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“IF THE SLIPPER FITS, YOU WEAR IT, WHORE”: THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE GENDER IN AMANDA PALMER'S LYRICS (1995-2009)

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Tarkastelen tässä pro gradu –tutkielmassa naissukupuolen rakentumista Yhdysvaltalaisen laulaja-lauluntekijän Amanda Palmerin sanoituksissa vuosina 1995-2009. Palmer esiintyy Bostonissa 2000-luvun alussa perustetussa yhtyeessä The Dresden Dolls rumpali Brian Viglionen kanssa ja toimii myös sooloartistina.

Tutkin naissukupuolta Palmerin sanoituksissa kolmen kategorian kautta: naisten ja miesten väliset suhteet; väkivalta; sekä raskaus, abortti, ja raiskaus. Tarkastelen sukupuolta kaksijakoisena; sukupuoli jakaantuu biologiseen sukupuoleen sekä sosiaalisesti rakentuneeseen, opittuun sukupuoleen. Tutkin sukupuolen rakentumista läntisen maailman mieshegemonian näkökulmasta; miessukupuolella on yhteiskunnallinen, sosiaalinen, ja kulttuurinen valta-asema ja sitä vastoin naissukupuolella alisteinen asema. Mieshegemoniassa olemassa olevia valta-asemia tuotetaan ja pidetään yllä mm. sukupuolen sosiaalisella rakentamisella ja ymmärtämällä sukupuoli vastakohtaparin nainen-mies kautta. Sekä naiset että miehet tiedostaen tai tietämättään tukevat tai vastustavat mieshegemoniaa sillä, miten he tuottavat sukupuolta. Naissukupuolen rakentumisen tutkimisen lisäksi tarkastelen myös tukevatko vai vastustavatko nämä rakennukset mieshegemoniaa. Lopuksi pohdin onko sanoituksissa kokemuksia, jotka ovat ainutlaatuisia nimenomaan naissukupuolelle.

Palmerin sanoituksissa naissukupuoli esitetään usein miessukupuolen vastakohtaparina. Sekä anatomiset että sosiaalisesti rakentuneet piirteet nähdään sukupuolen perustana. Palmer mm. viittaa usein naissukupuolen emotionaalisuuteen ja sitä vastoin miessukupuolen fyysisyyteen, selittäen nämä piirteet synnynnäisinä, eikä opittuina. Palmerin naishenkilöt käyttäytyvät usein sosiaalisen sukupuolensa konventioiden mukaan, mutta toisaalta myös uhmaavat niitä. Sanoitusten naissukupuolen rakennukset täten sekä tukevat että vastustavat mieshegemoniaa. Usein Palmer kritisoi parodian ja muiden tyylillisten keinojen avulla laulujensa naisten konventionaalista mieshegemoniaa tukevaa käyttäytymistä.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When I got to the party
They gave me a forty
And I must have been thirsty
'Cause I drank it so quickly
When I got to the bedroom
There was somebody waiting
And it isn't my fault
That the barbarian raped me

…sings Amanda Palmer in "Oasis" (2008), a song about a young girl being sexually assaulted at a party. The lyrics may seem too straight-forward for some – radio stations in the UK, for example, refused to air the song (Epstein 2009) – but for Palmer the style and subject are nothing out of the ordinary. For the topic of my Pro Gradu thesis I have chosen to analyse the lyrics of the North American singer-songwriter Amanda Palmer.

The focus of analysis is to examine the construction of female gender in Palmer's lyrics in the premise of Western male hegemony. The many expectations aimed at female gender by Western societies will be contemplated; expectations that contribute in their part to the way the gender is formed and, indeed, constructed. The three categories through which these gender expectations will be looked at in the lyrics are, first, female-male relationships and, second, violence. The third and final category revolves especially around the female body, consisting of pregnancy, abortion, and rape. The aim is to determine whether the gender constructions presented in the lyrics resist or comply with the so-called conventional gender premise of the Western male hegemony. The initial objective was to examine all gender manifestations in Amanda Palmer's lyrics – be they representing the "conventional woman" or the "conventional man" as they are understood in the West, or, on the other hand, differing manifestations from this binary. Due to the nature of Palmer's lyrics, however, seeing as their narrative is usually written from a female perspective, this thesis concentrates especially on the female gender.

Why examine Palmer's work in particular and focus on gender? I chose Palmer for a number of things. Naturally an influencing factor was my admiration of her music but also the fact that, to my knowledge and at least when talking about Finnish academia, no one has yet analyzed her work on a scale such as this thesis. It

must be said, however, that I have not encountered academic analyses on her work outside of Finland either. The examination of female gender in popular music, however, has been done from different perspectives by others before me. Anne Karppinen, for example, wrote her thesis about the representation of women in the early lyrics of the 1960s groups the Beatles and the Beach Boys (2005). Mari Piiräinen, on the other hand, examined singer-songwriter Tori Amos's quest for womanhood in her lyrics (2000). To the continuum of these two theses, among others, I aim to contribute with my thesis. Additionally, a motivating factor for gender analysis in particular is that Palmer is vocal about issues concerning gender in her lyrics. Furthermore, gender as an area of study is justified and appropriate as it is not just a mere matter of differences in characteristics or behaviour to be taken as is. Rather, as a whole, gender plays a significant part in the way a society is structured, and as such reveal something about the governing attitudes and beliefs in that society. The examination of gender construction in works of art hopefully helps us to acknowledge these constructions in our surroundings, in the so-called real world, if we accept the contention that art – to an extent – reflects life.

The lyrical analysis will be done from the premise that Western society is a patriarchy, i.e. a form of male hegemony, and, in addition, that gender is traditionally understood as a binary oppositional system. What this, in short, means is that there are considered to be two opposing genders, the female and the male, of which the male gender has the dominant and the privileged position in general in our society and culture. It should be noted, furthermore, that patriarchy and the binary system of gender is heteronormative, meaning that heterosexual relationships are perceived as the norm. These issues relating to gender have been discussed in the 20th century by theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir (1980), Judith Butler (1990), and R. W. Connell (1991). Already in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft (1996) published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which she asks that females be treated the same as males, for example, in terms of access to education. On the grounds of Western gender study theories it is asserted in this thesis that gender is a construction and, also, that gender as a construction is often produced and maintained for the benefit of the existing heteronormative male hegemony, as Davis et al state:

> …gender is a system of power in that it privileges some men and disadvantages most women. Gender is constructed and maintained by both the dominants and the

> oppressed because both ascribe to its values in personality and identity formation and in appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. Gender is hegemonic in that many of its foundational assumptions and ubiquitous processes are invisible, unquestioned, and unexamined.
> (2006: 2)

One of the underlying objectives of this thesis is to examine gender in Palmer's lyrics in order to, indeed, make it visible as a construction. The intention is to examine the construction of the female gender via social science theories and concepts therein. In addition to giving theoretical background and means to this thesis, naturally also biographical and musical background and context will be given, in order to see how they might influence or contribute to Palmer's work. Finally, as much as this thesis is a lyrical, social scientifical, and feminist analysis on gender, it is also undeniably an analysis of popular music. The study of popular music is not a fixed science; according to Whiteley (1997: xiii) "not a well-defined academic discipline". She states (1997: xiv) that "musical meaning is […] located at variable points":

> For scholars of popular music […] any grasp of musical understanding derives from identifying the specific localities in which the music is conceived and consumed. To theorise the significance of popular music, then, it is necessary to identify the interrelationships between musical sounds, lyrical texts and visual narratives (either in the form of live performance or music video) and how they produce and foreground different sensibilities. The act of listening to a song, for example, is distinct from watching either a live performance or a video.
> (Whiteley 1997: xiv)

This thesis will analyse the song lyrics from a gender perspective and while I, at times, will certainly refer to the musical and, perhaps also, visual aspects accompanying my chosen lyrics, and do agree with Whiteley's comment above, the lyrical aspect will be in the definite main role. As for the chosen topic of gender as understood in women's studies and other fields of social science, the perspective and theoretical premise should be acceptable because, as Whiteley says (1997: xiii), "there is no single methodological approach" to the analysis of popular music.

Initially I thought I would do this thesis without putting emphasis on Amanda Palmer's gender because I wanted to concentrate on examining the lyrics of *an artist*, and not of a female artist or a male artist, thinking that a lyric is a lyric and

a song is a song despite one's gender. I quickly realized, however, that I cannot, but also do not want to, bypass or ignore Palmer's gender and its affect on her work. As a female she is not the norm in patriarchal Western society, but neither is she the norm as an artist in the so-called society of rock music. As the intention is to examine compliance or resistance to patriarchy's notions of gender, one could not, then, ignore Palmer's place in the margin, as an Other and a minority, in this society. I agree with Charlotte Greig (1997: 168) who says that she does not believe there is a genre of 'women songwriters', just as there is not a genre of 'men songwriters'. According to Greig, women, just like men, are not a single, unified group with regard to songwriting and, thus, they cannot be lumped together due to their gender as songwriters.

> What I want to try and pinpoint, then, is not a generic similarity in women's songwriting, since I don't think one exists, but the way in which women have tried to write about the particular experiences in their lives that differ from those of men. (Greig 1997: 168)

One of those experiences is not the portrayal of romantic love, Greig continues, as it is a subject that has countless of times been approached by both women and men. Rather, she mentions the topics of childbearing and motherhood, and childbirth and pregnancy, as well as abortion, as some of the areas that are unique to women songwriters, such as Amanda Palmer. Even though Greig says that traditionally these issues have not been something a female protagonist is depicted as doing in popular music songs, the situation is changing, and, she argues, there is a submerged tradition of popular artists talking about the issues of childbearing and motherhood in their art. (Greig 1997: 169) The topic of abortion, for example, has been addressed by Sinead O'Conner in her song 'Three Babies' and Madonna in 'Papa Don't Preach' (Greig 1997: 176). Some of the topics listed as unique to women by Greig are featured also in the lyrics of Amanda Palmer. This thesis intends to contribute to the study of this tradition of women songwriters dealing with issues unique to *their* gender in particular. While, according to Greig, unique female experiences seem to be dependent upon a person being biologically female and capable of reproduction, she mentions also marriage – a social entity outside the body – as a possible area for unique female experiences (1997: 174). The most obvious and easiest place to look out for unique gender experiences might be the biological body, but one could argue

that they can be found outside biological sex and related to the social gender as well. In this respect I perhaps disagree with Greig (1997: 169) when she states that “there are few areas of experience that are unique to […] women in contrast to the experiences of men”. The contention is that even though both female and male songwriters can give an account of most topics, like Greig’s suggested topic of romantic love, there is nevertheless a difference and, thus, we should be open to the idea of seeing them as unique. In the premise of male hegemony and the binary oppositional system of gender, a male, from his privileged position in society cannot be expected to have the same experiences as a female, and vice versa. Before getting into the lyrical analysis portion of this thesis there will, however, be a discussion and introduction on the biographical and musical context of Amanda Palmer as well as a theoretical framework.

2. BIOGRAPHICAL AND MUSICAL CONTEXT

This section provides biographical background on Amanda Palmer and musical genre information with regard to her music, so as to give a context for the body of lyrical work analyzed in this thesis. At first there will be an introduction to the genres of rock and punk music, ones which arguably match Palmer's style the closest. This is followed with an elaboration on the study of gender with regard to rock music. Finally, there will be an introduction to Palmer as a solo artist and as part of the group The Dresden Dolls, focusing heavily on the musical, rather than the personal, background of Palmer.

2.1 Rock and punk music

Punk music is a form of rock music, and, therefore, it is necessary to talk about the origins and characteristics of rock music, before moving on to the genre of punk music. First of all, however, I will briefly address the genre to which both punk and rock in the end adhere to: rock and roll.

It is appropriate to make clear and differentiate the terms 'rock and roll' and 'rock', so as to avoid confusion, because at times they seem to be used interchangeably and at other times they are used and understood as distinct. Gaar (1992) refers with the term 'rock and roll' to contemporary popular music in general, which includes, among others, pop music as well as rock music. Claire Suddath's definition of 'rock and roll', on the other hand, seems narrower:

> I know that rock 'n' roll involves a bass, drums and a guitar, except for sometimes when it doesn't. Sometimes there's a keyboard. Sometimes there isn't. If I had to provide only one example – if I had to offer one song that defines what rock 'n' roll means to me – I'd go with Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock." After that, probably something by the Beatles.
> (Suddath 2010)

Jim Henke's idea of rock and roll differs from Suddath's definition above and is similar to Gaar's:

"Our definition of rock 'n' roll is very broad," says Jim Henke, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's vice president of exhibitions. "It's not just skinny white guys who play guitar." Henke argues that in the context of the museum, rock 'n' roll isn't just a sound; it's a culture. That culture extends from doo-wop harmonies and dance routines to people who bite the heads off bats. And somewhere within that culture is a Swedish pop group that has sold nearly 400 million albums.

This year, Abba will be inducted[1] along with Genesis (prog rock), Jimmy Cliff (reggae), the Hollies (British Invasion rock) and the Stooges (punk). "This is the perfect class of inductees," says Henke. "Rock 'n' roll has developed into all those subgenres. They're all related."
(Suddath 2010)

If we go by Gaar's and Henke's definitions, then, the very varied culture and phenomenon that is called 'rock and roll' is a genre that has birthed the subgenres of rock music and, also, punk music.

In *She's A Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* (1992) Gillian G. Gaar takes a look at rock and roll's history and evolution from the 1940s to the 1990s as a Western phenomenon in particular. 'Rock and roll' emerged and was born as a genre in the 1950s in the United States of America and has its roots in rhythm & blues, also referred to as R&B (1992: 3). In the racially segregated U.S. rhythm & blues was considered the music of black people and rock and roll's birth was preceded by the interest that the white youth had in R&B music (1992: 6). Elvis Presley was at the fore-front when R&B transformed into rock and roll, a genre which Gaar describes as "a hybrid that could be seen as either jumped-up country or watered-down rhythm & blues" (1992: 4). With Presley, Gaar notes at the same time, success was possible for an R&B artist on a wider scale:

Presley (…) "sounded" black but was in fact white, so he could perform R&B material with some measure of credibility and gain exposure through media still closed off to most black performers, such as television and Top 40 radio.
(1992: 4)

Due to racial politics and attitudes the term "rock and roll" was adopted to describe the new genre, "to distinguish it from the black-identified rhythm & blues", Gaar writes. She suggests that there was also the idea that rock and roll was somehow cleaner, and one could assume, thus, more suitable for white America, than R&B; a

[1] Inducted means to be accepted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

notion Gaar finds ironic given that the term for the new genre was a euphemism for sex. (1992: 6) The new term and the subsequent distinction from R&B were deemed as not enough, however:

> That rock & roll had its roots in the black community was reason enough to condemn it; the presence of ”suggestive” lyrics, and the fact that blacks and whites were able to freely mix at such performances added considerable fuel to the fire. Songs, rock & roll shows, and films featuring rock music were regularly banned.
> (Gaar 1992: 10)

A *Time* article titled Music: Rock’N’Roll from the 1950s tells that, indeed, “rock’n’roll” shows were banned, for example, in the U.S. in the dance halls of the city of New Jersey, in civic buildings in Santa Cruz, and in San Antonio city swimming-pool jukeboxes (1956). Considering the initial adversity that the new genre faced, it is understandable that rock and roll came, in essence, to equal rebellion and defiance. It could be argued that because rock and roll was to a large extent born amidst and out of a racially segregated society and culture, a rebellious us-against-them -attitude is inherent in it. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the phenomenon of R&B evolving to rock and roll culture is a prime example of the white majority stealing from the black community and culture for their own benefit via appropriation, tarnishing the grand notion of a movement that unifies people and rises above racial politics. Additionally, race with regard to genre and exposure was still an issue for decades to come after Presley and the 1950s. Gaar mentions, for example, the group Labelle and the difficulties they encountered in the 1970s:

> White radio wouldn’t play them because they were black, and black radio wouldn’t play them because rock was white music. Black artists that played rock music - or […] any musical style identified as ”white” – were faced with a contradiction that could not easily be resolved.
> (Gaar 1992: 200)

Furthermore, one could argue that what takes away from the suggested rebellion and defiance of rock and roll is its inevitable commercialism and fusion into mainstream culture.

From Presley and the 1950s onwards rock and roll was to evolve and branch out in the form of many a new subgenre. From the 1960s Gaar picks out, for example, the girl-group The Supremes and their particular ”Motown” sound, as well as Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin, alongside soul music, a genre that mixed gospel and blues; folk music with its political agenda, manifested in the work of, for example, Bob Dylan; and, finally, rock music and, its centerpiece, the electric guitar with the likes of Jimi Hendrix, the Greatful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, The Doors, The Velvet Underground, and the MC5. Influenced by these acts, among other things, there emerged a new genre in the 1970s – the genre of punk music. (Gaar 1992)

In the 1970s the dominating music styles in popular Western culture were disco and so-called arena rock (referring to the size of the venues in which bands performed). A change, or at least a disruption, was on its way, however, and it came roughly in the middle of the decade in the form of punk music. Gaar notes garage rock[2] of the 1960s especially being an influence on punk, mentioning American bands such as the Velvet Underground and the MC5. (1992: 230) She describes punk as rebellion against the status quo and as a back-to-basics attitude:

> There was a new, younger generation coming up that was anxious to drag rock & roll back to its three-chord roots that everyone could understand (and, more importantly, play) and was intent on wrestling the game away from the nads[3] of the major record companies by starting their own independent labels and publishing their own magazines…
> (Gaar 1992: 230)

This is not to say that punk was to stay clear away from the commercialism that the major music labels represented and to which rock and roll at large had earlier succumbed to, quite to the contrary. In retrospect the definite flagship of punk is usually considered to be the English group, the Sex Pistols, managed by one Malcolm McLaren. Gaar describes McLaren as being ”hardly reticent about his motivations” (1992: 240), referring to the fact that the band was a business to McLaren:

[2] A form of so-called raw and amateurish rock and roll.
[3] Nads is a slang word for testicles.

”Rock and Roll is not just music. You’re selling an attitude,” he told *Rolling Stone* in 1977. In another interview he said that selling records was not the point (”That was the icing on the cake”); the point was ”creating havoc” and ”getting money from an industry which sorely wanted the Sex Pistols as part of their tame machine. That was the excitement of it all.”
(Gaar 1992: 240)

According to Gaar the characteristics and affects of the genre were not, however, just to ”create havoc”, as McLaren puts it. Punk music was political in Britain, unlike in the United States. The Sex Pistols criticised the monarchy, the class system, and unemployment. (1992: 241) Punk music was also a platform for many female artists in the 1970s. Contributing and working in the movement were artists such as Patti Smith, Yoko Ono, Siouxsie Sioux, and Marianne Faithfull. One could argue that it is easy to place Amanda Palmer and the Dresden Dolls in the same category as these punk artists with their defiant attitude. Gaar mentions the theatrical make-up and costumes of Sioux (1992: 244), the mixing of rock and poetry by Smith (1992: 237), as well as X-Ray Spex’s single “Oh Bondage, Up Yours!” about the objectification of women (1992: 242). All of these features can indeed be detected in Palmer’s person and work. Furthermore, the underlying feminist agenda, for lack of a better term, of bands such as the Raincoats and the Au Pairs (1992: 246) is something one encounters also in Palmer’s music. In addition, the opportunity that punk raised to comment on social and political issues (1992: 221) is something inherent to Palmer. In 2008 when Palmer’s record label complained that she looked “fat” in her music video for the song “Leeds United”, Palmer not only refused to edit or digitally change the video but also openly discussed the issue in her online journal (Palmer 2008). Alongside the discussion Palmer posted a picture of her stomach that had been deemed too fat by the record label, inadvertently inspiring her fans to start taking pictures of their bare stomachs and posting them online (Saner 2008). This small movement was named rebellyon and clearly, visibly commented on and celebrated female body acceptance.

Moving forward from the origins of rock music and punk music to the present, Hyman’s suggestion (2006) that ”The Dresden Dolls evoke the sounds of the White Stripes, Fiona Apple, and the Fiery Furnaces all at once” seems apt. Upon hearing the Dresden Dolls for the first time in 2004 also I immediately thought of the Detroit-based White Stripes, formed in 1997. Not because of the fact that the White

Stripes, too, consist of only two people, guitarist Jack White and drummer Meg White, but much like with the Dresden Dolls, their sound too is raw and loud. At the start of the 21st century the White Stripes were at the fore-front of a so-called garage rock revival. In this revival they, alongside bands like the Hives from Sweden and, to an extent, the Strokes from the United States, brought about a desire for simply produced and played, yet raw and explosive type of music. This style owed greatly to the garage rock and punk bands of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Velvet Undergound in the case of the Strokes and Iggy Pop & the Stooges in the case of The White Stripes. The Dresden Dolls could also be seen as part of this revival, even though they have not enjoyed as huge a mainstream success as their above-mentioned colleagues.

2.2 Rock and gender

Just like in other cultural and societal phenomena, in rock, too, the category of gender and issues relating to it can be seen infiltrated in and affecting various parts of the genre. I will take into account various viewpoints, such as those of the artists and the fans, of studio songs and live performances, of even the instruments.

The phrase ”it’s a man’s world” rings particularly clear and true in the rock genre. Gaar writes that women in rock are still by and large defined in this order: as women first, and rock performers second. This is because women as a gender are not integrated into society but are still seen as an ”other” that deviates from a male norm. (1992: xii) Furthermore, according to Cohen (1997: 28) “in Euro-American cultures rock music has commonly symbolised masculinity”. Rather than seeing maleness in rock as a so-called natural state, however, Cohen sees it as being “actively ‘produced’ as male” (1997: 17).

> …ideas about gender are not fixed or universal but fluid and situational, and the different meanings attached to terms such as ’man’ and ’woman’, ’masculine’ and ’feminine’, ’male’ and ’female’ emphasize the fact that these are not biological but social categories, one of the many ways in which people and their bodies and behaviour are classified.
> (Cohen 1997: 30)

Although Cohen here makes her conclusions based on the indie rock scene in Liverpool, they can be generalized to an extent to describe the whole of the rock genre. Even if the maleness perpetuated by rock music is not a fixed phenomenon, and is in fact produced, it seems that a particular idea of maleness and masculinity is celebrated at the fore-front of rock as the norm. It is not a difficult conclusion, then, to state that this does not bode well for females and femininity with regard to rock.

In *Sexing the Groove* (1997: 41) Mavis Bayton talks about how females in rock are cast as outsiders and as the "other", the entity that deviates from the norm, by excluding them in various situations in various ways. Bayton claims that the outsider status of females is epitomized by the fact that there are so few women playing the electric guitar, whether by professionals or amateurs. She describes women's exclusion manifested in, for example, music shops where a female customer is faced with a male salesperson, on stage between female and male members of a band, or as harassment from members of the audience towards the female artist. The exclusion can be seen even in the design of the electric guitar which Bayton sees as a phallic extension of the male body. (1997: 41-47) There seems to be variation, however, within rock's subgenres in their attitude towards femininity and females, whether as musicians or audience members. Cohen (1997: 29) gives an example of this by comparing the attitudes in sub-genres such as heavy metal with the attitudes in indie rock and glam metal. Cohen suggests that heavy metal, unlike indie rock and glam metal, is less accepting of women and divergence from the conventional idea of masculinity. Also Sheila Whiteley (1997: 67-99) gives an example of attitudes changing according to genre by examining how the frontman of such a pivotal rock group as The Rolling Stones is not averse to being androgynous – Jagger is embracing as singer both so-called masculine and so-called feminine traits in his performance. Traditional femininity, then, seems to blend with traditional masculinity in rock with artists such as Mick Jagger and David Bowie, but when it comes to actually being a female, gender suddenly becomes an issue.

Norma Coates asked if women are still excluded from rock and answers the question with an affirmative (1997: 55). Using feminist scholar Judith Butler's notion of gender as a performance, rather than a fixed state, Coates describes gender in rock as follows:

> Rock is indeed a technology of gender in that 'masculinity' is reinforced and multiplied in its many discursive spaces. However, what is reiterated in and by rock is a particular type of masculinity, one which was 'fixed' in the early days of rock and roll. Rock masculinity, at least the stereotype which, I assert, is still very much in play discursively and psychically, is one in which any trace of the 'feminine' is expunged, incorporated or appropriated.
> (1997: 52)

Rock genre seems to very much mimic Western society's conventions when it comes to gender. This means that just like in society at large the norm and the privileged gender is the male, it is so in rock music also. In the present women are not excluded from rock but one could claim that they are still in the margins. Female rock artists are not unusual but still remain a rarity of sorts, or at least may struggle in their chosen profession because of their gender.

2.3 Amanda Palmer

Amanda Palmer was born on the 30th April 1976 in the United States in New York, New York. She is a singer, a pianist, a songwriter, and a former street performer. Palmer is a solo artist as well as the other half of the band the Dresden Dolls, formed in Boston around the year 2000 with drummer Brian Viglione. The Dresden Dolls have released two studio albums, entitled *The Dresden Dolls* (2003) and *No, Virginia…* (2006), as well as a live album *A Is For Accident* (2003) and a compilation album *Yes, Virginia…* (2008) containing b-sides and so-called left-over songs from earlier recording sessions. Amanda Palmer works also as a solo artist, having released an album entitled *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* (2008), and an accompanying DVD called *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Collection of Music Videos* (2009). In the Dresden Dolls Palmer provides lead vocals as well as plays the piano/keyboard, and is accompanied by Viglione who plays the drums and does backing vocals.

Palmer acts as the lyricist in The Dresden Dolls and her particular style of writing in the band can naturally be also seen in her solo work. The subjects of her lyrics range from love and relationships, to pregnancy and abortion, to self-harm and abuse, to portrayals of societal behaviour and expectations aimed at women, among other things. As a lyricist Palmer is, in my view, strongly-opinionated and

determined to get a point across, using rich metaphors and imagery. She can be extremely direct with her words, but she is also indirect and shrouds ideas in clever word-play, left for the listener to mull over. There is a fantastical element to her lyrics as well, a notion or a hint of a wonderfully coloured fictional world in which up seems to be down and down up but one cannot be exactly sure. The fantastical is manifested in songs such as that about "Coin-operated Boy" (2003), the machine boyfriend. One could argue that the fantastical is nearly always mixed with reality in the lyrics, however, given that Palmer is not out to tell superficial tales to celebrate the mere aesthetic of words and the images created thereby, but, in the end, to talk about the different, and very real phenomena in her surroundings, in our society and culture. If not earlier, then at least by the time Palmer refers to herself by name in the lyrics is the listener snapped back to reality and the illusion of fiction is disrupted, if only briefly.

Palmer and Viglione have described their band's style and genre as "Brechtian punk cabaret". This description roughly covers their music as well as their live performances and their aesthetics as a band. The term "punk" refers, as previously discussed, to the Western music movement that emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the technically advanced, and still advancing, corporate rock music. Massimo (2005) comments that the Dresden Dolls "might be best described as pre-rock punk rock":

> Pianist-singer Amanda Palmer and drummer Brian Viglione bash their way through Weimar Republic-style beer-hall stomps and piano-based rock, with Palmer's depressive lyrics and dramatic vocal style (sort of a more tuneful Nico[4]) as the gateway into a compelling picture of obsession and depression, served up (mostly) with a smile.
> (Massimo 2005)

Massimo's description strengthens the notion of the Dresden Dolls being a "punk cabaret" act, depicting them as he is as a band with a punk rock attitude in the setting of the German Weimar era, i.e. between the two World Wars.

Cabaret, unlike punk, is a genre or a style of music and performance outside the very center of the concept of popular music, but nonetheless inside it. Cabaret's literal meaning comes from French for 'tavern'. In 1912 it came to mean a

[4] A German singer and composer in the 1960s-1980s.

combination of a restaurant and a night club and was later on, in 1922, extended to mean entertainment in the form of a so-called floor show. (Harper 2010) Cabaret is also aptly described as ”a café that serves food and drink and offers entertainment often of an improvisatory, satirical, and topical nature” or, in slightly different words ”a form of theatrical entertainment, consisting mainly of political satire in the form of skits, songs, and improvisations” (Cabaret 2010). Viglione (Massimo 2005) says that both he and Palmer relate to the style of cabaret because of the intimacy of the genre, one that manifests as a real exchange between the performer and the audience. Because Viglione and Palmer are interested in audience-performer exchange, then the notion of a band calling themselves “Brechtian” , after German playwright Bertolt Brecht, makes sense.

According to Eagleton (1996: 170), Bertolt Brecht, along with other socialist artists, adopted the use of the so-called distancing or estranging effects, as used by formalists and Czech structuralists, in order to further his political goals. He continues:

> In their hands, the estranging devices (…) became more than verbal functions: they became poetic, cinematic and theatrical instruments for ‘denaturalizing’ and ‘defamiliarizing’ political society, showing just how deeply questionable what everyone took for granted as ‘obvious’ actually was.
> (1996: 136)

To use estrangement or alienation in art means, then, to distance the audience from things that are or seem ordinary or normal to them and make them see these things from another perspective or in another light. While describing the Dresden Dolls as “Brechtian” one could also be inclined to mention the concept of meta-commentary. Meta-commentary is slightly similar to intertextuality which is the act of referring in one text to another text. Meta-commentary, on the other hand, means to more or less visibly refer to or comment on the text as a piece of writing. In other words, meta-commentary in prose or poetry means commenting the text at hand and the act of writing that text *in* the text itself, thus disrupting the illusion of the text as fiction. While on the subject of fiction and reality, Eagleton writes the following:

> Many modernist literary works (…) make the ‘act of enunciating’, the process of their own production, part of their actual ‘content’. They do not try to pass themselves off as unquestionable, like Barthes’s natural sign, but as the Formalists

> would say ‘lay bare the device’ of their own composition. They do this so that they will not be mistaken for absolute truth – so that the reader will be encouraged to reflect critically on the partial, particular ways they construct reality, and so to recognize how it might all have happened differently. The finest example of such literature is perhaps the drama of Bertolt Brecht…
> (1996: 170)

The main point of using the term “Brechtian” – either by the band itself or by me in this thesis – to describe the Dresden Dolls, and Amanda Palmer, is perhaps to give the audience a jolt of sorts, to suggest that things are not necessarily as they seem. With the Dresden Dolls the listener, or the viewer, should be open to a wide range of perspectives in their work and the different possibilities of fact and of fiction, as well as the mixing of the two. Also, the suggestion of different perspectives, fiction and reality, creates a sense of duality that comes across already in the very name of the band:

> Dresden refers to the destruction of Dresden, Germany, in World War II, a town whose primary industry before the war was making porcelain dolls. Dolls, of course, refers to the innocence and fragility of those porcelain dolls. With their porcelain-painted faces and dissonant, compelling melodies, a more fitting name could not have been chosen by Palmer and Viglione.
> (Hymen 2006)

With regard to gender a duality can also be detected in Palmer’s lyrics. I will discuss the duality of gender and more in the next chapter before advancing to the lyrical analysis.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the definition of gender and how it is conventionally understood in Western societies as a unitary model. It also elaborates on the concepts of biological sex and social gender, following with a discussion on gender as non-unitary. Finally, this section considers the power positions in Western societies with regard to gender, focusing especially on the role of hegemonic masculinity.

3.1 Sex and gender as unitary

When defining gender as it is conventionally understood in Western society, one might suggest, for example, that it is a fixed state determined via anatomical and behavioural differences between members of our species. Anatomical characteristics, such as reproductive organs or hormones, have been conventionally seen as basis for differentiation, contributing to the subsequent emergence and existence of the category of gender. Certain behavioural characteristics, on the other hand, have been regarded as innately tied to the anatomical characteristics. According to this gender convention, one might then claim, for example, that women are less aggressive than men, or that men are less emotional than women. These statements imply that there is a natural connection between what one is physically, anatomically, with what one is psychologically, by behaviour. The suggested innate, so-called natural, connection between anatomical characteristics and personality characteristics, such as aggressiveness or emotionality, is, however, debatable. When viewed from an academic and social scientific perspective, the task of gender definition turns out complicated, if not downright problematic.

The reoccurring term when studying or discussing gender seems to indeed be ‘differences’. Connell suggests that conventionally women and men are understood as differing categories via trait differences:

> The most common conception of the psychology of gender is that women and men as groups have different traits: different temperaments, characters, outlooks and opinions, abilities, even whole structures of personality.
> (Connell 1991: 167)

Connell uses the term “psychology of gender” and with it refers to the concept of *social gender* which, in turn, is used to refer to the gender characteristics associated with a certain type of an anatomical body. The anatomical body, however, is often referred to as the *biological sex* by social scientists. Connell also talks about the conventional idea that the biological body and the “psychology of gender” – the biological sex and social gender, if you will – are tied together, so that they always go together:

> Often it is assumed that there is just one set of traits that characterizes men in general and thus defines masculinity. Likewise there is one set of traits for women, which defines femininity. This unitary model of sexual character is a familiar part of sexual ideology. It can be quite explicit: ’just like a woman’, ’just like a man’. More often it is implicit. Jokes against ’women drivers’, or the ’Mere Male’ column in the women’s magazine *New Idea*, work by calling into play shared assumptions of this kind: that women are hopeless with cars, that men are hopeless around the house. (Connell 1991: 167)

By sexual character Connell refers to social gender and the ideas of femininity and masculinity attached to the female and male gender, respectively, as constructed sets of traits according to one’s biological sex, i.e. the anatomical body. As examples of the most basic and obvious social gender characteristics, i.e. socially and culturally constructed ideas of gender characteristics, could serve the type of clothing that is in Western society thought of as appropriate for women but not for men (skirts, dresses, for example), or the kind of colours that are regarded as feminine but not masculine. There is nothing that innately, or “naturally”, ties skirts and dresses to the female gender and, thus, it can be deemed a social construction. This is evidenced by the fact, for example, that in other cultures, such as Arabic cultures, it is customary in everyday life for males to wear clothes which are physically identical to dresses, whereas the same cannot be proclaimed of the majority of the Western culture, with perhaps the exception of the Scottish kilt, and even then the garment is hardly considered everyday.

3.2 Biological sex and social gender defined

The definition of biological sex depends and varies on who is making the definition. The backgrounds and viewpoints of social scientists may differ greatly from those of natural scientists, for example, and this creates conflict. Butler (1990) makes a valid point when asking what sex is:

> Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such ”facts” for us? (1990: 6)

The question is justifiable, seeing as biology and the determination of biological sex is conventionally thought of as an area of expertise of the natural scientist and not of the feminist social scientist. I say “conventionally” because it has been suggested that even biological sex is a social construction:

> …perhaps the construction called sex is as culturally constructed as gender and […] the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Butler 1990: 7)

Even though natural scientists and social scientists, as scholars of different fields, work on the definition of biological sex, it does not mean that they are working against each other, however. In fact, the endeavour of defining sex is highly interdisciplinary. I will in the following paragraph explain biological sex as described by Juvonen (2008), a social scientist in the field of women’s studies, on the basis of natural sciences.

Biological sex is defined according to sex cells, which are also called gametes. It is according to the physical size of its sex cells that a sexually reproducing organism is determined as either female or male – whether a member of the human species or some other species. This is done following the principle that states that the one who has bigger sex cells is always determined as the female. A human’s sex can for the first time be determined in a four-week-old embryo, at which point the embryo starts producing a protein in accordance to the XX-chromosome (the so-called female chromosome) or the Xy-chromosome (the so-called male chromosome). There are, however, more than these two sexes. Juvonen describes the female and the male as the two extremes of the biological sex. Between

these extremes can be found the so-called hermaphrodites, preferably referred to as intersexuals, who have been born with the sexual reproductive organs of both the female and the male, or whose sex has otherwise been difficult to determine as strictly female or male. Also other features, such as growth hormones, alongside sex cells, are often taken into the equation, thus indicating that the determination of biological sex is not simple or entirely conclusive.

It should also be noted that what makes sex definition problematic is that researchers and natural scientists themselves are not above socially constructed gender stereotypes or gender biases. In other words, socially constructed gender stereotypes can affect the way in which scientists, for example, form research questions or criteria. Butler mentions (1990: 108) geneticists Eva Eicher and Linda L. Washburn, who have talked about gender bias in their field and, more specifically, in the determination of sex via biological means:

> …ovary-determination is never considered in the literature on sex-determination and (…) femaleness is always conceptualized in terms of the *absence* of the male-determining factor or the *passive* presence of that factor.
> (Butler 1990: 108, emphases added)

Unlike biological sex, socially constructed gender is seen as something learned and not innate. To elaborate the distinction between biological sex and social gender I will talk about their relation to one another by referring to a specific linguistic characteristic. When addressing the properties of language, one of the characteristics mentioned by Yule is language's arbitrariness:

> It is generally the case that there is no 'natural' connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. You cannot look at the Arabic word [for dog] and from its shape, for example, determine that it has a natural meaning, any more than you can with its English translation form dog.
> (Yule 1996: 21)

Just as linguistic forms and their connotations must be understood as distinct entities that have come arbitrarily together, likewise must also biological sex and social gender, to a great extent, be viewed. As an example, one only needs to look at the simple convention of the colours pink and blue with regard to human babies. In Western countries the colour pink is by default associated with female babies, and

blue with male babies. There is no biological, no so-called natural, basis for the associations of these colours with particular sexes and they could, therefore, be seen and determined as arbitrary. Furthermore, according to Goldacre (2007) pink was in fact regarded a boy's colour, and blue a girl's, in the early 20th century, until it suddenly became the norm to use them the other way around in, roughly, the middle of the century. The association of a colour with a sex is clearly a manifestation of cultural habit, a manifestation of social construction. In order to make a social construction seem innately tied to biological sex and, thus, legitimate, it is oftentimes naturalized, i.e. explained to have so-called natural cause and basis. Goldacre quotes the Ladies' Home Journal, a North-American magazine, from 1918:

> There has been a great diversity of opinion on the subject, but the generally accepted rule is pink for the boy and blue for the girl. The reason is that pink being a more decided and stronger colour is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.
> (Goldacre 2007)

The boy and the colour pink are here indicated to represent strength, whereas the girl and the colour blue are seen to represent *lack* of strength. When viewed together and in relation to each other the boy, the male, could be interpreted as the strong dominant one over the girl, the female. Of course in this case the social construction is most likely being produced and maintained by the idea, on the basis of biological differences, that males are usually physically stronger compared to females. The biological gender characteristics are, then, extended to the social gender and used as basis for defining the gender *outside* the body.

3.3 Sex and gender as non-unitary

What has been implicit thus far in my discussion is the conventional notion of there being two genders, and two genders only, the female and the male. We might refer to certain characteristics or behaviour as 'feminine' or 'masculine', but outside a conventional unitary model of sex and gender there are individuals who, for example, have the biological characteristics of a male and social characteristics of both females and males, or individuals who are biologically intersexed (i.e. with both

female and male biological characteristics) and identify with the male social gender. In addition, there are transgendered individuals who feel they have been born into the wrong biological body. The lines of biological sex and social gender, thus, blur and these entities mix and come together in a number of combinations. These combinations are naturally theorized with the help of the conventions with which we have come to understand gender, i.e. the conventional two-gender system of females and males. This system is often referred to as the binary oppositional system of gender, owing to Levi-Strauss's theory on binary oppositions. The binary system of gender refers to the thought that there is no in-between state between the two genders and that a person is, thus, expected to fit one of the opposing gender categories. Storey states (1997: 77) that according to Levi-Strauss "meaning is produced by dividing the world into mutually exclusive categories: culture/nature, man/woman, black/white, good/bad, us/them", for example. Storey continues that "Levi-Strauss sees meaning as a result of the interplay between a process of similarity and difference":

> …in order to say what is bad we must have some notion of what is good. In the same way, what it means to be a man is defined against what it means to be a woman. (1997: 77)

What it means to be a man, Storey writes, is defined against what it means to be a woman. A man is a man because he is not a woman. A woman is a woman because she is not a man. Differentiation and exclusivity essentially makes the current conventional binary gender system work, although what the system itself serves is a whole other question, one I will explore in the next chapter. The conventional view of gender and sex as unitary is rejected by scholars such as Connell. This is seen already in the terminology used to strictly separate the concepts and terms 'female' and 'male', when talking about the biological sex, from the concepts and terms 'woman' and 'man', when referring to the social gender, as done by, for example, Juvonen (2008). Also Garber (2005: 54) uses the term 'sex' when referring to biology and 'gender' when referring to sociology, anthropology, and culture. Furthermore, Walters notes (2005: 14) that feminists separate sex as "the biological 'raw material' from gender as the socially constructed edifice that creates masculinity and femininity". Walters suggests, then, that femininity and masculinity

as traits are socially constructed and not biologically determined. This notion is supported by Butler's comment on the division of sex and gender:

> The distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.
> (1990: 6)

I will hereafter use the terms 'female' and 'male' when specifically referring to biological sex, and 'woman' and 'man' when specifically referring to social gender. When talking about gender in general, on the other hand, comprising of both biological sex and social gender, I will use the terms 'female' and 'male'. In addition, when using the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' I mean to hereafter treat them like the terms 'woman' and 'man', i.e. as socially constructed and not biologically determined concepts.

3.4 Hegemonic masculinity

With regard to gender, Western society is a patriarchy, a male hegemony[5]. Being biologically male in a male hegemony, in addition to having, or acting according to, socially constructed characteristics of a man is regarded the norm and as such is always an advantage, regardless of whether or not males acknowledge it:

> One of the trickiest patriarchal paradoxes is that although patriarchy privileges men, many, if not most men don't *feel* privileged, powerful, or in control of much of anything, especially at work. (…) Privilege can take many forms, and its distribution among people in a society is a complicated process. (…) We can draw two points from this discussion that relate to the paradox of males *being* privileged under patriarchy but not necessarily *feeling* privileged. First, the fact that all men aren't better off than all women in every way doesn't mean that male privilege doesn't exist. Racism undermines black men's gender privilege, for example, by making it more difficult for them to earn good livings and claim the patriarchal position of "male provider." In similar ways, the dynamics of class undermine the male privilege of lower- and working-class men. This doesn't mean, however, that there's no such thing as male privilege or a patriarchal system that promotes and legitimates it. The advantages of male privilege may be harder for black or working-class men to feel or use in the context of lives limited by race and class. And these privileges may be less available to black men because, like all men under patriarchy, they are set in

[5] Hegemony roughly refers to one party having a dominant position in all or some areas of society.

competition with other men, a competition that white men are still winning. But the advantages of male privilege still exist as part of the patriarchal system and in one way or another they are available to *all* men, even if not to the same degree.
(Johnson 1997: 174-177)

Society privileges all males, then, and in this society there is one ideal and particular type of socially constructed masculinity that is especially embraced. This type of masculinity is called *hegemonic masculinity*. Connell interprets hegemonic masculinity as meaning social ascendancy:

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, 'hegemony' means (…) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is.
(Connell 1991: 184)

Hegemony according to Connell, then, is not physical power but a power more abstract and, one could argue, more deeply rooted in the institutions of society. The notion of social ascendancy implies social power or social supremacy, i.e. a hierarchical structure in which there is a dominant group to which all other groups are subordinated. According to Connell (1991: 183) men are on a global scale dominant over women and this is seen in the femininities and masculinities produced:

There is an ordering of versions of femininity and masculinity at the level of the whole society, in some ways analogous to the patterns of face-to-face relationships within institutions. (…) The forms of femininity and masculinity constituted at this level are stylized and impoverished. Their interrelation is centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women.
(Connell 1991: 183)

Connell is suggesting that the hegemony of men over women is seen on an institutional level in society, and, furthermore, that femininities and masculinities on a societal level can be seen to somewhat correlate the way they are manifested in actual human-to-human relations. Further, Connell uses the plural form 'masculinities' because not all males produce the hegemony's ideal type of masculinity, i.e. hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Connell states that "hegemonic

masculinity is always produced in relation to various *subordinated* masculinities as well as in relation to females" (1991: 183, emphasis added). She mentions characters such as Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, Sylvester Stallone, and Muhammed Ali – all known, might I note, for their physical prowess, with perhaps the exception of the first – as examples of the ideal type of masculinity that is hegemonic in our society. On the other end of the spectrum Connell mentions homosexual masculinity as "a key form of the previously mentioned subordinated masculinity". Morever, she states that "contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men (…) is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity". In addition Connell states that "the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage". (1991: 185-186)

Homosexuality defies a heterosexual order and, therefore, hegemonic masculinity considers it a threat as hegemonic masculinity relies on heterosexuality. Hegemonic masculinity is prone to both sexism, the oppression of females and anything feminine, as well as homophobia, then. It is worthy to note that if hegemonic masculinity relies on heterosexuality, then it is also dependent on the binary gender system and its gender conventions. Butler states that the institution of – compulsory and naturalized – heterosexuality depends on and, also in turn, helps produce, the binary:

> The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.
> (1990: 22)

It is the benefit of hegemonic masculinity, then, to maintain the binary system of gender by adhering to strict gender differentiation and construction and by favouring heterosexuality and homophobia. Any practise against these entities threatens the hegemonic order.

Between an ideal hegemonic masculinity and various masculinities subordinated to it, what roles do femininities come to play in the hegemony? Obviously they are subordinated to hegemonic masculinity but also to other existing masculinities. Furthermore, it should be noted that all men benefit from the male

hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, even though all men do not fit the ideal hegemonic masculinity:

> The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of 'hegemony' generally implies a large measure of consent. Few men are Bogarts or Stallones, many collaborate in sustaining those images. (Connell 1991: 185)

Connell also mentions forms of behaviour with regard to how subordinated groups of females react to and how femininities, then, take shape in the male hegemony that perpetuates hegemonic masculinity. The way that women – presumably referring to Western women, here – react is essentially three-fold, according to Connell:

> One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation. The interplay among them is a major part of the dynamics of change in the gender order as a whole.
> (Connell 1991: 183)

Male hegemony elicits compliance and resistance in varying degrees in women, but in all cases the fact remains that women belong to a subordinated group. The notion of emphasized femininity, as coined and described by Connell, appears at first startling, because it suggests that women take part in the maintenance of a construction that subordinates them by default. On the other hand, emphasized femininity as a phenomenon is understandable, considering the notion that we are to a major extent blind to the deeply-ingrained rules and attributes, the overall construction, of our society. Females emphasize femininity and comply with the patriarchal male hegemony because it *teaches* them to do so.

It is evident that understanding gender, or gender construction, in the Western society, is not a matter of just natural sciences, but rather, a combination of biology, sociology, history, politics, and philosophy. Gender positions and power relations in a society of hegemonic masculinity are asymmetrical. Male hegemony has come to and still comes to rely on perpetuating in many ways gender categories that are based on both socially as well as biologically obtained characteristics. As

much as these gender conventions can be complied with, they can also be rejected, resulting in resistance against hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy at large. I will proceed to examine the construction of female gender in Amanda Palmer's lyrics and, based on the constructions, interpret whether therein the male hegemony is complied with or resisted, actively or passively and consciously or subconsciously.

4. FEMALE-MALE RELATIONSHIPS

Because there is no noticeable variation or change in Palmer's songs with regard to theme depiction and Palmer's respective views, the lyrics analyzed will be treated as a consistent whole that is categorized by theme, instead of chronology. In this fourth chapter the analysis focuses on female-male relationships, consisting of romantic relationships. The fifth chapter deals with violence wherein the theme is to be understood in a concrete, physical sense as well as in a more abstract, psychological sense. In addition violence here covers something that can be done to another person or done by a person to herself. The sixth chapter consists of the themes of pregnancy, abortion, and rape. It is worthy to note that all three categories overlap from time to time, so that, for example, a song discussed in the first category of female-male relationships might very well touch upon the second category's theme of violence. Overlapping is unavoidable but the chosen songs have been grouped according to the themes that are most prominent in them. Regarding the third category of pregnancy, abortion, and rape it will help to know that putting together all these issues is a compromise of sorts. Pregnancy and abortion as well as rape and abortion overlap to such an extent that for the sake of the structure of this thesis they are handled together in one category, as opposed to examining them separately. The songs chosen for analysis range from unofficially released demo and live songs to live and studio songs in four albums of the Dresden Dolls as well as studio songs in Amanda Palmer's solo album. The songs picked for and discussed in this thesis are ones that best match and are the most fruitful with regard to this thesis and its topic.

In addition to examining and interpreting female gender construction I will also be determining whether the gender constructions featured in Palmer's lyrics comply with or reject male hegemony. Those constructions will be regarded as compliance with the hegemony that strengthen and act in accordance to the conventional binary system of gender, and/or compulsory heterosexuality, and/or the notion of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. The aim is to always give as detailed reasoning as possible as to what is considered compliance or resistance and why. For example, attention will be paid to the behaviour depicted in the lyrics, reflecting how it matches, or does not match, the conventional expectations aimed at the female gender in Western society. Finally, I will try to

determine to what extent the lyrics depict experiences that can be regarded uniquely female. Even though Palmer's work seems at times heavily autobiographical, as a rule the narrator of the lyrics will be referred to and regarded as a literary narrator, according to the conventions of prose and poetry analysis, rather than referring to Palmer herself as the narrator.

”It gets tricky, don't be picky, if the slipper fits, you wear it, whore.”
(Glass Slipper 2006)

The Dresden Dolls song ”Glass Slipper” (2006) heavily refers to and intertextualizes the fairy tale about a girl called Cinderella. There exist many versions of this folk story, from different eras and cultures from around the world (Kennedy 2010), but I will focus on the outlines of the tale as depicted by the German Brothers Grimm (1999) and the French Charles Perrault (2003). I see that retelling the story according to these Western authors is appropriate for the purposes of this thesis and analysis, as the outcome is a version of Cinderella that is arguably featured most prominently in contemporary popular Western culture, one to which also Palmer seems to refer.

There are versions in which the protagonist of the story is a boy, for example in The Irish Cinderlad retold by Climo (Sierra 1992, cited in “Cinderella Stories” 2011), but in contemporary Western culture the story is usually understood to be about a young girl. This young girl lives and works in a house with her father, stepmother, and two stepsisters. Cinderella has been demoted to the position of a servant in the household by her stepmother, forced to act in accordance to the stepmother's and stepsisters' whims. Cinderella is portrayed as good and kind while her stepmother and stepsisters are vain and jealous in nature. The story takes a turn in the form of a royal ball wherein the Prince is introduced to girls of suitable age for marriage. Cinderella cannot attend because she does not have the right attire for a ball but with the help of magic (trees and birds with the Grimms, a fairy godmother with Perrault) she in the end gets to go. At the ball the Prince falls in love with Cinderella but she flees from him, for she does not want to reveal her real, ashen-covered face, dirty from either sleeping on or working amidst chimney ashes. All the knowledge of Cinderella's identity is the slipper that she has left behind in her haste.

The Prince then proceeds to search out to whom the glass slipper fits and belongs. This woman is to become his wife. This woman is, of course, Cinderella.

On the surface the tale of Cinderella seems to be a story about love and a story about good triumphing over evil – especially in the Grimm tale where the stepsisters end up blind for their wickedness. From the point of view of this thesis, however, one quickly makes note of the underlying hierarchies and power dynamics that make the character relations and the story work the way they do. When thinking about female-male relationships and gender construction the first signifying thing about the society of the story is that females, here, seem to be financially at the mercy of males. In the story, as well as in contemporary Western society, being well-off financially means having a sort of power over one's self and one's life as an independent being. This is true with both females and males, although, as already said, in the story females seem to acquire this kind of independence through males, and only through males. Cinderella's stepmother, for example, seems financially independent but then again, she is a widow and one could assume that she has achieved personal independence by inheriting her late husband before marrying Cinderella's father. Furthermore, instead of her two biological daughters, and her step-daughter Cinderella, trying to make their own way in the world, they are implicitely and explicitly encouraged to marry well in the story, exemplified in the pursuit to marry the Prince. In this endeavor it is Cinderella who, unexpectedly, in the end succeeds. Her salvation out of a poor servant's life is marriage to the Prince, although the focus point of the story seems nowadays to be the notion that it is because of love that Cinderella and the Prince end up together.

A female in Cinderella's society does not have the equal opportunities to make herself an independent life because she is dependent on males, be that either a father or a husband. The fate of the female in this society could be seen as the fate of a child who needs to be cared for. Notions of romantic love aside, it is nothing short of miraculous that the Prince should want a so-called ordinary girl who is well below his social class, but the thought of Cinderella rejecting the Prince is ludicrous and out of the question. She benefits greatly from the marriage, socially as well as financially. When viewed from a 21st century point of view the story of Cinderella might be regarded as romantic and the relationship between her and the Prince seen as a romantic relationship but, still, the fact remains that Cinderella can find a way out of her poor neglected situation only by the help of a male and by the institution of

marriage. The story could, then, be seen as producing and maintaining the male hegemony. In the same way, a female accepting marriage could be seen as complying with the hegemony and, more importantly, a specific social gender, although one can hardly blame her. The story is certainly archaic in the sense of females not being allowed to manage their finances themselves but one needs to go back only a century and a half to learn that this was, in fact, a custom once in Western societies. In Finland, for example, it was in the year 1864 when unmarried females over the age of 25 gained financial sovereignty, whereas at the same time married females still remained under the legal care of their spouses. This meant that a male had the right to govern his spouse's wages and, if there was no prenuptial agreement, he had the right to his spouse's possessions as well. (Tuomaala 2010) One could of course argue that in centuries past also young males, especially those of royal descent, have been forced into arranged marriages for financial benefit, among other things. Then again, in the context of Cinderella, a young male would presumably be able to earn his living as an independent being.

Cinderella, then, gets married to the Prince in the story because the slipper fits her. Or, because Cinderella fits the glass slipper, Palmer might perhaps say. ”Glass Slipper” (2006) juxtaposes a romantic view of love and relationships, such as can be seen depicted in Cinderella, with a view much more sinister compared to that of the old folk tale. Palmer's narrator suggests that tales like Cinderella's do not occur anymore: ”No one's asking to go dancing/It's not like that anymore.” They do not happen to the narrator, at least, and love is an illusion that eventually shatters, just like magic in the fairy tale: ”How many minutes until midnight and you get your eyesight back.” In Perrault's depiction the spell breaks at midnight, revealing Cinderella as a poor servant. In Palmer's song as well the narrator waits for midnight, the moment when her companion ”gets his eyesight back” and sees her as she really is – whatever that is. There is a disturbing violence with which relationships are depicted: ”It's romantic if they mean it when they shut your fingers in the door.” Violence here is interpreted as love, as equaling love.

Love and relationships in general are not working for the narrator of “Glass Slipper” and she thinks she is to blame for it. The narrator's unsuitability for love and relationships is epitomized in the glass slipper. The shoe does not fit, no matter how hard she tries. She tries because, as she states, a woman is to take what she is offered and be glad she is offered it in the first place: ”It gets tricky, don't be

picky, if the slipper fits, you wear it, whore.” Palmer using derogatory language, such as ”whore”, to refer to a female underlines the position of the woman. ”Whore” denotes unworthiness as a woman and a person, in addition to denoting a prostitute who makes a living selling herself. Palmer could then be seen to compare Cinderella to a whore, for they both to an extent are forced to sell themselves to males. The whore in the song is, instead of financial security, offered a relationship but one where she loses something of herself, a sense of her true self. To this the narrator cannot succumb. The emotional pain of the relationship not working, the narrator not being fit, is manifested in the image of the physical pain prompted by a slipper not fitting: ”How many fittings must I sit through with my big feet blistering.” The narrator seems to know that she is not fit for the slipper and everything it entails, whether that means a specific romantic relationship or romantic relationships in general. She is tired of trying to keep up the illusion of the so-called perfect relationship and of trying to fit the ideal relationship: ”Too sore from fitting exactly to ride into setting suns aching to/Stand on my own two feet.” She wants to be on her own, to indeed stand on her own feet, and not just be part of a relationship.

Unlike Cinderella, Palmer’s narrator has a choice to back out of a relationship and the kind of behaviour expected of a female in said relationship in favour of a life more independent. One could argue that nowadays it is possible for a female to be independent while also being in an equal heterosexual relationship. Palmer’s narrator suggests, however, that these two ideas clash, at least in her case. The social gender convention of a female depending on a male is rejected in the song by rejecting the relationship altogether:

I'm not asking to go dancing, I'm not that dumb anymore
It’s exhausting to keep smiling when your toes are bleeding through the floor
It’s a gory sort of story that’s been told a million times before
Don't be sorry, just ignore me because honestly
I'm too sore from fitting exactly to ride into setting suns aching to
Stand on my own two feet

Dancing here refers to the idealized relationship. The exhausted smiles and bleeding toes are caused by the effort of trying to keep up a façade of fitting in. Palmer’s intention might not be to comment on the dichotomies of poor-wealthy/passive-active and the power relations in female-male relationships in society as such. Still, the underlying message and the emerging image of ”Glass Slipper” is that of a

woman struggling to be herself, under pressure, and wishing not to force herself fit a fixed societal and cultural ideal, thus rejecting the female-male relationship and, thereby, male hegemony. ”If the slipper fits you wear it, whore”, the song suggests, but in the end the narrator refuses to do so and states that she ”was never the right size”.

“Sex Changes” (2006) is ambiguous with regard to its topic. Likewise, already the title can be understood at least in two ways: the act of sex changing a person, or the procedure of changing a person’s biological sex. The song starts by referring to a procedure or an act of some sort happening to a person:

We're pleased to inform you that your application’s been accepted
Starting from the time you get this letter
Your life will be one never-ending
“Hope you're feeling better”
You get your choice of an aesthetic
We'll need to chop your clock off (tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tock)
It might not be what you expected
There is no money back once you've been ripped off

Before the procedure the person gets to choose her or his preferred aesthetic, instead of a medical anaesthetic, referring to at the least a new look and at the most a new biological sex. The “clock” that is removed from the person here could be understood as the male sex organ, the penis, thus referring to, indeed, a sex change. On the other hand, the “clock” – that goes tick tock – could be understood as a person’s heart being removed. One could also understand the ripping of the clock as removing one’s biological clock. In addition, it could be understood as castration, especially seeing as later on in the song the narrator states: ”No second thoughts the knife is nearing/You'll never hear the little pitter patter pitter patter ”. Finally, the procedure could be understood as an abortion and the ”little pitter patter”, thus, refers to having small children around the house. In any case, the procedure described is irreversible.

As previously mentioned with regard to the title, the song could be understood as talking about the consequences of the act of sex and how it changes

things. Pregnancy is seen as an unwanted, or at least problematic consequence of sex in the song.

You're big enough to stop pretending
You'll start to really show within a week or so
So don't go saying it's just come to your attention
You'll get more than you're asking for without the right protection

Today's a very special day
And how you'd love to have a little thing with which to play
But love won't get you very far
Today be still your beating heart
You'll have to keep on feeding it tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow

Palmer's narrator seems to be talking about love and sex here, suggesting that the two do not go well together. In the first verse quoted above she could be referring to a female starting to show her pregnancy. She could also be referring to a person coming to sexual maturity and entering the dating world, with the narrator warning of the possible consequences, i.e pregnancy: ”You'll get more than you're asking for without the right protection”. The narrator also states that ”love won't get you very far”, and one might argue that she is regarding love as something which by itself is not enough for a person to make it in the real world, such as when dealing with a pregnancy. On the other hand, the narrator could be referring to love being not enough because it is one-sided. According to the narrator, the female feels genuine love, while the male is only after sex:

Boys will be boys will be boys will be boys will be boys will be boys will be girls with no warning
Girls will be girls will be guys will be boys that don't cry over toys that they use to beat girls they despise by the morning
They always said that sex would change you

In this sense understanding the removing of one's ”clock” as the removal of one's heart makes sense as it would indicate an act of self-protection of sorts by the female for being despised by the male in the morning, after sex. This of course could be done by both females as well as males, but it is implied that males specifically behave in this way after sex. I am not certain as to what Palmer means by ”boys will be girls/ with no warning”, but the repetition of ”boys will be boys” could refer to the saying ”boys will be boys” used as an excuse for certain – often questionable – social

gender characteristics and behaviour related to young males. The following line is also ambiguous but one could understand ”girls will be guys will be boys that don’t cry” as saying that females change into males ”that don’t cry”, just like boys change into girls ”with no warning”.

If the narrator in “Glass Slipper” cannot fit herself as an independent being to a romantic relationship, then in “Sex Changes” the narrator presents sex as something that does not go together with love. She sees love, in the end, as nothing but an empty word. Palmer mockingly sings: ”Of course I love you and of course it's what's inside that matters,” only to continue to describe the situation as play, as charade:

But I think the whole charade is ending
It seems to me to be the only way to keep from getting
Caught up in a long life of regretting
The doctors said that once you get a taste for it you'll keep on cutting

The regretting here could be regret over an unwanted pregnancy and child, but also regret over all sorts of relationships not working. The cutting most likely refers to the procedure in the beginning of the song, be that a sex change, a castration, an abortion, or a procedure of emotionally detaching one’s heart and self. What is disturbing is that the procedure is being talked about as if it is a cosmetic surgery, as an ”aesthetic”, even though the affects seem profound. In favour of this notion is the line ”once you get a taste for it you’ll keep on cutting” which could refer to an addiction to cosmetic surgery. Additionally, cutting could also be understood as self-harming. The juxtaposition of cosmetic surgery with self-harming reveals the ambiguity of the procedure, as well as the whole of the song.

Gender depicted in “Sex Changes” follows the binary gender system. Gender is presented as the polar opposites of female and male, which both seem to carry their own separate characteristics of social gender. Also, at the same time, it is hinted that both sex and gender are something that can be changed: sex via a physical procedure and gender, socially constructed as it is, via a change in attitude or behaviour. Nevertheless, in ”Sex Changes” the female gender is constructed as an opposition to, and thus via, the male gender. The same, then, can be said of the construction of the male gender; it is done in opposition to the female gender. The song constructs gender via a stereotypical binary opposition of emotional/physical.

The social gender dichotomy presented states that whereas females are concerned with emotions, i.e. love, males are concerned with physical pleasure, i.e. sex. As a result of this suggested dichotomy Palmer's narrator talks about love with cynicism. She is not rejecting love or sex or relationships as such but doubts them because of social gender differences. Because the song underlines the gender binary system by adhering to social gender conventions, it can be seen to comply with male hegemony.

Also "Shores of California" (2006) highlights a perceived difference between females and males with regard to relationships. That is, as was hinted in "Sex Changes", the narrator's contention in "Shores of California" seems to be that women are after emotional aspects of a relationship, i.e. love, while men are after sex and sex only:

He's been trying with limited success
To get this girl to let him get into her pants
But every time he thinks he's getting close
She threatens death before he gets a chance

[…]

And she's been trying with limited success
To get him to turn out the lights and dance
'Cause like any girl all she really wants
That fickle little bitch romance

As in "Sex Changes", the extremes dealt with are the emotional and the physical aspects of a relationship with regard to the woman and the man, respectively. The gender-specific desires in a relationship are described crudely, as the man trying "to get this girl to let him get into her pants," as well as derogatory, as the woman wanting "that fickle little bitch romance." The narrator says that this gender binary has existed always and everywhere: "And that's the way it is in Oklahoma/That's the way since the animals and Noah." Because of the binary, because of "these conflicting specifications," women and men do not really, or at least easily, get together in a relationship, be that physically or emotionally or both. Furthermore, when viewed in context of the suggested binary, women and men come to see each other and each other's behaviour in a negative way. When focusing on the way

women and men are seen to behave with regard to sex in this gender conflict, the woman is seen as a “tease”, and the man a “sleaze”. Palmer also refers to the use of mace and GHB. Mace is a chemical aerosol spray used against violent attackers. GHB, on the other hand, is a rave drug, which is also used as a so-called ”date-rape” drug. ”Date-rape” refers to rapists mixing GHB in the drinks of their victims so as to sedate them.

And that is why a girl is called a tease
And that is why a guy is called a sleaze
And that's why God made escort agencies
One life to live and mace and GHB

There is a cynical, misogynistic contempt with which the narrator refers to the woman and the emotional part of the binary: ”That fickle little bitch romance.” The sentiment does not necessarily express the narrator’s thoughts and attitude, but rather represents attitudes in the suggested male culture preoccupied with the act of sex. In this culture, then, where the woman is regarded a “tease” for seemingly not wanting sex, and a man regarded a “sleaze” for seemingly wanting only sex, individuals are in the extreme pushed to acts that could be interpreted as legally and morally unsound: ”And that's why god made escort agencies/One life to live and mace and GHB.” The narrator refers, first of all, to escort agencies, i.e. the use of hired dates or prostitutes, being an answer to the ”conflicting” situation. Escort agencies can naturally be used by both women and men. If the escort agencies do not work out, in the very extreme the narrator, secondly, horrifyingly, refers to the use of mace and GHB. Using GHB as a ”date-rape” drug can undoubtedly be used by females as well as males, but seeing as rapists are most often males the use of GHB could be argued to refer to males here. The use of mace could, then, be seen to refer to females who are defending themselves against male attackers. Palmer is most likely bringing up the GHB/mace dichotomy because she wants to present the gender dichotomy of female/male and emotional/physical in its most extreme. The underlying premise of the situation depicted is undeniably in accordance to the male hegemony. The dominant position of the man becomes evident in the song and it is exemplified in the extreme situation depicted by Palmer. The conflict situation between the genders is ”resolved” via appeasing the male desire, and doing so at all cost. The female in this situation and in this culture is left to, rightly so, protect herself. When thinking

about power dynamics, the female is clearly in a weaker position here than is the male, and as such the song's portrayal of female-male relationships, sadly, mimics and supports the male hegemony.

The binary opposition of emotional/physical, the notion of females being especially preoccupied with the emotional aspect of relationships, and males, in turn, highlighting the physical aspect of them seems a very stereotypical stance on the gender differences. Should these differences be regarded as learned behaviour, as social construction? Or should they be regarded as innate, as biological? The narrator does, in fact, refer to the different gender behaviour being caused here by biological factors, by stating that the situation has always been like this, from the times of ancient Greek, from as far back as the dawn of animals, i.e. micro-organisms such as the protozoa: ”That's the way it's been since protozoa/First climbed onto the shores of California.” In this instance one could proclaim that biological males have ”naturally” a greater sex drive than do females due to, for example, higher testosterone levels in their bodies than those of females. The justification here would be that testosterone is a predominantly ”male” hormone that, among other things, heightens sex drive and, also, causes aggressive behaviour, unlike the predominantly ”female” hormone estrogen. In this sense the notion of males being more concerned with sex, than an emotional connection as well as sex, would seem feasible. The fact that there may be biological ways of explaining, to an extent, gender-specific behaviour, however, does not do away the suggestion of it being also socially constructed. It is a gross exaggeration to say all males, and only males, are predominantly driven by sex, and the same goes for saying that all females, and only females are driven by emotional factors. Palmer's narrator, however, accepts, and even suggests, that it might indeed be biology behind the gender binary and its subsequent conflict, but that as it is women and men are left alone:

Why all these conflicting specifications
Maybe to prevent overpopulation
All I know is that all around the nation
The girls are crying and the boys are masturbating

Females and males do not easily get together because of their differences, and perhaps, because of biological differences particularly. Palmer's narrator hints at slight frustration in the situation and the notion that females and

males seem to want different things. The song could also be understood to, at least partly, reject the notion of the emotional, describing emotions with contempt as the narrator is. With lines such as ”fickle little bitch romance” Palmer’s narrator is looking at socially constructed femininity, i.e. emotions in this case, from a specific socially constructed male point of view wherein feminine characteristics are the target of contempt. In hegemony it is characteristic to belittle those that are not in the dominant position and in the male hegemony what feminine or femaleness is or represents is rejected. This, conscious or unconscious, rejection has to do with the gender binary with its strict gender categories. The production and the maintenance of the gender binary, in turn, is absolutely crucial for the existence of the male hegemony, wherein the dominant male norm is not like the subservient female. There is a verse which, in all indication, seems to offer a male point of view on the emotional but the results are disheartening: ”Must not be too kind/Stop thinking love is blind/Clench your fists, yeah, write/’She’s just not my type…’.” The male could, then, have and want to fulfill emotional desires as well, but is, according to the rules of the hegemony, taught to reject the notion of emotions, or at least to hide them because they are ”feminine”. This would, of course, indicate a constructed social gender, rather than the biological sex.

”Shores of California” follows the gender binary and the two genders are partly discussed as polar opposites. In this sense the song and its gender construction, both female and male, complies with the male hegemony. The song does hint that there may be biological reasons that cause the differing gender characteristics, and the binary, but in the end the conclusion is that it is the learned social gender characteristics that cause the binary and the conflict between the genders. Nevertheless, in ”Shores of California” Palmer presents gender as a female-male binary and, therefore, its gender construction can be seen as complying to the male hegemony.

In ”Missed Me” (2003) Palmer touches upon the issues of age and sex in female-male relationships. Generally, if the age difference between the participants of a relationship is big, one easily assumes that the older party would to an extent have an upper hand due to, for example, a better financial situation or having more life experience. Of course this is only a suggestion and one perhaps cannot make wide

generalizations regarding age difference and power relations. In “Missed Me” age does not come to be a factor because there is a big age difference. Rather, age has significance in the song because the female is, in all indication, underage, thus making a possible relationship illegal and most likely also immoral:

Missed me missed me now you've got to kiss me
If you kiss me, mister, I might tell my sister
If I tell her, mister, she might tell my mother and my
Mother, mister, just might tell my father and my father
Mister, he won't be too happy and he'll have his lawyer
Come up from the city and arrest you, mister
So I wouldn’t miss me if you get me, mister, see?

The title of the song, as well as the line ”Missed me, missed me, now you’ve got to kiss me” repeated in it, are references to a nursery rhyme (Avruch 2010). The juxtaposition of a nursery rhyme with references to sex and a sexual relationship in the lyrics creates an uncomfortable, inappropriate mood. The relationship described in the song between the young, presumably underage female and the adult male indeed has awkward undertones to the listener. Avruch describes the narrator of Palmer’s song as ”a psychotic manipulative seductress, a cross between Lolita and Sylvia Plath, complete with creepy, come-hither intonations.” In addition to Avruch’s description, it should be noted that the way in which the song is performed gives an impression of a petulant, pre-adolescent girl; one who seems to desire the man and at the same time threaten him with what will happen if he in any way advances on her. The narrator describes herself as a little girl but rather than coming off as a young girl, one gets an impression of a young female who might be very near adulthood. In any case, the narrator seems somewhat manipulative, threatening to have the man put to jail if he leaves, or ”tricks”, her:

Missed me missed me now you've got to kiss me
If you kiss me, mister, you must think I’m pretty
If you think so, mister, you must want to fuck me
If you fuck me, mister, it must mean you love me
If you love me, mister, you would never leave me
It's as simple as can be!

Missed me missed me, now you've got to kiss me
If you miss me, mister, why do you keep leaving
If you trick me, mister, I will make you suffer

And they'll get you, mister, put you in the slammer and forget
You, mister, then I think you'll miss me won't you miss me
Won't you miss me

The ”tricking” most likely refers to the male first having sex, and possibly even a relationship, with the female and then leaving her. The narrator seems to be using blackmail against the male; she will tell all about their relations if the male leaves her. Avruch’s comparison between Palmer’s narrator and Vladimir Nabokov’s young female protagonist, from his novel Lolita in 1955, seems indeed valid and, one could even claim, imminent. In his essay Goldman (2004) discusses Lolita’s sexuality, seen as normal from the point of view of sexology, but abnormal by the man of the story, Humbert Humbert:

Lolita poses the question of how a woman's sexual awakening should be viewed. Specifically, through what interpretive or epistemological frame should readers view Lolita's sexuality – through what Humbert and myth tell us, or through a more prosaic lens? Through conscious and obsessive allusions to the Garden of Eden, Humbert creates a distinctly Edenic framework, an epistemology, for interpreting Lolita and her troubling sexuality. If we accept Humbert's epistemology, Lolita, like Eve, is culpable for her fall from innocence, and her fall from sexual *ignorance* becomes a mark of innate depravity. […] The science of sexology undermines Humbert's Edenic perspective of Lolita and establishes her behavior and development as normal. Rather than being a nymphomaniac who seduces Humbert Humbert, from this perspective she becomes a normally developing young woman who is exploited by an imaginative man who ironically sees her as the deviant. (Goldman 2004)

The narrator of the song bears resemblance to Humbert Humbert’s view of Lolita as a seductress. Just like Humbert does not view Lolita as a victim, in the song the narrator does not seem like a victim, with lines like ”if you kiss me, mister, I might tell my sister”, despite her age and the possible illegality of the relationship. Rather, through a facade of innocence the narrator seems to somewhat manipulate the situation and the man and, thus, is the one who has power in the relationship. Seeing as she is presumably a minor or at least under the age of consent, threatening the man with prison as she is, however, is she not a victim of a crime nonetheless? Most probably, yes. Looking at the situation from a legal point of view she is definitely a victim and the man should realize this as well, even though he might see *himself* as the victim, like Humbert Humbert, at the mercy of the narrator.

Putting aside notions about the legality of the relationship, one cannot help but be intrigued by the female's, at least seemingly, superior power position in the context of the male hegemony. The ground rule of hegemony is that the male by default has the advantage and the female the disadvantage in society, and this asymmetry with regard to power could also be seen reflected on a grass-root level as such in female-male relationships. In ”Missed Me” the narrator has an advantage over the male. How does she obtain and maintain it? How can any female rise above, or rise to be equal with, the male in terms of power in a relationship? One could suggest that the female uses her sexuality and body as a tool over the male. Then again one has to question the legitimacy of the female's power when it is achieved by emphasizing femininity, by pleasing the male desire via the female body.

In ”Missed Me” the female-male relationship, real or imagined, seems to be in the hands of the female. The theme of pedophilia is present in the song because the female is underage but it is unlikely that Palmer's intention is to talk about pedophilia as such. Rather, one of the main points of the song is the type of female behaviour presented in the song. This is not to say that a young male could and would not behave in the same way. In the premise of the male hegemonic society and the social gender binary of emotional/physical, however, it is far more likely for a female to use her body as a tool of power in a relationship such as this, and succeed in it. A male already has inherent power in the male hegemony but because a female does not, she might have to resort to using “assets” such as her body to gain power of sorts. The female's behaviour in ”Missed Me” is socially constructed, learned behaviour and it complies with the male hegemony, even though it may seem that the narrator resists it.

”Ampersand” (2008) seems to be one of Palmer's more personal and straight-forward songs regarding relationships. As much as the song addresses a female-male relationship, it is also an account on the narrator's person and how it might affect the relationship. In this sense “Ampersand” bears resemblance to “Glass Slipper”. The song starts with the narrator walking home at night while fire trucks go by her with sirens blasting. ”The ghetto boy are catcalling me,” she says and muses if that type of ”courtship” has ever been successful. She then accounts that she usually manages to shock these catcallers with a sincere greeting of ”Hi, my name's Amanda.” In the

chorus the narrator addresses a potential boyfriend or a spouse, saying that she refuses to have their relationship tie them together as a single unit:

And I'm not gonna live my life
On one side of an ampersand
Even if I went with you
I'm not the girl you think I am

And I'm not gonna match you
'Cause I'll lose my voice completely
No, I'm not gonna watch you
'Cause I'm not the one that's crazy

”I’m not gonna live my life/On one side of an ampersand,” the narrator says because she would lose her self, ”her voice”, completely. Ampersand refers, of course, to the ’&’ sign, meaning ’and’. The narrator, then, wants to be independent as her own person and rejects the notion of a couple in a relationship making a two-person unit, connected indeed by an ampersand. The narrator does not reject relationships as such but she seems to reject them as pre-defined by society and pre-planned, in this case, by the male:

But you've got the headstone all ready
All carved up and pretty
Your sick satisfaction
Those his and hers matching

The daisies all push up'n
Pairs to the horizon
Your eyes full of ketchup
It's nice that you're trying

The narrator accounts a morbid scene where the male has their relationship and life together planned and lived beforehand so far that it is literally already set in stone, their names carved side by side in a future tombstone and their bodies decaying, ”pushing daisies”. The male addressed in the song seems to have a very distinct notion of what a relationship should be like. He seems to regard the relationship as a do-or-die, all-or-nothing affair where the female and the male, when together, are together forever. The story takes a dramatic turn:

And nobody deserves to die

For you were awful adamant
That if I didn't love you
Then you had just one alternative

This ”alternative” to unrequited love refers to death, to suicide, and is the kind of approach to relationships the narrator shies away from. She says that she is not a Juliet, referring to Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, and that she will not die for the male or for love:

And I may be romantic
I may risk my life for it
But I ain't gonna die for you
You know I ain't no Juliet

I'm not gonna watch you
While you burn yourself out, baby
No, I'm not gonna stop you
'Cause I'm not the one that's crazy, yeah

The use of the colloquial ”ain’t” in juxtaposition to a character of canonized classic Western literature such as Shakespeare underlines the narrator’s reluctance to play socially defined and culturally idealized roles of convention as those in female-male relationships. She shows no mercy to the male when she turns him down, not getting involved if and when he does something to himself. The narrator will not play the male’s game because she’s ”not the one that’s crazy”. Instead she saves herself, her voice and her life.

Gender as a binary system of female and male is present in the song in the image of ”his and her matching”. Then again, ”his and her matching” refers more to the unity, the similarity through assimilation, of two people in a relationship, than their genders. ”His and her” could also be ”his and his” or ”her and her”. Gender construction can nonetheless be detected in the song in the ideas it depicts about conventional female-male relationships in particular. The female and the male differ in their views on a relationship. The female attests that while she might indeed be in a relationship she will not let it shadow and take over her own person and independence. The male, on the other hand, is invested on fulfilling a relationship convention wherein the female and the male in a relationship are the one and the same. Whereas the male wants to mimic the conventions of a marital couple, the female does not. A conventional female-male relationship is epitomized in matching

hand towels and a single gravestone for two. The male's idea of the relationship is in its utmost in congruence with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* wherein the title characters pursue to be together and die in the process. All of this the female rejects. She sees this type of relationship to mean an antiquated notion of marriage wherein she will lose her independence. It could be argued, however, that the narrator would not "lose her voice" nowadays in the relationship as a female might have lost her independence via marriage a century or two ago. As in "Glass Slipper", the notion still remains, however, that the narrator *feels* she will lose her independence in a relationship of conventional romantic love and marriage.

It could be argued that one could change the narrator's gender to a male's and that the views about relationships in "Ampersand" could very well be those of a male's. While this is true, it has to be stressed that the song and its message work better from a female gender's point of view. That is, according to the stereotypical emotional/physical dichotomy regarding females and males, it is the female social gender in particular that is conventionally expected to want an intense romantic relationship and not the male. In "Ampersand" the female narrator rejects the social gender conventions expected of her. She says "I'm not the girl you think I am", meaning she is not the social female who is taught to want marriage and matching hand towels. The narrator, then, rejects the female-male relationship because she equates it with a conventional dependent female gender role in particular. Therefore it can be concluded that the song's female gender construction rejects the male hegemony because it rejects conventional heteronormative female-male relationships.

The gender construction in three of the five analyzed songs – "Sex Changes", "Shores of California", and "Missed Me" – seems to comply with male hegemony by adhering to conventional gender expectations with regard to female-male relationships. The remaining two songs – "Glass Slipper" and "Ampersand" – reject the hegemony. Palmer's ambiguous style, especially in "Sex Changes", makes the process of analysis difficult at times but she can also be very clear with her intent, as for example in "Ampersand". Palmer's portrayal of female-male relationships and gender roles in these relationships is surprisingly conventional. Then again, her female protagonists do seem to rebel against these conventions at times.

5. VIOLENCE

“He’s gonna beat you like a pillow.”

“Girl Anachronism” (2003) is an account of the female narrator claiming to be, in accordance with the song title, misplaced in time, i.e. an anachronism. Why she feels this way seems to be connected with her character and behaviour that clashes with her surrounding environment. According to Palmer an influencing factor in the birth of the song was her notion that she herself felt like an anachronism, that she “always felt like the twenties or the sixties would have made more sense [to be born into]” (Girl Anachronism 2010).

The narrator of Girl Anachronism depicts herself as ”not the carefullest of girls”, with not only herself (”scars on my arms/and cracks in my hips”) but the surrounding physical objects as well (”the glass on the floor and the strings that're breaking”) getting damaged in her wake. The heaving wreck that seems to be her life can be better understood in the light of certain lines in the song that could indicate to mental health problems of some sort:

And you can tell
From the state of my room that they let me out too soon
And the pills that I ate
Came a couple years too late
And I’ve got some issues to work through
There I go again
Pretending to be you

Not only misplaced in time, the narrator’s very person or identity seems misplaced as well. At this point one needs to, however, make an enquiry as to whether or not gender is a significant factor in the song, one that warrants an analysis from a female point of view in particular. At first glance the girl in the song could perhaps indeed be changed into a boy, making it Boy Anachronism, but a further look at the portrayal of the character in the song indicates to a female social gender in particular.

When thinking about conventional social gender expectations it could be argued that in Western society young men are often regarded “naturally”, i.e. innately physically active, so that wrecking themselves and their surroundings, for example when playing a game, is seen as normal behaviour and not something to be

concerned about. In the same expectation continuum it could be argued that in Western society young females, on the other hand, are often regarded “naturally” passive. This means that young girls are expected to be, for example, well-composed and quiet, and if they hurt themselves or their surroundings – intentionally or unintentionally – there must be something wrong with them. Considering this, the lyrics of “Girl Anachronism” would lose a significant amount of their effect were the gender of the narrator male. In the context of the rest of the lyrics, a line like ”not the carefullest of boys” would perhaps not raise the same interest or wonder in the listener as “not the carefullest of girls”. Furthermore, the reactions that the female narrator’s situation elicits from the outside world, and herself as well, indicate that the song needs to be looked at from a female point of view in particular. It was suggested to me (personal communication 2008) that “Girl Anachronism” could not be “Boy Anachronism” because of the belittling attitudes in the song regarding the narrator’s troubling situation and, specifically, the notion that she is only acting out in order to get attention:

Don't call the doctors
‘Cause they've seen it all before
They'll say just
Let
Her
Crash
And
Burn
She’ll learn
The attention just encourages her

In a conversation with a physician (personal communication 2002) about females and mental illness, it came up that before there was a clinical name to, say an anxiety attack or an anxiety disorder, females suffering from a mental illness were often dismissed as ”emotional”; that there is really nothing wrong with them and that because they are women they tend to overreact. The reactions toward the female’s behaviour in “Girl Anachronism” bear resemblance to this social female gender characteristic of emotionality. Do not pay her attention because her condition does not call for it, the song explicitly says.

In her book The Female Malady: women, madness, and English culture 1830-1980 (1986) Elaine Showalter states:

It is certainly possible to see hysteria within the specific historical framework of the nineteenth century as an unconscious form of feminist protest, the counterpart of the attack on patriarchal values carried out by the women's movement of the time. In this perspective, Freud's Dora is the silent sister of Ibsen's Nora; both resist the social definitions that confine them to the doll's house of bourgeois femininity.
(1986: 5)

The term hysteria, as discussed by Showalter, was once used to describe mental illness and, particularly, female mental illness. Although she hints at the so-called hysterical females unconsciously rebelling against their surrounding society with social gender behaviour not expected of them, Showalter notes the pitfalls of treating a female's distressed state as not medical:

Such claims, however, come dangerously close to romanticizing and endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion rather than seeing it as the desperate communication of the powerless. […] A serious historical study of the female malady should not romanticize madness as one of women's wrongs any more than it should accept an essentialist equation between femininity and insanity. Rather, it must investigate how, in a particular cultural context, notions of gender influence the definition and, consequently, the treatment of mental disorder.
(1986: 5)

According to Showalter, then, female madness, hysteria, whatever we choose to call the phenomenon, should not be romanticized and the illness itself certainly should not be seen as gender-specific. In hindsight hysteria reveals itself as very much culturally and socially conditioned, however. Showalter points out the gender-specificity of mental illness in 19th century England:

Even when both men and women had similar symptoms of mental disorder, psychiatry differentiated between an English malady, associated with the intellectual and economic pressures on highly civilized men, and a female malady, associated with the sexuality and essential nature of women. Women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in the conduct of their lives.
(1986: 7)

Further indication of female mental illness and reactions to it being a socially conditioned phenomenon is the suggestion that it was in the end not females breaking down that initiated the era of psychiatric modernism, but rather the shell shocked

male casualties of the First World War (Showalter 1986: 164). The term and definition given to hysteria explicitly suggest that it is the very biological femaleness of a person that is making her ill and unstable. The term ”hysteric” originates from the Greek word ”hysterikos”, meaning ”concerning the womb” because it was thought that hysterical conditions originated from the womb (Hysteerinen 1997). The female malady, hysteria, seems to then be a social gender construction that is naturalized, i.e. disguised as a biological construction. One could argue that remnants of this social construction still persistently live in contemporary Western societies, in tired jokes about menstruating females having the so-called mad cow disease, for example.

A link can be drawn between the narrator of “Girl Anachronism” and the diagnosis of the hysterical woman: there is something wrong with this person and whatever it is, is perhaps because this person is a woman. ”Girl Anachronism” is a balancing act in this respect: there is a struggle between the socially constructed ”hysterical” female who does not need, or even deserve help, and the person who is ”not right now at all”, who is both not in the right time or her right mind. Palmer does address the issue of self-destruction and mental illness in her other songs as well. The song ”Bad Habit” (2003) is solely dedicated to the narrator talking about the habit of self-harming:

And pens and penknives take the blame
Crane my neck and scratch my name
But the ugly marks
Are worth the momentary gain
When I jab a sharpened object in
Choirs of angels seem to sing
Hymns of hate in memorandum

Also, in ”Ampersand” (2008) the narrator refers to people commenting on the sincerity of her situation with regard to her self-inflicted injuries:

And now to dress the wounds calls into question
How authentic they are
There is always someone criticizing me,
”She just likes paying hospitals”

As in “Bad Habit” and “Ampersand”, there is a similar self-deprecating attitude toward the narrator’s condition in “Girl Anachronism”. In “Girl Anachronism” the

narrator acknowledges – with sarcasm even embraces – the suggestion of a social female gender, a hysterical woman seeking for attention:

And you can tell
By the red in my eyes
And the bruises on my thighs
And the knots in my hair
And the bathtub full of flies
That I'm not right now at all
There I go again
Pretending that I'll fall

Pretending that she will fall, here, refers to her supposedly being only after attention. The imagery of red eyes, bruising thighs, knotted hair, and falling down, is violent and crude in its physicality and elicits alarm because it is not expected of the emotional social female. Peculiarly the narrator says that she is ”not so serious” and that ”this passion is a plagiarism”, suggesting that perhaps indeed she is not to be taken seriously. Then again, this suggestion might be the narrator deliberately trying to confuse and toy with those who do not take her seriously. In any case, in the end she claims that she is ”the world’s worst accident”, the Girl Anachronism.

Palmer addressing mental health and people’s reactions to it time and time again is perhaps a sign of the pressures an individual, a woman in this case, can feel in-between societal gendered attitudes to one’s condition and the actual condition. This is not to say, however, that there is a definite gendered significance with regard to mental health in songs such as ”Bad Habit” and ”Ampersand”. I have talked about gender and mental illness at length alongside this song but I do not think that it should as a whole be understood as depicting female mental instability in particular. Rather, the most noteworthy aspect of “Girl Anachronism” is the narrator’s reckless behaviour and person which is seen as abnormal by the outside world because she is a female. The narrator proudly, gleefully embraces societal gender conventions that are seen as abnormal to her female gender and, thus, ”Girl Anachronism” rejects to an extent the conventional gender binary and male hegemony. The crossing of gender boundaries with regard to behaviour is definitely seen as a positive thing in the song, especially seeing as the energy and determination behind the music and the attitude support this notion as well.

In ”Gravity” (2008) the physical phenomenon of gravity, is an explanation for unfortunate or unpleasant things occurring to the narrator. Gravity is something that either literally or metaphorically pulls people down, making them do questionable things as well as having questionable things done to them. Gravity in the song could be understood as a metaphor for a reality that is harsh. The song begins with what is presumably a car crash:

Gravity plays favorites
I know it 'cause I saw
Honest to God, officer
It's awful
(Awful)

In the midst of this frame-story the narrator depicts scenes from her life. She accounts, for example, performing oral sex at work:

Down at work I'm getting
too familiar with the floor
Trading in my talents
By the mouthful

The imagery of the song is indeed sordid, with the female’s ”talents” equaling her body. The narrator says that gravity is as a force something she cannot influence:

Hate to break it to you
But it's out of my control
Forces go to work
While we are sleeping
(Sleeping)

“Forces go to work/While we are sleeping“ indicates that these forces are somewhat invisible and indeed something one cannot influence. The quiet and calm vocals of the beginning break, here, Palmer belting out ”Someone tell her/Someone get her up!”, and we are back at the site of the car accident, trying to help the fallen victim up:

You can do it, good girl!
Right foot (Right foot!)
Left foot (Left foot!)

(This is just the way we showed you!)
Back in the car!
Careful with the seatbelt

Hold her
Look
I think it's cold
Poke her with something
and see if she's moving, okay?
I think we've lost her

It is as if the female is a ragdoll or a puppet in strings operated by other people. In the background Palmer goes through the alphabet in a speaking voice in a lazy, stupendous way. It seems as if the victim of the accident is either drunk or high on drugs and that, thus, she needs to be quickly helped back in the car before the police arrive at the scene. The imagery of this is as harsh as is the reality in which the narrator lives, a reality of competition:

Now
Necks are cracking sideways
Hit me from the back side
I am on the white side
You are on the black side
Cut a piece that's bite size
Shoot me from my good side
If you got a straight line
This would be a good time

This verse is repeated later on with three lines changed into ”I am on the thin side/You are on the fat side” and ”Shoot me from my bad side”. Although it is not explicitly suggested, the scenario of the song could be that of the modeling industry. Palmer refers to shooting ”from my good side” that could be understood as a photo shoot. Also, the song uses imagery that could be regarded as stereotypical of the modeling world and models in particular: appreciation of thinness, glorification of the exterior, overt competitiveness, drug use (”want a straight line”). Of course many of the song’s lines are ambiguous in their meaning, such as shooting (photos or a person) and cutting (food or a person) – the world described is indeed tinted with violence. On the other hand, the premise of the song could on a larger scale represent society where appreciation of the exterior, of thinness, of competitiveness certainly occurs.

One could argue that the narrator or the people described in ”Gravity” need not be female, that also a male could behave according to the song’s description. When put in the context of Western society, however, one can detect a social gender that is specifically female. When looking at statistics on eating disorders and gender, for example, female patients are in the majority with approximately only 10 per cent of them being male (Wolf 1991, cited in Shiltz 2010). This would support the notion that especially social females feel the pressure to confirm to society’s expectations of being thin. It, naturally, does not mean that social males do not feel pressure to fulfill society’s expectations on looks but just that those expectations do not first and foremost include weight and thinness but, for example, having an athletic body (Rosen & Gross 1987, cited in Shiltz 2010). Similar types of social expectations aimed at females can be found in Palmer’s unreleased demo song ”June Is Busting Out All Over” (Palmer 2006). In ”June..” Palmer depicts an attitude according to and atmosphere in which women become worthy through their looks and the effort they put into their looks: ”Imagine life fulfilled … You could be a model or just feel like one”. These efforts range from the use of cosmetics to diets to plastic surgery to pills, i.e. medicine: ”A screw, a pull, a twist, the drug that makes you prettiest”. If women do not adhere to this kind of behaviour and lifestyle, then they are, Palmer sings, ”ugly, sad and tragic”. The catalysis for all these efforts in becoming worthy, in reaching an aesthetic ideal seems, in the end, not to be the attainment of the ideal in itself, but the attainment of the ideal in order to please and entice the male gender instead: ”An 85 step diet plan - You need to try to please that man”. In both “June..” and “Gravity” the expectation specter depicted with regard to gender is that one gender, the female, is expected to fulfill the expectations and the desires of the other, the male.

The female gender in ”Gravity” is constructed via the body but the construction is heavily affected by female social gender characteristics that could be described as conventional. The female starves her body because thinness in females is an appreciated quality. The female uses her body as a means to an end by performing sexual acts, presumably to males. The female body is twisted, turned and shot through the camera lens. The female body is essentially an object. The social gender expectations presented in the song could indeed be considered as conventional. The notably violent imagery shrouding the song emphasizes the ruthlessness of its depicted world and female gender portrayals therein. One could

argue that the gender construction complies with the male hegemony if we accept the notion that the hegemony benefits from females restricting, violating, and using their bodies as a tool. Wolf (1991: 187, cited in Eastland 2010) says that ”a cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience.” Meanwhile Eastland concludes that ”women who remain thin are being obedient; it is another way for patriarchy to control women.” Conformity to gravity’s pull, the female social gender ideal in the song, such as thinness and pleasing the sexual male desire, complies with male hegemony because it hands the control of the female body to the hegemony. ”Gravity” is as a lyric ambiguous and vague. While its female gender construction complies with the male hegemony, however, one might detect an undercurrent of rejection or at least a mockery of the conventional female social gender in Palmer’s performance. At one point in the song the narrator, in fact, disrupts the notion of being at the mercy, the pull, of gravity by defiantly stating ”You think I can’t fly?/Well, you just watch me, watch!” In the end these two lines are overshadowed by the rest of the lyrics, and gravity, as the narrator begs ”Officer, forgive me please.”

The name Delilah is featured in the Old Testament in the story about Samson and Delilah. The etymology of the name is deemed of an unclear Hebrew origin but the meaning most commonly offered to it is ’delicate’. Some sources give the name meanings such as ’poor’ or ’small’, of biblical origin, and, of Hebrew origin, ’lovelorn’, ’seductive’, and ’delight’, for example. (Wieder 2010) According to Exum (2009) the name is wordplay on the Hebrew word ’layla’ which means ’night’.

In Palmer’s song ”Delilah” (2006) is described as ”an unrescuable schizo,” because she stays in obviously abusive relationships. Delilah does not seem to have much self-worth as she sacrifices herself over and over again, hoping for love but getting the very opposite instead:

In this same bar where you slammed down your hand
And said “Amanda, I'm in love”
No, you're not
You're just a sucker for the ones who use you
And it doesn't matter what I say or do
The stupid bastard's gonna have his way with you

The narrator feels there is nothing she can do to help Delilah who innocently falls prey to the ”stupid bastard” who takes advantage of her. The male described in the song is harsh and, indeed, abusive – ”[he is] probably watching porn of you from the fall” – and Delilah, in turn, is eager to please them.

And you thought you could change the world
By opening your legs
Well it isn't very hard
Try kicking them instead
And you thought you could change his mind
By changing your perfume to the kind his mother wore

Like her namesake, the courtesan in the Bible, Delilah is using herself and her body in order to gain and retain what she wants. Unlike her namesake, however, she seems to be unable to do so: ”And you thought you could change the world/By opening your legs.” The narrator is berating Delilah for it, for her passivity, for her lack of self-worth, for her means in defending herself: ”Well it isn't very hard/ Try kicking them instead.” This Delilah does not do, however, and she keeps bringing herself down for the sake of males, and perhaps for the sake of the idea of love. The narrator is very hard on Delilah and her situation, to the point of being misogynistic by saying she is either schizophrenic, meaning crazy, or else ”on the rag”, i.e. on her period, implying that menstruation is making her act crazy.

You are impossible, Delilah: the princess of denial
And after 7 years in advertising you are none the wiser

You're an unrescuable schizo
Or else you're on the rag
’Cause if you take him back
I'm gonna lose my nerve
He's gonna beat you like a pillow
You schizos never learn
And if you take him home
You'll get what you deserve

The narrator thinks Delilah is in denial, that she does not realize her circumstances. Delilah’s experience ”in advertising” could be understood as the ability to see behind public facades. She should then be able to see behind the facade of her situation but

is “none the wiser”. ”He’s gonna beat you like a pillow,” the narrator predicts. ”And if you take him home/You’ll get what you deserve,” she continues harshly.

From an outside, objective point of view, the most obvious and rational decision is indeed for a person in an abusive relationship to leave it immediately and this is most likely what is prompting the narrator’s overall seemingly unsupportive comments and attitude. The narrator wants Delilah to get out and save herself but Delilah seems to harbour an overt dependency on the males in her life. What is making her act in this way? More importantly, why is she putting up with these types of violent relationships? One needs to look at the situation from the victim’s point of view in order to gain understanding, which Palmer’s narrator does not do. As unfathomable as it is, it is customary for an abused person to stay in the relationship, rather than immediately get out. Suggested reasons for this vary; a person may stay because of low self-esteem, being afraid of retaliation for leaving, being ashamed, or even because of love, despite the abuse (Stannard Gromisch 2010). Kurz (1997: 452) cites Mills’s study from 1985:

> … the women she interviewed minimized the problematic aspects of their husband’s violence by ignoring it and focusing on the positive aspects of their relationship with their husband or by justifying their husband’s behavior as beyond his control.

Delilah, too, seems to ignore the violence and perhaps the reason for it is love, or what she sees as love. One could suggest that she is somewhat dependent on her relationships, unable as she seems to get out of them. The power relations in a relationship between an abuser and the abused are obviously asymmetrical. Delilah *is* oppressed. Yet it would be unwise to claim that the male hegemony actively perpetuates domestic violence. Additionally, also males suffer from domestic violence.

Depending on one’s point of view, Delilah is poor, she is lovelorn, or she is seductive. Instrumental in her situation is her body that is being abused by males as well as used as a means by herself. The female gender is most definitely constructed here, yet again, via the conventional female/male dichotomy of emotional/physical. The female in the song is portrayed as passive, as lying on her back, and as having her emotions governing the rational part of her mind, as claiming to be in love with someone who hurts her. The male, on the other hand, can be interpreted to be active, physical, and aggressive. The narrator acts as a

consciousness, an outsider, of sorts, however misogynistic she may come off as, who tries to make Delilah see her situation for what it is. The song's female gender construction complies with the binary gender system and can be seen to comply with the male hegemony. This is so even if throughout the song the narrator is trying to get Delilah to rebel against the conventions of her gender, to kick her legs.

”What's the Use of Wondrin'” (2008) features American singer and song-writer Annie Clark in vocals alongside Palmer. Clark and Palmer are accompanied by simple piano playing and the song has a quaint feeling to it overall both musically as well as lyrically. The vocal performance is minimalistic and serious in mood, indeed resembling more the style of traditional choirgirls than rock or pop singers. The lyrics depict the narrator's views on the dynamics in a female-male relationship:

What's the use of wond'rin
If he's good or if he's bad
Or if you like the way he wears his hat?
Oh, what's the use of wond'rin
If he's good or if he's bad?
He's your fella and you love him
That's all there is to that

Because the female loves her ”fella”, it is of no consequence to wonder if the male is ”good” or ”bad”. Her love is reason enough to put aside the male's character and behaviour, whatever that might be. The narrator's insistence to not question the male's character feels ominous in itself of said character. Indeed, in her heart of hearts the female might acknowledge that the male is ”bad” and that she should leave the relationship:

Common sense may tell you
That the ending will be sad
And now's the time to break and run away
Oh, what's the use of wond'rin
If the ending will be sad?
He's your fella and you love him
There's nothing more to say

The notion of the female breaking and running away gives the impression that the male being ”bad” means bad in a concrete, perhaps physical, way towards the female. This impression is strengthened by the sounds of a female quietly sobbing in the background in parts of the song. Yet again, despite the male being ”bad”, and possibly abusing the female, it is no use to wonder ”if the ending will be sad,” the female says. Her devotion to the male is blind and the justification for it juxtaposed to the male’s behaviour is shaky at best:

Something made him the way that he is
Whether he's false or true
And something gave him the things that are his
One of those things is you

The male’s character and behaviour, his whole person, is described as innate; a mysterious and vague ”something” makes the male what he is, whether good or bad, false or true. On the other hand, the male’s behaviour could be interpreted as not innate but built according to the conventions of social male gender, at least with regard to females. ”Something gave him the things that are his/One of those things is you” states that, first, the female is his possession and, second, that she is *automatically* his possession, granted by the mysterious ”something”. One could argue, then, that this ”something” represents the conventional asymmetrical power relations of male hegemony. The ”something” could be understood as pre-contemporary conventions of marriage, for example, wherein the female becomes the male’s possession. In this context one starts to wonder whether the female in the song really loves the male. In any case, the female is expected, as a possession, to be at the use and disposal of the male:

So when wants he wants your kisses
You'll give them to the lad
And anywhere he leads you, you will walk
And anytime he needs you, you'll go running there like mad
You’re his girl and he's your fella
And all the rest is talk

The female will kiss him when he wants, walk wherever he leads, and generally be at his service. She is not independent as a person and, obviously, the relationship is not equal. ”What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” brings to mind the situation depicted in

”Delilah” (2006). In both of these songs the females are at the beck and call of males. Whereas the narrator of ”Delilah” is vocally very critical of the abusive relationship, in ”What’s the Use of Wondrin’” the criticism is between the lines and very subtle. The latter song is more emphatic towards the female, all the while making it known to the listener that the female’s situation is not at all desirable, despite her protests. One could argue that also males suffer from abuse in relationships and therefore the violence in these two songs is not gender-specific. According to Kurz (1997: 444), however, a violence-against-women approach is more appropriate than is a gender-neutral family-violence or spouse-abuse approach when talking about violence aimed at females because its cause is “inequality and male dominance”. Kurz states:

> Women are typically the victims, not the perpetrators, of violence in intimate relationships. A violence against women perspective much more accurately explains the nature of violence in intimate relationships. It is norms and practices of male dominance that promote the use of violence by men toward female intimates. The proponents of the family violence perspective, in arguing that women are violent toward men, disregard gender and its determining role in structuring marital and other heterosexual relationships.
> (1997: 451)

The point is not to deny females as the perpetrators of violence and males as the victims of it but to argue that when it comes to gender and violence in relationships females are more often than not the victims of it. Furthermore, the point is to argue that behind this predicament is the notion of gender’s role with regard to violence in relationships. In this sense one needs to treat violence done by males against females and violence by females against males separately.

Female gender construction in ”What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” follows conventional ideas of female social gender. The female in the song is passive, submissive, and nonconfrontational, among other things. The gender binary is, then, present in the song as the opposing female and male genders: passive versus active and physical versus emotional. Moreover, male hegemony is present, as well, represented in the relationship as the subservient female and dominant male. The female gender construction can, then, be concluded to comply with the male hegemony. It is worthy to note, however, that Palmer subtly criticises this compliance, manifested in the female’s sobs in the background and the overall uptight, reserved style of musical arrangements and vocals.

Of the four songs “Girl Anachronism” is the one that very clearly rejects male hegemony. While “Gravity”, “Delilah”, and “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” comply to an extent with the hegemony, they also at the same time criticise the compliance. In addition to referring to the topic of violence “Delilah” and “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” also touch upon the topic of female-male relationships. These two songs depict female-male relationships, and females and males, via the emotional-physical binary that was detected already also in the songs discussed in the previous chapter.

6. PREGNANCY, ABORTION, AND RAPE

“I joke about sex because it's funny when you're frightened.”

”Not Mine” (Palmer 2007) is an unreleased song of Palmer’s in which she addresses the topic of pregnancy, also hinting at abortion, in a very intimate way from a female’s point of view. The narrator describes the possible features that the unborn baby would have:

Everyone says it’ll laugh like you
Everyone says it’ll get your smile
Well I’m the only one who knows you never loved me, baby
Not a single solitary time
Not a single solitary time
Everyone says it’ll have your temper
Everyone says it’ll have your eyes
Well I’m the only one who knows where you were sleeping, baby
And I really wouldn’t be surprised
I really wouldn’t be surprised
Everybody tells me that I’m crazy
Saying I’m too young to have a baby
But maybe the joke’s on you this time
Maybe the joke’s on you this time

The baby will have its father’s laugh, smile, temper, and eyes, accounts the narrator. In-between she also attests, however, that he never loved her. She also hints that he is not the father after all: ”I’m the only one who knows where you were sleeping, baby/And I really wouldn’t be surprised.” The narrator really would not be surprised if he were not the father? It does seem so, especially when taking note of the second to last line of the song: ”Well I don’t even know if you’re the father.” The listener gets the feeling that maybe the narrator is after retribution for the male not loving her by not clearing the assumption he might not be the father: ”maybe the joke’s on you this time,” she says.

Whereas the beginning of the song depicts a scenario in which the narrator keeps the child, by the end of it one is not sure that she will:

And everyone will say that I’m a liar
Everyday the swallowing gets tighter
Keeping this a secret has been murder
And I’d like to get on with my life

I'd like to get on with my life

With "everyone will say that I'm a liar" the narrator could be referring to lying about the father's identity and the people around her getting to know about it. On the other hand, it could also refer to people thinking she is lying about being pregnant in the first place, for whatever motives. In any case, the narrator is anxious. "Keeping this a secret has been murder," she says, ambiguously referring to the situation in which she is pregnant, to a male who does not love her or to a male that is not her boyfriend. At this point one gets the feeling that the narrator might be hinting at abortion; she has a secret that is murder, both figuratively as well as literally. Also the following line repeated twice, "I'd like to get on with my life", could allude at abortion as moving on with *her life*, without a child. The last lines of the song repeat the narrator's predicament: she does not know for sure that the father is her boyfriend, the one who everyone assumes it is. Even if he were the father, the narrator would perhaps not feel happy because he never loved her. The narrator's situation is, then, intolerable and she concludes that "there isn't any way it's mine", possibly referring to the termination of the pregnancy:

Everyone says it'll laugh like you
Everyone says it'll get your smile
Well I don't even know if you're the father
But there isn't any way it's mine

The most curious, provoking part of the song is indeed its last line: "There isn't any way it's mine". Artificial insemination and surrogate motherhood notwithstanding, it is, of course, impossible for a biological female to claim that she is not the biological parent of the baby she is carrying. Yet here Palmer's narrator is denouncing any possible parenthood. The pregnancy seems painful because of the unclear circumstances regarding the father and it is, therefore, understandable for the narrator to state that the baby is not hers, whether she means it literally or as an allusion to an abortion. By saying that the baby is literally not hers, the narrator is perhaps rejecting maternity on a symbolic level. If she indeed has an abortion, she is rejecting maternity on an actual, biological level as well. In case of abortion, denying her biological parenthood, however absurdly, might make the ordeal easier for her psychologically.

In Palmer's song the rejection of maternity, whether literal or figurative or both, seems on the surface an act of rejecting one's biological body. The autonomy of the female over her body is not compromised in that she herself gets to decide whether or not to have her baby. The notion that she is the one who can get pregnant, and decide over the pregnancy, seems to give her power over the male. One notices, however, that it is specifically this physical property, the biological female's and not the male's ability to bear offspring, that brings a burden of sorts on the female psychologically. The female's autonomy over childbearing comes, thus, with an unavoidable duty, or indeed a burden. In the song gender, then, in general is understood as the binary oppositions of female and male. The female gender construction follows the conventional binary system of gender but Palmer's last statement, ”it's not mine”, manages to disrupt it slightly. Thus, it could be argued that while the song does not as such reject or comply with the hegemony, it manages to disrupt it, to shake it up.

“Provanity” is a song from a demo tape from 1995 (Palmer 2006). The title ”Provanity” is a wordplay, a mixture of the terms 'profanity' and 'pro-vanity', the latter being used repeatedly in the actual lyrics. I understand pro-vanity to mean being *for* vanity, supporting vanity. Vanity in itself refers to uselessness, among other things, and being vain could be described as being preoccupied with the exterior, rather than the interior, of things. In addition, pro-vanity could be understood as ”before vanity”, i.e. standing in front of a bathroom vanity unit with a mirror. One could suggest that vanity is highly appreciated in contemporary Western culture, but at the same time it is regarded as an unflattering characteristic. If being vain, being preoccupied with the exterior and looks is seen as unflattering, then Palmer merging the terms pro-vanity and profanity is understandable. To promote vanity is profane, i.e. vulgar, the title of the song could suggest. What, exactly, does it mean to be pro-vanity, then? The narrator explains the concept of pro-vanity very vaguely:

I've been pro-vanity since I was ten.
I picture altars in past the shutters-den
Baby bottle didn't choke
There were no cherry lollipops, cherry lip smacker and I got off

Marry money, have a child, keep it pretty ugly as you eat sushi and drink cocktails

These lines and their meanings are unclear to me. The idea of pro-vanity as an attitude and behaviour, however, would seem to refer to a lifestyle in which one can enjoy oneself without a care in the world. With the narrator pro-vanity ”began” at the young age of ten. At a later age, as an adult, the pro-vain person acquires a wealthy spouse (”marry money”) which the narrator describes as a lifestyle that is ”pretty ugly”. The means to an easy, vain lifestyle, then, is to marry and subsequently take advantage of someone else’s financial means. As discussed in conjunction with ”Glass Slipper”, in the past it has been difficult, or downright forbidden, for a woman to do paid work and getting married was the only way for a female to secure her income. In the present such pursuits are no longer necessary, but the pro-vain woman is content to marry well instead of working for a living. Pro-vain attitude does, however, seem to elicit negative feelings and outright, horrific despair in the narrator:

There is no place I would rather be killed
Than in my own backyard
On my own propane grill

There is no place she would rather be killed than the premises of her own lifestyle. She feels contempt and is put off by the uselessness of it all:

And I'm sick of your smile
And I'm sick of your cake
And I'm sick of your meaningless blather
And I'm sick of your hair
And I wish it weren't there

There are lines in the song that indeed leave me uncertain as to their meaning, such as ”Baby bottle didn't choke/There were no cherry lollipops, cherry lip smacker and I got off.” In the context of lines like ”lolly didn't stop the little melancholy absence and I felt high so I ripped it off”, however, I could for example suggest that lollipops could be seen as exterior rewards to a child. Lollipops are something sweet but as the narrator states, they do not ”stop the little melancholy absence”. The little melancholy absence of what, one might inquire? The following line, ”Money prices an unborn child it would be hated”, could refer to the absence of a true caretaker, one

that does not give a price tag to a child. This line of thought is somewhat repeated later in the song when the narrator states that she does not ”think it's right/For a woman to breed for attention.” The suggestion of having a child in order to garner attention is horrific in itself but makes sense to a person who is pro-vanity. The child becomes an accessory. If the narrator is indeed the offspring of a so-called pro-vain person and has grown up in a culture of vanity, then she definitely is rejecting that culture. She says, ”I've been pro-vanity since I could know/No one will ever care to see what I don't show.” The last line refers to being preoccupied with the exterior and not the interior and, for example, appreciating looks and not one’s thoughts, emotions, or intelligence. The narrator is caught in the culture she grew up in and despises it, but also herself for it:

And I'm sick of myself
And I wish you could help
If you want to you can pull out the ladder
Oh, and it sounds so indulgent
Amazing I've managed
To keep you engaged for just four fucking minutes
And maybe you'd be provanity
Conformity to society’s expectations about looks

The four last lines reveal that what the narrator has been trying to do is to talk about the concept introduced in the title of the song: ”provanity/Conformity to society’s expectations about looks”.

In ”Pro-vanity” the female body is presented as a tool to gain attention as well as material goods, attention and material being what the pro-vain woman sees as desirable. Use of the female body as a tool does not exclude pregnancy and having children. The song suggests that in the culture of vanity one does not have a child because one truly wants one but, perhaps, because it is required after having married, or maybe because of money (”money prices an unborn child”), or because one wants attention. This view is naturally quite morbid. Then again, one could argue that marrying for money in order to maintain a lifestyle is already a way of using one’s body and one’s self as a tool to means and that having children is just a final extension of this practise. Palmer’s narrator describes a culture that teaches females that procreating for other reasons than wanting to have a child is worth praise as well as rewards, but she does not approve of it:

And I'm sick when I breathe
And I wish you would leave
At the very least have an abortion
I don't need a damn life
And I don't think it's right
For a woman to breed for attention

One cannot help but go back to the term pro-vanity and view it in conjunction with the song's ideas about procreation. Pro-vanity bears resemblance to the rhetoric used especially in the United States when talking about abortion and the groups of people who are against allowing it or for allowing it. The three major views that manifest in the discussion about abortion: the pro-choice, the pro-life, and the anti-abortion (Robinson 2009). The points of view of these three groups differ as follows: the first looks at the issue from the female's perspective, whereas the latter two look at it either from the fetus's perspective or the perspective of an institution, say, a church or a religion. Although Palmer's song's point is not to talk about being pro-choice or pro-life, she does nonetheless indirectly seem to support the female's right for an abortion, but, more than that, she seems to emphasize the female's *responsibility* to not procreate because of superficial, vain, purposes.

In ”Provanity” the female gender is constructed via the female body. One could argue that the song also presents a specific type of female social gender, one that is characterized by concern with material goods, the exterior, and, because of these concerns, marrying a wealthy spouse. This type of behaviour could be seen as belonging to male social gender as well, but in ”Provanity” it is presented as specifically female social behaviour. In addition, in the song the biological female sex is tied to the social female gender in that pregnancy is seen as an *extension* of social gender behaviour. The female gender construction is, then, done via the female body and also social gender behaviour aspects attached to the body. The song's lyrics are ambiguous but the impression one gets is that the narrator describes society that adheres to a conventional, almost antiquated, gender system. What speaks for this notion is the fact that it seems that the female's role is to marry, to have children; in essence to be a housewife. The song complies with the male hegemony, then, with its antiquated view on gender roles but the song's narrator, while part of the ”provain movement”, rejects and criticises this compliance.

”Mandy Goes To Med School” (2006) is a provocative song about abortion. The title’s ”Mandy” is most definitely a nickname and a reference to Amanda Palmer. Palmer references herself and her band mate, Brian Viglione, in the lyrics, describing them as ”quack doctors”, i.e. doctors who are not medically qualified. In the context of the song, a quack doctor means an abortionist – someone a female would turn to in circumstances where abortion is not legal or otherwise available. Palmer starts with troubling imagery:

I've been feeling dull as a coat hanger
Pretty as a picture of a patient on a fresh IV
Giddy as a gangbanger with a set of sutures where his magic Johnson ought to be

The narrator states she is ”feeling dull as a coat hanger” and this is most likely a reference to a coat hanger being used as an instrument of abortion. ”Pretty as a picture of a patient on a fresh IV,” she adds to her list of conflicting similes. The narrator continues describing herself as feeling ”giddy as a gangbanger with a set of sutures where his Magic Johnson ought to be”; referring most probably to a rapist whose penis has been cut of, leaving only sutures, i.e. stitches left. The imagery that Palmer uses in the song is gruelling, as is the subject matter: abortion from especially the point of view of the abortionist. The narrator, an abortionist, tells her patient how they will go about the procedure:

Yes, I'll tell you just the thing you need to be the next big thing
Let's start in with a test of your intelligence
And zest for the counter-productive
Up and down and roundabout and out the back
And keep your mouth shut tight
The lights are staying out but no sweat I've got aim like a mack truck
Guess how many fingers, ok, guess how many more I can fit there
Guess right get the toaster but you know, miss, guessing gets you nowhere

The lyrics give an impression of a dark back-alley in which the procedure is done in secrecy and silence: ”keep your mouth shut tight”, ”the lights are staying out.” Getting an abortion is not an everyday event and the narrator suggests one needs ”zest for the counter-productive”, willingness to be counter-productive, i.e. to not reproduce. The description of the procedure is more or less violent, ”I’ve got aim like

a mack truck", as well as crude: "guess how many fingers, ok, guess how many more I can fit there". Like the street seller of stolen goods, Palmer's narrator does her work at her car. The narrator suggests that the patient let her do the work because she knows what she is doing. The narrator also seems to suggest that the pregnant female cannot do the procedure herself and that if she does not get an abortion, she would have to resort to infanticide, i.e. to give birth to the baby and then kill it:

Yes, I can do everything you need from out of my new SUV
All my work is guaranteed to last the length of your recovery
Put away those pliers, honey, trust me 'cause I know the options
How about a nine-month long vacation and a two-foot coffin

"Pliers" is an ambiguous term because in the past they have been used as an aiding instrument in birth, but here they most likely refer to an instrument that is used in an abortion procedure.

It is clear that the narrator is not particularly emphatic towards her patients. With regard to her conduct and attitude as an abortionist the song bears resemblance to the character of Madame Sosostris in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) as interpreted by Hauck (2003: 247):

…there is an almost complete absence of guilt, or even remorse, in all of the abortions the poem represents: if Madame Sosostris is, as I have suggested, an abortionist, then abortion in this poem is being represented as a business enterprise…

If being an abortionist is an enterprise to Sosostris, likewise it is so to Palmer's narrator who seems mostly concerned with getting her work done:

I've been getting up close and intimate
Some close calls but I'm getting into it
In some states they say you can burn for it
But I'll burn that bridge when I get to it

It's not a bad thing
To get professional
It's got a nice ring
Mandy goes to med school

Indeed, the narrator calls what she is doing a "profession". She is not overtly concerned of the possible legal or moral consequences of her activities if she were to

be discovered and arrested. Her dedication to her work is deep and she knows she could be ruined. Yet, she does not seem to care; she will deal with the consequences when they come: ”I’ll burn that bridge when I get to it”. As an illegal abortionist she is a ”witch doctor”, a name sometimes also used for ”quack doctor”, which the narrator acknowledges by referring to the so-called witches being burned at the stake for their practise: ”In some states they say you can burn for it.” Hauck (2003: 238-239) suggests that also Madame Sosostris, as an abortionist, can be equated with a witch:

> …the epithet "wisest woman" links Madame Sosostris with the wise women of Europe, that is, the witches, who were the practitioners of the ancient medical arts, including the prevention of pregnancy and procurement of abortion. Their destruction during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries coincides […] with the assimilation of reproduction to male control . . . Identifying her with the witches raises the possibility that she is not so much the avatar of a debased religious tradition as a living conduit for "'secret information . . . which every woman knows,'" information widely perceived at the turn of the century to represent a threat to masculine hegemony. Indeed, her warning to "fear death by water" suggests knowledge of two forms of female reproductive control, abortion and postcoital douching, which, although very different in their intervention, can appear very alike.

In Palmer’s song the ”secret information” of abortion does not pertain to the female abortionist because the song also has a male abortionist, Brian. Nevertheless, the societal impact regarding abortions could be seen as the same in the song as they are in Hauck’s reading of *The Waste Land*. Hauck asserts that in the European society of past centuries, where abortion was absent, reproduction was under male control. She also suggests that information about female reproductive control was perceived a threat against masculine hegemony at the turn of the 20th century. Abortion as a procedure could then to an extent be interpreted as rejection of or rebellion against the male hegemony.

Palmer’s song does not look at abortion from the point of view of the pregnant female per se but it certainly sheds light on the horrors that a female might have to go through in case of unwanted pregnancy. When the subject matter is abortion, the termination of pregnancy, it is obvious that we are dealing with biological female sex, first and foremost. When talking about rejection of or compliance with the hegemony, it is in this case extremely difficult to say what is rejection and what compliance and, more importantly, why. Does the male

hegemony somehow benefit from forbidding abortion? Yes, if the denial of abortion is regarded an issue of power, of individual as well as institutional power. I have referred to Hauck's suggestion that abortion can be regarded a threat against male hegemony and male control. In this sense there is an underlying sense of rejection of the hegemony in Palmer's song in both the abortionist work as well as the pregnant female's conduct, i.e. getting the abortion done in secrecy. In the song the female gender is constructed via the female body on the premises of a society where the autonomy of said body is compromised in that a female has to resort to illegal abortions.

The title of "Lonesome Organist Rapes Page Turner" (2008) does not appear as a line in the song but it certainly sums up the circumstances as well as the female-male relationship featured. The title is to be understood as a double entendre; as describing professions as well as behaviour of the people in the song. Lonesome Organist, of course, refers to an organ, or any piano, while at the same time crudely referring to the male sex organ, and to the fact that the man in the song, the organist, is a rapist. Page Turner, on the other hand, sounds like a perfectly legitimate name for a woman, as well as being the profession of someone assisting a musician turn pages while playing.

The song starts with the man, the Organist, advancing on Page Turner while playing and, eventually, raping her:

So on the bench I watched his left hand crossing
While doubling entendres with the voicings
He said, "O darling, you're charming
Please don't find it alarming if I pull this stop out to free up a hand for heavy petting

Now there there
I'm a friendly man
I joke about sex because it's funny when you're frightened"

So silently I sat and turned the pages
Recalculating our respective ages
Over my shoulder, he muttered, "If I get any older
You can hack my wrists off with your choice of objects
No, I'm kidding

Don't be scared

I'm a friendly man
I joke about death because it's funny when you're frightened”

This is as far as I could get
He jabbed a needle in my neck
Erasing all the evidence
But there were matchsticks in my pants
And if a rock should hit my head
And I remember what he did
You'll be the very first to know

At first glance one notices that the situational power dynamics of the female and the male in the song follow larger, conventional gender power positions in the male hegemony, i.e. the dominant male and the subordinated female. Adding to the asymmetrical power position is the fact that the male is older than the female. Also what benefits the male is his, presumably, longer and more prominent career as a musician. Finally, the older male might also benefit from a better financial stance compared to the female. The Organist’s superior position and confidence of his power over the female is manifested clearly in his behaviour and the language used, i.e. the Organist makes lewd comments to the female; what he thinks are jokes about sex, all the while saying he is ”a friendly man”. The following line in particular describes the kind of power and the kind of affect males can have on females by just using words, just as in the song: ”I joke about sex because it's funny when you're frightened.” While males, too, can be raped, one can argue that females are more often victims of rape and, furthermore, have to live their lives in fear of rape, acknowledging its possibility. Because of this a male might not understand how even the most innocent reference to sex, let alone a sexual assault such as rape, can make a female uncomfortable, to a point of feeling threatened. This phenomenon, also referred to as rape culture, affects deeply the gender power dynamics in society, as well as contributes to the way a social gender is constructed and seen:

A rape culture is a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm.

In a rape culture both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable as death or taxes. This violence, however, is neither biologically nor

divinely ordained. Much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change.
(Buchwald et al.1994, quoted by McEwan 2009)

Due to the values and attitudes perpetuated by and in rape culture, the social male gender is, then, implicitly and explicitly encouraged to dehumanize females and treat them as not only sexual objects but sexual objects at the free disposal of males. A female in this culture is at all times the verbal and the physical, the subconscious and the conscious target of this phenomenon, on an individual as well as on a larger societal and cultural level. According to McEwan (2009) rape culture is heteronormative:

Rape culture is privileging heterosexuality because ubiquitous imagery of two adults of the same-sex engaging in egalitarian partnerships without gender-based dominance and submission undermines (erroneous) biological rationales for the rape culture's existence.

It seems, then, that rape culture relies on the power conventions of the binary gender system in the male hegemony.

In Palmer's song the Organist's remark on joking about sex and frightening the female is really about him reminding the female of his emotional and physical power over her. The female narrator is very much trapped in the situation in the sense that, as well as being taken advantage of by the male, the male is also preventing the narrator from succeeding professionally. The male indeed ties the female to him by having an emotional and physical hold over her. That is to say, he convinces the female to continue as a mere assistant and that she will become successful if she listens to him and does as he tells her to do. The male, thus, could be seen to prevent the narrator from realizing her own potential and, more importantly, from getting away from him and his abuse:

He told me that I showed a great potential
That given I turned heads and pages
Fame would be a piece of cake
But practice was essential
So like a stupid child I believed it
And golly who would had agreed if
I had been Schubert or Mozart
Devoted to the fine art of perfecting absolutely everything inconsequential

The song ends with decades having gone by. ”I am still sitting by his side/I turn the pages faithfully,” says Page Turner. She has not told anyone of the emotional or the physical abuse and has succumbed to the power and whims of the Organist, of which he thanks her.

And with a wink he says, ”I doubt we would be anywhere without
Your gift for keeping truth and consequence from meeting”

The male, then, admits that all their success, or rather all his success, is due to the female keeping quiet. Why she has kept quiet is for the listener to wonder.

The female gender construction in the song complies with the male hegemony and it is manifested as the female being trapped under the male’s control. The female and the male are portrayed as acting very much in accordance with conventional social gender characteristics in the patriarchy; the female is passive while the male is active, the female is subordinated while the male dominates. In another type of premise the female might have never suffered from abuse as depicted, but as it is, the male is able to take advantage of his privileged position in society and to use it directly in his personal and professional life. This does not mean that Page Turner, the abused person, could not be male in this situation. A young male could well adopt or perform the conventional social gender of the female, or some characteristics of it, and suffer the same fate as Page Turner.

Based partly on her own experiences as a teenager (Epstein 2009) in ”Oasis” (2008) Palmer depicts from a first-person point of view the story of a girl who is raped at a party, and subsequently gets pregnant and has an abortion. Although the subject matter is serious, the song is characterized by upbeat music, bearing resemblance to teeny bop songs with jovial choruses such as written and performed by, for example, the Beach Boys in the 1960s.

Contrary to what one might expect, the attitude of the female in the song is, judging by Palmer’s delivery, at least seemingly, disturbingly carefree and, thus, it matches the preppy nature of the music. The style of singing comes close to a parody and could be seen to mock to an extent the female and her carefree attitude

portrayed in the song. In the end, however, Palmer's intention seems to be to contrast a serious matter, a sexual assault, with an upbeat sound and a carefree point of view, in order to draw attention to the way the female and the world around her is reacting to the rape. Without the music the lyrics paint a horrible, agonizing situation:

When I got to the party
They gave me a forty
And I must have been thirsty
'Cause I drank it so quickly
When I got to the bedroom
There was somebody waiting
And it isn't my fault
That the barbarian raped me

When I went to get tested
I brought along my best friend
Melissa Mahoney
Who had once been molested
And she knew how to get there
She knew all the nurses
They were all really friendly
But the test came back positive

The narrator states that the rape is not her fault but that of the "barbarian" male who took advantage of her intoxicated state. The absence of the narrator's reaction, her thoughts and feelings, on the rape seems odd since rape is undoubtedly one of the most traumatic types of violence a person can be subjected to. Then again, this seems to be Palmer's intention. The narrator's carefree attitude gives the impression that in the culture and society around her rape, getting pregnant, and having an abortion are nothing out of the ordinary. She acknowledges that the blame is not to be put on her but seems indeed almost as if unaffected by the assault. Her unaffectedness is epitomized in a reference to casual everyday tasks such as sending letters:

Oh, oh, I've seen better days
But I don't care
Oh, I just sent a letter in the mail

The impression of this type of culture where sexual assault on a female is seen as normal, everyday, and not a big deal is strengthened by the notion of the narrator's friend having also been molested and her subsequently being familiar with the

narrator's clinic and its nurses. The normalization of sexual assault, i.e. rape culture, is indeed the theme that comes through the strongest in the song.

In "Oasis" the autonomy of the female over her body has been greatly compromised. It is the society of rape culture, as depicted in the song, that seems to have claimed ownership over a female's body without her consent. The actual physical, sexual assault is a violation of a person's right of physical autonomy, but when viewing from the premise of rape culture, society could be seen to claim ownership over a female's body already in an abstract sense. In this case not only physical assaults but also verbal assaults of varying degree against females are perpetuated and made possible by that culture. It is innate in rape culture that it is okay to make a female feel scared for her physical and mental safety. In "Oasis" this culture is so deeply ingrained that the narrator – the victim! – belittles her assault. In addition rape culture can be seen in the behaviour of the narrator's friend, Melissa, who tells all their classmates about the rape, but also in the ease with which the narrator forgives her :

When vacation was over
The word was all over
That I was a crack whore
Melissa had told them

And so now we're not talking
Except we have tickets
To see Blur in October
And I think we're still going

With regard to compromising the narrator's autonomy over her body, it does not end in the actual assault. When the narrator goes to have an abortion, she has to yet again deal with people trying to influence what is to be done to her body:

When I got my abortion
I brought along my boyfriend
We got there an hour
Before the appointment
And outside the building
There were all these annoying
Fundamentalist Christians
We tried to ignore them

The ”annoying fundamentalist Christians” is a reference to anti-abortion groups who picket (i.e. protest) outside abortion clinics, such as in the song. One could argue that this phenomenon is characteristic of the United States in particular, where, despite abortion in some circumstances having been legalized in 1973 (Johnson Lewis 2010), the public debate over it continues. What these protesters are doing in Palmer’s song is, of course, trying to make their view on the matter known; to, more or less forcibly, imply to the abortion clinic workers and their patients that abortions are wrong. The protesters in “Oasis” seem to fall into the category of pro-life; a group that Robinson (2009) describes in general as ”motivated by a strong desire to reduce the number of abortions -- typically by restricting abortion access”. Regarding female gender expectations, one of the most striking characteristics of the abortion discussion is the openness with which groups of people and institutions argue over the individual female’s autonomy over her body.

From the perspective of gender construction it is clear that the female gender is here constructed via the body. In a larger historical and societal context there is nothing new in the notion that a female is treated as an object by society. One needs to only look at, for example, the institution of marriage and one of its possible societal functions. Judith Butler (1990: 38-39) talks about Levi-Strauss’s structuralist suggestion wherein in marriage a woman is seen as an object of exchange between clans:

> The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity, but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated patrilineal identity.

Later (1990: 40), citing Irigaray, Butler says that this exchange is in fact about “homosocial desire”:

> …a relationship between men which is (…) about the bonds of men, but which takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women.

Females, in this case, then, act merely as goods or as means in producing and maintaining relations between males. In the same way females, and their thoughts on the matter, are oftentimes swept aside in the discussion about abortion, as if it was not their lives and bodies, first and foremost, that are in question. Regarding her

abortion, the narrator of ”Oasis” has de jure as well as de facto authority over her body, but it does not come to her without hindrance. One could indeed argue that the ongoing debate over abortion as well as the protesters, among other things, in their indirect way compromise and cast a doubt over the autonomy over her body.

What is curious is that while the narrator’s horrific situation is forced upon onto her by a male, it is also a male, or rather a group of males, that are her escape from the situation, her salvation, an oasis, in the midst of trauma. As ridiculous as the idea sounds, the narrator’s reaction after the assault is to send a letter to a band, in this case the title’s Oasis:

Oh, oh, I’ve seen better days but I don’t care
Oh I just got a letter in the mail

Oasis sent a photograph
It’s autographed and everything
Melissa's gonna wet herself, I swear

In the mid 1990s there emerged a music scene in the U.K. called Britpop, and at the center of this scene were bands such as Oasis, Pulp, and Blur, the first and the last of these being mentioned in Palmer’s song. Plagenhoef (2003) writes about Britpop:

> By 1995, Britpop was already too humorless a movement – despite its early desire to distance itself from American alternative earnestness, as personalities, most Britpop stars were nearly impossible to take seriously. The few bands that did exert some sort of wit were swept up away by a tide of laddism, a rejection of the political correctness and a renewed embrace of hyper-masculinity and the anti-intellectual trinity of sex, sports, and beer.

An idolization of male culture, or a so-called lad culture, was one of the characteristics of Britpop. In this respect it seems awkward or odd for our narrator to idolize bands such as Oasis and Blur. Palmer (Epstein 2009) herself comments the lyric:

> I remember thinking, “Wouldn’t it be funny, conceptually, to write a song about a girl who has all these terrible things happen, but really, everything’s fine because of some stupid reason?” And the stupid reason I pulled out of my ass was she got an autographed picture in the mail from her favorite band, Oasis.

Haphazardly as Palmer might have chosen this particular reason, it proves apt in the end by underlining the notion of the narrator obliviously living in a male hegemony, in a culture where she idolizes males as well as is assaulted by them. The female gender construction in the song very much complies with the male hegemony but as it is a parody, the song can be understood to criticise the construction and, more importantly, the male hegemony which produces and maintains it.

The songs in this chapter overlap with the topics of female-male relationships and violence from previous chapters, as was expected. Palmer's songs about pregnancy, abortion, and rape may seem disturbing, even horrifying, but the style with which she approaches them seems suitable nonetheless due to their serious and difficult nature. Of the five songs in this chapter "Lonesome Organist Rapes Page Turner" is the only one to comply with male hegemony. While "Mandy Goes To Med School" clearly rejects the hegemony, "Provanity" and "Oasis" comply with it but in the end also reject it. "Not Mine" proved to be the one song in not only this chapter but the whole thesis that does not clearly reject or comply with the hegemony.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In my analysis I have examined the construction of female gender in Amanda Palmer's lyrics through the premise of Western male hegemony and see if the constructions reject or comply with this hegemony. The results vary in that while male hegemony is definitely rejected in the lyrics on numerous occasions, the gender constructions also comply with the conventions of the hegemony. Oftentimes, however, when the gender construction complies with the hegemony, the compliance is at the same time criticised by Palmer. This criticism is presented directly by Palmer's narrator in, for example, ”Delilah” and ”Provanity”, or indirectly in, for example, ”What's the Use of Wondrin'?” and ”Oasis”. While the songs roughly fall into either of the two previously noted categories of compliance and rejection, Palmer's criticism aimed at many of the compliant gender constructions is indeed worth noticing. Criticism in these seemingly compliant cases could be interpreted as rejection of the hegemony. Because of this I will proceed to group the gender constructions in the analyzed songs into not two, but three, categories: compliance with, seeming compliance with, and rejection of the male hegemony. Only one of the song's I determined as not belonging to any of these categories.

In four of the songs female gender construction clearly complies with male hegemony. “Sex Changes”, “Shores of California”, “Missed Me”, and “Lonesome Organist Rapes Page Turner” all construct female gender in accordance with the conventions of the binary system of gender. Gender is presented as the polar opposites of female and male, which both carry their own separate characteristics of social gender. In “Sex Changes” and “Shores of California” Palmer exemplifies the separateness of social gender characteristics with the conventional dichotomy of female *emotion* and male *physicality*. Furthermore, in “Sex Changes” there is an undercurrent notion of sex and gender being something that can be changed, but rather than referring to gender as a fluid non-binary concept, the sex change in ”Sex Changes” is understood as an exchange between the two binaries, from female to male or vice versa, thus strengthening the notion of a binary gender system. In ”Missed Me” female gender is constructed especially by emphasizing femininity and embracing the notion of female fragility compared to the male. Lastly, the female gender construction in ”Lonesome Organist Rapes Page Turner” follows the

conventional social female characteristics of *passiveness* and *submissiveness* that oppose social male characteristics of activeness and domination.

Five of the analyzed songs were seemingly compliant with the male hegemony, i.e. the gender constructions were compliant with the hegemony but at the same time criticised by Palmer. These five include “Delilah”, “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?”, “Provanity”, “Gravity”, and “Oasis”. In ”Delilah” and “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” female gender is, yet again, constructed as the binary opposite to male gender. In both of these songs the female is portrayed through conventional social female characteristics of *passiveness, emotionality,* and – especially in “What’s the Use of Wondrin?” – *submissiveness*. Consistently throughout “Delilah” the narrator criticises the female protagonist’s behaviour, however, by urging her to stop acting in accordance to her social gender. The narrator is rejecting the characteristics of the conventional social female gender and, thereby, the male hegemony. Also ”What’s the Use of Wondrin’?” can be seen to criticise and reject social female gender characteristics and the hegemony but it is done by subtle nuances and the delivery of the song. In “Provanity” and “Gravity” female gender construction is done by bringing forth and underlining social female gender characteristics in particular. In ”Provanity” these characteristics include being concerned with the exterior, such as looks, instead of the interior, such as intelligence. In addition, the females in the song are depicted as dependent on their spouse. While the female gender construction complies with male hegemony by adhering to social female characteristics, Palmer’s narrator can be seen to criticise this construction and, in a roundabout way, reject the hegemony. In ”Gravity” female gender is constructed via social female gender characteristics reminiscent of those in ”Provanity”. While in the latter song the female’s financial independence is refuted, in ”Gravity” this is not the case. The concerns over the exterior of the female in ”Gravity”, however, match the concerns depicted in ”Provanity”. In addition, in both the songs the female body is presented very much as an object or a tool to means. The female gender is as good as the female body, both ”Gravity” and ”Provanity” seem to suggest, compromising a female’s authority over her body while pleasing the male desire, which, in turn, strengthen the male hegemony’s notion of a suppressed, controlled female. Finally, the female gender construction in ”Oasis” is done via the female body and attitudes attached to it. The female gender construction of “Oasis” complies with the male hegemony because of the trivial attitude with which not only the female protagonist

but also other people in the song deal with a sexual assault. The song's female gender construction normalizes rape which is characteristic of rape culture and rape culture, in turn, very much perpetuates and draws on the asymmetrical power positions of females and males in society. As a parody "Oasis" builds and draws attention to a female gender construction compliant with the hegemony only to reject it in the very end.

Four of the five remaining songs reject the male hegemony. "Glass Slipper" (2006) juxtaposes two types of female gender constructions with regard to the male hegemony. Palmer rejects the subservient female gender construction and the male hegemony by embracing the construction of an independent female. "Ampersand" rejects the male hegemony by rejecting the gender construction wherein the female, and also the male, is defined as one side of a heteronormative relationship. "Girl Anachronism", on the other hand, rejects the male hegemony by portraying a female gender construction that deviates from the conventional social female gender. The female gender construction in the song is based on the female's *activeness* and *physicality* of behaviour, in particular, which go against social female convention. In "Mandy Goes To Med School" the female gender is presented and constructed as the pregnant biological female body. The female gender construction rejects the male hegemony by the performance of illegal abortions to females. While the physical authority of the female's body is momentarily handed over to the abortionist, it is in the end the female's choice what happens to her body. The male hegemony is denied control over the female body and, thus, it is rejected.

"Not Mine" was the one song that did not clearly either comply with or reject the male hegemony with its female gender construction. In the song gender is constructed very much via the biological body, the female that gives birth and the male that does not. Gender in "Not Mine" is, indeed, presented as binary oppositions and as having distinct, here biological, characteristics. While the song does not comply with or reject the hegemony, it manages to disrupt it slightly when the narrator absurdly states that the child she is carrying is not hers.

In addition to examining female gender construction and compliance with the male hegemony, I wanted to assess whether or not Palmer presents experiences that are uniquely female in the songs. Going by Greig's interpretation and definition, experiences that are uniquely female are related to biological sex in particular but the experiences are not *absolutely* tied to the female biological sex and

the body. Saying this, the songs which most clearly offer unique female experiences are those concerning the female body in the category of pregnancy, abortion, and rape. Of these topics pregnancy and abortion can arguably be considered exclusively the domain of the biological female with regard to experiencing them. “Not Mine” emphasizes the different positions of the biological female and the biological male in case of (unwanted) pregnancy. The burden and responsibility of the pregnancy ultimately falls to the female because it is her body that is affected. Similarly ”Provanity” depicts a uniquely female experience when taking into account the reproductive role and characteristics of the biological female. The song’s social female characteristics of vanity, on the other hand, could be experienced by a male also. “Mandy Goes To Med School” could be seen to indirectly depict a unique female experience, even though the depiction is not done from the point of view of the pregnant female but that of the abortionist. “Oasis” gives an account of pregnancy and abortion as a result of rape and while rape can be experienced by males also, the rape and its consequences, i.e. pregnancy and abortion, together form a unique female experience in the song. The sexual abuse and the circumstances depicted in “Lonesome Organist Rapes Page Turner”, on the other hand, could happen to anybody regardless of gender and it, thus, does not give an account of a unique female experience as such. “Sex Changes” and “Shores of California” both suggest that the female’s experience with regard to female-male relationships is governed by a suggested social gender characteristic of emotion. On the other hand, in “Shores of California” also males manifest a hidden concern with and a desire to embrace emotion. In addition, in “Sex Changes” social gender is regarded as something that can be changed. It is not, then, feasible to claim that these two songs offer unique female experiences. At most they slightly touch upon it when making references to pregnancy and rape.

“Girl Anachronism” gives a unique account not via pregnancy, abortion, or rape but via the expectations aimed at the female social gender in a biological female body in particular. “Girl anachronism” depicts how the surrounding world reacts to a social and biological female who acts essentially as if a social male. Both ”Glass Slipper” and “Ampersand” can be seen to portray a unique female experience when viewed in the historical context of female emancipation and marriage. The narrators in the songs experience that a romantic relationship and marriage threaten their independent person. If in the past marriage has literally

equaled losing one's autonomy, in contemporary context the loss is a metaphorical one. "I'm not gonna match you/'Cause I'll lose my voice completely," Palmer sings in "Ampersand". In the face of love there is an undercurrent of submission born as a result of physical and perhaps also psychological abuse on the female protagonists' part in "Delilah" and What's the Use of Wondrin'?". Their experiences can be considered uniquely female, even though also males can suffer from abuse in relationships. The predicament here is that the female experience is unique because gender is a contributing factor in abuse in relationships. Although in "Missed Me" the situation depicted does rely heavily on the genders and the connotations of these genders with regard to power, the experience in it is not distinct enough to call it uniquely female. The song could well describe a relationship between an underage boy and an adult man, for example. Finally, neither do the circumstances of "Gravity" paint an experience that is uniquely female. While it does depict a particular social female gender, this social female gender could also be performed by a biological male.

The female gender constructions I have found in the lyrics of Amanda Palmer have been varied. On one hand the gender constructions in the lyrics are conventional because oftentimes they fit the binary oppositional system of gender wherein the female and male genders are presented as opposites. At the root of these opposites is the notion of anatomical differences between the genders but also, and perhaps more importantly, the socially ascribed characteristics attached to the genders. Palmer, for example, addresses the social gender dichotomy of female emotion and male physicality numerous of times, describing it as a fixed state, rather than something learned. In addition, Palmer's female protagonists are often seen acting in accordance to female social gender conventions, whether that is to their benefit or fall. On the other hand, Palmer's female gender portrayals repeatedly defy the conventions of gender understood as a binary, fixed entity. Palmer portrays females who consciously or subconsciously act against the social gender expectations laid upon them. Also, even when the female gender is constructed according to conventions of the binary gender system, Palmer often criticises these conventions either directly in the narration or indirectly in the style of performance, e.g. parody. In conclusion, then, Palmer's female gender constructions in their conventionality and unconventionality both comply with and reject the male hegemony. Overall I would claim, however, that Palmer more rejects than complies

with the hegemony because when consciously addressing the female gender and expectations therein, she rejects the expectations. In addition, it appears that more often than not Palmer presents unique female experiences in her lyrics, experiences related to the biological female sex but also the social female gender. In this sense Palmer can indeed be seen belonging to a tradition of songwriters who address unique issues concerning the female gender.

The one theme that I found overlapping with the others most was the theme of violence. The rich imagery used with regard to violence and the misogynistic, derogatory attitude with which it is often delivered is truly prominent in Palmer's work. In “Glass Slipper”, for example, Palmer uses the line “big feet blistering” when talking about a romantic relationship, a possible marriage, conjuring painful images of and a likeness to the Chinese cultural habit of binding married women’s feet, a practise which O’Toole and Shiffman (1997: 6) call “gender violence”. In “Shores of California” the female “threatens [the male] with death”, as does the male in “Ampersand”. Violence is especially evident also in Palmer’s songs about rape and abortion. In addition, Palmer makes references to self-harm on numerous occasions, for example, in “Sex Changes” with “The doctors said that once you get a taste for it you'll keep on cutting”.

With this thesis I have tried to contribute to the study of female gender as depicted in popular culture by a female artist. One of the aims of this thesis has been to point out the significance of gender in Western male hegemony, to make gender more visible as a social construction by looking at the factors influencing the construction. To achieve this I have looked at gender in the lyrics in their cultural, social, and political context. In addition it has been the aim of this thesis to search for experiences that are uniquely female. For further studies I would indeed suggest the topic of violence in Palmer’s work, with regard to gender or not. The infiltration of violence into as many everyday areas of (female) life as presented in Palmer’s lyrics leads to a normalization of violence which is troubling and worthy of analysis.

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