

## Emigration

Janice Walters

*No, no – surely not! My God – not more of those damned whores!  
Never have I known worse women.*

Lt Ralph Cark of the First Fleet

On sighting the *Lady Juliana* of the Second Fleet coming into Sydney Harbour with over two hundred female convicts aboard, June 1790.

This came in Response to the following statement:

If Her Majesty's Government be really desirous of seeing a well-conducted community spring up in these Colonies, the social wants of the people must be considered. If the paternal Government wish to entitle itself to that honoured appellation, it must look to the materials it may send as a nucleus for the formation of a good and great people. For all the clergy you can dispatch, all the school-masters you can appoint, all the churches you can build, and all the books you can export, will never do much good, without what a gentleman in that Colony very appropriately called "God's police" - wives and little children – good and virtuous women.

Caroline Chisholm

Emigration and Transportation Relatively Considered, 1847

In 1975, Anne Summers wrote a book that fascinated me about the history of women in Australia titled Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia. This book was published during the time period when the feminist movement was laying down its roots and as a university student studying psychology and sociology I was encouraged by the feminist messages that were beginning to filter through the academic community.

During my childhood and young adult years in Australia, I was influenced by the social and cultural messages that placed males in the position of dominance and women in the role of dependence. The publication of this book brought me to an awareness of the historical and sociological forces that brought about the assignment of these roles. The message that women should give up their independence and fulfill the role of the good wife and mother to be considered socially accepted was internalized by women for many generations. In this paper I will outline the argument made by Summers (1975) and relate it to the theory of Karen Horney. Horney (1945) was an early feminist psychologist who challenged Freud's (1967/1909) position on the psychological development of women when she argued that women envied the power and not the genitalia of the male. I will further speak about the show *Desperate Housewives* and suggest that the popularity of this show illustrates important points about the psychological state of women in today's cultural milieu.

Summers (1975) argued that deep in the Australian culture existed two images of women. One took the form of the "Damned Whore." These were the women who were brought to the new society to service the sexual needs of males who were expected to colonize the country. The second was labeled "God's Police" and was assigned to women who were to be the moral guardians of the community and mother to both their husbands and children. Thus, this early differentiation of women along stereotypical lines was internalized by the social and cultural fabric of this new country. Summers (1975), further suggested that the family became the institution within which these roles were played out and by which women were controlled. This social control of women allowed men to take their much desired freedom and to take on the role of dominance in what was to become a patriarchal social structure. Women who adhered to their "God's Police" role were those who did not, or more likely, could not due to the internalization process see how they could resist their female socialization to seek a male protector and remain faithful to his will

while raising children within the prescribed family institution. Those who took on the role of the "Damned Whore" included those who have or who were thought to have, contravened the code of femininity or in some other way not conducted themselves in accordance with the required role of women.

Summers (1975) suggested that following the Second World War and the return to the prescribed gender roles, there was a movement to suburbia. Many women hoped to fulfill their romantic fantasies of the engagement ring, wedding days, house plans and interior design. However, they did not anticipate that following a few years of marriage they could feel isolated and marooned in a remote suburb with a couple of tiny children whose constant demands left them feeling continually tired and depressed (Summers, 1975). This, together with the absence of their husband for long hours left them feeling cheated and deceived about the romance of marriage and the rewards of motherhood. Thus, they experienced a psychological disintegration as they lived with loneliness, overwork and boredom while trying to fulfill their assigned role. To fall from this role meant to be socially labeled and stigmatized as a "Damned Whore." The consequences of this stereotype had far reaching affects on both the individual and the family. Summers (1975) suggested that the suburban neurotic was born from this conflict leaving women feeling worthless, empty and lacking in purpose.

Horney (1945) proposed that neurotic needs are developed through basic anxiety. This occurs when a child perceives the parents to be neglectful. The result is the emergence of feelings of helplessness and abandonment. Horney (1945) further suggested that feelings of parental neglect caused the child to cope by taking on a defense in the form of "basic hostility." As the child moves away from this stage of "basic hostility" she learns that this is not helping to foster relationships and experiences "basic anxiety" as a consequence of feelings of helplessness and the possibility of abandonment. According to Horney (1945), neurotic needs lead to the adoption of a coping strategy in the form of compliance, aggression or withdrawal. It appears that the women of Australia referred to by Summers (1975) were pressured into adopting a compliant personality to avoid the negative stereotype and social alienation that would result from the label "Damned Whore."

Horney, (1945) further suggested that individuals identify with three basic aspects of the self. These include the "real," "ideal," and "despised" or "false" self. The "real self" is who we truly are and what we are capable of and that which will make us feel satisfied and fulfilled. The "despised self" is identified as one's negative thoughts of oneself through perceptions of what others think of us. If a person thinks of the "despised self" as everything one should not be, then an internal representation is built comprising all we should be in the form of the "ideal self." This occurs at the expense of our "real self."

Horney, (1945) spoke about the "tyranny of the shoulds," meaning the messages that the compliant personality gives to the self. These take on the form of I should be sweet, I should be saintly, I should be self-sacrificing. The "ideal self" emerges from the "tyranny of shoulds" and is represented by perfection and unrealistic standards. I believe that the "God's Police" image assigned to women finds a parallel in the "ideal self," whereas the "Damned Whore" image can be equated to the "despised self." Both of these stereotypes have the potential to leave an individual feeling unfulfilled in the form of the "real self."

Horney (1945) suggested that to defend against neurotic anxiety resulting from identification with the "despised self," a person identifies with the "ideal self." She further suggested that having to compensate for feelings of weakness, inadequacy, and low self-esteem causes the development of an idealized image of the self and a search for perfection. This idealized image generates a pride system, which consists of neurotic pride, neurotic claims, and tyrannical shoulds (Paris, 2004). A compliant person exhibits neurotic claims by presenting herself as sweet, saintly, and self sacrificing. The "God's Police" stereotype encouraged such personality development in women, whereas the "Damned Whores" stereotype created basic anxiety and feelings of abandonment for those who challenged the social and cultural expectations of the role of women

Consequently, those who deviated from the ideal of the perfect wife and mother were forced to confront the unacceptable, "despised self."

Because the perception of self is influenced by relationships with others, these stereotypes which were internalized by the culture left women with little room for self-fulfillment in the form of the "real self." They faced a constant tension between living up to the social expectations in the form of the "ideal self" and the threat of social alienation resulting from actions that deviated from those standards. Horney (1945) argued that for a person to be psychologically healthy they must be able to accept both their "despised" and "ideal" self. Further, they need to be able to find a midpoint at which the "real self" becomes acceptable (Horney, 1945). When the social structure sets up stereotypes that do not allow for such psychological freedom, neurotic anxiety can be the result. This may explain the suburban neurosis referred to by Summers (1975) when she spoke about the suburban women who experienced anxiety when confronted with the erosion of their romantic fantasies.

According to Horney (1945), when real and/or perceived abandonment occurs it is defended against by a compliant strategy resulting in the thought process if I can make you love me, you will not hurt me. This leaves the compliant personality needing to please others and be liked by them, to have someone to solve all of their problems and to present themselves as undemanding and satisfied with little. These social and psychological messages forced women to accept their dependent roles and to try even harder to live up to the unrealistic expectations placed on them by others.

I am now left asking myself why Desperate Housewives, the modern day version of the romantic image of the perfect wife and mother seems to have a parallel with the concept of the suburban neurotic referred to by Summers (1975). "The word desperate is defined as reckless from despair, violent and lawless, extremely dangerous, serious or bad" (Oxford, 1992, p.233). This show dominates the web with its chat rooms, downloads, pictures and storylines from each show.

The show is set in the perfect American suburb in which the romantic ideal can be fulfilled by the women who live on Wisteria Lane. These women are portrayed as sexually attractive, perfect wives and mothers, an image that appears to have been incorporated into their internal model of the "ideal self" as the definition of success. The viewer watches as they struggle to keep their deviations from the "ideal self" a secret from the community. I am struck by the parallel between this modern day version of the "God's Police" image described by Summers (1975) when she referred to the suburban women of the seventies.

As the season begins, the character Mary Alice is confronted with the possibility that her secret will be revealed. Her inability to cope with such exposure causes her to take her own life resulting in a scandal on Wisteria Lane. As the show unfolds, she begins to reveal the secrets of the other housewives highlighting their struggle to maintain their perfect family image in the face of psychological conflicts.

Bree is a deeply religious, white Anglo-Saxon protestant conservative who portrays herself as always in control. She presents as the perfect woman to the outside world while showing little emotion to her family or others. Bree's "ideal self" appears to hide an underlying 'despised self' as revealed to her sponsor when she tells him that she does not like herself. Underlying her compliant personality (Horney, 1945) is a character who the viewer watches struggling to find her "real self" as she fights her addiction to alcohol and is warned by her sex addict sponsor that he is a danger to her psychological well being.

Lynette is the working mother who gives up the role of homemaker to return to work. She struggles with the conflict between her role as a career woman and fulfilling her responsibilities as a wife and mother. When she does make an attempt to express her "real self" in her acknowledgement that she cannot fulfill her individual needs by adhering to the messages of her "ideal self", her decision to deviate is portrayed as having been the cause of much turmoil and

conflict within the family. This may leave the viewer questioning the consequences of such a decision for the wellbeing of the family and the threat of facing the 'despised' and unacceptable self.

Suzy is the divorcee who slips into depression and dependency following her divorce from her husband. The viewer is lead to believe that not living up to the standards of the "ideal self" by having a husband results in neurotic anxiety. Her dependency needs are redirected in her need for her daughter to take care of her. She appears to use reaction formation as a defense against her single, dating status by becoming the self righteous and sanctimonious single mother as she seeks social acceptance on Wisteria Lane. Thus, she continually struggles between her own and others' expectations in the form of her "ideal self" and the possibility of confronting her 'despised self' in the form of social alienation.

Gaby is a former model who has given up her career to move to the suburbs to live her dream of being wealthy, her "ideal self". She struggles to maintain her perfect image while living with the secret of her affair with her teenage gardener. This leaves her attempting to cope with her anxiety about the possibility of social exposure and having to confront her unacceptable 'despised self'.

Eddie portrays the serial divorcee who is always in search of a man to fulfill her needs. Her giving into her socially unacceptable 'despised self' results in her house being burned down. Thus, she pays the price for her noncompliance to the "ideal self" as she faces the loss of her base on Wisteria Lane.

The social structure of this perfect, modern day community expects these women to adhere to the unrealistic standards of the perfect wife and mother in the form of the internalized "ideal self". These women become the Desperate Housewives as they confront the possibility of their secret lives becoming public and the consequent social alienation in the form of their 'despised self'. This leaves them living with the constant tension between their need to portray the image internalized as the "ideal self" and the avoidance of the unacceptable image in the form of the 'despised self'. Horney (1945) points out that neurotic anxiety will result when an individual is unable to find the midpoint in the form of the "real self". Thus, leaving them as Desperate Housewives.

If fiction represents reality, the amount of public interest in this show would cause me to wonder if many of the shows' viewers are living vicariously through these characters as they identify with their struggle to express their "real self". Thus raising the question *to what extent does fantasy represent reality in the year 2006? Are women of today still finding themselves caught between their desire to fulfill the fantasy of the engagement ring, marriage, children and the house in a wealthy, seemingly perfect suburb and their need to express themselves in the form of the "real self"? Are they finding themselves caught in the tension between the internalized social expectations that result from the attainment of this fantasy and their need to find a way to live their lives in harmony with their "real self" without being forced to confront their internalized 'despised self'?*

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