

Jennifer Marks  
Dr. R. Foy  
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### Female Deliverance

Forced to conform to society's predefined feminine role, women often hide from their true identities. Some women withdraw from reality or react in extreme ways because of their deprivation of self-expression and lack of personal freedom. During Ancient Greek times, for example, women were considered subordinate to men, were banned from educational, cultural, and political events, and also were denied a voice of their own. In an effort to flee psychologically from tradition and bring about powerful emotional change, some women responded by rebelling, while others found internal strength to break away and radically alter their lifestyles through unique if only temporary outlets of expression. Even today, in the twenty-first century, women have yet to achieve total liberation. Escaping from societal constraints, females, from Ancient Greece to the twenty-first century, often mask themselves as strangers and participate in untamed rituals outside their own territory, where they unleash their "secret self" and liberate themselves as individuals.

In Ancient Greece, women emerged only through the imaginations and eyes of men, as unknown "individuals" and outsiders. Sue Blundell, in her book *Women in Ancient Greece*, explains that "almost everything that we know about Greek women is derived ultimately from a masculine source" (10). Because of the physical differences between men and women, men were cautious of the opposite sex and suppressed women in an effort to maintain control. Sue Blundell affirms that "it [was] a woman's sexuality which [was] potentially so threatening to a man's independence" (53). Although the male alleged self-sufficiency, men needed women to bear children. Anxious over the potential power of women, Greek men stripped women of their

main purpose as child bearers and classified the “parent of the child” as “he who mounts” (Keuls 33). Men, in fact, limited their wives from participation in society and from gaining knowledge and growing as individuals. In Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* (200-201), Eteocles verifies this notion when he says, “What’s outside, is man’s business, and let no woman give it thought. Let her stay inside and do no mischief” (qtd. in Keuls 65). Men consistently promoted the containment of women while also upholding the power of the male gender through the artistic form of the phallus.

Consequently, male anxiety led to, what Eva Keuls calls, the “reign of the phallus,” where male supremacy was on public display (Keuls 1). According to Eva Keuls, “the image of the male reproductive organ in permanent erection, the phallus, marked the dominance of men over women in the public sphere” (2). The idea of the phallus emerged as the generator of life and became a prominently displayed symbol utilized in Classical Athens as representation of male power. Keuls provides validation of this principle in her book, *The Reign of the Phallus* where she states, “phallic worship reinforced the stranglehold of man over woman, and in its extreme form, found in fifth-century Athens, virtually destroyed the female sex” (Keuls 67). The phallus represented a “kind of a weapon” or a “scepter of sovereignty” prominently displayed in various places, including artifacts on behalf of the elite male gender (Keuls 2). Statues of the god Hermes, with an erect and protruding penis, called *herms*, were placed publicly in courtyards and in front of houses as constant reminders to society of male superiority (Keuls 386). Due to a lack of confidence in their own sexuality, says Keuls, “Athenian men promoted the male organ as a symbol of fertility, parenthood, creativity, and self-defense” (Keuls 82). Through the persistent display of the phallus, men vibrantly flaunted their preeminence over women and symbolically fortified their superior position in society.

Because women threatened the manhood of the male gender, men physically confined and psychologically imprisoned women. Men were even concerned with the possibility of women getting out of hand and taking control of society (Keuls 321). Sue Blundell shares a quote by Gould, which supports the belief of women creating instability in society. Gould states, “Women are not part of, do not belong easily in, the male ordered world of the ‘civilized’ community” [and, therefore,] “threaten continually to overturn” [male] “stability or subvert its continuity” (19). Because of women’s closeness to nature, men believed women were like “caged tigers,” ready to pounce and “take revenge on the male world,” if not “tamed and cultivated by men” (Blundell 19). Such unwarranted panic may have caused men to inhibit women, in the rational fifth century Athens, but religious ceremonies offered women outlets to break free. Obviously, religious rituals, similar to the eccentric practices of Dionysus’ cult, a festival called *Adonia*, and even cult worship of the goddess Demeter allowed women to “let off steam and relieve what might otherwise be unbearable anxieties provoked by repression and restriction” (Keuls 349). Keuls also believed that the “order of society was strengthened by a flirtation” [with this] “ceremonial contrary behavior” (Keuls 349-350). By reviving hidden emotions and stimulating free expression, social diversions offered women critical outlets of escape.

While attempting to find some sense of individuality and release, women involved themselves in nonconventional religious and cultural ceremonies. Blundell tells us that “Through wine-drinking and ecstatic religious worship, [women] surrendered their normal identities and understandings” and perhaps gave birth to their secret selves (Blundell 165). The Maenads, for example, indulged in wild revelry and dance, exploring the strangers within themselves. Portrayed as wild animals in *The Bacchae*, Euripides suggests that freedom in the

hands of a woman could be detrimental to the order of society. Under the spell of Dionysus, for example, Agaue, the mother of Pentheus and one of the Maenads, kills her son Pentheus and becomes the scapegoat for his murder. This cult of Dionysus participated in “rituals of mad hysteria in which sexual hostilities and pent-up frustration were released,” [which also offered] “resolution of antagonism” [between men and women to promote a] “harmonious family life” (Keuls 373). Through ecstatic Dionysian rites, where uncontrolled female behavior existed, women emerged into “prominence” even if only for short periods of time (Blundell 166). With uncontrollable emotion, the Maenads buried the mold of the ideal female and, instead, raised the concept of the liberated female who ventured into a chaotic and unstructured lifestyle – a serious threat to the ordered, rational world of men.

Faced with modern societal constraints, women today also seek ways to escape from the norm and psychologically travel to a different state of mind. Popular festivals like New Year’s Eve celebrations and Mardi Gras relax public order and allow participants to indulge in otherwise discouraged or forbidden activities. Rite of reversals, like the Cajun *Couir du Mardi Gras*, a Mardi Gras run, offers individuals a “get away” from the restraints and hierarchies of society (Sexton 28). Rocky Sexton reinforces this concept by stating that the Cajun Mardi Gras run provides a “ritual consumption of alcohol [which] serves to loosen inhibitions, while the mask serves as a sort of cocoon, providing cover for the changes occurring in the real self underneath” (33). The conduct of individuals participating in the Mardi Gras run deviates from normal behavior and differs distinctively from every day life. This “time of excess” provides members of the run with a way to channel repressed feelings and stray from the cultural norm (Sexton 29). While the Tee Mamou, a traditional Mardi Gras run in Acadia Parish was exclusively established for men, women also organized a separate run in the early 1970s (Sexton

30). The Mardi Gras run allowed both men and women to unmask their “secret selves,” while also permitting societal rules to be stretched.

Additionally, Mardi Gras, a unique and wild annual celebration, provides a “symbolic space of leisure,” where individuals, both men and women, participate in “playful deviance” and unleash their “secret selves” (Redmon 27). Like the Maenads, Mardi Gras revelers participate in unrestrained and untamed rituals. While most people simply enjoy the “free-spirited” attitude of Mardi Gras, others engage in extreme behavior, releasing suppression and promoting non-conformity. Invariably, the importance of body parts as sexual symbols existed in Ancient Greece and certainly continues to exist today. Sexual freedom often provides self-validation and release of inner strength for an individual. Females, for example, may come to Mardi Gras in New Orleans to expose their body parts for beads or perhaps more specifically, for attention. Through an interview study performed during Mardi Gras, David Redmon offers real insight into this practice from individuals exploring their secret selves. As one female interviewee explained, if she exposed her breasts at home, she would be considered “a slut”; however, in New Orleans at Mardi Gras, she “was really not a whore, but just a family woman having a good time and getting the guys to yell and holler” (Redmon 34). Another woman provided further clarification for Redmon. She said, “Here, I’m really free, I’m open! Although I’m married at home, here I’m single. I’m a different self and no one knows” (Redmon 34). Providing an open stage for people, Mardi Gras offers a place where acting differently from societal expectations promotes excitement, fascination, and liberation – not much different from Ancient Greece.

Deviant behavior performed at Mardi Gras and erotic behavior carried out by Dionysus cult members as a result of confinement provides the impetus for women to explore the stranger within themselves (Redmon 33). In backspaces, or areas where individuals can “stand exposed

and find they need not try to conceal their stigma,” individuals often unveil layers of hidden emotions and concealed personalities (Redmon 28). While both Maenads and Mardi Gras revelers relish the freedom offered by untamed rituals, the concealment of the truth which is safely performed outside their own territory creates a fascinating experience. As Redmon tells us, “excitement and euphoria develop when people conceal their deviant secrets from important people who trust them” (39). Choosing to act in an uncharacteristic manner provides women with a liberated feeling of escape and power, as they are no longer restrained by men. Perhaps choosing to submerge into the unknown provides the thrill of release that many attempt to obtain, whether Mardi Gras maskers or Dionysus cult members.

By unleashing their “secret selves,” either in the woods outside of Thebes or during Mardi Gras in New Orleans, women capture a renewed sense of independence. While some women need the mask of themselves to be able to handle restraints, others *unmask* themselves and psychologically reach a point of true personal satisfaction and deliverance. Although the role of women has changed somewhat from Ancient Greece to the twenty-first century, with women today holding positions as Supreme Court Justices, governors, senators, and owners of major corporations, remnants of historical boundaries still remain. After all, only men have achieved being elected President of the United States, the highest office in America. Yet, today, Hillary Clinton, along with numerous other women, is attempting to create a new possibility for women forging inroads into a world once monopolized by men. These women continue to push the limits in breaking the “male world” paradigm. Although women today have escaped many historical constraints, women in general are not yet entirely liberated. As females find channels to release their emotions and unmask their “secret selves,” establishing outlets for tension now

created by responsibility rather than repression, women will transcend societal confines and personal anxieties to attain true liberation.

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