The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis
Volume 3, Issue 2, Summer and Autumn, 2015, pp. 91-111

The Metaphor of Vision and the Construction of Sexist-Norms in Western Metaphysics

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Abstract

Current feminisms have emphasized the *systematic* nature of women's oppression. Feminist scholars like Luce Irigaray insist that woman's difference and otherness is a matter of male-dominated institutional definition: because the woman is theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity, she is *seen* and *objectified* by the man as his opposite, described as an absence, a lack, and, most notoriously, the other. The metaphor of vision, or the panoptic gaze, is thus faulted with a construction of "sexist norms", and with the institutional definitions of gender and sexual difference. This paper examines the contention in the key theoretical writings of men- Freud, Lacan, and Sartre- who are engaged with the notion of femininity. Their conceptualizations on the notions of scopophilia, exhibitionism, and narcissism are specifically examined to explore the way the dichotomy of a male subject and a female object is formulated and perpetuated through heterocenteric assumptions about the gaze. It is concluded that within the masculine framework of Western metaphysics, a woman's entry into a presiding scopic economy contributes to her ineluctable limitation to passivity and her socio-sexual victimization. In this regard, the panoptic gaze is endowed with a constitutive influence upon the subjectivity of the individuals- appropriating the woman into a definable being.

Keywords: Gaze, Feminism, Heterosexuality, Oppositional Dichotomy, and Western Metaphysics

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: Thursday, January 25, 2018
Accepted: Thursday, February 1, 2018
Published: Saturday, March 31, 2018
Available Online: Sunday, February 18, 2018
DOI: 10.22049/JALDA.2015.13699

ISSN: 2383-2460; 2018

Introduction

The term gaze evokes a complex body of theory emanating from various sources and disciplines. It engages both with matters of individual psyche as well as with the wider social relations and historical issues. The former treats the term as a manifestation of a sexual drive and the latter apprehends it in terms of the effects of a competing social script. The psychoanalytic gaze mostly reflects Freudian mechanisms of voyeurism and exhibitionism as well as the asymmetrical gender relations and hierarchies they engender. It also benefits from Lacanian supplementary articulations on vision, emphasizing the repressed aspects of subjectivity that brings about alienation from itself. The historical one, on the other hand, mainly mirrors Foucauldian conceptualizations of observation and surveillance through which "institutions enable human beings to conceive of themselves as objects and the subject [thereby] learns to regulate his or her behavior" (Newman, 2004, p. 10).

For the past few decades, "gaze theory" has made its way into literary and cultural studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, Holocaust studies, black/whiteness studies, and critical race theory[1]. It is generally utilized as a theoretical framework to help explain the hierarchical networks of power existing between two or more groups or, alternatively, between a group and an object. Researchers variously point to the following: "white" and "black" gazes, the "tourist" gaze, heterosexual and homosexual gazes, the "imperial" gaze, the "transatlantic" gaze, the "animal" gaze, and the "meta-fictional" gaze, to name but a few (Manlove, 2007, p. 84).

Scholars like Hawthorn (2006), however, have deep misgivings about the origin of these theories, arguing that "Theories of the gaze cannot be traced back to a single place of origin or time of birth [since] they build on and incorporate a number of traditional literary-critical concerns … such as psychoanalysis, discourse studies, and film studies" (p. 509). The theory of the gaze, nonetheless, originally started as the study of the objectification of women in visual texts, and, as Berger (2008) highlights, it mainly operated within a specifically heterocentric framework in which the woman ought to continually watch herself. Berger says of the woman who sees herself being seen that "She turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (p. 4). This is, however, inherent in the relationship between the sexes. As he further elaborates, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (p. 4). Feminists like Irigaray (1974) argue that such an objectification of women is pervasive within the masculine framework of Western metaphysics[2] (as cited in Warhol & Herndl, 1997, pp. 430-3). The field of vision, she contends, has a central place in Freudian psychoanalysis[3]; and, it is this privileging of visibility in such a male-dominated, phallocenteric discourse that

unavoidably situates the woman forever as an object, and never a subject. In this regard, the panoptic gaze is vested in with a constitutive impact upon the subjectivity of individuals—appropriating woman into a definable being. Irigaray has charged that the metaphor of vision is complicit with the construction of "sexist norms" and is thus connected with the institutional definitions of gender and sexual difference. According to her, within the masculine framework of Western metaphysics, a woman's entry into a presiding scopic economy contributes to her ineluctable limitation to passivity and the subsequent socio-sexual victimization. The present study aims to look into the contention in the key theoretical writings of men—Freud, Lacan, and Sartre—whose fundamental texts in psychoanalysis and philosophy, in one way or another, engage with the notion of femininity (Asl, 2014). To this end, the concepts of scopophilia, exhibitionism, and narcissism are examined to explore the way the dichotomy[4] of a male subject and a female object is formulated and perpetuated through the heterocenteric assumptions about the gaze. Nonetheless, before we delve deeply into this issue, it is of great assistance to further contemplate on the allegation produced by the feminists.

Feminist Response to the Logic of Vision

In the context of the contemporaneous feminist theory, in terms of the theoretical debates concerning the construction of feminine subjectivity, the gaze matters (Kaplan, 1983; Manlove, 2007). Looking and being looked at together construct hierarchies of power, "the premise of the politics of power" (Sen, 2007). Feminists have charged the metaphor of vision with being intimately connected with the construction of gender and sexual difference[5] (Mulvey, 1975; Irigaray, 1974, 1985; De Lauretis, 1987; Butler, 1990; Keller & Grontkowski, 2003; Davoodifar & Asl, 2015; Asl, Abdullah, & Yaapar, 2016; Asl & Abdullah, 2017). Focusing on the place of the woman in the visual field, these critics believe, "the traditional privilege of vision acts to perpetuate the privileging of masculinity in modern writing practices" (Storr, 1994, p. 2). To them, it is the male voyeurism and fetishism that situate the female as spectacle or object of the look in order for her to reflect "his own self-sufficiency as a 'subject', to serve as a mediator in his own specular relationship with himself" (Felman, 1997, p. 17). Such is the male narcissistic principle on which the traditional role of a woman as exhibitionistic and as "the object of an appropriating 'male gaze'", is based (Newman, 2004, p. 5). Contemplating on the representation of women as objects of the gaze in traditional Hollywood films, Mulvey (1975) asserts that the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The woman appears; she is passive, the object; and she "holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (p. 11). The masculine, accordingly, is constructed as the subject, the active party and the one who gazes.

Feminists, according to Copjec (1989), take this object-status of women as "inevitably bound up with the structure of the look and the localization of the eye of authority … she carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self-image a function of being for another" (p. 288). This position gives the panoptic gaze a constitutive impact upon the subjectivity of the individuals: "The techniques of disciplinary power (of the construction of the subject) are conceived as capable of 'materially penetrating' the body in depth without depending on the mediation of the subject's own representations … [let alone] though having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness" (as cited in Krips, 2010, p. 94). In other words, the refusal of and the resistance against the gaze, or the power, turns out to be futile, "a sham—even where it exists, it is taken into account in advance; indeed, merely serves to incite new and more subtle processes of oppression" (p. 95).

In the feminist psychoanalytic discourse, one of the cardinal sources of the subjugation of women exists in the way women "have been consigned to visuality" (Chow, 1992, p. 114) and that "visuality [is], precisely, the nature of the social object that feminism should undertake to criticize" (p. 15). This is also the motive for Irigaray's thoroughly elaborated critique of the privilege of vision in Western thought. She points to the non-visible, therefore, non-theorizable nature of woman's sex and pleasure to confirm that "any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'" (1985, p. 119). As she elaborates,

> Woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks. Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her confinement to passivity. (1985, pp. 25-6)

In this context, the gaze, to feminist literary critics, works "as something imposed on women by men" (Newman, 2004, p. 8), best understood in terms of "the key theoretical writings of men", Freud, Lacan, and Sartre, whose fundamental texts engage with the notion of femininity (Felman, 1997, p. 8). Together, these texts constitute Western metaphysics that have confined women to "the feminine and simultaneously define[d] the feminine in relation to the masculine" and in the course of expounding their theories, have reduced gender to sexual difference and privileged masculinity in so doing (Storr, 1994, p. 36). As Felman observes,

> The metaphysical logic of dichotomous oppositions which dominates philosophical thought (Presence / Absence, Being / Nothingness, Truth / Error, Same / Other, Identity / Difference, etc.) is, in fact, a subtle mechanism of hierarchization which assures the unique valorization of the 'positive' pole (that is, of a *single* term) and, consequently, the repressive subordination of all "negativity", the mastery of difference as such … Theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity, the woman is viewed by the man as his opposite, that is to say, as *his* other, the negative of the positive, and not, in her own right, different, other, Otherness itself. (1997, pp. 8-9)

In her influential project, "Visual Pleasure" (1975), Mulvey argues that the exercise of vision necessarily enacts and enables the construction of a male subject and a female object, and concludes that the prevalence of the gaze in the Western thought, i.e. psychoanalysis and philosophy, plays a significant role in its privileging the masculine. In terms of this argument, feminist philosophers and theorists have already started to revolt against this male logic of the visual (Storr, 1994, p. 13). Chow (1992), for instance, bases her argument on Freudian psychoanalysis to assert that feminism should criticize "visuality" for its being exclusively phallocentric or "masculinist" (p. 5). According to her, Freudian theory posits a fundamental connection between the "eye and the male organ", or the phallus. For these theorists, psychoanalysis, particularly in its Freudian and Lacanian sense, is "ostensibly about sexual difference" (Storr, 1994, p. 15). Irigaray (1974), nevertheless, radically opposes the notion of sexual difference and by calling it an "illusion", argues that femininity is not defined in relation to the masculine, rather it is absolutely defined by the masculine. And so is the essence of psychoanalytic sexual difference not concerned with difference, but with the sameness, or to use her own terminology, with "hom(m)osexuality" (p. 25). Contemplating on Freud's reduction of sexual difference to sexual opposition, Irigaray (1974) observes,

> *The gaze is at stake from the outset* ... Now the little girl, the woman, supposedly has *nothing* you can see. She exposes, exhibits the possibility of *a nothing to see*. Or at any rate she shows nothing that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis ... This nothing, which actually cannot well be mastered in the twinkling of an eye, might equally well have acted as an inducement to perform castration upon an age-old oculocentrism. It might have been interpreted as the intervention of a difference, of a deferent, as a challenge to an imaginary whose functions are often improperly regulated in terms of sight ... Woman's castration is defined as her having nothing you can see, as her *having* nothing. In her having nothing penile, in seeing that she has No Thing. Nothing *like* man. That is to say, *no sex/organ* that can be seen in a *form* capable of founding its reality, reproducing its truth. *Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth*. The contract, the collusion, between one sex/organ and the victory won by visual dominance therefore leaves woman with her sexual void. (p. 431)

In a similar way, Grosz (2002), differentiates between two types of difference: difference between A and B and the difference between A and not-A. For these critics, the relationship between masculinity and femininity is that of sexual opposition and hence the privilege of vision in psychoanalysis, and by extension, in western philosophical tradition is what has to be rejected (Storr, 1994, p. 18). In their attempt to formulate an autonomous femininity, feminist philosophers and theorists have not only interrogated the theoretical and political implications of this privilege of vision but they have also precipitated in what Keller and Grontkowski (2003) call "revolt against the traditional hierarchy of the senses" (pp. 207-24).

The revolt, primarily initiated by Irigaray, emphasizes the fact that the heterosexual division of the gaze unavoidably engenders a hierarchical relation in which the man is positioned as subject and the woman as object of the look. That

being said, however, it is crucial to note that in its expressions of the opposition, feminism is pretty much "informed by psychoanalysis", by a "body of thought which itself already accords a great deal of importance to the role of the visual in the psychic life of the human subject" (Storr, 1994, p. 13). Such key psychoanalytic concepts that also to a great deal comprise the building blocks of the discussion of this research consist of key terms such as: scopophilia, voyeurism, narcissism, active-passive, and feminine-masculine.

Freudian Mechanisms of Voyeurism

Freud introduces us to Scopophilia, Voyeurism, Fetishism, and the male "fear of castration" (Clarke, 1997, p. 133). His psychoanalytical approach begins with a subject's erotic pleasure at looking at other people's bodies, i.e. scopophilia, which turns to voyeurism if the object of the gaze is unaware that they are being watched. In his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), Freud elaborates,

> scopophilia can also appear in children as a spontaneous manifestation. Small children whose attention has once been drawn - as a rule by masturbation - to their own genitals usually take the further step without help from outside and develop a lively interest in the genitals of their playmates. Since opportunities for satisfying curiosity of this kind usually occur only in the course of satisfying the two kinds of need for excretion, children of this kind turn into voyeurs, eager spectators of the processes of micturition and defaecation. (p. 1511)

The scopophilic behavior, for Freud, is primarily a source of pleasure and is formulated as an "early childhood curiosity", but once it is carried forward into adulthood, it may turn into a perversion, into an obsessive sexual practice. As he maintains, "When repression of these inclinations sets in, the desire to see other people's genitals (whether of their own or the opposite sex) persists as a tormenting compulsion, which in some cases of neurosis later affords the strongest motive force for the formation of symptoms" (p. 1511).

Besides, everyone who is a voyeur in his unconscious is at the same time an exhibitionist. However, the economy of the gaze is asymmetrical, suggesting that, "The libido for looking and touching is present in everyone in two forms, active and passive, male and female; and, according to the preponderance of the sexual character, one form or the other predominates" (p. 1695). Highlighting the libidinal power inherent in the eye and thereby emphasizing the mentioned unbalanced economy of the gaze, Mulvey (1975) argues,

> Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. His particular examples center around the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and the forbidden (curiosity about other people's genital and bodily functions, about the presence or absence of the penis and, retrospectively, about the primal scene). In this analysis scopophilia is essentially active. (pp. 8-9)

Scopophilia then divides the world into the active "lookers" and the passive "looked-at", and thus becomes "one of several drives making up the patriarchal sexual order" (Manlove, 2007, p. 88). Within this patriarchal unconscious, a series of binary sexual oppositions are constructed that contrast: male/female, active/passive, and sadistic/masochistic; and it is within this context that "masculinity is defined through gaze, femininity identified by to-be-looked-at-ness" (Finzsch, 2008, p. 4). The subject is constructed as masculine, and the object as feminine. Mulvey (1975) calls this the look's "active/passive heterosexual division". As she elaborates,

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle. (p. 11)

In a later work titled "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915), Freud develops his theory of scopophilia and attaches it to the pre-genital auto-eroticism. Due to the conflicts between the claims of sexuality and those of the ego, the sexual instincts may undergo different vicissitudes: 1) reversal into its opposite, 2) turning round upon the subject's own self, 3) repression, and 4) sublimation. The two examples he provides to elaborate on the first vicissitude is the two pairs of opposites: sadism-masochism and scopophilia-exhibitionism. In the former, "the active aim of the instincts (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the passive aim (to be tortured, to be looked at)". Masochism, in this case, is actually, "sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego", and he enjoys the assault upon himself (p. 2964). This process of reversal from activity to passivity, Freud maintains, is well represented in the following terms:

> (a) Sadism consists in the exercise of violence or power upon some other person as object.
> (b) This object is given up and replaced by the subject's self. With the turning round upon the self the change from an active to a passive instinctual aim is also effected.
> (c) An extraneous person is once more sought as object; this person, in consequence of the alteration which has taken place in the instinctual aim, has to take over the role of the subject. (p. 2964)

In a similar way, in the second pair of the opposites, i.e. the instincts whose respective aim is to look and to display oneself (scopophilia and exhibitionism), the exhibitionist looks at his own body and enjoys of his exposure. The same stages are also postulated here:

> (a) Looking is as an activity directed towards an extraneous object,

> (b) the subject gives up the object and turns the scopophilic instinct towards a part of his own body and transforms to passivity and sets up a new aim—that of being looked at,
> (c) a new subject to whom one displays oneself in order to be looked at by him is finally introduced at this stage. However, the only divergence that Freud posits here is the existence of an earlier stage that he calls 'auto-erotic'. (p. 2966)

For the beginning of its activity, Freud observes, the scopophilic instinct "has indeed an object, but that object is part of the subject's own body. It is only later that the instinct is led, by a process of comparison, to exchange this object for an analogous part of someone else's body—stage (a)" (p. 2966). Freud classes this preliminary stage of scopophilic instinct under "narcissism", and describes it as a "narcissistic formation". As he explains,

> The active scopophilic instinct develops from this, by leaving narcissism behind. The passive scopophilic instinct, on the contrary, holds fast to the narcissistic object. Similarly, the transformation of sadism into masochism implies a return to the narcissistic object. And in both these cases the narcissistic subject is, through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego. (p. 2968)

Although Freud distinguishes between "active and passive behaviors and motives", he does not explicitly align these with gender. Nevertheless, femininity, for both Freud and Lacan, is situated within the visible world and is embodied in the figure of a narcissistic woman who is at the core of the manipulation of masculine and feminine. The manipulation reduces the complexities of gender to "a question of either/or which leaves no room for anything other than compulsory heterosexuality and a rigidly pre-ordained binarism of sexual difference, the 'conceptual frame of universal sex opposition'" (Storr, 1994, p. 211). In the following section, we explain the ways visual narcissism, in Freudian and Lacanian terms, aligns femininity with an image of monstrosity.

Feminine Narcissism: Animality and Criminality

Freud links narcissism with female sexual organ. In the narcissistic femininity, the woman is aligned with criminals, animals, monster, and children. In this regard, while the excessive narcissism dooms the men to perversion or psychosis, it is regarded as an essential condition of femininity. As he writes in his introduction to "On Narcissism" (1914),

> With the onset of puberty the maturing of the female sexual organs ... seems to bring about an intensification of the original narcissism ... Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment ... Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love ... The importance of this type of woman for the erotic life of mankind is to be rated very high. Such women have the greatest fascination for men ... For it seems very evident that

> another person's narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are in search of object-love. The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats and large beasts of prey. Indeed, even great criminals and humorists, as they are represented in literature, compel our interest by the narcissistic consistency with which they manage to keep away from their ego anything which would diminish it. (p. 2943)

Here, the narcissistic woman is not only at once associated with child, animal, criminal, humorist, but is also the one who exercises the greatest fascination over men. This bizarre image of femininity also formulates Lacan's concept of the imaginary. Both the child image and the animal image turn up in "The mirror stage"[6]. To Freud, the child image implies that the "self-contentment and inaccessibility of the narcissistic woman is mirrored in that of the pre-subjective child captated by its own image" (Storr, 1994, p. 217). In his discussion of women's love for their own children, Freud (1914) explains that a part of the women's own body "confronts them like an extraneous object, to which, starting out from their narcissism, they can give complete object-love", suggesting that the only possible form of "feminine" object-love is "[p]arental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish" (p. 2945).

Similarly, the animal image helps Lacan find out the extent to which a relation between the animal world and that of the human world exists. As long as the woman has the attributes of Freudian narcissism—i.e. her being enigmatic and inaccessible, her being "uncaptured by masculine love"—she, like a successful animal, succeeds in "exercising her fascinating and seductive allure" over men. Akin to the Freudian narcissistic woman, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the animal's appeal lies in its self-contentment and inaccessibility: "An animal which is also an ideal, that is to say successful - the unsuccessful one is the one we managed to capture. This ideal animal gives us a vision of completeness, of fulfilment ... That's what makes this living form seductive, as its appearance harmoniously unfolds" (Lacan, 1988, p. 137)[7]. What distinguishes these two figures, nonetheless, is the "relation of gap and alienation that the human mirror stage infant has to its own image" (Storr, 1994, p. 219).

In addition to these images, Lacan's interpretation of the famous case of Papin sisters—the case of Christine and La Papin who were employed as welds in the household of M and Mme Lancelin—links female narcissism with criminality. One day, over an argument on house chores, the maids attacked their mistresses, using household implements, to beat them to death. The bodies were mutilated – the eyes torn out, the sexual parts uncovered, and the thighs and buttocks slashed and bloodied. Later that night, the Papins cleaned themselves and went into the same bed, "which led to allegations during their trial that they were engaged in an

incestuous and 'homosexual' relationship" (Storr, 1994, p. 221). Along with orthodox Freudian lines, Lacan conceives of this incident as "manifestation of a paranoia", which is based in unconscious aggressivity, accompanied by "sado-masochism and homosexuality", which in turn emerge as manifestations of imaginary hate and verliebtheit respectively. In other words, whereas homosexuality is a narcissistic fascination with the image of the other, sado-masochism is an aggressive drive aiming at its destruction. This kind of interpretation of the sisters' crime reveals that the crime is overloaded with feminine sexuality. Following Freud, in "Motifs du Crime Paranoiaque", Lacan describes the incident as a kind of "fraternal complex", that is the transformation of early sibling rivalry from hatred and aggression to desire (Rabaté, 2003). The crime is hence a crime of narcissistic passion, meaning that the female homosexuality is inevitably involved in the formation of such paranoid delusions. Excessive narcissism, in Freudian/Lacanian discourse, leads to this kind of narcissistic criminal behavior.

Femininity: Object Choice of the Masculine Subject

Meditating on the Freudian notion of the little girl's "penis envy", Irigaray (1974) argues that "the 'penis envy' attributed to woman", on the one hand, "soothes the anguish man feels, Freud feels, about the coherence of his narcissistic construction and reassures him against what he calls castration anxiety", and on the other, reveals the little girl's "subjection to man's desire-discourse-law" (pp. 434-5). Indeed, Freud introduces two types of sexual object-choice: the "narcissistic" and the "anaclitic". Within these notions, femininity is always formulated as the "object" for the masculine "subject".

In the anaclitic, the sexual instinct is attached "to the satisfaction of the ego-instincts" and is the primary normal attachment of the child to those who feed, care and protect him/her—i.e. the mother or a substitute for her. Freud characterizes the normal anaclitic object-choice as masculine: "A comparison of the male and female sexes then shows that there are fundamental differences between them in respect of their type of object-choice. Complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of the male" (Sandler & Fonagy, 2012, p. 88). The second type originates from a disturbance in the libidinal development of the subject. Freud calls them "perverts or homosexuals" whose love-object is not their mother but their own selves. This object-choice is termed "narcissistic" and characterizes femininity.

In a comparison of the male and female sexes, Freud (1914) asserts that the "complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of the male" (p. 2943). By contrast, the feminine type is "unfavourable to the development of a true object-choice". It is here that the stereotypical heterosexuality with its persistent dichotomy of active-masculine and passive-feminine is established. Whereas the anaclitic masculine reaches out in search of the object, the

narcissistic female awaits his attentions. Contemplating on the autism of a feminine sexuality, Storr (1994) observes that the narcissistic woman,

> does not seek a love-object of her own, but wishes rather for someone of whose masculine-anaclitic object-choice she will be the sexual object. Object-love as such, outside of motherhood, is only open to a woman who 'feel[s] masculine and develop[s] some way along masculine lines' (79). This characterisation, as we have already seen, amounts to the contiguity and autism of a feminine sexuality which, incapable of taking and exchanging objects, can only itself be taken or exchanged. (p. 228)

The distinction between the two types clearly suggests that there are only two positions available, masculine or feminine, and thus the normativity of heterosexuality is constructed while the free play of erotism is shunned. At this stage, Freud "conflates sexual object-choice with 'sexual difference'" (Storr, 1994, p. 229), where both male homosexuality and female homosexuality fall on the feminine side of anaclitic/narcissistic divide. The male homosexual is situated within feminine narcissism and similarly, female homosexuality is believed to be merely an excess of this object-choice: "The female homosexual is just too much of a woman" (p. 230). Finally, in his conclusion of "On Narcissism", Freud (1914) well provides a short summary of his distinction between anaclitic and narcissistic object-choice. According to him,

> A person may love: ----
>
> (1) According to the narcissistic type:
> (a) what he himself is (i.e. himself),
> (b) what he himself was,
> (c) what he himself would like to be,
> (d) someone who was once part of himself
>
> (2) According to the anaclitic (attachment) type:
> (a) the woman who feeds him,
> (b) the man who protects him.
>
> and the succession of substitutes who take their place. (p. 2944)

In a similar vein, Lacan's concept of the imaginary privileges the masculine. He endorses Freud's distinction of the two types of object-choice and remarks that they both are imaginary and originate in primary narcissism, one generated "through a libidinal investment in one's own image" and the other "through an investment in the image of the one who attends to the satisfaction of the ego-drives" (Storr, 1994, p. 230). His similar differentiation between "love" and "verliebtheit" privileges the anaclitic or heterosexual love as the "correct", normal kind of object-choice. For him, whereas the former is an exchange between subjects made in the context of the

symbolic, the latter is an imaginary one, a narcissistic love that is potentially self-destructive in terms of its absorption in the image of the other. As he elaborates,

> Love, now no longer conceived of as a passion but as an active gift, is always directed, beyond imaginary captivation, towards the being of the loved object, towards his particularity ... [L]ove, to the extent that it is one of the three lines of division in which the subject is engaged when he realises himself symbolically in speech, homes in on the being of the other. Without speech, in as much as it affirms being, all there is is Verliebtheit, imaginary fascination, but there is no love. (as cited in Bristow, 1993, p. 57)

In addition, Lacan puts homosexuality on the side of narcissism and thus femininity. Akin to the nature of the woman's desire, who normally positions herself as object of the desire of the other, Lacan states, "the requirement of this style of desire [i.e. homosexuality] can only be satisfied in an inexhaustible captation of the desire of the other" (as cited in Bristow, 1993, p. 58). Lacan condemns the narcissistic desire of the homosexual for exhausting "himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able to grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other" (p. 58) and this will prevent him from achieving the symbolic anchor of love, the heterosexual/symbolic exchange. At this stage, the woman's condition differs from that of the homosexual's. Unlike the homosexual, to enter the symbolic pact of heterosexuality, the woman does not need to give up her narcissism; rather, for Lacan, as is also the case for Freud, feminine heterosexual "object"-love seeks a man for whom she can be the object. Lacan's argument is based on his concept of the mirror stage, where a child recognizes itself as a "unified" being, separate from the-hitherto-thought-to-be-one image of the mother. Here, two separate images, that of "oneself" and that of the "mother", are recognized. The pre-symbolic child, however, does not privilege one over the other. But, upon its entry into the symbolic and thus becoming "sexed",

> he or she must choose according to the familiar Freudian pattern. Masculine desire chooses anaclitically, that is, chooses the image of the mother to fill the place of the 'other', and strives for the desire of the (m)other through 'having' what she lacks - namely, the phallus (95); feminine desire chooses narcissistically, that is chooses its own image as the 'other', and positions itself in the heterosexual relation as 'being' the phallus, the object (or signifier) to be exchanged in the marital pact. (as cited in Bristow, 1993, p. 60)

Clearly, both Freudian and Lacanian articulations on the masculine-anaclitic/feminine-narcissistic distinction is formulated, and maintained afterwards, on the condition that the subject's primary object-choice is "based on the sexual (ised) difference between the image of oneself as ideal or model and the image of

one's mother as model" (Storr, 1994, p. 235). They both see the "normal sexual satisfaction" for a woman in her relation with the opposite sex; i.e. a woman is considered as normal when she only makes the feminine choice of being a sexual object for a male lover and any other choices would inevitably lead to paranoid illness. Such normativity is also advocated in philosophical articulations of Jean Paul Sartre. In the following section, we will elaborate on the ways Sartre perpetuates this hierarchical notion of masculinity/femininity.

Sartrean Paradigm of the Active Masculine and the Passive Feminine

In Sartrean philosophical discourse, in keeping with Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis, masculinity is identified with activity and femininity with passivity (Asl & Mehrvand, 2014; Asl, Hull, & Abdullah, 2016). At the crux of his theories in *Being and Nothingness* (1953), consciousness is explicitly equated with the activity of looking and the body with the passivity of being looked at. This oppositional dichotomy of activity-passivity is considered as fundamental in the constitution of the subject-object relation. Within this oppositional dichotomy of active-subject and passive-object, formulated by the look, another hierarchical dichotomy, that of masculine-feminine, is established. Michele Le Doeuff (2006) emphasizes the fact that the dichotomy of activity-passivity necessarily leads to the formation of masculine-feminine and subject-object dichotomies (pp. 59-60). In a similar discussion, Simone de Beauvoir (2014), takes this proposition of Sartre to declare that "He [the man] is the Subject, he is the Absolute–she [the woman] is the Other", and that masculinity is continuously privileged (p. 16). These oppositional dichotomies, according to Storr (1994), "are set within the classic Cartesian framework of the mind-body split" (p. 70).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1953) differentiates between two types of being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself (p. xxxix). The former is the nature of being of non-conscious things and the latter is that of consciousness. Being-in-itself is described as a plentitude of being, while being-for-itself constitutes a lack in being and is fundamentally the nihilation of being-in-itself. Hence, in order to continually re-assert subject-hood, one needs to constitute oneself as the negation or nihilation of objects, i.e. to be active. To be 'pure subject', however, is to look without being looked at (Storr, 1994, p. 289). Sartrean "pure" subject-hood requires a lethal voyeurism, or a way of looking at the object without oneself being looked at. Le Doeuff (1980) points to this alignment of mind-body dichotomy with the masculine-feminine dichotomy to indicate that in *Being and Nothingness* only two female figures do exist: one is a "frigid" one and the other is the one who pretends not to understand her would-be lover's sexual intentions (pp. 277-8).

In the last section of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre equates "in-itself" with a "sexual female body". He compares the "slimy", a "constant hysteresis", to "the flattening out of the full breasts of a woman who is lying on her back" (p. 608) and exemplifies the danger that being-in-itself constitutes to the being-for-itself of consciousness:

> [T]he For-itself is suddenly compromised. I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me ... It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking ... I cannot slide on this slime, all its suction cups hold me back ... It is a trap ... Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet feminine revenge which may be symbolized on another level by the quality sugary. (p. 777)

Then, he identifies the "hole" as being-in-itself's plea to the-for-itself,

> [T]he hole is originally presented as a nothingness 'to be filled' with my own flesh ... [T]o plug up a hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plenitude of being may exist; that is, to subject the passion of the For-itself so as to shape, to perfect, and to preserve the totality of the In-itself ... The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open'. (p. 781-2)

Sartre offers the body of a full-breasted woman lying on her back as the epitome of "object-state", a state in which the female body is in a totally passive, inert status, waiting to be filled by the action of the for-itself; an object which the conscious for-itself must nihilate in order to maintain its subject-hood:

> The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open'. It is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution. Conversely woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is in the form of a hole. (p. 782)

Storr (1994) clarifies that for Sartre "the being-in-itself to which consciousness is reduced as soon as it apprehends that it is - or may be - looked at by the Other amounts to that of being a body: "[T]o be an object-for-others or to-be-a-body are two ontological modalities which are strictly equivalent expressions of the being-for-others and the part of the for-itself" (p. 346). Since the body consistently attempts to constitute the being-in-itself, the consciousness, in turn, endeavors to nihilate in its emergence.

In the battle of looks, each for-itself strives to nihilate the Other to the status of being-in-itself by fixing it with its look. When the for-itself disappears, it leaves

behind the body. The living body in Sartrean discourse is thus of ambiguous ontological status:

> [W]e could define the body as the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of, contingency. The body is nothing other than the for-itself; it is not an in-itself in the for-itself, for in that case it would solidify everything. But it is the fact that the for-itself is not its own foundation [i.e. 'it is what it is not and is not what it is', it is a perpetual projection of the subject's 'possibles'], and this fact is expressed by the necessity of existing as an engaged, contingent being among other contingent beings. (1953, p. 309)

Finally, the body is paradoxically both the necessary condition of being-for-itself (I could not exist without a body) and the contingency or "facticity" of being which the for-itself strives to nihilate: "The body is what I nihilate. It is the in-itself which is surpassed by the nihilating for-itself and which re-apprehends the for-itself in this very surpassing" (1953, p. 309). But once the for-itself ceases to exist, the in-itself of the body is no longer surpassed; the body loses the ambiguity of being it received from consciousness and lapses into the status of a mere thing, an object like any other object in the Other's field of vision. "[T]o die is to lose all possibility of revealing oneself as subject to an Other" (p. 297). It is when I am dead that the Other will be able to look at me in the certain knowledge that I will never be able to return the look. This is the ultimate realization of being reduced to an object and so to be totally vanquished. Hence, in Sartrean philosophy, it is ultimately the masculine that, in the battle of looks between male and female, nihilates the Other to the state of "being-in-itself" and enjoys supremacy over the feminine.

Conclusion

Feminist scholars emphasize the fact that woman's difference and otherness is a matter of male-dominated institutional definition (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Sosnoski, 1981; Christian, 1990; Michie, 1996; Felman, 1997; Warhol & Herndl, 1997). Irigaray (1974), for instance, argues that a subtle mechanism of hierarchization operates within the metaphysical logic of dichotomous oppositions that dominates Western theoretical writings. An exploration of this allegation in the key theoretical writings of men—Freud, Lacan, and Sartre, revealed that the dichotomy of a male subject and a female object is formulated and perpetuated through their heterocenteric assumptions about the gaze. For both Freud and Lacan, femininity is situated within the visible world, and is embodied in the figure of a narcissistic woman who is at the core of the manipulation of the masculine and the feminine. In addition, visual narcissism, in Freudian and Lacanian discourse, associates femininity with an image of monstrosity, animality, and criminality. To this is also added Freud's proposition of two types of sexual object-choice: the "narcissistic"

and the "anaclitic", within which femininity is doomed to be constituted as the "object" for the masculine "subject". It is finally concluded that both Freud and Lacan theoretically subordinate the woman to the concept of masculinity, and objectify the woman as the man's opposite.

Similarly, a brief review of Sartrean theories on the process of looking reveals that the active-passive dichotomy that forms the core of the very nature of "being" in his philosophy, is basically established and perpetuated through the privileged status of "vision". This hierarchy of seeing and being seen, regarded as the two fundamental modes of being in relation to the Other falls into a "classic heterosexual division of labor between masculine and feminine cast along the lines of the mind-body split by [his] characterization of being-in-itself as essentially feminine" (Storr, 1994, p. 100). In Sartrean ontology, in a similar vein to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the woman becomes the object, the body, whereas the masculine is granted the power of asserting his nihilating look at the feminine being-in-itself as the passive object. With this theoretical background in mind, we come to conclusion that the construction of "sexual difference" necessarily constitutes a network of hierarchies in which the male is privileged and the female is disempowered. The established dichotomy, by itself, formulates another normativity, that of heterosexual relationship, and considers any other type as deviance.

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Notes:

1. See Acton, C. (2004). Diverting the gaze: The unseen text in women's war writing. *College Literature*, *31*(2), 53-79.; Drummond, K. G. (2003). The queering of Swan Lake: A new male gaze for the performance of sexual desire. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *45*(2-4), 235-255.; Eileraas, K. (2003). Reframing the colonial gaze: Photography, ownership, and feminist resistance. *MLN*, *118*(4), 807-840.; Ball, K. (2003). Unspeakable differences, obscene pleasures: The Holocaust as an object of desire. *Women in German Yearbook*, *19*, 20-49.; Russell, M. (1991). Race and the dominant gaze: Narratives of law and inequality in popular film. *15 legal stud. F 243*. Santa Clara University.

2. By Western metaphysics we refer to the contemporary line of thought and philosophy in the West that is concerned with the central concepts and categories like essence, identity, subject, object, inside/outside, as well as the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it. For a broader meaning of the term see, Craig, E. (1998). Metaphysics. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy* (pp. 5443-5445). London: Routledge. For a feminist critique of the metaphysics that also makes a bold attempt to move beyond these metaphysics, refer to Colebrook, C. (1997), Feminist philosophy and the philosophy of feminism: Irigaray and the history of Western metaphysics. *Hypatia*, 12, 79–98.

3. Irigaray employs the current deconstructive philosophical methods of thinking developed by Jacques Derrida to argue that in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis the male sex organ is given a privileged status of the present, a thing that can be seen, whereas female sexuality is described as an absence of that presence (Felman, 1997, p. 9). For her, the privilege accorded to visibility results in a fundamental "misrepresentation, or nonrepresentation of women's desire" (Warhol & Herndl, 1997, p. 427).

4. Dichotomy is generally defined as "a form of logical division consisting of the separation of a class into two subclasses", one of which is privileged to have a certain quality or attribute. ("Dichotomy", 2016, para. 1). In Western philosophical tradition, these parts are taken to be both jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive. In the logic of dichotomy, only one subclass must be privileged at a time, and, in consequence, no attribute can belong to both parts at the same time. Jacques Derrida makes a radical attack on this logic and charges Western philosophers with developing a "metaphysics of presence". According to him, Western philosophical notions "draw on something outside themselves for their meaning and this "something" has been overlooked, ignored, and even suppressed throughout the history of Western philosophy" (Sweetman, 1997, p. 230). For an elaborate

discussion of his deconstructive approach to Western metaphysics, see, Sweetman, B. (1997). The deconstruction of western metaphysics: Derrida and Maritain on identity. In R. T. Ciapalo (Ed.), *Postmodernism and Christian philosophy* (pp. 230-247). Washington D. C.: CUA Press.

5. Recent feminists have attempted to distinguish sharply between gender and sexual difference. Gender, as De Lauretis explains, allows the subject to surpass the terms of its construction as merely either male or non-male (female) and unlike sexual difference does not obscure women's differences from each other, differences like race and class ((De Lauretis, 1987, pp. 1-2; Storr, 1994, p. 26).

6. In the mirror stage, the child sees its own image in a mirror and starts identifying with that image. The mirror stage provides the child with a totalized body image, which paves the way for assumptions of the "I". See Feldman, S. (2006). *The shadow of difference: Sex, race, and the unconscious* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304939635). Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/304939635?accountid=14645.

7. For a complete collection of Lacan's seminars on Freud refer to Lacan, J., & Miller, J. A. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. Cambridge University Press.

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