

## Empowering the Female Voice: Interdisciplinarity, Feminism, and the Memoir

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### Abstract

Women's voices have historically been silenced or Othered, but through the interdisciplinary genre of the memoir, women are able to write from a female perspective and create a strong voice for feminism. By sharing the reality of the female experience, the memoirist ultimately reveals truths about her own life, and in doing so examines the world in which she lives—especially with regard to gendered identity and social norms. This paper explores feminist and interdisciplinary aspects of the contemporary female-authored memoir with a focus on two key feminist issues—women's roles or gendered identity and the male gaze—within the memoirs of bell hooks, Caitlin Moran, and Tina Fey. Through their personal narratives, Moran, hooks, and Fey explore politically charged topics that are often silenced due to social stigma, while voicing their feelings of dissent toward social and gendered norms, ultimately generating and promoting important feminist discourse.

**Keywords:** feminist, feminism, interdisciplinary, memoir

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### Introduction

The memoir is a valuable and important genre for interdisciplinary exploration and study. The contemporary female-authored memoir, in particular, weaves together elements from multiple disciplines and creates a strong voice for feminism by expressing the personal while also examining cultural contexts from a female perspective. As an interdisciplinary genre, the memoir exposes the "complexity of the world and requires us to have a better understanding of the relationships and connections between fields that intersect and overlap" (Strober, 2011, p. 5). Much more than the narrative self is revealed within the memoir. Personal narratives reveal life experiences that are undeniably and intrinsically connected to cultural contexts, thereby crossing disciplinary boundaries and exemplifying societal and gendered norms.

The excitement of autobiography [or memoir] as a category of study is that it links together many different disciplines...the study of autobiography explodes disciplinary boundaries and is difficult to define as a distinct genre...This kind of disruptive interdisciplinarity, the challenging of traditional boundaries and definitions, has also been central to the feminist project...and autobiography provides a meeting-place for many different kinds of feminis[m] (Cosslett, 2000, p. 1).

The female-authored memoir provides a broader perspective into the lives of contemporary women—the experiences of whom have historically been silenced or Othered: "traditionally, knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men's experiences were normative, as if being human meant being male" (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 3). The female author, therefore, is faced with a significant and somewhat daunting task. By telling her story, she must "find her self-in-the-world...by facing (affronting?) and mounting an enormous struggle with the cultural fictions—myths, narratives, iconographies, languages—which heretofore have delimited the representation of women. And which are culturally and physically saturating" (Showalter, 1985, p. 274). Feminism's aim for equality cannot succeed without the strength of women's voices. The study of women's personal narratives, then, becomes increasingly important for understanding and "examining the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender" with a much-needed female perspective (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 5). In addition, the female-authored memoir is a wide-ranging literary genre wherein a variety of women are able to

share their own experiences—ultimately exposing truths and creating an outlet for personal stories and perspectives. When diverse women communicate the personal, they break the silence of oppression and create a powerful force—one that can bring about change and reveal truths. Meredith Maran (1997) describes the importance of women sharing their stories:

We might miss the chance to change the world—for ourselves, for our daughters, and yes, for our sons. We might miss the chance to finally see who a woman might be, who a man might be, set free from the confines of gender rigidity. And what better way to begin than the way women have always begun: by telling the truth about our lives? (p. xiii).

By revealing personal truths and experiences, the contemporary female-authored memoir opens doors to a new and complex world, enabling the reader to make connections to cultural contexts and to think critically about interdisciplinarity and feminism.

The following memoirs—*Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* by bell hooks (1996), *Bossypants* by Tina Fey (2011), and *How To Be a Woman* by Caitlin Moran (2011)—relate intimate narratives while also reflecting and critiquing cultural contexts. The honest and sometimes shocking nature of the narratives expresses the importance of relating the female experience without shame and without adhering to patriarchal or societal norms. Moran, hooks, and Fey use their memoirs to explore feminist issues and their own gendered identities—each of them “bringing female gendering to bear on our previously male-gendered narratives of the self and culture” (Buss, 2002, p. 3). Rather than silencing the female experience, these authors embrace, celebrate, and critique it through their own reflective lenses, paving the way for more women writers and strengthening the feminist voice. In recent years, feminism has shown a “strong interest in the autobiographical, beginning with the attempt to connect the ‘personal’ with the ‘political’, and the concomitant emphasis on women’s experience as a vital resource in the creation of women’s knowledge” (Cosslett, 2000, p. 2). Through sharing the intimate details of her own life, the memoirist expresses the raw or very real nature of the female experience—unveiling the many (and often silenced) challenges that contemporary women face within society; challenges such as the paradigm of women’s roles in relation to identity and self and the male gaze. The topics surrounding women’s roles, identity, and sexualization are often silenced or simply accepted as cultural norms. The memoir exposes these relevant issues by reflecting the personal with an interdisciplinary and cultural influence that establishes a meaningful voice for feminism and the female experience.

## Identity and the Self

Writing—sharing their personal thoughts and experiences—is among the most significant contributions individual women have made to the progress of feminism. “[T]heir sharing is a gift of themselves, and a gift to themselves also,” because it acknowledges that women’s voices and experiences matter (Silverman, 1984, p. viii). When women remain silent, especially with regard to the very personal, feminism fails. Women need to share their personal experiences and reflect upon them, considering how their gendered roles are problematized within society.

If women’s personal narratives both present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women’s lives, they are especially suitable documents for illuminating several aspects of gendered relations: the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, and the dynamics of power relations between women and men. Since women’s...life stories...recount a process of construction of the self, these narratives are potentially rich sources for the exploration of the process of gendered self-identity (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 5).

In the foreword to her memoir, *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, bell hooks (1996) describes the text as “the story of a girlhood rebellion, of my struggle to create self and identity distinct from and yet inclusive of the world around me” (p. xi). The exploration of her past allows hooks to become familiar with how her experiences are a reflection of who she is and, ultimately, a reflection of what

it means to be a black woman (or girl) within her society. Women's personal narratives "as written articulations of self and identity...[are] a central means for constructing a sense of identity" (Cosslett, 2000, p. 45). For hooks (1996), writing and exploring her own story is meaningful as it thoughtfully reveals "the inner life of a girl inventing herself—creating the foundation of self-hood and identity" (p. xi).

She is able to examine, through writing her personal narrative, how her early years and feelings of dissent toward her role as a black woman have contributed to her identity and sense of self. hooks tells a sombre story, focusing on her childhood experiences and her racial and gendered identity.

It is necessary for hooks (1996) to tell not only the female perspective, but also the perspective of the black girl—a subject always in the "peripheral...little black girls [are often regarded as]...props, background...never center stage" (p. xii). The reader must become aware of the cultural contexts in order to interpret her story; hooks (1996) explains how

many feminist thinkers writing and talking about girlhood...like to suggest that black girls have better self-esteem than their white counterparts. The measurement of this difference is often that black girls are more assertive, speak more, appear more confident. Yet in traditional southern-based black life, it was and is expected of girls to be articulate, to hold ourselves with dignity....These traits were meant to uplift the race. They were not necessarily traits associated with building female self-esteem. An outspoken girl might still feel that she was worthless because her skin was not light enough or her hair the right texture (p.xiii).

A critical element of hooks's identity involves not only her gendered self but also her self as a black woman. One cannot fully comprehend the story of the southern black woman with a feminist perspective alone; consideration of the cultural context is vital. In the American South, where hooks grew up, there is a "persistence of racial division, inadequacies in education, health, and poverty...[and] attitudes and perceptions vary substantially between the races" (Cooper, 2009, p. 820). Segregation was a major part of her early life, living in an area where "more than any other feature, even social class, the racial makeup of residents distinguished one...neighbourhood from another" (Fischer, 2010, p. 146). hooks (1996), referring to herself in the third person, explains that "she and other children want to understand Race but no one explains it. They learn without understanding that the world is more a home for white folks than it is for anyone else, that black people who most resemble white folks will live better in that world" (p. 31). Similarly, in the introduction to her own memoir, acclaimed American writer Maya Angelou (1969) states, "[i]f growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat" (p. 4). However, hooks (1996) adds that in order to more accurately "understand the complexity of black girlhood we need more work that documents that reality in all its variations and diversity...there is no one story of black girlhood" (p. xiii). Here, hooks reinforces the importance of black women sharing their personal narratives, giving voice to their diverse outlooks and experiences in order to challenge paradigms and break barriers. Women of all different races and social backgrounds must tell their stories, for silence is the enemy that creates fear of the unknown and further isolates the Othered female.

Cultural and gender-normative expectations can often lead to harmful stereotypes or cultural expectations. In her memoir, hooks (1996) recounts a memory of playing with her brother and a red wagon. She and her brother

shared possession of it but they had different roles in relationship to it. She was to ride in the red wagon and he was to pull it. She was to ride in it because she was a girl—a would-be princess whom some rich prince would come seeking, take away to his palace, and keep her there in splendour forever(p. 19).

The idea that hooks, as a girl, is to sit in the wagon while the boy pulls it and takes her wherever he decides becomes a metaphor for the submissive female and the dominant male. hooks (1996)

remembers taking a turn pulling the wagon; “she did not mind pulling him. It was the grown-ups...who had trouble seeing her pull that big boy in the wagon” (p. 20). As children, hooks and her brother do not intuitively understand the gender-normative roles they are expected to play. It is the adults who first impose and reinforce the ideologies of gender-normative behaviour. hooks began questioning this as a young child and explores it further throughout her memoir.

As hooks reflects on her girlhood, she remembers the many times that she was reprimanded for having too much spirit or acting in a way that was considered unfeminine. After disobeying her brother and father one evening, hooks (1996) is beaten by her father and afterwards overhears him say that she “ha[s] too much spirit, that she ha[s] to learn to mind, that that spirit ha[s] to be broken” (p. 30). She learns early that she does not fit in and that her desire for dissent—to break away from the enforced gender roles—makes her an outcast. Her family tries to help her accept her role as a female. They encourage her to embrace feminine characteristics such as a desire for beauty. Even her brother, who is her closest friend, “must show in every way that there is nothing about her that he can stand. He must not be on the side of the outcast” (hooks, 1996, p. 166). Eventually hooks realizes, through much hardship and self-discovery, that she doesn’t have to fit the mould of the submissive female. Through writing, reflecting on, and sharing her story, hooks comes to accept who she is and, in doing so, creates another voice with which to express the complexity and diversity of the female experience. In the final paragraph of her memoir, hooks (1996) explains how she has come to a sense of self-discovery and acceptance:

At night when everyone is silent and everything is still, I lie in the darkness...I tell myself stories, write poems, record my dreams. In my journal I write—I belong in this place of words. This is my home. This dark, bone black inner cave where I am making a world for myself (p. 183).

Through writing, hooks discovers a place where she belongs; where she can carve out her own unique role as a woman. Through writing her memoir, she has found a voice for reclaiming her abusive childhood and finding strength in her experiences. Sharing reflections and ideas about her own life, hooks contributes to the voice of feminism—professing that dissent from the norm should be celebrated and understood rather than silenced, disregarded or feared.

Fey (2011) writes about her own struggles with gender-normative roles when she writes of her experience as a woman in a position of power in the workforce. Her role as a female leader sits uncomfortably with many, and she is often asked questions such as “‘Is it hard for you, being the boss?’ and ‘Is it uncomfortable for you to be the person in charge?’” (Fey, 2011, p. 5). Many people assume that because Fey is a woman, she should feel unnatural or uncomfortable being the boss and telling others (men, in particular) what to do—something that is still often considered unfeminine. Fey (2011) responds by stating that she wonders why Donald Trump, for example, does not receive the same questions: “Gosh, Mr. Trump, is it awkward for you to be the boss of all these people?” (p. 5). Gendered assumptions such as these are prevalent and have become a cultural image or stereotype. The greatest problem “with cultural images is that they so often deny complexity in favour of a stereotyped norm of experience...[they] assume a culturally understood meaning that does not often allow for differences in experiences” (Matthews, 2010, p. 3). In order to break down gender-normative ideologies and stereotypes, women must continue to share their personal experiences and perspectives, which will help to promote the diversity, complexity, and relevance of the female experience.

### Women’s Role as Wife and Mother

The role of wife and mother is a complex and often contentious issue with which contemporary women continue to grapple. Emillie Zaslow (2009) points out that one of the many battles women face can be found in the

variety of contemporary women’s magazines consistently offer[ing] mixed messages about the roles and responsibilities of mothers; alternately suggesting that women who had a

public-professional life were powerful but selfish while their counterparts, the stay-at-home moms, were selfless, over involved soccer moms who had failed to make a mark outside of the domestic sphere (p. 108).

In their memoirs, Moran and Fey tackle the issues surrounding women's role as mother (from the point of view of the privileged white female). In *How To Be a Woman*, Moran (2011) discusses the long hours and many years of work associated with raising children but suggests that even with all that, having children is

the easy option for a woman...because if you have children, at least people won't keep asking you when you're going to have children...for some reason, the world really wants to know when women are having children [and] is oddly panicked by women who are being a bit relaxed and 'whatever' about it all (p. 229).

Having children is commonly understood as the role of all women and, therefore, choosing not to have children

is a very, very hard decision for a woman to make....[W]e think of non-mothers as rangy lone wolves...[and] we make women feel that their narrative has ground to a halt in their thirties if they don't 'finish things' properly and have children (Moran, 2011, p. 234).

Moran (2011) points out that "the reason they don't ask men when they're having kids, of course, is because men can, pretty much, carry on as normal once they've had a baby. That's how the world's still wired" (p. 233). In writing her personal narrative, Moran asks the reader to reconsider the paradigm of women and motherhood. Why do women feel guilty if they don't want to have children? Is this right? How are the circumstances different for men? Moran uses her personal experiences to examine women's role as mother and encourages the reader to think critically about the cultural contexts and social pressure surrounding this topic. Personal thoughts and experiences such as Moran's highlight problems within a society while encouraging the reader to think differently about these issues.

In *Bossypants*, Tina Fey discusses her experience of being a mother while juggling a career. Fey (2011) describes her disappointment when her daughter brings home a book entitled *My Working Mom*, wherein the fictional working mother is depicted as a witch who is never around and, "in the heart-warming conclusion,...the child says she doesn't like having a working mom but she can't picture her any other way" (p.255). Fey (2011) explains, "I didn't love it. I'm sure the TWO MEN who wrote this book had the absolute best intentions, but this leads me to my point. The topic of working moms is a tap dance recital in a minefield" (p. 255). Again, the paradigm of women's role as mother reflects cultural and interdisciplinary contexts. A prevailing view in Western society continues to be that a good mother should stay home with her children, putting work and career out of mind; the contemporary working mother, therefore, often faces incredible guilt because of this widespread belief. The topic of the working mother and the question of guilt were recently discussed in the British newspaper *The Telegraph*:

Figures from 2010 show that a record 2.2 million mothers with children as young as six months were working full-time...But it's not bad news; research from US universities last month, revealed that women who return to work shortly after starting a family have better mental and physical health than those who opt to stay at home. A recent Gallup study found 28 per cent of unemployed mothers described themselves as depressed, compared with 17 per cent of employed mothers—and the British Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health reported that mothers who stayed at home were more likely to be overweight (38 per cent) than those who juggled family and career (23 per cent). Do a great many of us regret going to the office every day?...Of course we do...but...we felt compelled to do it, so we did. And we'd probably do it again, because modern motherhood is not a simplistic choice (Woods, 2012, n.p.).

The article explains that in general, working mothers are mentally and physically healthier, thereby

suggesting that they find some level of fulfillment—and even joy—in their work. The guilt that women carry with them is often their biggest challenge. Zaslow (2009) describes the “new mom” phenomenon whereby “new moms are now expected to have high-status jobs, maintain sexy exteriors for their husbands, and also act as matriarchal martyrs who dote over their children” (p. 108). The motherhood paradigm and the “new mom phenomenon” can be challenged when women share their personal experiences and perspectives. Once again, not all women will agree, but generating and promoting discourse on the topic strengthens the female voice, promotes acceptance, and acknowledges the challenges that face all mothers.

In *Bone Black*, hooks (1996) recounts the numerous ways in which she feels that she does not fit in—within her family and within society as a whole. Her own family treats her as an outcast because she does not embrace the “normal” desires of a young girl—namely, the desire to be beautiful and to get married. hooks’s mother tells her “again and again about the importance of learning to cook, clean, etc., in order to be a good wife” (hooks, 1996, p. 97). From hooks’s (1996) perspective, however, “the problem with marriage [is] not the good wife, but the lack of the good husband” (p. 97). In observing the marriage of her own parents, hooks can see the many dangerous flaws—the problems that so many women, including her mother, have come to accept as the norm—that accompany the gender-normative roles of men and women within a marriage.

She could not tell her mother how she became a different person as soon as the husband left the house in the morning, how she became energetic, noisy, silly, funny, fussy, strong, capable, tender, everything that she was not when he was around. When he was around she became silent. She reminded her of a dog sitting, standing obediently until the master, the head of the house, gave her orders to move, to do this to do that, to cook his food just so, to make sure the house was clean just so (hooks, 1996, p. 98).

After years of observing the marriage of her parents, hooks (1996) concludes that “marriage is for men...women get nothing out of it” (p. 98). She does not accept the role of the dutiful, doting wife and has no desire to get married herself. Her family’s opinion does little to change her mind. They tell her that she will have a difficult time finding a husband. Not only because she lacks “the hips, breasts, thighs that men [are] interested in. But more importantly she [is] too smart, men [do] not like smart women” (hooks, 1996, p. 99). Because she has her own opinions and acknowledges the problems displayed within the gender-normative marriage roles, hooks feels alienated from her family who support and uphold such ideals. Through writing, however, she carves out her own identity and breaks down the barriers surrounding women’s role as the good wife.

## The Male Gaze

The often-cited feminist term “the male gaze” was coined by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. In her essay, Mulvey describes a film theory whereby women are gazed upon in a sexual manner by the camera (or assumed male audience) in such a way that they become objectified. These images

reassure men of their sexual power and, at the same moment, deny any sexuality of women other than the male construction. They are evidence of gendered difference because any effort to replace the woman in these images with a man violates ‘the assumptions of the likely viewer’ (Berger, 1972, p. 64).

The male gaze theory continues to be relevant today within popular culture and in the personal experiences described by authors such as Moran and Fey.

As a columnist, one of Moran’s (2011) assignments is to visit a local strip club and write about her experience. After being there for a short time, the bouncer asks her to leave—assuming that she and her colleague must be prostitutes. It is then that Moran (2011) realizes in this world of strip clubs, “woman-type runs on a binary system: stripper, whore” (p. 161). On reflection of her visit to the strip club, Moran (2011) writes

What are strip clubs and lap-dancing clubs if not 'light entertainment' versions of the entire history of misogyny?...If women are having to strip to get an education—in a way that male teenage students are really notably not—then that's a gigantic political issue, not a reason to keep strip clubs going....Between 60 and 80 percent of strippers come from a background of sexual abuse. This place is a mess, a horrible mess. Every dance, every private booth, is a small unhappiness, an ugly impoliteness: the bastard child of misogyny and commerce (pp. 163-164).

Moran (2011) makes the point that in 2010, "Iceland—with a lesbian prime minister and a parliament that is 50 percent female—became the first country in the world to outlaw strip clubs for feminist, rather than religious reasons" (p. 164). Moran's experience with the strip club is brief, but it ignites within her a discomfort with the representation of women and a desire to share her opinion. As she so bluntly states at the end of the chapter: "Girls, get the fuck off the podium—you're letting us all down" (2011, p. 163).

Although Moran makes a powerful statement with regard to the degrading nature of the strip club, she does simplify the issue somewhat. Like all women, those who work in this industry need opportunities to speak out, share their own experiences, and contribute to the discussion. Unfortunately, the female sex worker represents a group of individuals who are marginalized and who carry with them a "legacy of work [considered to be] 'unspeakable', stigmatized, and clandestine. Absent from both Canadian census data and statistics that plot the contours of the formal labour force, sex trade workers have proved to be an elusive population"—and another example of the silenced, disregarded female experience (Ross, 2000, p. 225). With more personal stories shared from a female perspective (especially from the perspective of the sex worker herself) about the reality of strip clubs and other sex work, the feminist voice becomes increasingly strengthened and inclusive.

It is not only in strip clubs that women are viewed as sexual objects and the male gaze is promoted, but also ubiquitously within popular culture.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly....It makes sense that many girls and women grow up seeing images of girls and women the way men do—the images themselves are simply constructed that way....Seeing the visual cues of the male gaze, in turn, affects how women understand images of other women (Zeisler, 2008, pp. 8-9).

In a satirical chapter on beauty advice, Fey (2011) discusses the numerous ways that women can make themselves "beautiful" and concludes with the statement, "If you retain nothing else, always remember the most important Rule of Beauty. 'Who cares?'" (p. 114). Fey creates a sense of absurdity surrounding the never-ending list of problems that women feel they need to fix in order to make themselves "beautiful" and fit the expectations imposed on them by popular culture. Women feel inadequate in so many ways—especially with regard to their bodies. Fey (2011) explains:

[t]here are an infinite number of things that can be 'incorrect' on a woman's body. At any given moment on planet Earth, a woman is buying a product to correct one of the following 'deficiencies': big pores, oily T-zone, cankles, lunch lady arms, nipples too big, nipples too small, breasts too big, breasts too small, 'no arch in my eyebrows', muffin top, spider veins [and the list goes on] (pp. 20-21).

Fey's sarcasm with regard to the topic of beauty, coupled with her own personal experience and "advice", challenges the paradigm of the perfect body and exposes the reality of the objectified female form. She encourages the reader to question why we feel the need to worry about so many bodily "imperfections"—to not simply accept, but rather consider the cultural contexts. In the end, Fey declares, it really shouldn't matter. We need to stop caring.

Moran (2011) dedicates a chapter in her memoir to discuss the prevalence of Brazilian waxing within Western culture. "It is now accepted that women *will* wax. We never had a debate about it. It just happened—and we never thought to discuss it" (Moran, 2011, p. 45). According to the pornography industry, women must be waxed and bare to be sexually attractive. If you ask the question "why do 21st-century women feel they have to remove their pubic hair?" the answer is, 'because everyone does in porno'...[and] the real reason all porn stars wax is because, if you remove all the fur, you can see more when you're doing penetrative shots" (Moran, 2011, pp. 46-47). Pornography (a multibillion dollar industry notably run by men) is dictating how women should look in order to be sexy and popular culture has come to accept and normalize this. Moran has noticed that the majority of women she knows feel pressured to get a Brazilian wax in order to be sexually attractive to their partner. Unfortunately, it has become the norm that men who "have been conditioned to expect a tidy Brazilian...may genuinely find anything else very off-putting" (Moran, 2011, p. 46). Moran (2011) explains that "we've come to a point where it's basically costing us *money* to have a vagina. They're making us pay for *maintenance and upkeep* of our lulus, like they're a communal garden" (p. 46). Moran's candid discussion critically examines this often-silenced topic and asks the reader to think logically about the pressure placed on women and the ridiculous amounts of money being spent.

Full bikini waxing is standard practice for the fashion-conscious in North America. However, there is now a movement that claims Brazilian waxing, among other things, is evidence of a wider 'pornification' of North American society. Hot has replaced beautiful as the ultimate compliment and hot, according[ly]...means 'f—kable'...Women today...are not more in touch with their sexuality as a result of all this display, and in fact they may even be less so....It's an idea that female sexuality should be about performance and not about pleasure ("Brazilian Waxing", 2006).

The Brazilian wax, perhaps, is not a top concern for feminist theorists; but as Moran points out, the patriarchal dictation of the idealized "sexy woman" creates an unrealistic gendered expectation—one that most women find difficult to escape from and may not be inclined to discuss openly. There is little consideration or discussion from the female perspective and yet topics such as these most require exploration. Once again, the memoir becomes a place where women can share their personal experiences (even about such intimate topics as pubic hair) and generate feminist discourse.

In a chapter entitled "Dear Internet", Fey (2011) writes sarcastic responses to the online correspondence she has received from the public. It is interesting to note that all of these messages illustrate gender discrimination. The comments include statements such as: "when is Tina going to do something about that hideous scar across her cheek?"; 'Tina Fey is an ugly, pear-shaped, bitchy, overrated troll'; 'the only reason she's celebrated is because she's a woman'; [and] 'I'd stick it in her tail pipe'" (Fey, 2011, pp. 163-165). What these comments all seem to have in common is a reference to her gender or sexuality. Fey is berated because she is an outspoken woman and the public wants to tame her by criticizing her looks and thinking of her as a sexual object. A woman in the public eye with a powerful career is viewed by many as inappropriate, unfeminine, and, perhaps, intimidating or disruptive to social norms. Both Fey and Moran write about the fear that women have when it comes to aging and losing sexual appeal—especially when they are in the public eye. Fey (2011) observes that

women, at least in comedy, are labelled 'crazy' after a certain age....I've known older men in comedy who can barely feed and clean themselves, and they still work. The women, though, they're all 'crazy'....I have a suspicion that the definition of 'crazy' in show business is a woman who keeps talking even after no one wants to fuck her anymore (pp. 270-271).

The message that popular culture continues to send is that women must be sexual objects to be desirable and successful. If they are no longer considered sexy, they should disappear—there is no use for them anymore. According to Moran (2011),

men visibly age every day—but women are supposed to stop the decline at around 37, 38, and live out the next 30 or 40 years in some magical bubble where their hair is still shiny and chestnut, their face unlined, their lips puffy, and their tits up on the top third of the rib cage. Why can't we just loosen our belts, take off our heels, and cheerfully rot, like the boys (p. 285).

Moran's (2011) philosophy about whether something should be a feminist concern or not is if men share similar problems: "you can tell whether some misogynistic societal pressure is being exerted on women by calmly enquiring, 'And are the men doing this, as well?'" (p. 281). It is apparent that women's concern with sexual appeal is due to the imposed societal expectations and the cultural phenomenon of the male gaze. The interdisciplinary memoir examines phenomena such as the male gaze with meaningful, personal perspectives.

## Conclusion

Women need to share their voices in order to strengthen the female perspective, especially with regard to the very personal. "Listening to women's voices, studying women's writings, and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world" (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 4). The memoir testifies to personal experience; and the term testimony

has important resonances for feminism, which begins with women speaking about their hitherto unheard experiences, and also testifying to their feminist beliefs. The idea of difference between women of different ages, classes, races, nations also points towards the importance of many voices, all testifying to their own truths (Cosslett, 2000, p. 9).

The multiple and diverse voices of the female experience must be heard, celebrated, and united in order to strengthen the voice for feminism and dispel patriarchal and cultural norms. As Moran (2011) explains, women must "counter the awkwardness, disconnect, and bullshit of being a modern woman not by shouting at it or internalizing it—but by simply pointing it out and going 'HA!' instead" (pp. 13-14). With a candid approach to women's issues, the memoirist is able to critique her own personal experiences and use them as a reflection on society as a whole. The memoir encompasses the many voices of feminism where there is not one privileged white academic voice

polic[ing] and regulat[ing] who is and isn't a 'woman' based on their interpretation of...gender presentation [or] 'saving' people and making decisions for them, rather than supporting their right to self-determination, whether it's engaging in sex work, or wearing a hijab (Yee, 2011, p. 12).

The memoir does not discriminate or determine how to be a feminist, but rather allows for broader understanding and acceptance through raising important issues, both personal and political. Ultimately, women's personal narratives and the autobiographical process incorporate "not only facts and events, but also social representations and cultural values" (Cosslett, 2000, p. 61). The feminist issues that are uncovered within the memoir cannot be fully dealt with and understood when looking at the literature alone; they must be considered with an interdisciplinary perspective because these issues reflect a "complex society [and] cannot be solved...[without] attempting to [understand] these problems...in their complexity and interrelations" (Strober, 2011, p. 94). Interdisciplinarity, therefore, creates a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted memoir and the diverse and complex female experience, thereby allowing the reader to view "women's personal narratives from new perspectives" and, ultimately, uncover truths (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 12). We cannot simply read the memoirs of Moran, Fey, hooks, and others as personal narratives; we must examine the relevant cultural contexts using feminist and interdisciplinary lenses to alter our own way of thinking and broaden our own perspectives, thereby bringing the often-silenced female experience to the forefront.

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