September 2017

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Jeanine Staples

Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, staples@psu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Staples, J. (2018). How #BlackGirlMagic Cultivates Supreme Love to Heal and Save Souls That Can Heal and Save the World: An Introduction to Endarkened Feminist Epistemological and Ontological Evolutions of Self Through a Critique of Beyoncé's Lemonade. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 16 (2). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.16.2.05>

How #BlackGirlMagic Cultivates Supreme Love to Heal and Save Souls That Can Heal and Save the World An Introduction to Endarkened Feminist Epistemological and Ontological Evolutions of Self Through a Critique of Beyoncé's *Lemonade*

Jeanine M. Staples

The Lemons in Lemonade

Beyoncé's 2016 visual album, *Lemonade*, is an artistic and conceptual triumph. It is filled with cultural references from powerhouse literature like Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Butler's *Kindred*, and the poetry of newcomer Warsan Shire.¹ It presents a tapestry of journey method through iterations of consciousness and experiences that are tied to a feminine and Black feminist tradition/s. Each of the album's eleven chapters, from "Intuition" to "Redemption," contains critical expressions and creative embodiments of a human predicament assigned to women, to Black women in particular: t/Terror in love. This t/Terror consists of the intimate partner-based relational microaggressions many of us endure and ineffectually discuss with our affinity groups (e.g., mothers and daughters, nieces and aunties, sisterfriends, and colleagues). These aggressions, fielded from very early childhood to elder adulthood, result in emotional tax, psychological breaks, and somatic pain (Staples, 2012, 2016; Williams & Nichols, 2012). These microaggressions include (and are not limited to) infidelity, gaslighting (the practice of convincing a mentally healthy person that their con-

Jeanine M. Staples is an associate professor of literacy and language, African American studies, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. Her email address is: staples@psu.edu

cept of reality is false), splitting (the practice of regarding people and situations as completely “good” or completely “bad,” leaving no room for human nuance), proxy recruitment (a way of controlling or manipulating a partner by subversively enlisting their close family member or friend to promote a return to abuse/abuser), and ranking and comparing (the process of drawing unnecessary, inappropriate, and unhealthy comparisons between individuals and groups in order to shame and blame an other).

Beyoncé masterfully performs the results of these aggressions by showing their manifestations in soma (prostrate bodies, crying eyes, swinging baseball bats, peripatetic movements, silent stares) and soul (profane outbursts, complex ruminations, lyrical twists, and incessant questioning). She does this in all of her theatrical, physical, emotional, and intellectual #BlackGirlMagic. Yet, while many critics have lauded *Lemonade* for its unique centering of many Black women’s experiences, I argue that it actually crowds those articulations by inserting male and masculine figures as elusive, powerful ghosts and ubiquitous, necessary gods, things to be feared and worshiped. These insertions, in effect, promote the idolatry of men and masculinity because, in the album, they function as the taken-for-granted center of girls’ and women’s experiences in love and life. I do not condemn the work for such centering, featuring Beyoncé as the worrying, wandering woman, attempting to understand herself in relation to her father and husband, as the object of various aggressions. She contends with herself as ravenous to understand why she must understand herself through these vantage points. I see this work as a delectable new literacies artifact—one that can be understood as portraiture for not only the lived experiences of many Black girls and women, but also as portraiture for the effects of complex patriarchal ideologies that pervade the lives of those girls and women. I argue that this work presents visual representations of the toxic lover identities that a number of women reactively and defensively construct for emotional sense making, relational coping, and social survival; it makes clearer the often elusive and various relational and social t/Terrors Black girls and women field in soul and soma, over the lifespan; and, it stills the masculine figure(s) for which many women pine, offering alternative ways of constructing gaze so that we can notice women’s complex sociocultural and socioemotional power sincerely and, eventually, revere it.

Lemonade’s artistic and cultural triumph is notable because it centers these politics of relating (e.g. how it is socialized, racialized, sexualized, and gendered). Social justice movements include attention to relating, grasping deeply a woman’s reactionary construction of her lover identity—her entire relational ideology and way of being. This inclusion is imperative to understanding the scope and sequence of abuses rooted in a supremacist patriarchal ideology, in addition to that of redemption and healing. Beyoncé’s work presents an opportunity to further the work of deconstructing the lover identities that are built in relation to supremacist patriarchal ideologies, as they (re)produce t/Terrors in love and life. She does this through her #BlackGirlMagic, by showing us what the lover identities do to make

sense of violations, suffering, sacrifice, choice, expression, control, power, and (r)evolution. This demonstration provides a means for our understanding of the relationship between lover identity and social and emotional justice, better positioning us to do womanhood wondrously and justice dynamically, both now and in the future.

To further a critique of this possibility and new embodiment of womanhood (as opposed to a mere, reactionary performance of womanhood), I intend to understand better how #BlackGirlMagic functions as a heuristic for understanding the essential power of Black girls and women. In this article, I explore how #BlackGirlMagic seems to be commonly named and conceptualized, as is anecdotally described in popular parlance. I will tie this definition to #BlackGirlMagic's relationship to Blackness, Girlness, and Womaness. Next, I present a more detailed description of relational and social t/Terrors and the iterative fragments of Self that are affected by these t/Terrors. Then, I share the ways these fragmented selves form five (5) toxic, reactionary lover identities, like the ones Beyoncé performs in *Lemonade*. I close with a clear articulation of the ways supremacist patriarchal ideologies hurt and kill people (through the antagonism, abuse, and figurative or literal deaths preceding these lover identities, and often following them). I conclude with a presentation of a solution to this pain and death.

Regarding Magic, Blackness, Girlness, and Womaness

Magic can be difficult to explain. It is essentially mysterious, enchanting, power. It is captivating, fascinating, and spellbinding in its effects. It crafts realities and alters the course of events by challenging senses and beliefs. There is magic at the intersection of Blackness, Girlness, and Womaness. I see Blackness as a deeply soulful, kinetic, inclusive identity phenomenon that one can embody *through* Diasporic cultural lineages, *as* communal heritage, and *in* personal wholeness (Staples, 2016; Alexander-Floyd, 2007; Lorde, 1984). It is *anchored* by historical weights, *informed* by contemporary nuances, and a *generator* of afro futuristic now (Barr, 2008; Staples, 2016). Blackness has apparent and obscured languages, sign systems, artifacts, and effects that people who are Black generate, push forward, and revise. This generating, pushing, and revising happens for various purposes and in various places (spiritual, soulful, and somatic). Some include, but are not limited to, commanding ethereal appointments, initiating social visibility, securing economic stability, realizing self-actualization, pushing forward various justice movements, and achieving political solvency. This dynamism comes from Black people at all developmental stages, across all socioeconomic statuses, along a vast spectrum of gender orientations, and within all nations on earth (Staples, 2016). This broad inclusivity and substantial range are what make Blackness so complex and heavy. *Lemonade's* entire scope represents this Blackness.

Girlness and Blackness can cooperate with each other. I understand Girlness as

a multifarious sensibility of youth. Girlness is imaginative, expressive, expansive, organic, fun, curious, smart, quick, faithful energy. Girlness bounces, brightens, and soars. People who are girls can lead with buoyant vitality. They often breed visions and enterprising energy. Girlness, like Blackness, is complex, yet light. Womaness describes a graduated state of mind, emerging from, and intertwined with, Girlness. Womaness often carries within it wisdom, temperance, patience, grace, courage, and a bolder power. This identity phenomenon is informed by, and informs, generations, and even other worlds. It charts course. It paves ways to make happen that which needs to happen to anchor and elevate Self, Others, communities, and worlds. Although this identity provokes movement, it is actually fairly still in its effect; Womaness is as much, perhaps more, about being energy as it is about doing energy. Womaness embodies (i.e. holding immovable and immutable within Self) beauty, sensuality, reproduction, and creativity, among other things.

Considering Black Girls' and Women's Magic in Relation to the White (and Black) Male Power Structure(s)

People who have Blackness, Girlness, and Womaness operating within their collected person generate magic. This Black Girl Magic² (BGM) manifests more life than can be articulated here. For example, BGM (re)produces, from the people who possess it, art, music, performances, literatures, languages, literacies, sciences, mathematics, technologies, landscapes, relationships, communities, and civilizations. This (re)productivity happens despite relational hardships, material poverty, physical violence, sexual abuse, social marginalization, socioeconomic oppression, academic neglect, mental accosting, and emotional pain (Staples, 2012, 2016). In fact, Black Girl Magic is *so magical* it can actually withstand and use such injustices and attempts to dehumanize and erase as fodder for its persistent existence (hence, *Lemonade*). As such, this magic is seen as unbelievably weird, undeniably alluring, incomparably inspiring, and absolutely threatening. This is evident when Beyoncé shows the ethereal parts of her Black Girl Magic in her visual album (see, for instance, 4:51, 36:12, 38:47, 45:57, and 50:01 in *Lemonade*'s respective chapters).

The people who possess, (re)produce, and perform this magic (i.e., Black girls and women, whether in reality or surreality) bear the same complicated portraiture which frames the magic itself. Those who do *not* possess Black Girl Magic both love and hate it. This love and hate happen because Black Girl Magic is immediately recognized as the bedrock of humanity, and so, is understood as inherently worthy of reverence and deep regard. Simultaneously, Black Girl Magic is recognized as a prime source for devising epistemological processes and ontological embodiments that can decolonize souls and spaces. It is also a prime source for dismantling White (and Black/Brown) supremacist patriarchal ideologies and enactments. In addition, this magic can illuminate previously hidden impetuses for unjust social policies, cultural practices, legal pipelines, and curricula that perpetuate the reign

of Whiteness, hyper-masculinity, typical bodies and mentalities, and capitalism/capitalistic practices in local, regional, national, and global contexts. This renders the power structure stuck. It is continually drawn to, and deeply in love with the majesty and mastery of Black Girl Magic, and also petrified by it, simmering in fearful, defensive, murderous hate with regard to its range, variation, depth, scope, ability to annihilate and begin again on its own terms—just outside the oppressive reach of hyper-patriarchal webs.

To push forward understanding about this magic—the ways it enables, becomes embodied, is (re)produced, and enacted—I will briefly explore the ways a group of ten (10) Black women³ overcame t/Terror in love and life after 9/11. First, I introduce the term “t/Terror” and define how I use it in the context of my phenomenological inquiry into Black women’s epistemological and ontological (re)productions. Next, I clarify how a proliferation of relational and social t/Terrors can produce toxic *lover identities* by which some women live. I also describe these reactionary lover identities and clarify how their performance unwittingly does the work of supremacist patriarchies in girls’ and women’s romantic, kinship, and affiliate circles. Finally, I introduce a lover identity discovered through #BlackGirlMagic called Supreme Lover Identity. I note how development of a Supreme Lover Identity can interrupt and heal cycles of dehumanization, erasures, lovelessness, fear, and pain within (and ascribed to) Black girls and women, and thereby, heal and save the world – those phenomena featured in Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*.

Regarding t/Terror-ible Things and the Fragmented Selves That Are Relationally and Socially Affected

Like *Lemonade*, I explore Black women’s t/Terror in love and life in *The Revelations of Asher: Toward Supreme Love In Self* (Staples, 2016). I define t/Terrors as relational and social aggressions that occur over time, in various contexts, and with multiple individuals and/or groups. The aggressions appear and function at micro, macro, and institutional levels. Unlike *Lemonade*, in which Beyoncé mainly focuses on relational microaggressions, in *The Revelations* I focus on both micro and macroaggressive t/Terrors.⁴ I name *White* supremacist patriarchal ideologies⁵ as productive and reproductive forces that engender these t/Terrors and provoke them to escalation and entanglement. For instance, a (heterosexual⁶) relational terror happens when a man tells a woman with whom he shares a narcissistic/codependent emotional and/or sexual dynamic that she is slow, stupid, weak, or unwanted. Chronic infidelities, splitting, and proxy recruitments are other forms of relational terrors.⁷ Gaslighting is another example of a relational terror. Gaslighting happens when a person talks about, instigates, and promotes an experience or promise then later acts as if the idea or experience was not mentioned, or did not occur, and pretends it was not made. Gaslighting is a terrorizing tactic because it destabilizes one’s sense of reality and incrementally deconstructs self-trust when most relationally vulnerable.

The Patriarchy enables such terrors by privileging and making automatically trustworthy, reasonable, logical, and credible the voices and stories of men while also minimizing, hystericizing, and denigrating the voices and stories of women. Girls and women learn and ingest these sensibilities as matters-of-fact, over time.

Social terrors can be similar to relational terrors. The distinction is that social terrors are microaggressions that occur most often in schools and society (although they can certainly occur in other contexts). A social terror happens, for instance, when an employer is continually dismissive of the contributions of a racially or gender marginalized colleague (be they a subordinate or supervisor). Such microaggressions can occur between educators and students in pre-K-20 education as well. Social terrors also happen when a marginalized person is offered a lower wage or salary for the same position in which a centralized person is paid more. In addition, these terrors take place when a marginalized person is called by a pet name instead of given due respect through professional address. Being touched or talked to inappropriately in the workplace (e.g. hair fondled, skin grazed, clothes commented upon disapprovingly when they meet dress code requirements, etc.) are also examples of social terrors. Relational and social terrors are almost ubiquitous. They are also minute, fleeting, called debatable, and often normalized, rendering the recipient solely responsible for any offense, shock, fear, or indignation they produce. They are easily dismissed when noted in isolation. However, because microaggressive terrors are multiplicitous and continual, they bear a cumulative effect that can result in low self-esteem, poor self-concept, and even self-loathing (McCabe, 2009; Staples, 2012; 2016). In addition to these psychological stressors, relational and social terrors can also lead to adverse emotional and physical conditions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Williams & Nichols, 2012). To understand how t/Terrors affect people, particularly those that can be considered relationally and socially vulnerable because of the hate, fear, envy, and greed projected onto their souls and somas (i.e., those of Black girls and women), one must understand fragmented selves.

Finding Fragmented Selves

I center Black women's magical wisdom and ways of being as primary heuristics through which to understand relational and social t/Terrors and dismantle the supremacist patriarchal ideologies that generate them. *The Revelations of Asher* features and complexly explores endarkened epistemologies and ontologies through the voices and stories of seven (7) fragmented selves belonging to ten (10) Black women. Each of these can also be located in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. They are most evident when she animates or articulates one of these iterations of Self by expressing the emotive center they respectively represent. For example, in chapter 3: "Anger", Beyoncé draws from a fragmented self I call Sash. She (Sash) is an emotive center for rage, volatility, offense and defense, antagonism, and revenge. I came to identify and understand each of the seven (7) fragmented selves by employing ethnographic

methods and a phenomenological methodological frame to collect and organize data and member experiences during the two-year interpretive inquiry on which my book is based. I triangulated an analytic framework to organize, explore, and make sense of themes rising from the data (i.e., individual and whole group interviews, journal entries, email correspondences, and instant messages). The framework used to analyze data consisted of a theory of endarkened feminist epistemology, a theory of critical new literacies, and phenomenology (see *The Revelations of Asher: Toward Supreme Love In Self* for more on this constructive methodology and interpretive analysis). While employing this triangulated analytic frame, I found the fragmented selves of the Black women speaking and teaching in the data.

A fragmented self (Staples, 2016) is an iteration of one's collective identity. It is one semblance of the whole, humanist, ideal "I" in the conceptions of every person (De Freitas & Paton, 2009; Wright, 2003). Fragmentations are different from characters because they are not full or well rounded. Rather, they lean more toward archetypal formations. I explain further:

Fragmentations are performed as aspects of Self because they voice one particular sensibility in fairly unilateral ways; they articulate an individual's dominant inclinations through language and its effects. Fragmentations do not necessarily evolve, so they are not overly concerned, necessarily, with growth, or learning. They simply express and pursue manifestation. They are only focused on giving voice to the stories and inherent sensibility of the person they belong to, given the aspect of Self they represent. Fragmentations do this through language, selections of image, music, story, and the like. For instance, in an elementary sense, a fragmented self may singularly voice an individual's anger, inquisitiveness, her melancholy, wisdom, or faith. In a graduated sense, a fragmentation may evolve to speak as an angry "whore," inquiring "teacher," melancholy "servant," wise "mother," or adamant "savior/warrior." Subsequently, she continually contributes stories or sentiments of/from/as these ways of *being*. She also interprets lived experiences from her vantage point and offers the *knowledge* she gleans as "truth," and as REALITY, at one's core. (Staples, 2016, p. 14)

When a person experiences a disproportionate number of relational and social t/Terrors over the course of a particular period of time (as Beyoncé demonstrates in *Lemonade*), various fragmented selves are affected with emotional disease, psychological disorder, and sociocultural dismemberment. This means, the voices with which fragments of Self communicate knowledge in the interior life of a girl or woman can become mean or anxious. In addition, the stories they produce, structuring a sense of reality, can become toxic. For example, the fragmented self that holds emotive energies for rage, anger, and defense can merge with the fragmented self that holds emotive energies for insecurity, worry, doubt, and a sense of unworthiness. See Appendix A to read brief descriptions of each of the seven (7) fragmented selves. See the following references in *Lemonade* to see performances of these selves (2:10 & 2:32—*Rajah*; 16:20 *Asher*; 17:08 & 30:01—*Maven*; 10:32—*Nason*; 23:42 & 24:51

Kagan; 00:53 & 30:43—*Laish*; and 7:04 & 14:40—*Sash*). Note that these selves are given names for personification. This tactic is intended to make these fragmented, emotive energies more personally relatable to scholars and seekers. The unmediated merging of selves, when they've been t/Terrorized, can produce a reactionary lover identity through which a girl or woman engages with Self, Other, communities, and the world. A "lover identity is a person's entire relational ideology and way of being" (Staples, 2016, p. 13). A "reactionary lover identity (one ruled by intoxicated, reactionary, unhealed, t/Terrorized fragmented selves) not only disables the formation of social, sexual, and romantic relationships, it disables familial, phileo, and communal relationships as well" (Staples, 2016, p. 15).

Regarding Terrified Lover Identities

Whereas fragmented selves are phenomena bound to the interior, lover identities are performed for witnesses of the exterior. I found five (5) toxic lover identities (comprised of variously formed fragmented selves) in the data I produced with Black women. Most people who have suffered chronic relational or social t/Terrors (i.e. microaggressions and macroaggressions) have both a dominant and subordinate reactionary lover identity. It is important to note that lover identity (like other social identities) can be fluid because it is constructed. It can (and often does) change. It can shift over the lifespan and in relation to evolutions of Self and healthy, affirming, impacting communions and relations with Self and Others. What follows is a brief description of each of the five (5) toxic lover identities. As these descriptions are presented, I refer to iconic women found in "popular culture narratives" (PCNs) to contextualize them.

PCNs have five primary descriptors (Staples, 2008a, b). First, popular culture narratives portray nuances of social constructs. Race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality are often at issue in them. Second, they commonly depict archetypes—representative human paradigms that embody "types" of identity. Third, these narratives frequently mingle standardized English and variations of English. This mingling affords characters, authors, or narrators the ability to texturize social situations and individuals in specific ways. Fourth, PCNs produce or describe visual representations that signify and complicate language. That is, compositions of rich moving and still images are depicted and invoked to pictorially translate what is expressed. Lastly, they provoke readers to deeper revelations about predicaments of human conditions and the complexities of personhood, place, word, and image. These provocations can be (and often are) initiated by both print and visual popular culture texts.

PCNs offer a point of entry into the literate lives of many marginalized groups because they are widely consumed, readily accessible, and consistently (re)present (for study and entertainment) innumerable scenarios of various lived experiences (both "real" and "contrived"). Engagements with popular culture narratives often produce creative, artistic responses in talk and writing. Research suggests that in-

teractivity—visual, aural, and tactile engagements with media texts—arouses such responses because individual senses and sensibilities are in mutual play through these engagements and they motivate expression (Lovejoy, 2004; Manovich, 2001; Morse, 2003). Popular culture narratives are helpful in couching the descriptions of lover identities. Descriptions of the lover identities found in my research are presented below as direct-to-second-person address, for impact. Note that Supreme Lover Identity, the lover identity created by #BlackGirlMagic, subsumes and triumphs over all of the toxic, reactionary lover identities presented next.

Main Chick. A Main Chick is the head of a pack. If you are a Main Chick, you are a leader. You are an overachiever and desirous of, if not accustomed to, the finer things in life. Although it's not your preference, you don't mind being out in front, and running the show. You know how to get things done. You are responsible. You keep up appearances. You want the rights, titles, privileges, and accoutrement that come with having a person who gives you social capital...from the basic necessities to the most exclusive extravagances...along with a notable title (such as "wife" or "wifey"). So, you keep someone in your life at all times, or, you make it a point to do so. A great deal of your energy is tied up within this goal. You can be very judgmental and controlling...sometimes flippant. You can be privately and publicly very hard on other women. It's been said that you have little tolerance for "foolishness". You know how to take care of people and they look up to you for that reason (and many other reasons). You're good at being the head of a household. Although you want to be cared for, you're not quite sure how to accept care. This is ironic and confusing to many people because you *expect* care... along with respect. You're pretty tense.... a little stressed. You worry a lot. At times, you have been envied by other women and, quietly, you've enjoyed that quite a bit. Your lover identity enables chronically abusive men, thereby endangering other women, in addition to children, in schools and society. Examples of women storied in various popular culture narratives who appear to embody the Main Chick lover identity: Camille Cosby⁸ and Dottie Sandusky.⁹ In *Lemonade*, Beyoncé reveals herself to be a recovering Main Chick, calling for death to Side Chicks (10:47).

Side Chick. You are a woman on the side (or you have been before...or you are regularly). You are in want of attention, affection, and affirmation from others. You are desirous of time and energy from outside yourself (preferably from a man). You see yourself as deprived of gifts, great sex, and good times. Your desires are heightened and often the center of your attention. You're actually pretty strong on the inside, but you're weak on the outside. You melt with touch, taste, tickles, and stimulations. You want presents, trips, time, attention...or something much less grand...you'll take crumbs from a man and you've spun inside of "imaginary relationships" for months, even years. You're not quite sure what a real, bonafide, public, interdependent, healthy relationship really is. You have had semblances of the titles that a Main Chick enjoys (such as "wife" or "wifey"). However, they're

only given in flashes. The titles granted to you are bestowed in secret. They are not rooted or grounded in a pattern of observable normalcy that happens outside of a bedroom or hiding place. You feel desperate a lot. You feel confused often. You struggle with obsession and anxiety. You talk, a regularly, about your “relationship” and make ultimatums in relation to it. They are ultimatums you do not fulfill. You struggle with a particular kind of depression. It’s a depression that feels normal, even while it keeps you sick. You think it’s normal to not have what you want and exceptional to get what you need. Examples of women storied in various popular culture narratives who appear to (allegedly) embody the Side Chick lover identity: Rachel Roy¹⁰ and Rhianna.¹¹

Bonnie. You are a powerhouse. You are a ride-or-die chick. You believe in standing up for your man and standing in for him too. Men take advantage of your work ethic, your grind, your resources, your enterprising energy, your kindness, and your blindness. (Then again, you offer these things freely.) You stomach abuse and see it as a part of the process of winning the admiration of your Clyde. Bonnies are usually weak on the inside and very strong on the outside. You put on a good show externally, full of defensiveness, explanations, and justifications for all manner of emotional neglect, psychological abuse, financial extortion, and even physical violence. You put on this show with bravado, sometimes flair, a real defiance for counter-arguments, all while you die internally. You need to please. You need external affirmation like a drug. You’ve given your money, home, and self-respect to your Clyde at various times and in various degrees. You have no real idea or understanding of boundaries or standards. You believe this is a way to earn your status, to make yourself indispensable, to distinguish yourself from other women. You believe this even though this way of being is destroying you, very slowly and certainly. Examples of women storied in various popular culture narratives who appear to embody the Bonnie lover identity: Janay Palmer Rice.¹² Bonnie is probably Beyoncé’s subordinate lover identity.

Victim. You are the trickiest lover. You are the hardest to heal. You’ve either engaged in relationships with many counterparts or very, very few. You hate and fear those counterparts and want desperately for their approval and closeness too. You are a paradox. Because of the actual abuse and trauma you’ve suffered you are both desperate for attachment and also eager to avoid it. Your memory is spotty. It’s difficult to recall some (or much) of what has happened in your past, from childhood to adulthood. You have a level of dissociative disorder. You’ve blocked out various parts of your past. So, you’re often, in danger of making up abuse that didn’t happen, along with the abuse that did happen. You protect yourself and hurt yourself. You love yourself and hate yourself. You are either meek, mild, timid, and unsure, OR, you are cunning, deceitful, evasive, and slick. You are stuck in survival mode. People have to prove themselves to you, even though there is no way to win your authentic approval. You don’t really approve of anyone. You certainly don’t

approve of yourself. You think everyone is out to get you. You think everyone has left you out. You abandon and avoid yourself frequently. You do not know how to set boundaries. You use absolute language to say you are “never” wrong. You’re in danger of stunted growth when this is not acknowledged. You suffer relentlessly. You don’t apologize. You play the martyr. In love you “always” win and “always” lose, simultaneously. Examples of women storied in various popular culture narratives who appear to embody the Victim lover identity: Mary Lee Johnston, mother of Claireece “Precious” Jones, in the novel *Push* and film *Precious*. (Occasionally) Kenya Moore of the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* reality TV series.

Bitch. You are the baddest chick. People know not to mess with you, cross you, talk to you, or look at you wrong. You are generally angry, defensive, brash, and caustic. You yell at people in your head and in your life. You stand up for yourself, even if it means standing on top of others. You can be profane, sarcastic, argumentative, and fiercely protective. You tell it like it is. You can dismiss other’s experiences and feelings fairly easily. You’re smart as a whip. You can argue other people away, belittling them into oblivion. You are hardened, doubtful, negative, and non-believing. You are rolling your eyes at this description. While you’re tough inside and out, you can also be touchy and fretful. This binary makes you vibrate with tensions that other people can feel when they’re around you. You’ve noticed this and picked up on their distancing. This has made you harder, faster, stronger, and ready to pounce or retreat. You can disappear when/if confronted (although very, very, very few people know or would even believe this is true). Although, deep down, you know how afraid you are. You’re terrified...and you hate me for saying so. Examples of women storied in various popular culture narratives who appear to embody the Bitch lover identity: Joseline Hernandez of the *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* reality TV series. Annalise Keating of the television drama, *How To Get Away With Murder*.

These toxic, reactionary lover identities are commonly manufactured among women who have been t/Terrorized in love and life. Because lover identity is one’s entire relational ideology and way of being, it can be a particularly powerful impetus for social and emotional justice movements, while also being a necessarily central subject of social and emotional justice work. This is true because, if lover identity is built in reaction to progressive and unmediated t/Terrors over the course of weeks, months, years, or lifetimes, it harms not only the one embodying the identity, but also every relationship she participates in. This includes relationships that are romantic, platonic, sexual, familial, and social, in addition to those that are professional, cultural, academic, and political. Thus, toxic lover identities can result in painful, deleterious, and broad-ranging intergenerational, communal, even global effects. That means, global consciousness can be understood as ultimately a result of waves of individually substantiated collectives of various lover identities embodied by each member of humanity. Various lover identities can then be examined

to understand and conceptualize social and emotional justice movements for all humankind. So, Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, presents a glimpse of this ultimate outcome through the examination of one ripple: her lived experience with relational terrors in love. Imagine the gargantuan depth, breadth, and impact of the collective.

In the next section, I will explore the ways supremacist patriarchal ideologies and enactments provoke dis-ease, dis-order, and dis-memberment of the iterative seven (7) fragmented selves and incite their clustering to form these five (5) toxic, reactionary lover identities. I will do this by exploring how supremacist patriarchies hurt and kill people. I will then briefly explain how these identities reveal a three-part problem (3) that foregrounds them: disease, disorder, and dismemberment in the *soul* and *flesh/body*. Finally, I will conclude with how Supreme Lover Identity, born of #BlackGirlMagic, can function as the one (1) solution to this cycle and its terrifying sociocultural and socioemotional outcomes.

Regarding Supremacist Patriarchal Ideologies and Enactments

This section of this essay is taken from *The Revelations of Asher: Toward Supreme Love In Self* (Staples, 2016, pp. 549-554). It is used with permission. Here, I will make one of the most basic, accurate, and essential points about supremacist patriarchal ideologies. I will make a second point about how to dismantle such ideologies through #BlackGirlMagic, in the section that immediately follows:

Point #1. Supremacist Patriarchies Hurt and Kill People.

The reach and influence of supremacist patriarchies extends to, and includes, ALL people. No one is immune to their outcomes. Both victims and perpetrators of supremacist patriarchies are at risk of figurative and literal deaths every day, over the course of their entire lives. We each suffer all manner of slights and unspeakable terrors that extend from these patriarchies. For example, people who self-identify as women, particularly those of us who self-identify as women of color, are subject to a pervasive and relentless range of anti-subject biases, social rejections, moral abandonments and outright erasures, cultural disregards, demoralizing body critiques, variations of neglect, physical harassments, batteries, assaults, rapes, etc. (see Alexander-Floyd, 2007; Crenshaw, 2015; Staples, 2016). These terrors wound the most vulnerable and unreconciled fragments of our Self. They trigger the voices and stories of our unmediated fragmented selves in particular ways. The existence and perpetuation of terrors trigger survivalist knowledge frames, incite fictive constructions of reactionary REALITIES, and encourage the “reasonableness” of deleterious and disabling ways of being. All realms bearing hallmarks of human identity (including the place of the spirit, the place of the soul, and the place of the flesh/body) and forming guidelines for human engagements, are affected by these phenomena. In effect, social relationships, practices, and institutions; cultural norms and values; and vast emotional and psychological terrains and enactments that are

occupied and operationalized by women, can become dangerously diseased. All of humanity is affected by these diseases...these terrors turned to Terrors.

Conversely, people who self-identify as men, particularly men of color, are too often trained to associate and interpret their social worth, cultural capital, political savvy, interpersonal intelligence, and physical prowess with their ability to uphold and perpetuate supremacist patriarchies in personal and public relationships.¹³ These associations and interpretations are embraced even as one performs a range of dismissals and indifferences to the existence of terrors (*it's all in your head; that didn't happen*). They are often embraced while one minimizes the influence of the psychological and emotional outcomes of terror (*it wasn't that bad; get over it; that was a long time ago; it shouldn't matter anymore*). Training in racist, supremacist, patriarchal ideologies depends on defense of its normalization (*that's how men are; that's how it is; you should have expected this; it is what it is*). It also depends on degradation and/or objectification of others (*you're an ice princess; she's a tease; you're crazy; that one's a whore; she's a slut; you're so touchy, too sensitive; she got what she deserved; what did you expect; she was asking for it*). This training also depends on outright entitlement to the perceived privileges one gains from enacting racist and sexist patriarchal norms that perpetuate terrors (*I'm a man; I have needs; if you won't, someone else will; it's a man's world*). I say "perceived privileges" because people who self-identify as men do not actually benefit from supremacist patriarchies. They are, instead, subject to the same toxicities, differently ordered in the Spectrum of their Personhoods. These toxicities cause blindness, deafness, muting, and tastelessness in the place of the flesh/body; they cause de-sensitizations and cauterizations in the place of the *soul*; and, they incite aimlessness, Godlessness, and tendencies for irreverent dismissals in the place of the spirit. They further alienate people who claim manhood from the range and variation of constructed REALITIES, knowledges, and reactionary ways of *being* perpetuated among people who claim womanhood. This further roots the idea of separation (which, as discussed in footnote #75 in *The Revelations of Asher*,¹⁴ is a terrifying illusion). It also makes relational and social t/Terrors probable and even inevitable.

Regarding Supreme Lover Identity

Point # 2. Supreme Love Heals and Saves People.

Cultivating a Supreme Lover Identity means building up the internal constitution required to identify, interpret, and facilitate your trajectory of voices, stories, and terrors. It means demonstrating wisdom, compassion, acceptance, and inclusion in relation to every aspect of Self...becoming selectively and strategically involved with however the fragmented selves voice and whatever they story. Supreme Lover Identity is dependent on developing a highly and deeply literate life. It means learning to read, write, speak, and listen to selves on a regular basis. When supremacist patriarchies (constructing racism, sexism, homophobia, classism,

ageism, xenophobia, fatphobia, colorism, ableism, and the like) fulfill themselves through people and within relationships, invocations of Supreme Love can act as mediator, healer, even as savior, in the Spectrum of Personhood (where terrors are stored). Supreme Lover Identity enables the work of mediating not only the selves that voice and story the REALITIES, knowledges, and ways of being formed as reaction to supremacist patriarchies, it acts as grace too. It does this by redeeming and enacting the highest form of consciousness in relation to these REALITIES, knowledges, and ways of being. Such a consciousness saves by invoking radical acceptance, radical wisdom, radical inclusion, and soulful appropriation of all that is present (whether active or dormant). All of this means that when the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical terrors associated with supremacist patriarchies happen to people, especially women... particularly women of color...there is a way to do healing and configure counter-action to stave off figurative deaths and the entrenchment of hurtful ways of being.¹⁵

This is significant. It means that overcoming diseased lover identities is possible. This overcoming is so necessary, because, as I stated previously, in the chapter entitled, “This book is different: An introduction: A warped lover identity”... not only disables the formation of social, sexual, and romantic relationships, it disables familial, phileo, and communal relationships as well. Such disabilities undercut social and emotional justice work and activism because they stunt empathy, compassion, and altruism at their core.

CAUTION: The cultivation of this Love and Identity does not absolve oppressors or perpetrators of their guilt and shame for intentionally or unwittingly perpetuating supremacist patriarchies. Supreme Love doesn’t do that. The forgiveness it extends does not let anyone off the hook. The forgiveness it extends creates space within Self for absolute nakedness, benevolent observation, complex acknowledgment, awareness of multifaceted connection, and the possibility for deliverance, healing, and atonement. It empowers people to meet with the effects of patriarchies by developing revelatory consciousness as a *spirit*, within their own wounded *soul*, and *soma* (*flesh/body*).

Once this extension in Self is made, it then becomes possible to branch it out to Others, and to the World. This extension... this blanket hope, and deific power... alters global consciousness, one person, one partnership, one community, and one nation at a time. It results in a dismantling of patriarchies. When taken seriously, the cultivation of a Supreme Lover Identity then makes justice work palpable, personal, and perpetual. It really anchors social and emotional justice work by securing the respectful regard and inalienable rights of people who are singularly or multifariously marginalized, victimized, brutalized, neglected, penalized, etc. Such people Self-identify as women, persons of color, those who are called [dis]abled, homosexual, transgender, queer, fat, old, etc. (although, of course, Supreme Love

is not reserved for any one type of person... Supreme Love and Supreme Lover Identity is for *everyone* and *everybody*).

Remember this takeaway, if you remember nothing else from this endarkened, feminist, new literacies event: Suppressed and enacted supremacist patriarchies hurt and kill people. The ideologies, words, behaviors, actions, and systems they construct, sanction, justify and perpetuate from the personal to the public, through all manner of relationships, wound the place of the *spirit*, the place of the *soul*, and the place of the *flesh/body*. The social justice movements developed to support the oppressed, marginalized, disenfranchised, rejected, abandoned, erased, murdered people who bear their brunts cannot have the deep roots and far-reaching effects of our wildest dreams unless they are paired with emotional justice work that privileges the complex knowledge, REALITIES, and generated ways of being among terrorized Black women.

To Be Clear: Being a Supreme Lover does not mean coaching women to be doormats (when I write this, I am considering how Supreme Love's emphasis on acceptance, forgiveness, inclusion, etc. can be misunderstood in its application). It does not mean allowing male-generated or systemically sustained violence from the personal to the public to be ignored or [God forbid] condoned (when I write this, I am considering Supreme Love's emphasis on the Self as primary context for work instead of the Oppressing Other). Rather, it means acknowledging the inherent authority and government of the One who can be healed and saved: You, Me, Us—Self: by cooperating with/learning from/emulating sincerely and consistently the Highest Order of Divine Thought in relation to humanity from the inside out. This vantage point results in impacting resistances, protests, scaffolds of dissent, and methods for transgression, transformation, wholeness, and cure. These emotional justice movements generatively affect both oppressors and oppressive systems. This is evolution of collective consciousness, paradigm shift, cultural progress, and social re-design that can reasonably coincide with altered laws, policies, curricula, media landscapes, and social practices. This is how change happens and takes root. And people who say they are men can be... must be... allies in this work. #LetsGetSome #SupremeLove #SupremeLoversUnite.

Disease, Disorder, and Dismemberment in the *Soul* and *Soma* (*Flesh/Body*)

When the fragmented selves of individuals are inflamed at the intersections of racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, transphobia, xenophobia, etc. there is disease in one's interior space (as exemplified in Beyoncé's naked expression of internal strife in *Lemonade*). The emotional disease is a lack of certainty, health, strength, and soundness. This disease inhibits one's ability to perceive or accept affection, respect, and compassion. Inhibitions in receipt of these gifts result in inhibitions

in giving these gifts. Disorder in the place of the *soul* and *soma* (*flesh/body*) is lack of deliberative arrangement; it is psychological chaos. Disorder happens when the fragments of one's Self are repeatedly t/Terrorized and one lacks integral method for communication and relating. This results in confusion, random hoarding of thoughts, questions, and ideas, and crippled pathways for intimacy and empathy. To be dismembered in the *soul* and *soma* (*flesh/body*) is to be crippled and broken as a result of unmediated and untreated relational and social t/Terrors; it has to do with lack of coherence, unity, and solidity in social spheres. Its outcome is a vapid, aimless person without root or core.

Each of the five (5) toxic, reactionary lover identities is the external representation of the internal disease, disorder, and dismemberment that comes from a t/Terrorized collective Self. Each of the seven (7) fragmented selves, variously triggered and demoralized by relational and social t/Terrors compounded by intersectional pain points reproduced in a white supremacist patriarchal society, comprise a whole Self. Supreme Lover Identity—a product of #BlackGirlMagic—can heal t/Terrors, cure disease, repair disorder, and reverse dismemberment in the *soul* and *soma* (*flesh/body*).

Supreme Lover Identity—A Product of #BlackGirlMagic: A Conclusion

Beyoncé comes to hint at the presence of a Supreme Lover Identity when, at the end of *Lemonade*, she accepts all of her disease, disorder, and dismemberment by recognizing the voices and stories of her terrorized fragmented selves. As she performs various lover identities, holding to her dominant and subordinate expressions powerfully, she orchestrates her multivocality and organically produces balm through verse. Her radical acceptance and compassion of selves and stories leads her to author her own conclusion, noting, “my torture became my remedy” (52:01). This exemplifies a crux of this ultimate, encompassing lover identity: A Supreme Lover is one who loves without conditions. S/he is so filled with the power of radical acceptance and forgiveness, deep wisdom and courage, that s/he cannot be deterred in her quest to fulfill the fullness of her/him/themselves by anything, such as fear-inducing social risks, perceived relational failures, un/intended emotional hurts, threats of personal humiliation or pain, physical abuses and violations, psychological manipulations and traumas, and relational disappointments. A Supreme Lover is both respectful and relentless. She is aware of fear and is dominant in relation to it, perhaps even integrated with it, and able to transform its crippling powers into energy that fosters forward, (r)evolutionary motion in lived experiences and relationships.

To cultivate a Supreme Lover Identity means to know the iterations of one's Self in fragments, to really dig them out, hear their voices, learn their stories and the revelations they contribute to the center, to the whole of one's Self. It means to then choose, from both the most divine and base aspects of Self, ways to access,

engage with, and learn from those voices and stories on a daily basis (perhaps even an hourly basis). It means learning methods for respectfully being (with) ourselves and all that we know as REAL. It also means positioning and integrating aspects of Self toward wholeness and completeness. A Supreme Lover Identity is a critical, creative power in consciousness endowed to every human being by his or her Creator. This identity is already in you, as it is in me. It only needs to be recognized in the Spectrum of Personhood,¹⁶ learned, and cultivated to maturity. The study that grounds *The Revelations of Asher* taught me that being in touch with a Supreme Lover Identity and living with/for/in service to it at the forefront of consciousness, so that it deeply informs thoughts, words, and actions in the formation of every interaction and relationship, is very difficult work. Yet, it warrants commitment.

Such work is worth every effort because not only does this Identity result in immeasurable levels of personal freedom and strength, learning and bolstering the presence of a Supreme Lover Identity also results in social, cultural, and political capital. This is true because Supreme Love and Loving form the impetuses for all creation and destruction, all perceptions of good and all evil, every emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical, and sexual intimacy, in addition to all sources of empathy, communion, and power. A Supreme Lover Identity contains All Things. When we know Supremely facilitated methods of love and loving, perceiving and relating, reading and writing, speaking, and listening...methods that access the wholeness of our Self, orchestrating and participating masterfully with the full Spectrum of our Personhood...we can be free to thoroughly know and save ourselves, righteously fulfill ourselves, tirelessly and deeply empathize with ourselves, and radically accept, forgive, and also serve ourselves. If we can do this for ourselves, we can begin to do this for and with Others. These abilities inherently enable us to initiate, respond to, and cooperate in the formation of communions that fertilize communities that can change the world. This is real talk. It is REAL being and REAL knowledge. It came from REAL writing that emerged from REAL Black women's souls. This is #BlackGirlMagic. The magic that is at the intersection of Blackness, Girlness, and Womanness in the scope of humanity makes Supreme Lover Identity possible, rendering its ideologies and ontologies not only accessible, but also generative and expandable. Thus, #BlackGirlMagic produces Supreme Love, providing a way to heal our *souls*, heal our *soma* (*flesh/body*), and heal the world.

Notes

¹ Poems: "For Women Who Are Difficult to Love," "The Unbearable Weight of Staying," and "Nail Technician As Palm Reader."

² I see Black Girl Magic (BGM) as preceding, enlivening, and following Black Woman Magic (BWM). I use BGM as a dominant term in this essay to note its significance as a precursor to, and stabilizer of, BWM. I refer to BGM as a necessary originator of freedoms for oppressed and marginalized people because the unique balance of innocence and fearlessness in BGM is the germinating spark required for the development of BWM. So, I write about

BGM here, though not yet about its indelible and intertwined relationship with BWM.

³ The ten (10) individuals who were members of the ethnographic, narrative inquiry upon which *The Revelations of Asher* was built each identified as heterosexual, cisgender, African American, middle class, Christian women. For the purposes of my research, I defined inquiry members as college-educated, post-adolescent/young adult women. At the time of the study, each member was between the ages of 26 and 32. I (the author), was also counted as a member of the inquiry.

⁴ I define macroaggressive Terrors as relational or social abuses - linked to intimate partners or community members. Terrors stem from terrors the way trees come from seeds. Terrors manifest in the flesh/body, are exacted by the flesh/body, and do damage to the flesh/body. Terrors are easily documented (i.e. they make the news and one can file a police report testifying to their existence). Some relational Terrors are: child molestation or sexual abuse, rape, bunny boiling, and physical battery. Some social Terrors are: corporal punishment in schools [for more on this, see Crenshaw. K. (2015). *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* (African American Policy Forum). New York: Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies] police brutality, and anti-black, anti-woman, anti-gay, anti-(dis)abled, anti-fat, anti-aged vigilante terrorism. Terrors often erupt in bruised, broken, maimed, and/or dead flesh/bodies. Terrors are anchored in substantive materials like skin, bones, blood, in addition to matter whereby we make clothing or tools that can inflict pain or bring demise to flesh/bodies. So, Terrors are overtly brutal to the extent that terrors are covertly disorienting.

⁵ Incidentally, I also, to a lesser extent, explore the ways Black supremacist patriarchal ideologies and enactments perpetuate t/Terrors in the lives of Black women.

⁶ t/Terrors are not confined or even defined by gender identity or sexual orientation. I note this qualifier only to expound upon the example provided.

⁷ Learn more about these microaggressions as habits of individuals who suffer with various personality disorders by visiting this site: <http://outofthefog.website/traits>

⁸ Camille Cosby's husband of 50 years, Bill Cosby, has been accused of drugging, molesting, and raping women over the course of their marriage. Camille Cosby publicly denies knowledge of these crimes and rejects culpability in their perpetuation.

⁹ Dottie Sandusky's husband of 45 years, Jerry Sandusky, has been convicted of grooming, molesting, emotionally terrorizing, and raping children. Dottie Sandusky publicly denies knowledge of these crimes, refutes the conviction, and rejects culpability in their perpetuation.

¹⁰ Rachel Roy, a high-end fashion designer, has been accused of inappropriate relations with Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, a man who is married to Beyoncé Knowles-Carter.

¹¹ Rhianna, a pop singer, has been accused of various affairs with multiple men in the entertainment industry.

¹² Janay Palmer Rice is the wife of Ray Rice, an NFL player, formerly of the Baltimore Ravens. The two were captured on surveillance video in an altercation in which Ray Rice sucker punched Janay Rice, knocking her unconscious then dragging her body across the threshold of an open elevator. Janay Rice later publicly forgave Ray Rice, denied that he beat her, married him, and defends him vehemently.

¹³ To read more about the construction of masculinities in relation to the racist, homophobic, capitalist, imperialist ideologies of Western patriarchies, in particular, see: hooks, b. (2004). *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge; hooks, b. (2004). *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Atria; Majors, R., & Billson, J.M. (1992). *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books; Neal, M.A. (2013). *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: New

York University. To read more about how White, supremacist patriarchal norms and values are etched into the fabric of American (Western) sociocultural and socioemotional terrain, see: Kimmel, M. (2008). *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. New York: Harper Collins; Kimmel, K. (2012). *Manhood In America: A Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University.

¹⁴ “Here is another truth: There is no separation. Separation is an illusion. This illusion is also a result of racist, sexist, supremacist patriarchies. The sociocultural and sociopolitical divisions they introduce within and across communities actually serves in perpetuating manifold oppressions by pitting women against each other, thereby, weakening our individual sensitivities, associations, and respect, and also crippling our group power” (Staples, 2016, p. 332).

¹⁵ terrors cause figurative deaths in the Spectrum of Personhood. terrors can be categorically organized by noting the ways people voice and story accounts of mental confusion, social humiliation, emotional neglect, and physical violence in the context of all manner of relationship (including romantic, sexual, social, professional, familial, and phileo). All of these types of terror meet in a nexus that is signified by, cyclically responsive to, and resulting in, emotional and psychological trauma that manifests in various ways. As personal and public ideologies supported by deeply complex systems of oppression and dehumanization (e.g., racism and sexism) play out in relationships via the connections we bear to one another, we are stuck in the spin of unreconciled post-traumatic stress and disordered spectrums. When this happens and is not interrupted and healed, no one can realize justice, be it emotional or social. This is true no matter how many rallies we stage, how many laws get changed, what policies are revised, and whatever curricula and counseling programs are implemented.

¹⁶ This entire section is an excerpt from Staples, J. (2016). *The revelations of Asher: Toward Supreme Love in Self [An Endarkened, Feminist New Literacies Event]* (pp. 19-21). New York: Peter Lang.

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Appendix

The Seven [7] Fragmented Selves

Rajah—a spiritually inclined fragmented self who performs iterations of ethereal wisdom and peace; she refers to Biblical scripture and mystical thought; she demonstrates patience; she invokes stillness and quiet through her voice and stories; a prayer warrior; Rajah is a bearer of hope, faith, and love.

Maven—a maternal fragmented self who performs oversight and advising; she cautions, warns, tempers, and justifies; Maven is serious, she believes in tradition; Maven provides boundaries, and reminds of laws and reason.

Asher—a teacherly fragmented self who performs inquiry, commends searches, gathers information, passes judgments, processes knowledge, explores binaries, and asks questions through her voice and stories; a leader; Asher is resistant, curious, sassy, determined, and a little sarcastic; she keeps records, keeps scores, and charts course, accordingly.

Kagan—a sensuous, vivacious, funny fragmented self who performs sexuality, heightened energy, style, and vivaciousness; she is bold; she explicates, insists, relies on pragmatism, and appreciates material, concretized things; she enjoys attention and indulgence; Kagan is challenging, impulsive, desirous, and emphatic, even brash.

Nason—an approval seeking fragmented self who performs pursuits of external validation; she longs to please through her voice and stories; she enacts desperation and neediness; she tries too hard and yet, can be evasive; she simultaneously embodies unencumbered and unregulated kindness and fear; Nason is a people pleaser, regarding the opinions of men and women above her own; she is mindlessly loyal and can be easily controlled.

Laish—an insecure, small, timid fragmentation who performs brokenness and uncertainty; she contemplates (un)worthiness and power; she gives voice to silences and can perform fading, even erasure in her diminutive stature; Laish provides energy for hesitations, contemplations, and sympathies; she embodies tenderness, stillness, and quiet.

Sash—a dissenting, contentious, angry fragmented self; she embodies all that is contrary, competitive, disagreeable and base; she can be loud (thrashing) or quiet (smoldering); Sash defends and confronts; she is an armed guard; she is argumentative; she is resistant, bold, and brave; she can bind and serve as wedge; she haunts and halts.