

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

Institut für Anglistik

Seminar: Feminist Media Studies

Reading Journal

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WS 2016/17

Am I Just Feminine or Already Feminist?
Developing an Understanding for Feminist Media
Studies through the Process of Self-Reflection

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9 March, 2017

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I. THEORETICAL PART

1. Introduction

We act as if that being of a man or being of a woman actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start. (Judith Butler)

The first time I was dealing with gender studies at the university was actually in a linguistics seminar, in which looked at the concept of gender from a broader typological perspective. In this seminar, I learnt how predetermined we actually are in our perception of seemingly fixed concepts. We are so used to thinking of gender in terms of this triadic distinction into masculine, feminine and neuter that we think that our perception of gender as sex-based is the only possible one. This seminar introduced me to languages in which 20 different gender distinctions are possible, which are not even related to the concept of biological sex. Thus, when I came across Judith Butler's critical explanation of gender concepts as social constructions, I became aware of the fact that not only language is constructed but also gender roles. These serve as an unspoken contract in society, which was never signed by individual women or men but was just theoretically discussed, linguistically labelled, and transmitted over time.

In my seminar on feminist media studies, I would like to look at concepts such as gender in a broader perspective. I attempt to look at how gender roles are presented in different forms of media in terms of symbolic visualizations and verbal illustrations. Since Butler talks about it not as a static concept but an ongoing formative process, I would like to explore its hidden transformative potential. If gender really is unstable and changeable I would like explore whether it is possible to introduce new patterns and rhetoric to grasp its complexity. I attempt to follow this week-long, reflective project by looking at theoretical texts as well as, at media and social media as platforms of exchange. I attempt to document my observations in a reading journal, which primarily captures my own learning progress in this field. Since I do not know much yet about feminism I am grateful to take the opportunity to deal with this fascinating and complex topic in academic terms. The theoretical input given in this seminar shall help me to discover my own role as a woman in modern society and how I can cope with feminist issues in a professional and critical way.

1.1. Personal Aims of the Reading Journal:

I would like to start my reading journal by giving a few notes on my own understanding of feminist media studies and my expectations of this course. I attempt to use this reading journal for three central aims, which touch upon a personal, theoretical, and practical level. The triadic guideline below visualizes my main thoughts. It shall not serve as a strict guideline, but rather as a list of personal goals, which shall encourage me and make my working effort measurable.

1. THEORETICAL EFFORTS

- Learn more about feminism and its underlying concepts and ideas
- Implement terms such as “gender”, “heteronormativity”, “misogyny”, “gender roles” etc. in my vocabulary and learn how to use them precisely.
- Get to know different approaches to gender studies (ex. psychological, semiotic, linguistic) etc.

2. PRACTICAL EFFORTS

- Capture my working process and evaluate my learning progress in this seminar (How was my perception of feminist issues before and how did it change?)
- Express discontent openly
- Use social media more attentively and in a diverse manner (Social media as a platform of speaking and raising criticism, not just careless chatting)
- React to gender discrimination and harassment in a more professional way

3. INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS

- Discover myself and my own role as a woman in society and as a media user
- Become more attentive towards medial representations and learn how to watch and interpret them critically
- Become more critical and self-aware during this week-long process of writing and self-reflection

1.2. Starting with something personal: Individual level as a point of departure

As a point of departure in my learning process, I would like to present my preliminary thoughts on the question whether I see myself as a feminist. The answer is: I do not

know yet. I am not sure whether I would call myself a feminist, since I always tended to associate feminism with political activism and demonstrations against sexual harassment, gender discrimination and sexism in public. Personally, I would claim that I did not feel the necessity yet to take part in demonstrations or raise criticism in public, since I never felt disadvantaged or personally offended. For instance, I have a job at the department of English linguistics, where I receive considerable recognition based on the quality of my work. Gender discrimination is never an issue here, since I work with a very diverse, reliable, and open-minded team. Luckily I also never had to deal with issues such as sexual harassment, cyber-mobbing etc., but I can imagine how traumatic and humiliating such experiences might be.

The only thing, which really bothers me is the medial representation of gender roles in some TV shows such as “The Bachelor”, “Adam sucht Eva”, “Germany’s Next Topmodel” etc. I find it disgusting that women are exclusively reduced to their outward appearance and expose their bodies in unnatural, exaggerated ways, transmitting the motto: “Sex sells”. By doing so, they reduce themselves to their outward appearance and are consequently treated as commercial goods. I always believed that these portrayals of women are so outdated and I did not understand how people could just watch them. I naively supposed that they watched them for reasons of entertainment and did not take those too serious. I never believed that people could really have such a degrading view on women in our modern times. However, the election of Donald Trump and the whole medial presentation of his election campaign this year taught me a harsh lesson and made me critically aware of the fact that misogyny is still an issue today. It is even more omnipresent than one might guess.

2. Theoretical Efforts in the Course of my Reading

2.1. Thornham, Sue (2007). “Introduction: Thinking Women/ Media/ Feminism”

Key terms: Gender, Woman, Feminism vs. Femininity

I have decided to start my investigation with Thornham’s article, since she is giving a comprehensible introduction to the field of feminism and media studies. First of all, she structures her article in a comprehensible way, by pointing out a triadic relationship between woman-feminism-and media studies. She tries to explain all concepts mentioned in her article and gives definitions of the notion of feminism, the concept

of woman and femininity and the role of the media. What appears to be interesting is, that she does not just define concepts in a descriptive way, but that she challenges pre-established definitions and tries to develop a unique critical rhetoric. I would claim that the text is a good start-up for getting used to feminist concepts and media studies in general.

2.1.1. Agreement and Reading Experience

I agree with Thornham on several points, which are not exclusively related to the content level but also the linguistic manner of approaching issues. First of all, she frames the problematic and indicates a triadic relationship between women-feminism-and media, which is equally mirrored by a triadic oppression on the economic level (male oppression in the film industry, 2007:2), semiotic level (packaging of women in images, 2007: 2), and on the theoretical level (oppression in film theory, 2007: 2). What I really liked, was the way she tries to resolve these types of oppression and undermine this argumentation by following a semiotic analysis. She refers to the fact that woman as a category is “semantically unstable” (2007: 4), which in terms of semiotics means that it has no stable signifier and thus allows ambiguities and several alternative representations. Her basic idea indeed shows that the term demands careful definition and redefinition over time in order to remain valid. Interestingly, she tries to overcome this semantic instability by completing the linguistic paradigm woman by adding the concept of feminism, as she concretely describes feminism as a progressive positioning of women through “the voicing of women from the side of woman” (2007:4). I found this idea very interesting since in my understanding this evokes the categorical shift from woman in association with femininity and passivity towards a feminist in associating with critical voicing and activism. I would claim that this is an effective first step to pursue a meaningful change on women and femininity in people’s mindsets. The dynamics of this discussion allowed me to develop a more flexible understanding of gender and gender roles, which are not binary and set in stone but dynamic and adjustable to the necessities of a given time.

2.1.2. Disagreement and Questions

What I somehow find problematic in her article was the passage in which she strongly differentiates between feminist and women identities. “Unlike Hobson, then, Radway separates the feminist who understands the ideological power of the romance text,

from the ordinary woman reader, who does not” (2007: 11). Radway’s differentiation between women and feminists does not appear to be justified here, since it trivializes ordinary women’s commitment and power to a certain degree. In my eyes it violates the former idea of women’s progressive voicing (2007:4). Instead of showing a new woman’s quality and progress here and integrating both concepts into one category, it creates a twofold division between women and feminists as their intellectual ideological counterparts.

What I also found problematic in this article is this all-inclusive positioning of feminists. The different theoretical depictions Thornham (2007) presents in her article, all seem to consider women as one single category. I came across so many passages in which the possessive pronoun our (ex. “our identities” Thornham, 2007: 18) is used, or in which women (ex. “In nineteenth-century art women were confined [...]” Thornham, 2007: 12) are used as a universal conception, referring to all women. However, I was wondering whether this all-inclusive positioning really accounts for all women and all women’s interests. This would suppose that women all have the same perception of the issue and that they all share the same cultural, historical, and theoretical background, which certainly is not true.

2.2. Gill, Rosalind (2011). “Sexism Reloaded, or, It’s Time to Get Angry Again!”

Key terms: New sexism, sexualisation, unspeakable inequalities, femonationalism

In her article “Sexism Reloaded, or It’s Time to Get Angry Again!”, Gill (2011) shows how postfeminism works and the problematics related to the post-feminist era. Her main critique is the silencing and depoliticization of the movement, which she captures by using the term “unspeakable inequalities” (2011: 63). Her main aim of the paper is to reapplicate the term sexism, explain the ideology behind it, show its evolution and adjust it to the rhetoric of the modern era.

2.2.1. Agreement and Reading Experience

Before reading Gill’s article I thought about sexism in terms of objectification of women in the media. After having read the text I realized that my understanding of sexism is rather expressed by the terms “pornification” or “sexualization” (Gill, 2011: 65), which only grasp the moral dimension but not the entire complexity of this concept and its political notion. In general, I really like how Gill presents her ambition

to revitalize the term sexism and raise critical awareness, which in our modern highly politicized era appears to be more than necessary. She starts her article by describing new sexism as a new kind of discrimination, which she especially observes in the field of media production. In spite of pursuing a (pseudo-)egalitarian view on women, producers hesitate in employing women and use careful rhetoric to camouflage their acts of discrimination (Gill, 2011: 64). I think Gill mentions a strong thought here. Sexism nowadays is not less existent but it occurs under new forms. She provides a nuanced definition of the term sexism, which has a dynamic notion similar to Thornham's (2007: 4) definition of women. Both changed its shape and meaning and shall always be reconsidered over the course of time.

The passage, which I found the most inspiring in this context, was the one on "Connecting Sexism: Dreaming Big and Thinking 'Conjuncturally' (Gill, 2011: 67ff.) since it re-politicizes the notion of sexism. I definitely agree that sexism and other forms of discrimination such as racism, for instance, are closely interrelated and present different viewpoints on the axes of political power. The comparison of the "liberated Western woman" in contrast to the "oppressed usually Muslim counterpart" (Gill, 2011: 67), is a strong example, which made me think about it. When I started thinking about this example I recognized how false it is to base our own emancipatory force and our progress on such questionable comparisons. It serves the purpose of shifting attention away from our own deficits to others, who are in a presumably worse situation. To me it seems as if we have become somehow blind for our own problems. People often tend to camouflage their own insecurity in a discourse of hegemonial and emancipatory power, which by patronizing the Muslim woman intersects with a discourse on racism as well. Not only Gill but also Olson and Horn-Schott (2017: n. pag) stress the interrelation between "feminist pursuits" and "foreign policy interests". With reference to Sara Farris they coin the term *femonationalism*, which fuels fear against male migrants and results from such a hegemonic perspective. Dealing with these passages helped me to discover the close links between feminist studies and politics. Feminism is not just activism followed by women for the achievement of women's rights exclusively. It is a political standpoint which counters all forms of inequalities, as these often intersect.

2.2.2. Disagreement and Questions

Even though Gill presents some really strong and advanced thoughts, there are some issues which I found questionable. For instance, I do not entirely agree with Gill's harsh critique that "we appear to have become [...] peculiarly narrow in our preoccupations and foci of interest-beauty, celebrity, sexualisation [...] and curiously timid in our thinking" (2011: 68). It is unquestionable that beauty standards are not completely unimportant in our society but I do not think that one should overgeneralize that and address that to all women and all cultural contexts equally. Rather than saying that we are preoccupied with such issues I would say that the media is overloaded with the presentation of these for purely commercial reasons. I also do not understand in what respect we have become timid. It would have been easier to follow her point here if she would have been more precise in her terminology and if she would have explained the underlying basis for her evaluation. If she means timid in the sense of lack of openness and muteness, I would disagree with her, since I actually think that women are more omnipresent in the public sphere and raise their voice. Let's take politics as an example. When I consider both my German and Croatian background, I notice a considerable advancement over the course of time. In both Germany and Croatia there are female leading powers such as Angela Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović etc., having significant transformational power and voice in the political domain. I also have noticed that in my Croatian hometown women are predominant as leading political voices, which only some years before would not have been possible. Personally, I think that the problem lies less in the muteness and hesitance of women to speak up but more in the lack of efficiency of their verbal renderings. For instance women's talk is often associated with the use fillers and hedges such as "like" or that they tend to speak simultaneously. Both aspects weaken the power of their utterances since they make women appear more emotionally involved into the discourse but less professional. This matches with the problematic related to the invalidation of critique through the use of irony, which Gill (2011) has framed before. It covers the complexity of expressing discontent about structural inequalities, without being perceived as overly sensitive or hysterical (cf. Gill 2011: 64). I am curious to follow this line of thought and see how other authors deal with this problem of sexism and degradation of women. Moreover, I am interested in

finding out more about the link between media and the transmission and re-creation of gender roles.

2.3. Tuchman, Gaye (1978) “The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media

Key terms: symbolic annihilation, sex typing

I have decided to deal with Tuchman’s text next, since I think that it continues Gill’s thoughts on sexism by introducing a new rhetoric and a new methodology to the discussion. In her article, Tuchman focuses on the influential power of the mass media in a US-American context. She deals with representations of gender roles in the media and how these might affect their audience in their attitudes on gender and their positioning in society. Tuchman remarks that trivialization or absence of women (*symbolic annihilation*) (cf. Tuchman 1978: 10) is favored in the media. Tuchman observes this type of neglect in varying degrees in newspapers (1978:25ff.), commercial and non-commercial television (1978: 9ff.), and male and female magazines (1978: 17ff.). To make her analysis valid, she provides several examples of gendering for instance in films or in the make-up of man- and woman’s magazines. Her extensive scientific analysis allows her to conclude that mass media mirror dominant social values and that they have a socializing function by transmitting commonly agreed norms of behavior onto young people (1978: 37). Her article has made it clear to me, that the educative and social function of media should not be underestimated. They do not have a mere representative function but they actively contribute to the construction of gender roles by the way they choose to arrange, and present their material.

2.3.1. Agreement and Reading Experience

After having read the article, I was wondering whether I could transfer the investigation of media studies in a US American context to my German background. I was curious to test whether the hypotheses about the symbolic annihilation of women in the media hold also true for the German newspapers, male and female magazines and non-commercial TV programs that I am used to. Since the article was written about 39 years ago, I was also interested to look at, whether the results of her study are still dated.

The first hypothesis I tested was that “[w]hen television women are involved in violence, unlike males, they are more likely to be victims than aggressors” (1978: 13). Since many films we watch in Germany are Hollywood movies, it is not surprising that Tuchman’s findings hold true for the German context as well. Especially in German action films I noticed that there are predominantly female victims and male heroes. I would like to illustrate this idea by focusing on the German action film “Tschiller: Off Duty” (2016). Even though at first it seems as if a female hero is possible, the plot turns into a different direction. After her mother has been murdered by a Kurdish criminal, it is her daughter Lenny who follows the murderer in an attempt of revenge. The attempt of Tschiller’s daughter is blocked before it could even start, since she shifts from the role of a female hero to being the kidnapped victim, who is finally freed by (surprise, surprise) a male hero. What I also found striking was the example of “The Devil Wears Prada” (2006), in which the woman, unless being the villain, is somehow trivialized. In the first place, I felt really entertained by watching a film, in which women are dominant and hold strong positions of power. However, when reconsidering the plot and make-up of the film under this new awareness of symbolic annihilation, I definitely became more critical in my judgment. Let’s assume that the protagonist would have been a man instead of a woman. I guess, that in such a case the film would not have caught any attention, since we are so used of having men in management positions. Also, the labelling of Meryl Streep in her role of Miranda Priestly, the successful editor, as “devil” is negatively connotated. I thought about the question how such a labelling might influence the audience’s watching experience. I could imagine that people might perceive this calculated, career-centered behavior as unnatural, evil and thus, not favorable for a woman. If such a behavior is however exercised by a man, he is perceived as the attractive, unapproachable, successful idol for many men (ex. Mr. Big in *Sex and the City* or Mr. Grey in *Fifty Shades of Grey*). Therefore, I would claim, that the symbolic annihilation in this case does not lie in the absence of women but rather in the exceptionalism of their representations. We are far from being used to having women in high positions and whenever they occupy these, they are likely to be judged negatively.

The second hypothesis concerns the representation of women in national newspapers. Tuchman (1978: 29) states that newspapers similar to films encourage

“symbolic annihilation” due to their ways of “ignoring women at work and trivializing women through banishment to hearth and home”. For my investigation, I have decided to examine German national newspapers such as Die Zeit, FAZ etc. When skimming the articles and different newspaper sections, I noticed that the representation of women is marginal in general. In the sports section for instance (especially football and basketball) women’s efforts are neglected. Instead of giving information on women’s football (ex. the women’s football world cup), discussions on the so-called soccer-player’s wives (in German *Spielerfrauen*) are far more frequent. I came across a certain amount of articles in which Cathy Hummels is giving some really “fundamental” fashion and make-up tips or talking about her relationship with Mats Hummels (ex. article by Anna Kempler “Über EM Tipps- Die Zeit 2016). When taking articles into account, which focus on the job market, women’s efforts are again neglected. Many articles are dealing with problems of the reconcilability of family and professional life (ex. Roland Lindner “Das Märchen von der Vereinbarkeit” FAZ 2014). Articles as such are discouraging for women, since they always feel as if they have to choose between having children and working. To my mind, it is a choice which is unfair and unjustified and it is also a choice which is presented as an exclusively female choice. Even as workers, women are always pushed into this position of being the eventual mother, while men as fathers are completely taken out of this discussion on family planning.

Finally, I was interested in testing the assumption that “woman’s magazine is sex-typed in a way that is not true of men’s magazines” (1978: 22). In order to check on this assumption I was looking at several women’s and men’s magazines. The most interesting German examples were Bond Men’s Magazine (2017) and Barbara-Kein normales Frauenmagazin (2017). Already the table of contents indicated that the woman’s magazine is more centered on issues of women’s interest such as food, fashion tips, decoration. The lifestyle section revolved around women’s hobbies. The men’s magazine appeared to be more neutral, focusing on themes like lifestyle and social values such as democracy and decency with a short note on the presidential election and Donald Trump. Even though there are also sections on male fashion for instance, I had the impression that this magazine could catch women’s and men’s interests equally. It offers a good equilibrium of lifestyle and business and appeals to

a broader readership than the women's magazine. Nevertheless, there are also certain strong counter-examples of women's magazines which are revolving around political issues such as EMMA for instance. The magazine goes beyond this traditional picture of the woman as "passive and dependent" (Tuchman 1978: 8) and portrays women's commitment in politics and the labor force based on real-life examples and not just stereotypical depictions of women.

2.3.2. Disagreement and Questions

What I found questionable in this article was the section, which deals with the influence of mass media on children's behavior. Tuchman (1978: 6) with reference to Lesser describes the learning process of children as rather passive and based on imitation exclusively. I would disagree at this point, since I do not think that children are only passive recipients of information. Children are learning through experience and their learning progress is not only determined by the media, but also the environment, in which they are being raised. I would assume that if a child is raised in a conservative family which is in favor of these traditional gender roles (men as workers and women as housewives), a child is more likely to develop this picture as well. However, if a child grows up in a more liberal family, I would claim that the child becomes more critical about such medial representations. Also, educational and social institutions such as school or elementary school might significantly affect children in their perception of gender roles and make them either rethink depictions of women in the media or reinforce stereotypes. I would thus claim that, raising critical awareness is a reflective ongoing process, which children are likely to undergo due to their exposure to different environments.

What I somehow missed in this article was the inclusion of representations of trans-gender, homosexuals and other minorities in the media. Tuchman is presenting a heteronormative, white perspective and again falls in this dyadic distinction of gender roles into male and female, the masculine-dominance and feminine-passivity. But what about the representation of those groups which intersect between these two poles? How are they presented in the media and do they also face stereotypisation?

2.4. Mulvey, Laura (1999) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

Key terms: phallogentrism, scopophilia, voyeurism, castration moment, male gaze

Laura Mulvey's article appears to be a good choice for closing this discussion on the symbolic annihilation of women, since it goes back to its essential roots. Mulvey focuses on the triadic relation of characters in a film, film producers and the audience and how these three instances influence our watching behavior and manipulate our watching experience in a cinematic context. The author starts her investigation by referring to Freud's psychoanalysis in order to raise the reader's awareness of people's preconditioned understanding of gender imbalances in patriarchal systems. She relates to the basic idea of *phallogentrism*, which exposes a perspective which is male-centered and considers women as the castrated other. (cf. Mulvey 1999: 833). Not only the castrated woman seems to suffer from her absence of a penis but also men have to cope with their castration fear. According to Mulvey (1999: 840ff.) they have three possibilities to overcome their fears: (1) demystifying the woman by discovering her body, (2) punishing and saving her from her guilt (related to sadistic tendencies) and (3) turning women in an erotic, fetishist objects of desire (related to voyeurism). Mulvey nicely presents how these basic psychological drives are put into action and create different scenaria in cinematic depictions by Hitchcock and Sternberg for instance.

2.4.1. Agreement and Reading Experience

I agree with Mulvey on several points she mentions in her article. First of all, I am convinced, that in mainstream films the main purpose of the film is to create pleasure, which often goes hand in hand with portraying women as erotic images (1999: 834). I therefore appreciate Mulvey's attempt to deconstruct this sort of uncritical watching of such films. In order to describe audience's pleasure and watching experience she introduces the term *scopophilia*, which I found really useful in this context. It is a Freudian concept and basically means pleasure derived from looking at objects. This pleasure of looking takes on two forms; (1) sexual pleasure derived from looking at an object of desire on screen, and (2) the identification with an idealized form of the self on screen (cf. Mulvey 1999: 835). It also stresses the interrelation between us as audience and the character's in films. By simply observing them on screen we do not remain neutral but shape their roles; one's being the figures of identification and one's being the observed objects of interest. What caught my attention in this article was the passage (1999: 836), when the author compares children's mirror phase and their

complex, multi-layered process of identification (*imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification*) with people's watching experience of a film on a screen. Both the mirror and the screen show abstractions or idealizations of the self being perceived as "more complete, more perfect" (1999: 836). This happens either by looking at oneself or by identifying with a hero on screen. Even though we as adults in contrast to small children normally have a strong self-awareness, it becomes weakened and challenged in the cinema context. Mulvey mentions this by saying that "I forgot who I am and where I was" (1999: 836). I think that anyone who has been watching a good film before knows this kind of feeling and agrees with Mulvey at this point. I often tend to associate myself with one character on screen and have the feeling that I am losing myself in the story plot, by feeling compassion, fear or joy, by sympathizing with the characters, by seeing the things they are seeing etc. While reading the article, I was able to develop this new awareness, that watching films is not just a passive, relaxing process but that it is an active process of observation, identification and positioning into the story plot, which needs to be critically reflected. I will definitely keep these thoughts in mind when watching the next movie.

2.4.2. Disagreement and Questions

Mulvey stresses some really important points, which are backed with psychoanalytic concepts such as Freudian scopophilia or Lacan's mirror phase. The article is well written but sometimes difficult to follow without a well-grounded theoretical background on psychology. A short passage which still remains inapproachable to me is the following:

Woman's desire is subjected to her image or bearer of the bleeding wounds, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it. She turns her child into the signifier of her own desire to possess a penis" (1999: 834).

This passage is very figurative and illustrates quite abstract signifiers. For instance I do not understand yet in how far the child substitutes or accounts for the woman's desire to have a penis. As far as I have understood it correctly, the child symbolically represents her own trauma, which she reiterates and therefore has to cope with. For instance, if a mother had born a boy, he makes her even more conscious of her castration moment and fuels her wish to have a penis as well. In case that she had born a girl, the mother reiterates her own trauma and transmits it onto her daughter, since

she and her girl will presumably share the same desire of having a penis. However, I was wondering whether I understood it correctly and how plausible it is to include the child in this discussion of the castration moment. I guess in order to be able to fully grasp the meaning of this passage more research needs to be done.

Moreover, there are also certain passages which demanded clarification and extension. I would like to particularly stick to the passage, in which Mulvey mentions the shape and nature of the so-called male gaze:

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 onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly (1999: 837).

In this passage Mulvey stresses a strictly dual relationship between the man as observer and woman as the observed one in the film. I was wondering whether such a uni-directional way of looking still holds true for cinematic productions. What about women looking at men in films as the objects of desire? Do only men have this determining male gaze or do also women when looking at other women in films as the objects of desire have it? I guess that my questions indicate how vague this term is and that it demands further precision. Moreover, I thought about whether male gaze as an all-inclusive term really accounts for all men who are watching films. I was primarily thinking about those men, who do not belong to this hegemonic, heterosexual dominant group as portrayed here, such as homosexuals for instance. Since the term male gaze seems to be a really narrow, heteronormative, patriarchal labelling, I was wondering whether there are ways of capturing one's watching experience in a more neutral way. Maybe I would choose the term dominating-pleasurable gaze instead.

II. PRACTICAL PART

3. Different Forms of Misogyny as Portrayed in the Online Media

The Internet has become an essential part in our modern communication, in information gathering, and opinion making. Especially social media accounts such as Twitter or Facebook serve as important platforms of exchange, which are also used by celebrities and politicians. In this context of Feminist Media Studies, I would like to take a closer look at the role of the Internet and social media in the discussion of

(online)violence and misogyny. The main issues of this analysis include Donald Trump’s electoral campaign and forms of e-bile by the Alt-right movement.

3.1. Theoretical Preliminaries to Online Misogyny: Jane (2014) “Understanding e-bile”

I decided to start with Jane, Ann’s (2012) article “Understanding e-bile” as a theoretical introduction to the discussion on misogyny and forms of online-hatred. Jane (2014: 533) refuses to use terms such as trolling, flaming and cyberbullying, but introduces the new term “e-bile”, which shall capture the entire complexity and broadness of sexually violent comments and threats on the internet. I was approaching the article by asking myself a few questions.

What is e-bile? In her most general working definition, Jane (2014: 533) associates e-bile with any given comment or written text, which is considered to be intrusive and hostile by all three parties in the communication event (sender, receiver, and external observer). She more concretely states that the term describes “the extravagant invective, the sexualized threats of violence and the recreational nastiness”(2014: 533) in Internet discourses. Jane (2014: 542) introduces the term “textual sadism” as a consequence of e-bile. This term indicates the sufferance and emotional ruptures, which e-bile victims have to cope with. According to Jane (2014) the negative effects of e-bile do not only create ruptures on an individual level but also affect the collective on a broader social and political level. They block the preservation of civil, moral values such as “social inclusivity” or “democratic engagement” (cf. Jane 2014: 542). E-bile is not a mere example of individual acts of violence but also appears to be a sign of systemic violence.

Why is it better to use e-bile than let’s say flaming or cyberbullying? What makes the term e-bile favorable as a concept in this discussion of online violence, is its novelty. Traditional terms like flaming were already theoretically approached, controversially discussed and finally trivialized. For instance, some theoreticians reject and ignore issues of flaming and downplay it to “harmless humor” or “simply jokes that have been misunderstood or taken too seriously” (2014: 539). Such attitudes have devaluated the term and made it inefficient. To my mind, the blaming of victims for being too sensitive or humorless (2014: 539) pushes critique into the wrong direction and makes offenders less criticisable. This is what the concept of e-bile shall prevent.

Which forms does e-bile take on in online media? First of all, there is a certain amount of gendering in e-biles. Male power versus female powerlessness are dominant dichotomies in sexually-violent comments. Women have to face sex-typing and have to cope with either slut shaming (ex. “You’re a ugly, whorish, slut” 2014: 531) or comments on their lack of attractiveness. For instance women have to cope with disgusting jokes and ratings on their “rapeability” (2014: 535). Not only women but also some men have to cope with e-bile. Whenever men are confronted with e-bile, they have to deal with degrading comments on their penis size for instance.

How do men and women react to e-biles?

Jane’s (2014) investigation has shown that men react less emotionally to online-harassment than women. The men’s comment on concrete issues of e-bile showed that they do not take these issues too serious and do not feel personally offended. Women in contrast to that react emotionally and conceive “feelings of irritation, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, vulnerability [...]”(Jane 2014: 536). The emotional responses by women might relate to the fact that they statistically more often occur to be victims of e-bile than men.

3.2. Misogyny and the 2016 Presidential Elections

3.2.1. Williams, Patricia (2016). “Race and sex stoke deep responses in the American psyche”

What I especially like about William’s article (2016: n. pag) is that she starts with a strong anecdote; a personal story of a young woman, who has been sexually harassed by her uncle but was never listened to or taken seriously when claiming about this serious issue. However, when she and her mother once met a black man in a store, her mother became very worried about the black man’s potential sexual intentions. By displaying this anecdote, Williams passes from an individual level of fear and sexual harassments to a broader collective dimension. She opens up the discussion on femonationalism (Olson 2017: n. pag) and racism, which were omnipresent in Trump’s electoral campaign. Williams links the anecdote to Hillary being the young woman and Trump being the uncle. The frightened mother in this story symbolically relates to all women who are voting for Trump and appear to be blind for his acts of discrimination under the premise of their disappointment for Hillary Clinton. Thus, in terms of Williams, they are “willing to give Uncle Donald a pass in the face of multiple

allegations of sexual assault, breathtaking racism, unprecedented crudity, cruelty [...]”(Williams 2016: n. pag). The author’s remark indicates, that he is the one, who artificially creates this fear and hate by exposing the presumable “woman victim” to such hate figures as “the Muslim terrorist” or the “Mexican rapist” (Williams 2016: n. pag). By observing Trump’s political campaign in light of Mulvey’s and Williams’s articles, it seems as if Trump builds his own scenario, which is stereotyped, sex-based and far away from reality.

3.2.2. Morgan, Robin (2016) “A diseased Patriarchy is in a Battle to the Death with Women”

Morgan similar to Williams stresses the core problematic of the American political system being a “diseased system of male supremacy”, which works against women and some men, who do not adjust to the heteronormative, hegemonic system. Morgan shows a broader understanding of feminism, which does not only include women but also men, who do not adjust to the white, heteronormative, empowered group of men. What I also really like about Morgan’s article is that she neither idealizes (idol for all women) nor victimizes (poor, degraded woman) Hillary Clinton, but that she judges her defaults in realistic terms as human and normal, since they are not hers exclusively but apply to many other politicians as well. I absolutely enjoyed reading her play on words when she started to invent compound nouns relating to Donald Trump such as “an orange self-proclaimed ‘sexual predator’”(Morgan 2016: n.pag), for instance. Not only are they provocative and satirical, but also are they unique since they present a rhetoric, which was born outside of the discourse of “patriarchal language”, as Mulvey (1999: 834) would call it. Morgan writes from a female perspective and successfully perverts the male gaze and power relations. In contrast to Williams, she does not put women in position of fear but vice versa by referring to “men terrified of a future filled with brown, black and female faces”(Morgan 2016: n.pag). By the way how Williams displays male fear, she disempowers Trump’s rhetoric, which is not perceived as a powerful dominating speech act anymore, but rather an act out of fear. Even though Williams sometimes seems to exaggerate the discourse on patriarchy and male supremacy, she presents some interesting ideas. Her ideas are rooted in the possible empowerment of minorities such as women and blacks for instance.

3.2.3. Talbot, Margaret (2016) “At the second Presidential debate, Trump declared Clinton a fighter”

Talbot portrays Clinton’s long term confrontation with sexism and humiliation, which started long before the Trump election. Talbot (2016: n.pag) mentions the example of the 2007 presidential election, when a reporter asked McCain how to “beat the bitch”. The use of a very degrading, and politically incorrect labelling of Clinton as bitch, shows that misogyny is openly legitimated in a public sphere. Talbot (2016: n.pag) gives a concise definition of misogyny as “the kind of hate and fear-filled objectification of women that flourishes in corners of the Internet and in the rhetoric of Trump [...]”. It seems as if gender is used as a political weapon, which touches upon a very personal, intimate sphere, politicizes it and exposes it in an extreme form in the presidential election in 2016.

The Trump-Pence Campaign (2016) presents buttons, which continue this disgusting “hate-fear-filled objectification of women” (Talbot 2016: n. pag) by turning women literally (in form of the buttons) as well as symbolically (comparison to animals, body division) into objects. In order to illustrate this idea, I have picked out two representations of Hillary, which are offensive in two different ways:



Figure 1: Trump-Pence Campaign (2016) Buttons

The Hillary Meal Deal button was also referred to by Talbot in her article. They objectify Hillary Clinton in two related ways. First of all, she is compared to a chicken. She is reduced to her body, which is indirectly divided into bits and pieces (2 fat thighs, 2 small breasts). The adjectives small and fat are also negatively connotated and appear to indicate that her outward appearance is not favorable. The second button emotionally touches Hillary’s private life and relates to the love affair of her husband Bill Clinton with Monica Lewinsky. Her efforts on the political level are “symbolically

annihilated”, since she is pushed from the public sphere to a private, domestic sphere by being victimized as the poor, betrayed wife. What both buttons have in common is that they expose portrayals of women as passive objects, which are camouflaged in a satirical and sarcastic discourse. Again we are confronted with Gill’s problematic of how to break down these “unspeakable inequalities” (2011: 63) and raise criticism effectively.

Trump uses humiliating and degrading language to refer to women in general by labelling them as “fat pigs” (Talbot 2016: n.pag.) for instance. He even relates to his own daughter as a “piece of ass” (Talbot 2016: n.pag) and turns her into a viable sex object of his taste. In class, we raised the question whether this is a sign of homosociality or extreme patriarchy. Based on the articles, Twitter comments and TV depictions of Trump I came across so far, I would claim that Trump exercises an over-the-top patriarchy, since he builds up his male power by degrading women, other races and male minorities such as Muslims, homosexuals etc. I definitely agree with Michelle Obama as cited by Talbot, that he uses a “language that has been painful for so many of us, not just as women, but as parents trying to protect our children [...] who think that our nation’s leaders should meet basic standards of human decency” (Talbot 2016 n.pag). In her citation she stresses the fact that it is important to uphold the core essence of moral values, equality and human dignity and that men of political power shall be careful in the way they express their ideas.

3.2.4. Stern, Marlow (2015) “Donald Trump’s Gross History of Misogyny

In his article Stern (2015) lists Trump’s sexist statements and refers to interview material and Trump’s twitter account as source material. Instead of simply summarizing what Stern has just said about Donald Trump, I would like comment on a selected material choice, which was particularly annoying and shocking to me.

In the first place, I would like to refer to the comment Trump made about Megyn Kelly.



Figure 2: Trump’s tweet on Megyn Kelly (2015)

In this example, Trump embarrasses Megyn Kelly publicly by talking about her menstrual cycle in such an exaggerated, distasteful, and inappropriate way, that one feels ashamed. What Trump expresses here is what Freud would label as castration fear. After having led an interview with Megyn Kelly in which she was critically touching upon delicate themes, Trump seems to feel the necessity to save his power and manliness by referring to her as the castrated other.

While browsing Trump's twitter account I came across another comment which made me really angry:

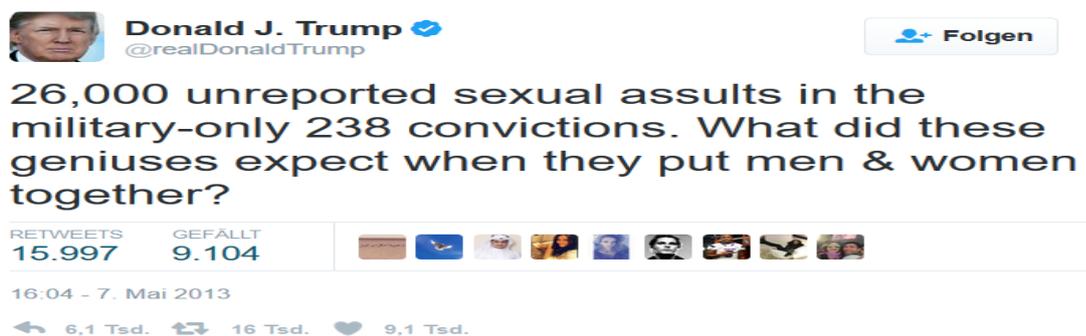


Figure 3: Trump's tweet on sexual assaults (2013)

I do not know what bothers me more, the 9.1 thousand hearts which express love and support for this comment or the comment itself. This comment is a clear case of e-bile (Jane 2014). What is expressed here is basically, that the possibility of rape and sexual assaults simply cannot be excluded when you put men and women together. Comments as such might trigger the wrong idea that women are “fuckable” or in terms of Jane “rapeable” (2014: 533) and sort of downplay their cruelty. In this comment, Trump stresses the power of hegemonic masculinity and this attitude of “I can take whoever I want to”. But what else shall we expect from a man who openly says that he “grabs women by their pussy”. Even though such comments might appear to be trivial acts of teasing, they should not be downplayed.

3.3. Misogyny and the Altright Movement

3.3.1. Anglin, Andrew and Liddell, Colin's (2016) Two Normie's Guides to the Alt Right.

After having examined the example of Donald Trump as an individual, I would like to take a closer look at the representation of misogyny on a more collective level. Therefore, I have chosen to deal with the Alt-Right movement. Before I am going to take a closer look at Alt-right homepages and concrete examples of misogyny, I started

reading two guides to the Alt-Right in order to get an overview on the movement's underlying premises, their rhetoric and argumentation strategies. I started my investigation by asking myself several questions before looking at the webpages.

1) Who or what is the Alt-Right? When I started reading Liddell's Guide (2016) to the Alt-Right, I felt like being thrown back to the Nazi time, in which racism and anti-feminist sentiments were strongly pursued and infected a whole mass of people. Both the Hitler-friendly pictures and rhetorical parallels to Nazism were alarming on the website. The second Alt-Right guide justifies this means of expressions and describes the alt-right as a "mass movement, that could only exist on the internet, where everyone's voice is as loud as they are able to make it"(Anglin 2016: n.pag). The internet seems to be a niche for all those who are acting out their white nationalist, racist, and anti-feminist phantasies by feeling safe due to their anonymity on the web. Similar to Trump they are packaging their ideas and pictures as satire and humoristic depictions, which makes critique and censorship of extreme ideas impossible and ineffective.

What kinds of strategies is the Alt-Right using? One strategy seems to be the invalidation of commonly agreed-norms. In his Alt-Right guide (2016: n. pag) Liddell voices harsh criticism against "the tyranny of political correctness" and the acceptance of "un-examined premises", which state that:

- All races are equal and interchangeable
- Equality is a good thing
- Men and women should be equal and treated the same in all things
- Gays and straights should be equal and treated the same in all things (cf. Liddell 2016)

The labelling of discussions on multi-culturalism, gender-equality and human dignity as "un-examined premises", dangerously puts into question what we consider to be the fundamentals of our modern, liberal, democratic, egalitarian and diverse societies. The weakening of these generally agreed social norms, allows the Alt-Right to open up a discussion of active anti-feminism. Anglin supports this idea as well and states: "We believe in abolishing feminism and reestablishing traditional gender roles in society, a process which would involve sending women back to the home to produce and raise children [...]" (Anglin 2016: n.pag). The seriousness of their verbal renderings shall not be underestimated since Anglin (2016: n.pag) openly boasts of being the "only site

which has actually gotten a feminist fired from a video game company”. He (2016 n. pag) refers back to the case when Alison Rapp was fired from Nintendo after being trolled online. Cyber-violence and harassment appear to be viable strategies used by the Alt-Right.

3.3.2. Examples of Misogyny on the Return of Kings- Roosh V. 's Alt-right blog

Based on the Alt-right website Return of Kings I would like to outline four strategies of how they pursue anti-feminist discourses and try to legitimate them.

1 Strategy: humiliation and degradation of women. One article posted by Valizadeh (2017) on Return of King is entitled as “27 Attractive Girls Who Became Ugly Freaks Because Of Feminism”. Another one by Albrecht (2017) says “3 Feminists Who Caused The Most Harm to the World”. I consider the portrayals of these women on the website as a direct infringement of privacy and shaming in public. One girl for instance is offended as being “transformed into a girl who looks like she has cancer or some other systemic disease” (Valizadeh 2017: n.pag). Another comment states that “even an animal groom themselves better than she has”. (Valizadeh 2017: n.pag). These comments are inappropriate and should definitely be blocked.

3. Strategy: Threatening and Brandmarking.

Carver's (2017) article “6 Types of People Who Deserve the Cucking Stool”, pursues open violence against certain types of minorities. Groups and certain individuals (like the feminist Ana Casparian) are brandmarked as Modern Day common scolds (strong women), race baiters (activists against racism) actual male cucks (these men who are sympathizing with feminism), who deserve torture and public humiliation. The labellings are negatively connotated and the different types of activism are interpreted and exposed in a negative light by the author.

3 Strategy: Exposing Male Supremacy By Presenting Women as Commodity Objects

In his article “Why It is Essential You Adopt An “Always On” Strategy For Game” Troy Francis (2017: n. pag.) gives men advice of how to conquer women. He presents them as passive objects of desire and creates an artificial sexual market with women being the “target market”(Francis 2017: n.pag). The multiple comparisons the author states between commercial products goods and women allow him to objectify women

and label them as “beta bucks and alpha fucks”(Francis 2017: n.pag). Such terms are distasteful but covered as an economic language choice, which has its basis in marketing and advertisement. The author legitimates the representation of women as sex objects.

4. strategy: Justifying all sorts of comments and behavior regardless of how humiliating they are

In his article “Why Shaming Men (and Women) Is Important And Necessary”, Forney (2015: n. pag) legitimates and even encourages each type of trolling, shit storming and shaming in order to devaluate all kinds of feminists actions against these. His argumentation is questionable since he encourages shaming under pretence of stabilizing the society and enabling free speech (Forney 2015: n.pag). Virtues such as respect, decency, political correctness and truth are lost in Forney’s discourse and become replaced by values such as power, dominance, ethnocentrism and white nationalism. What I found even more inappropriate was that he argues that it is not the shit storming which is problematic, but the reaction to it by those who feel offended. He (2015: n.pag) states that the feeling of shame is a sign of “that whatever you’re being shamed for is something you hate about yourself and want to change”. How false it is to blame the victim and not the offender by perverting direct, external violent acts of hate into personal, internal self-hate. Such an argumentation is extremely dangerous, since it hinders any kind of critique.

The strategies exposed in the Alt-Right blog correspond to the e-bile strategies presented by Jane (2014) before. While reading articles on the blog, I was wondering why people have the permission to express all sorts of comments, which are violating all norms of respectful, social behavior? Of course, we have freedom of speech, but I do not think that this includes agitation against minorities, racist and violence-supportive discourses, and vulgar comments.

4. Speaking back to Trumpism and Misogyny

In a next step, I would like to investigate how to speak back to these forms of online-harassment. In order to make this analysis more systematic I would like to stick to an approach mentioned by Mulvey (1999: 834) of “how to fight the unconscious structured like a language [...] while still caught within the language of patriarchy.” I would like to follow this approach and explore its limits: Are authors raising critique

against discrimination and misogyny by using male-derived rhetoric or are they going beyond the limits of the language of patriarchy? I will use both textual and visual material, which revolve around misogyny.

4.1. Reversing the Phallogentric Order: Now the Pussy is Speaking

4.1.1. Video Pussy Riots



Figure 4: Youtube Video Pussy Riot-Make America Great Again

The first form of protest is trying to fight against Trump by using his own rhetoric and showing the shocking consequences of a Trump presidency, which is based on xenophobia and misogyny. The video Pussy Riot portrays some American men and many dominant white women who are wearing uniforms with Trump stickers, and have a similar hair-cut as Trump. The embodiment of Trump in both male and female characters is extremely weird and also shows that trumpism is not only about Trump himself, but that it includes a whole movement. The clip shows brutal scenes of brandmarking a Mexican woman as outsider, fat cow etc. and causing her an unbearable pain. What I found interesting is that a (pseudo) objectivity and factuality was tried to be uphold by occasionally blending in Trump's interviews and paroles. I think this made the video even more shocking, since it strengthens its message and truth value. I would like to illustrate this idea by looking at one specific example.

[Trump] "Sadly, The American Dream is dead. I will bring it back [Shooting of a woman in the video], bigger and better and stronger than ever before (White men are going out of the room and leave the shot woman lying on the floor. (Video Pussy Riots 2016-youtube: 4.20-4.50).

Even though it is a complete exaggeration, I found this scene unveils a lot about Trump's vision of America. The death of the woman is the symbolic act of the dying American Dream, and the dying American values such as multiculturalism, equality,

the pursuit of happiness etc. Trump’s vision of a better America is a homogenic, white, nationalist America. The video shows how misogyny, ethnocentrism and nationalism intersect in the most violent sense.

These exaggerated scenes are so brutal that I sometimes had to look away. I had mixed feelings while watching the video. I somehow struggled between feelings of humor, anger, blank fear, and shock. Personally, I do not think that this type of protest works for me, since I feel rather shocked and blocked by the pictures I have seen and I need some more time to process them. However, I am sure that there are a lot of people whose revolutionary spirit and anger could be awakened by such visual representations.

4.1.2. Music video: The Pussy Grabs Back

The second form of protest also remains in this discourse of Trump’s language choice and revolves around his “I grab them by the Pussy” rhetoric. Interestingly, Kim Boekbinder adopts the pussy-term as her own by using it under a different connotation than Trump. Now it is not him (a man) anymore, who uses the term to objectify women to sexual objects, but it is her (a woman) who uses the term as a political weapon and a means of empowerment. In her song, she repeats the word pussy several times. I perceived it as a kind of mantra or slogan and for some reason I had the impression that it lost some of its vulgarity. This impression was even strengthened by the music video and cover accompanying the song.



Figure 5: Youtube Cover of the Song Pussy Grabs Back

The cover shows one female domestic cat in the body of a woman. The use of the domestic cat is not haphazardly chosen by Boekbinder, but relates to the original sense of pussy, which is not related to vagina but simply to cat. The passage I like the most is the following:

The man has been racist as fuck. But how he's out of luck? If pussy is his downfall we'll take it. If you think it's just Trump/ Go home you're drunk/ Leave the vote to the big girls not the rapist (Boekbinder, Kim (2016) "Pussy Grabs Back"-Youtube: 1.34-1.48).

Similar to the video "Pussy Riots", the song "Pussy grabs back" indicates that the problem does not lie in Trump exclusively, but in this whole class of nationalist, classist, white supporters of anti-feminism. I would claim that Boekbinder cleverly expresses her superiority over Trump by showing a) that she is not intimidated by his vulgar paroles, b) that she could fight him back with the same weapons and c) that she could easily trivialize his vulgar and degrading rhetoric and turn into a more fundamental discourse of political activism.

4.1.3. Photo-Story: Trump's Rhetoric Imprinted on Naked Women's Bodies

In the article "7 powerful photos protesting Donald Trump that Facebook doesn't want to see" Sarah Harvard (2016) shows Aria Watson's photo series. Her photographs are very intimate and show naked women, who have Donald Trump's rhetoric imprinted on their bodies. I would like to stick to one visual depiction which I found particularly powerful.



Figure 6: Aria Watson's photo series

On this picture a woman's body is imprinted with the phrase: "Grab em' by the pussy- Trump". The woman hides her genital area in a protective, resistant manner. She seems

to be a very strong and brave woman, since she confidently shows that she has complete control over her own body. Even though this imprinting of violent words is also a sort of brandmarking, it is different than the brandmarking shown in the video Pussy riots. In this case, it is the woman itself who carries the printings voluntarily- it is her choice. This could be considered as an act of self-deliberation. What the printings also make clear, is that Trump's words are not just words, as he often tries to trivialize them. They are infringements on women's privacy. What is interesting about this photo, is that it does not show the woman's face. This makes the photo less individual and raises the message on a collective level. The message is that any woman shall protect her own privacy and exert control over her own body. I found this type of protest really touching, because I was deeply impressed by the courage of the women to present their bodies in such intimate ways. What I also found very convincing was this method they used to express critique. The photos express critique in a silent but still effective manner. They unveil Trump's vulgarity in a very visual but non-aggressive manner, they sensualize women to preserve their dignity and they pervert feelings of shame into feelings of confidence, pride and respect.

[4.2. Celebrate Women are raising Critique against Trump](#)

The two types of protest which touched me the most were the speeches by two women whom I really admire, respect, and appreciate: the famous actor Meryl Streep and Michelle Obama. Both speeches left me speechless, because they were given in such a simple, emotional and honest tone. I have consciously chosen one speech before the election and one after the election in order to see how both differ in tone and message.

[4.2.1. Michelle Obama's Powerful New Hampshire Speech \(2016\)](#)

In her speech in New Hampshire, Michelle Obama criticizes Trump's distasteful vulgar comments in a highly emotional touching way. She expresses discontent in a very intelligent manner. What I like about her speech is that she refuses to insult Trump and repeat his vulgar language. The strength of her speech is based on her openness and honesty in describing her feelings of shame, her vulnerability and her disappointment, which are shared by so many other people as well.

I also appreciate that she stresses several times that manliness as incorporated and transmitted by Trump is not the norm:

The men that you and I know don't treat women this way. They are loving fathers who are sickened by the thought of their daughters being exposed to this kind of vicious language about women. They are husbands and brothers and sons who don't tolerate women being treated and demeaned and disrespected. (Michelle Obama's Epic Speech on Trump's Sexual Behavior 2016, Youtube: 9.54: 10.11).

Trump's behavior shall not be confused with masculinity but shall be treated as a sign of vulgarity and disrespect, which is not tolerable for any man and especially not for a man of political power. She stresses this point by saying "strong men – men who are truly role models – don't need to put down women to make themselves feel powerful" The passage I enjoyed the most in her speech is about one anecdote about a six year-old boy:

In fact, someone recently told me a story about their six-year-old son who one day was watching the news – they were watching the news together. And the little boy, out of the blue, said, "I think Hillary Clinton will be president." And his mom said, "Well, why do you say that?" And this little six-year-old said, "Because the other guy called someone a piggy and," he said, "You cannot be president if you call someone a piggy." (Michelle Obama's Epic Speech on Trump's Sexual Behavior 2016, Youtube: 10.35-10.58).

What this anecdote shows, is that real greatness is not linked to a dominating, intrusive rhetoric but to a moral, respectful universal discourse, which can be even expressed by a very young member in society, such as the six-year old boy. By using this anecdote Michelle Obama degrades Trump's superiority in a non-offensive way. Since he uses such insulting speech acts, he does not seem to fit as the representative of a nation, which cannot identify with this low, shameful talk.

What I also like about her speech is that she encourages women to speak up against open forms of violence and harassment. She claims that "Now is the time for all of us to stand up and say enough is enough. This has got to stop right now" (Michelle Obama's Epic Speech on Trump's Sexual Behavior 2016, Youtube: 8.40-8.49). This performative speech act is particularly strong because it indicates that we all have a possibility to counter sexism and misogyny. Obama's speech act reminded me of Gill's article "Sexism Reloaded: It's Time to get angry again" because both express this idea of voice raising and overcoming unspeakable differences, by just naming and discussing them. Even speaking up against such issues can make a difference and provoke a shift in people's mindsets. It appears to be women's duty to speak up for themselves and their daughters and sons. Michelle Obama indicates that women have

to think about future generations and counter the devastating impacts of gender-discrimination and disillusion associated with Trump's over the top patriarchy.

All in all, I found Obama's form of protest really convincing and encouraging. It indicated to me how easy it is to effectively voice criticism without becoming offensive and intrusive. I would claim that Michelle Obama has effectively countered some of the Alt-right prejudices associated with women and feminism. Even though she is emotional I would not call her overly sensitive, as she speaks in a quiet tone and openly admits her vulnerability and emotivity (minute 7.01). I would argue, that this shows a great degree of confidence. By using the anecdote of the six-year-old boy, she also overcomes the Alt-Right's idea that the feeling of shame is a sign of internal self-hate. Even a small boy has a natural sense of what is right and wrong and is capable to identify inappropriate shameful behavior. I think we can all learn a lot from Michelle Obama.

4.2.2. Meryl Streep's Speech at the Golden Globes (2017)

Even though we did not deal with Meryl Streep's Speech in class, I decided to include it in this paper. I felt that it was a nice continuation of Michelle Obama's powerful speech, since it illuminates the topic from a slightly different angle. Streep uses her five minutes very wisely and counters xenophobia and sexism in an effective way. She starts her talk with a sarcastic comment, which unveils Trump's exclusiveness as a president:

Thank you, Hollywood foreign press. Just to pick up on what Hugh Laurie said. You and all of us in this room, really, belong to the most vilified segments in American society right now. Think about it. Hollywood, foreigners, and the press. (Meryl Streep Golden Globes 2017, Youtube: 0.37-0.41)

Her humoristic and mocking tone shows that the American society according to Trump's taste is very limited, since it outsources the most important opinion-making parts in society; namely Hollywood, foreigners and the press. Meryl Streep continues mentioning names of artists who are outstanding such as Ryan Gosling, Natalie Portman or Dev Patel for instance. They all belong to different nationalities and make up the American spirit, which by origin is diverse and multi-cultural.

There was one moment in her speech which touched me personally and made me think about it:

There was one performance this year that stunned me. It sank its hooks in my heart. Not because it was good. There was nothing good about it. But it was effective and it did its job. It made its intended audience laugh and show their teeth. It was that moment when the person asking to sit in the most respected seat in our country imitated a disabled reporter, someone he outranked in privilege, power, and the capacity to fight back. (Meryl Streep Golden Globe Speech 2017, Youtube: 2: 46- 3: 26)

When I heard this story my disrespect for Trump turned into rage. It told me everything I had to know about the president's perception of power. He excerpts physical power, which is not based on quality and depth but on humiliation and violation of those, who are part of a presumably weak minority. It made it once again clear to me that feminism is not about women's rights. There are no women's rights as opposed to men's rights. There are just human rights, which shall account for everyone regardless of color, sex, political stance, mental or physical capacity etc. And whenever human rights are violated as shown in this particular case, people have to react and stand their ground. Similar to Michelle Obama, Meryl Streep uses a simple and highly emotional tone to express her critique on Donald Trump. I really liked her speech and felt encouraged to express discontent openly. These two strong women have shown that one should not feel intimidated and ashamed but angry and motivated to speak up.

4.3. How can I protect myself from online-violence?

After I came across so many powerful and diverse forms of protest, I was wondering how I could raise criticism against misogyny on the web and how I could eventually prevent myself from being trolled. In order to find some tips I decided to browse the Center for Solutions to Online Violence's website. One post by Ashe Dryden says: "You asked: How do I deal with Online Harassment? How do I help the targets of Online Harassment?" (Dryden 2014: n.pag) The method which would work best for me is to block people who are harassing me, since I do not want to spend my time and energy on reading a humiliating post about me. I was wondering why I should give anyone the possibility and permission to degrade and shame me. Another useful tip concerns technical security issues on Facebook (2014: n.pag). Since I regularly use Facebook to communicate with my friends, it appears indispensable that I familiarize with all security issues and changes on Facebook. I once had a very inconvenient encounter with a random guy who shared my profile pictures on his facebook website and commented on them in very vulgar ways with his friends. I was really shocked

and felt vulnerable and helplessly exposed to them. I reacted immediately, as I firstly forced the guy to delete the pictures on his website and afterwards blocked him. From that moment on I carefully reread all the security recommendations on Facebook and made my profile inaccessible to strangers.

All in all, it seems to me that prevention is a very good form of countering misogyny and online harassment. The more I know about security issues and the more cautious I am, the more confident I will get as a digital media user. This is a sign of self-control.

5. Conclusion

I would like to close this discussion by reflecting on my theoretical, practical and individual efforts I have undergone during this week-long writing and reflection process. I will try to refer back to my personal guideline as framed in part 1.2.

While writing this reading journal I realized that the readings really raised my interest and awareness for feminist issues, their political aspects, their topicality and importance. On the theoretical level I would argue that I developed a more profound understanding of feminist concepts. I expanded my vocabulary and learnt how to implement terms such as new sexism, femonationalism, scopophilia, or symbolic annihilation effectively in my work. Moreover, I also got to know a certain amount of different approaches to gender studies such as psychological (Mulvey), semiotic-linguistic (Touchman) and political (Gill) approaches. This allows me to discuss this complex topic from various angles.

Secondly, the practical part helped me to cope with the presented material in a critical and academic way. I learnt how to use and analyze digital media material effectively, since I came across various webpages (ex. Alt right homepages, feminist webpages etc.), videos on youtube (Pussy grabs back, Pussy riots, Michelle Obama's speech, Meryl Streep's speech) and twitter accounts (ex. Trump's twitter account). In addition to that I learnt about different ways of how to react to gender discrimination. What I found most rewarding was that emotional responses could be effective means of raising critique. They are not a sign of weakness and sensitivity. Since I am a very emotional person I had to cope with that prejudice very often. They could be a sign of strength, encouragement and self-acceptance. Both speeches Michelle Obama's and Meryl Streep's speech taught me this lesson. There are also several creative ways (ex. the photographs) to express criticism. In the end, it is not important which kind of

criticism one choses. It is important that one becomes critical at all and breaks the long-lasting silence.

Finally, on the individual level I would claim that I considered the reading journal as a sort of therapeutic writing. It was refreshing to write down my thoughts and comments, to raise criticism and express disgust in a very personal manner, which would not have been possible in a traditional term paper. I had the possibility to overcome my own insecurities, to discover a new field of study, and to organize and arrange my work in an independent way. At the end of this discussion I would definitely reconsider my primary thoughts on feminism, which I primarily associated with women's political activism and demonstrations. I would now state that feminism is not just political activism pushed forward by women for women, but a voicing for equal opportunities, rights and choices for all. Feminism is not a discussion about gender equality in terms of female and male rights, but it is a discussion on equality in terms of human dignity and human rights regardless of gender identity. It is an alienation from this binary, differentiated thinking towards a collective, dynamic thinking. The whole discussion about misogyny does not have the purpose of victimizing the poor woman who strives for revenge, but to illustrate it as a sign of a systemic violence, which goes far beyond the level of individual acts of harassment and sexual assaults. It shows the defaults of a whole social and political system, which allows niches for exercising violent power and control over suppressed minorities. It is a system, which does not preserve the core moral values, which are so fundamental in our democratic society: honesty, decency, respect and equality. If someone asked me now if I consider myself as a feminist, I would definitely say yes, because I would raise my voice and stand up for these core moral values at any time.

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