Dedication

This Special Issue of the Journal of Gender Studies is dedicated to our friend and colleague Janet Blackman. Janet has been the Treasurer of the Journal of Gender Studies for many years, until ill-health forced her to step down in November 2016. Janet was a great feminist and activist who has worked tirelessly for workers' rights. She was a popular and dedicated lecturer in History from 1962 until her retirement in 2001 and was the founding editor of the international journal *Social History,* a position she continued long after retirement. Janet has been well known locally in many contexts including chairing the Humberside Theatre Trust (later known as Hull Truck) and helping to set up Viking Radio. On the international stage, Janet has played a key role in the United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland traveling to many of the world's political trouble-spots with UN delegations. She was also a long-term president of the Hull branch of the Association of University Teachers, where she helped numerous colleagues many of whom became her lifelong friends. I will miss spotting Janet at the bus stop opposite her home and picking her up on my way into work. There is an absence there now, although I still look for her. I will always remember the support and guidance she gave me on behalf of the university union when I successfully challenged the University of Hull on a matter of unequal pay. Janet sadly died following a short illness on 29th November 2016. She leaves a tangible absence, and will be greatly missed by us all at the Journal of Gender Studies.

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Gendering Happiness and its Discontents

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Abstract

Providing an introductory framework to the Special Issue: *Gendering Happiness: the power of pleasure,* here I consider the highly gendered and political contexts of happiness, pleasure, desire, and the tyrannies of its converse discontents. As this special issue explores, pleasure and joy can be found in diverse contexts, but ones that are always intersectionally gendered and particularly situated. Just as *the personal is political*, happiness is not an individual, private emotion. Rather such emotions are socio-culturally situated, shifting through time and space, and embedded in normative social and moral codes regulating appropriate meanings of who should be happy, when, and how that happiness should be performed. Moreover, normative processes of gendering within socio-cultural patriarchal contexts or gender regimes can have significantly negative impacts on both women's and men's mental wellbeing. Through a gender analysis of happiness and its discontents we are able to locate and critically interrogate the intersections of gender and power at play in this complex politicised and structural arena of emotion.

Keywords: *happiness, gender, power, pleasure, tyranny, desire, patriarchy, mental wellbeing*

In this special issue I have selected a range of articles that reflect interdisciplinary perspectives on the gendering of happiness, the politics of pleasure and the tyrannies of 'doing' and 'being' happy. Our focus here is not on defining or somehow measuring happiness, but rather on how happiness and its discontents are experienced in ways conditioned by conflicting gendered normative morals and values (Walker and Kavedžija, 2015). To even begin to define happiness is clearly complex, and problematic, not least because happiness or otherwise is an amorphous, ambiguous, transitory state of being. What is more important to note, perhaps, is that such emotions are socio-culturally situated, shifting through time and space, and embedded in normative social and moral codes regulating appropriate meanings of who should be happy, when, and how that happiness should be performed within particular gender regimes (Ahmed, 2010; Colson, 2012; Nieto Valdivieso, 2017 this issue). Here the feminist slogan, *the personal is political*, is particularly apt because, as Gable states, '[h]appiness, or [...] sadness, is not merely a private emotion, but is deeply connected to the social, economic, and cultural order.' (Gable, 2017, this issue). Similarly, Walker and Kavedžija talk about happiness thus;

> 'The idea of happiness [...] makes a claim about what is most desirable and worthwhile in a person's life. It purports to be an all-inclusive assessment of a person's condition, either at a specific moment in time or in relation to a life in its entirety; it expresses a hope that the various aims,

> enjoyments, and desires that characterize a life—though they may often conflict with each other—may ultimately be harmonized, or somehow rendered coherent […] happiness is about feeling good […] a general sense of contentment or satisfaction with life. It is inherently subjective, consisting of people's evaluations of their own life, both affective and cognitive […] This [understanding], of course, says much about the social, economic, and political conditions in which it emerged' (Walker and Kavedžija, 2015, p.1)

Inevitably then, and as several of the articles selected here illustrate, experiences of happiness, pleasure and joy are found in diverse contexts, and hold different meanings for differently situated people. Nevertheless, happiness is always a highly gendered social construct that requires understanding within contextually and culturally specific patriarchal structural frameworks. We may no doubt be taken to task for bringing this critical gendered analysis to happiness – becoming, as Ahmed would say, 'feminist killjoys' 'when we express unhappiness about how the happiness of a few rests on the unhappiness of the many' (Ahmed, 2015, n.p.). Indeed, Cieslik (2016) cautions against an overly simplistic representation of happiness as a social problem, arguing that accounts of happiness suggest this emotion is experienced in more complex social ways, and that, "thin' accounts of happiness have inhibited a serious sociological engagement with the things that really matter to ordinary people, such as our efforts to balance suffering and flourishing in our daily lives' (Cieslik, 2016, p.407). Here there are no 'thin' accounts of happiness, but rather a nuanced gender analysis of people's differently situated experiences of happiness and its discontents.

For me, it is critical that feminist scholars and practitioners continue in their efforts to provide gender analyses of people's everyday lived experiences in diverse socio-cultural structural contexts worldwide. This is a mantle that a visionary group of feminist scholars in Hull took up just over a quarter of a century ago, creating the Journal of Gender Studies as a space for dissemination of feminist critical theory and gender analyses. Over the years the JGS has in no small way contributed to this critical project of continued transnational feminist gender analysis, facilitating our understandings of the ways in which women's and men's lives are conditioned by socio-cultural, heteronormative patriarchal structural frameworks, or gender regimes (Walby, 2011). It is through interrogating gender norms and practices, examining 'how they are produced, regulated, consumed and performed' (Nayak and Kehily, 2008, p.5) that we are able see the broader picture of gender patterns and arrangements. Gender analyses then facilitate our articulation of relationships between gender and power and enable us to;

> 'see how gender is institutionally organized, discursively constituted, embodied and transfigured in social life […] begin to explain how gender relations are embedded within the social fabric of human societies and

> serve to shape the choices and possibilities open to us as gendered subjects' (Nayak and Kehily, 2008, p.5).

This special issue contributes to this ongoing project by providing a gender analysis of happiness and its' discontents through a range of interdisciplinary lenses. In drawing together this issue my starting point was not with happiness *per se*, but rather with processes of gendering through which particularly situated women and men learn what 'happiness' means for them and how it is to be performed in particular contexts. As a feminist anthropologist, I admit that I am often drawn to the darker counterparts of happiness, and particularly how experiences of gendering can be detrimental to mental wellbeing, linked to feelings of 'sadness', low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Sarah Ahmed (2010) has suggested that there is a powerful link between unhappiness and female imagination. I would also argue that there is a strong connection between contemporary cultural constructions of both femininity and masculinity and negative experiences of mental wellbeing. Over the past three decades I have conducted a range of qualitative research, most usually with women and girls, listening to their narratives, and gathering rich life history interviews from all over the world. Through the course of one longitudinal study in the UK, involving over 500 women between the ages of 16 and 93, I had the privilege of listening to many women talking about their experiences of gendering through the lifecourse (Clisby and Holdsworth, 2014). Although in this research I had not specifically set out to talk about wellbeing, links between poorer mental wellbeing and women's experiences of gendering emerged as a persistent thread in almost all women's life history narratives. What women were saying time and again was that their experiences of becoming and being a woman can be, had been, and continued to be damaging to their mental wellbeing, often manifest through lower self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Thus, what clearly emerged for me was the strength of that link between poorer mental wellbeing and normative processes of gendering, a link that has a major impact on women's opportunities, aspirations and experiences of gender inequality. Of course I am not suggesting here that all women lack confidence and have low self-esteem. Nor am I suggesting that men do not experience poorer mental wellbeing at times in their lives. Obviously, we are all inevitably affected by the many and various obstacles life throws in our paths, and we are all particularly vulnerable to lack of confidence and mental wellbeing issues at critical pressure points. Moreover, I would strongly argue that normative constructions of masculinities continue to be problematic for men as well as for women. Far more work is required to extend socio-culturally accepted normative masculinities to provide much greater fluidity and flexibility across a diverse range of masculine scripts. Nevertheless, what I am suggesting is that there continues to be something specific, and specifically problematic, about normative constructions of femininities that can result in women and girls experiencing lower self-esteem and mental wellbeing issues in ways that are

connected to their very gendered identities. Importantly, however, whilst the ways in which women's gendered identity is constructed may leave them more prone to mental ill-health, the flaw lies not with individual women but in the continued, insidious and pervasive normative patriarchal constructions of their gendered beings.

When considering links between processes of gendering, women's identities and notions of happiness and wellbeing, I have found it useful to draw on the work of feminist philosopher, D.T. Meyers. Meyers rejects a false universalism of women's gender identity, but at the same time argues that to sever identity from gender is also a mistake, because 'gender is internalized and does become a dimension of women's identities' (2002:4). However, she also asserts that the developmental process in childhood and beyond is not merely a process of internalization, it is also a process of individualization, that 'women's identities are both gendered and individualized' (2002:4). It is also important to recognise that this process of individualisation of identity 'does not fully protect women's agentic capacities from damage. That women's identities are gendered in patriarchal cultures does impede women's ability to function as self-determining agents' (2002:5). Thus, whilst not uniformly internalised 'subordination is internalized and becomes integral to individualized, subordinated identities' (2002:6).

This is not a radical departure from previous studies and debates in this field. Indeed there is long and rich history of similar arguments and over the past few decades in particular a significant body of work has developed exploring the relationships between ill-health, constructions of femininity and the socio-economic and cultural conditions of women's lives. Feminist psychologist Jane Ussher, for example, has written extensively on the historical socio-cultural connections that have been made between women and madness. As she states;

> '[f]or centuries women have occupied a unique place in the annals of insanity. Women outnumber men in diagnoses of madness, from the 'hysteria' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to 'neurotic' and mood disorders in the twentieth and twenty-first. Women are more also more likely to receive psychiatric 'treatment' [...] However, if we examine the roots of this distress in the context of women's lives, it can be conceptualised as a reasonable response, not a reflection of pathology within' (Ussher, 2011: 1-2).

American psychologist Paula Caplan makes a similar point, asking, '[do] we live in such a crazy-making, sick, impersonal society that it does serious psychological damage to half of us? [...] Should we be calling [women] the mentally ill [...] or society's wounded?' (Caplan, 1995:6). Much contemporary academic work in this field began to emerge in the early 1970s. Gove and Tudor (1973), for example, explored the relationship between women's mental health and marital status in the United States and found that married women experienced more mental health problems than their male counterparts, which they argued - along similar lines to

the more well-known 'Housework' research by Anne Oakley in the UK context - was 'grounded in the lack of alternative gratification available to housewives; the low status of housework; the unstructured and invisible nature of housework; the poor conditions experienced by women in paid employment; and the conflicting role expectations faced by women' (Gove and Tudor, 1973, cited in Hockey, 1993:251).

In a more literary context, both Elaine Showalter and Philip Martin also make links between classic feminist analysis of the masculine 'One' and the feminine 'Other' and how symbolic imagery of femininity and 'madness' leach into cultural representations underpinned by these gender dualisms. As Martin explains, '[w]oman and madness share the same territory [...] they may be said to enter a concentric relationship around a central point occupied by fundamental male normality' (Martin, 1987: 42). Showalter develops this point further, stating, '[w]hile the name of the symbolic female disorder may change from one historical period to the next, the gender asymmetry of the representational tradition remains constant. Thus madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady' (Showalter, 1987, 4).

In addition to academic research, in recent years there has been a more general growing global recognition of the significance, prevalence, and often gendered nature of mental health problems. The World Health Organisation states that depression, predicted to be the second leading cause of global disability by 2020, is twice as common in women (WHO 2016), and in England alone the annual cost of mental health problems is estimated at over £100 billion (Centre for Mental Health, 2010). In the mid-2000s, the former labour government recognised the need to mainstream gender into mental health in local planning and social care services and called for a 'cultural change' within mental health services in order to understand the needs of women and develop more gender-aware training and provision. Needless to say that in the past few years we have seen little follow through to support this pledge. However, even if we did see the kind of action needed through such things as enhanced service provision, this alone would do little to tackle a fundamental causal factor. Although policy reform can attempt to address functional issues of mental health, for many women, their experience of unhappiness and poor mental wellbeing continues to be impacted on by deeply rooted socio-cultural identity constructions, from an early age and throughout their lives, in ways that are complex, difficult to quantify and embedded within everyday gendered practices and experiences cutting across age and class differences.

By way of illustration, I would argue that, although perhaps less prevalent now than in the past, there continues to exist an underlying, insidious but pervasive valorisation of boys and men both within family lives and beyond which has a significant part to play in girl's identity formation and self-esteem. Many women I have interviewed over the past decades felt that boys were still (despite any evidence to the contrary) assumed or expected to be, for example, more intelligent, better at sports, better able to negotiate the public arena, more confident, that boys games are

more exciting, that boys subjects were better, harder and had a greater value, and that eventually their careers are more important. Inevitably these deep-rooted beliefs learned as children continue to have a significant impact on women's identities and self-esteem.

This then was my starting point for this special issue. I simply wanted to explore further what it means to be 'happy', to feel 'sadness' as gendered beings and solicit interdisciplinary perspectives from other feminist scholars on this theme. As I am a huge fan of the work of spoken word poet Holly McNish, I asked her if she would write a poem that spoke to this theme. Her resulting poem '*Willy'*, written for this issue, is a brilliantly apt opening. It is meant to be spoken aloud and has a rhythmic logic as such, so I do recommend that you read this out loud.

In this poem, recalling her own experience as a mum with a young child, McNish sets a scene of simple pleasures. Pre-school children playing in the park, happy, smiling faces, parents chatting, boys and girls both enjoying their play just the same;

'The boys all swing and scream in glee

The girls all swing and scream in glee

Same knees same feet same legs'

McNish lures us into this innocent display of childish happiness before cleverly revealing the distinctly gendered social world we inhabit. This is not a world of equal pleasures, this is a world in which expectations of children are markedly different, a world in which boys are given an accepted name for their 'willy', are allowed to express pleasure at their sexual feelings, allowed to touch their bodies. But we inhabit a world in which girls not only have no clearly acceptable word for their clitoris, they also learn from an early age that they must not touch 'it', that they are not supposed to feel sexual pleasure from their bodies, that, moreover, their bodies are somehow dirty and taboo.

'Boys and their willies hey

And everybody jokes

Then the mother of a girl agrees

And half the parents choke

Hands down her pants

She says

And everyone is awkward

And I realise by three years old

We are all already daunted

By a girl touching her flesh'

[…]

'But when the girls describe their private parts

Everybody's name is different

Even the parents don't know how to talk about

the skin their girls are wearing'

McNish's wonderful poem provides a perfect opening frame for this special issue. Through this playground scene she forces us to confront the powerful contradictions and preclusions insidiously embedded in our gendered norms and moralistic social values. What this poem so effectively illustrates are the ways that happiness, pleasure, and their converse sanctions and taboos are experienced through our gendered beings in ways that are complex and contradictory but always imbricated in unequal power dynamics. Each in their own ways, the articles in this issue explore this tricky terrain of gendering happiness and its discontents, teasing out these nuanced and complex interrelations.

In the next article of this collection Vicki Robinson (*The Accomplishment of Happiness: Feminism, pleasure, heterosexuality and consumption*) draws on her various collaborative research both on heterosexuality and footwear as a lens through which to problematise 'the notion of happiness as an oppressive normalising concept that acts to breed misery, in that individuals are led to compare their own experiences with popular cultural references such as: 'happily married', 'living happily ever after', 'domestic bliss'' (Robinson, 2017, this issue). Drawing on Ahmed (2010), she argues 'that the promise of happiness (including its objects, rituals and trajectory) is located in the production of privilege (in marriage, family, monogamy, employment, money, heterosexuality, gender norms and citizenship)'. Ultimately, Robinson calls for a relational understanding of gender and life course to enable us to see 'happiness and its relationship to pleasure in more complex and nuanced ways [and allow] us to re-imagine theoretical conceptions of structure and agency within a dominant and patriarchal institution, that of hegemonic heterosexuality' (Robinson, 2017, this issue).

Continuing the theme of sexuality, Zoran Milosavljevic (*My Happiness is Your Horror: Discourses of virtual communication and HIV/AIDs in gay men's narratives in Serbia*) explores perceptions of happiness among Serbian gay men through their use of online communication on gay dating sites and social networks. Here Milosavljevic highlights the connection between online identity play, health disclosure in virtual communication, and the possibility of HIV transmission as important factors for understandings of wellbeing and happiness among gay individuals. Breanne Fahs (*On "good sex" and other dangerous ideas: women*

narrate their joyous and happy sexual encounters) also considers the importance of sex for ones' sense of self and for analyses of the socio-cultural gendered constructions of happiness. With echoes of themes brought out through Holly McNish's poem, Fahs draws on women's experiences of the body and sexuality as a lens through which to understand power and control. She explores how 'what makes women happy sexually connects to bigger stories about women's entitlement to, and relationship with, happiness as an emotional state of mind' (Fahs, 2017, this issue). Sexual pleasure is a critical aspect of women's understandings of themselves and their social contexts, and, as Fahs argues, '[w]hat women expect (of course, limited by what they're told to expect or what they believe they are entitled to expect) matters if we want to understand gender and power. Similarly, what women want, or how they imagine good sex, sheds light on the all-too-distant points between the kind of sex they are having and the kind of sex they want to be having' (2017, this issue).

Leading from 'good sex' to the consequences of intercourse, Susan Hogan (*The Tyranny of Expectations of Post-Natal Delight*) focuses on the contested nature of childbirth practices. Taking a historical perspective, Hogan discusses the modern medical/interventionist model of birth now predominant in the UK and examines the consequences of prevailing norms for women. Situating her discussion of the transition to motherhood within a wider exploration of the cultural expectations regarding women, childbirth and maternal receptiveness, Hogan focuses on 'why pregnancy, childbirth and new motherhood are not necessarily delightful' (Hogan, 2017, this issue). As Hogan states, '[w]omen become smarter, more beautiful and more fulfilled as a result of becoming mothers, so gendered discourses assure us - we are fulfilling our biological destiny - we'll become 'real' women. Indeed, if we miss the opportunity to procreate we may never feel 'whole' and our 'biological clocks' are clicking away. Whether we ascribe to the stereotypical rhetoric or not, we are saturated with it' (2017, this issue). As a contested mother myself, juggling multiple social roles, and usually often left feeling that I never quite succeed at any, Hogan's article hit particularly close to home. I join in her call to 'reject the tyranny of the expectation of post-natal delight and acknowledge that pregnant women and new mothers are caught in a web of intersecting and conflicting discourses, practices and expectancies which render the experience unstable; it is not women per se who are 'unstable' it is the very terrain, or field, itself' (Hogan, 2017, this issue).

Moving away from the realms of sexuality, sex and the body, Emily Falconer ('*Learning to be Zen': Women travellers and the imperative to be happy*) draws our attention to the emotional management of lone, independent women travellers as they move through tourist spaces. Through exploring women's narratives of their travels, Falconer argues that women travellers feel 'compelled to feel and display characteristics of happiness, humour and 'learning to be Zen' in order to be successful travellers [...] in the face of embodied, emotional and gendered constraints - including multiple forms of sexual harassment and in some cases violence' (Falconer, 2017, this issue). Drawing on Ahmed's (2010) depiction of the 'feminist

killjoy', Ehrenriech's (2010) 'tyranny of positive thinking' and feminist politics of emotions, Falconer points to the emancipatory potential of anger, challenging the idea that women's resistance and empowerment through travel is incompatible with anger and unhappiness.

The violating discourse of rape trials is the focus of Zoe Brigley Thompson's article (*Happiness (or Not) After Rape: Hysterics and Harpies in the Media versus Killjoys in Black Women's Fiction*). Through an analysis of the literary works of Danticat and Walker, here Brigley Thompson makes the case that happiness scripts have a close connection with rape scripts in that both provide a set of gendered rules of behaviour. Moreover, representations of rape particularly in media and legal discourses, confine rape victims to narrow representational scripts as 'broken hysterics or vengeful harpies'. As she states, '[i]n one narrative, the survivor is seen as broken, tainted, or hysterical even, and certainly not reliable as a rational subject. The second script minimizes the trauma of rape, framing it as a manageable or everyday experience, and it encourages the survivor to put aside anger and hurt, or risk being framed as bitter and vengeful. Though contradictory, both narratives work to silence those who have experienced rape, the first through discrediting survivors, and the second by dismissing the unhappiness and pain caused by sexual violence' (Brigley Thompson, 2017, this issue).

In her powerful research with female fighters in Colombia, Yoana Nieto Valdivieso (*The Joy of the Militancy: Happiness and the Pursuit of Revolutionary Struggle*) highlights the ways in which pleasure and joy have been an overlooked aspect of the experience of female participation in guerrilla groups and politico-military organisations. Just as 'women's participation in revolutionary struggle brings into question traditional views about women's engagement in armed violence, in consequence destabilising both the gender order and the political, social and capitalist order' (Nieto Valdivieso, 2017, this issue), so too is the notion of 'women narrating their involvement as actors of violence, using tropes of pleasure and happiness' considered taboo. As Nieto Valdivieso argues, these 'violent' women subvert both normative concepts of happiness and the gender order through talking about the pleasure and joy they gained from their roles as armed combatants. However, what Nieto Valdivieso's research finds is that although 'happiness and joy, as well as pleasure in one's identity as an insurgent do not seem to be appropriate emotions', nevertheless, these emotions are 'at the core of some women's identities, and have played a central role in their reconfiguration of self' in the post-conflict process of reconstruction' (2017, this issue).

As an apt companion piece, Janet Lee's article ('*Knights of the Air': Joyful Slaughter and the Pleasures of Moral Survival*) also explores the 'pleasures' of war through a focus on the 'sanctioned killing' represented in diaries and letters written by British airmen during World War I. Here Lee makes 'the case for the triumph of joyful survival over joyful slaughter as a consequence of the moral performance of killing

rather than being killed' (2017, this issue). Lee explores the ways pleasure is performed in the context of emotional communities regulated by gender regimes within particular settings - in this case how pleasure is constructed and represented by First World War airmen of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Through considering the power of pleasure in both sanctioned killing and moral survival, Lee 'interrogates killing in war as a technology of happiness that shapes martial masculinities' (2017, this issue).

We conclude this special issue with a final historical focus, this time on a particular point in 19th Century American history. Nicolette Gable ('*Willful Sadness': American Decadence, Gender, and the Pleasures of Pessimism*) provides a fascinating insight into the American Decadents of the 19th century and the ways in which they posed a threat 'to the healthy minded American because of their invitation into a world of strange pleasures. This "morbid" life and art was predicated on a pessimistic view of the future which contrasted sharply with the progressive and optimistic American ideal' (2017, this issue). However, significantly, Decadence could only be embraced by the few, and was heavily intersected by class and gender, as Gable explains, '[o]nly the wealthiest could afford such a lifestyle, and only men could make such a life a cultural protest. For women such a life would not signal the gender protest that it did for men, rather it would be interpreted more easily as the effect of over civilization on a woman's nerves' (2017, this issue).

What I hope you gain from this special issue is a gendered insight into the diverse and complex world of happiness, power, pleasure and the tyrannies of desire. As Walker and Kavedžija state; 'the values of happiness go some way toward constituting the worlds of lived moral, political, and emotional experience, and an examination of those values may reveal to us their outlines and contours' (2015, p.18). A gender analysis of happiness is one important element in our larger feminist project, regardless of whether we risk becoming 'killjoys'. It thus seems appropriate to end with Sarah Ahmed's own words on the nuances of happiness;

> The freedom to be happy can become: the freedom to avoid proximity to whatever compromises your happiness. Caring for happiness can become: the freedom not to care about unhappiness. Perhaps we need to turn away from any happiness that is premised on turning away from suffering. To be touched by this suffering would not be premised on feeling the other's suffering. […] To walk away from the paths of happiness would be a refusal of indifference, a willingness to stay proximate to the unhappiness of others, however we are affected' (Ahmed, 2015, n.p.).

I hope that, happy or otherwise, you enjoy this special issue of the Journal of Gender Studies – whatever that means for you as a situated knower within your particular gender regimes.

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