

Woman as Family

Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Julie Rajan's Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence demonstrate patriarchy's restriction of the female identity to that of the family, ultimately preventing women from existing as entirely independent, especially within narratives.

First, Clarissa's sense of invisibility results from the dependence of her identity as a woman on her marital status within masculine society. Unable to express herself, Clarissa's body, "with all its capacities, seemed...nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself...unknown," having lost her individuality to patriarchy's perception of her as "being Mrs. Richard Dalloway,...not even Clarissa" anymore (Woolf 10). In other words, society forces Clarissa's identity into dependence upon that of her husband rather than allowing her to maintain a distinct self. That is to say, unlike her male counterparts, Clarissa exists within the narrative as a piece of a unit rather than as an individual. As a result, patriarchy succeeds in inhibiting women from existing as independent characters within the text. Society views Clarissa's actions as representative of the family's motives, respectability, and status due to her inability to achieve distinctness from the familial identity. Consequently, society disregards Clarissa's personal motives and emotions, ultimately inducing her sense of anonymity and ambiguity. Therefore, through masculine society's restriction of Clarissa's identity to that of her husband, patriarchy succeeds in suppressing feminine expression. Even further, without an outlet for expression, femininity fails to exist independently of masculinity, preventing women from existing as autonomous characters within the text. At the crux, patriarchy's oppression of feminine

independence hinders the ability of women to function separately from the family unit while also limiting feminine self-expression.

Next, Juie Rajan's piece further examines the limitations patriarchy places upon feminine identity through an analysis of society's perception of the identity of women suicide bombers. Western narratives of female suicide bombers fail to separate a woman exhibiting violence from a woman operating as a maternal figure within the family. Continually, media "remind the Western public of the differences between 'good' and 'bad' mothers," attributing female monstrosity to an inability to achieve the "good" mother status rather than to the heinous displays of suicide bombing violence (Rajan 275). In essence, patriarchy's failure to distinguish between a woman's identity and her familial status insinuates that women exist only as parts of a family unit rather than as independent beings. Further, by limiting a woman's identity to that of her family, society prevents women from acting out of their own, autonomous belief system. Rather, the decisions, actions, and motives of women become associated with those of her family, generating an understanding of women as victims of familial and societal influences. In other words, society portrays women, even those committing shocking acts of violence, as incapable of functioning autonomously within their setting due to their inability to attain an independent identity. As a result, the restrictions placed upon female identity by masculine society oppress feminine independence, even in mass media sources. Patriarchy enforces the intertwining of feminine and familial identities such that the two become indistinguishable from one another. Thus, the female identity becomes synonymous with both the family's identity as well as the stereotyped characterization of the maternal figure. Ultimately, patriarchal society represses the feminine self such that women depend on marital and familial status for their own sense of identity. Fundamentally, masculinity places limitations upon the female identity that

prevent women from existing as independent beings, even in cases of extreme violence such as the suicide bombings discussed in Rajan's work.