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**ABJECTION AND THE MATERNAL BODY: RETHINKING KRISTEVA AND  
PHENOMENOLOGY**

BY  
DANA CARSON

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor.

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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Abjection and the Maternal Body: Rethinking Kristeva and Phenomenology

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June 10, 2020

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis considers how the sacred, understood in the radical Durkheimian tradition, shapes the phenomenological experience of pregnancy. Julia Kristeva viewed maternity as the meeting of culture and nature, and between subject and other. Maternity is the point where biological reproduction and social reproduction meet. By examining the sociological and phenomenological aspects of Julia Kristeva's work and supplementing them with radical Durkheimian and feminist discourse, I argue that the image of the Virgin, sustained through the sacred, creates an alienating experience of pregnancy and diminishes the ability to experience the semiotic in corporeal experiences and transgressive acts. While Kristeva begins an analytic of the sacred, referring to its duality, she misses the nuances of the social, the sacred, and irrationality articulated in Georges Bataille's work on which she draws. By using Bataille's underexplored concepts such as the sacred, sacrifice, experience and the irrational, we are able to develop his phenomenological sensibilities, using them to supplement Kristeva's more psychoanalytic approach. Powerful irrationalities of social life are frequently structured by the dynamics of liminality, abjection and sacrosanct principles. Moreover, the sacred is not the sole experience and there is experience outside discourse. Pain, for example, has a foremost corporeal base, though it may at times be mediated by discourse. By combining Bataille's radical Durkheimian phenomenology of the sacred, and Kristeva's psychoanalytic cultural theory, a more adequate social analysis of the pregnant body is articulated.

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## **ABJECTION AND THE MATERNAL BODY: RETHINKING KRISTEVA AND PHENOMENOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

When discussing the maternal, and becoming maternal, the sacred very frequently shapes how it is experienced, suggesting the need for a phenomenology of this form of human existence. Kelly Oliver (1993) explains that, for Kristeva, “maternity calls into question the boundary between culture and nature. She chooses maternity as a prototype precisely because it breaks down borders between culture and nature and between subject and other” (p.100). This is an intersection where biological reproduction meets social reproduction and the forces that contribute to social reproduction. By examining the sociological and phenomenological aspects of Julia Kristeva’s work and supplementing them with radical Durkheimian and feminist discourse, I argue that the image of the Virgin, sustained through the sacred, creates an alienating experience of pregnancy and diminishes the ability to experience the semiotic in corporeal experiences and transgressive acts. Kristeva’s work contains an analytic of the sacred but never fully develops it. Influenced by the radical Durkheimianism of Georges Bataille, Kristeva references the ambivalence of the sacred but misses the nuances of the social, the sacred, and the irrational that Bataille considers, by focusing too narrowly on “laws, norms, and authority” (Datta, 2005, p.629). An extension, and necessary next step in Kristeva's understanding of the sacred, and how it may influence the pregnant subject, is to productively interrogate her analytic and its appropriation of Bataille's concept of the sacred. Using Bataille's theory of the sacred “as a cultural resource in social and political mobilization; and as a conceptual tool for the analysis of collective life” (Horgan, 2014, p.746), we are able to pull out the phenomenological strength

1. Some texts used in this thesis come before an era where gender neutral language was used. To avoid misquoting such texts, the original terminology is retained throughout this thesis.

of Bataille's theory. This includes Bataille's under-explored concepts of the sacred and sacrifice (Shilling & Mellor, 2013) and in particular, Bataille's use of the irrational (Datta, 2005). Similarly, Datta (2005) notes the importance of the unconscious in Bataille's account of the sacred. In this regard, Bataille does well to supplement Kristeva given her use of psychoanalysis facilitates her rigorous accounts of drives, desires, and passions behind behavior. Humans are irrational and impassioned beings. These fundamentally human and social traits surround liminality, abjection and sacrosanct principles found in societies. Oliver (1993) further highlights the importance of exploring the sacred in relation to the subject when she explains "Kristeva analyses maternity in order to suggest that all distinctions between subjects, objects, all identifications of unified subjects, are arbitrary" (p.100). The subject, the object, and crucially the abject as that which is radically excluded and negatively valorized, are perceived through the sacred. For Bataille, as for Durkheim, nothing is inherently sacred but is created and sustained as such through social dynamics (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014). Drawing on Bataille, one is in a better position to explore and redress limitations in Kristeva's work through his more detailed conception of the sacred.

This thesis reads and retheorizes the work of Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille to examine the contemporary Western experience of pregnancy. In the introduction, I contextualize the need for more phenomenology driven theory on pregnancy and the method of symptomatic reading. Chapter One highlights the limitations in Judith Butler's understanding of subjectivity, the body, and experience in order to demonstrate the necessity of revisiting Julia Kristeva and other prior feminist writing. In Chapter Two, I review and explicate Julia Kristeva's influences and key concepts such as "the chora," "the semiotic," "symbolic elements," and "the Symbolic Realm." This chapter also adumbrates criticism of Kristeva's work and makes a case to continue

despite her limitations. In Chapter Three, I focus attention on the sacred. In particular, I foreground the necessity of supplementing Kristeva's work with radical Durkheimian concepts in order to create a more adequate analysis of the pregnant subject with Kristeva's concepts. Chapter Four expounds how the sustained image of the Virgin does not allow for women to engage in the left sacred. Moreover, this chapter examines how the fetus transitioned to becoming the sacred fetal subject and took precedent over the pregnant subject. The image of the Virgin and the elevation of the fetus to a subject force the pregnant subject into a position of a profane reproductive tool. Chapter Five forefronts the taboo and stigma pregnant women must navigate. The Rule of the Father becomes evident when exploring how stigma and taboo, in the form of benevolent and hostile sexism, sustains the image of the Virgin. Transgression under this sacred order becomes an oppressive abjection as opposed to a means of liberating oneself from a fragmented identity. The chapter concludes by examining abjection in relation to different groups of "failed pregnant women" such as those who receive abortions, those who are childless, or those who experience postpartum depression. In Chapter Six, I review a potential resistance in midwifery and explore where the pregnant subject may find agency. I finish this thesis with a final call to herethics, or an ethics of respect and a secular sacred, so that women may have more control over their experiences of pregnancy.

This thesis considers the contemporary Western experience of pregnancy, specifically drawing on research of heterosexual women whose primary societal referents are Canada, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. The main focus of the thesis is predominantly theoretical, aiming to develop tools for analysing the social constitution of the phenomenology of the pregnant woman in relation to the gendered dynamics of the sacred, abjection, and liminality. The sacred ties social beings to the community, enforces obligations

and taboos through fear and glory, and constitutes the primary existential reference points of socio-political life (Datta, 2008). When the sacred is not respected, transgressed, or when it is shown to be discourse and not objective reality, the community uses abjection to eliminate or contain the threat, and reinscribe acceptable limits. This could come in the form of exiling a person preaching against the sacred or flouting taboos. The liminal periods refer to thresholds in the sacred that demarcate what is sacred, who is subject, and who and what are objects to be regulated in relation to the sacred and its administration (Datta, 2019).

There is a complex array of dynamics and factors contributing to different experiences of pregnancy including age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, marital status, and religion, etc., each of which warrant dedicated investigation in their own right. Rather than catalogue this complexity, I contend that there are “social facts” (Pearce, 2001, p.15) that are external to, coercive upon (especially in terms of morality and obligatory and expected forms of conduct), and pervasive in society pertinent to the phenomenology of pregnancy, as a modality of feminine corporeality. In this regard, phenomenology refers to the social framing, through varieties of “collective representations” and powerful symbols (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014) of the individual and collective sense and evaluation of *corporeal* experience and its discursive rendering. This kind of phenomenology thus extends recent Durkheimian work on the sociology of “perception” that is produced by the synthesis of individual sensations, one’s particular social location, and collective representations, including varieties of authoritative discourses like medicine, religion, and cultural representations of maternity, femininity, childrearing, and family (Nakhaie & Datta, 2019). A phenomenology like this includes women who announce their pregnant condition and women with a visible pregnancy stomach. Feminine corporeality refers to those bodily experiences that are unique to women, which includes, amongst other biological functions and

capabilities, pregnancy, labor, delivery, and motherhood. This phenomenology attends to the sociological meditation on the sacred and the corporality of subject formation involving the maternal body as defined by cis-gendered women with visible or social markers of pregnancy.

Woodiwiss (2005) refers to theory as the work of constructing ways of seeing (p.12), including “seeing” what cannot be accounted for in strictly empiricist terms as what can be got through our senses. Visualizing one’s conceptions, and explicating your conceptions so that others may understand your argument are thus inherent in theorizing. Critical and dialogical theory allows us to trace through a problem with different approaches in order to find the best explanation (Woodiwiss, 2005; Pearce, 2001). This is important; however, when we consider aspects of the corporeal that cannot be seen, or adequately described using language, we need to also use a sociological form of phenomenology to highlight how experiences are inflected by complex social dynamics. Phenomenology is the study of how people express their social milieu. In other words, “phenomenology studies the basic structures of consciousness—especially the tools and practical knowledge that underwrite action and intention” (Calhoun, 2002). Some branches of phenomenology emphasize language and symbolic behavior in experience (Calhoun, 2002). Moreover, this thesis forwards aims to advance the study of experience outside discourse as well. One example Woodiwiss (2005) gives is Durkheim’s model of social solidarity (p.49). Durkheim explains the institutions that create social solidarity in order to create a “visible index” (Woodiwiss, 2005, p.49). However, Durkheim also engaged with corporeal phenomenology, especially in his discussion of “collective effervescence” and “ecstatic” experiences. During moments of collective effervescence, people feel physically and spiritually removed from the mundane experiences of daily life and connect to the community in unity (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014, p.487). This thesis uses both theory and phenomenology in order to grasp both the aspect

of the social embedded in discourse but also the corporeal experiences such as pain that women in pregnancy undergo. By focusing on Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille, theorists with dedication to the corporeal, a more adequate sociological phenomenology of the pregnant woman is developed.

Maternity is an experience that shakes the foundations of identity, body, and social being. Prior to experiencing a pregnancy, an individual may identify themselves with a profession, a hobby, or a name. However, once the physical transformation of maternity begins, new signifiers of identity such as “pregnant”, “mother”, and “patient,” begin to attach themselves to the person regardless of preference. Many women who undergo pregnancy describe a loss of identity and autonomy (Weeks, 2011). During the gestation period, the pregnant woman is no longer an individual but is predominantly considered in relation to the fetus. The fetus, at this time, is considered another being. Moreover, this other being is often considered equally, or in some cases, more important than the woman carrying the fetus. A prime example of this is what Jessica Benjamin (2013) refers to as a “split complementary.” A split complementary, in a manner similar to a dialectical relation, is a situation where each identity is reliant on the other party involved. In this case, the mother and fetus depend on each other. Without the fetus, the woman is not “pregnant” nor an expectant “mother” and without the woman or girl, the fetus would not exist. Just as the doer requires the object of their action, the mother and fetus can be understood as a constantly fluctuating identity, dissolving in and out of one being. The mother becomes an object to the fetus as a womb, and the fetus becomes an object to the mother as a not-yet-subject. The limit of the inside and outside of the subject is questioned. *Ambiguity* in a liminal state, paradoxically becomes the only stable point of identification.

Maternal bodies experience a unique “objectification,” and “abjection”—one that reifies and conflicts with the actual subjecthood of the social being. Even within a shifting cultural climate, one that emphasizes gender fluidity and equality, it is still disproportionately women who sacrifice their financial, social, and professional lives in order to create and care for their children or children that will be raised by others (Weeks, 2011). As Kristeva (2012) boldly states, “do we need to be reminded of the numerous studies on discrimination against women in post-revolutionary society” (p.51). If wealth translates into power in a capitalist society, and women are constantly sacrificing their wealth in order to contribute to the domestic sphere, then male societal dominance is still evident.

In a society that emphasizes individualism, and one that has caused extended families to disperse in order to meet work needs, the task of raising children is no longer given to “the village”. The majority of families rely on one parent to stay at home or to take time away from work to some extent. This duty tends to fall on the mother. Traditionally, society has downplayed women’s isolation and feelings, assuming all mothers “were married, white and terrified about carrot cake making your fetus too fat” (Cooke, 2019, p.2). This means more pertinent issues such as sexism motivating proscriptions towards pregnant women (Murphy et al., 2011) and “the laws inability to deal with pregnant women” (Caldwell, 2002, p.28) have not been forefront. If controlling reproduction is the “hallmark” of patriarchy as Weeks (2011) describes it, then far more attention to women’s phenomenological experience of reproduction is necessary and what systems patriarchy works through to channel power. A closer examination of Julia Kristeva’s theory, with supplementary material from Georges Bataille, can yield a phenomenologically fruitful analysis.

### **Revisiting Phenomenology through Symptomatic Reading**

Plenty of current approaches used in studying pregnant women are empirically focused but lack the theoretical framework that gives sociological meaning to the various findings (Mykhalovskiy & Weir, 2004). These studies focus on objective factors such as the effect of stress on the fetus or the success rate of latching after a caesarean section. Some work has practical implications; as Neyer and Bernardi (2011) mention in their overview of feminist activism on motherhood, liberal feminist theory has tended to focus on rights-based claims especially regarding safe abortion and contraceptives. Most of the literature disregards phenomenology as unimportant to the end goal of policy change although most feminist literature on this subject works to ensure women have a better maternal experience through political and policy changes. Moreover, when literature does take experience into account, there is usually an intentional focus on the experience of the fetus, newborn or child that is considered (Benjamin, 2013). Mykhalovskiy and Weir (2004) call for more theoretical research on the topic as opposed to empirical studies currently dominating the medical field. As opposed to seeing issues as isolated and unrelated such as caesarean births as a medical phenomenon, and postpartum depression as a psychological phenomenon, a look at the way society shapes pregnancy should be examined in order to grasp the larger picture. We need to use the “sociological imagination” in order to see the institutions and social forces that alter the individual experiences of pregnancy. Theoretical research exploring the phenomenology of the pregnant subject, especially in terms of abjection and subjecthood is necessary to fill the gap in this topic’s oeuvre. Abjection, in this thesis, refers to the Kristevian notion of outcasting an individual or yourself for transgressing a social norm that shakes the status quo of socially established identities, domains, and practices. Subjecthood refers to the social constitution of individuals in their interrelationships with others thus shaping



their active participation in social life. Subjecthood can come in opposition to subjectivity, which can lead to abjection.

This thesis uses the theoretical methodology of “symptomatic readings” to explore the issue of feminine corporeality in the maternal body using the work of Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille. Symptomatic reading is a method of rational and critical exegesis forwarded by Althusser (2016). This type of reading acknowledges that there are issues in theories, but the focus is on using the stronger aspects of each theory in order to uncover new answers to unasked questions (Althusser, 2016). Pearce (2001) explains that in symptomatic reading, “the reader finds his own symptoms in the text alongside the manifest concerns of the writer, and seeks answers to his own questions, which may be different from those posed by the writer” (p.xiii). Essentially, as opposed to a strict focus on finding problems within the theory, the theory uses a new problem to encounter a voice in the text that was not yet uncovered (Althusser, 2016). As Bataille (1989) notes, “a philosophy is never a house; it is a construction site” (p. 11). Theory can always be synthesized, altered, or re-visited in order to think through a new issue. This approach is also noted by Woodiwiss (2005) who explains theory can never be finished and is only ever a way of thinking systematically through various issues. This particular strategy is fruitful in visiting the influential social theorist Judith Butler, who has garnered widespread attention in terms of theory focusing on corporeality and analysing gender constructions. However, I argue that Butler’s strength in gender constructionism tends to obscure questions of feminine corporeality which can be a particularly empowering concept for the pregnant subject. By revisiting the voices of her predecessors, previous theoretical discourse can be used to more adequately conceptualize the phenomenology of maternal corporeality.

## Chapter One: Judith Butler and Her Limits

### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the limitations of Judith Butler's work in order to make a case for returning to Julia Kristeva. The strategy to return to prior feminist writing is done in order to focus on developing both the theory and phenomenology to better conceptualize corporeal experience in pregnancy and how these experiences are shaped by the sacred. This chapter highlights the problem of the missing subject in Butler's work. By missing subject, I am referring to the lack of phenomenology in Butler's theory. I first examine Butler's engagement in ontological idealism and then explore the less common critique of Butler's linguistic monism. Generally, the experiences and passions of the subject are not discussed by Butler even though the subject is central to her work. This not only means that the individual needs of particular bodies are ignored, such as pregnant women, but also that corporeal experiences that resist oppressive discourses are not possible. However, the problem of the missing subject, or rather missing phenomenology, in feminist and gender theory is not limited to Butler. Butler is simply an example of a larger avoidance of phenomenology in contemporary feminist writing that needs to be corrected. Though much of Butler's work is concerned with the subject, subjecthood, and subjectivity, she dismisses phenomenology and corporeal experience, asserting a discourse dominant ontology of gender.

### Missing the Phenomenological Perspective of the Subject

Judith Butler articulates a sophisticated, and influential theory of gender construction and play in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Gender Trouble* (1990). Second wave feminism sharply distinguished sex from gender. It argued that gender is a social construct and not derived from

sex (Chambers, 2007). Judith Butler, as a leading contemporary feminist and gender theorist advanced the notion that sex too is a social construct thus opening the potential for freeing identity from sex. Unfortunately, her work affords little agency to subjects and phenomenology is most often passed over for ontological or epistemic arguments. In short, *Butler discusses the subject without regard to the experience of the subject*. In terms of analysing the maternal body from a phenomenological perspective, her feminist theory predecessors have greater explanatory power. My aim here is not to discount Butler; rather it is to revisit the work of Julia Kristeva who has been dismissed as a biological reductionist and passed over for gender construction theories as feminism evolved. As Pearce (2001) explains, when reading symptomatically, the goal is not to systematize or clarify, nor is it to point out shortcomings, but to use fruitful conceptions and reformulate them to explain new questions (p.xiii). My hope is that taking a step back and rediscovering Kristeva's theory that influenced Judith Butler, through symptomatic reading, will allow a fruitful reconception for a contemporary problem.

For Butler, identity is enacted in action and inscribed in speech (Chambers & Carver, 2008). Those with power are able to determine which discourses flourish and which are silenced. It follows that our identity is tied to power. Subjection, according to Butler (1997) both subordinates but also creates subjects. Taboos, prohibitions, and suppressions all function to constitute particular subjects. Even the simple idea of having a name points to a social place (Butler, 1993). This is not to suggest that the subject is the power structure or that the subject is the discourse. There is more involved in creating and sustaining a discourse than individual people but the subject does play a role in sustaining a discourse (Butler, 1997). Neither power nor the subject can be reduced to one another, though both are intimately connected.

For Butler, identity is never independent from others not least since common language and discourse mediate social relations. In this sense, we can see a notable Hegelian influence on Butler's work (Stark, 2014). The subject is "negativity" and is never complete: the subject is always in relation to what it is not. The subject for Butler is produced by being "separated and differentiated" (Butler, 1997, p.9). For Hegel, the subject is dependent on others for recognition (Hegel, 1977). This Hegelian notion is carried on in Butler's explanation of identity, whereby our ability to take on an identity—to perform the desired role—is negotiated and reliant on the recognition of others: "you is part of what composes who 'I' am" (Butler, 2004, p.22). There is a social dimension to the subject. Moreover, Butler calls for a recognition of corporeal vulnerability (Butler, 2004). She describes Hegel's slave and compares the analogy to the way the body is negated in ethical demand, where the Foucauldian notion of the soul imprisoning the body is called forth (Butler, 1997, p.33). Our social "souls", our identity as persons within our society determines what bodily expressions we are allowed to have and how each expression will be interpreted by the community. Without this recognition, the subject becomes "abject". For Butler, this means the subject will undergo stigma and sanctions until returning to an acceptable identity role. For instance, the lesbian becomes the "dyke", the trans-man becomes the "freak", the black single parent becomes the "welfare mom", and so on. These people are narrowed out through derogatory titles as a means of excluding and punishing because these roles shake the assumption of acceptable identities. Subjects who stray too far from the roles deemed suitable, roles that keep the status quo in society stable, risk abjection. Perhaps more daunting though, subjects risk undergoing regulation to contain or eliminate the abject. As Chambers (2007) explains, "if one is to place Butler as Hegelian, she is far more guilty of ignoring the body than if one were to read her in an alternative lens" (p.6). Though discourse mediates the way we interact

with a body, ignoring the actual physical body takes away power from marginal groups. The body still exists in its differences and unique needs.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler discusses the problem of using the category of “women” as a common identity because it places gender at the forefront above all other aspects, while at the same time being immersed in a language that only allows women to be discussed as “lack” or “other”. She argues that unity in a category is not necessary or even desirable, arguing for “a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity” (Butler, 1990, p.15). Yet, the body for Butler is not a suitable foundation for ontology. The body, she says, is “a process of mineralization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler, 1993, p.9). While the body cannot be reduced to linguistics, bodily norms are created through daily speech and enacting corporeal habits. With a call to focus on corporeal habits and inscribed rolls, the phenomenological and the corporeal in itself are neglected.

The problem in Butler’s work with regard to subjectivity is that though identity and subjectivity are central to her theory, the focus of her work is on ontology not phenomenology (Meijer & Prins, 1998). Gambaudo (2017) notes that we cannot have a phenomenology of gender under this theory “because it is always preceded by the terms by which we are meant to discover it” (p.31). Moreover, if Butler is focused on ontology, this ontology of being rejects a cultural or biological foundation for one without any essence (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p.4). Butler then rejects the body as well. This amounts to ontological idealism, and tends to clash with Butler’s other theoretical concepts. Woodiwiss (2005) explains that ontological idealism holds that social reality depends on what individuals think and exists solely in people’s minds; however, it can be dismissed once one considers the history of knowledge production, including scientific revolutions (p.36). Experiments fail, and nature surprises us, which would not possible if that

nature was dependent on human minds (Woodiwiss, 2005, p.36). The corporeal reality, and the physical limitations it imposes—albeit diminishing restraints with medical advances—are not adequately attended to when Butler discusses identity and how identity is experienced. For Butler, “the subject is ontologically secured in a supposedly pre-political and even pre-social realm...with that ‘foundational fiction; the political operations that *continue* to secure legitimacy...are effectively concealed” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p.21). A subject without essence leaves nothing but a discursive idealism. Although Butler claims the ontology of substances is superfluous (Butler, 1999, p.23), her claim that a subject is entirely formed only after action is not convincing. As Meijer and Prins (1998) explain, “there is no doer behind the deed” (p.279). The subject may only be recognized and defined after action, however, that individual still exists, experiences, and thinks prior. There is some sort of being, some sort of essence that is acting.

Feminist critical theorist Seyla Benhabib (1995) accuses Butler of a serious disregard of any concepts of selfhood, agency, and autonomy (Benhabib, 1995, p.21). Moreover, Benhabib (1995) doubts whether Butler's theory of performativity can explain the constitution of the self but also the ability of the subject to resist power and discourse. For Butler, the subject is constituted by language and the body is materialized through discourse, but that does not mean that language is the sole determinant of the subject (Benhabib, 1995, p.135). Furthermore, Benhabib (1995) notes the same issue with Butler's conception of agency: “the notion of agency as the effect of discursive conditions does not entail that these conditions control the use of agency” (Benhabib, 1995, p.18). Essentially, the potentials and current means of resistance are not adequately theorized.

Chambers and Carver (2008) discuss Butler's emergence as a leading figure in third wave feminism. They explain that "third wave feminism names an extremely broad, diverse and thoroughly conflicted group of thinkers, but it successfully pulls together those writings that vigilantly question the notion of 'the experience of women'" (p.4). The experience of the subject is lost when we only consider how discourse works with the body, as opposed to how those deemed abject experience their abjection. By revisiting prior feminist writing, we are able to visit the phenomenology of pregnancy as an experience of women. Oh (2009) points out in her discussion of motherhood as performativity that motherhood can never be fully separated from a woman's body. She makes this claim based on the corporeal nature of caring for a newborn even in the absence of birthing the child. The line between essentialism and culture is blurred because of this in a way that Butler's work cannot account for.

Chambers and Carver (2008) come to the defense of Butler by rejecting her position as an ontological theory and wavering about her as an epistemic theorist. Butler has expressed that "we cannot have access to the body except through discourse" (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p.51). This does not mean that the body is entirely reduced to matter but that the matter is materialized through discourse. The body comes prior to the sign and is signified as such (Butler, 1993). The only way to have access to the body in these terms is through discourse. When Butler is taken to be an epistemic theorist, the problem reduces to linguistic monism (Vasterling, 1999). Butler's theory thus becomes guilty of discursive determinism. This means that the body for Butler is linguistic or at least is only accessible through language meaning this is an epistemic argument, as opposed to an ontological grounding in the body or a phenomenological reading.

The body for Butler is partially constructed by oppressive norms in this sense as the norms prescribed onto the body will come to seem natural (Vasterling, 1999, p.24). However,

Butler's "tendency, reinforced by psychoanalytical interpretation, to equate accessibility and intelligibility or, in other words, to restrict (pre)conscious experience to the intelligible, is debilitating for such a theory" (Vasterling, 1999, p. 25). If this is the case, we are unable to use corporeal experiences as a means of resistance (Vasterling, 1999, p.26). That leaves a depressing conclusion of passive subjects, or subjects that can only be active and transformative in language and signification. Vasterling also argues that Butler's epistemological position rejects the possibility of pre-conscious experience although it is notable that Butler follows the psychoanalytic tradition. Psychoanalysis insists there is a space prior to discourse where the subject exists. Butler (1993) states, "the idea and the conveying are phenomenologically coincident...although Freud's language engages a causal temporality that has the body part precede its 'idea,' he nevertheless confirms here the indissolubility of a body part" (p.59). Freud's concept of polymorphous perversity, discussed by Johnson-Eilola (2012), demonstrates the psychoanalytic stance that bodies can experience sensory level pleasure be it through transgression or prior to learning socially acceptable pleasures. Generally, Butler is less about subjectivity than about "the material out of which such a construct is forged" (Grosz, 1989, p.18). These notable issues with Butler's work are further reasons to engage with her influences and second wave feminism in order to create a more adequate analysis of the pregnant subject.

Chambers (2007) believes that critics ask about the body in Butler's work because of its implications for sex. While this may hold true in some cases, the body is an important lacuna in Butler's work because of experiences that fundamentally alter the body. Whether the maternal is constructed or not, the body will change and the subject will experience this change, not least by being construed in discourse and social relations as an object of medical knowledge, or an abjected being. To ignore that phenomenology is to ignore that subject's experience and, in this



case, a particular group of women. Butler herself in *Gender Trouble* (1990) admits the subject is important for feminist politics. Later, in *Violence Mourning Politics* (2004) she states that “it is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense our own and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies” (p.23). In order to make claims to the body, we need to acknowledge the body. While I acknowledge Butler’s advances in gender and sexuality studies, Kristeva’s theory, though predating the current sociological climate towards the body, holds more explanatory power with regards to the phenomenology of the pregnant subject.

The phenomenology of this female experience is lost when theories dispense with the notion of a female experience, and of “female.” Gambaudo (2017) notes the second wave feminist interest in phenomenology is lost in contemporary gender theories. Though there are plenty of rich concepts in modern theories of gender and particularly constructivism, the consequence of erasing the notion of “female writing” means displacing much feminist writing, feminist theory, and a phenomenology focusing on “female experience”. As Chambers and Carver (2008) suggest, “to think of sex as itself subject to gender norms cannot allow us to do away with the specificity of sex” (p.12). If everything is performance, then the corporeal experiences of women are performance. If the corporeal experiences of women are seen as a performance, they are easier dismissed than if they are discussed as real. This puts women, all women, in a dangerous position of minimizing their complexly constituted forms of agency. Though Butler laughs at the “notion of a particular female problem or affliction” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p.19) she also acknowledges the severity these problems pose for people when she claims to bring “laughter in the face of serious categories” (Butler, 1990, p.xxviii). The struggles women undergo, including and especially women of color, trans women, and infertile women, go beyond gender play and expression but are part of the core of their being. Of course, society

shapes the experiences of women but to deny an authentic female corporeality is to deny the reality of their existence and experiences.

### **Conclusion: An Overall Need to Revisit the Body**

Butler is far from the only theorist positing the mind as central. Generally, Western culture assumes the mind superiority over the body (Grosz, 1989; see also Woodiwiss, 2005). The mind has been central when considering subjectivity in Western culture. This displacement roots back to Plato, where the body (“*soma*”) was thought of as a shell. There was, then, a non-corporeal being trapped in the body. The larger influences of this movement for contemporary society include René Descartes and Christianity, which, since the fourth century CE, has dominated Western society and thus the discourse underlying Western society (Grosz, 1989). In the mind becoming central to the notion of subjectivity, the body becomes the lesser of a dichotomy. Grosz (1989) explains that subjectivity is thought about in a dualism whereby the mind is the privileged term and the body is a “conceptual blind spot” (p.3). Grosz (1989) explains the body is either studied as an organ in terms of function or as an object. However, in dualisms, privileged terms tend to become associated. For instance, light over dark is associated with good over evil. In a similar way, mind over body has become connected to male over female (Grosz, 1989). She calls for a need to displace the mind as central and understand subjectivity through the body as well. Susan Bordo (1993) in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* seconds this notion stating that we see the body “as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects: these are common images within western philosophy” (p.3). Women, being the negative term are then seen as animal, appetite, aggression, and as lacking reason or morality. Their bodies are seen as lesser and as tools to the privileged

male mind. These dualisms alienate the subject. Bordo calls this the shift from Cartesian thought to a body void of a subject. Luce Irigaray makes claims to the body as a process to be paid attention to as opposed to a substance to dissect (Grosz, 1989). Julia Kristeva sees the body as separate from discourse and capable of real experiences outside of discourse (Kristeva, 1980b). Giving up corporeality when previous models in feminism faltered is not an adequate solution. The necessity of attending to the body, particularly when discussing phenomenology, is not a branch of sociology to be phased out and needs more theoretical attention.

This chapter demonstrates the problem of theorizing subjectivity without attention to the phenomenological experience of the subject. By engaging in ontological idealism, or linguistic monism as some theorists suggest, Butler dismisses the unique needs that come with having different bodies and the possibility of resistance to discourse through corporeal experiences. Instead of repudiating Kristeva's conceptions of the abject and the corporeal in a phenomenological analysis, reformulating these concepts to work alongside Georges Bataille's radical Durkheimian conception of the sacred can yield a new basis for analysing the subject during pregnancy. Advancing a sociological phenomenology that reflects corporeal experience as well as experience within discourse can help subjects claim experiences on their own terms. This new symptomatic reading of Kristeva can be used to look at contemporary experiences of pregnancy and potential solutions to negative aspects of the experiences.

## Chapter Two: Julia Kristeva's Theory of Culture and the Body

### Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the return to Julia Kristeva in order to establish a phenomenology of the pregnant subject. This chapter begins by introducing Kristeva's primary influences; Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and Feminism; in order to establish the necessary history of her important concepts. An analysis of the criticisms forwarded against Kristeva is given, which are primarily biological reductionism and essentialism, along with a defense against these criticisms. This chapter also introduces Kristeva's concept of "herethics," which is later discussed as a means of resistance. Additional concepts such as the "chora," "the symbolic and the Symbolic Realm," and "the semiotic" are outlined. The latter half of the chapter explores Patriarchal Western Culture and explores how this culture may be sustained through Marxist Feminist theory as well as the sacred. Kristeva's conception of the subject, the object, and the abject are outlined and used to explore how women experience oppression. Lastly, I explore Kristeva's view of maternity in relation to the subject, object, and abject as well as its limitations. This is done in order to make a case for extending Bataille's radical Durkheimian concepts into Kristeva's theory in order to adequately analyse how the sacred sustains a dysfunctional form of abjection for pregnant subjects without dismissing their corporeal experiences.

While Judith Butler has been at the leading edge of feminist theory, the limitations in her work, discussed above, warrant substantial rethinking. However, Butler's use of Julia Kristeva's work, Kristeva's formation of the concept of abjection in particular, provides an important theoretical opening to developing a phenomenology of abjection, and the pregnant subject, one attentive to social relations, power, and the body. Additionally, Butler engages in Kristeva's interest in the body but focuses on ontology as a discourse about being as opposed to the

phenomenology of embodied existence. Butler believes that Kristeva reifies maternity and ignores the cultural construction of motherhood (Butler 1990). While Kristeva's theory is rooted in a particular context, her concepts of the Symbolic realm and symbolic elements in the symbolic realm must be distinguished in order to avoid conflating the terms and construing Kristeva as an essentialist. Symbolic elements need not always take the same form, and upon examining a different society with different symbolic elements, Kristeva's analysis may yield different results. However, Kristeva chooses to look at the current and available categories and discourses as opposed to an abstract future potential. By symptomatically reading Kristeva, we can better analyse the phenomenology of pregnant women than if we were to dismiss her concepts and focus on ontology-based theory such as Butler.

Kristeva is foremost a psychoanalyst, both clinical and academic. Her priority is to help her analysands, which she believes is done through expressing themselves. Kristeva's goal is for the subject "to be found in the cure...this means producing subjects who are free to construct imaginary fantasies (or works of art), to produce a new language, precisely because they are able to situate themselves in relation to the Law" (Moi, 1986, p.18). By expressing their subjectivity, found in the imaginary or the realm of love, her patients are able to feel better and experience the world in a meaningful way (Moi, 1986, p.14-15). Kristeva calls for a relation of what she calls "herethics": an ethics of love demonstrated in the mother-child relationship. Herethics is a relationship of respect and listening to understand. Kristeva's work appeals to me sociologically, but it also appeals because it considers and comes from a female and a maternal perspective. Here, I attend to the main components of Kristeva's theoretical system to provide a basis for my own critical and synthetic work.

Kristeva as a psychoanalyst is indebted to Sigmund Freud. She is, however, a post-Lacanian psychoanalyst whereby she reworks the perspective of the famous French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who advocated for a return to Freud. Kristeva's interest in and attitude towards phenomenology and subjectivity also leave her indebted to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Her interest in semiotics and psychoanalysis led to her notion of "semanalysis." Kristeva (1973) proposed this term in *The System and the Speaking Subject* to explain a study that combines "bio-physiological processes", which can be studied through psychoanalysis, corporeality, and "social constraints", which can be studied through discourses (p.28). Kristeva describes semanalysis as a Hegelian dialectic with a material base (1973, p.31). Her final influence, and one which she largely rejects, is that of feminism, at least of certain stripes. However, due to Kristeva's sustained interest and commitment to women's issues, maternity, and motherhood, she is exceptionally influential in feminist and cultural theory. Together, with these four influences, Kristeva synthesizes a theory with phenomenological potential.

### **Kristeva, Hegel, and the Dialectic**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* brought phenomenology and subjectivity to the forefront of social thought. He began his work, and continued much of it, by revising Immanuel Kant's critical idealism. Kant argues that we cannot know noumena, the outside world, and that only phenomena, which he describes as our conscious representation synthesized with empirical input (McCumber, 2014). Similar to a pin-point impression toy, we will never know the physical hand on the outside—the noumena—we will only ever see the image buffered by the medium of subjectivity. Hegel wanted to show that we can experience noumena as noumena. For Hegel, the dialectic is a way of trying to reconcile this issue. The

dialectic, as the constitutive movement of being through knowing, is a conception on how “adequate concepts are reached, that is to say concepts which will enable a man [sic] to both grasp and become reconciled to his [sic] experience” (Plante, 1983, p.139). Something cannot be its opposite: Black cannot be white, up cannot be down. This is the general idea of thesis and antithesis. The logic of noncontradiction means the concepts become related precisely by the positing of a concept, but in conflict since to grasp an idea, means to also posit what does not fall under its idea. The conflict between them drives an energy, a will to know, leading to a synthesis whereby a new category subsumes the two opposing categories: “Their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.” (Hegel, 1977, p.2). Sense and perception synthesize to understanding or as Hegel calls it in *The Science of Logic* (Hegel, 1962) “immediacy” and “mediation”. “Immediacy” generally refers to sensory input and “mediation” refers to subjective experience of sensory input. The synthesis keeps going and building starting with simple, practical knowledge and leading to larger spiritual, sophisticated, universal knowledge of the self and understanding. For Hegel, each synthesis brings us closer and closer to god (i.e., the full self-consciousness of absolute knowledge) in the sense that we get closer to the universal (Speight, 2008, p.23). Self-contradicting concepts break down to show the mediation behind subjective and collective knowledge. Though Kristeva clarifies how mediation comes to alter experiences and uses psychoanalysis to resolve the mind-body dualism, she nonetheless takes a Hegelian interest in a dual mediated being.

Hegel was working toward a project of conceptualizing totality while maintaining the stance that the individual is important to the larger picture. For Hegel, this is how people experience the world: subjective thought meets objective truth. Phenomenology is the

spontaneous notion of sense certainty (Speight, 2008) or what McCumber calls rationally mediated experience. Therefore, phenomenology is how the world spontaneously appears to us, and how our truth, our grasp of being itself, appears to us. The mind does shape the world suggesting that there is a social character to our knowledge, but this theory also acknowledges that our experiences are real and important. As Nancy (2002) explains “the subject is what it does, it is its act and its doing is the experience of the consciousness of negativity of substance” (p.5), and that the subject is always changing and is “in infinite relation” (p.12). The subject thus unreflectedly applies an implicit understanding of the world and themselves in their actions, bumping up against what one does not fully understand or control. As our social relations change, our form of subjectivity changes and the way we experience and act in the world changes.

A key idea in Hegel’s writing is the loss of spirit (“presence of being”) to tools. Tools have an established purpose and are created with a thought of future use, a concretized *telos*. When we become tools, it can feel alienating because we, as human subjects, are being treated as objects. Property begins to embody personality, and the person becomes an object. The universal personhood of modern times is misleading: “the slave” is alive and well. The investment in the corporeal, the subject and phenomenological as brought to the center by Hegel is an underappreciated influence on Kristeva’s writings. What happens to the woman under specific discourses, especially in terms of the maternal and the use of women as wombs, is an interest rooted in the loss of spirit to tools. Though there are major, marked differences between Kristeva and Hegel, the influence of Hegel should not be overlooked.



## **Kristeva and Psychoanalysis**

The more evident influence in Kristeva's writing is that of psychoanalysis. Freud's contributions to psychology, sociology, social and cultural theory are numerous and far beyond the scope of this thesis to detail. However, the notable and pertinent highlight in Freud's work, in terms of Kristeva and the maternal, is his interruption to the mind-body dualism highlighted by Grosz (1989). Plaut (2005) notes that the Freudian "Id" is part of the unconscious which contains drives, traumas and "the constitutional factor in the individual" (p.74). For Freud, drives are somatically derived, instinctual needs that pressure us to behave in certain ways (Meissner, 2009, p.817). This means the Id contains some sort of essence of the person and some sort of link to the person that is corporeal. This also means that the Id cannot be fully controlled. There will always be a part of the Id capable of transgressing. Freud believed that the Id experienced corporeal and sensory perception: corporeal, unreflected input and agitations essentially; whereas the ego added form to sensations and perceptions. Freud (1962) explains that if one were to only think in pictures, in sensory input, there would be a closer connection to the unconscious drives in each of us but no form to the thought. It would only be a partial consciousness and there would be no way to navigate the input in a social context without the ego.

Freud claimed that the drives in our unconscious are the primary motivations behind our behaviors. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1961) explains that drives are always trying to break through or "discharge" through action. This once again forefronts corporeality. The physical experiences, behaviors, of a subject are real and important. This highlight of phenomenology is carried by Kristeva throughout her *oeuvre*. Though Kristeva relies on a post-Lacanian reading of Freud, she nonetheless draws heavily from his concepts of the mind and

body being interconnected. She moves further towards discourse as an organizing, form giving force but she holds true to the notion of foundational drives within each being.

Though Kristeva is influenced by Freud, she follows a post-Lacanian psychoanalysis in her theoretical works. Jacques Lacan, notably associated with structuralism, is an essential background as Kristeva draws heavily from his theory. For Lacan, “Psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject. From the Freudian point of view the individual is the subject captured and tortured by language” (Lacan, 2015, p.243). Post-Lacanian psychoanalysis still follows and reworks Freudian conceptions; however, there is a larger focus on the illusion of the self and lack of unity in a subject (Elliot, 2014, p. 117). How the subject experiences their fragmented identity, and how their relationships connect to their identity is important.

The Imaginary, defined by raw input, sensory perception, and an experience of totality and unity with one’s self, and the Symbolic which is defined by symbols in the institutional social realm, language, and social communication, is the mediation between the conscious and unconscious (Elliot, 2014, p.117). For Lacan, the child enters the mirror stage around 6 to 18 months, which allows for the feeling of unity as a whole and separate being: “The mirror provides the subject with relief from the experience of fragmentation by granting an illusory sense of bodily unity” (Elliot, 2009, p.118). The mirror stage is when we recognize that we are our own being, but this image of unity is exactly that—an illusion (Elliot, 2014, p.117). This is because the infant perceives a coherent totality whereas their corporeal experience is of an uncoordinated being unable to master its movements. As we grapple with resolving the experience of our corporeal fragmentation with the desire and image of unity, we are further fragmented by entering the Symbolic. Language intrudes on the imaginary which allows for a

sense of unity, and a sense of unity with the mother (Elliot, 2014, p.121). For Lacan, language is the “paternal metaphor”, the rule of the father, that comes between the infant and the mother although it is necessary for the infant to become a speaking being (Elliot, 2014, p.121). We understand and define ourselves as a subject that is separate from other beings and we become aware that being recognized as a subject depends on speech and language, about which the child has limited knowledge. The Symbolic thus comes to dominate in the social institution of the family, displacing the Imaginary.

Prior to the speaking stage, the child is still one with its caregiver, most often mother. The needs of the child are provided and are physical in nature. The mother provides the child sustenance in other words. When language begins, the child’s needs turn to demands and as the child becomes more independent and the caregiver begins to be less involved, the child understands something is being lost. The child understands that mother is taken away by something (as she is less and less involved in supplying the needs of the infant) and direct nourishment is replaced by language. The child is immersed in language and grows resentful of the mother leaving. This is where our longing for the lost object, i.e., melancholy, originates according to Lacan (Gambuado, 2017). The critical difference between Lacan’s conception of the mirror stage and Kristeva’s conception, is that Kristeva sees the separation as physical not absolute. Kristeva states that the “child must agree to lose the mother in order to be able to imagine or name her” (Summers-Bremner, 1998, p.182). A physical separation means the ability to name the thing that is not you, which acknowledges that it is not you—“Mother is not me, therefore I am not mother.” This does not mean an absolute rejection of the mother as a subject is necessary and this is a key point Kristeva carries through her work.

For Lacan, the imperfection of language is what causes us distress, *jouissance* and the Real. The Real constitutes a place of trauma or rupture in both the Imaginary and Symbolic that language cannot adequately conceptualize or convey. Since the trauma can never be expressed adequately through language, and we can never consciously grasp it; it is referred to as a “missed encounter” with the Real (Botting, 1994, p.24). The Real is the violent repression that haunts our reality (Datta, 2005). It is something that cannot be consciously processed, and fears and desires reside here. Kristeva takes up this notion and adds the addition of “the Semiotic,” (experience that transgresses discourse) as well as the symbolic as in symbolic elements of our current predominant discourse within the Symbolic realm which is closer to Lacan’s conception Symbolic.

Moreover, construing Lacan’s “Real” as a lack of lack, or a place without absence, means there is potential for subjects to try to immerse themselves in the Real in order to cope with their fragmented identities (Botting, 1994, p.30). Where the Imaginary is an illusion of unity, the Real poses a distressing but rewarding experience of the self—void of negativity. This concept lends inspiration to Kristeva’s notion of the abject discussed in Chapter Two. The Semiotic, as an emotional realm that disrupts the Symbolic, acts as a mediary between the Imaginary and the Real. By doing this, Kristeva uses psychoanalytic extension to connect the affective, non-discursive, and corporeal dimensions of subjectivity. Emotion now has a place in the Lacanian imaginary (Gambuado, 2017), as do passions. Moreover, Lacan’s conception of the Real, which interpolates aspects of Bataille’s concept of the sacred, foreshadows Kristeva’s conception of the abject, particularly as a place on the outskirts of society and that which cannot be included in the Symbolic domain of institutions with their rules, values, and practice norms.

## **Kristeva and Feminism**

Kristeva's final influence discussed in this thesis is that of feminist literature. Kristeva's place in feminism, or some critics desire to exclude her from feminism, is one she herself may dispute. Oliver (1993) states that "Julia Kristeva has become known for her rejection of feminism" (p.94). Moi (1986) clarifies this point by stating Kristeva rejected what she deemed bourgeois feminism, the politicising of all human relationships and the tendency of feminism at the time to emphasize "women's intrinsic difference from men" (p.10). For Kristeva, the issue is not with feminism itself, her issue is with feminism used by individuals to boost their status at the cost of harming other women. For instance, "in 'Stabat Mater,' Kristeva chastises feminists for circumventing the *real experience* of motherhood by accepting the Western myth that motherhood is identical with femininity" (Oliver, 1993, p.104). This stance alone makes Kristeva a powerful proponent of women's issues including the choice to become a mother. In consideration that Kristeva's work has an ongoing interest in matters concerning women, the maternal, and motherhood as demonstrated through works such as *Stabat Mater* (1977), *About Chinese Women* (1974), and in her concept of "herethics", and the reworking of Lacan. Notwithstanding flaws identified by critics in her work, Kristeva very clearly writes with a feminist intention.

Daniella Forster (2016) discusses four dualities of modern society. She explains that man is in opposition to God whereby previously "God is at the level of man" (Forster, 2016, p.198), current Christian/Judeo conceptions of God raise him above man. She explains that transgression links meaning to nonmeaning. If this is the case, taboo and ritual, practices of the sacred, are essential for analysis in the phenomenology of the subject. Kristeva draws on the sacred, though she does not conceptualize it to the same extent as Georges Bataille. However, by drawing on Bataille's theory of the sacred in conjunction with Kristeva, understanding the way this duality

affects maternity is possible and opens up the potential to resolve the duality. It is particularly important for Kristeva to look at the way a monotheistic, perfect, male God changed society and women's roles in society compared to polytheistic, imperfect Gods. Man and nature are in opposition through the creation and practice of science and that man and community are placed in opposition by forcing duty to oppose desire and virtue to oppose happiness (Forster, 2016). As Kristeva (1968) explains, science, including medical science, is always constructed through an ideology. When this ideology is in opposition to the happiness and desires of a subject, they may experience emotional turmoil. Lastly, the self and reality are alienated through the mind-body dualism. Forster (2016) notes that these dualisms emerge through discourse and explains "conceptual thought requires a corresponding language" and that "language requires a linguistic community" (p.83). She also claims that in overcoming these dualisms, one can be happy. Both Hegelian thought and psychoanalysis are focused on reconciling this dualism. Dualities create the feeling of fragmentation. If the mind is in opposition to the body, how can anyone feel whole? From a phenomenological standpoint, dualities cause the subject to experience distress. Kristeva's theory of discourse and her studies of semantics are of clear use in analysing the practices and knowledge that make these dualities possible.

The importance of corporeality in phenomenology is a lasting subject of interest for Kristeva and her call for a politics of emotion, studying phenomenology and emotion but not independent of the social basis that situates the subject. Becoming conscious of the self, of objects, and of representation is the means of overcoming duality for Forster. I would add the importance of becoming conscious of the abject and the power structures creating these categorizations is essential to overcoming them, abjection in the Kristevian sense of a transgression that shakes the status quo of an identity. Moreover, noting the difference between

communal truth and universal truth in the analysis of these relations is necessary. Finally, Kristeva posits an interesting perspective by specifically asking women's place in these dualisms. Drawing on her predecessors, Kristeva creates a theory with a powerful analytic capable of carrying out a phenomenology of the maternal.

### **Criticisms of Kristeva**

The main criticism forwarded against Kristeva's work is that she engages in biological reductionism or essentialism. This criticism suggests that Kristeva favors answers rooted in biology rather than examining culture to find a more adequate answer. This criticism also suggests that she lumps all women under one set of characteristics. Though Kristeva does have some instances of biological reductionism in her work, it is a hasty generalization to categorize her as a biological reductionist and dismiss the totality of her theory. There is much rich sociological theory within Kristeva's work to engage with.

One particular criticism is rooted in the concept that the feminine has a greater link to the Semiotic, meaning that women have a greater link to the Semiotic. This is not the case, at least not in Kristeva's work. As Grosz (1989) points out, by displacing the assumption that the feminine equates to woman, the Semiotic, the ability to connect with the Semiotic and the feminine is not privileged by any particular sex inherently. Another criticism on a similar note is that the Symbolic is anti-women. Again, this is not the case in Kristeva's words. Kristeva has always placed women primarily as speaking beings. Women are just as engaged in the Symbolic as any other sex. However, Kristeva discussed the symbolic element as it is currently organized, under patriarchal terms, which is oppressive towards women. The distinction between the Symbolic realm, which Kristeva tends to differentiate by capitalizing the "S", and the symbolic

element is not always noted by critics. It is nonetheless a key distinction as symbolic elements can vary. This variance also means that resistance and change to the symbolic element is possible.

Another criticism comes from the assumption of sex as a natural given. Much of Kristeva's work, and all of Bataille's work, is situated from a pre-trans era. Butler assumes there is nothing inherent about the body, and that there is nothing stable about identity. For Butler, the body is only ever signified: "There is no body in itself, no natural sexual difference. Rather, sexed bodies are always matters of representation" (Oliver, 1993, p.99). This allows the doors of identity to open to a wide variety of possibilities. However, this also denies feminine corporeality: a concept that allows for female experience to be taken seriously and, in particular, pregnant women. For even if this corporeality is socially made, and sex does not exist, "it is based on this sexual difference that culture is built" (Kristeva, 2012, p.53). Concurring with Gail Schwab, Caldwell states "while theorists may envisage a future world of multiple sexes or no sex at all, those forms of identity are not clearly available, or desired, by many women" (Caldwell, 2002, p.30). A future with a different categorization of sex may be possible, but it is not the current state of society. Working within the categories, within what feels real right now, may work better to help women than to theorize abstract potentials.

More than the argument of whether sex exists naturally or not, or whether we should do away with sex or not, comes the criticism that Kristeva's focus on sex diminishes the other parts of identity. Caldwell (2002) discusses the way differences among women tends to be ignored, which in turn ignores oppressive forces constituting these differences (p.31). A charge that has been similarly leveled of Luce Irigaray, and a charge I dismiss with the same defense given to Irigaray. Caldwell (2002) defends this stance when she endorses Grosz, stating that, "Elizabeth



Grosz generously notes that it is not Irigaray's task to list every form of fundamental difference" (p.32). Though this approach is not the perfect solution, it is a better alternative than exploiting the bodies of women while simultaneously denying their difference because we are unable to explore every possible difference.

Some of Kristeva's work does suggest essentialism; much of it stems from the difficulty of reading through sex without diminishing difference. Oliver (1993) describes Kristeva's struggle to discuss identity and difference without dissolving it falling into a generalization when she states, "While there is legitimate textual grounds for interpreting a slippage in Kristeva's texts, I think that this slippage can be productively read as Kristeva's struggle against representing sexed bodies as only two types of bodies" (p.97). Despite this struggle, Kristeva advocates through her work for a politics of individuals. Kristeva advocates for individuals to turn within and remember who we are outside of society: "it is an essential kind of resistance in a technocratic society to rehabilitate memory along with the questioning and to allow the conflict of the individual to take place, thus creating a culture that would satisfy these needs" (Kristeva, 2002, p.101). She does so in her discussion about corporeal vulnerability, particularly in regard to disabled bodies, and in her notion of herethics. Kristeva (1984) claims, "I have the deep conviction that every person has a very particular sexuality" (p.24), a position consistent with the best of clinical psychoanalysis that respects the unique fantasy forms of each analysand. Caldwell (2002) explains this notion through the idea of equality. Equality creates a standard to make all groups on par with and it assumes all groups want this standard. In this way, the idea of equality comes with the idea of an ideal citizen (Caldwell, 2002, p.20). Diversity becomes a hierarchy where all are subjugated by the ideal. The diverse are helped to become equal, and in becoming equal they become the ideal citizen. However, when concepts repress differences in

order to try and create equality, different needs of different groups cannot be met (Caldwell, 2002). Acknowledging differences among women is important, but so too is acknowledging differences between women and men in order to meet the needs of women. In a similar notion to Kristeva's shared corporeal vulnerability, Caldwell (2002) describes a new ethics of sexual difference where subjects look at themselves as other and acknowledge their own difference. Much of Kristeva's criticism is rooted in misunderstanding her concepts of the semiotic and symbolic, though some of her work does engage in essentialism. This is why we must pull the strengths of her theory as opposed to disregarding her fruitful concepts because of weaknesses in other areas of her work.

### **The Symbolic and Semiotic**

Kristeva developed an early focus on semanalysis. Her interest in semiotics stems from her interest in discovering social law in the Symbolic dimension of language and how social practices express this law. In terms of phenomenology, semiotics is a poor study as semiotics cannot escape language (Kristeva, 1973, p.30). Semiotics is a part of language. However, the study of semiotics does force a reflection of the discursive position of the subject, and that paired with psychoanalysis, can be productive. Within semiotics, Kristeva explains there is a "genotext" and a "phenotext". The genotext is the drive, the Semiotic, behind the language. The genotext is the "languages underlying foundation" (Kristeva, 1974b, p.121). The phenotext is the actual communication, or the expression through language. The phenotext does not always precisely translate the genotext, nor is it necessarily capable of translating the genotext.

For Kristeva, language does not merely represent the world, but it produces it (Moi 1986). Symbols and language interact with other signs and transform into new meanings and

representations. Kristeva draws on Hegel's dialectic in this aspect of her theory. The primary example is that the word of the Lord becomes the marking that then produces the reality as it "evokes a collection of associated images and ideas" as opposed to one reality (Moi, 1986, p.72). By extension, the image of the maternal, of the Virgin Mary, and of immaculate conception by a monotheistic, male entity, produces the images of idealized motherhood. These points in semiotics are the precursor to Kristeva's notion of the Symbolic and Semiotic.

Kristeva's notion of the Semiotic is linked to the "Chora," i.e., pre-verbal sensation. It includes the experience of the fetus in the womb and the marks of this term in the fetus' life. Kristeva describes the Chora as "a rhythmic pulsion rather than a new language. It constitutes the "heterogeneous disruptive dimension of language" (Moi, 1986, p.13) and as "discrete quantities of energy [that] move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such" (Kristeva, 1974b, p.93). *The Chora, then, is corporeal and posits itself as the foundational experience of all beings.* Butler (1993) describes the Chora as "that site where materiality and femininity appear to merge to form a materiality prior to and formative of any notion of the empirical" (p.17). While this commends the importance of corporeality to phenomenology, Butler disregards this aspect.

Kristeva at times suggests that engaging with the Chora through the Semiotic may be more accessible to women but she never states that men are not able to engage as well through a "feminine particularity" that can be found in any human being especially through creative acts (Kristeva, 2004). This is because "women take part in the symbolic order, but only as outsiders" (Kristeva, 2004, p.497). Kristeva makes a distinction, not always noted in translations of her work, between the Symbolic order and symbolic elements within the Symbolic. The subject enters the Symbolic order during the thetic phase, which stems from the mirror stage (Oliver,

1993, p.96). This is the time when children must separate from their mothers and enter into language. The Symbolic realm acts as a stabilizer for our desires and drives as the Semiotic is constantly trying to subvert our frames of reference (Elliot, 2009, p.234). Kristeva (1996) explains, “by symbolic, I mean the tributary signification of language, all the effects of meaning that appear from the moment linguistic signs are articulated into grammar, not only chronologically but logically as well (p.21). This is the point where the subject’s drives and desires are communicated through language and are therefore also filtered through language as used in specific institutional contexts. Outsiders are better able to engage in breaks from the dominant discourse which engages the Semiotic. This is because outsiders are transgressing the symbolic in some way already. Mothers, for Kristeva, are also able to engage more actively with the Semiotic. As the mother has historically been, and still generally is, the primary caregiver in Western society, most infants’ pre-oedipal and pre-symbolic interactions are with the mother, and there is a clear sensory quality to maternal care which includes touch, rocking, feeding, and general caring. This allows mothers to engage more actively with the Semiotic.

The Semiotic then, is the corporeal and emotional realm of pre-oedipal drives constituted in relation between mother and infant that disrupt everyday speech (Elliot, 2009). The Semiotic, not to be confused with semiotics, is the connection to the Chora after language has been introduced. The Semiotic cannot alone articulate needs and we require language to give form to our thoughts. Without language, the Semiotic would simply be an overflow of emotion, disruption, and even trauma. We would not be able to articulate or conceptualize these feelings or experiences. Kristeva (1996) explains that, “by semiotic, I mean, for example, the child’s echolalia before the appearance of language, but also the play of colors in an abstract painting or a piece of music that lacks signification but has meaning” (p.21). Since the Semiotic works

within language, not outside of societal discourse, children do not need to override the Imaginary to enter the Symbolic order. By channeling creativity and emotion, the Semiotic is engaged and connects an individual to both the Symbolic order, the Imaginary, and the Real. For Kristeva:

The semiotic element within the signifying process is the drives as they discharge within language. This drive discharge is associated with rhythm and tone. And because these sounds and rhythms are primarily associated with the sounds and rhythms of the maternal body, the semiotic element of language is also associated with the maternal. The semiotic is the subterranean element of meaning within signification that does not signify (Oliver 1993 p. 96).

Botting (1994) compares the Semiotic to Blanchot's "Other of Speech" (p.34). "Other of speech" connects us to Lacan's the Real and allows for communication outside and within language. The Semiotic does with an affective dimension. Because the Semiotic allows a connection to the Real, where we can be a "lack of lack" as opposed to an image of unity, the Semiotic is associated with the authentic subject. This allows legitimate communication through the body; however, this also means that experiences mediated by language in which patriarchal values are dominant are likely to be filtered through frameworks facilitative of male domination. No matter our awareness of this, the tendency is to reproduce patriarchal frameworks unless forms of resistance, including art, poetry, psychoanalytic practice, and revolt, constitute alternative subject positions that can be used as a basis for social transformation. The overarching problem with feminine corporeality then, is that the discussion is always filtered, mediated, tainted, or bumping up against a patriarchal discourse. The engagement with the Semiotic is as close to a pure corporeal language that we can tap into.

For Kristeva, this engagement can be bodily, maternal, creative or poetic. Derrida (1978) states that "to be a poet is to know how to leave speech" (p.70). It is precisely this leaving, that allows for *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the leftover joy after we have paid our societal dues (Datta,

2005). It is the surplus after the Symbolic, or that bit of us that we cannot symbolize but that touches the core of who we are. This core is not that of an essential human nature but is complexly constituted by internal subjective dynamics of biography and personality, including conflicting unconscious desires, fantasies, an understanding of oneself, and how psychodynamics even dialectically code our bodies, and parts of our bodies, as objects of potential desire for others. Summers-Bremner (1998) explains, “For Kristeva, ‘poetic language’ stages the confrontation between ‘semiotic jouissance and thethetic’ celebrating the maternal remnants of language at the limits of sense “(186).

A notable example of such an exploration of language, the maternal, and the poetic is found in Norbese Philip’s *She Tries Her Tongue* (1989). The questions Phillip poses include whether women are fully included, active participants in speech. Do we have adequate speech in language for women and mothers? And whether, as Derrida (1978) suggests, “Male discourse protects itself against feminine perspective by subsequent silence” (p.38)? Creative acts allow for a play with what seemed to be rigid structures and allows for a porous connection to the Semiotic. The Semiotic transmits our drives to the Symbolic for expression through sublimation. The act of sublimation is itself creative. This means that language requires creativity, as creativity turns our drives into acceptable expressions, but this also means there is an open gateway to the semiotic through creativity (Kristeva, 2004). Brophy (1998) discusses Kristeva’s view of maternity as a creative act in and of itself, a poetry in the body that engages the Semiotic. If the Semiotic is linked to the feminine, as the feminine is averse to patriarchal discourse, it is because the feminine has been placed as a silent, invisible support, just as women have been placed in this role. An intimate connection between the Semiotic and the feminine emerges in this particular context.

The symbolic element, the particular institutionalized discourses engaging each subject, opposes the Semiotic element. However, the Semiotic relies on the Symbolic order. As the rhythm of the sounds in language exert an unconscious pressure in the language itself, while at the same time the symbolic element, the social discourse, can silence the Chora with only slight access through the Semiotic. When the distinction between the Symbolic and the symbolic element is noted, it becomes clear that “the Symbolic is not the order of man...both men and women can access the semiotic and the Symbolic, although sexual difference as it is constructed in our culture does come to bear on how and how much” (Oliver, 1993, p.103).

Though our particular language is phallogentric, this is not the only symbolic element available. Kristeva makes it clear that women are first and foremost speaking beings. Though “women cannot merely jump outside of the Symbolic order or patriarchy” (Kristeva, 1993, p.101), they must take their place in language and in the Symbolic as it is necessary for our drives, including love, which Kristeva holds in the highest regard. The relationship between the Semiotic and Symbolic is not opposition but more a “dialectic oscillation” (Kristeva, 1980, p.96). Both rely on one another. Without the Semiotic, we would have no desire, drive, or generally speaking, reason to speak and use language. Without language, we would have no form to our subjectivity or desires but would merely be sense input.

### **Kristeva’s Conception of Western Culture**

Kristeva views contemporary Western society as embedded within the patriarchal symbolic, and dominated by phallogentric language (Oliver, 1997). Our symbolic world, or the world in which we are socialized, is not inherently patriarchal but is currently organized in this way and sustains itself through language, social institutions, structures and practices. Phallogentric discourse refers

to the way society centers men as beneficial and women as lesser. Women and girls are not seen as powerful subjects capable of experiencing unity but as objects to be used to further society.

According to Rosati (2003), “the normative content from modernity...is derived from the Hebrew morality of justice in the Old Testament and the Christian ethics of love in the New Testament” (p.188). This foundation in religion, and the sacred that constitutes and builds these religions, then ultimately, carries patriarchal conceptions. Summers-Bremner (1998) explains that the wide depictions of the Virgin and the crucifixion show “her to be a liminal figure who articulates phallic culture’s refusal to acknowledge maternal contribution. Christian orthodoxy which habitually uses the feminine-maternal to mark the fleshy and to outlaw it as excess” (p.180). The work of women in terms of reproduction and motherhood is never fully acknowledged in contemporary social structures: patriarchy as embedded through the sacred and capitalism. Datta’s (2005) discussion of Kristeva and the sacred explains the view of the Collège, whose work, via Bataille, one of its members, largely influenced Kristeva, that “contemporary society was characterized by utilitarian and egoistic orientations of life under modernity, capitalism and fascism” (p.621). The issue of capitalism becomes incredibly important when the contributions of women, the work of women, in terms of the maternal is denied.

Juliet Mitchell, drawing on Lacan and Althusser in her work on feminist Marxism, describes ideology not as faith, but as expectations and ideas we have about the world due to how we were raised. As she puts it, “the dominant ideology of a capitalist society is a bourgeois one” (Mitchell, 1971 p.33). Middle-class culture is so normalized that it is invisible in discussions of culture. By remaining invisible, it stays dominant because it is rarely problematized. Mitchell contends that ideology is rooted in the economy and unless the economy changes, the ideologies rooted within will remain. While Kristeva would also likely argue that



ideology is rooted in more than the economy, she would agree that capitalism supports patriarchy through the rule of the father. This places women at a disadvantage in Western capitalist societies. Glick and Fiske (2001), while researching ambivalent and hostile sexism, explain that men are typically the dominant sex in society. However, there are exceptions to this. Patriarchy is so powerful because it has been presented as a universal mode of power that spans time and geographic location (Mitchell, 1971, p83). That universal quality is part of ideology and makes the individual resisting that ideology abject because the person is resisting a hegemonic symbolic reference point. It creates the idea that it is a single person against the world.

According to Julia Kristeva, patriarchal discourse surrounds us and influences us right down to what we desire. Although equality has increased, and in a relatively short period of time feminism and gender studies have advanced rapidly, patriarchy is still embedded in our language, institutions, social systems, practices, and forms of subjectification. When Kristeva claims that society is “male,” she suggests that the terms we live by, our norms, our taboos, and, most importantly, that which is deemed sacred is defined in terms of the masculine.

“Chauvinism” describes an individual that has internalized male domination (Mitchell, 1971, p.64) whereas “sexism” describes a society. Historically, when patriarchy was more blatant and Western women were in a more disadvantaged position than today, these concepts were cemented in our ideology. In psychoanalytic terms, the phallus becomes associated with the penis by women's systematic exclusion from self-identification and autonomy (Grosz, 1990, p. 116). The penis becomes part of the Symbolic ideal making the feminine different and part of the Real, or that which cannot be articulated in the Symbolic.

Ehrenreich (1976) suggests that the modern form of patriarchy is sustained and embraced by capitalism. She explains that “patriarchy is not in the same form—capitalism does not have

the male head that patriarchy did but it is still male supremacy” (Ehrenreich, 1976). On average, women make less than their male counterparts, are found in less managerial and CEO positions, and tend to sacrifice the most in their career and finances when starting a family (Ehrenreich, 1976), and this is borne out by more recent analyses. Being a mother negatively affected hiring decisions, salary decisions, and workplace evaluations (Kricheli-Katz, 2013; Anderson, Binder, & Krause, 2003; Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & In, 2007; Callan, 1985). Bornstein, Williams, & Painter (2012) call this the “motherhood penalty” and the “maternal wall” (p.47) and further note discrimination is still strong with many workplaces still using the assumption of a caregiver housewife when making their policies (p.46). It is often the woman who stays at home to care for the child after giving birth and this is generally the accepted social norm: “by making childbearing out to be the natural vocation of women it becomes bio-historical fact” (Mitchell, 1971, p.76). Moreover, even women who do not take leave often need some amount of time to recover before or after giving birth: “women are exploited at work, and relegated to the home” (Mitchell, 1971, p.99). Mitchell posits a theory whereby patriarchy and capitalism work together to subjugate women and reproduce the two complementary systems. By normalizing women birthing and caring for children, despite the sacrifices one has to make when motherhood is carefully laid out, more women will be inclined to have children. Kristeva's concept is similar in that our drives direct us towards certain actions and that we have to transform those drives into socially acceptable acts. We become emotionally driven to have children when it is presented as a necessary and natural duty and motherhood is the socially acceptable form of this act.

This absence tends to label pregnant women as less dedicated to a company and with the assumption caregiving will disrupt the dedication to productivity, pregnant women are not

deemed as valuable in a capitalist society. As Meg Luxton (2014) has highlighted in her feminist political economy, capitalism generally benefits from “women’s unpaid caregiving labor” (p.149)<sup>1</sup> while also rendering her the most financially vulnerable and therefore less powerful. In a capitalist market supported by patriarchy, men are productive and women are reproductive (Grosz, 1989). Mitchell (1971) explains “reproduction in our society is often a kind of sad mimicry of production” (p.108) and that “the chief institution of patriarchy is the family (p.64). This is both in the sense that it falls on the woman to reproduce, but also that the woman is responsible for socializing the child into the patriarchal ideology.

The woman, in becoming the maternal body, either through pregnancy, childbearing, or child-rearing, is thrown further into this systematic inequality. Mitchell (1971) states, “another biological element—her maternal function was one of the fundamental conditions that made her economically dependent on the man” (p.80). The man is afforded the title of breadwinner. He is given the freedom to work, to work late, and to work over caring for his children both in the sense of literal, physical freedom but also in the often more daunting place of social freedom. Ehrenreich (2005) explains, “it is women who are most isolated in what has become an increasingly privatized family existence” (p.76). Because of the female ability to reproduce, women are used for biological reproduction in capitalism with the purpose of producing children that will continue the cycle of capitalism and patriarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> There is considerable debate regarding the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. Some theorists suggest it is in the best interest of capitalism if all forms of labour are socialized and market oriented. Other theorists draw attention to the generally unpaid and underpaid work involving the general reproduction of labour power (including the next generation of workers); and the tendency to extend capitalist employment to women in order to show their connection. Though, capitalism and patriarchy are not necessarily dependent on each other and likely, are able to be sustained separately. My position is that in our current system, it would appear that patriarchy and capitalism work together.

Male societal dominance is most evident when mothers are deemed jobless and by extension deemed unproductive. Although this “unproductive labor” determines her family’s ability to contribute to the labor market (Weeks, 2011, p.34), it is constantly seen as secondary, as some natural privilege women are given, and even spoken about as “leisure”. The lucky housewife who is afforded “the privilege” to sit around all day is as common a narrative as is the lazy welfare mom who is living off the system. Both are used to belittle the contributions of mothers to the labor force (Weeks, 2011). However, women who forgo motherhood, or choose to go back to work, receive the same scrutiny. The double-edged sword comes through what Weeks (2011) describes as the “mommy wars” (p.37). Whether women are lazy stay at home moms, or uncaring working mothers, they are faced with constant scrutiny—constant abjection.

Weeks explains:

The guilt being passed on to all women (“working” or “stay-at-home”) is sustained by the language that hides the role that men can and do play in the domestic sphere, by the impact that domestic work has on the public economy, by the moral imperative attached to raising children, and by the impossibility of any woman ever successfully fulfilling every social expectation (Weeks, 2011, p.37).

There is no correct, socially acceptable way of being a mother, of being a maternal body, because the expectations in a capitalist society are constantly in contradiction. Motherhood must involve an element of abjection in the experience. Moreover, to ignore the contradictions and follow one set of expectations, the woman would still be required to be an ideal, a perfection that is not humanly attainable. The ego-ideal is the form of the ideal "I" after it has overcome the ideal-ego, or the idealization of itself (Buchanan, 2010). Simplified, the ego-ideal is seeing the "I" through others instead of the "I" as it sees itself. An image presented by Lacan’s Imaginary, the pregnant subject has to reconcile their reality with the unified Virgin, as this is the image through which we view and judge mothers as opposed to how they want to see themselves.

Ehrenreich (1976) is keen to note the systematic inequality inherent in capitalist societies, but also the trend of inequality between the sexes—the most common form being male authority and female submission (p.71). These findings continue to be valid as Bornstein, Williams, & Painter (2012) find sex discrimination against women to be one of the strongest forms of discrimination in the United States workplace today (p.46). Economic security is given to those good, subjected, complacent women; however, those who dabble in the abject by refusing this role, risk financial suffering and male violence which serve as a threat or as a punishment. While there has been a cultural shift, one that gives women more power than historically seen, especially in the domestic sphere, women are still at a disadvantage and will remain at a disadvantage because Western capitalism was built within a patriarchal framework.

This point is poignantly addressed by Luce Irigaray in *Women, Sacred, and Money* when she explains in demanding unpaid labor of women, women are forced to repress the desire to trade amongst each other, which is a necessity under our economic system. She states,

The fuss caused by problems of contraception, abortion and the production of more or less artificial children can be understood in terms of the fact that *procreation has been the value underlying our societies for thousands of years*. The question isn't expressed in these terms—the 'work' is unpaid, the job is enveloped in an intangible aura of sacredness, in masks commensurate with the repressions and ignorance which is presupposed and continues to demand. (Irigaray, 1986, p.14).

Our society assumes the mother should raise the child without pay as it is her “natural” place and sacred duty. The mother must “nurture both man and society—a *totem before any designated, identified or represented totem*” (Irigaray, 1986, p.13). When money is not given where it is due, when work is not credited adequately, the entire system is deregulated (Irigaray, 1986). By positing mothers as undervalued nurtures, where labor is obfuscated by ideology, a dysfunction in capitalism emerges. This is not to suggest it is the only dysfunction or possibility of dysfunction, but that it is the pertinent dysfunction to mothers in capitalism.

Kristeva (1968) explains that we need to think of “the relation of a body to expenditure” (p.82), or in other words, surpass Marx’s notion of expenditure and extend to the corporeal. She takes this concept from Georges Bataille’s notion of the “accursed share.” We need to think of the excess energy that we all possess and how it is used just as we think of how excess profits are used. The sacred has altered the maternal, naturalised it, as such women are not acknowledged for their labor and are then disadvantaged in a society that values labor. Women become tools, or objects, under this symbolic.

### **Subject, Object, Abject**

Lacan argued that the subject was an absence rather than a positive entity (Datta, 2005, p.632). The subject must carve out a space. For Kristeva, structuralism could not account for the mutations of the subject. For instance, the way feminism changed the concept of the subject. She uses psychoanalysis to get around this anachronistic fault. The subject enters the world in a pre-given role and relation. Any decentering of the subject within the Symbolic order is painful. Understanding this emotional area is a strength in Kristeva’s theory: “Emotions belong to all vertebrates...the passions, on the other hand, are specific to man” (Kristeva, 2012, p.80). The passions come from a being capable of self-reflection and must be able to be shared or have “the capacity for an encounter” (Kristeva, 2012, p.80). Kristeva compares the emotion of aggression to the passion of hatred and attachment versus love. Passion is part of the imaginary, tapped into by the Semiotic, and given form by the Symbolic. She claims that the language of the unconscious is the language of passion. When we desire something that is against the determined social structure, transgression and taboo allow an opening to the Semiotic.

Botting (1994) connects the Lacanian Real to Kristeva's concept of the Chora. As mentioned, the Chora is a rhythmic pulsation, as opposed to a language (Moi, 1986, p.13). Because of its ability to disrupt the Symbolic, but also that it denies rationality in the Symbolic by denying signification and conceptualization, the Chora is a heterogeneous element. Bataille conceptualizes heterogeneous elements as aspects that exceed reason and resist conceptualization such as piss, shit, decay but also aspects of reality such as chance and irrationality (Botting, 1994). They are outside of societal organization and are unproductive expenditure (Botting, 1994). Chance threatens stability and resists signification which allows for the rational to be questioned (Botting, 1994). "Bataille's heterological sensibilities refer to the ambivalent nature of the sacred as a source of both attraction and repulsion in social life" (Datta, 2019 p.87). The Chora, and by extension the Semiotic, are an emotional heterogeneous element because it sacrifices the order of language.

Kristeva (1980b) states in the *Powers of Horror* that, for the subject, "I am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death" (p.231). In order to become one's true self, in order for the pure subject to seep through the symbolic element, the death of the social subject is necessary. This means displacing one's self as the ideal citizen, the ideal woman, or the ideal mother through transgressing the sacred. To explain, "in the dialectic of seeing/being seen, the female occupies the place of being seen/because the pleasure of seeing is immediately caught in the net of Christian logic" (Kristeva, 2012, p.59) that being love and incarnation. This love and incarnation are not love of the other but of the self, the male self.

The subject is a passionate being and a being that engages in the Semiotic. Because of this, the subject is a corporeal being and is partially a heterogeneous element in the Symbolic order. The subject is capable of disrupting and destabilizing the Symbolic order, which also

means the subject is an active agent and is capable of resisting oppressive symbolic elements in the Symbolic order. This also means the subject can be in opposition to the social subject. The social subject is the ego-ideal. What the ideal citizen looks like may vary but in a patriarchal symbolic, the ideal citizen is male or created in an image ideal to the patriarchal social order. When the subjectivity of the social subject is disregarded, the social subject becomes a tool for a particular role or function in society. Bataille (1988) explains this when he states “servile use has made a *thing* (an *object*) of that which, in a deep sense, is of the same nature as the *subject*” (p.55). The subject becomes passive for the purposes of production.

Men, through creating images of femininity are able to identify with themselves, creating a narcissistic love through the image of the female they imagine: “The history of femininity is the history of the feminine as Western artists have depicted it ” (Kristeva, 2012, p.60). The ideal woman is not a subject, but a discourse. Georges Bataille (1922) gives a similar analysis in his account of Notre-Dame de Reims during the war in France. The earliest form of architecture as art is the hut and the temple and what differentiates them (Hollier, 1992, p.6). It follows that architecture concerns itself with using art to symbolize religion. It is created to be seen and expresses society’s ideal being (Hollier, 1994, p.ix). In Bataille’s (2018) science of religion, what he refers to as “heterology”, he examines the excluded aspects of unproductive expenditure (p.30). Religion and art, both unproductive expenditures, were separated into dirty and clean. Bataille uses the example of the slaughterhouse and the museum to demonstrate this (Hollier, 1992, p.xi). Art shows an ideal, clean image separate from the brutal, dirty, abject slaughterhouse that threatens the pure image. Women in art show an ideal and hide the abject. The analysis comes together in Bataille’s discussion of Notre-Dame or the mother of Christ (Hollier, 1992, p.20). The beauty and strength of Notre-Dame, the mother, showed the endurance and sanctity of



France (Hollier, 1995). When France fell, Bataille states, “I thought that corpses themselves did not mirror death more than did a shattered church” (Bataille, 1922, p.17). However, “at the heart of beauty lies a murder” (Hollier, 1992, p.xiii). The sacrifice of life made for France, made for Christ, and made for the mother of Christ, make the church more beautiful and have deeper meaning when it is in ruins than when it showed a false ideal.

When we use phallogentric language, and language that focuses on what is object, women become symbolic elements: “The transfer of male fantasies onto female bodies, simple supports, passive objects of male desire” (Kristeva, 2012, p.62). We are no longer speaking of a specific subject, but just as the word of the Lord becomes a series of images painting a reality, woman becomes a series of ideals. A similar note is touched on by Butler when she states, “and as a nurse, mother, womb, the feminine is synecdochally collapsed into a set of figural functions” (Butler, 1993, p.53). Women become tools under the rule of the father and the love given under these circumstances is that of narcissistic love (Kristeva, 1987). It is love with an object. There is more meaning to the experiences and images of women when we shatter the depiction.

Kristeva describes abjection as a physical place or position, not a subject or qualitative state (Kristeva, 1982). She highlights social geography, whereby abjection is defined as the outskirts. The abject is a place where the Semiotic threatens to collapse the Symbolic. She further describes abjection not as filth, dirt, or bile but that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva, 1980b, p.232). Mary Douglas similarly understands the issue with dirt and pollution as an issue of “contact with anomalous elements” (Datta, 2005b, p.301). These elements do not conform to classification in the same way that transgression breaks social organization and abjection is an effect of this break. This is why we treat dirt and bile as dirty, contagious, or to be kept away from us. However, Douglas fails to account for the joy one feels

when they choose to play in the mud. Kristeva and Bataille see the abject as both distressing but also positive and freeing, whereas Douglas only accounts for the negative contagion in pollution (Datta, 2005b, p.302). When a subject is forced into abjection and into contact with the abject it is a distressing experience. But when a subject uses transgression to voluntarily strip away the social subject, or to break away from the servile life of an object, the experience is ecstatic.

As mentioned, the Symbolic is that illusion of stability, rationality, and institutional coherence, and “abjection is above all ambiguity” (Kristeva, 1980b, p.236). It is the opposite of stability and shows the illusion of the stable subject in the Symbolic. Abjection, then, is situated in the Lacanian Real, which as mentioned, is tied to the Chora (Botting, 1994, p.38). This awareness is scary, it is outside of the societal thresholds and the subject thresholds, but the abject is a process of creating a space for the “I” through transgression (Kristeva, 1982). Abject is “neither object nor subject... [the abject] attract and reject each other...the pure and the impure” (Kristeva, 2012, p.160). The abject subject, though a person is a monstrosity to the social subject. It is described as a violent place, founded on an original trauma which Kristeva states is birthing. The abject then is related to identity separating from the mother, but in a place before language. Kristeva (2012) explains abjection as “the original repression, where the first indications of neotenus demarcation are manifested with desire for the other and desire of the other” (p.184). When we revisit this feeling, we are experiencing the abject. It is similar to Freud’s understanding of the uncanny where we are repulsed and tantalized, drawn in and terrified. The abject, at its core, is the subject void of the Symbolic. The subject, the real subject, “is none other than abject” (Kristeva, 1980b, p.232). The possibility of *jouissance* in the abject comes from this ability to carve out a space for the subject outside of the social subject. By returning to the repressed, we open ourselves to the Real.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva illustrates the abject as a corpse. We understand our life is limited because of death, and this matters to us because we are constituted as unique subjects as opposed to a part of a larger continuity that continues past our individual life. We have divided the soul and the body to make our particular life carry on past its biological lifespan. The tombs we mark, creations we produce, memorials we hold, and pictures we take are all to keep a specific name in memory. Bataille (1990) explains the dialectical being for Hegel is “*temporal and finite*” (p.12). Awareness and the ability to revel in our pending death is what separates us from animals. Even though the body has deceased, the social soul can live on. The corpse is that aspect of the being that is left. The corpse is not an object, yet we would not consider it a subject either: “A dead body cannot be called nothing at all” (Bataille, 1957, p.57). Death is the major abjection for us as we cannot put it into language. We cannot know death in a communicable way.

Those in this area of abjection are not included in the norms—they are different and must be treated as such until they can—if they can—be brought back into common ground. This includes controlling the abject so as to not collapse the Symbolic further much in the way a virus contaminates others. In terms of a corpse, these taboo and transgression have minimal consequences as the subject in question is deceased. However, the abjection of living subjects can result in harm. In *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and... Vulnerability*, Kristeva discusses the exclusion of the disabled experience. Others experience the disabled person as a reminder of a threat, and a bending of what they consider the image of a person. This discrimination against the disabled is not a shared vulnerability (Kristeva, 2012). What is abject is determined by discourse, and for Kristeva, this discourse is patriarchal in type. The necessity of how the sacred shapes

taboo and transgression becomes necessary to developing the concept of the abject and how transgression can be used for resistance without resulting in exclusion, prohibition, or regulation.

Butler, in a paradoxical definition, defines abjection as bodies that are deemed not to matter—though that does not mean we pay no attention—these bodies actually matter too much to us. For Butler, power “*produces* human subjects [as subjectivities]” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p.22). Prescribed and approved of roles are freely given; however, if someone enacts a taboo or takes on a role unsuited for them—for instance, transgender individuals—society works to correct the actor: “there are punishments for not doing gender right” (Butler, 1993, p.55). Stigma and exile are used to correct subjects who are not appropriately enacting their roles. These roles are by no means necessary nor unchangeable, but function to reinforce the current structure of society and are thereby protected through marginalization and punishment. Chambers and Carver (2008) explain that, “children must *learn* the already established norms of the society into which they are born, and thus they have more occasion to deviate from those norms than the so-called grown-ups. Deviation from norms, however, often proves to be a very weighty affair with grave consequences” (p. 10). Society becomes obsessed with controlling, studying, changing, and oppressing the abject. Discourse that controls what is an acceptable norm, or role to play, is constantly reinvented and re-established through replaying those very roles. Those who refuse these roles are viewed in reflection of the grotesque and abnormal.

Transgression reveals the boundaries of the Symbolic order. Bataille’s notion of the sacred discussed in Chapter Three is helpful in analyzing this dynamic. If the subject cannot be controlled and the left sacred enacted through them becomes threatening, they need to be abjected in order to preserve the sacred order. As Datta (2000) notes, “practices of eliminating produce the sacred at the same time that they attempt to regulate it” (p.30). Datta attends to two

practices of elimination. First, we eliminate the accursed share in festival and ritual practices which allow for transgression in a specific time and place, or rather in suspended time and space (Datta, 2000, p.194). The accursed share refers to the excess, and in particular excess energy, produced that must be expended (Bataille, 1989, p.37) Second, we eliminate subjects who threaten the group when they transgress without consent. A basic example of this is a human sacrifice in ritual in contrast to a murder. One is sanctioned and to sustain the life-force of the totemic, whereas the other is done for the individual. In the latter case, the transgressor must be eliminated to protect the group. However, there is also an attraction to transgression and abjection. Bataille is not able to explain why we have this attraction beyond the notion that it brings continuity; however, Kristeva is able to fill this gap with her notion of the abject, which is rooted in psychoanalysis. We are drawn to the abject because it tells us something about ourselves beyond symbolic elements. Bataille refers to this process as “unknowing”, which he uses in reference to laughter (Trahair, 2001). Unknowing, in Bataille’s terms, is linked to the Freudian unconscious but he never elaborates on this point as Kristeva does. The discomfort in abjection comes from the subject re-establishing identity.

Symptomatically read, abjection defines a subject that is marked as marginal and on the outskirts of society due to a constructed quality or stigma. Abjection occurs in the realm of the sacred, when the left sacred threatens the status quo or social identity, regulation and taboo are used to ensure the norm persists. Abjection is offensive because it pulls open the curtain on society’s construction which forces us to reconceive our identity. Since it is uncomfortable, even painful, we resist abjection but are attracted to it. Often, we resist abjection by marginalizing and mistreating those who are already abject. This way, we can deny how close we are to being that other person. We create, and inflate, differences so that we can deny we are them.

### **Kristeva on Maternity and the Subject**

Maternity in Kristeva's terms is an abject experience in that it shakes the foundation of identity. She discusses the maternal experience as a subject-in-process. The fetus is in the process of growing to fruition until the time comes to enter the social as a subject: "This not-yet-other germinating within her who will be a new object and then, with a bit of luck, a subject and from now on, a target of love, sometimes hate, and often both at one" (Kristeva, 2012, p.84). The child physically separates from the mother, but also separates mentally by entering the symbolic as a social being. The child, in order to become a subject separate and whole from its caregiver must abject the mother. More specifically, in order to truly be an individual subject, the child merely needs to separate themselves from the "maternal container" (Oliver, 1993, p104) not the subject of the mother. Kristeva (2010) notes, "It is only thus that she allows the infant to create its language, a language of its own, which is tantamount to choosing a language that is foreign to that of the mother" (p.693). Entering the symbolic world splits the child from the mother whereby the Semiotic reconnects us to our mother tongue. This foundational experience of separation links the child and identity to experiences of abjection.

The maternal figure also experiences a transformative process; however, her abjection is doubled. The first abjection comes from the mother negotiating her own subjectivity on her terms with her child. During the process of pregnancy, "the future mother becomes an object of desire, pleasure, and aversion for herself. We call this shift a 'narcissistic withdrawal' and wonder about the exact status of the object in this maternal adventure" (Kristeva, 2012, p.85). Kristeva discusses that few women with the intent to bring their pregnancy to fruition experience their pregnancies as objects. The fetus for many is, "first a narcissistic double, then a target of projective identification, then a separate and autonomous other, the link of the mother to her

child is a veritable analysis in action” (Kristeva, 2012, p.88). The mother understands that the baby is not her and must not stay a part of her. The emotions of attachment and aggression are transformed by the maternal relationship to the passion of motherhood and of love. “Kristeva uses maternity as an example of an experience that calls into question any notion of a unified subject “(Oliver, 1993, p.100). This is because in pregnancy, there is a literal division of the flesh along with the identity. At a time, the fetus is dependent, inside, attached to the pregnant subject. In this sense, the fetus is part of the subject in the same way an arm or a leg would be. However, the fetus will be an autonomous being, which means the fetus is at the same time an other. The mother is destabilized and experiences a loss and a multiplication of identity through this third party who was once a double and is now a loved other. This is why Kristeva (2011) refers to the mother as a “multiverse.” This abjection, though it can be scary and a daunting process, results in respect and love for all subjects involved.

A secondary abjection occurs not on the mother’s terms but from an outside force. As mentioned, the child must abject the maternal container not the actual mother. Unfortunately, “in our culture, however, because the maternal function is not separated from our representations of women or the feminine, women themselves have become abjected within our society” (Oliver, 1993, p.104). In *Stabat Mater*, Kristeva explores the cult of the virgin and the paradox of motherhood: That of the ideal subject and the abjection of women. Kristeva is quick to highlight the influence of the sacred on motherhood. Kristeva states, “we are forced to note that we do not have a secular discourse on the fundamental experiences of human fate...with the lack of a secular discourse on motherhood, mothers are left with the consumerism of disposable diapers or at best child psychiatry” (Kristeva, 2012, p.27).

Religious mystifications paint the maternal as a passage or a threshold of culture and nature, a liminality, as opposed to a subject. For Irigaray and Kristeva, the depiction of the Virgin Mary is “a symptom of western society’s need to disavow maternal origin” (Summers-Bremner, 1998, p.189-190). Women become conflated with the feminine and the maternal. The mother has a sacred duty as a vessel for the upcoming child and this abjection, this turning the mother from subject to object, negates consciousness and turns motherhood into an ethic. The maternal, “split the woman between identity and its collapse, between consciousness of self and its erasure” (Elliot, 2009, p.231). The maternal under the influence of the sacred has forced women to become tools of reproduction. As Kristeva states, “Religions and various fundamentalisms have so brutally assigned women to reproduction alone” and “female liberation movements have so ferociously opposed this ‘repression’” (Kristeva, 2012, p.54). Women are placed in a position to either succumb to the image of Mary whereby any detour from the ideal results in social abjection or reject maternity entirely resulting in societal abjection. Either path, the woman is forced into an abjection on the terms of others not herself.

Any form of abjection is uncomfortable or even painful. In maternity, identity is shifted. Elliot explains, “all experiences of pregnancy and maternity call into play powerful unconscious forces and primitive anxiety, reawakening the repressed division between flesh and word, imagination and representation, nature and culture” (Elliot, 2009, p.230) Maternity then, for Kristeva, is always an intersection of subject, object and abject.. Understanding how the sacred organized the abject is essential to understanding how the maternal experience is restricted. We can then establish a more adequate phenomenology as we will understand the relations and institutions that deem the pregnant woman subject, object, or abject.



## Conclusion

This chapter explored the influences Kristeva used in creating her concepts of “herethics,” “the chora,” “the symbolic and the Symbolic Order,” and the “semiotic.” Moreover, this chapter highlighted the way misunderstanding these concepts can lead to criticisms of biological reductionism and essentialism in Kristeva’s work. An additional topic covered includes how the current patriarchal symbolic elements in the Symbolic order were created and are sustained through capitalism and the sacred, particularly by reducing the value of women’s labor to a sacred duty and natural vocation, which is further elaborated on in the next chapter. Lastly, Kristeva’s view of the body, the subject, the object, and the abject were explored and in particular the pregnant subject’s relation to these categories. Of concern is the dysfunctional abjection pregnant women experience when the pregnant subject is rejected as opposed to the maternal container. All in all, Kristeva’s theory is an excellent exploration of the phenomenology of the pregnant subject; however, more information on how the sacred establishes the maternal as a sacred duty and natural vocation, as well as how the nuances of the sacred interact with the subject’s experience, is a necessary next step.

Kristeva draws on psychoanalysis in order to practice a phenomenology that is invested in women and the obstacles they face. Moreover, Kristeva attends to the obstacles pregnant women and mothers face in a patriarchal symbolic. She forwards the idea of corporeal experience in her concept of the Semiotic but still attends to culture in her notion of the Symbolic. For Kristeva, phenomenology is both corporeal experience, experience outside discourse, and experience within discourse. Moreover, the condition subtending all of this is rooted in the Chora and the Semiotic both of which are frequently in tension with the Symbolic and these dynamics inflect subjectivity, objectivity, and abjection. Kristeva believes herethics, an

ethics of love and respect that is demonstrated in the mother-child relationship, is necessary to relieve fragmented and distressing lives. Those subjects who find themselves as objects, or tools for utilitarian purposes, or those who find themselves abject, rejected from society. While Kristeva understands that humans are passionate beings and that the sacred structures our symbolic elements, she does not conceptualize the sacred to the extent Georges Bataille does. In order to create a more explicit theory of the phenomenology developed here, the nuances of the sacred and the irrational must be attended to especially, to understand why we deem some individuals abject.

Kristeva's work has its flaws, including essentialist aspects; however, as Kelly Oliver (1993) points out, "It is important to resist the temptation to reduce Kristeva's theories to their barest elements and then dismiss them as essentialist, reductionist, or stereotypical. At the same time, it is crucial not to accept uncritically all of her statements" (p.95). When taken on her own terms, particularly when read symptomatically with Bataille's theory of the sacred, Kristeva's thoughts are more engaging phenomenologically than many available alternatives due to her radical commitment to the corporeal. As opposed to dismissing rich sociological concepts, we need to retheorize them. Whether this corporeality is socially made or natural, it is nonetheless the current available category and how it shapes experience is pertinent. It is therefore my contention and theoretical decision to integrate prior feminist writing to examine the concept of pregnancy in order to yield a model of subjectivity and resistance.

### Chapter Three: Kristeva, Bataille and the sacred

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on how a thorough conception of the sacred is able to supplement Kristeva's work in order to more adequately theorize the pregnant subject. The chapter begins by exploring how the semiotic and symbolic are tied to transgression and the way the sacred determines the boundaries of what is acceptable and therefore, what is transgression. I then examine Kristeva's incomplete conception of the sacred in relation to her discussion of women and motherhood. Because Kristeva does not explicitly theorize her conception of the sacred, using Georges Bataille, who draws heavily from Durkheim, creates a more thorough understanding of Kristeva's concepts. After a complete view of the sacred is established, I revisit Kristeva's concept of "herethics" as a new secular sacred. Lastly, I examine how the abject, created through transgressing the sacred, can be empowering or oppressive to those experiencing it.

Kristeva's use of the sacred can be related to Hegelian reference points. Plant (1983) discusses Hegel's interest in how religion can come to fragment community and personality when "the task of any religion, in Hegel's view, is that of fostering social morality" (Plante, 1983, p.33). He then goes on to discuss Subjective religion (religion that involves the whole "man" [sic]), juxtaposed to Objective religion (religion based solely on reason which fragmented the man). Clearly, the viewing of religion as both creative and dangerous is not novel in Kristeva (see Datta 2005, p. 618). However, Hegel's focus on morality as a given and not a construct, often irrationally constructed at that, as well as his focus on religion as opposed to the more foundational phenomenon of the sacred makes him a hinderance in Kristeva's work. Summers-Bremner (1998) discusses the importance of the sacred to Kristeva and Irigaray

whereby, “both thinkers also address the relation between religion, cultural repression and symbolic structures as these bear on the social construction of mothering” (p.181). The idea that the sacred is a two-sided, possessing an inherent “ambivalence” or “ambiguity” (as opposed to two types of sacred), and that the sacred is social while also central to identity formation and recognition, are all Durkheimian and by extension, Bataille. A serious social scientific theory of the sacred was not developed until Durkheim and his team undertook a dedicated sociology of religion in the late 1890s. Moreover, the irrational side of constructing the sacred, as well as the “left-sacred” i.e., the darker element of the sacred, was brought to fruition by Bataille. Bataille questioned the assumption that people act rationally which is a premise pervasive in social science, from utilitarianism, methodological individualism, to functionalism. Bataille’s intervention elucidated the dysfunction and irrational elements of society. Kristeva draws from Bataille but does not fully extend her theory using his analytic of the sacred. This leaves an untapped area of sociological theory that can be used to analyse the phenomenology of the pregnant subject.

### **Kristeva and the Sacred**

A precursor to Kristeva's concepts of the Chora and her theoretic of the sacred, came from her studying semiotics and “carnavalesque” language. For Kristeva, “carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language” (Moi, 1986, p.36). Kristeva follows Mikhail Bakhtin and defines carnivalesque language as poetic language that inverts the regular rules of language. In other words, carnivalesque language is a form of transgression. Metaphor, grammatical breaks, allusion, and other such poetic devices are a few examples of how a subject is able to use language to show the boundaries and construction of language. In exposing language through

this transgression, a creative process occurs whereby something is produced—namely art, a new meaning, a fresh perspective. However, the subject too is involved in this creative process. Kristeva maintains this general idea as she develops her concepts of symbolic elements in the Symbolic and the Semiotic Realms. The Semiotic acts as a transgression and poetic language is one means of attaining communication with the Semiotic. When the symbolic is transgressed, it brings to light the immanent socially constructed “rule.” However, because the symbolic elements are those elements that give our world form, the transgression shows the boundaries of our own life world, the boundaries of the very subject.

In this sense, the sacred as a symbolic element in our Symbolic realm, and a powerful element at that, is intimately tied to identity formation, and the discursive resources we use to make sense of the world, others, and ourselves, and therefore, to phenomenology. The sacred tells us about what is important and powerful to a society; whether rational or not, whether emotionally driven or not, the sacred is created as a reflection of a society not as an independent, objective reality (Durkheim 1995). Likewise, the identity of a person is formed within the Symbolic including the structures of the sacred. Datta (2005) explains, "the sacred for Kristeva implies some positive representation to which subjects refer in making their world and their existence meaningful in the deepest way" (p.629). Subjects use the symbolic structure of the sacred to add form to their experiences which then constitutes how they come to define their being. The sacred, then, produces a social subject. When the sacred is transgressed, the boundaries become evident and the subject's place among the boundaries becomes evident.

Though never fully developed in Kristeva, she frequently and even explicitly, ponders the notion of a dual sacred. Kristeva (1980b) asks, “Could the sacred be, whatever its variants, a two-sided formation?” (p.255). She hints at a darker sacred potential in her discussion of

sacrifice. The “sacred,” a derivative of the Latin word *sacer*, has a link to sacrifice. Kristeva describes this link when she states, “the sacred is a unifying ‘sacrifice’ ...that separates, forbids, and pacifies the social pact. Yet a second type of sacred is suggested in the same societies, signifying ‘overflowing life’ and ‘growth’” (Kristeva, 2012, p.52). This notion in Kristeva's work is heavily influenced by Georges Bataille's conception of the left and right sacred but it is not spelled out with all the nuances of Bataille's analytic. For Bataille, “the sacred has been generated by taboo violating rituals, and sacrifices” (Pearce, 2001, p.222). Transgression helps release the excess energy and unproductive wastes in society (Pearce, 2001). After the sacred has been established, a pure, clean form of the sacred can form in interaction. For instance, the Eucharist, or receiving *Corpus Christi*, stems from the final supper before the literal sacrifice of Jesus Christ's flesh and blood. Because “taboo marks the place of horror”, mishandling the Eucharist is perceived as a direct act against Jesus Christ (Pawlett, 2016, p.30). Regardless, Kristeva does consider a dual-nature sacred, whereby both sides are intertwined, fluid, and dependent.

Kristeva's use of the carnivalesque when forming her theory of the Semiotic and Symbolic acknowledges sacred phenomena and events, including its ambivalence as found in the duality of “food and excrement” (Moi, 1986, p.49). In many ways, the sacred mimics the relationship of the Semiotic and Symbolic. Both the productive and destructive side of the sacred need each other. One functions to support the existence of the other and together they demarcate societal boundaries. Sacrifice, similarly, works in the destructive side of the sacred in order to enforce and reproduce the productive side of the sacred. Datta (2005) explains, "human existence is inherently bound up with the meaning of one's mortality, a problem that the rite of sacrifice attempts to come to grips with...Social life is born, dies, is renewed" (p.621; cf. Hegel

1990). Religion, and the sacred, is a way of facing death. Society chooses to sacrifice in order to renew the produced values. A sacrifice represents a value, and the purification of a transgressed value. As mentioned, transgression shows the construction; it pulls the curtain. In order to maintain the sacred as a symbolic element in the Symbolic order, its construction must not be exposed. This in itself is not an issue. However, when power imbalances are present in a society, the issue of who holds the power of sacrifice and the sacred in society and who is affected by the boundaries it creates becomes apparent.

### **Women and the Sacred**

Religion, for Kristeva, is what separates sexes so drastically. This separation allows for exclusion from the rights given to the group. Kristeva explains, "universality is our god: this is what guarantees each citizen—regardless of sex, origin, belief, and so on—equal access to rights, all rights...the metaphysical universal, like its republican variant, excluded women in a similar way" (Kristeva, 2012, p.51). Kristeva likens the exclusion of women from the sacred as similar to the exclusion of foreigners in the Roman empire in order to highlight the construct of universality. Datta (2009) explains that, "sacral exclusion is argued to be the foundational relation in the formation of western polities" (p.170). Exclusion is a social fact of Western society and what is excluded is what we deem as a threat—any viable alternative group that may have an "alternative life of its own" (Datta, 2009, p.170). Guaranteed rights do not exist and we choose who is included; nothing is inherent.

Both Kristeva and Luce Irigaray focus on this question of power and the sacred in their writings. Irigaray (1986) explains that "something else which is obvious: in sacrificial religions, religious and social rites are almost universally in the hands of men" (p.8). Women are not

permitted, are not given the power to be active subjects within the sacred (Irigaray, 1986). Gane (1992) explains part of men's ascendancy through the concept of pure and impure within people. Following Durkheim's analysis of the incest taboo, Gane explains that individual blood represents the blood of the group (Gane, 1992, p.107). This is why if someone is murdered, it is considered an act against the community. Women, who bleed during menstruation, are spilling the blood of the group and are then impure and able to contaminate others in the group (Gane, 1992, p. 107). Bataille (1957) further explains that, "The menstrual discharge is further associated with sexual activity and the accompanying suggestion of degradation" (p.54). To contaminate the sacred is sacrilege. Datta (2019) defines sacrilege as "a failure to maintain the separation of the sacred from the profane, resulting in serious harms to the offender and potentially the community as a whole" (p.95). Gane (1992) further notes, "Mauss emphasised that same point adding that this tendency was strengthened by the fact that women were also considered the carriers of malign forces which rendered them dangerous" (p.109). Kristeva (1974) narrows this notion to specifically Judaic and Christian religions in her writing. Judaic and Christian religion conceive of women as the silent other and privilege the patriarchal as opposed to previous religions that celebrated the maternal and were fertility oriented (1974). Neither theorist suggests that religion or the sacred is inherently male-oriented, but they do conceive of the current symbolic structure of the sacred as male.

For Irigaray, the imbalance comes from female exclusion in the realm of the sacred and in the ritual of sacrifice. Irigaray (1986) explains how women, "are therefore *reinserted into a form of sociality that has been determined by sacrifice*. They haven't been included in it and they're still excluded from it. At this level they remain an inert body, paralyzed in and through cultural bonds which aren't their own" (p.9). Datta (2019) explains that sacrifice is



hegemonizing. It creates a small in-group with a dominant discourse that can create a “system of valuation”, where they alone can determine which subjects and objects are more important than others (Datta, 2019, p.97). By denying women full participation, women can never be fully initiated into the dominant group, thus "a sub-group that excludes women and children, and those who don't belong to the clan" is formed (Datta, 2019, p.99). Women are not permitted an active role though they are subject to the restrictions and boundaries of the sacred. Irigaray discusses sacrifice for the basis of subjectivity. Caldwell clarifies this point when stating that, “one term is elevated as a regulative ideal or standard for order, and the other is reduced to the constitutive but excluded ground of this order” (Caldwell, 2015, p.18). Male subjectivity is the ideal, benchmark for subjectivity and female subjectivity becomes the sacrifice for it. By privileging one form of subjectivity, “it denies the worldly conditions of existence such as embodiment, sexuation, and the relation to others” (Caldwell, 2015, p.19). In turn, women are denied the same conditions of existence. They are not subjects because their subjectivity is rendered a necessary casualty to the male subjectivity.

Kristeva is cognizant of this female exclusion as well and argues much of it stems from the way women are depicted and symbolized in Christian and Judaic religions. In particular, Kristeva refers to the figure of Mary, and more generally, the virgin. Virginité is seen as a necessary credential to the inclusion of women in the sacred: “this virginité imposes women’s exclusion from sexuality, a punitive chastity that seems to be the price women must pay for admission to the sacred—and to representation” (Kristeva, 2012, p. 64). An impossible ideal, sustained by the ego-ideal, women are forced to navigate who they should be with who they are. Should women be admitted to this regime of the sacred by upholding this ideal, they simply become the fantasy of the Virgin. The place of the female subject, and the sexual female subject

specifically, within this religious structure is an object or an abject. Denying the role of the Virgin would question the very system, so exclusion or at least quarantine for maximum control is necessary to uphold this sacred.

### **The Pregnant Subject and the Sacred**

Kristeva carries this notion forward to analyse how the sacred has affected women's reproduction by controlling their experience of it. Kristeva (2012) states, "Christendom went on to truly construct the maternal experience" (p.211). What she means when she states this is that by switching from religions based on fertility and maternity, and by forwarding the image of the Virgin mother, the notion of creation and externality is questioned. Women are no longer those with power to create but are vessels for the monotheistic male subjectivity to reproduce His being: "recognition of virginity as an unthinkable externality, a challenge to the logics of beginnings, causes and effects" (Kristeva, 2012, p.211). Masculinity becomes central and women are the antithesis. Women, in maternity, create life. That recognition of a physically and emotionally challenging task is important. In monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Christendom, they are the children of God not women. Though women give birth to children, and it is their sacred duty to do so, the children are God's will. Women become tools. This notion still exists through the image of the Virgin and women's unrecognized labor. The image of the Virgin elevates motherhood to be a fulfilling, natural vocation that is necessary for female fulfillment. Women are expected to want to be mothers. Irigaray (1986) seconds this notion whereby the essential work women do remains unpaid due to lack of recognition: "there is no constitution, development or renewal of the social body without women's work: their cathartic function as loved mistress or wife, their function as reproducing mother, their functions as carer

and housewife assuring life and survival" (p.15). None of these roles are paid and yet each one is essential for society, in its current form, to be sustained. If society acknowledged these roles that women carry, the masculine superiority is dissolved.

Georges Bataille also sees dysfunction in a Christian sacred. Christianity does not allow for transgression. Transgression is always viewed as "repugnant" (Bataille, 1957, p.89). While primitive cultures suspended the law and allowed for acts of transgression that created a feeling of unity and belonging, Christianity enforces consequences to "sin" (Bataille, 1957, p.89). Sacrifice is altered to become murder with the death of Jesus Christ and eroticism is deemed a sin of the flesh to be contained (Bataille, 1957, p.89). The left sacred is rejected from Christianity: "only in Christianity did the existence of the impure world become a profanation" (Bataille, 1957, p.122). Enjoying and engaging in corporeal experiences is rejected under Christianity. Though Christianity has become less common in contemporary society, the image of the Virgin is still apparent. Women are denied pleasure in corporeal engagement when the image of the Virgin persists. Sin is still evident in taboos and women are not permitted to freely transgress many taboos, particularly those of eroticism.

Moreover, women are naturalized into believing motherhood is "essential". The Western naturalization of motherhood, and its equation with femininity is a notion Kristeva chastises and what she calls a religious myth in crisis (Oliver, 1993, p104). In order to be a woman, a real woman, there is an idea that we must have children. As Kristeva (1974) explains, "divided from man...wife, daughter, or sister, or all of them at once, but she will rarely have a name. Her function is to assure procreation" (p.140). Without women actively filling these essential roles, in order to not risk protest, women must believe they should be mothers and that they should be an impossible ideal mother. When they are unable to fulfill the role, as it is impossible to do, the

women are stigmatized or abjected. Both Kristeva and Irigaray highlight this concept when discussing the figure of the Virgin in hysterical terms with hopes of demonstrating how the sacred uses the Virgin to neutralize the contradictions of the maternal experience (Summers-Bremner, 2008, p.179). Hysterical terms are extremely emotional and transcend social order in order to juxtapose the ego-ideal of the Virgin with the abject reality. The hysteric refuses the place others wish to interpolate them into.

By describing abjection as a place in society, the sacred acts as a threshold to that place. Kristeva states, “The sacred appearing as a celebration of the passage of the border between two structures or two identities (inside/outside, woman/man, child/mother)” (Kristeva, 2012, p.210). She is describing the liminal quality of the sacred. Datta (2009) notes the distinction between *sacer* and *sanctus*. He claims “*Sacer* defines the outside of the community as seen from the inside or the inside of the community as seen from the outside” (p.179). *Sanctus* on the other hand is the threshold separating that inside and outside that allows for the reproduction of the sacred by sustaining the power relations that maintain the sacred (Datta, 2009, p.179). If the abject is a place that shakes identity, and the sacred is the boundary of identity, transgressing the sacred leads to abjection. However, if the identity being held as ideal is male, then women are forced to transgress the sacred thereby being forced into abjection. Similarly, if the ideal image of the woman or the mother is unattainable, the Virgin for instance, transgression is forced and women are forced into abjection.

A seemingly impossible predicament, are women doomed to abjection? Drawing on Georges Bataille’s concept of weak prohibition, Kristeva (1980b) claims, “collective existence does not seem to have, in such cases, sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine” (p.255). Women are still active subjects. There is a clear desire to

control female experiences such as the maternal, but there is also active resistance. The boundaries demarcating sacrosanct principles are fluid and are not as simple as good versus evil. The dual nature of the sacred, and uneven power relations, create a weighted scale where the same action by two people is deemed differently. As Oliver (1993) puts it, "Kristeva argues that without a secular discourse or myth of motherhood that absorbs abjection, abjection is misplaced onto women" (p.104). A discourse is able to drown out another. For Kristeva, creating a stronger secular discourse to overcome current discourse on the maternal is essential.

### **Examining the Influence of Georges Bataille in Kristeva**

The sacred shapes the phenomenological experience of the maternal. For Kristeva, "maternity calls into question the boundary between culture and nature. She chooses maternity as a prototype precisely because it breaks down borders between culture and nature and between subject and other" (Oliver, 1993, p.100). Biological and social reproduction intersect in the maternal experience. While Kristeva begins an analytic of the sacred and its duality, she misses the nuances captured by Bataille. By using Bataille's concept of the sacred in conjunction with Kristeva's phenomenological strength, we are able to better theorize the phenomenology of the maternal. This includes Bataille's under-explored concepts of the sacred and sacrifice (Shilling & Mellor, 2013) and in particular, Bataille's use of the irrational (Datta, 2005). On the other hand, Bataille's analytic is enhanced by Kristeva's use of psychoanalysis as the unconscious is important to Bataille's concept of the sacred (Datta, 2005). The sacred is not inherently rational, though it is often presented as such. Understanding the emotional and irrational constituents of the sacred is important for a more comprehensive consideration. The subject, the object, and the object are perceived through the sacred and nothing is inherently sacred but is created as such.

This means how we treat the subject, the object, and the abject are directed through a constructed perception that influences us. Bataille is able to explore these gaps in Kristeva's work through his more detailed conception of the sacred.

### **Emile Durkheim and Georges Bataille's Conception of the Sacred**

Bataille's theory of the sacred is an extension, albeit a darker and more phenomenological one, of Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred. Durkheim's conclusion, that individual experience and collective experience can be trusted and is actually foundational to social cohesion comes in opposition to the Kantian frame of thought pertinent in his time. For Durkheim, perception has a social basis (Nakhaie & Datta, 2018, p.146). This social basis is a moral bond (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014, p.483) and this moral bond, or solidarity, is what allows for shared values and rules that enforce and sustain those values (Rosati, 2003). Bataille discusses the sacred as an absence or something that does not have a place and yet it forces a space for itself through transgressing the profane. The sacred isn't then a thing as we make it out to be but an effect. In transgressing, or interrupting the process, we connect to primal, fundamental experiences that are essential to constituting subjecthood. Phenomenologically, we experience the subject beyond the ego-ideal in transgression.

Often, the re-energizing of the community means "a sacrifice of self-centered desire if individuals are to enjoy cultural existence" (Shilling & Mellor, 2011, p.23). For instance, Kristeva describes the sacrifice of narcissistic love in maternity that must occur in order for the mother-child relationship to develop without dysfunction. In order to create these moral bonds, we need institutions as vehicles of social reproduction (Pearce, 2014). People have to want to sacrifice their own wants for the larger society. Durkheim (1995) states, "it is in the school of

collective life that the individual has learned to form ideals. It is by assimilating the ideals worked out by society that the individual is able to conceive of the ideal" (p.425). The sacred immerses the individual in the ideal of what life could be and should be if we follow the rules and values given. This of course is not a reality but a necessary fantasy to ensure social cohesion.

Durkheim surpasses the notion of religion proper in his theory of the sacred. He defines religion "as a system of obligatory beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014, p.474). Narrowing this definition further, "Durkheim argued that religion needs to be defined in terms of the collective representations and practices that establish, refer to, and reproduce a radical difference in a society" (Datta, 2005, p.618) The sacred is set apart and forbidden, just as the differences between sacred set apart opposing societies. It is a social marker of inclusion through exclusion. All collectivities are marked somehow to attribute them to a particular social group (Shilling & Mellor, 2011). The sacred is created by moments of collective effervescence whereby "a preceding collective subjectivity is emptied and what is left is the experience of the force/drive of social existence" (Datta, 2005, p. 635). This moment is relived in sacred rituals and celebrated in totemic collective representations (Datta, 2005; 2008). These representations help determine how social subjects think about themselves and others. It affects their judgements and their actual experience of an event, situation, or relationship.

Crucially, the sacred is constructed (Pearce 2014; Horgan 2014). The totem for Durkheim "highlights the role of collective representations in legitimating a social order" (Datta, 2008, p.285). The totem represents the sacred. It stands for the "classificatory schema of a cosmos" (Datta, 2008, p.291), which orders how we act, what relationships we build, and how we view our society. Datta (2008) refers to this as our beliefs, which determine how we view our society, and our rites, which are the actions we enact in society (p.292). Nothing is sacred in and of itself

but is made sacred. Rituals help sustain the sacred by recreating the process of the sacred becoming sacred. As Shilling and Mellor (2011) explain, the sacred structures the expression of rituals “rituals that are themselves focused upon the totem of the collectivity” (p.20). Rituals help re-enact that moment of collective effervescence. The sacred is “a factor of social solidarity and as the collective representation of social solidarity itself” (Rosati, 2003, p.174). Religion is able to recreate its power, or draw its power from itself, through ritual practices that subjects use to cope with the forces of power (Habermas, 2011). A cycle that refuels itself unless social solidarity or the collective representation behind the sacred loses force. This notion is included in Bataille's conception of "sovereignty" (Datta, 2019, p.176). Transgression is able to create new moments of collective effervescence, which are able to cement a new sacred especially among the group of individuals who are not included in the current sacred order (Datta 2008).

Anomie, according to Durkheim, refers to a state of existential impasses about the future with no clear basis for choosing between them. It tends to present itself in times of social change, where old norms are questioned, but new norms and alternatives have not been established (Jones & Barbara, n.d.). Some theorists suggest an emerging anomie or an already present anomie. Datta (2005) suggests the lessening of authority and increasing permissiveness in contemporary society has led to anomie, or in Kristeva's terms, "new maladies of the soul" (p. 629). Elliot (2009) describes Putnam's interpretation of anomie in society whereby "disconnected individualism replaces civic engagement...[and] transactional encounters replace genuine relationships" (p.29). Finally, Pearce (2014) explains how people under these conditions "become open to the influence of anti-communal discourse promoting anti-social conduct" (p. 625-626). The rise of the individual and the dissipation of the village, pregnant women find themselves in a community only concerned with individual needs. When the sacred loses its



power or becomes dysfunctional, leading to a questioning of its values, social cohesion falters until a new sacred can secure and differentiate the "clan".

There is another element to sustaining the sacred, which provides cohesion. When a hegemonic collective representation is questioned, the sacred evokes fear. Sacred things are protected by prohibitions. Just as the sacred is constructed, the profane is constructed. Durkheim (1995) states, "sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions apply (p.38). Pearce (2014) explains, "collective representations indicate what is sacred and what is profane. Sacredness does not derive from qualities of the object itself" (p.621). Society determines what will be considered profane and how those profane things will be oriented to the sacred. However, there is a key element missing in this definition. Neither God nor the Devil are profane, but we certainly do not see them in the same light. Both function together to keep a particular sacred protected and while the Devil has the ability to profane the sacred, he himself is sacred. This is why "though the sacred and profane are defined in opposition to one another" (Horgan, 2014, p.744), they are highly dependent on one another, fluid, and interlinked (Datta & Milbrandt, 2011, p.488). There is clearly a supplementary aspect to the sacred.

Durkheim mentions the potential of a dual sacred particularly when discussing how "the hyper excitement associated with effervescent assemblies could for a time lead to transgression and the overturning of social norms, and the injury and even death of participants" (Shilling & Mellor, 2011, p.28). The dual sacred points to the ambiguity in the sacred. For Datta (2008), "attending to this ambivalence of the sacred is fundamentally important since it points to an inherent instability and volatility in sacrality itself" (p.286). Moreover, negative rites, also called prohibitions, in the form of taboo and stigma keep the sacred order and prevent profanation

(Datta & Milbrandt, 2014). The profane world refers to individualistic, utilitarian, and/or economic aspects of life (Datta & Milbrandt, 2014, p.482). To profane an object or a subject would be to take it out of the sacred and into the everyday world for utilitarian purposes. For instance, Durkheim in *Incest, The origins of Taboo*, discusses how menstruating women would be excluded from the social for a period of time. As mentioned, the menstruating woman, able to contaminate the sacred and turn it profane, is not herself profane (Gane, 1992). The totemic principle of collective blood is transgressed in menstruation. She holds a dark power and a power that needs to be controlled in order to protect the light sacred. Datta and Milbrandt (2014) discuss the tendency for the body to be profane, whereas the soul or the social element of the person representing the larger clan tends to be sacred. Female experiences of menstruation, maternity, and childbirth tend to have a lot of corporeal experiences and elements of the totemic life force of the group. The desire to control these elements comes from the notion of this darker sacred being powerful enough to profane the light sacred. Georges Bataille champions this notion in his works and theorizes the left sacred in a way Durkheim had not yet done.

The sacred is always presented as an "ought" question (Rosati, 2003, p.174), supplying content to the ideal and exemplary form of social life. When there is disagreement on what ought to be done, either because social change has brought about a new question not answered by the current sacred or because social change has demonstrated a value that opposes the current sacred, social cohesion weakens and anomie proliferates. An example comes from the rapid advances of the feminist movement, which opposed patriarchal values. As mentioned, Western notions of the sacred tend to be rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition which carry male-centric values. This rooting in Christianity is also noted by Cornel West (2011) in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, reproducing male dominance.

In order to redress and remedy anomie, but reject the dysfunction in current sacred reference points, both Durkheim and later Kristeva call for a new secular sacred. For Kristeva, this secular sacred looks like a sacred based on the values of respect and love, which she claims is mirrored in the healthy mother-child relationship. She refers to this secular sacred as “herethics”. For Kristeva, herethics could replace the male-centric sacred that currently dominates. By changing the discourse associated with an experience, the experience changes. This means women would be able to experience pregnancy on their own terms. Such a possibility must start with examining the experiences of different people in relation to the sacred. A phenomenological approach is necessary in order to determine how to ease the maladies experienced. Moreover, understanding the dynamism of the sacred in these experiences is necessary. In this area, Durkheim mentions but never fully develops a dual nature sacred. Bataille takes up this task with particular attention to phenomenology in his work.

### **Georges Bataille’s Left Sacred**

In addition to Durkheimian social science, Georges Bataille drew on the surrealist movement, including its experimentations with psychoanalysis. His relation to surrealism includes his skepticism of external data that does not consider unity and connectedness in experience (Campbell, 1999). This is not to suggest Bataille ignored social reality. As Richardson (1994) points out, Bataille was an avid researcher. Simply, Bataille’s projects at their core have the aim of transgressing to escape the bourgeois individual “I” in order to connect to the larger social group or ultimately, to the cosmos. Durkheim’s influence on Bataille weighs heavily in this goal, and Kristeva also takes up this notion in trying to break away from power imbalances in certain

discourses in order to allow subjects to feel moments of unity. All at heart are projects of totality that are concerned with the experiences and enrichment of the human experience.

We experience the sacred as both “captivating and terrible” (Bataille, 2018, p.30). We are drawn into it and at the same time disgusted and fearful of it. For every pure element, there is an impure, or an “ecstatic horror which is at the root of religion” (Bataille, 2018, p.34). Bataille (2018) explains that, “the impure is generated from the pure and vice versa. It is in the possibility of these transmutations that we discover the ambiguity of the sacred” (p.33). This ambiguity presents us with an attraction and repulsion to the sacred. Bataille's analysis of attraction and repulsion is best described through "heterology". As mentioned, heterology is what Bataille (2018) refers to as his science of religion and it includes the study of the excluded parts of life that are censored by our need to idealize (p.29). Bataille (2018) explains that, “ambivalence begins only from this base. It appears in the obsessional neurosis as a desire to touch sexual objects, a desire contradicted by a strong prohibition, but it only acquires its human meaning at the moment when we see the abyss that separates such objects from the rest of the world” (p.35). When we transgress, we are able to reveal the thresholds holding the sacred together. More importantly, we are able to see them as constructed. The influence of the ego-ideal in heterology should be noted in order to understand the human need to idealize though Bataille does not explicitly use this term. Heterology is related to scatology, or the science of excrement because both are entirely other from the profane world (Bataille, 2018, p.30). Reflecting back on Bataille's notion of heterogeneous elements as those aspects of life such as chance which escape social order, heterology brings forth an irrational and unstable point in the sacred. Importantly, heterology brings forth an area of phenomenology that is outside social order. Lacan's *The Real* surpasses signification, and therefore, it is a place of excess (Botting, 1994). A very Bataillean

point, this excess, beyond what is normally delimited and permitted, is what surges and interrupts the symbolic (Botting, 1994). The sacred for Bataille, is experienced not known (Pawlett, 2016, p.21). Similarly, the Real is only ever felt through the body. In this respect, it is similar to the Lacanian Real, but in a more sociological vein.

Unlike the conventional understanding of the sacred, which generally sees those things outside of the mundane as good, cherished, and beneficial, Bataille saw two intermingled genres of the sacred realm that were both separate from the profane utility focused realm. As Riley (2005) notes, *sacer* means both holy and damned (p.28). The sacred is the world of diffusing power into objects so as to relate to the social. The sacred has a social basis that creates cohesion and a volatile order. Bataille's examination of the right sacred is very much in agreement with Durkheim's analysis of the sacred. The right sacred is that which is beneficent, good, traditionally thought of as sacred. Rosati (2003) defines the right sacred as "what is pure, sane, good, valuable...the right side is a factor of social solidarity, a religious element that overcomes religion understood in a strict sense, a factor of collective attraction" (Rosati, p.181). Generally, the right sacred is rational and moral. Bataille extends Durkheim's work through his notion of the left sacred. The concept of the left sacred is not novel to Bataille's work. Rosati (2003) discusses Mircea Eliade's notion of an ambiguous sacred referred to as "nouminoso" (p.178). Rosati (2003) defines the left sacred as "what is impure, disturbing, bad, all that a collective identity would like to refuse to acknowledge as part of itself, what it perceives as radically negative" (p.181). The left sacred is that with the power to instill fear, reduce social norms, and create change. Both the left and right sacred are separate from the profane and both create social solidarity, either by fear or connection.

Taboo, stigma, and ritual extend from the left sacred. Specifically, the left sacred is used to protect the status quo and the norms cherished in the right sacred. Pawlett (2015) explains that Bataille distinguishes the left sacred as those parts of life that are repulsive and horrifying yet are awe inspiring. The left sacred is the executioner that ensures laws are followed, or the devil that ensures society's morals are followed lest a lifetime of punishment in hell. The dark, scary portion of the sacred is crucial to ensure the right is followed and remains dominant. The right sacred must be kept pure, which is why there must be a devil to carry out the punishment. Where initially, one might think of God and the Devil as opposite, they are actually intricately connected and work together to instill moral standards. Moreover, the sacred for Bataille, as for Durkheim, extends beyond strict religious domains. For Bataille, "the sacred is a way of conceiving of, and relating to, a realm of things" (Pearce, 2003, p.55), and the way creative and destructive energies are used in these processes. The sacred is a constraining force, and at times oppressive but we do not necessarily feel it is. When taboo and stigma in the left sacred are masked by the benevolent right, we do not feel our freedom being constrained, we feel social cohesion and empowerment. We feel that we are part of the group.

The profane, for Durkheim, as for Bataille, is simply the world that is concerned with utility and the individual subject as "I" (Leuba, 1913). To use an item as a tool is to have an end in mind. The sacred, on the other hand, has a connection to us as a social whole. It is an end in itself. The sacred is connected to tradition but only so much as the tradition "come[s] to us as the expression of powers superior to us and connected with us...and when failure to conform to these ways entails danger" (Leuba, 1913, p.327). For instance, a slave is no longer a person. The slave has a specific use attached to them and their active subjecthood is taken. The slave is a profaned person. Important to this definition are the fluidity, the dynamism, and the movement

that this conception allows. Objects can move from a sacred to a profane state, and the right sacred can interact with the left as opposed to older conceptions of the sacred that kept maleficent and beneficent separated (Riley, 2005). Returning to the mind-body divide that Bataille (1989) also discusses, the body tends to be considered profane, a tool for the mind. The corporeal subject is slave to the social subject. For Bataille, this divide does not allow for continuity and to truly engage with the sacred, we need to reach a state of continuity (Bataille, 1989). This also means that any left sacred heavily associated with corporeality tends to be dismissed as illegitimate and profane (Bataille, 1989). By rejecting the mind-body divide, a whole new area of sacred phenomenological events can be explored through the left sacred. Religions, then, are beliefs combined with practices that seek to control, to an extent, the sacred through action (Leuba, 1913). Here, Datta's (2019) notion of *sanctus*, or the "reproduction of an already existing set of dominant normative coordinates" is evoked (p.179). When properly performed, experiences of the sacred affect the soul and the body. The profane is the world concerned with individuals as individuals and objects whereas the left sacred has active energy to alter the relation of subjects to objects.

Bataille tends to discuss sacrifice in terms of bodily communication through violence and eroticism far more than he does through creativity as Kristeva tends to do. Though Kristeva (2011) does argue in *Reliance, or Maternal Eroticism* that motherhood is erotic as it is a passion meaning there is an intimate connection to another. Sacrifice is "socially creative, but also potentially violent" and modernity lacks this energy (Shilling & Mellor, 2013 p. 322). Sacrifice, and transgression allow for collective effervescence to form. Collective effervescence allows people to step out of the profane and connect to each other. Not only does this allow for social cohesion in the feeling of belonging, but it reminds the group of the totemic principle which

solidifies the sacred (Datta & Milbrandt, p.490). Datta & Milbrandt (2014), drawing on Durkheim, explain that in moments of collective effervescence, "the sacred, is produced on such occasions. This social force is ecstatic (from the Greek, "ekstasis") in which people "stand" (stasis) "out of" (ek-) their usual placement in the order" (p.487). These traits of humans are able to create a feeling of continuity within us. For Bataille, eroticism is violent in the sense that we are taken out of our normal "I"; The individual identity is dissolved.

"But sexual reproduction, basically a matter of cellular division just like asexual reproduction, brings in a new kind of transition from discontinuity to continuity. Sperm and ovum are to begin with discontinuous entities, but they *unite*, and consequently a continuity comes into existence between them to form a new entity from the death and disappearance of the separate beings" (Bataille, 1962, p.14)

The subject that we are in everyday social life is completely stripped away. The body is not born social but becomes social when that which connects us to animality is destroyed (Bataille, 1989). People, just as animals, all begin as "water in water" but are immediately separated from all other people as named individuals (Bataille, 1990) thus introducing the social as a form of *negativity*, in the Hegelian dialectical sense. Our name is a unique marker of who we are away from all other species. It is the first question we are usually asked in order to establish ourselves. Our imminence, or our natural animal state becomes conflicted with our sense of immediacy stemming from our consciousness of death (Bataille, 1990). We understand our life is limited because of death, and this matters to us because we are constituted as unique subjects as opposed to a part of a larger continuity that continues past our individual life. We have divided the soul and the body to make our particular life carry on past its biological lifespan. The tombs we mark, creations we produce, memorials we hold, and pictures we take are all to keep a specific name in memory. Even though the body has deceased, the social soul can live on. In other words, as subjects we seek to transcend social organization as opposed to living in non-"I"



immanence. Often, we do this by rejecting the sacred but this transcendence is just an illusion though, and only in moments of immanence, when we lose the “I” do we have moments of continuity and intimacy where we are connected to other beings and our “self” in its purest form.

Direk (2004) sees Bataille’s discussion of violence and the sacred in terms of “immanent violence” and “transcendental violence”. Immanent violence, that moves us into continuity and temporarily destroys the “I”, comes through sacrifice, eroticism, and laughter (Direk, 2004). These extreme bodily states bring us outside ourselves in a sovereign experience. Transcendental violence has a utility attached to it because its purpose is to lift us above the immanence, and animality, we come from. Transcendental violence subordinates or has a clear hierarchical order involved (Direk, 2004), which means transcendence can never be “water in water”. The individual is no longer the social self but becomes dissolved as the “screaming bitch” during climax (Bataille, 1962).

Moments of extreme bodily pleasure or pain bring us back to our animal state and thus, back to moments of continuity of dynamic being “in itself,” and we are able to experience corporeality outside of discourse, our *noumenal* aspects. That is why in most cases, pleasure (including *jouissance*) has to have some element of transgression and the simplest sin is that of nudity (Bataille, 1989). Clothing is entirely social and takes us away from our animality. Removing it takes us closer to immanence since the sacred is communication through the body. Shilling and Mellor (2013) state, “It is not just the existence of things set apart from the profane world...but the precise manner in which sacralization occurs: *diverse processes of making things sacred cultivate very different forms of society, and very different social subjects*” (p.324). The violence of dissolving oneself into a partner can occur erotically or through literal violence as Bataille suggests; however, immanent violence can occur maternally much in the same way or

creatively. There is a fundamental need for continuity that drives people towards art, religion, creativity, and the sacred (Pawlett, 2015). Direk (2004) suggests reaching Bataille's notion of immanence through poetry is possible because it is a sacrifice of language as rational discourse. Both are a self-sacrifice, not of death but of dissolved identity, which is what Bataille links to continuity (Pawlett, 2015). Specifically, death of the social self. Things are made sacred through "ritual expenditures" (Shilling & Mellor, 2013, p.232). In engaging with the Semiotic, the symbolic element is temporarily sacrificed. Sacrifice itself is the offering of something good, or in other words expenditure for the sake of expenditure. It does not need to be in the form that Bataille suggests though there are societies that are structured for erotic and violent sacrifice.

The left sacred is intricately tied to the abject—walking a fine, flexible line between protective and dangerous. The left sacred evokes the disgust and fear that is used to control and contain. The dual nature of the sacred then marks it as ambiguous. It attracts and repulses (Rosati, 2003). With an intricate connection to the abject, the left sacred is a fine, soluble boundary between protective and dangerous. Where the profane subject is an object, the abject subject has the potential to surpass the individual "I". As the subject engages in transgression, they are marked as profane in order to strip away the uncontrollable power. The "subject and object are a series of flows...fragments capable of being linked together" (Grosz, 1989, p.167). The abject is overdetermined and has numerous relations shaping it. Together, the relations work to reproduce the social being, not the biological being.

The sacred establishes norms that are profoundly intertwined with the body and how we experience the body. Importantly, it is not the sole experience and there is experience outside discourse. Butler (1993) explains, "Freud will state quite clearly that bodily pain is the precondition of bodily self discovery" (p.58). Pain has a corporeal base first and foremost. At

times, discourse may mediate pain but it is foundationally physical. It is a phenomenological experience beyond discourse. By combining Kristeva's psychoanalysis and Bataille's phenomenology with the sacred, an analysis of the interiority of social constituted existence, inside the body but beyond law or corporeal acceptable habit is possible (Grosz, 1989, p.117).

### **Abjection in the Sacred**

The most notable intersection between Butler, Kristeva and Bataille concerns a consideration of abjection. Bataille's concept of abjection is centered on the filth, shit, piss and the horror that draws us in and disgusts. It is the body being pulled from the wreckage as we stare, the homeless person yelling on the subway, or the uncanny feeling of being alone in a wax museum and importantly, the notion that we are one small step away from being that—subhuman. We have a curiosity that gravitates us towards the abject, but we never want to be immersed on anyone else's terms. We are voyeurs and we are animals. This is why what can be seen and what can be felt is immensely important to Bataille. His focus on corporeality, bodily flows and movement, and how these connect people, are central to his phenomenology. Under current societal structures, "Kristeva argues that without a secular discourse or myth of motherhood that absorbs abjection, abjection is misplaced onto women" (Oliver, 1993, p.104). Women's bodies, women as real subjects, are not represented in the sacred, are not active subjects in the sacred, but are bodies that matter too much. The need to control women's reproductive power, sexuality, and maternity, force women into a space of abjection. Both motherhood and women's sexuality are heavily policed (Mokobocho-Mohlakoana, 2008). So long as the process is controlled, the left sacred is controlled. The moment the pregnant subject transgresses, the left sacred—not the

Virgin but the whore—appears into identity and into the sacred. Abjection is used to eliminate the threat to the myth.

We are drawn in to the abject not from enjoyment of disgust but because it tells us something fundamental about ourselves. It sorts through our identity and is familiar because it is a place we have visited before. Both Butler and Kristeva theorize discourse as an organizing and oppressive force. However, whereas Butler rejects any ontology grounded in the body (Chambers, 2007), Kristeva posits a foundational human experience that is separate, though admittedly intertwined, with discourse. Due to her corporeal engagement and interest in sacrosanct principles, Kristeva works far better than Butler in synthesis with the sacred and abjection. The Semiotic, as theorized by Kristeva, is the body and soul in communication (Oliver, 2010). The Semiotic is rhythmic, corporeal, and largely related to what Bataille calls immanent experience. Both Kristeva and Bataille see the importance of bodily communication, though Kristeva places the origin of this desire in the Chora: the pre-symbolic world of the womb that the fetus begins in that comes to direct our drives (Oliver, 2010). Essentially, the Chora is the language we speak before we are socialized into discourse, a basis of continuity in human existence and experience. Once we are brought into discourse, we can no longer be submersed in the Chora and can only occasionally reach these freeing moments of continuity through engagement with the Semiotic.

## **Conclusion**

Though Kristeva mentions a dual sacred, she does not adequately theorize it. Using Bataille's radical Durkheimian sacred, and especially his use of the left sacred, a better analytic of the pregnant subject can be made. The restrictions, taboos, and expectations of the pregnant subject

become more apparent when viewed through the boundaries the sacred imposes. This is evident in the image of the Virgin, which encourages women to have children as a natural vocation or even a sacred duty. In order to remove these expectations, a new secular sacred to replace the image of the Virgin must be brought forth. For Kristeva, this is “herethics.” By using herethics, women will be able to control more of their pregnancy experience and be able to enjoy the corporeal elements of the experience. Moreover, herethics allows women empowerment through abjection as opposed to an oppressive, punitive abjection.

Hegel, Bataille noted, saw that discourse separated parts from totality (Bataille, 1990, p.14). This leads to a fragmented experience of the self and a longing for feeling whole. For Kristeva, the Semiotic is most often reached through poetry that breaks away from discourse but can also occur through bodily experiences that are rhythmic such as fetal pulsations, contractions, fetal hiccups, etc. Because the fetus is incapable of Symbolic language, the maternal figure experiences the Semiotic through the bodily communication of the fetus. For Bataille, engaging in transgression can lead to ecstatic moments where collective effervescence, a feeling that exceeds discourse, allows for moments of continuity. Importantly, the transgression must be on one’s own terms. We must abject ourselves as opposed to being deemed abject, shaking loose the constraints of acceptable bourgeois subjectivity.

However, the experience of the maternal is largely constituted through the sacred, which is socially variant but always consists of the same structural elements. As Horgan states, “symbolic power is moral power...symbolic power must be affective” (Horgan, 2014, p.758). The sacred tells us something about how society is organized and thinks of itself (Rosati, 2003). The sacred is emotionally charged, and uses symbolic elements in the Symbolic realm to structure the social. This, of course, alters how a subject experiences events and evaluates and

understands themselves. Women, as beings capable of giving life, held reproductive power both biologically and socially. They also have the power to destroy life, particularly social life. In order to control reproduction, the Virgin is evoked in order to assure mothers follow a particular role. This symbol becomes cemented in the ego-ideal and pregnancy becomes a pre-ordered process. Women become tools of reproduction--objects. If women are to reject the Virgin, they transgress and are deemed abject. This can lead to experiencing pregnancy as distressing. Kristeva suggests using herethics in order to allow women to experience pregnancy as they wish.

## Chapter Four: Analysing the Sacred and Pregnancy

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss various contemporary examples of the Virgin which are depicted and juxtaposed in cinema and literature. This is done in order to demonstrate one of the many ways the sacred sustains itself outside of religion proper. In juxtaposition to contemporary images of motherhood, historic images of creator goddesses were shown that tapped into both the left and right sacred. The Virgin strips the left sacred away, and when women experience the left sacred, they are abjected. The only option is to deny the experience of the left sacred making the experience profane. I then examine how the threshold of the subject was changed from birth to pre-birth. This change, creating the concept of fetus as a subject, altered how women were constituted in pregnancy. Instead of subjects, women become wombs in order to secure the life of the fetus. This is necessary to examine in order to depict how women experience their pregnancy as objects, not subjects and in order to demonstrate the unrealistic expectations put upon the pregnant subject.

Modern cinematic and literary depictions of women tap into the abject and left sacred of women. By showing this image of women as negative, the image of the Virgin is reinforced. The *Twilight* (Condon et al., 2011) film series shows its main character, Bella, deteriorating into a zombie-like state as her crossbred vampire fetus, described as “monstrous”, an “abomination”, and “unnatural”, sucks the life from her. However, her ability to create biological reproduction that is not social reproduction is where the abjection and fear of the left sacred takes place. It is this fear that drives the desire to profane and control women in reproduction. Similar depictions take place in *I am Mother* (Sputore et al, 2019) which takes out feminine corporeality entirely focusing on a robot who uses focus and function to efficiently mother. This film ends in a

dystopic play on the fear of what might happen if women stop their essential mothering roles. The movie *Mother!* (Aronafsky et al., 2017) roots itself in the abject depiction of a mass metaphor of nature versus God. God of course represents the social order and the necessity of women's natural function being in harmony with the social order. The movie ends in the death of the mother, representing nature, due to the father's careless actions, representing society. The movie then ends with restarting the relationship between a reborn mother and father. The repetition of the cycle shows a flaw in the social order.

Perhaps the clearest depiction of the abject in motherhood comes through the classic sci-fi movie *Alien* (Scott et al., 1979). This movie presents an alien creature hunting and killing astronauts but at the core of the alien, it is a mother. The alien begins attacking in order to protect the eggs—the alien's offspring. The eggs are born in a parasitic fashion whereby they enter a person, take over the corporeal function of the person as codependent until they are fully formed, and then they birth themselves with the sacrifice of the carrier. In this depiction of motherhood, the mother does not have to sacrifice and those who are sacrificed for the eggs to hatch are depicted as subjects as opposed to wombs. Moreover, by depicting the half-formed aliens as aliens instead of children, we do not give them the same subjectivity as a human fetus forming in a woman. The abject in *Alien* comes from the familiarity and fear of uncontrolled maternal power.

Margaret Atwood (2006) plays on the depiction of women becoming profane to the sacred fetal subject in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this novel, female sexuality is forbidden and met with communal hangings to reinforce the belief system through the left sacred, through fear of punishment and sacrifice of women. Sexuality is for reproduction and only socially accepted reproduction. Only affluent families are given children to socially reproduce and men are not



tested for infertility demonstrating that biological reproduction falls on the women. Women who do not want children are painted as disgusting, evil, and to be expelled from the community. Ritualized regulation and women are highlighted, illustrating a separation from autonomy and corporeality by becoming an extension of the wife as a tool for reproduction. These are only a few examples of how images and symbols of the Virgin are cemented into contemporary culture without explicitly using religion proper. Although such depictions are hyperbolic and brought to dystopic extremes, many aspects ring true.

The link between the sacred and the maternal seems to be far less at the forefront today in contemporary North American culture than the historical importance attributed to fertility and the gods. However, these depictions demonstrate the way the image of the Virgin is still held as an ideal to achieve. The Virgin is not an inherent sacred symbol and historically, women tended to be depicted as both creator and destroyer—embodying both the left and right sacred as opposed to only depicting the right. Instead of celebrating the maternal in its creative and sacrificial aspects, the sacred works to profane women and control the maternal experience. With this in mind, it is essential to reconsider Kristeva's work and the problematic of the sacred as conceptualized by Bataille in order to analyse pregnancy in contemporary Western society. Both Kristeva and Bataille discuss the concepts of subject, object and abject, as well as how the sacred interacts and creates these categories. Both theories maintain a commitment to the corporeal and an interest in the way the corporeal interacts with subjectivity. What is most important in developing a theory of the maternal through Kristeva's analytic in conjunction with the sacred is that we are able to both see a phenomenology of the maternal experience as well as the problem with examining the phenomenology of the maternal (we see the social forces that shape and constrain the experience) in which abjection plays a significant role. This allows us to examine

social practices silencing female voices, excluding maternal corporality, as well as grounding a theory in women's embodied experience and their own accounts of it.

### **The Left Sacred in Pregnancy**

Mothers and fertile women have historically and cross-culturally been depicted as creator goddesses with both the power to give life but also the power of destruction. While hardly the only example, Medusa was both mother and killer. She created life, but she also created art through her destruction of life. This dualism, both left and right sacred in Bataille's terms, follow the pregnant subject into contemporary Western experiences. This is evident in the way hostile and benevolent sexism are used to both protect the pregnant subject and the life she gives the society, but also to control the female subject in order to restrict that ability. Historic examples of mothers engaged in both the left and right sacred are abundant. Tobin (1991) highlights both Egypt's goddess Isis, and Greek goddess Demeter who are both mothers and agriculture Gods capable of creating and destroying harvests. Ge, a minor fertility goddess in Greek cities, is related to Gaia or the mother of earth, ocean, and titans (Press, 2011). All these things are necessary for life but left unruly bring mass destruction. Klein (2008) highlights the Aztec goddess Coatlicue who was the mother of Huitzilopochtli but also sacrificed (along with her sisters) to put the sun in motion. She, along with many fertility goddesses, is associated with snakes. In *The snake goddesses of the LM IIB and LM IIC periods*, Gesell (2010) discusses the many snake goddesses who are depicted as mothers but also as sacrificial goddesses. The snake, both capable of shedding its old skin to renew itself, but also dangerous was depicted as sacred. The image of the snake changed over time to represent evil. Chakravarty (2012) explains how women in Manasa Mangal Kavya in Bengal use stories of snake goddesses as a counter

discourse to patriarchy. The attraction and repulsion of the snake goddesses, and the fertility goddesses mimic the dialectic tension between women and the ingroup amongst a volatile social nucleus.

However, with the sustained image of the Virgin, the balances of power in the sacred cannot be maintained. These goddesses, both to be praised and feared, now have their left sacred stripped away. The powers of the left and right no longer work to reaffirm. The left sacred becomes something strictly to be contained or radically excluded, feared, and controlled. The goddesses had to be abjected or profaned in order to regulate the now imbalanced left sacred. The snake came to represent evil. Eve is warned to stay away from the snake in the bible. Using a prior sacred symbol as a sign of evil works as a warning to not engage in that prior sacred order. This has seeped into the social world as demonstrated by Cardozo-Freeman (1978) who discusses the Mexican fear of snakes who invade the womb and come after children. The sacred is never inherently good or bad. It is merely a construction. Prior to the construction of the fetus as a subject, a creation of God not woman, women themselves were seen as beings with the potential of both left and right sacred. Without the power to control women, it was necessary to profane them. To take away sacred power and render them objects to be controlled. The sacred, both left and right, went from being a power of women to being a means of controlling women. This was done through patriarchal notions of the sacred enacted through sexism.

As women are profaned, by being turned into tools or instrumental vehicles during pregnancy, rituals are less pertinent and sacrifice holds less power. While there are still examples of ritual-like activities such as the wedding, the baby announcement, the baby shower, and the gender reveal, most techniques focus on proscription and risk assessment in medical terms. Rituals exist to protect thresholds. As Weir (2006) states, “thresholds have techniques facilitating

entry and exit, techniques which organize the relations between inside and outside, before and after” (p.3). The fetus was profane, but the child was sacred and in need of protection. When the sacred fetal subject emerged, that threshold was blurred. There is nothing sustaining the middle so women have fewer rituals for childbirth. Capila (1998) talks about Himalaya women in Garhwal who have songs of celebration for life events which are called *Mangal Geet*. These ritual songs are sung during birth, naming, weddings, etc. For these women, *Mangal Geet* shapes their experience of the maternal in relation to corporeal changes. In Western women’s cases, controlling biological reproduction to ensure reproduction is all that matters. This means women are obliged to find meaning in the experience of being a medical object.

The pregnant subject tends to sacrifice her personhood, putting other aspects of identity aside to be “mother”, and the pregnant subject tends to sacrifice financially by disrupting their careers. Moreover, corporeality forces pregnant women, and even birthing and non-birthing mothers, to sacrifice. Childbirth is an immense corporeal sacrifice in itself that can still result in death. Moreover, the nature of caring for a baby is corporeal and requires that the child’s needs be met before the parent. By framing women as objects, rather than subjects actively engaging in the left sacred, the woman’s sacrifice is no longer her sacrifice for the child that she can make meaning through but society’s tool to secure social reproduction. This new framing of pregnancy and birth developed from the concept of the fetus as the subject.

### **A Change in the Subject**

Children are sacred. We protect them, we keep them separate from the abject, and we nourish them. Those who harm children are looked at as the most despicable people and we make claims to children’s vulnerability as the reason for our investment in them. However, children also

represent the next generation and the future of the clan and the continuity of the totemic principle, or in modern cases, the state. The focus on fertility rates, population sizes, and citizenship show the importance of children. Michel Foucault (1990) demonstrates this in his discussion of population, not as individual people but as “its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation” (p.25). Children keep the totem of the state alive and it is the state’s vulnerability that must be protected by protecting children. Agencies protecting children’s welfare and laws against child abuse demonstrate this desire to protect children. Our children need to be safe more than the outsider’s children need to be safe. It is then a sacred duty to have and protect children; however, what constitutes a child has evolved.

A shift in the maternal experience comes from a liminal shift in subjecthood. The liminal period, rooted in *limen*, is referring to the threshold of corporeality in relation to the mother’s physical agency and the fetal social subject. At some point, the fetus becomes a child and liminal thresholds can change when that happens and the process by which that happens. Lorna Weir (2006) explains, “the threshold of the living subject constitutes the zone of transition into and out of human bodily substance” (p. 1). For Kristeva, the mirror stage is the point where the child distinguishes itself from the mother and a separate social being in natural development. Today, “in contemporary medicine, law and politics of the global north, the living subject is often claimed to pre-exist birth” (Weir, 2006, p.i). This means that pregnancy is the new threshold of the subject, not birth, and not the mirror stage. The fetus is constituted as a being from the moment it is discovered. The act of naming the fetus itself is a social act to solidify a subject within the woman. Grosz (1989) agrees the body is a threshold from internal to external and from self to other and that pregnancy disrupts the boundary. By the liminal period of subjecthood

shifting from after birth to in the womb, the fetus is constituted as a child much earlier and becomes a subject buried alive with the mother as its coffin. The implications of this liminal shift on the pregnant subject will be explored below, but first I will discuss how this shift occurred.

One such factor in shifting the liminal period comes from challenges to the law. Though ultimately unsuccessful, the presentation of the fetus as a subject in the court of law shook the threshold. Weir discusses this notion in detail and states a series of cases, for instance, *Montreal Tramways vs Léveillé (1933) 4 DLR 338*. Léveillé went to court for damage against the fetus after falling on their property but was not successful in the case. This outcome tended to be the norm particularly in Canada and the United Kingdom. The law prevailed and “the courts turned away from the authoritarian potential of the perinatal threshold to use women as a vessel for fetal health” (Weir, 2006, p.27). Perinatal refers to the moment right before birth. The perinatal threshold then refers to what we constitute as the transition from fetus to child. Canada has even created a maternal immunity from legal consequences in regard to fetal harm. However, the fact that maternal immunity was created shows how often the mother is blamed for any harm the fetus undergoes. Moreover, some cases where the child had some long-term damage because of an event that occurred while they were a fetus have successfully won their cases. An example comes from the Canadian civil case *Duval v. Seguin (1972)* where Duval sued Seguin for injuries the fetus sustained during a negligent car accident. Whether the court ruled in favor of the fetus or not, the act of bringing a fetus to court as a subject was enough to shift the thresholds and change the liminal period in pregnancy.

An additional shift comes from property rights. In order to own property, one must be an adult juridical subject. Objects do not own other objects, subjects own objects. When the concept of *child en ventre sa mere* appeared in estate law, a notable shift in the subject was seen. *Child*

*en ventre sa mere* literally means “child in the mother’s womb” and this concept was used in order to give an estate to a child who was not yet born (Weir, 2006, p.131). Usually this occurred in the wills of a parent who would not live until the child was actually born. This concept did eventually branch out to discuss the rights of the fetus as well. By constituting the fetus as a subject with rights to property and implies potential other rights, the fetus becomes a child much earlier.

Ultimately, medical advances focusing on statistics, that Michel Foucault links to “biopolitics”, shifted the fetus to a subject at a much earlier period of time. The study of perinatal mortality in the 1950’s brought the perinatal threshold into dispute (Weir, 2006). Studies in North America began counting stillbirths in infant mortality statistics as deaths from 1920 through 1950 (Weir, 2006); if the fetus is able to die, then it must be living. By bringing this notion under the light, the fetus becomes an object of knowledge under a dominant discourse and the idea of the fetus as a subject in the making is formed. With medical advances and studies on pregnancy, where the fetus is the subject of the study and the woman is the environment, fetus viability became earlier. As technology advances, earlier detection and intervention becomes possible. Pregnancy was now viewed through medical risk assessment in order to lower infant mortality. Women had to make lifestyle changes in order to keep the fetus’ risk as low as possible. Child welfare agencies were able to call for forced medical care on women in order to “reduce unhealthy wards of the state” (Weir, 2006, p.27). Reducing infant mortality was the priority and maternal mortality was a second consideration.

Some theorists advance the idea that resistance may be possible with advancing medical technology. While this technology made the sacred fetal subject possible, it has also allowed for reproductive choice both in preventing pregnancy, terminating pregnancy, or in assisting

pregnancy. Kristeva (2012) states, “The control of procreation has not made women superfluous” (p.55). For her, technology gives women power. Medical advances may prove to alter the potentials of motherhood or of sex allowing for greater variance in identity or control over the tasks attributed to an identity; however, an important note comes from Irigaray (1986) when she states, “an artificial womb isn’t yet an artificial nurturer, at least not a post-natal one” (p.13). Though contraceptives brought freedom in the notion that women, with the privilege of access to these medical advances, are no longer forced to bear children, they have not yet allowed women a completely free choice. Petersen (2004) explains that an autonomous choice requires informed subjects making decisions that they understand without undue influence. Without a secular sacred, a potential form being herethics, this simply is not the case. Since we rely on women to reproduce in order to continue the system, we use the sacred as a discourse to sway subjects to the desired path.

Moreover, medical advances can also work against women. Just as the sacred fetal subject was brought to life by medical advances, “advances in the scientific understanding of childhood have been widely used as an argument to reassert women’s quintessential maternal function” (Mitchell, 1972, p.118). Many women do not have the privilege of contemplating patriarchal implications of choices or do not have access to medical technology that can assist them in their desired choices. Watson (2014) notes that more than half of the United Kingdom’s pregnancies are unplanned and doctors tend to feel more comfortable assuming that each pregnancy is desired. Though Mitchell claims new technology can be freeing, Grosz (1989) notes that overcoming a biological function may not change the meaning if the power dynamic remains. The use behind the technology may still be channeled by power dynamics. For instance, in-vitro fertilization tends to have expenses tied to it meaning that only people of a certain class



are able to use it to assist their pregnancy. Lastly, if women are viewed as no longer valuable in reproduction, they may achieve more autonomy or they may be pushed out as useless objects.

The key is that the discourse must be changed along with the technology.

The liminal period in pregnancy marks a threshold where the fetus becomes a subject and where the fetus becomes a separate entity from the mother. The inside and the outside of the subject are demarcated by the threshold. Weir (2006) explains, “when the birth threshold of the living subject came unfixed, so too did the relations of before and after, inside and outside, that had been held apart by birth. Moving the threshold before birth attached the arrival of the living subject to the inside of the maternal body during pregnancy” (p.29). Birth no longer sustained the threshold. This corporeal boundary was now seen as revealing the subject but not constituting it meaning that when the subject actually becomes a subject in the womb is not entirely fixed. There is much debate, particularly in abortion discourses, about when the subject actually comes to be. The result of these changes tends to heavily affect women.

### **The Profanation of Women**

As the fetal subject becomes more important, and the womb is thought of as the fetus’ home, women become the houses that secure the fetal subject. This conflict of determining who has bodily autonomy in pregnancy is referred to as the maternal-fetal conflict and arose from the creation of the sacred fetal subject (Paltrow, 1994). However, discourse is not linear. It has exceptions, flaws, and resistance, which is good for the pregnant subject as it avoids the handmaiden dystopia Atwood (2006) envisioned. However, when women are conceptualized in this way, they become profane objects as opposed to subjects with the ability to engage with the left and right sacred. Moreover, their transgression is seen as a threat and their abjection is meant

to be punitive as opposed to liberating. For instance, female sexuality is met with slut-shaming as opposed to being considered an ordinary human need (Harding, 2015). Only certain individuals are given the social approval to reproduce. Mothers who are single, non-white, immigrant, lesbian, or who have low socioeconomic status experience characterization as deviants (Summers-Bremner, 1998, p.165). Those women who do not adhere to the form of “motherhood” experience stigma, isolation, and even physical abuse ranging from sterilization to torture. An instance of this is observed when examining the very recent treatment of pregnant women in prison (Hewko, 2014). Only 6% of incarcerated women are pregnant (Hewko, 2014). These women do not have ready access to prenatal care, birthing options, alternate food, or vitamins. It was only in 2014 that 18 states in the United States of America passed anti-shackling laws for women, which prevented women in active labor from being restrained; however, 23 states still allow some form of restraints (Hewko, 2014). The experience, humanity, and life of the pregnant woman did not take precedent. The only concern was to use the woman’s body to birth a healthy child that would shortly be taken from her. Hewko further notes that forced termination amongst incarcerated women, especially those who become pregnant after entering the prison system, is not unheard of. Susan Bordo (1993) lends credit to these findings and states, “the causal and morally imperious approach medicine and law have taken to non-consensual medical interference in the reproductive lives of women-particularly when they are of non-European descent, poor, or non-English-speaking” (p.75). Both Hewko and Bordo discuss coerced sterilizations to prevent those deemed unworthy from reproducing. Bordo (1993) notes, from 1900 to 1960, approximately 60,000 people in the United States were sterilized without explicit consent. Hewko (2014) adds 148 female prisoners in California underwent tubal ligations without receiving the proper process to gain consent. The lack of bodily autonomy

given to many women, with the above being only a few examples, demonstrates that the physical experiences in pregnancy do matter and that discourse which prevents women from controlling these aspects of pregnancy causes the experience of pregnancy to be distorted.

These modern depictions represent a profound and powerful social ambivalence towards mothers and how we profane women to control the anxieties stemming from an imbalanced left sacred. The problem is not in the maternal body itself, but in the way we as a society have polarized and classified it. Glick and Fiske (2001) refer to this as the “Madonna-whore” dichotomy. To put this in Kristeva's terms, because the symbolic world is threatened by the Semiotic, as the Semiotic itself is the collapse of the Symbolic, careful measures must be taken to ensure the potential power coming from this experience are controlled and channeled in a way deemed appropriate. By changing the threshold of subjectivity to pre-birth, the fetus as an object inside the mother as a subject is reversed. The fetus becomes a subject and that subjectivity comes before the mother. The mother becomes a womb, an object to house the fetus. If a mother rejects this role and asserts her subjectivity, she transgresses into abjection. Medical discourse helps to maintain the fetus as subject and dominant patriarchy discourses are used to regulate the threshold. Without enforcing the threshold, the boundaries of subject, object, and abject break down. The sacred, in its current gendered order, turns the pregnant body into one single ideal pregnant body (Grosz, 1989). This ideal is depicted through the Virgin Mary and enforced by feminine ideals in discourse. Bartlett in sacred traditions explains that when we claim our own sacredness, we no longer need to rely on others to create the experience. In this sense, the Semiotic is indeed a form of a “left sacred” experience with immense potential to cross into the abject on one's own terms.

Weir (2006) explains the way we use risk assessment to control people. Following Ulrich Beck's theory of the risk society, Weir (2006) explains that we force pregnant women to prepare for risks they cannot control and when we do this, the focus is on future harm and lifestyle as opposed to an actual diagnosis indicating an unhealthy state. Every action a pregnant woman takes from sleep schedule, exercise, food, bowel movements, weight, etc. can be monitored and controlled this way. Moreover, some medical practices place the subjectivity of the fetus above the subjectivity of the woman. For instance, induction rates continue to rise in order to follow a schedule for the fetus to be delivered at an optimum time, though induction raises the risk for caesarean section (Mei-Dan et al., 2017). Trying to control this much of anyone's lives is incredibly alienating and domineering. Women are profaned when they are used as medical tools for reproduction. There is no "I" that is "We" or "water in water". Pregnancy under medical risk assessment is not an experience of unity for the community whereby a woman sacrifices her body for a child, because medicine aims at efficiency with a precise order to a procedure to which women are subjected.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focuses on the way the status of the fetus as a subject helped to profane women. Three aspects brought the sacred-fetal subject into life: property inheritance, law, and medical advances focusing on risk assessment of the fetus. By transforming the fetus into a subject, the autonomy of the woman is in question: whose body is it? When the woman undergoes these corporeal changes, it is no longer under the discourse of her body changing but of changes necessary to keep the fetus healthy. Her experience of corporeal is now under medical assessment. The kicks she feels are not to be enjoyed but to be tallied and reported at the next

visit to see if she should be worried or not. The pregnant subject becomes a medical tool. She becomes an object, not a subject. The shift in the perinatal threshold from birth to before birth alters the view of when the subject's life starts. By using Kristeva's phenomenology, and radical Durkheimian concepts of the sacred, we can see how the sustained image of the Virgin encourages women to undergo pregnancy in the reflection of an ideal image. By forcing this ideal experience to be the only acceptable experience, women are alienated by experiences outside of the ideal and are forced to become tools with an intended purpose and path.

## Chapter Five: Experiencing Stigma

### Introduction

Chapter five examines how the rule of the father creates taboo and stigma in order to control women's choices and sustain the image of the Virgin. Taboo and stigma are seen through ambivalent sexism, which is hostile and benevolent sexism combined. Under this form of the sacred, abjection does not become a process where women can become "lack of lack" but one of expelling social threats to the status quo. Women who do not enact pregnancy properly, those who receive or endorse abortion, the childless by choice and the subfecund are some of the groups of women who experience oppressive abjection. Because of this, pregnancy as an experience that shakes the foundation of identity, is not able to be a liberating experience but becomes an alienating one.

The phenomena Kristeva's conceptualizes as "the father" is evident in pregnancy discourse. Most notably, we see the father acted out through benevolent sexism. Medical risk assessment and benevolent sexism takes away bodily autonomy from the woman but disguises the control in the cloak of protection, concern, and goodwill. As Moya et al. (2007) explain, "ideologically, paternalism is manifested by subjectively affectionate attitudes that are nevertheless condescending and reinforce women's lower status (p.1422). By situating a female experience in a phallogocentric symbolic, women are unable to fully engage as female experience is found where phallogocentric discourse is broken down (Gambaudo, 2017, p.25). Women who reject benevolent sexism are met with stigma in the form of hostile sexism. Hostile sexism is a means of abjection, used to eliminate the threat or the subject if they do not correct their behaviours. Women become an object and target of expert discourse that enforce patriarchal

values. Women are symbolically blocked from tapping into the power of reproductive corporeal sacrifice.

### **Taboo and Stigma**

Taboo and stigma extend from the dangers associated with the left sacred and are used along with the right sacred in order to uphold the totemic principle. In a patriarchal sacred order, male dominance is an important principle to maintain. As mentioned, transgression is a sin in Christianity (Bataille, 1957). This means “the feelings roused by the transgression of the taboo had to be suppressed at all costs” (Bataille, 1957, p.125). While Christianity is not as common in contemporary Western society, the image of the Virgin is persistent, which means female transgression is still suppressed. Women cannot have ecstatic experiences, they cannot step “out of place,” as they need to understand their subordinate position in the sacred system of valuation. Sexism is commonly discussed in terms of hostility; however, sexism is actually a means of controlling and dominating a particular sex and this does not necessarily have to happen through hostility or even be resisted. Hostile sexism is what is normally thought of when discussing sexism. It is chauvinism, it is lesser pay, it is rape culture, and the like. This form of sexism functions via taboo and stigma. It sanctions women to certain roles in order to ensure they do not threaten identity. Benevolent sexism includes those acts that seem protective, perhaps almost paternal, but that restrict the autonomy and respect of the person. Ambivalent sexism is the combination of both types, and this is what Murphy studies. For Murphy et al. (2011), sexism is fluid and women can easily move from receiving benevolent sexism to hostile. This fluidity reflects the status that women move in and out of. Generally, the ambivalence that women are viewed with is what necessitates both types of sexism to work towards sustaining an ideal.

Women are either sacred objects, those that are housing a child for instance, or they are abject, those that are ignoring the risk assessments in pregnancy for instance. The fluidity of this seeming dichotomy is reflective of a prior left sacred state that has been suppressed and occluded in order to forward a monotheistic sacred whereby reproduction is in the hands of one male God.

Many women do not resist benevolent sexism and even enjoy its protection and comfort. Benevolent sexism refers to actions and attitudes that are “ostensibly protective, motivated to preserve the welfare of pregnant women and their children...The second function of proscriptions, whether intended or not, is that they are potentially derogatory” (Murphy et al., 2011, p.813). Cases of women being put second to the fetus are plenty; however, I have detailed a few below for example. Murphy explains taboos as “both ancient and modern, [and] surround the types of food and drink women should consume during pregnancy, the places they should go, the exercise they should take, and even the states of mind that they should experience” (Murphy et al. 2011, p.812). Sutton et al. (2011) noted a case where a woman in a restaurant was denied cheddar cheese despite pasteurized cheeses being perfectly harmless to both the woman and the fetus (p.4). More disturbing was a case where a woman was court ordered to follow her obstetrician’s bed rest orders (Sutton et al, 2011, p.5). Cases of women in Europe subjected to pre- and post-natal confinement, and dietary exclusions which included nutritious and beneficial foods were also found by Sutton et al. (2011). These findings were supported by Meyer-Rochow (2009) who explain, “it is often pregnant and lactating women in various parts of the world that are forced to abstain from especially nutritious and beneficial foods” (p.8). These practices are excused as a way to protect the woman when in reality these restrictions are solely to protect the sacred fetal subject and control the woman as its pre-birth environment (Sutton et al, 2011, p.6). Any proscription is restraining. However, it is important to note that the restraints placed on



women are solely in order to protect the fecundity of the group. It is not about the woman but about the ability of the group to continue through protecting social reproduction.

Who in particular is affected by benevolent sexism and who enables this system? Murphy found that men scored higher than women on acts of hostile and benevolent sexism; however, both men and women equally endorsed proscriptions. So, while both men and women are part of this system, men tend to be active participants more often. Endorsed proscriptions included alcohol consumption, foods such as deli meat and seafood, and rigorous exercise as well as pregnant women who were openly “flouting these taboos” (Murphy et al, 2011, p.814). Men perceived enforcing proscriptions as their duty and a good deed, whereas women were more likely to see these as restrictions and sexism (Sutton et al. 2011). Women found benevolent sexism to actually be appealing; however, women’s endorsement was associated with a higher awareness of men’s hostility suggesting that these women are picking the lesser threat (Sibley & Wilson, 2004). It is safer to be coddled, even if the motivation is control, than to be physically or financially harmed. Sutton et al. (2011) found that women were particularly accepting of benevolent sexism with intimate males. Unfortunately, much of this advice and policing over women stems from misinformation meaning the proscriptions and control over the pregnant women are not protecting her or the fetus (Clair & Anderson, 1989). When determining which dichotomy one is placed on, it is unlikely to want to be abject and met with exclusion and violence as opposed to being glorified and condescended. Leaning into the image of the Virgin is less alienating, though it is a nearly impossible ideal to sustain.

Social stigma is likely to be passed by both sexes onto pregnant women, though, it seems men are more inclined to actively engage in benevolent and hostile sexism than women. This is true of most aspects of the sacred as previously noted. As Nakhaie and Datta (2018) explain,

perceptions play a large role in how we interpret our experiences. Both men and women are endorsing the perception that benevolent sexism is protection for pregnant women. Ignoring the paternal rule evident in this type of behavior, the larger threat stems from the fluidity of benevolent to hostile sexism which is being endorsed by both men and women! Ambivalent sexism is important here, as these restrictions come from benevolent sexism, however, hostile sexism was associated with the idea that those breaking these rules deserve to be punished (Murphy et al., 2011, p.815). Even more disturbing is that punitive attitudes were directed at the woman for engaging in risky behaviour towards herself (Murphy et al., 2011, p.815). The punishment is individual and punitive measures are used for the “woman’s sake”, an echo of atonement for a sin.

As mentioned, ambivalent sexism is the fluidity of benevolent sexism to hostile sexism. Ambivalent sexism encompasses both the paternal and the punitive attitudes not as separate but as interconnected and dependent parts of sexism though they are distinct. Moya et al. (2007) found in cross-national comparisons that benevolent and hostile sexism were positively correlated and predicted “structural indicators of gender inequality” (p.1422). Patriarchy refers to gender inequality that disproportionately favors male rule. Benevolent sexism creates the proscriptions imposed on women, but those women who do not follow, either actively or accidentally, the restrictions are deemed abject and even punishable. An example of the extreme attitudes towards women is clear in Crandall, Eshleman, and O’Brien (2002) who found prejudice towards pregnant women that drink, was deemed more acceptable than to gang members, drug dealers, adulterers, and negligent parents. This prejudice exists even though the official medical advice, though against consumption, states that a small amount is harmless (Murphy et al., 2011, p.812). Yet there is something deeply offensive about profaning pregnancy

(Sutton et al., 2011, p.6-7). Women are treated as though a drop of alcohol will cause fetal alcohol syndrome, even when this is far from the medical reality.

Another example comes from Glick, Singletary and Kazama (2007) who conducted a field experiment where female participants posed as customers or job applicants in America. These women were made to be visibly pregnant through a prosthesis. Those who came in as job applicants were treated significantly more hostile than those who were customers. Hebl, King, Glick et al. (2007) further found that pregnant women were rated as less competent, unfit for hire, and unfit for promotion in a video analysis. These findings were found through Halpert, Wilson, & Hickman (1993) and Bragger, Kutcher, Morgan, & Firth (2002) whereby they used the same woman doing the same work in each video and had people rate their work ethic; however, they have the woman wearing a pregnancy prosthesis in one video. The ambivalent state of pregnant women is threatening to social norms and tends to be met with hostility in order to sustain the current sacred order.

It is not that pregnant women themselves are hated, but that society works to protect its current form. Glick and Fisk (1996) argued that cultural representations of women are ambivalent. Throughout history and across cultures, women have been revered as well as reviled (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Sibley and Wilson (2004) provided further insight into how these subjectively positive and negative sexist ideologies complement each other by showing that ambivalent sexism tends to generate more polarized female subtypes. Moreover, this form of sexist ideology, as are majority of sexist ideologies, are linked to patriarchal social systems (Sibley & Wilson, 2004). Sexism, benevolent and hostile, work together to reinforce male-centric values. This mirrors the left and right sacred, working to enforce a sacred that favors men. In order to control reproduction, both biological and social, controlling women is

necessary. The Virgin Mary; ideal mother, wife, and woman; is a large part of that image. By using women's reproduction and sexuality as cultural characteristics in a patriarchal symbolic (Grosz, 1989), women become very vulnerable as the sacred will be used to control or abject them. Hebl et al. (2007) suggests that the treatment differs based on what is socially acceptable. Future mothers can shop, but not work. This suggestion is further reinforced whereby those who were pregnant and attempting to secure "masculine work" such as a janitor were treated more hostile by the public than those securing "feminine work" such as a maid (Sutton et al., 2011). The difference between a maid and janitor is minor; however, the social characterization of the two positions creates a juxtaposition. Pregnant women defying traditional roles of the "feminine" by working may incite hostility, where women who play into the traditional role may elicit benevolence: "Symbolically, the pregnant worker may pose a threat to "traditional family values" among some perceivers, whereas pregnant women who do not work would implicitly affirm, rather than challenge, such values, eliciting a positive (rather than a negative) reaction" (Hebl et al., 2007, p.1500). These polarized reactions are dependent on how the behaviour of a pregnant woman makes the other person think about identity. Essentially, this study showed that pregnant women most definitely faced sexism, but if they were seen as playing along in their role, they were able to dodge threatening behaviors.

Hostile sexism allows pregnant women to be thrown into further financial vulnerability. In a capitalist system, where these women already experience financial turmoil, social attitudes enforce and subordinate pregnant women. Aside from the actual physical and material harm that this does to pregnant women, ambivalent sexism also causes psychological strain. Though these women are not actually harming their unborn child, "in contemporary Western cultures, pregnant women who flout conventional prohibitions may experience confusion, guilt and stigma

(Murphy et al., 2011, p.812). By creating an atmosphere where women feel the need to internally police themselves, more control over reproductive actions can occur. The phenomenology of pregnancy is tightly kept within a storyline created not by the woman but by the sacred. This is why hostile sexism tends to be directed at women who challenge men's power and the image of the ideal mother (Glick et al., 2000, p.764). Benevolent sexism, though still controlling and evident of the rule of the father, is used to protect and thereby reward women who do follow the standing order.

### **Conceptualizing Abortion Stigma: From Object to Abject**

This shift in status, both of fetus as subject and woman as object, changed the notion of abortion as well. Abortion transgresses the ideal maternal. Kumar, Hessini, and Mitchell in *Conceptualizing Abortion Stigma* state, "that abortion transgresses three cherished 'feminine' ideals: perpetual fecundity; the inevitability of motherhood; and instinctive nurturing" (p.625). These aspects of the "feminine" are societal ideals used to create an acceptable identity or role for women. In other words, these ideals are the sustained image of the Virgin. When they are actively denied or transgressed, women no longer fit that ideal and they are treated as abject in order to contain the threat to the standing order. As Goffman (1963) states, "the term [stigma] is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it" (p.2). Abortion does not have a visible physical marker so the abjection is only to those women who refuse to actively hide the act. However, some women are able to have private and safe abortions in order "to avoid self-identifying or adopting a tainted identity linked to the experience" (Goffman, 1963, p.630). With only 35-60% of abortions being reported in surveys (Jagannathan, 2001), we see the desire to hide the act. Unfortunately, this tends to reinforce the cycle of silence and makes

abortion look like a rarity. Goffman (1963) explains, “once the exceptionality of abortion is rhetorically established, it is possible to create a category of 'women who abort' as deviant from the norm” (p. 629). Without women who nurture children and birth children, we at this time have no alternative to sustaining society. This threatens women’s social identity which is why the notion of the sacred fetal subject is sustained.

Additionally, a stigmatized act or condition can bring shame and stigma to the larger group. Das (2001) states “stigma is seen as contagious” (10). It is this fear of contagion, that woman's “sins” or acts against the future generation will spread to other women. If abortion is not stigmatized, the hysteria that all women will suddenly have the desire to abort every fetus arises. The Heartbeat Bill, a recent American initiative, exemplifies the hysteria. This bill was used to defund Planned Parenthood, even though none of Planned Parenthood’s received funding, from the government, went to abortion services. This act ultimately gives women less medical attention in all aspects of reproductive health and choices, without stopping abortions. Women who need an abortion but have no safe place tend to abort at home. These women face title changes anywhere from classless to murderer. Religious rhetoric fuels this abjection because the fetus is a child of God not the women. The act of abortion is an act against God. The religious rhetoric fuels the notion of the sacred fetal subject and the womb, as an object. Abortion is only protected under privacy laws, not laws on bodily autonomy because the woman in pregnancy is an object (Caldwell, 2002). The assumed autonomy of the fetus claiming a right to life comes before the autonomy of the woman carrying the child.

With early detection of pregnancy, the fetus is presented as life earlier than ever before, meaning even early abortion, use of Plan B, or miscarriage can be stigmatized with the woman undergoing forced abjection. It is important to remember, as Kumar, Hessini, and Mitchell

(2009) states, “stigmatised behaviours need not be visible to be stigmatised” (p.626). Abortion rhetoric fueled by the sacred allows for a persistent stigma against women who transgress the ideals of the feminine. There is clear resistance through the Pro-Choice discourse and “the fact that so many women do have abortions, despite powerful barriers, indicates that this is contested space where agency and resistance are dynamic” (Kumar, Hessini, & Mitchell, 2009, p.628). However, even some of these discourses are dangerous to women as they once again place them as a passive object. Cannold (2002) explains the soft strategy of “portray[ing] women who abort as unwitting victims, duped into abortions by amoral providers and feminists” (p.633). Of course, this strategy places less abjection on a particular woman, but in general the image of any woman who does not fit the nurturing, birthing, fertile mother is abject on society’s terms not their own. Women are still not given power in this strategy. Pro-Choice discourse, that aims at unmasking the sacred in order to contest the notion of the sacred fetal subject, is the more viable, present solution to allow women to only abject themselves on their terms and not undergo abjection for their reproductive choices. These are met with harsh resistance: the right sacred is in place to keep norms established. However, with more traction and growth, a potential for a sacred of herethics is possible as these discussions on how the sacred is used to control certain people are presented.

### **Abjection: The Childless**

A similar abjection is faced by women who do not have children. Women who do not have children tend to be divided into two groups: childless by choice and subfecund. The latter categorization, those who are defined in terms of subfecundity, refer to those women who physically have difficulty or cannot conceive and/or carry to full term (Loftus, 2009, p.395).

Infertility is a relatively common problem, though its taboo nature makes open discussion amongst social groups scarce. When society paints motherhood as a duty, as a natural desire, and as necessary to success and happiness, subfecundity becomes shameful. How can a woman be incapable of what she is naturally endowed to do? This is the unfortunate discourse that is directed towards the subfecund. In fact, “without the right cultural ideology, it is not possible for women to be ‘infertile’” (Loftus, 2009, p.412). Infertility becomes a monstrosity and an act against nature. Indeed, the subfecund are abject the moment they let the secret out.

Moreover, it is presumed that infertility, in situations where a heterosexual couple are concerned, is the fault of the woman. Watson (2014) explains that the male is commonly absent during fertility consultations, assuming the responsibility, and hence too, the blame and stigma should belong to the woman. The option that the male counterpart has the fertility problem is only considered after the female is ruled out. The aspiring mother must prove herself fit to conceive under the eye of the Western medical model that privileges men). In fact, “the medical model has become the dominant cognitive framework the infertile use to interpret their experience” (Loftus 2009p.395). Here, the woman is once again an object, a patient, a tool, and a risk as opposed to a person with subjectivity, emotion, and experience. Here, women are reduced to a biological function in an eerie resemblance to the handmaidens of Atwood’s dystopia.

What of the former category of women, namely those who could, to their knowledge, have children but actively choose not to? This could be women who are in relationships and they have no desire to extend that family through children or those who remain outside of a monogamous relationship who have chosen to stay childless. Summers-Bremner, in his study of voluntarily childless women, noted some fascinating findings. First, “nearly all childless women felt that they faced some disapproval from friends and family” (Summers-Bremner, 1998, p.165).



This disapproval was directly related to the choice to not have children. Loftus (2009) explains that the choice to have children takes place in a framework that suggests women must reproduce both as biological destiny but to ensure society continues.

Western society depicts a series of life events that are critical to pass through in order to be a successful woman: marriage and children. In contrast to the seeming natural flow of this order is the Beti women of Cameroon who organize adulthood by individual social interactions rather than life stages (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). So, while there is a choice in the matter, the choice is constrained by the sacred whereby to choose against the path of the Virgin is to choose the path of the abject. Social stigma, then, extends inward from the overall societal expectation that women are to become mothers into the core social group of these individual women.

Veevers (1975) noted that this disapproval was the basis of numerous social sanctions placed upon the woman which were either to simply show displeasure with the choice, or to attempt to change their minds. Social pressure largely came from those close to the woman, including “pressure from their parents, in-laws, siblings, work associates, friends, and doctors” (Veevers, 1975, p.473). This core makes up the support system for these individuals who have to navigate and explain their choice to live a certain way. This finding remains true as Sharp and Ganong (2011) found “Women, when compared with men, experience more pronounced pressure to conform to the SNAF ideology” (p.957). SNAF stand for a Standard North American Family, which includes one intact marriage with children. Being childless by choice is in no physically way dangerous or harmful to the individual, though it is treated as such.

Summers-Bremner (1998) found that childless women were perceived as less happy and with less rewarding lives than those with children. Important about this finding was that these voluntarily childless women were aware of these negative attitudes towards them. To be aware

of the judgements being passed on to us affects the way we navigate through our subjection. Awareness of the discourse about you, and navigating whether you believe it, foundationally changes the phenomenological of one's existence. Summers-Bremner (1998) found "some of these women struggled with perceptions of themselves as unfeminine; however, this was less common among voluntarily childless women compared to involuntarily childless women (p.167). One way women protected themselves from negatively stemming from disapproval in their deviant belief system was by isolating themselves (Veevers, 1975). This includes cutting ties with friends that choose to have children, or finding friends who actively choose not to have children. The struggle with navigating identity seems to be harder on those trying to fit with societal expectations without being able to rather than those actively choosing an alternative life.

However, for the voluntarily childless, their identity was intricately tied to not having children. Kelly (2009), in her study of the voluntarily childless, found these women "perceived motherhood as entailing a loss of identity" (p.164). This rings a familiar narrative, whereby women are defined first and sometimes solely as mothers. The idea that children must come before a mother's career, her goals, and her other relationships, including her relationship with herself. Veevers (1975) found that the stereotyping works on both ends of the debate. The childless are stereotyped and "constitute a deviant category: statistically, socially, ethically, and perhaps even psychologically" (Veevers, 1975, p.472). However, "the childless also stereotype housewives and mothers. Their expressions of superiority involve two related themes: one, that the fact of motherhood per se does not reflect any special talent, skill or ability; and two, that the act of mothering is of minimal significance for society" (Veevers, 1975, p.480). As these women create their own group, individuals isolated from the larger group create a subgroup. This group with their own belief system, and their own sacrosanct principles and sacred beliefs around

identity and freedom of choice, use different discourse to reaffirm their position. One such practice is using the term “breeders” to refer to those who choose to have children in reference to animals (Veevers, 975). By lowering people to the state of animals, the childless are able to symbolically become superior whereas in the dominant’s group discourse they are abject. On either side, these women are being defined only in relation to their potential reproduction as opposed to any other dimension of their identities.

### **Abjection: The Inability to Sustain an Ideal**

Stigma and exile extend beyond non-mothers to those mothers who do not fit the ideal. The ideal mother fulfills the feminine discourse of fertile, birthing, and nurturing. When women struggle with their presupposed roles, they may become abject. Approximately 13% of women experience postpartum depression. Likely an underestimate, this number relies on those who have sought treatment and does not include additional mood disorders. Still, this lower estimate is higher than the 10% upper estimate of pregnancies that suffer from gestational diabetes and the average 12% estimate of women who will suffer from breast cancer. While there are plenty of screening processes for both the latter diseases, there is still a stigma posed against mothers with postpartum depression—mothers who do not fit the idealized notion of motherhood (Beck 2001). In an extremely alienating system, sustaining investment is difficult. Women are further judged on their ability to parent and bear children with scrutiny. Lorna Weir (2006) conceptualizes this phenomenon in terms of the “public fetus.” The public fetus is when the public feels they have a valid voice in the rearing of the child. Unfortunately, judgement falls harsher on minority and poor women showing that even within maternity the balances of power are uneven (Weir, 2006, p.6). Moreover, women are expected to look and function in their careers as though they have

not had a child. Fox and Neiterman (2015) found that women appreciated their postpartum bodies so long as they performed maternal functions without flaw; however, they also noted that they experienced distress with their appearance when they returned to work. All of these women reject the status of an object, a tool for reproduction, and become abject. When they are unable to function as a “tool” for their “intended” purpose, they are classified as a threat to be exiled or eliminated.

### **Conclusion**

The Rule of the Father is demonstrated in benevolent and hostile sexism. Both sides of sexism function together in order to enforce the image of the Virgin. Much as the sacred holds a right sacred and a left sacred, women are encouraged to be “ideal mothers” through condescending praise and control or through taboo, stigma, and even violence. With many different ways to transgress this ideal, indeed it is almost impossible not to transgress, the pregnant subject may feel stigma, alienation, and abjection. Unfortunately, while abjection can be a liberating experience, when it is forced onto a person it can be very oppressive. There are examples of some women who take this abjection and use it to empower themselves. For example, the childless by choice who created their own identity as separate and superior to “breeders”. However, a system of valuation is still being used in this experience. Rather, a mutual respect and understanding of the choices and experiences each of us wishes to undergo and how we wish to navigate those experiences should be forwarded.

The ego-ideal projects an image that we feel we must sustain. This image is upheld by the sacred. We feel that we are obliged and that it is our sacred duty to meet this ideal. Ordinarily, there is a system of valorization in the sacred (Datta, 2019, p.97). For instance, men are not

expected to act as priests because it would be too challenging to uphold that standard for those who are not as pious. However, women are still expected to meet the image of the Virgin as though that image is not an ideal. With so much variance in all aspects of pregnancy and the maternal, how can we pinpoint what the experience ought to be? When the sacred functions to sustain male dominance, taboo and stigma in the form of sexism extend from the left sacred. Opening the symbolic elements up to new discourses can allow women to take their experiences on their own terms without feeling stigma.

## Chapter Six: Critical Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses how pregnancy allows subjects to connect to the semiotic through corporeal experience. However, the importance of allowing subjects to experience this corporeal phenomenon on their own terms is essential in order to avoid experiencing alienation.

Midwifery, as a form of herethics, allows pregnant subjects to transgress boundaries that constrict their experience. This transgression, and experiencing pregnancy on their own terms, whatever that may look like, allows for agency.

The way we frame reproduction tells us about our society. In the radical Durkheimian account, social reproduction is typically viewed as something precarious and risky for the group. The maternal figure is the intersection of biological and social reproduction (Luxton, 2014). When sexism is the ideology fueling risk assessment, legal cases, and financial sacrifice for pregnant women, we stop protecting women as subjects of our group and instead protect them as resources. There is no village to help them, no community, only an audience to monitor them as they become objects of expert and moral discourse. Moreover, the fact that we desire limited reproduction demonstrates that society only wants a certain type of child born, which places unnecessary pressure on pregnant subjects to yield acceptable offspring (Veevers, 1975). Children take a lot of resources to bear and rear, so it is desired that those invested resources yield a socially appropriate subject in return. Under these conditions, it is hard to argue that pregnancy is not alienating.

In order to ease alienation, women need to have more control over their birthing experience. Bartlett (2001) advocates for a sacred birth where the couple, but particularly the woman, manages her own pregnancy in order to achieve a peak experience. The effervescence is

lost when culture devalues self-management by stigmatizing the woman, or when someone else manages the process. Here, again, Kristeva's notion of herethics comes through as a necessary new sacred order. We need to sacrifice the Virgin in order to pave the way for a secular sacred. A focus on understanding and respecting differences in the maternal journey, along with viewing our own choices as abject as opposed to abjecting others for their choices, is a starting ground to healing a dysfunctional cycle. Women can use herethics to develop a means of resistance through self-abjection in an alienating system. This allows them more control over their experience and to view their experience on their own terms. The phenomenology of pregnancy can be created by the subject as opposed to dominant sacrosanct discourses and their agents.

Abjection by definition is a threat to a current socially acceptable identity and social order. When women are forced to be abject in order to sustain socially acceptable identities, it becomes oppressive. The subject feels constrained in their choices and limitations are put on their freedom of choices. However, women can undergo abjection on their own terms in order to explore various aspects of their own identity. By engaging in counter discourse, and meaning making, resistance is available against oppressive discourses. Rosati (2003), Kristeva (1984), Habermas (2011), and Durkheim (2008) have all occasioned a secular sacred. For Kristeva, this looks like herethics.

### **The Semiotic and the Corporeal**

The maternal body, due to the immense corporeal experiences associated with all phases and potentials of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood, is deeply engaged with the semiotic. From the earliest and simplest experience, described by Weir (2006) as the quickening, is "the moment when the hidden presence is felt, the woman senses she is pregnant" (p.12). This feeling has no

rational Symbolic basis; it is nothing more than trusting in a feeling. Often women's relationship to their bodies is questioned though they are the only people able to directly communicate with their bodies as well as the fetus in the womb. Bartlett (2001) explains that when birth is viewed as sacred, and women are given control over the sacred process, the consciousness of the community is raised in a similar way Durkheim refers to collective effervescence. The decision may involve pain or even death, but women need to be able to make their own choices in order to engage in the left sacred during birth. By using herethics, we can understand how each individual woman's needs and desires in her birth are different and allow her to control her experience of her pregnancy. Recognizing this type of communication as valid, and the experiences women have during this process as valid is essential to safeguarding the experience of the maternal.

### **Midwifery as Herethics**

A basis for further resistance comes from discourse and practices in midwifery. One discourse is able to silence another. While patriarchal symbolic elements have tended to silence women's voices, it also means that the reverse could to an extent be true. Kristeva (2004) claims the feminine genius is the ability to "challenge the sociohistorical conditions of your identity" (p.504). Though phallogocentric language may mediate the counter—discourse, resistance and transformation are still possible. Bartlett (2001) in her practice of being a midwife encourages women to claim their own sacredness and rely less on others to carve out what they believe the path should be. She explains that rules and regulation is used to create the proper experience, which prevents the flow of the sacred. Women are tools as opposed to active subjects in their own sacred experience. Women have explicitly stated that lack of control in their birthing experience is a main source of discontentment but that they were dependent on the medical



system (Broderick, 2008). For instance, the tendency of medical intervention to lead to a cascade of interventions, and the use of unnecessary cesarean sections for profit by some doctors was not well known by women (Klein et al., 2009). Midwives were able to inform the women they work with of these aspects and were found generally to be more client centered (Reime et al., 2004). These women also underestimated the impact a midwife could have on their birth experience meaning that the midwife has not yet become mainstream though they are part of the healthcare system.

### **Complex Questions of Agency and Social Change**

A possible definition of agency is the ability for subjects to make their own decisions, to experience life on their own terms, to make meaning in their experiences, and to take seriously their experiences, including experiences outside of discourse such as corporeal experiences. While Kristeva and Bataille do not explicitly detail their conception of agency, both took a deep interest in understanding phenomenology and its corporeal aspects. Bataille detailed the way the sacred restricts our experiences but also the pleasure and delight we have when we transgress those boundaries. Kristeva allowed us to understand how transgression brings delight through semiotic engagement. Again, both Kristeva and Bataille saw discourse and symbolic elements as restraining and something to transgress in order to feel unified. Through transgression, be it through effervescent moments, corporeal experiences of pain and pleasure, creative endeavors, and other experiences of transgression that engage the semiotic, we reveal the boundaries of what is socially constructed and gain agency as individuals. For Kristeva, revealing the Virgin as a false construction in favor of herethics, what she envisions as the new secular sacred, is a necessary change to be established by connecting to others through respecting vulnerability.

When we understand that the boundaries of the symbolic elements are constructed and we are able to think and act in any alternative way, we are able to change oppressive discourses.

Oppressive discourses that do not allow for transgression and blocking experiences that engage in the semiotic restrict agency. As mentioned, symbolic elements within the Symbolic Realm are not inherently oppressive and can change. Symbolic elements are inherently restrictive, but can be structured to allow for transgression as play and identity forming instead of punitive. Abjection does not need to be forced but can be a liberating experience. To clarify, pregnant subjects could experience abjection on their own terms. Pregnancy shakes the foundations of identity whether or not the symbolic elements tied to the experience direct it in such a way because of its corporeal changes. The corporeal changes that will occur during a pregnancy allow the semiotic to be engaged. Engaging in the semiotic always has some element of transgression but this abjection is not in order to punish and regulate the subject in order to keep the status quo secure, but to show the subject the “lack of lack” and the construction of their boundaries to elevate the community as effervescent moments do. However, the sacred sustains the image of the Virgin, a symbolic element that seeks to control female experiences and a sacred that does not allow for transgression, which makes agency difficult and alienating. On the other hand, although agency may be uncomfortable and be met with hostility, it is still a possibility. By creating meaning in one’s abjection, or rather breaking meaning and revealing boundaries to show the possibility of alternatives in the construction of symbolic elements, and by engaging in and enjoying those experiences of the semiotic, the subject can use their agency.

## Conclusion

Midwives embody Kristeva's notion of herethics and her metaphor of "Cura" as the ideal medical model. For Kristeva et al. (2017), Cura is the entity that holds together the spirit and the material with love. This means a strong consideration of how culture influences our view of these aspects as well. When this view is used, the process of healing can occur as opposed to trying to force all women into one state deemed as healthy. The focus is not on risk assessment but on ensuring each pregnancy and birth reflects what is sacred to the pregnant subject in order to allow her to enter an ecstatic state. Midwifery is able to transgress the sacred by putting the woman's wishes as a subject above risks to the fetus. It is important to remember that risks are not diagnoses and often risk is used to constrain the woman with very little probability of coming to fruition. Still, to engage in midwifery that allows for women to experience pregnancy on their own terms is to engage in self-abjection. It is resistance and it is allowing women to transgress the Symbolic on their own terms. Phenomenologically, it is a freeing experience where the subject breaks the ego-ideal and is able to experience an absence of absence.

By calling attention to the obstacles women in the midst of the maternal environment have been expressing, obstacles that are guised under notions of the sacred, this research can help express those frustrations experienced. In Kristeva's discussion of vulnerability and the disabled, she explains her vision, or her utopia, that would come about from respecting vulnerability, understanding we are all vulnerable and ultimately sharing our vulnerability. For Kristeva, the subject is essential for this to be possible for if "the question of the subject is not raised, there is no sharing" (Kristeva, 2012, p.31). By engaging in the subject phenomenologically first, we advocate for more control over their experiences, alternatives, and active listening. By doing so, I hope women will have more control over their birthing

experiences including medical decisions such as termination and prenatal care. At the very least, I hope women will find empowerment through being able to discuss their experiences, even if these experiences are mediated by symbolic elements.

## Conclusion

Generally speaking, Julia Kristeva, grounded her approach in Freudian psychoanalysis and literary theory emphasizing subject formation, objecthood, and the boundaries between. By symptomatically attending to the sociological influences of Kristeva's work, Georges Bataille and Emile Durkheim in particular, I have been able to develop a more adequate analytic of subjecthood and a sociological phenomenology of pregnancy. The sacred adds a dimension to the complexities of power by showing the way abjection sustains forms of sacral social order such as the image of the Virgin. Contemporary feminist theory, gender theory, and queer theory scholars largely focus on political strategy and ontology of the subject or social conditions surrounding the subject. A major theorist exemplifying this point is Judith Butler, who admits to focusing on ontology and epistemology rather than phenomenology and the dynamics of social relations. While this part of theory is important, it reminds us that adequate theoretical models frequently must address how various levels of theory and social analysis are articulated together. In this regard, Butler's focus on discourse and ontology at the expense of other ways of considering subjectivity and social life, is unnecessarily narrow and dogmatic. Phenomenology allows for an intimacy with the subject *as subject*, one who experiences and actively participates, as opposed to the subject as an object of study.

That is not to suggest that there is one authentic female voice which must become the reference to all of womanhood—historically that voice being white, cis-gendered, and middle- or upper-class. Simply, I am stating that the white woman's voice is different from the black woman's voice which is different from the poor woman's voice which is different from the mother's voice and so on in any number of intersections that can be mentioned, but that there is something authentic in each of these voices. Moreover, this authentic trace is able to bring these

women together in a connection through the feminine, or rather, a connection through the Semiotic. While respecting the advancement in the area of gender construction, this thesis focuses on the notion of pregnancy and motherhood from a stance that there is a female voice that is possible and important. It is not to limit the female voice to cis-gendered, fertile women or motherhood, but to engage with that particular niche within the broader spectrum of female voices.

Kristeva's conceptions of the symbolic and Semiotic allow for an analytic capable of tapping into the lived experience of pregnant women contributing a rich phenomenology. By understanding the difference between what is internal language and experience, that which is Semiotic or the subject removed from discourse, and what is Symbolic, or that which is socially organized and learned, we are able to tap into moments of social experience with meaning made by the subject and society with the subject in primary as opposed to society driving the meaning making experience. The grounding in corporeality that Kristeva articulated, and certainly that Bataille and Durkheim agree with, has previously been dismissed as biologically reductive in many contemporary theories. However, by dismissing corporeal experience, and in particular corporeal experience that strays from the fictive norm (be it trans experience, female experience, black experience, or maternal experience) takes away the power of these experiences and makes phenomenology of these experiences impossible.

The Chora, a foundationally physical language that constitutes social being for Kristeva, a conception consonant with Durkheim and Bataille's conception of the immanence of subjectivity in the social, continuously remains present in each individual being regardless of gender, sex, discourse, etc. It is the foundation experience of the subject, as a social and relational being. In other words, the Chora is purely the subject untouched by discourse, which of

course, can only exist prior to the tainting of the subject upon birth when they are immediately immersed in discourse. It is this corporeal grounding that is highlighted in the maternal experience discussed above as “feminine corporeality.” Regardless of fertility technology and regardless of who is experiencing pregnancy, be it a woman, or a trans individual, etc., the importance is in the physical changes the subject undergoes in the corporealisation of existence in a dynamic social milieu and how they find meaning in those experiences outside of imposed discourses. The nuances of the embodied experience are then shaped by discourse. Without discourse, all these individuals would still have unique corporeal experiences of pregnancy; however, the meaning and subject formation attributed to their condition in society changes according to the sacred.

Kristeva’s conception of the abject, that being a differentiated place of symbolic and ritual exclusion, highlights the liminality tied to subjecthood and the relations surrounding and affecting subject formation. These boundaries are determined by the sacred demarcations of in a society. A fetus, not only in being deemed a social being but in being a social being representative of the future fecundity of the group, is treated with the utmost importance and sacred measures. In becoming a subject prior to birth, the fetus takes precedent over the pregnant subject who must follow medical risk assessment recommendations.

This aspect is where we see the importance of Bataille and Durkheim for rendering a broader account of the social constitution of the pregnant woman and extending Kristeva’s theory in a sociological way. Bataille’s ability to systematically create a theory of the sacred that attends to the left sacred, highlights an aspect of subjecthood not usually attended to. Indeed, pregnancy is full of love and beauty, but it is also filled with fear of mortality, bile, and the abject. The balance is in constant flow and the meaning tied to each aspect is largely dependent

on where the woman, now sacred object of fertility, is placed on the sacred scales, or worse, if she departs from the sacred entirely and becomes abject herself. Durkheim's keen understanding of the way these relationships affect us, the way the sacred organizes our life and how these two crucial areas of the social come together to shape our sense of subjecthood, is what made him a crucial source to include in this new analysis.

All three theorists hold corporeal experience as pertinent and grounded in social reality. Pregnancy is a truly physical, corporeal experience one intimately tied to the social and the social to it. It does not matter what meaning we tie to our pregnancy, our stomach will stretch, our body will undergo many possible side effects, and our body will expel the fetus at some point in time. A physical manifestation will unfold. Of course, our social climate changes the way these physical changes are experienced, but experienced nonetheless they will be. This is why examining theories attendant to corporeal phenomenology are essential to revisit.

The aim of this thesis was to retheorize Julia Kristeva's fruitful analytics in a sociological way to analyse dynamic movement of the subject in relation to the sacred. The research showed that Bataille's theory of the sacred and Kristeva's notion of the Semiotic and symbolic remain pertinent and complementary resources for generating a sociological understanding of subject formation, abjection, objectification, and the overall phenomenology of pregnancy. By attending to Kristeva, and analysing prior source material, particularly that of Bataille and Durkheim, we see a new, symptomatic reading of her works: tracing a new question, not yet asked of the theory, in order to find answers to a contemporary problem. This method of theoretical reading and revision, has been exceptionally important in neo-classical sociology. By using Kristeva in conjunction with intersecting theories, she can be symptomatically read to account for contemporary phenomena.



As noted, the phenomenology of pregnant women is an underdeveloped area of sociology. Instead, the topic has been saturated with medically-oriented research focusing on the development of the fetus and physical viability of the mother. The research rarely includes emotion or meaning-making in the process of pregnancy. This research intended to depict the current restrictions in the process of pregnancy that turn women from subjects into objects. Taboo, prohibition, and proscriptions, reinforced by patriarchy and the medical model of health, force pregnant women to walk a particular trail. The issue comes when the woman's subjectivity calls upon herself to walk a different path and her autonomy is met with punishment and violation: social exclusion and judgement through to violence and legal action against women who do not carry through their pregnancies as instructed. The point is not merely to state women have been objectified, but to explain the effect that this treatment has in a particular setting—how objectification and abjection affects pregnant women as well as how women can use abjection to resist objectification. Moreover, the goal extends to further phenomenological research that will allow pregnant women a voice in their pregnancies and freedom as subjects to choose how they would like to experience their pregnancies and the meanings they personally attach to the various stage

## GLOSSARY

**Abject.** A person who has shown the construction of identity and social boundaries through transgression. In order to protect the status quo, those who are abject tend to be excluded and contained as they are deemed a threat.

**Agency.** The ability to make meaning and choices about one's experiences including corporeal experiences within and outside of discourse. Agency is discovered and enacted through transgression.

**Chora.** The preverbal sensations of a fetus. The Chora is Kristeva's concept of communication before a language.

**Ego-Ideal.** A Psychoanalytic term that refers to our mind imposing ideal social standards, behaviours, and concepts of the self upon itself.

**Heterology.** Bataille's study of the excluded parts of religion. Particularly the irrational elements such as chance, which demonstrate its imperfect construction.

**Herethics.** Kristeva's concept of a new ethics founded on love, respect, and vulnerability. Herethics is modelled after an ideal mother-child relationship.

**Ideal-Ego.** A Psychoanalytic term that refers to our mind after it overcomes the Ego-Ideal. It is the actual ideal form of the self.

**Left Sacred.** That aspect of the sacred which invokes fear and disgust in order to strengthen belief.

**Object.** Tools in the profane world. Objects are things that already have a pre-existing intended use.

**Phenomenology.** Our social framing and evaluation of experiences, including corporeal experiences. Our perception of experiences is created through symbols, collective representations, and experiences outside of discourse.

**Profane.** For Bataille, profane is the everyday, ordinary, mundane world of tools.

**The Real.** Lacan's conception of a place of trauma or rupture in both the Imaginary and Symbolic that language cannot adequately conceptualize or convey. The real is a place where subjects experience a "lack of lack" and is related to Kristeva's conception of the abject.

**Right Sacred.** That aspect of the sacred which invokes awe and benevolence in order to strengthen belief.

**Sacred.** In Bataille's Radical Durkheimian concept, the sacred is set apart and forbidden, strengthens social bonds, involves ritual and uses both the left and right sacred to structure behaviours.

**Semiotic.** Kristeva's concept of a rhythmic corporeal communication that extends from the *chora* and is achieved through transgressing *symbolic elements*.

**Subject.** The being as fragmented, social, and corporeal. The subject has agency, is foremost a speaking being within the Symbolic Realm but can engage in the semiotic through transgression.

**Symbolic Realm.** Kristeva's concept of the language based social world.

**Symbolic Elements.** Kristeva's concept of language, symbols, and structures which organize our social world and together belong to the *Symbolic Realm*. Symbolic elements are not inherently oppressive but are restrictive and are constructed.

**Symptomatic Reading.** A method of theorizing whereby one finds new answers to questions that were never asked in the text in order to yield new, fruitful analysis.

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