THE DYNAMICS OF OBJECTIFICATION WITHIN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

by

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## Introduction

The construction of an individual's identity is determined by a variety of factors. Each component serves as a puzzle piece in the ultimate construction of the total individual and helps determine whether and how an individual fits into their community. Being seen by others in a particular way can help construct and fortify an individual's sense of belonging. But it can also lead to a feeling of being an outsider and not belonging. This can create a feeling of "otherness" within the individual, where they question not only their role within society but their sense of identity and agency and their value as subjects. However, even if being perceived as other or as an object can be negative, it can also be advantageous.

In the portfolio that follows I demonstrate why that is the case. I begin by examining Jean-Paul Sartre's view of how being seen as both subject and object is significant in individuals' perceptions of each other. I then connect that to Michel Foucault's discussion of Panopticism, which raises questions about another way of being seen, namely by an entity that is not seen in return. I discuss how being constantly aware of the even the possibility of being seen can constrain behavior and promote a certain kind of performance. Continuing from this concept, I look more specifically at the behavioral roles and constraints individuals encounter in the realm of social media, specifically, the layers of individuals choosing and creating profiles and selectively editing their online identity as well as being the object of various online audiences. I conclude by introducing three papers, each of which provides evidentiary support for the concept of the individual identity as influenced by the awareness of being seen and objectified by other people.

In the sense of being aware of being seen as the "Other," French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre emphasizes the significance of humans as both subjects, which is how they initially experience the world, and as objects, in which they are aware of being seen by other subjects. In his work, *Being and Nothingness*, specifically in the chapter "The Look," Sartre focuses in part on the juxtaposition of individuals in both the subject and object role. Sartre believes it is important for the individual to realize how the "Other" will appear frequently before them in the everyday reality of life as both seeing subject and as seen object (Sartre 253). While an individual first observes the Other, they see both a being that is a physical presence in the world (an object) and a being that sees them in return (a subject). And this seeing is mutual: perception is shifted when the subject goes from being the observer to being the observed. Any individual, as the subject, who gazes upon another as the object, must then be prepared to have the roles reversed where the once perceived object has the capability to gaze upon the once-subject (256). Once this shift occurs, the perception of what the world views the new object is now within the perception of the new subject, who was once the previous object. Control over how one is seen is relinquished to the new observer. In an atmosphere where an individual is defined based on their connections to the observer and the world, there is a level of ownership of their identity the individual gives up by allowing themselves to be viewed. However, the same idea applies to those who observe, who allow themselves to be watched through a differing perspective lens, just as they view others through their own lens (257). The back-and-forth between subject to object for the individual creates a type of dyad which allows the believed perceptions of another subject to influence an individual's understanding of their identity. Therefore, their own once-familiar perception of themselves becomes somewhat

strained and called into question. Once aware of their own position of being seen as an object at any moment, the individual questions not only who they are or how they are seen, but also how to act under this awareness.

The relationship in being seen is a fascinating one between individuals. In part, the individual generates a curiosity in how they are seen when they are aware they are being watched. This is of great interest to Sartre, in that there is a constant change of perception and desire to control the perceptions of the Other occurring within each individual. The individual is able to control what they see of the other individual; however they cannot control how they are perceived by an onlooker's gaze. This concept causes a mental battle between the selves, which is two-fold: not being able to read what other people are perceiving about them, while always feeling under the watchful eyes of everyone's gaze.

This concept is further developed by Michel Foucault while discussing Panopticism. Like Sartre, Foucault focuses on how the individual is affected under the gaze of another. However, more specifically, and slightly differently, Foucault shifts more into the unpredictability of being seen. He is interested in cases of uncertainty about being seen and unawareness of when or if it occurs. This concept of Foucault is developed in *Discipline and Punish*, where he focuses more on his interest in the idea of the possibility of being seen at any and all times. There is a power which comes from the unknown and for Foucault, being constantly visible is a danger. The concept of Panopticism is that the individual is always being seen, yet is not able to fully see in return.

Taken from Jeremy Bentham's work, Foucault's Panopticon is a circular prison allows all prisoners to be seen by the guard in the center tower but not to fully see the guard because of the

use of strategic backlighting. Through this strategy of backlighting, the idea is to convince the

prisoners there is always someone in the tower watching them, to the point where there is no

need to physically have any guard in the tower. Just the *possibility* of thinking someone is in the

tower suffices. Since they are unable to fully see the guard in the tower, the prisoner has

little-to-no knowledge of when they are being surveilled, but knows they could be at any given

time. There is complete omniscient power over the prisoner, with the prisoners already feeling

the pressure and paranoia of being watched. Here, the individual (prisoner) leaves the onlooker

(the guard in the tower) to develop their own perceptions and analytical judgements about the

person. They are enclosed in a way which leaves them in the position of being the object of

being observed and perceived of information, but never one of communication (Foucault 200).

Even if the individual may develop a certain level of assuredness and confidence within

themselves, there is always the element of power over the individual by the onlooker. As

Foucault further explains, this never leaves the individual:

> Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and
>
> permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. To arrange things
>
> that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action;
>
> that the perfection of power should ten to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this
>
> architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation
>
> independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up
>
> in a power situation of which they are the bearers (201).

The idea that the power of surveillance must be invisible, yet verifiable, leaves the individual in

society constantly in the dark of whether or not they may be seen, when and where. This puts

them on high alert under pressure of the gaze, mentally, thinking they always must have to act a certain way or else they may be met with disapproval, judgement, castigation, etc. The physical structure of the panopticon aside, the idea of the structure permeates elsewhere within the culture. As Foucault explains:

> Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies of depth...We are neither in the amphitheater, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power to which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism (217).

The word, "we," in the last line is essential here. The roles of watching and being watched are interchangeable and cyclical. At some point, everyone will have their spot in the cultural watchtower, just as they will in the cell. Individuals will always be cognizant knowing they are consistently under one form of gaze or another. In the end, everyone plays a role in drafting, constructing, and operating this "machine."

The feeling of being seen and always being observed has individuals actively aware of how they are perceived by the external culture. This leads individuals into self-editing and continuously crafting characteristics in order to be accepted by their respective community. This supposed acceptance then impacts how individuals will see themselves. Therefore, the individuals will attempt to craft identities according to how their external community bestows approval on them. This builds (or breaks) their confidence, and, in doing so, affects their future actions, depending on what community and atmosphere they find themselves. Through this, they become precarious specimens in a continuous social experiment (Muller 367). The online community provides an example of this high awareness of being seen for several years

When individuals allow themselves to be seen, to have layers of themselves be gazed upon and scrutinized, it unleashes a vulnerability within them. They surrender themselves in going from subjects to objects. In changing positions from subjects to objects there is both a loss of control and security within the individual. They open the many facets of their character to be closely examined where certain characteristics they do not favor are suddenly out of their control. They are no longer in control of the script. In addition, Muller explains how a conflict which is raised is the question of whether or not those who surrender themselves to be seen are then capable of fairly assessing each other (370). Online social media platforms provide a supposed perfect opportunity for examining layers of one's identity as well as those who also participate in the space. There is a temptation among people to gaze into some sort of window in others' lives, to observe how different people operate, behave, and also how they present themselves towards certain people or groups. As the gazing beings, individuals make consistent and continuous calculations on each other, analyzing their patterns to further develop their perspective on answering the unending question: "Who is this person?". The cycle, however, in relation to this concept, deals with this knowledge of being seen and the back-and-forth between the individual's inner self versus their outer self (369). The more the individual crafts their outer self in a certain fashion they begin to then make an attempt to break away from that "brand" of self to curate an inner self. This is seen as an effort to have some amount of ownership of themselves and to appear in a way which they may think is "preferred" by society.

Humans in online communities are very used to playing and living in the dual roles of reality and appearance:

...we are able to contemplate ourselves and others by observing and evaluating the appearances on the world's stage. The outcome of this theatrical ability to intendedly display ourselves to others and playing a role in social contexts is at the end...what we call 'self-knowledge' (369).

To achieve this type of self-knowledge, individuals receive and analyze how they are perceived by each other and use that feedback to continuously craft different roles to present to the outside, or in this case, the digital world via online profiles, with the feedback coming in the form of likes, comments, retweets, etc. There is, however, a significant conflict the self faces: maintaining a consistent identity across several digital platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and also career-based social media platforms, like LinkedIn and Indeed. Each individual can create several "by-products" or "prototypes" of the original version of themselves they want for that particular platform's audience to view. Think of it as manufacturing themselves on an identity assembly line. In a sense, they really can fashion alternate identities which are custom made to fit whichever mold the specific platform may appear to require.

For the individual, they believe having these multiple versions of themselves in their arsenal provides more variety and layers to appeal and perhaps even be accepted by a wide range of people within different communities of which they are drawn to belong. However, Muller suggests that the individual, in an effort to appeal to the masses, spreads their outer self too thin. Even though they made their mark on each platform by providing these different prototypes of themselves, there runs the risk of severe inconsistency with the individual's core, inner self-a battle of the selves. This connects to Muller's questions about whether or not their virtual identities are indeed legitimate and authentic (369). This lack of authentication when it comes to

individual identity on social media platforms comes with questioning the actual content of what the user *chooses* to include and post to their own personal pages. The lack of tone, context, and additional background information of what people may be used to gathering and are aware of when they have a relationship with someone in the offline world leads to questioning how much of one's true self is one getting without actually being able to interact in a personal and direct way.

A constant risk of misinterpretation of language and meaning on digital platforms leads to an overall omission of self, with no true guarantee of who the true person is on the other side of the login. The user (as ironically referred to on these platforms, rather than people) always has the capability to edit what is seen versus what is not seen. Under the knowledge and awareness of always being viewed, careful consideration is planned as to which kind of material will be shared for the rest of the online community view; the idea of which "brand" being presented seems never ending (Matthews 40).

Users can also control what photos are seen (or unseen), how a certain post is worded with the ability to go back, at will, and edit the language of the post to suit their own (or others') approval. There is even the ability to cast the online world which surrounds them within the platform. They can add other members to their page, or "friends," of their own personal choosing, in which they are able to view their posts, photos, etc., in addition to being able to backtrack several years and delete or edit comments and posts, essentially being able to literally re-write a piece of their own history. This is also true with the concept of tagged photos. When someone is "tagged" in a photo on social media, the picture, with their name attached, appears on the feed and also on the person's own page, without their knowledge. However, with one simple

gesture of pressing the "remove tag" button, their linked names are instantly removed, wiped from their own feed.  The picture remains in existence, but the individual has removed themselves from that specific moment in time.  Or, at least, this leads them to believe they did. They are also able to follow and keep track of certain celebrities, athletes, political and activism causes, and other specific elements of the culture to their liking.  All of this comprises what is seen on the user's "feed," which shows them all of the content posted periodically so they have their own customized world in which they can explore for an unlimited time frame.

However, connecting back to the online versus offline world and outer versus inner self, the authenticity of these identities may be called into question.  In reality, one cannot censor and customize what and who they want to see and interact with on a daily basis. The inability to completely control what one sees and how one is seen could lead to a conflation between what kind of reality is truly guaranteed to them, and the true identity of the person they are claiming to be.  Specifically, one will layout a customized look or design to their own personal page and post about specific-only content so that they will appear to fit a certain type of mold or brand for how the person desires to be seen.  Although they may be able to present a certain look to the public, they do not have complete control, both online and in reality, over how others may perceive the look they are outwardly presenting.  Again, they give up the security to a scrutinizing audience. The element of  the audience plays a factor of authentication.  An online community can beneficially allow an individual to break away from their norm and experience a temporary alternative in a life or role which they otherwise are not able to experience in offline reality. They allow themselves to experience and discover new possible layers to their identity which includes certain feedback from different posts on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, or their latest

trending videos on TikTok.  However, it is important to consider who the individual's online role

is really serving.  Are they doing this solely for themselves, or have they gotten caught up in an

endless cycle of performing, and serving, an insatiable audience who constantly demands more?

In doing so, does this erode certain ownership of the individual's identity and behavior, ceding a

portion to this audience?

Understanding the essence of the self and "I" assists the individual in answering these

questions.  The idea of "I" is always changing, since life events altar one's circumstances and

experiences (Hongladoram 538).  The concept of "I" is deemed significant for the individual's

self-awareness of their own existence and sense of ownership of their identity.  People who are

fully aware of all of the representations of the self are also aware of being seen – and being seen

differently -- in different environments of public communities (544).  The aspects of acceptance

and acknowledgment are applicable to this concept. In acknowledging their "I," or their agency

of being, individuals must also be able to accept they do not have full control over how they are

perceived and may not be perceived as they see themselves.  It is important that, in seeing

themselves, they also must realize they will appear as different representations to different

people's perceptions.

Being seen within the realm of a public forum also creates a sensitivity within the

individual, which becomes more personal based on their own connection to that community.

The individual's sensitivity stems from both intellectual knowledge, where the individual

becomes aware they are being seen by groups or communities in certain environments, and

sensitive knowledge, which has the individual feeling and then reacting a certain way, due to

their intellectual awareness (Paikkattu 327).  These two levels of self-knowledge build towards

the awareness of the individuals' sense of "I" for their existence.  Through this, their recognition

of external factors which contributes to their awareness of being seen plays a significant role in

the sense of self that exists in various social spheres.  It is not just being able to think about and

to know of these factors, but also being able to know how to live among these factors in the

communities that is important(329).  For the individual to also recognize where and how they fit

into these communities, recognition of others' minds and thought processes is essential.

Consciousness lifts the individual into awareness of how they may be seen, thereby

making them aware of themselves as thinking beings (subjects), who are able to reflect rationally

on how they are perceived (as both subjects and objects). Being able to think rationally and

recognize different thought processes in others who are mutually also being aware of the gaze

and perception of each other is significant in helping the individual construct their self-identity.

Construction of the self takes precedence over focusing too greatly on the relationships with

others in the community (Weinberg 400).  The relationship between individuals and their

respective communities varies.  Depending on the positioning of the individual within their

communities, certain characteristics will be observed and dissected.  The individual, aware of

being seen, will utilize this specific awareness to assist in their process of constructing their

identity on both a personal and professional level.

The following three, supplemental papers focus on how individuals engage in varying

levels of awareness in how they are perceived by differing communities.  Each of the papers

observes different scenarios where individuals navigate their own introspection of their place in

society, specifically, when it comes to how they believe the gaze of their surrounding society

perceives them in return.  Aside from examining identity from the perspective of the individual,

the papers that follow explore both the personal stakes at hand as well as how being in the public eye affects the introspection about personal identity. An essential part of this concept connects to individuals being aware they may be seen, surveilled, and studied by anyone at any given time. That possibility creates a heightened sense of awareness of how they present themselves to society and can encourage a seemingly never-ending evaluation and dissection of self.  When it comes to the individual determining their own identity and the place they hold in the culture, it is possible they do not have total control over this realization; in some capacity, they do need the gaze of onlookers to assist in their identity fulfillment.  The three papers that follow examine how individuals use the effects of objectification toward the contribution to their identity.

The first paper focuses on how vanity, a notoriously known vice, and argues that vanity may be beneficial to the individual and therefore can be considered, at least in part, a virtue. Observed on its surface, vanity is thought to engage individuals in destructive behaviors, such as selfishness, egotism, and narcissism.  However, once the layers of vanity are peeled back, it becomes apparent that vanity is also connected to self-love.  The more the individual is able to access these attributes, the more their self-esteem and self-confidence grow, which then allows them to give back to their community in a constructive way.  A significant factor for this to be successfully achieved by the individual comes in the form of the individual taking stock into what the observant members of their surrounding community think of them and what they bring to the table, in terms of giving back.  The more the individual is able to demonstrate their value to society, thus gaining more respect and credence, the more the individual gains in confidence and self-love and, in turn, will want to continue positively contributing to their society's greater good.

The second paper explores the 17th Century Baroque playwright Racine's *Phaedra*. In his play, Racine depicts the supernatural gaze and its detrimental effect on the individual. Phaedra, the main character, is followed as she attempts to achieve virtue by ridding herself of the guilt she possesses due to being cursed by the gods from birth. What plagues Phaedra is the constant pressure and angst she feels from being omnisciently seen. She has no real sense of security or ability to hide from the gods' sight, specifically from Apollo, the sun god, who is her grandfather, high above, as if shining a constant spotlight on Phaedra. The more Phaedra attempts to rid herself of this curse and achieve virtue, including not being damned by the gods, she ends up severely damaging the relationships with those who were once closest to her. However, she is unable to see this herself.

The third and final section examines former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and how she was able to craft an identity of substance and femininity while not being constrained by what she thought were meaningless and superficial cultural focuses. When she was elected the first woman Prime Minister of Britain, Thatcher knew she would be evaluated by many in the press, as well as many in her own country and even the world, on the basis of her being a "first," specifically the first woman ruler of the western world. Thatcher, being aware of the different levels of the scrutinizing gaze from the opposition, the press, as well as world leaders, made it a point to craft an identity focusing on her own brand of strength and femininity. To accomplish this, she rejected the idea of feminism, yet made sure her image and vocal tonality were softened enough to be both approachable, yet deceptive, which allowed her to still come across as powerful. She also took a hard line geopolitically, refusing to bow down to Argentina while victorious during the Falklands War, for fear it would make both herself and Britain appear weak

on the world stage.  For Thatcher, both her and her country's reputations were at stake and having both viewed as an international weakling was not an option.

Together, the papers which make up the remainder of the portfolio demonstrate how individuals utilize the dynamics of seeing and being seen by others to construct their identities.  I offer concrete evidence of various scenarios in which individuals find themselves as the object of different degrees of scrutiny and different types of gazes. Their awareness of being seen plays a significant role in an individual's recognition of the potential roles they play in their respective personal and public communities.

**Vanity:**
**Virtue in Disguise**

Vanity, an obsession of one's own pride, ego, and appearance, initially can be perceived as possessing the qualities which classify it as a vice. On the surface level, individuals who are seen as being vain are said to be selfish, self-absorbed, narcissistic, and egotistical: vulgar vanity. However, in contrast to those initial surface-based traits in which vanity is known, beyond the surface is where its value and substance lies. Certain factors, ideas, and even the purpose of individuals can easily seem to be understood as being or meaning one way, yet can also be misunderstood when explored more deeply; such is the case with vanity. When peeling back layers of vanity, there are positive opportunities for the individual which give the individual, when enacted in a positive manner, virtuous attributes, which engages the self-love component of vanity. In turn, this self-love enables one's self-esteem to grow, leading to more confidence within the individual, which then leads to them being more able to contribute positively to their society. I argue that because it provides individuals with more opportunities in engaging in self-love in order to be self-fulfilled, contribute more to society, and to enhance one's own self-esteem, vanity is more virtuous than vicious.

Vanity and its Value: A Triad

Vanity can be perceived as a need or necessity for the individual. The value vanity provides for them is essential for growth and development in society. When utilized in a more positive and modest way, vanity assists individuals to enhance their outlook, responsibilities, and in turn, their productivity. In *The Value of Vanity*, suggests a similar notion: "No one could live, and, indeed, no one tries to live, without it. It is as essential to individual advancement, to human progress, to civilization, as to the perpetuity of the race" (Browne 379). On one hand,

this idea may seem foolish or a waste, suggesting people "try" to include something which is normally seen as being a detriment, let alone it being something they need to have.  However, if looking at vanity through the lens of self-love and proper pride, I believe it is essential for individuals to embrace elements of vanity in order for them to flourish.

Differing from self-*absorption* and vulgar vanity, self-*awareness*, in addition to self-love, and self-consciousness, make up the "trilogy" of main benefits which stem from vanity, relating to proper pride.  The more self-aware an individual is of their well-being, the more aware they are of how they are being perceived by their community. Whether it be family at home, friend circles, or the workplace, the more cognizant they will be of their progress and performance.  In order for this to have an effect, there is some stoking of the ego flames which will need to be done.  Ego is something within humans which can hold the most value, whether or not it is outwardly admitted.  We do not want to appear or perceived as being too weak, lacking of value or worth, incapable, or yes, even being considered unattractive.  These factors, when made conscious to the individual, serve as motivators, a form of changing agent, to propel the individual to either maintain or further enhance their perceived value, worth, and love of self. For example, in the professional world, if a manager of a company assigns a project to a group of employees, with a potential promotion on the line, each employee will no doubt want to do their best work to not only attain the coveted promotion, but also to prove their skills and talents in front of their fellow group members.  In turn, this will not only show their worth, but also to hopefully gain compliments and accolades during the process to further motivate them to set and reach even higher standards.  Here, achieving the outward motivating appearance which vanity

has to offer benefits the group, motivating them to raise their own standards to prove to the other they are of worthy contribution and value to the cause and overall mission of their group.

I liken this to the classic school dodgeball scenario: no individual wants to be picked last for dodgeball during gym class. The question is not so much about ability as it is about appearance and morale. Usually, everyone in the class already knows ahead of time who the more talented athletes in the class are, the ones who will be selected first. Likewise, it is also widely known who are the average and below average students. Among this group lies an inward fear of being the last one standing up against the gymnasium wall, not because their known athletic shortcomings, but because of what the image will represent: inadequate, worthless, less than, unwanted; traits no one ever desires to outwardly present to anyone, whether in junior high or in the boardroom.

Browne would agree with this concept, especially when it comes to not only being your best but more specifically, looking and performing your best. He writes in regards to the importance of vanity's place in a performing society: "Without it, life would be stunted; the world would stagnate. What great, glorious, or disinterested action or career is not due to its promptings?" (380). In this sense, one's ego, combined with proper pride, helps to make the world progress and also feeds into competition among individuals. Competition fuels the need for individuals to perform better so they appear valuable and capable, which is a positive. A degree of selfishness, looking out for number one (yourself), is imperative. One argument against this idea could be that this promotes undue pressure and also egotistical behavior, which can have negative effects on the particular group in question. However, to achieve success, it is essential for one to be somewhat selfish to ensure his/her own success, which their society, in

turn, can reap the benefits.  For example, Steve Jobs creating the iPhone required some selfishness and vanity on his part to show the world his genius and skillset.  However, the product which was created from this has revolutionized the technological domain and also the world, showing that "vanity, proper, strikes a loftier key" (380).  The aspect of using selfishness could actually turn the trilogy of proper pride into a Quadrilogy, with this fourth element being the umbrella to which under the initial three reside.

This is not without conflict, though, and raises the following question: how is it guaranteed any individual who exercises the right amount of good vanity, self-love, and proper pride will be able to maintain the healthy level and flourish without letting themselves lose sight of the positive, thus slipping into the more vicious and vulgar side of vanity?  This brings to mind the story of Narcissus, who drowned after being overly consumed with the beauty of his own image reflected in the water, or even the story of Icarus, pushing the limits with his wax wings and melting them by getting too close to the sun, leading to his downfall.  Although there is no guarantee of a person's obedience when it comes to their ego, it will be vital for them to draw on praise and feedback at a steady and consistent pace from others in order to take stock in one's character.  As Browne puts it, "...by a steady progress of elimination and accretion, we build up and strengthen what we understand as character" (380).  This reinforces the idea of the individual's responsibility to make the choice to rid themselves of any potential vulgarity which may invade their proper pride, while using the feedback and opinions of others to increase self-awareness of their character.  Think of it as the individual creating for themselves a "Character Savings Account," where the more one takes in others' perception of them, the more aware they are of their perceived character and therefore accumulate a certain amount of "stock,"

which can either rise or fall based on what and how they decide to use these perceptions, either

making more of an effort to contribute to society's benefit while increasing positive self-esteem

(virtuous), or solely focusing on their own ego concerns (vicious).

Hume on Vanity and Virtue: Not-So-Strange Bedfellows

Although there is always a chance of the individual backfiring and falling into vicious

and vulgar habits by getting lost in their own ego and pride, vanity may prove to have a closer

bond with virtue than initially considered. As mentioned, vanity's self-love can be a positive

force by individuals to better themselves and in addition, to better society. Individuals, at some

level, seek approval from society, be it personally or professionally. To seek favorable opinions

and approval is not wrong. I see it as being a very normal human reaction because to some

degree, to "belong" means success and accomplishment and also the opportunity to prosper even

further. Therefore, it is not so much as vicious selfishness, but more about the desire to feel a

part of society, which can help develop or maintain a level of contribution to help improve the

society which has accepted them. Philip A. Reed, in *The Alliance of Virtue and Vanity in

Hume's Moral Theory*, supports this idea while drawing on Hume's perspective, explaining

"Hume insists the 'love of fame' is a 'spring of our constitution, that brings a great addition of

force to moral sentiment'...he describes vanity merely as a 'social passion'" (598).

The role vanity plays in establishing our love of self and self-esteem comes from how we

want to appear to the community, as something of value, as we strive to fit into the fabric of

society and contribute. The more approval we seek and then receive, the more pride we take in

ourselves because we see ourselves as belonging to a joint cause with other individuals. The

more our "pride meter" rises, the more we then become motivated to keep our place in society, which is to be of value. Pride in ourselves turns into taking pride in our society by giving back, which is seen as virtuous. For the individuals who seem to fall short of having initial motivation or lack discovering their inner pride, vanity can serve as a hand-up for them. Not all individuals carry the same amount of pride and motivation to believe in themselves enough on their own, therefore, vanity aids in bolstering self-esteem and pride. Reed supports this idea of vanity as the virtuous helper:

> Since virtue is a cause of esteem from others and vice is a cause of their hatred and blame, it follows that agents will be motivated to pursue virtue and avoid vice in an effort to invoke esteem and dispel hatred. In this way vanity can make up for the motivational deficiencies of the moral sentiments. (600)

How I interpret this idea to assist in my argument is when humans feel as if they are lacking, or less-than, in any form in a functioning society, what they turn to are ways and methods of garnering esteem from the outer sources of the community around them. This comes in the form of societal pressure. Initially, feeling the pressures of society may cause a sense of anxiety or weariness among the individual, which may seem like the last thing they might seek. However, in this realm of Vanity as it relates to proper pride, the individual looks to feed off of societal pressure in order to receive the rewards and favor society has to offer when one follows its rules. In lieu of viewing it as conforming to society, the individual may take the alternate view of seeing their behavior as seeking to be one with society. The individual cares about what society thinks of them, which can run counterintuitive to what others perceive to believe what makes one truly an individual. However, in this specific instance, they believe this method motivates them

to do the right thing, for themselves and for society, which can be seen as a net positive: both the individual and the community prosper. I believe Hume would agree with my perspective here, in that what is most important for the individual who feels less-than is to attain more motivation and praise as a source of encouragement to grow their self-belief (601).

Only drawing on constant sympathy contributes nothing to society; it deprives it of a would-be asset. Not only will receiving admiration help produce a positive mindset, it will also lead to character awareness, which I believe Junius Henri Browne would support, in regards to taking stock in character perception and self-awareness. In this sense, vanity can contribute to more of the cause of the common good. The more aware individuals are of their character, habits, and inner conscience, it will be reflected in what is given back to society as well as other individuals. Hume helps to cement this idea, recognizing the importance and striving for consistent acknowledgment of character:

> By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others; which is the surest guardian of every virtue. (602)

I connect this back to the individual utilizing the pressure of societal rules in order to feel rewarded by the contribution of good behavior. Specifically, when it comes to surveying themselves and past behavior, both positive and negative. Failing to do so could be regarded as selfish. Should someone not invest in their memory to recollect and analyze prior behavior and

societal perception does not clear a path to human flourishing.  No one, not the individual or societal as a whole, wins when individual members of society ignore perceived behaviors, therefore stunting any possibility for positive growth.

There are two main concepts I want to make clear about this idea of perpetually seeking out approval from others in order to feed our ego and self-esteem.  The first is this should be seen more as a behavior of consistency, not something one is forced to do.  For this, I will recall the "Character Savings Account" example I previously mentioned: consistently taking stock in one's perception by society to see if any interest has accumulated, which is vital for moral growth.  The second concept is an argument which can be made against this entire premise:  how can always seeking out approval of others for our own sake be considered virtuous? Do we not know ourselves best? Why then surrender control and authority of our own character identity to society?  I counter with this: I see this as not surrendering any part of our identity, rather, it is more of a humbling of ourselves.  We are showing respect towards other individuals to help direct us towards a path of moral development, while acknowledging we value and appreciate their counsel in helping us on a journey to human flourishing. We humble ourselves first so that we may grow.  This, I believe, is a true sign of virtuous behavior brought on by elements of vanity.

Taking this into consideration, along with Hume's point of view, I contend it is valuable for the individual to contain and display degrees of vanity than not, in order to generate more self-awareness, self-esteem, so that he/she may flourish.  Combining this with a humbling of one's self while showing respect to the opinions of others helps to indeed unite vanity and virtue in a unique alliance.

The Kantian Counterargument

I maintain individuals tend to thrive more in society when they engage in the brand of vanity which leads them to experience proper pride and their ego is fed and nurtured, leading to the strengthening of their character. Compare this to a modern example of the individual who consumes protein after exercising at the gym to maintain and enhance a healthy fitness level. It is vital, however, that in order to achieve the fullest of benefits from engaging in vanity and the degree of proper pride and self-love, one must be certain his/her actions are genuine and intent on the positive development of the individuals. Inauthenticity and lack of honest, positive purpose will lead them down the path towards vainglory and further vicious behavior. One's motives are extraordinarily essential and are the driving force behind achieving a level of fulfilling self-love. The individual must have permanent, positive, and consistent designs behind their motives of performing and attaining fulfillment, which they can then give back to their community. A failure of consistency will only garner temporary results, and therefore, temporary growth. In *Vanity*, A.T. Nuyen suggests Kant disagrees entirely with the premise of vanity providing anything of value, saying Kant equates all vanity as being on a level with the vice of vainglory. Nuyen says, for Kant, "...vanity is the same as vainglory because the glory that the vain person seeks is only for the things that are not inherently worthy, that is, things that are empty of moral worth" (618). I would raise issue to Nuyen's (and Kant's) statement here because of my insistence that although vanity does indeed have its downfalls for the individual when misused, it can still, however, promote moral well-being and character development when enacted for the right reasons. To Kant's point, the concern remains regarding how whether or not it can be determined if the individual's actions are self-serving and concentrating only on

being seen as a good person, rather than actually *being* a good person. This point should be redirected back to the previous points on the individual's methods and consistency. It can be very difficult to measure one's character in an instant or short frame of time, since it can never be one hundred percent determined. Therefore, observing one's actions as contributions over time, while taking notice if they are at a consistent level and bearing results, can be the barometer. It all comes down to individual choice and method which determines their fate.

There is, however, part of Kant's view on vanity which I agree with, which is the vain person is also arrogant, exercising this demand to be noticed, as if placing themselves on top of a pedestal for attention (618). There must be a foundation of substance and moral purpose for actions and character to be legitimate. Far too often, especially in the age of social media dominance in the current culture, there is more of an inclination to do good works, yes, however they are done for the glory and recognition, while using the occasion and people involved as props and players, respectively, to enhance this production of which they hope to be placed on center stage. I believe Nuyen would agree here with this idea as he remarks on several highly populated events such as galas, charitable functions, and fundraising dinners which can serve as the stage for the glory display to take place. For Nuyen, these are "ideal social settings for seeking attention" (624), where narcissism has the opportunity to bloom, should the individual engage.

Nuyen's reference to ideal social settings for arrogance and narcissism resonates because pop culture has become more prominent in displaying this idea, which can be used in the Kantian trial case against vanity. Exhibit A: the Bravo reality television series, *The Real Housewives of Dallas*, features Texan socialites who pride themselves on not only giving money to charitable

organizations, but making sure everyone within the Dallas perimeter knows it, either sponsoring or hosting anything from a luxurious gala to a three-person lunch, just as long as they can make sure their name is present on some kind of upright display.  Many arguments over who is more "giving" have caused intense fractions in friendships as well as physical altercations.  This would include one 'wife' cornering another 'wife' against a wall in public, yelling in her face while threatening her that her "charity world" will go down in flames.  This was, however, about nothing to do with anything charitable, but with a supposed unflattering comment gossiped behind closed doors.  One might ask: why then bring one's charity participation into the fight?  The answer is simple: because for these particular women, public charitable interaction is a significant rung when climbing the social ladder.  If one's reputation is shot, especially within this particular world, she is essentially cast away.  As vapid as this is, it provides Kant and fellow Kantians with the perfect ammunition for their argument.

Connecting this back to the age of social media, a majority of individuals have become obsessed with broadcasting current behavior and/or accomplishments for the world to see.  On one hand, individuals can see this as a way to recognize good deeds, which in itself, is not wrong.  If anything, it can serve as motivating or inspirational factors to spur more good deeds.  However, the opposite end of the argument may see constant social media posting as only serving the ego and provides nothing genuine for anyone else.  They may suggest that if the individual is truly genuine and authentic, then why not be humble and be content with no one else knowing about your good acts? This cycle, however, keeps on coming back to whether or not it is serving the good of society more than the individual.

A conversation between Aristotle and Kant would be fascinating to be present for.  I believe Aristotle would not only disagree with Kant's view of vanity, but would maintain the vain person can also live well and flourish.  Aristotle, according to Nuyen, believes the finer things in life lead to more happiness for the individual, therefore, pursuing them really is not a flaw with the individual and should not be seen as such, so long as it proves to be a long-lasting positive effect for the individual (624).  Though Kant does make a valid argument against vanity, I side more with Aristotle here.  Depriving an individual of pursuing elements on a supposed higher plane of living because it is assumed the individual may become corrupt will only lower the standards for them and reduce the chances for them to excel.  Allowing them the opportunity to better themselves will allow for a chance at a growth in self-confidence and in character.  Society, as previously mentioned, will help them in determining if they have indeed gone too far or if they are making a positive step.  This should be considered, whether or not members of the community are good or bad.  As mentioned throughout, perception from the surrounding community should be considered by the individual when taking stock into their own level of self-love.  No matter their own virtuous or vicious proclivities, all opinions count.  More specifically, they should because not only will the individual be privy to a wide variety of opinion and perceptions about their behavior and contributions, but they will also provide the individual a window into the current working and functionality of the community to which they are looking to give back.  In doing so, the individual may have a more specific view into what parts of society may need the individual's specific skill set even more, spurred by the developmental growth in the individual's self-love, by way of vanity and proper pride.

There is, however, one idea of Nuyen's which I slightly question, in regards to the vain person's place in society. He suggests the vain person can live as a happy individual, to which I agree. However, I do challenge his following remarks: "It is possible for the vain person to have many friends. Indeed, vain people are attracted to each other and tend to form a circle of friendship for the purpose of mutual admiration" (625). I agree it is very possible vain people can have and maintain friendships, however what I would challenge here is how long can friendships between many vain people maintain admiration for each other. Since people who engage in vanity seek approval among society, is it possible for each vain person in the friend circle to be equally admiring of each other without eventually wanting more in return? I believe it is possible, but not entirely a safe guarantee. I equate this to a person in higher office who surrounds him/herself with only "Yes" men-those will always agree and support any action or decision the official does without any pushback or challenge. Yes, the constant praise and compliments will sound wonderful at first, however, after time passes, the official will no doubt start to believe he/she can do no wrong and everything they say is gospel, as well as they run the risk of growing soft and weak in their core beliefs when there is no one to challenge a decision, thus forcing the official to reinforce his/her principles as to why they believe what they believe. Although I believe more in Aristotle's view of vanity, there are some Kantian shades with which I side.

<div align="center">Nietzsche's Vanity Viewpoint: Guilt-Free Living</div>

Though the inflated egos of individuals is a major deal-breaker for Kant, Nietzsche, according to Ruth Abbey in *The Roots of Ressentiment: Nietzsche on Vanity*, observes only when any individual engages in the self-love spectrum of vanity, they will be able to execute positive,

beautiful, and honorable actions.  Seemingly agreeing with Browne and Reed on vanity as more

virtuous, individuals can live as truly free people, unshackled from any constraints or fear of

being perceived as selfish or evil (51).  However, there are two obstacles which Abbey provides

where Nietzsche believes impede the individual from pursuing happier lives and performing

honorable actions.  One obstacle I agree with, while the second one I find a disagreement.

The first obstacle is vanity, itself-the word, that is.  Nietzsche believes individuals may be

doomed from the start because the word "vanity" already has a negative connotation, perhaps

causing people to shy away from engaging after growing up hearing the negatives of the word

and the consequences which may accompany it.  This makes any positive outcome vanity can

offer the individual seemingly doomed from the start (51).  Since the word may be considered

guilty in the court of public opinion, individuals, by habit, also would not want to be connected

to anything which could risk a "guilty" verdict upon them as well.  A main reason why I believe

Abbey believes vanity is branded with a negative reputation is because it often gets unfairly

associated with the qualities of ressentiment-suppressed negative feelings and emotions which

can be acted upon when allowed to come to the surface by the individual, which points to a

severe lack of self-love or the desire to improve one's self for their community (58).  Abbey uses

Nietzsche's main differentiation between vanity and ressentiment to help support my initial

argument: "Because the vain need to affirm their self-worth, they can aspire to compete with or

surpass the greatness of others.  Those consumed by *ressentiment*, however, can only hope to

bring others down to their level" (59).  There is a clear difference here between those who desire

or possess self-love, to those who severely lack it and hope to lower everyone else to their

unmotivated level.  This is why I argue the importance of vanity and its benefits: helping to

prove the positive side of vanity can further separate itself from a connection to ressentiment, where an individual may be unfairly given a negative reputation, because of the word itself.

The second obstacle for Nietzsche, which I do challenge somewhat, is also discussed by Abbey in her article, *Swanton and Nietzsche on Self-Love*, which, in part, pertains to Christianity and the importance its role plays in the individual when experiencing self-love. For Nietzsche, Christianity serves as an inhibitor to individuals of the faith. Abbey mentions how Christians may interpret the freeing, valiant sensation of self-love as a divine gift from God, perhaps even receiving direct grace from God, which would make a significant case for pushing self-love into virtue territory. Nietzsche, however, believes this to be completely backwards, since Christianity has indoctrinated its followers into believing self-love is sinful, therefore misrepresenting the entire meaning of it (393). I agree with Nietzsche on this point because the combination of guilt and fear can indeed hold Christians back from exploring possibilities with themselves if told God would not favor it. Looking at this from Nietzsche's perspective, this connects further to the aspect of self-negation, where in this case, if one makes God's will their sole worry, they risk being consumed and shielded from other avenues of self-love and growth.

Taking it one step further, Nietzsche goes on to suggest why, if they are capable of loving their flawed neighbor, Christians cannot love themselves in the same way without the aid of God-to show themselves an act of grace, something he believes God would approve (394). This leads into my disagreement with Nietzsche, on page 394, where he suggests after Christians realize and exercise self-love, they "will no longer have any need of your God, and the whole drama of Fall and Redemption will be played out to the end in you yourselves!" From my perspective, it seems Kant and Nietzsche are on two polar extreme opposite ends of vanity and

self-love being either right or wrong. What I disagree with Nietzsche here is for many Christians, God not only serves as an almighty presence, but also a moral guide to help keep individuals humble and seek to do virtuous, good deeds on a journey to become better people. He appears to be suggesting a spiritual overthrow of God, promoting completely removing God from the picture. This would be extremely detrimental for Christians, by eliminating a significant element of their belief system and what it means for them to be virtuous, both in spirit and in their character. However, Nietzsche, a non-believer of God, holds the belief that Christians only use God as a fictional hindrance and a means to have a reason for their actions, therefore eliminating any need for individual agency. He sees this as an unneeded construct Christians have created and used which has become a cage for them, seemingly without being aware of this.

Abbey, however, attempts to provide some levity to Nietzsche's claim, referencing Swanton's view of the dynamic between ordinary human and a spiritual god: "...if the individual sees him or herself from a god's eye view, that optic is bound to generate disappointment and a sense of one's own failure and feebleness" (395). What Abbey is discussing about Swanton's views is a point which I highly agree with, and connects back to individuals engaging in a motivational competition with each other to help themselves become better people in their society. If you try to compete with God or any god of one's belief, failure is most assuredly imminent for that individual. The goal is not for one to put him/herself on par with God, since this is an unattainable feat, leading to disappointment. The goal for mere mortals is and should be to be as good (or better) than each other on a human level, where progress and success are much more guaranteed, which, when successful, increases confidence in their character and self-worth and self-esteem.

Significance of Self-Esteem

A significant component of my argument in favor of vanity and self-love is the individual attaining more self-esteem through earning praise for good acts done by engaging in vanity and self-love. The more positive praise he/she receives, the more their confidence grows in relation to who they are and what their purpose is in society. To understand more about how vital of a role self-esteem plays in the individual, it is important to understand the benefits it provides. Mark Leary, in *Making Sense of Self-Esteem*, asserts having high self-esteem is a crucial part in facilitating goal achievement and problem solving, while also helping to alleviate psychological and societal problems for a community (33). Think of it as a domino effect: the more an individual seeks and receive praise from society by doing good acts, the more motivated he/she will be to continue to better themselves because of their newly discovered confidence, to contribute more back to the society which has helped them in this effort. For Leary, maintaining positive relationships is a significant part of continuous positive self-esteem development: "When people behave in ways that protect or enhance their self-esteem, they are typically acting in ways that they believe will increase their relational value…" (35).

Maintaining an understanding of relationships and one's place in society can start as young as early childhood years, which is discussed in *Understanding the Vital Human Quest for Self-Esteem* by Jeff Greenberg, whom I believe would agree with Leary, especially concerning valuing feedback and praise. In the case of young children, the parents of the child can serve the role of the society, enforcing and reinforcing cues for the child to gather and interpret to help adjust their behavior. Greenberg explains: "...the child's feelings of security depend on parental love, comfort, and protection. Over the course of childhood, the seemingly omnipotent parents

necessarily impose standards of goodness requiring certain behaviors from the child to keep that protection" (50). This "protection" the child seeks can be equated to a degree of approval from society to the individual. The more the child perceives good behavior with love and security (or societal acceptance) and bad behavior with abandonment or a loss of love and acceptance, the child will naturally seek to attain more love and approval from their parents, which may prompt even more good behavior from the child, which can be comparable to the grown individual continuingly seeking praise from his/her peers, thus solidifying the importance of not just high self-esteem itself, but also the journey to seek it. The good behavior, no matter what age, contributes to the betterment of their own society, whether in the individual home or the outside community, resulting in the individual becoming virtuous.

## Conclusion

Vanity, though classified as and considered by many as more vicious among individuals, has been unfairly given a negative reputation. For any society to thrive, it is imperative for its citizens to individually thrive, which gives vanity the opportunity to prove it consists of more positive attributes, rather than the more commonly known vulgar qualities of self-absorption, extreme narcissism, and vainglory. I maintain that in order for the individual to improve his/herself, it is essential they engage in vanity, specifically the traits of proper pride, self-love, self-awareness, and self-consciousness. When properly engaging in these attributes of vanity, they are giving themselves the opportunity for positive development within their self-esteem and an even stronger belief in their value and self-worth, including seeking and receiving opinions of praise and feedback. This both feeds and influences their character development. When these elements are strengthened, the ability of the individual becomes more believable within them,

leading the individual to use their strengthened self-esteem and ability to contribute back to the society, which in turn, has contributed to the individual's recognized growth.  Though there is no perfect guarantee the individual will always use vanity to his/her benefit, there is more cause to believe in its positive and constructive qualities.  The court of premature public opinion may side against vanity, however, after considering opinions and arguments of philosophers such as Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Swanton, I see this as case closed, in favor of vanity: more virtuous than vicious.

**Tilting the Scales:**
**Phaedra and the Navigation of Virtue**

In Racine's *Phaedra*, what makes Phaedra an intriguing figure to the audience is how

steadfast she is to maintain her innocence, despite the conflict hybrid which befell her: her curse

from the mythological gods combined with the Christianity-based original sin. Her struggle to

maintain her free will which impacted her freedom of decision making, however, has

overshadowed this innocence.  In her effort to thwart her imperfections and move more towards

being a woman of virtue, the more imperfect and flawed she made herself.  The audience sees

Phaedra develop a sense of passion within herself, driven by both the cursed desire and her

desire to be seen as virtuous.  However, this passion is dangerous for Phaedra.  And like many

character traits, passion can spiral out of control and backfire on the individual, causing them

tragic, unexpected, and unintentioned results.  When individuals' awareness of being seen is

heightened, feeling as if they are under a constant microscope, the pressure mounts to both

please and also perform.  These heightened awareness levels can generate a dilemma in

perception within the individual.  On one side, the individual focuses on *how* they are being

perceived by those who are watching, knowing every step they take may be subject to scrutiny.

However, there is also the factor of introspection where the individual looks inward to

themselves, in an effort to examine how they may *want* to be seen by those who surround them.

This, in turn, affects their choices, whether or not their effects are positive or negative.  Phaedra

finds herself grappling with being seen not only as the innocent party, but also as a woman of

virtue.  To take a closer look at the latter concept, it is important to keep in mind what the

meaning of virtue means in Phaedra's case.  One definition of virtue is best explained through

Aquinas' analysis of the Augustinian definition  of virtue, which is: "a good quality of the mind

by which we live rightly and no one can use badly which God works in us without us" (Austin 109).   It is important for the reader of *Phaedra* to examine her motives and actions based on this definition, specifically the idea of "a good quality of the mind" and "living rightly."  Though her intentions, to her, are just, Phaedra falls short of these two concepts.  This leads to the last element of the definition of God working through the person, in which Pheadra, through her own missteps, has slowly eliminated space through which any pure, higher being, can work.  In wanting to be seen as a woman with the right correct mode of intentions and character, Phaedra shows through her own damning choices how she is someone who lacks more virtue than she acquires.

Fractured from the Start: Ungodly ties with the gods

Racine makes Phaedra's dilemma very clear for his audience as he prefaces his play to us: "Phaedra is, in fact, neither wholly guilty nor wholly innocent," (Racine, 3).  The paradox for Phaedra can be similar to that of walking through a minefield, where every step she takes, she risks causing explosions of misguided behavior.  She has indeed stepped on several metaphorical traps in her quest to achieve virtue.  In doing so, she has severely damaged the lives of those in close relation to her.  The foundation to these damages, however, was laid when Venus cursed Phaedra, resulting in her attraction to her husband's son, Hippolytus.  Phaedra struggles and anguishes over her cursed self because it damages any relationship she could ever hope to have with the gods, as she discusses with Oenone: "Alas, how Venus hates us! As Love's thrall,/ Into what vileness did my mother fall!" (21).  Referencing her mother, she suggests herself as the innocent party, which is true, yet is also doomed to be a walking representation of her mother's folly.  Though Phaedra has done nothing wrong on *her* end to deserve Venus' curse, her struggle

to maintain a virtuous disposition turns fragile.  This fragility can also be triggered by the

presence of the sun god, Apollo, who is also her grandfather, acting as the perpetual judge for

Phaedra.

The presence of Apollo in *Phaedra* is fascinating because he manages to appear as

omnipresent and not physically or verbally interacting with Phaedra.  For Phaedra, however, that

is enough to feel the "burning" judgement from the gods through Apollo casting the sun's light

on Phaedra, perpetuating the tarnished relationship between her and the gods.  This concept is

also similar to Michel Foucalt's view on "Panopticism," from *Discipline and Punish*.  Foucault

describes the constant sensation of surveillance brought on to an individual when the individual

believes they are always under the watchful eyes of a being, even though they may not fully be

able to view the being.  Foucault describes the goal of Panopticism to generate within the

individual "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning

of power.  So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it

discontinuous in its actions…"  This is precisely what has happened to Phaedra, where although

she cannot physically see Apollo, she still feels the extraordinary weight of his gaze which

becomes increasingly mentally difficult to bear.  She does not need to see Apollo to know his

presence is always near.   Phaedra experiences from above, as Foucault puts it, the power of

"mind over mind," and Phaedra is seemingly on the losing end of that battle.  What Racine does

with the sun is both intriguing and ambiguous.  He portrays Phaedra as clearly having a sort of

anxiety of being under the sun's light, Apollo's gaze.  Yet, there could be more than one

possibility for Phaedra's feelings, as she discusses with Oenone.  There are three instances in Act

I, Scene III where Phaedra expresses this unease of the fiery heat from above: "My eyes are

blinded by the glare of day,/ And now I feel my trembling knees give way" (16), "...For the last time, O Sun, I see your face," and "Oh, to be sitting in the woods' deep shade!" (17). When she mentions how she is being blinded, Phaedra could be referencing how she feels the scorn and torturous glare from the gods where both the literal and figurative heat is too much for her to bear, hence her knees giving way. Phaedra could also be trying to hide from her own guilty conscience from the curse as she exclaims how she must evade and escape the sunlight to be in the solace of the shade, never to be in the presence of the sunlight again. The phrase "shed some light…" refers to the light revealing all it touches, leaving nowhere for secrets or evil to hide. With this in mind, Phaedra could be extremely fearful of her true, cursed self being revealed to her with no way to escape the burden of her guilt. Try as she may, there is no escaping this reality labyrinth for Phaedra. Attempting to do so results in Phaedra appearing more disingenuous and inauthentic of a person, which is one character trait she is striving to avoid. Her balancing act between authenticity and inauthenticity continues.

Authenticity can play a significant role at any point in a lifetime, especially concerning both the past and evolution of one's character. Within this evolution of their character is history, a significant foundation of identity. How one sees themselves (and is seen) can be heavily determined on their history, more specifically, past choices which were made, as well as past associations and the actions made within that community. Phaedra has had difficulty in this regard, in that she has been trying to escape the recognition of her curse which has her having romantic designs on Hippolytus. Phaedra's past involves her mother's misdeeds, thus the curse being rendered unto Pheadera, making it a part of her reality. This is where the majority of Phaedra's fault lies-her inability to confront reality. Her choice to not fully confront and admit

to her flawed emotions, trying to force her cursed feelings below the surface, has caused her to

enter the dangerous territory of inauthentic existence.  In *I Want to Die, I Hate my Life:*

*Phaedra's Malaise*, Simon Critchley describes the idea of inauthentic existence as having an

altered and twisted perspective on one's life and the meaning behind it.  In relation to Phaedra,

her view of life has become that of an arduous task to be feared, dreaded, and forced.  This is

otherwise known as experiencing Originary inauthenticity, feeling that life is nothing more than

a heavy burden, a weight which tears at the very reason  (Critchley 30).  Phaedra even helps to

directly reinforce this idea in the beginning of the play, during Act I, scene iii, when she

describes to Oenone how even her own clothing has become too much of a heavy burden to bear:

"These veils, these baubles, how they burden me!/ What meddling hand has twined my hair, and

made/ Upon my brow so intricate a braid?/ All things oppress me, vex me, do me ill" (Racine

16).  Her curse's burden from above has Phaedra on notice where it has become not only

mentally taxing for me, but also physically.  Again, here is Foucault's Panopticism at work, with

Phaedra unable to emotionally free herself from the weight being cast on her from the gods, and

well aware she her fate has her shackled to being surveilled.  She is caught up in what Foucault

says, is a "power situation of which they are themselves the bearers."

Because of Phaedra's history, thanks to her mother, and also because of  her tainted

relationship with the gods, she views her life as something to be admonished, with her past

something to be outran: "...she is a prisoner of her past...The virus of Venus that flows in her

blood weighs her down.  She writhes, she burns.  Her body possesses or is possessed by an

unbearable gravity that pulls her earthwards," (31).  Phaedra's constant suppression of her past

and feelings has her more emotionally crippled, torn between the cruel truth of reality and the

blinders she attempts to block reality.  However, because Phaedra consistently engages in inauthentic behavior of denial and dishonesty of the reality confronting her, the past would very much remain a part of her present.  She may be through with her past, but the gods made sure the past was nowhere through with her (30).  This pushes Phaedra into a steady downfall into dark character.  Though the gods have sealed her fate, it is Phaedra who chooses to seal the fate of those around her, acts of which can be considered unvirtuous.

<div align="center">Oenone: A Confidante When Convenient</div>

Culpability, or lack thereof, is what emphasizes Phaedra's mode of unvirtuous behavior.  Admittance with a catch is her modus operandi, especially when it comes to the demise of her relationship with nurse and confidante, Oenone.  Part of Phaedra's obstructive path to being more virtuous is her refusal to break her silence about her cursed emotional state (19).  This choice has led her to allow the build-up of these emotions to eat away at her until she feels forced to crack.  This is where the role of Oenone is significant.  In her conversation with Phaedra in the third scene of Act I of *Phaedra*, Oenone is able to get Phaedra to confess, albeit indirectly:

PHAEDRA. I feel love's raging thirst.

OENONE. For whom?

PHAEDRA. Of all dire things, now hear the worst./ I love...From that dread name I shrink, undone;/ I love…

OENONE. Whom?

PHAEDRA. Think of a Scythian woman's son,/ A prince I long ill-used and heaped with blame.

OENONE. Hyppolytus? Gods!

PHAEDRA. 'Twas you who spoke his name.  (Racine 23)

What is very telling is the last line spoken by Phaedra in this exchange which, up until this point, appears to be an innocent conversation between close friends.  During this exchange, one can notice Phaedra avoids any opening or opportunity to speak Hippolytus' name.  Creating a language labyrinth of her own, she goes in every other direction, dropping anguish-ridden hints for Oenone, until Oenone is able to put the pieces together that it is Hippolytus to whom Phaedra is intimately drawn. Once it is out in the open, Phaedra seems to be putting the blame on Oenone, since Oenone is the one who actually speaks the name.  Again, Phaedra is trying to avoid reality.  By not verbally speaking Hippolytus' name, she believes she avoids any main culpability in the matter, again delving into inauthentic living.

However, despite Phaedra's ignoring reality, she does show some signs of being virtuous and having an honest heart.  Once she confesses to Hippolytus of her feelings through the curse, she realizes the impossibility of them coexisting in the same space from that moment onward. Oenone, whose motives are not entirely lily white either, decides Hippolytus must be accused of something horrendous before he has the chance to do the same to Phaedra, especially with the added news of Theseus being alive.  She decides they can use Hippolytus' Amazonian heritage against him, painting him as having "a savage hate for womankind" (55).  Phaedra, however, in a moment of showing a glimpse or virtuous character, cannot bring herself to go along with this plan.  She cannot bear to see an innocent man be falsely accused.  Although she initially appears to show compassion here for the situation, it is quickly extinguished by her own doing.  Oenone convinces Phaedra of the "kill-or-be-killed" mentality, to save her own honor before Phaedra's "monster" drags it through the mud, even if it means an innocent man may be destroyed: "But even if guiltless blood must flow, the cost/ Were less than if your honor should be lost./ That

honor is too dear to risk; its cause/ Is priceless, and its dictates are your laws" (61).  No matter

the risk, no matter who may fall, if Phaedra is still standing with some sense of honor and dignity

intact and the threat to her character erased, then all will be just and is for a noble cause.

Oenone's words manage to sway Phaedra to her perspective, with the last two lines being the

wind which sway Phaedra away from virtue: "You must give up, since honor is at stake,/

Everything, even virtue, for its sake" (61).

Phaedra bears no blame for Oenone pressuring her, for that blame is tied to Oenone,

alone.  What Phaedra does, though, is make the choice to abandon her initial virtuous mindset

and relinquish any rational thought.  She errs on the side of weakness and lack of responsibility

and lets the task fall on Phaedra, seemingly without a degree of resistance she fooled the

audience into think she possessed: "Do what you will; I yield myself to you./ In my confusion, I

know now what to do" (61).  Phaedra plays the dangerous game of floating in the middle of two

sides, fearful of making the wrong choice and chooses to use confusion as her shield.  She has

lost an enormous sense of rational thinking here, and through this, has denied herself the

attainment of virtue.  The ability to be able to reason is only effective from the amount of virtue

which helps to fuel it (Austin, "Rational Virtue" 112).  The lack of virtue Phaedra is exhibiting,

allowing her mind to be softened from Oenone's scheme, erodes her rational thinking, little by

little.  Because of her choice to abdicate responsibility, Phaedra sets the wheels in motion which

will seal Oenone's fate.

Phaedra's misjudgment and faulty thinking faults her once again, both by her own choice

and her oblivious perspective. Once Hippolytus leaves after his argument with Theseus over

Oenone's falsehood, Phaedra is furious to learn he has gone to be with Aricia.  However, she

directs her anger towards Oenone as the one who is responsible for driving away Hippolytus to another woman with a disgusted and tainted last impression of Phaedra. She admonishes Oenone for her hand in the matter:

> Wretch! Will you pour such poison in my ear
>
> Right to the end? Look how you've ruined me.
>
> You dragged me back to all I sought to flee.
>
> You blinded me to duty; called it no wrong
>
> To see Hippolytus, whom I'd shun so long. (Racine 84)

Phaedra immediately seems to have wiped from her memory that it was she, Phaedra, who allowed herself to believe Oenone's plan for Hippolytus and even gave her permission and entrusted her to get the job done. Phaedra accuses Oenone of "dragging" her back to the dark place she fought so hard to escape, but it was Phaedra, herself, who put up no resistance in her false indictment of her confidante. Fascinatingly, it is Phaedra's words which appear to be the driving force, not Oenone's actions. Phaedra's hypocrisy is blatant here because had Oenone succeeded in her plan, which Phaedra willingly gave her approval, Phaedra would have held Oenone up as a hero and someone to be commended for all time. However, Phaedra exhibits not only hypocrisy, but also selfishness and lack of responsibility by distancing herself from Oenone (Baudin 153). She is completely and utterly oblivious to all logical concepts, such as consequences of her actions and words over time. Her obsession with and forced behavior of obtaining virtue has chained her to these events and blinds her to anything else logical (Braga 291). Phaedra's loyalty seems to sway the opposite of whichever way blame seems the furthest from contact. Though in the end when Oenone commits suicide from feeling dejected, betrayed,

and tossed to the side by a woman whom she thought of as a loyal, Phaedra was just as responsible. Phaedra may not have been on the ledge when Oenone threw herself into the sea, but she most certainly gave her the emotional shove into Oenone's back. The catch, however, is though Oenone met her demise at her own hands, she can be seen as more virtuous than Phaedra because, though death was the result, Oenone admitted her wrong doing with a solemn attempt at clearing her conscience, contrite for her actions (294). Though the demise of Phaedra's confidante is indeed tragic, perhaps the most tragic of the fractured relationships of Phaedra can be found in the unwitting, innocent man himself, Hippolytus.

## Hippolytus: Guilty of Being Innocent

The significant moment concerning Phaedra's confession to Hippolytus of her lust for him is how she is trying to play both sides of the coin. Her confession, both of her lustful feelings and also of coming clean of how she was able to have him banished in the first place, is a momentary stroke of honesty. She does make the choice to come clean, perhaps in an effort to help clear her conscience and restore some level of virtue to her soul, freeing her from this grip she feels Venus has had over her. However, there are instances in this confession where she still is altering between reality and absence of accountability. During her dialogue, Phaedra alternates back and forth between referring to herself in both first and third person: "What I'd have done to to save that charming head!/ My love would not have trusted to a thread./ No, Phaedra would have wished to share with you/ Your perils…" (Racine 46) and " Behold the Phaedra as she is, insane/ With love for you" (47). By again referring to herself in the third person here, Phaedra cannot give up engaging in inauthentic and disingenuous living by not accepting and acknowledging her full responsibility for her actions. Even more, she is still

toying with Hippolytus' emotions by suggesting there is still love for him from this "other" woman named Phaedra, despite herself knowing it has always been just her, no matter what alternate identity she tries to use in order to excuse her actions.

Phaedra is allowing both her passion and her hatred of this situation to battle within her head concerning her relationship with Hippolytus. Her passion, in this sense, can be two-fold. On one end is the passion she feels for Hippolytus because of Venus' curse. On the other hand, she also has a passion in that she has a deep desire to be both vindicated and understood in her predicament as attempts to break her silence. As Marion Monaco discusses, in *Racine and the Problem of Suicide*, Phaedra allows certain parts of her destroy other parts of her, which creates in her a form of self-delusion and the weak hope of being love where it does not exist, though she hopelessly tried to force it into existence (451).

Although having passion is seen as a positive aspect for the individual, misusing and misplacing it in situations can also be dire. Nicholas Austin, in the chapter "Passionate Virtue" from *Aquinas on Virtue*, elaborates on this idea of when passion and rational thought intersect: "...the wicked 'do not rightly love themselves, but love what they [wrongly] think themselves to be.' This disordered self-love, which is really a kind of self-hate, could be the fault of a will distorted by passion" (134). Austin also goes on to mention how "passions seem to be somewhat chaotic impulses that often conflict with reason…" (135). What Austin is conveying here is indeed a chaotic struggle Phaedra has been enduring all throughout this play: trying to control the level of passion she feels while battling the negative feelings about herself and her identity as a person because of her affliction. Her passion has been misdirected by way of Oenone's

scheme which lead to her death and also with Hippolytus in forever altering the way he now sees his stepmother and eventually will seal his fate as well.

Because of Phaedra's distorted passion and loathing of herself, she chooses to engage in the aforementioned scheme of Oenone to falsely accuse Hippolytus of sexual assault to Theseus. This leads to Theseus and Hippolytus having an intense argument. There is a moment of significance during Racine's *Phaedra*, concerning character and virtue, in their heated exchange, which gives credence to the unvirtuous character of Phaedra:

THESEUS. A rascal never shrinks from perjury./ Cease now to weary me with sly discourse,/ If your false virtue has but that resource.

HIPPOLYTUS. My virtue may seem false and sly to you,/ But Phaedra has good cause to know it true. (75)

How ironic it is here that Theseus is accusing his own innocent son of having no virtue, based on a lie which was in part aided by Phaedra, a woman who has chosen several times not to engage in virtuous behavior. Even more ironic is that Hippolytus even claims Phaedra knows he is of good character and is innocent of any lewd charge brought against him, yet Phaedra chooses to stay silent until it is too late. Hippolytus is banished by Theseus, where later, he is killed by Neptune, through request from Theseus, himself.

During Act V, Scene vii, in a supposed act of virtue, Phaedra decides to atone for her wrongdoings by confessing to Theseus about Hippolytus' innocence. Proclaiming that her "wrongful silence must be ended" and his "guiltless son must be at last defended," (104) she confesses to having lustful feelings towards Hippolytus and aiding in the scheme with Oenone to tarnish his honor, only to spare her own. In an effort to rid the world of her impurity, she has

already consumed poison and promptly dies after her confession.  One could argue this gesture of hers is selfless because of how she is punishing herself and purifying the world a little more by taking her out of it, while knowing she is damning herself for all eternity to face judgement from her father, Minos.  However, she has had many opportunities to intervene on Oenone's and Hippolytus' behalf.  Doing so could have spared their lives, not to mention given her more a sense of the virtue she desired to have.  Because of this, both Phaedra and her suicide could be interpreted as fraudulent.  She seems to accept any form of fate only when everything else she has tried and forced has failed her.  Having been completely broken of both spirit and conscience, which to a degree caused two deaths, her last choice in the matter is to exit the earth by purposely causing one more death (Monaco 454).  Throughout the entirety of Racine's play, Phaedra was on a quest to attain virtue and nobility, but in forcing the situation, found herself failing time and time again.  She seemed to conflate virtue with perfection, the latter of which can never be attainable by humans.  In striving for the impossible perfection it has seen her cause the downfall of not only two close people within her circle, but her own downfall as well (Reckford 307).

Though she has seemingly made peace with her inner demons and actions, it is too little, too late for Phaedra to retain any shred of good character and virtuous standard.  The miseries of life "are due to self-destructive choices" (Austin, "Passionate Virtue" 133).  Phaedra has had a hand in causing both inner and outer damage.  Her own destructive choices to engage in unvirtuous behavior has caused misery in some form for all who surrounded her.  The damage, by Phaedra's own making, has been done.

Conclusion

How an individual perceives themselves within any group is significant to their identity.

The same can also be said, however, of how a group perceives the individual in return. Both

perspectives play a role in the thought process and decision making one makes according to how

they think they will be best suited, especially when the individual is searching to be in good

favor and achieve virtue within those associations and connections. Continuous striving for

virtue has its rewards, however, contain its downfalls for the individual. A significant difference

between the two are the choices the individual makes in how he or she goes about reacting and

responding in methods which not only have its effects on themselves, but also those who are

connected to them. One cannot always be in control of life's circumstances, especially when it is

something they were never connected to initially, however find themselves indirectly impacted.

They do, however, on some level, have control over how they react, speak, and carry themselves

through the situation. In Racine's *Phaedra*, Phaedra knew she was innocent of the cause of the

curse which befell her. However, she began to eradicate any dignified ground by engaging in

non-virtuous acts, all in an attempt to be seen as an innocent woman, all leading to the

destruction of those she considered close to her. Seeking to maintain a level of virtue and being

seen in authentic good standing is something to be strived for. However, as Phaedra had a

first-hand account of discovering, the risk of losing sight of an outcome for the common good for

all involved can have negative outcomes for one's identity on both sides of the coin.

**No "Firsts" Necessary:**
**How Margaret Thatcher Crafted an Identity of Substance, Femininity, & Resolve**

Margaret Thatcher was aware it took a certain type of skill set and will to navigate the paths of British politics. Steadily progressing her way up the ladder, from Member of Parliament, to the Leader of the Conservative Party, to the upper echelon of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, she found herself in another significant position, that of political outsider. Knowing she would be judged more closely because of her unique position of "first woman Prime Minister," her mission was to carve out a position where she was able to govern with her own brand of principles and vision, while preventing the public's perception and fixation of "first woman Prime Minister" to overshadow her. In doing so, she helped lift Britain out of what foreign nations such as Russia and also home critics, considered to be international mediocrity, in terms of diplomacy, militarily, and industrially, and back on to the world stage as a first-rate power. Through her obstacles and successes, and realizing strategies in leadership while utilizing her unique persona as her own woman, Margaret Thatcher was able to successfully craft her own identity as a political leader of both femininity and strength, using substance as the driving force, in the roles of both lady and leader.

## *Lady* Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher had no use for women to be used to bolster her standing as a political figure or world leader. Specifically, she did not believe filling her cabinet or any specific leadership position with women would push policy or have any other effect in advancing diplomacy. Having only one woman briefly serve in her cabinet during her Premiership, she never looked to capitalize on the feminist movement or to have a set quota of women serving under her in order to help drive her vision for the United Kingdom. In the political realm,

Thatcher did not have any direct connection to or lineage of people of power, such as being a daughter or wife of a prominent male politico, which saw lift the profiles of other prominent female political figures by the exploitation of those specific connections (Berlinski 71-72). Being the "first" in any position carries a level of significance or distinction for the individual, for whatever the category their "first" is recognized by their respective country's citizenry. The amount of influence which can be generated from the positioning can help push through certain causes, policies, and their personal agendas.

As the first woman Prime Minister, Thatcher, if she wanted, certainly had the opportunity to use this unofficial part of her title to her advantage, perhaps even as a sort of guilty tool to help advance legislation. Aside from policy, there is also the expected cause célèbre which finds itself attached, where the impact on the culture is also heavily discussed on near equal, if not equal, footing, as the political impact. For example, in 2008, while still awaiting the day of the first woman President, the United States had the notoriety of having its own notable political "first." The U.S. press and public proclaimed its enthusiasm with the election of its first African American President in Barack Obama, with magazine covers and pop culture television appearances of the new "first" First Family soon following. While successful leaders tend to be measured in the areas of their rhetoric, thought processes, and policy positions and the execution, a focus on gender, in any degree, is found interwoven between them.

That said, successful female leaders are more likely to use aspects of their gender to set themselves apart from more mainstream leaders (Simms 275). It was this concept which Thatcher utilized during her Premiership. She rejected the idea of feminism as an ideology. She found incredible fault in using the existence of being a woman as the sole reason why she should

succeed and garner accolades in her political career.  In a recent interview, Thatcher biographer Claire Berlinski emphasized this point by comparing two distinct perspectives on this subject, that of how Thatcher viewed her candidacy versus the modern 21st century campaigns by women which seem to push their gender as a major reason for their running:

> She never presented herself as, for example, Hillary Clinton did, as someone who should be elected *because* she was a woman, because this would break glass ceilings, because this was an historic achievement...that wasn't the point of her candidacy and of her time in power...Her being a woman was significant. It was historically significant.  And she was a different kind of Prime Minister than anyone who had gone before her because of it.  But she *never* campaigned on the idea of 'elect me because this will prove to women everywhere that you can be anything you want to be', or 'elect me because I understand women better'...It was not, in any sense, a modern identity-themed campaign. (Berlinski, personal)

  Although it is true she detested feminism and using the feminist movement to solidify any achievement, she was not opposed to using certain elements of her *femininity* to assist in crafting the type of leader she intended to be.  She knew she possessed softer qualities and characteristics which could put people at ease, such as being a wife, mother, grocer's daughter, and also being smaller in stature.  Her method was not to use these qualities so much for reasons *why* she should win favor, but rather, because of what they could bring to the table in order to enhance her approachability (Simms 278-279).  Additionally, Thatcher had a dislike, or distrust, rather, for women.  In her mind, women were ruthless, far more than men could ever be.  She had no time for women who vied to be the center of attention of men and who could undercut Thatcher's idea

of being a valued asset for reasons that did not involve her female sex. This could be an instance

of being a "first" slightly playing in her head-the idea of viewing herself as an outsider trying to

be a success and not wanting any obstacle preventing this, regardless if it were members of her

own sex. Being successful in the cause and the will of the common good and country came first

for Thatcher; any other insignificant factor, sex included, was a distant second (Berlinski 97-99).

Thatcher was very aware of what and how she thought people viewed her when she

started to make her first forays into the British political realm. She liked to think she could

pinpoint and gauge people's opinions, men especially, of her, a young woman from small-town

Grantham, England, a daughter of a grocer. She noted as such, in a type of inner monologue, as

if taking mental memos of other men's supposed thoughts about her, at least according to her

perspective. For example, what she mentally presumed the opinion of a close male acquaintance

after she secured the nomination from the Dartford constituency in 1950: "...what a pity such a

charming girl should be lost to politics! She'll find it very heavy-going, wonder if she'll stay the

course…" (Moore 79). In 1959, when she first entered the House of Commons, Thatcher knew

she was already at a disadvantage. Being in a small group of female Members of Parliament,

there was a strong sense by Thatcher that she would likely have to make even more of an effort

to be taken seriously as a new voice. Although some attention was paid to her, what was

frustrating to Thatcher was how early on the only questions and commentary seemed to be asked

from the media were only focused on what she simply referred to as "the welfare thing." She

was often asked to provide the "women's angle" on subjects such as what a working week for

wives was like, advice on the best strategy to look for a husband, and tips on how to get young

children to save more money. Not the material a Chemist from Oxford or a tax law-focused

Barrister might desire, but nonetheless, Thatcher accepted it as temporary fate, for the time being

(145). She knew she was being viewed not just as a person of a different sex, but also of a

different class and was not deterred as what she humorously dismissed as "male chauvinist

hilarity." Thatcher knew this was a time to make the decision to either sink or swim, in which

she saw the birth of an unrelenting determination (Clarke 318).

Margaret Thatcher was keenly aware of her positioning of a woman and utilized it as an

attribute as a politician. She knew she possessed different aspects of being a woman which she

could use to her advantage, combined with the momentum and aura of her being a "first"

(Berlinski 85). Knowing she could use elements of her femininity to her advantage when

working with cabinet members, foreign leaders, and the public, there was also the question of

how to navigate this strategy throughout the political landscape without having it reversed and

used against her. During her Premiership, Thatcher's perspective of her appearance counted for

much of her approach. Meticulous in every sense, Thatcher knew how to maximize the details,

with her power suits and dresses, her hair seemingly permanently shaped into an imposing,

golden helmet, gleaming pearls, steely-eyed, charming glint glances, and her ability to pack a

venue, whether at a party conference or giving a speech during a joint session of the U.S.

Congress. Everything seemed as though it was packaged and put together like a product being

produced by a major high-budget film company, with Thatcher the extraordinarily gifted actress

who was hired by production to play the role of Thatcher, herself (75). Even the way she crafted

how she spoke was purposely done to both ease her early nerves of speaking on television and to

also accentuate her feminine appeal and softness. She was instructed that in order to put

whichever audience in front of her at ease, she was to speak tight into the microphone with her

voice lowered.  This, she was told, would make her sound much more confident, reasonable, and also "sexy."  Exuding strength while maintaining her femininity was the cornerstone of the Margaret Thatcher live-action performance (Moore 309).

One of these living performances which would have earned her at least one encore came in the form of one of her most memorable speeches, specifically because it earned her an infamous position on the world stage, care of a notorious foe.  During a speech at Kensington Town Hall, known as her "Britain Awake" speech, Thatcher proceeded to verbally ridicule and undermine aspects of the Soviet Union, from their ruthless quest for global dominance to their prioritizing warfare above the welfare of their people.  There is one section of Thatcher's speech which takes the Soviets to task:

> The Russians are bent on world dominance, and they are rapidly acquiring the means to become the most powerful imperial nation the world has seen.The men in the Soviet politburo don't have to worry about the ebb and flow of public opinion. They put guns before butter, while we put just about everything before guns.They know that they are a super power in only one sense—the military sense.  They are a failure in human and economic terms.

Thatcher's level of criticism dug deeper than a routine, standard criticism of an enemy country.  With these words she placed the Soviets beneath her, both morally and in regards to humanity.  She intentionally made the effort to dehumanize them, as if they are unsophisticated and animalistic.  As she puts it, the Soviets are "failures" at being decent human beings, creatures who would offer the lives of their fellow citizens for an even bigger taste of power.

This impassioned speech by Thatcher certainly did not go unnoticed by the Soviets, who, in response through their Red Army's state newspaper, *Red Star*, dubbed her The "Iron Lady". Intending to be an insult, they wished to compare her to Bismarck, the powerful, male German ruler who was also known as the "Iron Chancellor". Thatcher, however, jumped on this opportunity to spin it in her favor and back on the Soviets. A Margaret Thatcher Production is ready to again capitalize on another living performance. She appeared again for a speech to the Conservative Association while taking on a temporary persona for the evening:

> I stand before you tonight in my Red Star chiffon evening gown, my face softly made up and my fair hair gently waved, the Iron Lady of the Western world. A Cold War warrior...Yes, I *am* an iron lady...if that's how they wish to interpret my defence of values and freedoms fundamental to our way of life. (Moore 332-333)

Thatcher made sure to again express elements of her femininity in this moment, even if slightly tongue-in-cheek. Once again she showed how she exuded both power and control, all while maintaining a gentle, soft element of being feminine.

Aside from outward appearance, Thatcher possessed the gift of astuteness. She could easily read a room of her colleagues and execute her already-existing motherhood qualities to her liking when taking and maintaining control of the room. Referenced by former foreign policy advisor Charles Powell in an interview with Berlinski, since the overwhelming majority of her cabinet was all men, she knew she was looking out into a room filled with former English schoolboys who had been repeatedly commanded to always respect and listen to their mothers and to grown women, in general, to be polite and to always do what they are told. Since this had been their first experience having a woman in charge, Thatcher knew she could get tough with

them by raising her voice to a level, if need be, like a mother scolding her children.  All the while

she knew there was a very miniscule chance the men would even dare to challenge her or talk

back-never to "mother," that is (Berlinski 87).  Perhaps one of the greater examples of "Mother

Thatcher" in full effect, is when she was dealing with the opposing Labour Party Leader, Neil

Kinnock.

Like Thatcher, Kinnock also possessed elements of charm. Yet, he was also a notorious

"blowhard," and, in tone and aggressiveness, seen as no match to go up against Thatcher.

During Prime Minister's Questions, a weekly segment during a session of Parliament where the

members get to ask the Prime Minister anything.  As leader of the Labour Party, Kinnock was

always expected to deliver blow after blow and put Thatcher in her place in the name of the

opposition.  However, Kinnock felt himself unable to capitalize, even when he felt Thatcher may

have been weak during the session.  On the contrary, it was Thatcher who seemed to get the

better of Kinnock.  In a peculiar mode of defense for not giving Thatcher his usual brand of

verbal blows, Kinnock, in an interview with Berlinski, offered his reasoning:

> ...the immediate problem I had-I had two immediate problems. One was, she's a woman
>
> seventeen years older than myself.  And there were punches thrown against, say John
>
> Major (former British Prime Minister and Thatcher's successor), who's a man of my age,
>
> that I just couldn't throw against a woman seventeen years older...there's a form of
>
> language that-you know, I could accuse Major of hypocrisy, of evasion...That's the way I
>
> was brought up, and, the fact is, it wasn't my instinct to be vile to a lady who was
>
> seventeen years older.  Secondly, in any case, the public would see fellows my age
>
> standing toe-to-toe and knocking the hell out of each other and think, "...if I did it to a

woman, a whole segment of society...would say, 'That's so disrespectful. That wasn't political antagonism, that was *disrespect*.'" (88, 90)

Thatcher was not oblivious to this feeling which she found common with several men in both political parties. She understood *why* certain men had difficulty working under a woman, but only in the initial sense. She wondered why those men had no problem offering many solutions and assistance for women who were seen as the "weaker" sex. However, for those women, like Thatcher, who asked for no special treatment or favor because of their sex, only to be respected and judged for her position, they indirectly caused men to be puzzled on their approach to cooperating with them or how to even approach them (King 445).

This uncertainty of approaching Thatcher continued the more she grew in recognition and also as she gained power and into her Premiership. The media approached Thatcher in a way which seemed to frame her as a wife and mother first, with the title Prime Minister as an afterthought or a somewhat shiny accessory like an earring or emblem on a handbag. When it comes to the media, not only do they have a role in mediating the identities between the public figure and the audience, but they also have a major role in helping to frame the image of the figure, based on how they choose to cover him or her. To the media's defense in Thatcher's case, though, Thatcher did show herself in the media eye by performing activities like grocery shopping, cooking, spending time with her children, etc., which at that time were all assumed roles of a woman.

To Thatcher's defense, however, this was also her attempt at maintaining her femininity, so an "identity impasse" was inevitable (Ponton 199). This was especially clear when Thatcher was elected as leader of the Conservative Party. Of the thirty questions she was asked by the

press, fifteen were asked on the basis of Thatcher being a woman and her thoughts of what it *meant* for her and the country, if the UK was *ready* for a major female government leader, and how many other women she planned to put in her Shadow Cabinet (209). Thatcher, clearly not giving a shred of attention for the meaning of women in any sense of her victory, gave a blunt and direct answer, shutting down any sense of this being a lift in the name of the women's liberation movement:

> Q: Mrs. Thatcher do you view your victory today as a victory for Margaret Thatcher alone or do you view it as well as a victory for women in Britain?
>
> MT: Neither. No one can win alone. Ever. You can only win by having a lot of people thinking and working the way you do. It's not a victory for Margaret Thatcher, it's not a victory for women. It is a victory for someone in politics. (211)

Thatcher, clearly aware of the potential no-win identity "trap" of a situation, chose words to carefully divert from an answer which would either portray her as acting selfish, or claiming a win for feminism, of which she was not supportive. Instead, she opted to claim victory for those in a community rallying around a cause for the greater good-of something bigger than themselves.

## *Leader* Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher's self-awareness was not only focused on how her sex played a role in how she portrayed herself to the public, but she was also very cognizant of what kind of leader she was going to be for the UK and how she intended to govern. One of the higher priorities for Thatcher from the outset was to eliminate the idea of maintaining consensus. She viewed consensus as a complete dead-end solution which portrayed a great weakness within a person, in

which she had zero time for allowing. For Thatcher, trying to maintain consensus, in the name of keeping the peace and not ruffling feathers on either side, was the complete opposite of productivity and where there is an unending search for principles and ideals with no end in sight-a perpetual cycle of appeasement. If a person does not intend to show strength and risk displeasing people along the way, then he or she does not deserve to be anywhere leadership (Williams 78). Though there was no way for her to know exactly the level of opposition she would be up against, Thatcher was aware of the unsuccessful efforts of previous governments' attempts to break through the ideological "staleness" (Berlinski, personal). Arguably, one of the most significant events during Thatcher's Premiership which truly tested her strength and mettle, was the Falklands War.

On March 19, 1982, word got to Thatcher that Argentine Dictator, Leopoldo Galtieri had unleashed the Argentine army to storm and overtake the British-controlled Falkland Islands, which were off the southern tip of South America. The timing of the Argentine invasion is significant for two reasons, both concerning perception: Britain and Thatcher's. When Thatcher came to power in 1979, Britain was far from the envy of the world. Between the end of World War II and 1979, it had gradually turned into a third-rate country, considered to be the "sick man" of Europe. It "boasted" a paralyzed economy and workforce, low standard of living, and an even lower overall morale. During this period, the British government seemed only concerned with managing the decline, keeping it steady enough to stay above water, or, what Thatcher would call (and despise), consensus. Meanwhile, Thatcher is still having her temperature taken by the British public. Yes, she had the attention of being a "first," but had still yet to be truly and heavily battle-tested. British citizens and also members of Thatcher's cabinet

were still observing and figuring out exactly what kind of leader she planned on being and for what she was really going to stand. Thatcher was one who had to see all options presented on the table, even if the opinion in the room was overwhelming one way or another. Consulting with her military advisors only produced mass amounts of pessimism, especially with a weakened British Navy which was in no shape to travel 8,000 miles, let alone wage a war against anyone on their own, anywhere, with the sole exception being the Soviet Union (Berlinski, Hoover Institution).

There was, however, a different angle to consider. Among her military analysis which was given, only one man, an admiral said the mission may be possible and he could draft a task force, if Thatcher permitted, which she immediately approved-not only of the task force, but to pull the trigger and approve the mission to defend sovereign British territory. This idea of British territory weighed heavy on Thatcher. She knew she had two options to consider, with one being to do nothing and allow the Argentines to take the islands, a land mass small enough to be forgotten if one wanted. For Thatcher, however, the size or distance did not matter. She viewed this entirely on principle and pride, for both herself and Britain. Argentina invaded based on pure power and geographic grounds. Essentially, Argentina decided to make a power move and take over the land because it was convenient and close enough to do so.

Given Britain's weakened state, Thatcher knew she, and Britain, had to take a stand. If Britain did not think of itself strong enough to defend its rightful land, then for what else would it bend the knee and buckle? How could she even think about projecting any sort of strength without being ridiculed? Furthermore, what kind of message would this send to other dictators around the world when it came to allowing them to invade any land they wanted, solely on the

grounds of "it's next to us?" (Berlinski).  Thatcher also made sure her position was made loud

and clear during an interview after the task force was deployed.  When asked if she would resign,

should the mission fail, she echoed a former British leader: "Do you remember what Queen

Victoria once said?  'Failure-the possibilities do not exist'" (Berlinski 677).  The reality of the

situation, though, was that failure was very much an existing possibility.  Thatcher had no

previous military experience and rejected the experienced, expert knowledge of the majority of

her military advisors, all while having a depleted Naval force.  There is the more present notion

that should Britain had been humiliatingly defeated during the Falklands War, the public,

political opposition, and future historians could have tarnished Thatcher from that moment on as

insane and reckless, and most likely a significant reason for possibly weakening Great Britain

even more (Berlinski, personal).  The defense of territory for Britain, however, was not the only

factor which weighed on Thatcher's mind as the war was underway and continued.  Her

perceived status of a world leader with strength and conviction was also a battle she was

fighting.

An example of Thatcher's conviction was certainly displayed for the world to see when

she gave orders to sink the Argentine warship, the *Belgrano*.  During the war, Britain had set up

a two hundred mile exclusion zone, warning that any Argentine ship within the zone would be

subject to destruction.  The *Belgrano*, albeit very close to the line, did not pass into the zone, and

was even starting to sail away from the islands.  Thatcher made the call to have the ship sunk

anyway.  While some Parliament Members and British citizens claimed this was a war crime,

Thatcher stood her ground and held firm that the ship was a direct threat to the British.  Her

stance was especially visible during an interview with famed journalist, David Frost.  As the two

went back and forth, seemingly with Frost attempting to get Thatcher to admit there was fault in her decision, and Thatcher holding strong in her stance, Thatcher's voice began to get even more impassioned.  She believed she made the right decision, maintaining she and her military advisors saw the *Belgrano* turning in a way which positioned itself to soon make a play for British ships again.  There is one key exchange, which, when viewing the interview, one can see the conviction in Thatcher's eyes and hear it in her voice, regardless if one believes she was at fault or within her right.  Staring Frost down, not giving an inch, she proclaims in an intent, low solemn tone: "That ship was a danger to our boys. *That's* why the ship was sunk. I know it was right to sink her. And I would do...the same...again."  She continues with a slight dig towards Frost, as if bringing out scolding Mother Maggie: "Because so would you, had you not been a television commentator, but been in a position of responsibility…".

Her rigid stance as world leader was also shown to even her closest of allies.  During this time, Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan had formed not only a strong, allied "working relationship," but also a solid, personal friendship.  This dynamic, however, hit a snag during the Falklands War.  A major part was due to Reagan and his State Department attempting to get Thatcher to agree to an appeasement deal with Argentina, something for which Thatcher would not stand.  She took this as a slight from someone whom she considered a dear friend and also Britain's strongest international supporter.  She tried making the case to Reagan for seeing the mission through by comparing the Falklands to the U.S. state of Alaska, appealing to their close bond and similar governing style of peace-through-strength.  She made the point how there would be no way Reagan would ever let Alaska be taken, send hundreds of troops to the territory to reclaim it for the U.S., but then back off under the hopes of a ceasefire treaty.  Reagan, not

seeing the accuracy in her comparison, still tried to talk Thatcher into an appeasement deal.

Thatcher then appeals to the personal. Moreover, she felt her leadership and strength called into

question. Take this excerpt from the ending of a phone call between the two, concerning the

possibility of a Thatcher appeasement deal:

> MT: Ron, I'm not handing over the islands now. I can't lose the lives and blood of our
>
> soldiers to hand the islands over to a contact. It's not possible. You are surely not asking
>
> me, Ron, after we've lost some of our finest young men, you are surely not saying, that
>
> after the Argentine withdrawal, that our forces, and our administration, become
>
> immediately idle? I had to go to immense distances and mobilize half my country.
>
> RR: Margaret, but I thought that part of this proposal...Margaret, I...Yes, well...Well,
>
> Margaret, I know that I've intruded and I know how…
>
> MT: You've not intruded at all, and I'm glad you telephoned. (Berlinski 176).

Cue the sound of an elongated dial tone, because their conversation ended there. One can feel

the subtle tension bubbling below the surface, but was kept underneath long enough to not do

any damage. That was the strength of Thatcher and Reagan's friendship. Thatcher, in this

instance, though, could have felt as if she were being ordered about by Reagan, or at the very

least, like someone else was trying to act like a parent towards *her*, in the midst of trying to

prove her mettle in her first huge test as a world leader.

In the end, on June 14, 1982, the Falklands War came to an end, with Thatcher and her

British Navy defeating the Argentines and reclaiming the islands in the name of Britain. More

importantly though, the victory gave an enormous boost to not only British morale, but an

enormous gain for British prestige and credibility on the world stage once again and propelled

Thatcher to a massive general election victory in 1983 (178-179).  Thatcher also personally

noted the following about Britain's perception before and after the war: "We had come to be

seen by both friends and enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capability to defend

its interests in peace, let alone war.  Victory in the Falklands changed that.  Everywhere I went

after the war, Britain's name meant something more than it had" (Thatcher 173-174).  Thatcher

was not focused on only restoring British sovereignty over the Falklands, she was also, above all,

focused on restoring an ownership of British pride for the people of the UK.  Like becoming the

leader she knew she could be, no other possibility would suffice.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Both her strong will and also being a unique and unusual political figure saw Margaret

Thatcher's identity form during the span of her eleven year Premiership over Britain.  This

identity has varied between Thatcher's own perception and also from those in the political and

public sphere, while earning her the label "Iron Lady" in the process.  Thatcher's ability to

maintain a balance between strong governance, while keeping intact elements of femininity,

through adversity and triumph, has been an integral factor in shaping both her own and the

public's perception of her tenure as Prime Minister.  Ever cognizant of the perpetual watchful

eye of the press and public, deliver for her country not only a stronger country, but the

confidence in a devoted and determined leader.  For Margaret Thatcher, being a "first" of any

kind was a non-factor when it came to her determined vision for her country's people of whom

she loved.  Her success as leader meant Britain's success; there was no other alternative.

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