SEDUCTION: A FEMINIST READING OF BERTHE MORISOT’S PAINTINGS

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my family for always supporting my dreams,

To my professors who mentored me,

To my colleagues who inspired me with their own work,

And to my partner, Christian Tillett, for his endless encouragement and love.
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ABSTRACT

Berthe Morisot was one of the founders of the French Impressionist movement in the nineteenth century. However, she is not researched with the same level of respect as her male Impressionist counterparts. Scholars often rely on her biography to analyze her artwork, compare her to other women artists, or briefly mention her accomplishments in a generalized history of the French Impressionist movement. I analyzed nine of Morisot’s paintings and applied feminist theory, including third-wave feminism (post-1960’s). My research was angled to approach and understand Morisot’s artwork as a contemporary woman would at an exhibition.
CHAPTER ONE: Review of Literature

The use of feminist theory in art is both a conceptual and applied theory advocating for the social and political equality of the sexes. In point of fact, feminists reacted to centuries of patriarchal oppression. A result of this oppression has been the exclusion of women from any political power especially over something as simple as their own bodies. Feminism as a movement occurred in France during the post-revolutionary period when they were redefining their national identity. Towards the turn of the twentieth-century, Paris became a cosmopolitan space that liberated traditional ideology in many aspects especially regarding gender and social class. A feminist art historian challenges the patriarchal appropriation of art. The theory redefines femininity and masculinity by removing the binary opposition of gender characteristics (stereotypes), and inserts a female’s perspective and interpretation of the visual arts.

The art historian who most fully expounded upon this was Linda Nochlin. She analyzed nineteenth century European artwork and applied a feminist lens. She was especially interested in things such as the female fragmented body, the incomplete family portrait, overt voyeurism, tropes of landscape (the use of the female body as nature), and in finally unpacking the binary opposition of feminine versus masculine. Her essay titled, Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? was published in 1971. It became the first feminist art history essay ever widely read. The first sentence of the article begins with the question that is literally the title. Why? Nochlin examines the reasons be-
hind the lack of gender diversity studied in art history. Her opening critique was the lack of women artists included in the canon. Nochlin examined the socio-political disadvantages women have confronted throughout history. Throughout time art production was a male activity taught in various academies. The experience for women was different because a private teacher generally taught them at home. They lacked the opportunity to learn art in a broader context and thus lacked the opportunity to produce a wider array of genre. For example, if women did produce paintings, it was not necessarily oil on canvas, because it was not easily accessible at home, or easily self-taught. Artwork produced by women was then perceived as a craft rather than a fine art and not taken as seriously by the public as was their male counterparts.

Feminist art historians are told to stay away from the simple solution of only reinserting, superficially, women into the canon. Nochlin suggested that all of us interested in the arts should question the authority of who is included and who is excluded. Another point that Nochlin examined is the need to recognize who were the patrons of the arts. Who had the capabilities of obtaining an art education? Who had the opportunity of exhibiting their own art? Women, then as now, need to first believe they are equal to men without guilt or self-pity. One can argue we have allowed ourselves to be written out of the canon with our passiveness and acceptance of the situation. Women need to be committed to the redefinition of femininity and their roles with less obedience to male opinion. My interest in Berthe Morisot is due to this set of complicated experiences for she too was held back by the patriarchal power structure.
Another important author is the art historian Norma Broude. She focused on Impressionist landscapes, color theory, and the tropes of landscape as a female body. In her book titled, *Impressionism: A Feminist Reading*, published in 1991, Broude discussed the effects of the Enlightenment on the progress of science, particularly focusing on the importance of the iconography and optics of color. Throughout history, science has been understood as a masculine subject to study because only men were allowed to attend schools of various kinds. Science as a subject was considered to be rational and logical. These two characteristics were unassociated with women, because they were stereotyped as being emotional and irrational. Curiously, the “over use” of color in painting was understood as being feminine due to its affiliation with emotion.

Broude also interestingly argued that Impressionism complicated the binary opposition of masculine and feminine characteristics. Impressionism was heavily based upon the use of color, amongst other things. The progress of science and study of optics resulted in the development of color theory. This impacted the Impressionists’ understanding of light in fleeting moments and their choice of palette. The thickly applied pigment on the canvas was interpreted in its day by the public as feminine due to the lack of academic technique and the perceived visibility of emotions in the brushwork. However, the foundation of the color theory was scientific, which should have been perceived as a masculine subject. Yet French Impressionist paintings embodied both masculine and feminine characteristics. If both genders were present then how could not be the negation of each other?
One of the issues in the study of Berthe Morisot is that scholars gloss over her work. Typically, they simplify and correlate Berthe Morisot’s biography to her portfolio of artwork. The scholarship is a generalization rather than an individual analysis of each piece of art. Also, due to their personal relationship, scholars concentrate on a comparison between Morisot and her brother-in-law, Édouard Manet, or the other female Impressionist living in France, Mary Cassatt. This sort of treatment minimizes the significance of Morisot. It does not help to clarify her role in the establishment and growth of the Impressionist movement.

In 1957, her grandson, Denis Rouart, collected correspondences between Berthe Morisot, her Impressionist colleagues, and family members. The letters were first published in French before finally being translated into English, it was titled, *Berthe Morisot: Correspondence with Her Family and Friends*. This has become a significant source for Morisot scholars. This newly accessed material arranged chronologically, now allows scholars some access to the thinking process of Morisot on specific political events as well as on her artwork. The dates on the letters also allow scholars to contextualize particular events, locations, and associates. While it is extremely significant to have these correspondences, scholars have a tendency to minimalize the information and use it as a method to date and still gloss over her paintings. This is why more research is needed on Berthe Morisot.

Only two scholars have written biographies on Berthe Morisot. Anne Higonnet published *Berthe Morisot* in 1973. Higonnet chronologically narrates pivotal life events
in the painter’s life. Especially important are chapters nine through eleven, which focused on the juxtaposition of Édouard Manet and Berthe Morisot’s artwork. Manet is described as a role model and master painter that influenced the work of Morisot as if she was his pupil when in fact she was not. Morisot is not positioned as a colleague of Manet, which reduces the significance of her artwork. Furthermore, an entire chapter is dedicated to her husband, Eugène Manet, solely because he is the brother of Édouard Manet. The extensive description of the relationship between the Manet brothers and Morisot also reduced the level of independence that she had obtained as a professional woman whose aspirations extended well beyond marriage.

In 2002, a catalog of artwork titled, Berthe Morisot 1841-1895 was published in French by the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille and in an additional volume titled, Berthe Morisot by the Fondation Pierre Gianadda in Marigny. The second chapter of the catalog is titled The Portraits of Berthe Morisot by Édouard Manet. This particular chapter introduces Morisot as a female model rather than a colleague of Manet. This is an inversion of the author’s stated intent. The third chapter The Sensations Berthe Morisot had at the Louvre explained how Manet became a key person in Morisot’s artistic circle because he provided networking and introductions to other artists. In total, the catalog Berthe Morisot 1841-1895 dedicated the first forty-four pages to the influence of Manet on Morisot with other references of him scattered throughout the catalog’s text. The author did not deal with the stated subject matter of Berthe Morisot. The catalog analyzed Morisot’s artwork only in a generalized history of the Impressionist movement.
Morisot is not the central focus. The text positions her as a female painter amongst male artists, but does not include information specifically analyzing her individual paintings. Instead, the author emphasizes the group of Impressionists and is a generalized history of late nineteenth century Impressionism.

In 1999, Griselda Pollock, a feminist art historian, published a book *Differencing the Canon*. Only the ninth chapter titled, *A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the Dark, Seeing Double, at Least, with Manet* mentions *Berthe Morisot*. The first paragraph of the chapter emphasizes Morisot’s achievements as a female artist, which focuses on her gender rather than equalizing her artistic achievements with her male colleagues. Also, the portrayal of Morisot’s portrait in Manet’s work is more significant in scholarship than her portrait paintings. A photograph of Morisot is juxtaposed with Manet’s portrait of Morisot titled, *Repose* in 1870. Both portraits depict Morisot reclining. Pollock compares and contrasts the aesthetics of Morisot’s physicality in both portraits because she analyzes the differences between the male and female perspective of viewing. As an example of this is in the examination of the feminine garments Morisot has chosen to wear as a model. We do not know who chose the clothing that she is wearing, but they are usually white. Pollock associates the use of this white iconographically as feminine and purity, whereas black garments are associated as masculine because the lack of color equates to a lack of beauty. Referencing color association with gender establishes an acknowledgement of binary opposition; specifically the soft and light colors are feminine and strong and dark colors are masculine.
Pollock compared Morisot to the woman in Manet’s painting, *Olympia* completed in 1863. The model in *Olympia* was a renowned escort whereas Morisot belonged to the bourgeois. The main focus was to analyze gender roles in correlation to sexuality. Griselda Pollock inserts and develops a discourse on the representation of the female body and female sexuality in art history. However, rather than redefining masculinity or femininity, Pollock uses the terms as defined by patriarchal ideology. Pollock does not emphasize Morisot’s production of artwork despite the article categorized as feminist art history. Pollock also limits Morisot’s scholarship to biographical achievements without providing specific commentary on Morisot’s individual paintings and career.

The art historian Kathleen Adler wrote the introduction to an edition of the text, *Berthe Morisot: Correspondences with Her Family and Friends* published in 1987. She also published an article titled, *The Suburban, the Modern, and ‘une Dame de Passy’* in 1989. The text focuses on Berthe Morisot as part of the French bourgeois culture amidst the urbanization of Paris. Adler views Paris as a constructed modernized space divided by multiple binary oppositions. Gender is associated with a designated space. For example, the city is either city-suburb, city-country, urban-rural, or public-private that can be interpreted as male or female space. Adler associates the historical association of women as part of the private sphere whereas men are part of the public sphere. The woman is designed to the home because a female’s gender role is intertwined with her biological capabilities of reproduction. Essentialism, which is defined as a theory of practice that defines a person’s existence and role in society, correlates the role of wo-
men to motherhood and the nurturer of children. A division of labor in modern societies was no longer necessary as in previous eras. The topic of women in an urban space is more important in this article than the specific art historical analysis of Berthe Morisot’s artwork.

Morisot tends to be compared to other women artists rather than being included as an equal in comparison to renowned male Impressionists. It seems that there are only three or four female artists worthy of discussion. If a female Impressionist is included in scholarship the article features American Impressionist painter, Mary Cassatt, or French Impressionist painter Eva Gonzalèz. The artwork of Berthe Morisot is only briefly mentioned or used for a comparison. This lacking of female diversity is continued by Britta C. Dwyer who published a review of an exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt titled, *Women Impressionists Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Eva Gonzales, Marie Bracquemond* in 2009. These four women were selected for the exhibition likely based upon their gender. Also, these four artists are categorized as female Impressionists or women Impressionists as opposed to just Impressionist painters.

Accompanying the exhibition was a catalog with images and supplementary text. The Director of Schirn Kunsthalle, Max Hollein, provides the angle for the exhibition in the catalog’s introduction. Here he states that the curator selected this exhibition title to explore the correlation between Impressionism and femininity. Morisot and Cassatt received a combined five chapters dedicated to their artwork in the exhibition catalog. Sylvie Patry, a Curator at the Musée d’Orsay, wrote a short essay on Morisot that seem-
ly dismisses her accomplishments in the general historical development of the Impressionists. In the review by Dwyer, only two paragraphs mention the essays on Morisot whereas half the article was dedicated to scholarship in the exhibition catalog on Mary Cassatt. The emphasis on Cassatt reflects the depth of scholarship published on her and the lack of scholarship on Morisot beyond her personal biography.

Scholars also use Marxism to analyze artworks by Morisot. Linda Nochlin published an essay titled, Morisot’s Wet Nurse: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting as part of the anthology edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard titled, The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History. This particular essay by Nochlin is significant because the essay analyzes one particular painting by Morisot, Wet Nurse. The wet nurse is depicted feeding Julie Manet, and Nochlin paralleled this to being akin to the history of the Madonna and child paintings. Further Nochlin explains that the role of mother is divided into two categories: biological and nurturer. A person that nurtures and raises the baby does not have to be the same woman who births the baby. We see both women at work. The wet nurse’s work is to feed the child while Morisot’s (her biological mother) work is to paint their portraits in the garden.

Nochlin also emphasized the changed role of women from motherhood to a career woman. Work specifically segregated for women is often correlated to the body and to sexuality. Another example of this included in Nochlin’s essay is women working as prostitutes or performers working, such as ballerinas depicted by Degas. Both of these representations of females use their bodies to perform their work. In addition, Nochlin
correlated Impressionist paintings to depictions of female leisure. The idea of public space and parks for pleasure evolved from what was once a traditionally masculine space, part of a public sphere that now had changed to include women.

Finally, Freudian psychoanalytic theory is a popular lens for scholarship about Morisot. Mary Jacobus published an article titled, *Berthe Morisot: Inventing the Psyche* in 2008. The essay focuses on Morisot’s painting, *The Psyche*. Jacobus parallels the portrait of a half-clad female at her boudoir in Morisot’s paintings, to the portraits of Morisot in Manet’s paintings. It is argued the young female model in front of the mirror in Morisot’s painting is a younger self-portrait of herself. The self-absorption is amplified with the awareness of the mirrors. Mirrors not only reflect an exterior but an interior view of their subject matter. The potentiality of voyeurism as signified by the mirror is interrupted by the ability of the viewer to see both the young woman’s face in profile and her reflection. By not portraying the woman’s eyes staring back at the viewer, Morisot’s painting *The Psyche* portrays themes of self-reflection rather than solely pleasing the male gaze. Jacobus argues the viewer intrudes upon this constructed private and intimate space.

Having summarized all of this, more works need to be done on Morisot. This thesis applies third wave, a more in depth version of the 1960’s feminist theory, to nine of Berthe Morisot’s paintings. Here I will analyze the representation of women and femininity in the constructed spaces in the paintings. The constructed spaces Morisot paints include a landscape, and an interior space of a home. The female models are de-
picted alongside elements of nature that are tropes of female sexuality, such as water symbolizing purity, or fields signifying domestication and fertility. Some of Morisot’s paintings also concentrate on the relationship between a maternal figure and a daughter. Motherhood is a gender role that focuses on the female body and female sexuality, which is progressive ideology of third-wave feminism. Although Morisot was not a self-claimed feminist, she desired to be an equal with her male colleagues. The paintings by Morisot are a product that redefines woman’s work.

To get to a better understanding of Morisot’s work, since scholarship is limited, I apply theory from renowned Gender and Women’s Studies scholars. The three main texts that influenced my work are The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir, The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf, and Of Woman Born by Adrienne Rich. Simone de Beauvoir explains the historical oppression of women, essentialism, and the evolved gender roles in society from a female perspective. Naomi Wolf coined the term “the beauty myth,” which references societal pressures for women to purchase unnecessary cosmetics to please the male gaze and attract a suitor. Finally, Adrienne Rich discusses the institute of marriage as a patriarchal social structure that suppresses the feminine gender role.

Morisot’s paintings focus on the representation of women in specific environments. The three main environments depicted in Morisot paintings are women in gardens or fields, women near a mirror or reflective surface, and women with their daughters. Females become the dominant subjects in Morisot’s portfolio. Therefore, I focus on the representation of women depicted in these constructed spaces that have sexual
connotations. The three chapters focus on the different relationships between the female models and the constructed space. I selected three paintings for each chapter. In each, the first painting analyzed was painted prior to the Impressionist movement; the second painting was painted during the Impressionist movement; and the third painting was after the final Impressionist exhibition.
CHAPTER TWO: Tropes of Female Sexuality in Landscape

Berthe Morisot’s artwork predominately consists of female models deliberately depicted in a constructed space. The female body is often a trope for naturalistic landscape due to the capabilities of reproduction and fertility, mirrored by nature itself. Society’s definition of women in their original state bares the expectation of virginity. Similarly, a piece of land that is not yet owned is referred to as “virgin land.” In this parallel the man is the dominant gender whereas the woman is passive, mainly as a piece of submissive property. Even if obliquely, these constructed spaces where the female forms are depicted reference sexuality. The parallel of women and landscape allude to expectations of purity or to the essentialist alignments of women and nature.¹

Essentialism categorizes people using a set of intrinsic characteristics, natures, or dispositions. In essence, young girls are taught to aspire towards marriage and motherhood. Femininity sorrowfully devolves to embody passivity, weakness, and merely the role of nurturer. According to Simone de Beauvoir, “Males and females are two types of individuals who are differentiated in one species for the purposes of repro-

duction; they can be defined only correlatively.” It is inconsistent to project the male expectation of purity onto females, if women’s societal role solely revolves around the seduction of suitors and reproduction. In reality, the exchange between the genders is much more complicated.

*Prior to the Impressionist Movement: Hide and Seek*

In 1873, Berthe Morisot painted *Hide and Seek* in oil on canvas [Figure 1]. The painting is 45 cm. x 55 cm. In the background, farms and fields stretch to the horizon, filling the space with rows of crops. A woman in a white dress identified as Berthe Morisot’s sister, Edma, stands in the foreground. She is partially hidden behind a tree covered in red blossoming flowers that is directly placed in the center of the composition. Her waist is cinched with a black belt, and her other accessories include a black hat with a green ribbon and a white umbrella, which she holds in her left hand. On the left side of the tree, in a lush field, Edma’s daughter, Jeanne, stands. She is bedecked in all white, a white dress and a white hat with a white ribbon.

The garments that the female models wore signified their bourgeois social status in alignment with feminine ideals. George Moore, a French art critic who championed

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3 Edma Morisot decided to quit painting to fulfill her role as wife and mother despite having a great deal of success; she was also accepted into the Salon exhibition alongside her sister, Berthe Morisot. In 1869, Edma married Adolphe Pontillon, a French naval officer. She became an ideal example of traditional femininity. See Denis Rouart, ed, *Berthe Morisot Correspondence with Her Family and Friends*, London: Camden Press, 1987, pg. 1-236.
the Impressionists, stated, “Never did a white dress play so important or indeed so charming a part in a picture. The dress is the picture.”

The white garments represented a moral responsibility. The exposure of the woman’s skin was identified as indecent and sinful, according to Christian ideology. Thus, women wore modest attire that did not expose their bodies. For example, the dresses depicted in the painting had sleeves that covered their arms, a skirt that covered their legs, and a high collar line that covered their necks. Those who could afford the most fashionable attire wore dresses shaped to the body with sculptural folds and thin fabric. The depiction of expensive clothing worn by the women models indicated idleness.

Morisot depicted clean white garments. White would easily stain if the women were physically working outdoors, but bourgeois women did not have the social responsibility to work.

A division of labor evolved from the division in gender expectations. Men were the breadwinners who financially supported their families. In opposition, women’s role in society was to be a wife and mother. Thus, they were associated with their home where the family belonged. Morisot segregated these two constructed spaces with the farmland in the background (private property) and the naturalistic landscape (public property) in the foreground. Rather than being positioned in a home garden, associated

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4 The original French quote stated, “Jamais une robe blanche n’a joué un rôle si important ou si charmant décidément dans un tableau. La robe est le tableau,” see Gianadda pg. 35.
6 Ibid pg. 120 and 126.
with the home, the depictions of Edma and Jeanne are in a lush field. The women are represented as independent from the male governance of the home.

In the lush field, Morisot depicted Edma and Jeanne playing a game of Hide and Seek. In the game, the seeker actively searches for the participant in hiding. The participant in hiding has a passive role of waiting to be found by the seeker. The power structure of Hide and Seek favors the participant who seeks the person in hiding. Similarly, the power dynamic between genders favors the male because it is the male who actively seeks the female in society when in search for a wife or lover. According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, “Whether she is provocative or consensual, it is he who takes her: she is taken.” Although only Edma and Jeanne are depicted participating in the game of Hide and Seek, both are hidden behind the tree. Who is the participant in the role of seeker? Despite the negation of a male figure in the painting, the presence of a daughter signifies Edma as “taken” by her husband in marriage.

A woman was reduced to property as a man’s wife during the nineteenth century. Women were not legally permitted to be independent entities; therefore, daughters were in the possession of their fathers until marriage when they became the possession of their husband. Virginity acts as a payment towards the husband to signify the exclusivity in ownership of her body, her genealogy, and her living situation. A “sexual des-

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7 See De Beauvoir pg. 35.
8 Ibid pg. 442.
9 Ibid pg. 457.
“tiny” develops for a female virgin who, according to Simone de Beauvoir, overcomes both psychological and physical “labors” as the man takes pleasures from her pain of being deflowered. Thus, the farmland in the background is no longer considered virgin territory. The rows of crops visualize a man working on the land and making it his own space. Likewise, the blossoming flowers featured on the branches of the tree remain in their natural state on virgin territory. The naturalistic, lush fields are untouched by man. Thus, the space is not yet deflowered.

The female models are depicted on the visible divide of the cultivated farmland and the virgin territory. Symbolically, this particular location in the composition represents a divide in expectation for female sexuality. Women are expected to either be virgins, like the naturalistic landscape, or be “taken” by their husband, like the farmland in the background. Morisot depicted Edma as independent and dependent, pure and sexually active with a daughter as evidentiary support. If the depiction of Edma embodied both masculine and feminine characteristics then the gender power structures could not be the negation of each other.

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10 Ibid pg. 461.
During the Impressionist Period: On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne

In 1884, Berthe Morisot painted *On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne* in oil on canvas [Figure 2]. The painting is 27 cm. x 35 cm. Edma is identified as the woman on the left in the composition. She is depicted in a blue dress and a white hat with a blue ribbon. Jeanne is identified as the little girl. She is wearing a white dress with a white hat. The water in *On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne* consists of a variety of blue tones, similar to Edma’s dress, with reflections of dark green, which is the same hue as the grass towards the top of the canvas. Orange is found in the hair of Edma, the swan’s duckbill, the hat of Edma, and the boat. The two females are illuminated by the sunlight and are diagonally positioned in the center of the composition, which guides the viewer’s eye horizontally across the canvas. The perspective of the painting is tilted downwards so the viewer sees only the water surrounding the two female figures in the wooden boat and a small fraction of a park visible towards the top of the composition. The only other subjects in the composition are two swans gliding in the water to the right of the boat.

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11 In 1884, Morisot assisted in organizing a posthumous retrospective exhibition and auction. They included the works of Edouard Manet, her brother-in-law. It was located at the École des Beaux-Arts because he always desired to be accepted by this art academy. Morisot also notably spent the summer at Bougival, a western suburb of Paris, which emphasized her social status and capabilities of leisure amidst the modernization of Paris. An example of her at leisure is in *On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne*. See Rouart pg. 1-236.

12 Degas écrit, “Un peu vaporeuse cach[ait] un dessin des plus sûrs... Mme. Morisot expose, par exemple de jolies ébauches de femmes, il y a beaucoup de talent et de vie dans ces lignes vaporeuses et à peine tracées...Pourquoi avec ce talent là ne se donne-t-elle pas la peine de finir ? ” See Ganadda-Martigny pg. 188.
Women were traditionally depicted in art as bathers when associated with water because it symbolized purity in accordance to baptismal practices. The act of bathing in water metaphorically implied an expectation for women to be virgins. These religious connotations were also associated with the pond in the park that Morisot painted. However, the two female models were depicted gliding on top of the water in a boat rather than submerged into the pond. The women were not being cleansed or purified but rather perpendicular to the symbolic baptismal water.

The only subjects physically in the water were two white swans and one black swan. The set of swans paralleled the positioning of the two women in the boat. In French the term for swan is grue, which was also slang for prostitute. Swans were also considered “ornamental birds” due to their grace and poise—characteristics associated with femininity of French bourgeois women. The white feathers of the swan symbolized purity and faithfulness: similarly to the white garments that Morisot depicted her female models wearing. The black swan was considered mysterious, somber, and sinful in folklore. Black correlated to notions of dirt and impurity since it is in binary opposition to the color white. The use of color symbolism was an important component in Impressionist paintings. Berthe Morisot was inspired by the subtle colorful qualities of water.

13See “The Swan,” in Order of Bards and Druids.
The surface reflected fleeting moments of constant movement, which continuously changed the color seen in the water.\textsuperscript{14}

An interest in studying color theory and optics correlated to the Enlightenment and the increased interest of science. John Constable, an English artist, stated, “Painting is a science, and should be pursued as an enquiry into the laws of nature.”\textsuperscript{15} Nineteenth century chemist Eugène Chevreul first published his research in 1839 on the subject of color.\textsuperscript{16} He was highly influenced by Newton’s aesthetic studies of perception. It was Chevreul who discovered the relational effect of complementary colors positioned near each other. By positioning two contrasting colors next to each other, such as blue and orange, the colors visually appear bolder. The study of optics and color theory was considered a hard science and regarded as a masculine subject due to the applied methods of logic and rationality.

Impressionists, including Morisot, had knowledge of the development in optics and color theory. The plein-air technique used by the Impressionists was based off these new studies of perception. The artists aspired to paint what they saw. Morisot painted specific colors in a specific location in a specific time frame. Norma Broude stated in her book \textit{Impressionism: A Feminist Reading}:

The goal of the Impressionists was to render their impressions of fugitive luminary phenomena, or “effects,” a goal that was long regarded in the twentieth

\textsuperscript{14} See Ganadda-Martigny pg. 188.
\textsuperscript{15} See Norma Broude \textit{Impressionism: A Feminist Interpretation} pg. 117.
\textsuperscript{16} See Broude pg. 115.
century as merely an optical exercise...This connection in Impressionist criticism between nature’s luminary states and the expression of an artist’s subjective experience in nature provides a vital key to our understanding of Impressionism; although, as we have seen, it is not unique to its literature.\footnote{17 \textit{Ibid} pg. 31.}

However, the use of color in painting without structured contoured lines were regarded as irrational and emotional—two feminine characteristics in the gender binary. In opposition, the masculinity rejected emotions. Men were supposed to be rational and logical. In art, the line became a visual cue that signified this expected rational composure from men. This concept of brushstroke, line versus color, was further instilled by the male-dominated art schools. The academic style of painting and drawing in the nineteenth century included an emphasis on lines rather than color. The Impressionistic focus on water, particularly the reflection of light and color in water, was perceived as a feminine artistic style.\footnote{18 See Broude pg. 150-151.}

Morisot’s artwork was perceived as feminine due to the lack of lines and lack of realism in her paintings. The emotions of the artist are visible in the rapid brushstrokes. Norma Broude quotes English critic P.G. Hamerton in her book \textit{Impressionism: A Feminist Reading}:

Impressionism is in reality nothing more than effect-painting, which is the foundation of harmony in landscape and also the necessary condition of the expression of the artist’s feeling. Accurate linear drawing of the forms of tangible objects...excludes the expression of sentiment and is unfavorable to unity, while,
an effect almost ensures unity of itself, and excites an emotion in the artist which communicates itself in his work.\textsuperscript{19}

Morisot exemplified the scientific knowledge of color in her artwork when she painted blue, orange, and green hues next to each other in the composition. This color combination is a split complementary color scheme. Morisot applied Chevreul’s research on the relationship between complementary colors.

The applied color theory in the composition of the painting \textit{On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne} visualized Morisot’s understanding of science and the study of optics, masculine subject matters. Yet, the plein-air style of painting that depends on the perception of color was considered feminine. Impressionism then embodies both masculine and feminine characteristics in the construction of the paintings. If the art movement could embody both masculine and feminine characteristics then the subjects depicted in the Impressionist paintings could also embody both sets of characteristics. The two female models depicted in the boat were wearing appropriate feminine bourgeois garments. However, their lack of interaction with the water also symbolized a lack of cleanliness or purity that coincided with feminine ideals. The female models visually dissembled the synonymous relationship of purity, female sexuality, and water. Morisot redefined feminine ideals to include female sexuality rather than categorize a woman being either a virgin or a whore.

\textsuperscript{19} See Broude pg. 70.
After the Impressionist Movement: The Cherry Pickers

In 1891, toward the end of Morisot’s career, she painted *The Cherry Pickers* using oil on canvas [Figure 3]. The painting is 154 cm. x 84 cm. Two women are depicted with a ladder in the center of the composition. One woman is in profile, wearing a white dress, and stands on the top steps of a ladder picking cherries from the surrounding trees in the orchard. The second woman has her back towards the viewer and is depicted in a white dress with a white hat. She stands on the ground and assists the first woman collect cherries. The background of the painting is presumably a cherry orchard where the women participate in a seasonal activity.

The cherry orchard as a constructed landscape incorporated symbols of female sexuality. The cherry was a common symbol correlating with the loss of virginity similar to the term “deflowering.” Initially, one would perceive the depiction of women as

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20 In 1890, Morisot traveled to Mézy where she stayed at Maison Blotière. She remained in this location for the year. La Belle Époque—1890 until 1914 with World War I—, which was a progressive period that high artistic and cultural development occurred. It was towards the turn of the century around the same time period of the last Impressionist Exhibition, in 1886. Morisot participated in this exhibition. The following year, in 1887, Morisot also exhibited her artwork at the Georges Petit’s International Exhibition, with Les XX in Brussels, and in Durand-Ruel’s New York Impressionist Exhibition. This was significant because Morisot’s artwork was now viewed on an international stage. Berthe Morisot completed multiple studies of *The Cherry Pickers*. Two major differences between the variations are the color palettes and the position of the arms of the woman picking the cherries from the tree. Degas preferred Morisot’s version that was smaller in scale. See Ganadda-Martigny pg. 384.

21 *The Cherry Pickers* was completed one year to her solo exhibition, which was also the same year as the death of her husband, Eugène Manet. Due to the death of her husband, she missed her own solo exhibition opening. See Rouart pg. 189.
figures integrated in the landscape. The idea of women embodied into the orchard coincides with the female body as a trope for landscape. The female models depicted are part of the orchard, part of the fruit amongst the trees waiting to be picked or “taken.”

Adrienne Rich, a Gender and Women’s Studies scholar, described the sexual role of women in the restrictions of marriage and institutionalized motherhood. She stated, “Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self.”22 The gender role of women was a socially constructed and learned behavior taught from the older generations to the younger generations. The patriarchal ideology of nineteenth century France taught a young girl to aspire to a heterosexual relationship and pursue motherhood rather than a profession. Adrienne Rich states that women “sought only to fulfill the requirements of both institutions,”25 a social role advertised to women as a natural role where they need to play their part.24 Consequently, women lacked knowledge of their own needs and suppressed their own desirability beyond marriage and motherhood.25

Adrienne Rich also argued that males excluded aspects of sexuality such as lesbianism, abortion, and illegitimate children. These forms of female sexuality threat-

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22 See Adrienne Rich, On Born Woman pg. 42.
23 Ibid pg. 41.
24 Ibid pg. 41.
25 Ibid pg. 41.
ened the male’s political power and lineage.\textsuperscript{26} Whether the family was bourgeoisie or proletariat, a man needed a woman, in marriage according to Catholicism, to reproduce an heir for his family name. Sons were the only offspring allowed to pass down the family name. This cultural tradition further promoted the favoritism towards males in society and neglected the genealogy of women. These restrictions on female sexuality favored the patriarchy.

Female independence was established through opportunities of work specifically designated for women. For example, Morisot depicted both female models on the ladder, gathering the fruit. The role of gatherer was traditionally feminine and in opposition to the masculine role of hunter. Adrienne Rich states:

\textit{The mother ‘collected wild plants, berries, barks, flowers and roots...these she dried and labeled...to be used upon short notice...at times she was a surgeon...and fitted and bound together fingers, hanging on shreds; or removed a rusty spike from a foot, washed the wound...and saved the injured member.’}\textsuperscript{27}

Women had more opportunities for productivity, work and, therefore independence.\textsuperscript{28} When women from lower classes worked, it was for necessity because the male was negligent in his gender role as provider and essentially became dependent on his wife’s earnings.\textsuperscript{29} This emasculated a man. If females participated in a designated male space then the space was perceived as feminine. This provokes the question: what role would

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid pg. 42.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid pg. 47-48.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid pg. 48.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid pg. 49.
men have in society if women began working, earning money, and not at home with the children? Women were warned that their absence from the home had negative side effects for the family. If women had a career then she was considered negligent of the children.\textsuperscript{30} This was an oppressive strategy practiced by men to maintain an imbalance of power between genders.

Morisot depicted the women reclaiming their sexuality in \textit{The Cherry Pickers}. They are in a cherry orchard, a masculine space, and participate in the active role of selector rather than selected. If the cherry symbolized virginity and purity then the women selecting the fruit own it as their own property. The female models decide when and what cherries they want to keep or give away. Metaphorically, this ownership symbolizes the female ownership of female sexuality and the female body.

Berthe Morisot redefined the expectations of female sexuality. She was a female artist, wife, and mother who understood the science of optics and color theory. Yet as an Impressionist painter she painted an emotional perception of constructed landscapes at a specific fleeting moment. The combination of masculine and feminine characteristics that Morisot embodied as a person is also embedded into her artwork. All three paintings include depictions of women in a constructed landscape whether it is in a park on water, in an orchard, or in a field. The landscape was a trope for the female body, which implied the essentialist role for women as mothers and nurturers. The

\footnote{Ibid pg. 49.}
trole also focused on the female body to define the feminine role. This is paradoxical because women were expected to be pure and disassociate from sexuality yet aspire to motherhood and reproduce. By depicting feminine bourgeois women in these sexual-ized and constructed landscapes the female body and female sexuality was visually inserted into the discourse. The binary of masculinity and femininity are less oppositional and more intertwined in Morisot’s genre painting.
CHAPTER THREE: Women’s Idealized Beauty

Berthe Morisot depicted female models in a bedroom. This space, as part of a home, was designated feminine. Often included was in the room was a boudoir with an upright mirror. A woman sat in front of the mirror while getting dressed, styling her hair, and applying cosmetic products. It allowed a reflection of physical beauty to be seen, which signified vanity. The mirror also emphasized the importance of the gaze. The woman looked at her own reflection while the viewer and painter watched her. Idealizations of physical beauty were projected onto the woman.

Cosmetics were feminine products that were widely believed to make women more beautiful. Naomi Wolf, a renowned Gender and Women’s Studies scholar, coined the term “the beauty myth” to describe why women felt the need to purchase and wear make-up. The cosmetic industry targeted females and advertised that cosmetics would boost self-confidence and increase their physical beauty. Why would a female feel it necessary to alter their natural beauty? A woman desired to feel attractive and seduce a suitor. Thus, when female applied cosmetics it had seductive connotations. The power dynamic between the genders shifted when women appropriated cosmetics as tools used to express female sexuality.
Prior to the Impressionist Movement: The Harbor at Lorient

In 1869, Berthe Morisot painted *The Harbor at Lorient* in oil on canvas [Figure 4]. The painting is 45cm. x 72cm. Although the woman was unidentified, presumably she was Morisot’s younger sister, Edma, who visited Morisot around the completion of the painting. Edma was depicted sitting on the edge of a dock at an unknown harbor in Lorient. She wore a white dress with long-sleeves that extended to the ground. Her body was fully covered, which signified modesty and purity. Edma also wore a white hat and red necklace. In her hand was an umbrella to shade from the sunlight (a signifier of her bourgeois social class). A river was depicted diagonally in the center of the composition with neither endpoint in vantage. Reflected in this large body of water were a few clouds above the high horizon line. Only a few small boats were located in the distance alongside smaller buildings that lacked detail on the opposite side of the river from where Edma sat.

Morisot’s composition emphasized two subjects: the water and the woman who gazed into the water. The highly reflective surface of the water functioned similarly to a mirror. Linda Nochlin, an art historian, wrote, “Here, the mirror brings us not only an adoration of mysterious beauty but, at the same time, intimations of its inevitable de-

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31 In 1870, Morisot showed in Le Salon, and she remained in Paris during the siege and commune. See Rouart pg. 31.
struction.” The idea of gazing at a self-reflection signified vanity because it emphasized the importance of a person’s physical body and beauty. Who defined beauty? It was subjective and changed on an individual basis. For a woman in nineteenth century France, physical attraction was both a tool to remain in the bourgeois social class, to find a husband, and fulfill the dutiful role as a traditional wife. Thus, men received the social power to decided if a woman was beautiful. Linda Nochlin wrote:

The acceptance of woman as object of the desiring male gaze in the visual arts is so universal that for a woman to question, or to draw attention to this fact, is to invite derision, to reveal herself as one who does not understand the sophisticated strategies of high culture and takes art ‘too literally,’ and is therefore unable to respond to aesthetic discourses.

Seducing a male contradicted the ideological expectation of purity in women, yet a woman was commonly depicted gazing into her self-reflection, conscious of her beauty, and in the pursuit of accomplishing an idealized beauty to attract the male gaze. In The Harbor at Lorient the female model was not preparing for the day nor did she have her cosmetics on her person. It was neither a private nor an intimate moment. She was depicted with an already completed aesthetic for that particular day.

Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist, argued in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that the woman had two choices: substitute herself in for the role of

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34 Ibid pg. 29.
the male or accept the male-created role of female passivity and seduction. Morisot complicated Mulvey’s two options for female models by depicting a female’s perspective on daily routines of women. The judgment of one female’s opinion of another, particularly between sisters, was important in the development of self-confidence. Companionship of sisters and other women in the house provided the main source of social interaction and emotional support. Edma always supported Berthe’s art career. After the physical separation on March 19, 1869, the same year Morisot painted The Harbor at Lorient, Berthe wrote Edma:

If we go on in this way, my dear Edma, we shall no longer be good for anything. You cry on receiving my letters, and I did just the same this morning...but, I repeat, this sort of thing is unhealthy. It is making us lose whatever remains of our youth and beauty. For me this is of no importance, but for you it is different...come now, the lot you have chosen is not the worst one. You have a serious attachment and a man’s heart devoted to you. Do not revile your fate. Remember that it is sad to be alone; despite anything that might be said or done, a woman has an immense need of affection.

In this letter, Morisot mentioned the need for a woman to have affection, youth, and beauty. These perceived needs correlated to a fear of remaining unwed. Mothers encouraged their daughters to pursue marriage and fulfill the feminine gender role as wife

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37 Ibid pg. 33.
and mother. Madame Morisot wrote a to Edma Pontillon on June 22, 1871 about Berthe Morisot stating:

I am earnestly imploring Berthe not to be so disdainful...we must consider that in a few years she will be more alone, she will have fewer ties than now; her youth will fade, and of the friends she supposes herself to have now, only a few will remain. I think that Eugène Manet is crazy most of the time, and that the erratic behaviour of all these individuals augurs no assurance for happiness in life.38

Madame Morisot’s letter emphasized the importance of marriage to a proper man, which was accomplished by a woman’s youth and beauty. Thus, Edma represented femininity.

In opposition, Morisot challenged gender constructs. She chose an “unfeminine” lifestyle as a career woman. Anne Higonnet, a biographer for Berthe Morisot, stated, “By choosing safely feminine themes, Morisot made it possible to cling to tenaciously to an extremely daring unfeminine career while making minimal personal sacrifices.” Higonnet seemed to say that Morisot tried to make her unfeminine job seem feminine by painting feminine subject matter.

Morisot emphasized the role of women and explored the correlation between femininity and expected beauty. A reflection of a woman was interpreted one of two ways. In a more traditional interpretation, a woman gazed into the river in order to check if she portrayed the idealized beauty, inclusive of proper garments, make-up, and hairstyle. An embodied feminine aesthetic signified not only a woman’s social class but

38 Ibid pg. 75-76.
also her aspirations to fulfill the female gender role. Progressive feminist thinking expanded upon the discourse on females’ ownership of their own body. Thus in a progressive interpretation, a woman manipulated the role of cosmetics to reclaim control of her body and her courting of men. It was contradictory to demand modesty and purity as well as maintain an idealized beauty that correlates to vanity, attraction, and seduction.

*During the Impressionist Movement: Young Woman Powdering Her Face*

In 1877, Berthe Morisot participated in the third Impressionist Exhibition located at 6 Rue Le Peletier. She was the only female artist included in this art exhibition. It was exactly one year after the second Impressionist Exhibition at 11 Rue Peletier, and the same year Morisot moved to 9 Avénue d'Eylau, Passy, a wealthier suburb of Paris. Morisot’s self-confidence as a professional artist continuously increased. On December 22, 1874, at the age of 33, Berthe Morisot married Eugéne Manet. She demanded a husband who would support her art career and be already established or be willing to remain at home while she worked. In less than a month after their wedding, Morisot went back to work. She painted and sold art to provide for her family. One year after completing *The Harbor at Lorient*, Morisot gave birth to her one and only child, a girl named Julie, on November 14, 1878. Eugéne Manet often remained at home to raise the daughter, which defied or redefined bourgeois gender roles.
In 1877, Berthe Morisot painted *Young Woman Powdering Her Face* in oil on canvas [Figure 5]. The painting is 46cm. x 39cm. The composition of Young Woman Powdering Her Face visually divided. On one half of the composition was the depiction of a young woman. She wore a white gown with ruffles. Her camisole beneath the dress was visible on the left half of her body. The dress’s sleeve only covered her right arm, indicating she was getting ready in the morning. Visible brushstrokes further insinuated the process of immediate actions, a particular moment of the day. Her only accessories were a black necklace tightly around her neck and a pair of black earrings. The woman’s hair was fashionably styled, half pinned upwards while the other half was loosely curled. In her right hand was a cosmetic powder brush, and in her left hand was a large and lavishly decorated mirror that she tilted upwards to gaze at her own reflection. In the left half of the composition is a large, full-body mirror parallel to the young woman.

The female model is depicted in profile. The lack of confrontation with the viewer positioned the female as passive (a feminine trait). However, the painting held two significant forms of empowerment towards women. First, Morisot portrayed a woman in the process of applying the cosmetics rather than a completed aesthetic look. There-

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39 See Higonnet pg. 107-125 and 147.
40 Duranty écrit, “Ce qu’il nous faut, c’est la note spéciale de l’individu moderne, dans son vêtements, au milieu de ses habitudes sociales, chez lui ou dans la rue...avec un dos, nous voulons que se révèle un tempérament, un âge, un état social...” see Ganad-da-Martigny pg. 49.
This painting is now currently part of the collection at Le Musée d’Orsay in Paris.
fore, this privatized space also revealed a natural woman without clear evidence of cosmetics that conformed to the projected idealism of beauty.41 Aileen Ribeiro, a historian of fashion, observes the difficulty in most female portraits to determine if the sitter already wears makeup and how much the artist enhances the aesthetics of cosmetic beauty through artistic liberties. The female model is not depicted as an idealized beauty.

Secondly, Morisot inserted this designated feminine space (the private sphere) into the masculine space (public sphere) of an art gallery. By exhibiting the feminine presence into the masculine space, the viewer participated in the painting as an intruder. Morisot inserted a private feminine moment into a public masculine space, promoting the value of women as equal subject worthy to be painted. The female model depicted in the midst of her morning routine is equalized to the masculine academic-styled art exhibited alongside Young Woman Powdering Her Face. Furthermore, there is a dual layer of female work exhibited. Morisot exhibited her professional artwork and the female model worked on applying cosmetics. Women, such as Morisot, would complete a morning ritual of applying and removing cosmetics in the day and night all while working throughout the day. This was an extra daily labor her male colleagues did not feel obligated to do. The separation between public appearance and private practice

corresponded to the public idealism of women’s beauty and the private purposes of women who strived to seduce the males’ gaze.

After the Impressionist Movement: At the Dressing Table

Berthe Morisot’s first one-person exhibition was at Boussod and Valadon, Paris on April 13, 1892 shortly after she visited Mesnil and Vassé to complete more studies. In 1893, she moved to 10 Rue Weber, Passy, a wealthy suburb in Paris. Then in 1894, Morisot exhibited with Le Libre Esthétique in Brussels, and it was the year the state purchased the first of her artworks titled Jeune femme en toilette de ball, which is now in Le Musée d’Orsay. The subject matter included a woman who gazed at herself in a mirror while she sat in a bedroom. It was acceptable for a permanent collection because the painting was deemed uncontroversial on the surface level since the woman represented femininity.

Towards the end Morisot’s career, she painted At the Dressing Table in oil on canvas [Figure 6], which now belongs to a private collection. The painting is 30 cm. x 41 cm. Although the dates were unknown for this particular painting, the style of the artwork indicated that Morisot’s completed this painting towards the end of her career. She used rapid and visible brushstrokes; also, the canvas was not completely covered in pigment. It was common in her artwork only after the eighth of the Impressionists exhibitions towards the turn of the century.⁴²

⁴² Rouart pg. 1-236.
The central focus in the composition *At the Dressing Table* is an unidentified woman. She sat in a chair at a red table that dominated the foreground of the painting. Only her upper body was depicted. The woman had long reddish-orange hair that was partially in a bun. She was either in the middle of styling her hair or she is undoing her hair at night. It was unclear because there were no signifiers for the time of day. The red table was her boudoir and contained only two objects: a perfume bottle in the center and a mirror. However, the woman did not appear to be wearing cosmetic products nor were there any indication of cosmetics on her dressing table. Her eyes gazed downwards towards the right of the canvas, towards a hand mirror. The hand mirror on the dressing table was an important object in the room.

Boudoirs typically had larger mirrors upright against the wall as seen in the painting *Young Woman Powdering Her Face* by Morisot. Although there was a small mirror on the table, the positioning of the viewer aligned with the traditional positioning of the larger mirror on a boudoir. If the viewer was in the position of the mirror than the viewer’s projected opinion was the woman’s reflection.  

43 Tamar Garb, a feminist art historian, stated, “The nineteenth century worship of a remote, sanitized female beauty bore little relation to the way that male artists and writers related to the actual women with whom they came into contact.” A dual voyeuristic pleasure was de-
rived from female reflections. Women received pleasure from gazing into their own self-reflection, due to the ideological pressure to be beautiful. Men often sexually gazed at her. The subject in the painting was easily accessible to the male gaze. Men would have had the power position as viewer to project their desires onto the painting. The female’s non-confrontational gaze would have been perceived passive and submissive to the male gaze.

The female model was not concerned with the viewer. Her gaze was not on the larger mirror where the viewer was positioned. Naomi Wolf states, “Images that turn women into objects or eroticize the degradation of women have arisen to counterbalance women’s recent self-assertion.”\(^{44}\) The female’s lack of acknowledgement of the viewer did not signify her passivity or submissiveness but rather signified the female’s independence. She focused on her self-reflection in the small hand mirror. Her facial expressions signified lightness, serenity, and peace. This was supplemented by lighter hues that surrounded her in the background. Correspondingly, the female was depicted with a sense of self-confidence. She appeared comfortable in her own skin while ignoring the judgment of the viewer. In this painting, the female was the only critic who she acknowledged.

Berthe Morisot depicts the empowerment of cosmetics. The female models are depicted in either a natural beauty or uses the cosmetics to express sexuality. Censored feminine issues become inserted into the gallery space and visible for the public. The progressive act of attracting the opposite sex through the application of aesthetics is a form of seduction. Morisot begins a dialogue of femininity versus masculinity and the role of voyeurism, female self-confidence, and reclamation of the body through a woman’s self-defined idealized beauty.
CHAPTER FOUR: The Relationship of a Mother and a Daughter

A woman was expected to exhibit feminine traits, such as passivity, purity, and modesty. For a woman, the embodiment of these characteristics allowed them to maintain their social status in a patriarchal society. Thus, females aspired to be a wife and mother. Although these were traditional feminine roles, reproduction emphasized the importance of a female’s body and her sexuality. Only women had the capability to continuously birth the next generations. Morisot depicted only women in the familial portrait of past and future generations. Their bodies and their sexual acts were significant to the fulfillment of the female gender role. Morisot’s paintings, whose subject matter solely focused on the relationship of a mother and a daughter, explored these contradictive feminine expectations projected onto women.

Prior to the Impressionist Movement: Woman and Child on a Balcony

In 1871, Berthe Morisot painted Woman and Child on a Balcony in watercolor on paper [Figure 7]. The painting was 60cm. x 75 cm. The two women depicted in the painting are identified as Edma Pontillion, and the young girl is a niece, Paule Gobillard. The older female was depicted similar to a parental guardian for the younger girl. The relationship between the woman and the child visually functioned similar to the relationship of a mother and a child. The older woman would be expected to exhibit expected feminine behavior for the younger girl, such as mentor would.
The two females were depicted on the half of the Seine River renown for being a bourgeois neighborhood filled with Parisian wealth.\textsuperscript{45} They were situated on a balcony that overlooked Morisot’s gardens located on rue Franklin.\textsuperscript{46} A black handrail outlined the perimeter of the balcony and restricted the females to this designated space overlooking a garden and Paris. Rather than interacting with the designated feminine space or performing a motherly duty, both the older woman and the younger girl gazed out towards the city. This indicated that the women aspired beyond the traditional female gender. Morisot’s inclusion of a black handrail in the composition then signified both a physical and metaphoric barrier for the women. It prevented the women from extending beyond this designated space of the balcony. However, it also represented the power positions between the genders, especially restrictions females, such as Morisot, had to overcome. For example, the public sphere was designated and socially constructed as a masculine space whereas the private sphere (the home) was designated feminine. It was the gender role of motherhood, aligned with essentialist tropes, which began the affiliation of women with children at their home.

Women were the only gender capable of reproduction. This was both a gift and a burden. It made women important figures in society because it was a necessity for new generations to be born. However, since only women were capable of birthing children

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid pg. 11.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid pg. 11.
then only the women could be at home to nurture the children. This unique aspect of a female’s body also was restrictive.

If the woman was needed at home then the man had to get a job and financially support the family outside of the home. This relationship between the genders, work, and designated space established the traditional familial dynamic. Adrienne Rich argued the wife was the male’s property once married. Therefore, the children became his property once they were born, which implied that a male also had reproductive ownership of the woman.\textsuperscript{47} In the male claiming ownership of the female body through marriage, women were further removed from an empowered position. She did not even own her body.

In opposition, Simone de Beauvoir argued that motherhood was a form of emancipation for women. By birthing a child, the woman was no longer a child; therefore, she was more independent. The child belonged to her because it was once apart of her own body. Thus, the mother could never be a separated from the child. The female body throughout the stages of pregnancy was also the central focus for the family. Simone de Beauvoir stated:

Many women find peace a marvelous peace in their pregnancy: they feel justified; they always liked to observe themselves, to spy on their bodies; because of their sense of social duty, they did not dare to fuc on their body with too much self-indulgence: now they have the right to; everything they do for their own well-being they also do for the child.\textsuperscript{48}

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\textsuperscript{47} See Adrienne Rich, \textit{On Born Woman} pg. 119.\textsuperscript{48} Ibid pg. 544.
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Any interaction with a pregnant woman could affect the child; therefore, family members worked around the mother-to-be. Her role evolved into leader rather than a submissive entity. Simone de Beauvoir stated:

The woman who feels affection for her husband will often tailor her failings to his: she will welcome pregnancy and motherhood with joy or mystery depending on whether he is proud or put upon...if she feels hostility toward the husband, the situation is quite different: she can fiercely devote herself to the child, denying the father possession, or, in on the other hand, hate the offspring of the detested man.\(^4\)

In the painting *Young Woman and Child on a Balcony* there was an absent father figure. The excluded male presence redefined familial power structures because the female figure had to embody both the masculine and feminine roles. Morisot painted the mother figure as both an authoritarian figure and a nurturer. Similarly, the presence of a niece rather than a nephew visualized female appreciation. Although a son could carry on a family name, a daughter had the responsibility of motherhood and reproduction. It exemplified the abilities for women to expand the feminine role.

*During the Impressionist Movement: The Wet Nurse Angele Feeding Julie Manet*

In 1880, Morisot participated in the fifth Impressionist Exhibition and painted *The Wet Nurse Angele Feeding Julie Manet* in oil on canvas [Figure 8]. The painting was 61cm. x 50cm. The figure in the center of the composition was a wet nurse. Angele was

\(^4\) Ibid pg. 535.
hired to breastfeed Morisot’s newborn daughter, Julie.\textsuperscript{50} She wore a white dress with a pink necktie. Her dark hair was tucked underneath a white bonnet with pink ribbons. Her body was positioned forward, looking directly at the viewer, which depicted her in a power position over the viewer. Positioned diagonally across the chest of Angele is Julie, who was depicted wearing a white dress. Her left hand and mouth are laid on Angele’s chest. The breast was not exposed. Instead, Morisot depicted Angele’s left breast in more circular shape than her right one. It was emphasized with a bright white color, which was difficult to differentiate from Julie’s garments. If the woman was destined to fulfill her role as mother than the depiction of breastfeeding should neither be a radical subject matter nor an edited figure.

Linda Nochlin compared Morisot’s depiction of Angele and Julie Manet to traditional depictions of the Madonna and her Child.\textsuperscript{51} She stated:

Morisot’s Wet Nurse is equally innovative in its subject matter. For this is not the old motif of the Madonna and Child, updated and secularized, as it is in a work like Renoir’s Aline Nursing or in many of the mother-and-child paintings by other prominent woman member of the Impressionist group, Mary Cassatt.\textsuperscript{52}

This referenced the tradition of mothers depicted with the children. In particular, it was the Virgin Mary who represented the ideal feminine role for women, particularly in Catholic countries, such as France. However, the role of mother was not just a biolog-


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid pg. 230-243.
cal relationship. The role of mother compartmentalized into two categories: biological and sociological. A woman who physically the birthed the child did not always have to be the woman who nurtured and raised the child due to the role of a wet nurse. For example, Berthe Morisot was permitted to fulfill her role as mother then continue her career. She did not have to perform the physical responsibilities, such as nursing her daughter.

The ability for a mother to produce the necessary milk for her child and nurse was often glamourized. In reality, it was not an adored activity post-birth. Scholar Simone de Beauvoir stated, “Even nursing brings them no joy, and, on the contrary, they worry about ruining their breasts; they resent feeling their cracked breasts, their painful glands; the baby’s mouth hurts them: he seems to be sucking their strength, life, and happiness from them.” Despite the negative toll on the body, only a mother was capable of breastfeeding. It was her body’s responsibility to feed her child, unless a family was wealthy. Morisot paid for another woman to nurse her child. However, if a woman was not spending her time at home with her child then what was she doing?

Women of the bourgeois social class had time available for leisurely activities outside of the home. It also enabled women to balance work and family. For example, Morisot was present in the painting by being the painter. She was also the biological mother to the child that Angele nursed.

54 See De Beauvoir pg. 551.
Designated work for women was promoted in the painting. The painting itself was also a product of a working woman artist, and the subject matter focused on a role dependent upon only a female’s body. Linda Nochlin states:

Certainly, this painting embodies one of the most unusual circumstances in the history of art—perhaps a unique one: a woman painting another woman nursing her baby. Or, to put it another way, introducing what is not seen but what is known into what is visible, two working women confront each other here, across the body of ‘their’ child and the boundaries of class, both with claims to motherhood and mothering, both, one assumes, engaged in pleasurable activity which, at the same time, may be considered production in the literal sense of the word.55

The wet nurse was a popularized female profession. Bourgeois women often hired a proletarian woman to breastfeed in place of herself. It benefited both women. First, it gave the bourgeois woman more time apart from the child, thus, more independence. Women were not just restricted to the home because they had to be with their children. Secondly, it enabled women to be in the role of provider, which was typically designated for men only. This was most common with proletarian families. Women from lower social classes sought work if their husband’s income was insubstantial to provide for the family. Typically the roles were physical. For example, they were gleaners in fields, prostitutes, or wet nurses. Each emphasized the importance of a woman’s body. Women who worked also challenged designated feminine and masculine spaces. The binary between gender roles were slowly expanding and intertwining to embody both masculine and feminine characteristics rather than being in opposition.

55 Nochlin pg. 231.
In 1894, Berthe Morisot painted *Young Woman and Child, Avenue du Bois* with acrylic on canvas [Figure 9]. The painting was 50.17cm. x 60.96 cm. This painting was one of Morisot’s last depictions of a mother and child before her death in 1895. Morisot had traveled to Brussels on March 13 for her exhibition with Le Libre Esthétique and to Brittany, France on August 8. While in Brittany, she rented a house at Saint-Brieuc in Portrieux.\(^{56}\) It was a countryside and view of the shore that inspired Morisot’s work in this time period.\(^{57}\) In continuing her travels, Morisot extended her work trip to Tréguier, Lannion, Perros-Guirec, La Clarté, Léon, Brest, Auray, Vannes, and Nantes before returning to Paris.\(^{58}\)

After her return to Paris, Morisot completed the painting *Young Woman and Child, Avenue du Bois*. In the center of the composition are two female figures: an adult woman and a little girl, both seated on the ground. The young woman wore a maroon long-sleeve dress, a white blouse, and a navy-blue necktie. Morisot included thick black contours of the young woman’s body. This emphasized her hour-glass figure. The young woman’s waist would have been pulled inward due to a corset beneath her dress,

\(^{56}\) Ibid pg. 205.
\(^{57}\) Ibid pg. 207.
\(^{58}\) This voyage was a solo trip. Her husband and daughter remained at home. Morisot was visited by her nieces, but she also extended an invitation to Renoir to work alongside her in Brittany.\(^{58}\) Ibid pg. 208-209.
which gave her this bodily shape. She also had on a navy-blue bonnet with flowers. The little girl wore a bright-yellow bonnet with a red long-sleeve dress. These garments were clear signifiers of the females social status. Only bourgeoisie women could afford this attire. The women portrayed feminine ideals.

It was the role of the mother to educate and mentor her children, particular her daughter(s) in life. The guidance of an older generation was significant to the progression in gender roles. Betty Friedan, an American feminist theorist, stated:

Our daughters, in the compulsion and challenge of their new career choices, are surprised when the power of that other choice now—the to-be-or-not-to-be of motherhood—hits them with an agonizing indecision. They discover it as some blessed possibility we kept from them or were too blighted, perverted to appreciate. Or, having learned some lesson we didn’t realize we had passed on to them so well, they simply forgot that choice, with only the excessive energy expended in denying any urge to motherhood hinting at the possible power of that urge, in practical conflict now with career....Anatomy is no longer destiny for these daughters in the same way as for Freud’s women, but surely that very choice for motherhood is basic to their identity as women today, even though it no longer has to, or even can, define it totally.  

Mothers either encouraged their daughters to fulfill a traditional feminine role or promoted their daughters to establish a career. These two life choices were set in opposition to each other. If a woman desired to be a stay at home mother without a career, she was also fully dependent upon her husband. Thus, she remained submissive and passive. However, shaming the traditional feminine role or purposefully denying oneself...
motherhood as a feminist statement equally lacked progress for women. Men’s decisions still catalyst the feminist’s choice because the rebellion to the traditional was in response to already established patriarchal ideology. How do women progress towards equality if both rebelling against tradition and following tradition are in result to patriarchal oppression? Gender roles were no longer clearly defined.

Thickly applied brushstrokes composed the background. Yellow and red hues were thickly applied behind the head of the young female model. Also, a large application of a green hue was applied to the bottom half of the composition. This was a common characteristic of Morisot’s paintings completed towards the end of her life. The inclusion of green could have represented a patch of grass in a garden or possibly a park. In this scenario, the mother and child align with the essentialist trope of woman’s body paralleling nature’s fertility. White flowers were also depicted to allude to a natural landscape. The inclusion of white symbolized purity in a traditionally feminine plant, flowers. Despite detailed renderings of both the females, the only indicator for the background is in the title of the painting, Avenue du Bois.

The Avenue du Bois, identified in the title, was a specific and central location in Paris. It was a wealthier bourgeois district in the city as part of the 16th arrondisment. It would have had both car traffic and pedestrian foot-traffic. The street connected the people to L’Arc de Tromphe de L’Étoile. This was a significant nationalistic French monument. It was commissioned by Napoleon in 1833 and erected in 1836, during Morisot’s lifetime. The Neoclassical iconography on L’Arc de Tromphe de L’Étoile promot-
ed sacrifice for the nation as a whole entity rather than a focus on individual freedom. It honored Napoleon’s troops and remained erected as a memorial. The idea of military, aggression, and males as protectors coincided with the patriarchal ideals of characteristics masculinity embodied in nineteenth century France. Yet, Morisot depicted the two female models on the Avenue du Bois. Either they were situated on a different section of the street, or Morisot consciously wanted to neutralize the space so both women and men belonged there.

Removing the easily recognizable background forced viewers to focus on the depiction of two female figures. Morisot depicted the two females faced inwards, towards the center of the composition, in profile. Both appeared bored and lifeless. Betty Friedan, an American feminist scholar, focused on the relationship of women and boredom in their gender roles as wife and mother. She coined the term the feminine mystique as a universal problem with women, particularly suburban women in America, who felt a lack of satisfaction with their life. Friedan wrote:

Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her child, chauffeured Cub Scots and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’ For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers.60

In particular, the young woman’s facial expression was melancholic and solemn. Her lips were pressed tightly together, and her eyes were partially closed. Neither interacted with each other. Both gazed off into the distance as if they did not want to be in their current positions. This unsatification with life is what catalysts change and progress.

The young girl’s bored expression is the most significant. She will still age and develop into a woman, herself. In the process of transitioning from a girl to woman she will apply the knowledge her mother had taught or exemplified. She will also have the power to change what she does not like with new and ever-changing socio-political freedoms of women. Thus, she will relieve the older female from the daily responsibilities of motherhood in the continuation of the life cycle. The depiction of a mother and daughter visually collide the past, present, and future generations of women into one composition. Perhaps the younger female generation will progress beyond the restrictions enforced by patriarchal ideology and continue to redefine and reshape femininity to embody more than the negation of the masculine.

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61 Ibid pg. 630.
CONCLUSION

Paintings by Impressionist painters complicated the binary of masculinity and femininity. The *plein-air* technique used by the Impressionist paintings was inspired by the scientific study of optics and color theory. Science, as a subject, was considered masculine because it required logic and rationality. However, this increased interest of color, as opposed to linework, was considered emotional. Thus, Impressionism was perceived as an unacademic and feminine style of art.

Berthe Morisot was one of the founding members of the Impressionist movement. She depicted three main subjects in her paintings: women in constructed landscapes, women with mirrors in interior spaces, and a mother with her daughter. The female models in her paintings represented femininity in the nineteenth century. Often they wore garments that signified their bourgeois social class, and they were depicted in commonly designated spaces for women.

The constructed spaces that Morisot painted the female models in were often a trope for female sexuality. Landscape was often paralleled to the female body. Both land and women had the biological responsibility to reproduce. This resulted in the essentialist gender role of women. Since they were the only gender capable of reproduction and nursing a child than they were the ones who were designated to the private sphere (a home). Therefore, it was common for women to be depicted in their bedrooms in front of boudoirs with mirrors. A female’s reflection in a mirror emphasized the impact of the male gaze. An idealized beauty was associated with femininity. The use of
cosmetics allowed women to alter her natural appearance to appease the public, particularly men. It was the responsibility of a mother to educate her daughter on these feminine expectations. Women were expected to be pure, modesty, and submissive.

However, female sexuality was the foundation to their gender role. The private sphere (a home) was designated feminine due to the capabilities of a woman’s body. Females were expected to be wives and mothers. Thus, they were expected to have sex in order to reproduce. The mirrors and application of cosmetics were also feminine tools used to seduce the male gaze rather than appease beauty ideals. A woman aspired for marriage. Thus, she needed to seduce her suitors. Finally, a depiction of a woman next to her daughter signified to the public that she was not a pure woman. Sexualizing the female body in art from a woman’s perspective (Morisot) revolutionized and expanded the role of women. Gender expectations lacked a clear definition when both the masculine and feminine were embodied.
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