

intimating social anxiety and what the future might hold if such hidden desires become manifest” (qtd. in Miller 490). As a whole, this is an interesting argument to consider, especially in terms of allocating blame for Eve’s deviance, because her corruption as a girl child would then be inevitable and, therefore, would have little to do with the individually learned mothering behaviours of Magdalena. Additionally, when considering Eve’s agentic capacity as a girl child, it is evident that agency does not equate consent. Indeed, although Eve has the agency to choose for and position herself as a girl child, she exists in a world she does not maturely comprehend and act on, precisely because she is a child. It is for this reason that, when it concerns copulation, it is crucial to bear in mind that by law, a child is fundamentally unable to consent.

Eve is raped upon multiple occasions throughout her girlhood and by different men, although it is her art teacher, Mr Simon, who sexually violates her for the very first time. Significantly enough, Mr Simon reminds Eve of her father, Richard, and she notes that his “only attraction” as a man is “his power as a teacher” (Charles 109). Authority and “the rules of hierarchy” are therefore particularly important details within the novel and Eve’s perception of adulthood (Ross 99). As articulated by Fiona Ross, “*Ordentlike mense* (decent people) ‘know their place’”, and in the context of *ordentlikheid*, Eve quickly learns that her place is to stay out of the presence of adults and to keep questions to herself (99; Charles 14, 25). In fact, Eve is made aware of her place within the first few pages of the novel when her father beats her with his belt for being “in the company of grown-ups”, or rather, for brazenly taking up space as a girl child among adults (Charles 14). Furthermore, Ross explains that knowing one’s place is an instruction “firmly embedded in colonial society” that insists upon one’s adherence to “the rules of hierarchy that express and maintain power relations – including those of class, gender, and age” (99). Henceforth, Eve’s ‘becoming-woman’ takes place in a space that encompasses a number of limitations and boundaries, a space in which she holds very little power and control as a girl child. And in this space, as Jeftha maintains, she also learns “the unspoken system of appeasing adults (and those around her) through quietness and invisibility” (30). Power and control as commodities therefore become restricted to adulthood, and so Eve longs to be a grown-up; in fact, she refers to becoming “a big girl” as her “biggest wish” (Charles 106). Thus, she learns to manipulate the male gaze for her own personal gain, and this manipulation becomes a remarkable outlet of power despite her position hierarchically; in essence, Eve learns to use her body as a source of influence over boys and men alike.

As a ‘coloured’ working-class girl child, a position in society that hierarchically renders her powerless, Eve’s ability to influence and control the male gaze, such as that of Mr Simon, through the use of her body, is largely liberating for her. Thus, this behaviour (albeit defiant) is repeated and becomes characteristic because it is a successful way for Eve to escape “the rules of hierarchy that express and maintain power relations” in apartheid South Africa (Ross 99). Essentially, I consider Eve’s pursuit of a relationship with Mr Simon to have reasons that differ greatly from his; this is made palpable by Eve’s discomfort about their first sexual encounter, since copulation was never her primary motivation. Jeftha likewise confirms this discomfort by expressing that “Eve feels something is inherently wrong and dangerous about her adult art teacher kissing her and attempting to initiate intercourse” (36). Mr Simon, on the other hand, grooms Eve with gifts and other luxury items, as well as, most importantly, words of affirmation in an effort to sexually exploit her (Charles 157). He makes her feel safe, and since he reminds Eve of her father, this behaviour becomes confused with care, affection, and the kind of recognition that she longs to receive from her own father, yet hardly ever does. Alas, Eve’s innocence becomes “perverted under the control of Mr Simon” and the reality of her lack of power as a ‘coloured’ girl child makes itself known “in the scene where he first rapes her” (Jeftha 37). As a final point, while it is evident that Eve has the ability to become sexually aroused as I consider many girls do, I do not believe that this equates her ability to engage in consensual copulation and/or other sexual activities, regardless of her actions.

As a girl child, she cannot be held responsible for her own sexual violation.

It appears that her parents’ and her community’s total disregard for Eve’s *inability to consent* in this relationship with Mr Simon as a girl child, has plenty to do with the fact that she exists within a racially discriminatory regime built upon a history of slavery and colonialism. In fact, “Roman Dutch Law [...] once rendered Black⁵ women unrapable” and therefore, viewed them as “complicit with their own sexual violation” (Gqola 53; Baderoon qtd. in Jeftha 28). For this reason, as articulated by Gqola following Gabeba Baderoon, while it is necessary to acknowledge the “‘violence and sexual exploitation’ that characterised early Capetonian slaveholding society”, it is likewise imperative “that we try to take seriously the ‘trauma of slavery and sexual subjection’ on which South Africa is founded” (42, emphasis added).

⁵ Gqola uses a “capitalised Black here to refer to black and brown people, in other words, the collective people of African and South Asian descent” (4).

Consequently, in view of this contextual history and the political context of apartheid, Magdalena's 'intergenerational emotional archive' may be said to have an unbounded history of systematic violence, racial discrimination, and "deep collective trauma" (See Chapter Three, Gqola 55). Moreover, this 'emotional archive' to a large extent initiates her melancholia and is likewise an 'archive of emotion' that she passes down to her own children, particularly her daughter Eve, manifesting in ways that differ from those of Eugenides's Lisbon girls, and Flynn's Camille and Amma. And so, while the daughters of my primary texts all inherit some degree of collective trauma, none are as harmful as that of Eve's.

Eve is entangled with her mother's genealogy in ways unlike that of Eugenides' and Flynn's characters. This is because, as a 'coloured' woman existing within the apartheid context, Magdalena has a history of unfathomable trauma in comparison to those of Mrs Lisbon and Adora who are white, privileged women. Furthermore, this painful history is significantly embedded within Magdalena and Eve's lived experiences, including the way in which Magdalena has learned to curb her daughter's deviance by way of shame. As mentioned in Chapter Three, 'coloured' bodies have been "steeped in shame through association with concepts of miscegenation" as a result of apartheid and its racial categorising (Jeftha 28). For that reason, blame cannot be placed solely upon Magdalena for the way in which she has learned to utilise shame as a means to control her daughter's behaviour. Moreover, she cannot be blamed for the "vulnerability of girl bodies in coloured communities" and for Eve's sexual exploitation at the hands of her teacher (Jeftha 33).

Conclusion

Through a close reading of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects*, and Sandra Charles's *Eve*, this dissertation illustrated the myriad ways in which girls and women are socially conditioned to uphold the category 'woman' and to regulate not only their own bodies in various ways, but also the bodies and behaviours of others. This project began with an interest in feminist performance poetry; specifically, the deliberate and unapologetic voices of feminist slam poets who refused to be silenced by heteropatriarchy and its production of a culture that seeks to dominate women – both cisgendered and transgendered. However, upon reading Flynn's novel, I was struck by her protagonist's opinion that "some women aren't made to be mothers. And some women aren't made to be daughters" (179). And so, my interest was piqued in not only motherhood as the archetype of 'ideal' femininity, but also in the various unapologetic ways of *being* a 'woman'.

If being a mother is the 'epitome' of femininity, what does this mean for women who a) have no desire to be mothers, and b) are physically unable to become mothers? And if women are 'made' to be mothers, what does this mean for daughters who experience maltreatment at the hands of their own? These were two crucial questions nestled at the centre of my dissertation, and I am hesitant to say that I have the answers. However, I can confidently say that my primary texts demonstrate learned mothering behaviours and 'emotional archives' as being significantly influential across contexts and within various mother-daughter relationships. Furthermore, by exploring girlhood as a significant period of socialisation, I have effectively discussed the unrealistic idealisation of girls as 'pure' and innocent beings, as well as the veracity of their sexual curiosity and capacity for in/direct aggression. Additionally, an exploration of girlhood as a 'process of apprenticeship' to mothers provides a useful approach because it tangibly portrays the role played by social conditioning to achieve submission to the demands of the category 'woman' and its heteropatriarchal gendered expectations. Thus, the mother-daughter relationship becomes a valuable lens through which to consider this conditioning, as well as to view 'woman' as a category that attempts to stringently regulate the bodily experiences of girls and women.

Since mothers are the anticipated 'primary carer' in most heteropatriarchal settings, they are consequently and unfairly held to be 'primarily responsible' for the insurgence of their children.

At the same time, since daughters are expected to obey their parents, particularly their mothers, any digression from heteronormative behaviour is similarly considered ‘inappropriate’ and/or *incorrigible*. In view of this, discussions of womanhood and its essential features unambiguously demonstrate the lived experiences of girls and women as restricted and regulated by a socially constructed and gendered category – a category that defines ‘appropriate’ femininity as a heteronormative ‘spectacle’. Furthermore, this dissertation emphasises the significance of acknowledging the category ‘woman’ as based on whiteness as the ‘ideal’, illustrating the result of a failure to account for differences amongst girls and women such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. By examining the lived experience of girls and women within the global North by way of Eugenides’s and Flynn’s novels, and in comparison to the South by way of Charles’s novel set in apartheid South Africa, this dissertation therefore highlights the importance of the differences listed above. Moreover, the intersection of these differences is, in effect, crucial in the deliberation of diverse mothering behaviours, as well as the diversity of girl experience, identity formation, and becoming.

A consideration of mothering as a *learned* behaviour has proven useful to this dissertation because it highlights the outcome that a mother’s melancholia and ‘emotional archive’ can have on the relationship that she shares with her daughter. Mrs. Lisbon, Adora Crellin and Magdalena Forbes are melancholic mothers who inherit potent ‘intergenerational emotional archives’. However, Magdalena’s ‘collective trauma’ as a ‘coloured’ woman in the apartheid era, significantly sets her apart from white mothers of the global North. In other words, her lived experience of racial discrimination and her inherited trauma of exploitation have a larger influence on her gendered expression as a mother, and so the differences amongst women prove crucial to account for in the deliberation of mothering behaviours. Similarly, Lux Lisbon, Amma Crellin, and Eve Forbes understand the complexity of mother-daughter relationships, and all three girls experience a certain degree of maltreatment at the hands of their mothers. However, despite their negligence, these mothers cannot be held primarily responsible for the decisions made by their daughters for the reason that these girls are ‘knowing and active agents’. Mothers cannot be considered the scapegoat for blame, nor can daughters be considered ‘failed children’ for refusing to conform to the category ‘woman’.

In conclusion, this dissertation evidences the impact of heteropatriarchal norms and expectations upon the lived experience of girls and women. Furthermore, through an analysis of

my three primary texts, the agency and diversity of girls and women are made palpable in their ability to ‘take up’ and fulfil multiple subject positions, or put differently, to both survive and resist heteropatriarchy and its ideals. Although this study did not focus on boys and becoming men, and their relationships with either their fathers or mothers, it is research that is equally important as boys too, can take up multiple subject positions in becoming men. For now, though, my study has revealed that there are various ways of *being* both a ‘woman’ and a mother. And so, it is crucial to acknowledge that the discursively constructed category ‘woman’ is damaging because it does not allow for various expressions of gender and lived experiences.

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