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Blood and the Patriarchy

Blood as a metaphor for the patriarchy's effects on society has not been fully explored as a pressure point that could be leveraged in discourses of sex, gender, race, and disability. In the film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the titular character Max gives a character a blood transfusion using his own blood. By analyzing the physical characteristics of blood, we can gain a better understanding of the patriarchy in the United States. Blood is red, which is typically associated with violence, representing the struggles faced by women's rights advocates. It is essential for life, embodying the importance of women's rights. It is also warm, lending itself as a symbol to the concepts of motherhood and the importance of women's contributions in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, it can be transferred from person-to-person, mirroring the exchange of political power in the United States. It is viscous, acting as a metaphor for society's resistance to change. It clots and forms a physical barrier to prevent blood loss, symbolizing the institutional barriers that protect the patriarchy. Also, blood is opaque, which can be interpreted as symbolic of both a lack of government transparency and the incredibly subtle ways that the patriarchy is imposed upon us in our everyday lives. Finally, blood is a fluid, and its ability to flow freely represents the exchange of ideas and the hope for political change. While the case may be made that blood is a symbolic representation of men's struggles, I argue that it is more effective to analyze blood through the lens of the patriarchy.

Some may assert the counterclaim that blood should be interpreted as a symbol of men's struggles. They might view it as a symbol of male sacrifice, representing the pressure society places on men to create families and provide for them. People with this strictly patriarchal belief may also be inclined to assert the idea that a woman's place is in the home. While this interpretation of blood could be argued, it is more effective to analyze blood in a manner that accounts for the patriarchy's effects on both men and women. The patriarchy oppresses both men and women to different extents; women are expected to be homemakers and men are expected to be breadwinners. Dismantling the patriarchy will bring an end to this gender-based oppression. Women also face shocking amounts of sexual and domestic violence, and interpreting blood to only symbolize the struggles of men is blatantly ignoring this fact ("Ending Violence Against Women"). It is inappropriate to only analyze blood as it relates to men, as this ignores the oppression faced and sacrifices made by women.

Firstly, blood is red. Red is a color typically associated with anger, violence, and rage. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a violent movie that contains brutal depictions of bloodshed. By examining blood in the context of the entire film, it becomes necessary to recognize its association with violence. Therefore, the film makes blood representative of the struggles faced by those who advocate for women's rights. Throughout history, protestors and other women's rights advocates have been subjected to violence in their quest for gender equality. For example, blood has been spilled during the suffragette movements of the earlier twentieth century, and it continues to be spilled with today's modern abortion advocacy movement (Riddell). More generally, studying blood's association with violence calls to mind the shocking rates of domestic and sexual violence against women. According to UN Women, one third of women experience physical or sexual violence ("Ending Violence Against Women"). The patriarchy

encourages this to happen; telling men that women are lesser than them and should be treated like property and contributing to this disgusting statistic. By relating blood to women's advocacy, we can recognize those who have lost their lives in the quest for gender equality, as well as all of the women who have endured physical or sexual abuse.

Additionally, blood is essential for life. All humans need blood to survive; it is a biological necessity. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Max gives up some of his blood to the character Furiosa to prolong her life. With this in mind, we can consider the symbolic implications of blood as it relates to the patriarchy. Blood is essential for humans, and this is symbolic of the need for women's rights in our society. Women's rights are a necessity, and it is incredibly important to recognize the contributions of women. Gender equality as a broader concept is something that liberates people of all genders, and dismantling the patriarchy would provide a better quality of life to all people who face discrimination based on their gender identity. Like blood, advocating for women's rights is a necessity if we expect women to continue contributing to society.

Furthermore, blood is warm. Because of this, a connection can be drawn between blood and motherhood. Motherhood is also a central theme of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, establishing this symbolic interpretation when considering the context of the movie. A mother's warmth provides comfort and support to her children. Unfortunately, society has not always given women this same support. Historically, women have been strictly placed into the traditional housewife role, often becoming the sole caretakers of their children, and yet they are often treated as second-class citizens. In a society that does not value the contributions of women, the warmth of blood serves as a reminder of the importance of motherhood. The patriarchy forces women into a role that is vital for the survival of humanity, but it refuses to acknowledge how important their

contributions are. This concept of warmth extends far beyond motherhood; women are valuable assets to our society in countless ways, and it is wrong to oppress them and expect their contributions simultaneously.

Another characteristic of blood is the fact that it can be transferred from person-to-person, provided each person has the same blood type. In the end of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Max gives a transfusion of his blood to another character to prolong her life. This exchange of life is symbolic of how our society's political power is transferred from person-to-person, enforcing the patriarchy. Political power is transferred to politicians that support the patriarchy, and they pass legislation to force their ideas upon others. This also highlights the importance of voting, as it increases the chances that power will be transferred to a politician attempting to dismantle the patriarchy. The transferrable nature of blood can also be explored by analyzing the increasing rate of blood donation in our society. According to the American Red Cross, someone in the United States donates blood every two seconds ("US Blood Supply Facts"). This is symbolic of the political turmoil in our society; there is a notable rise in extremism, and the exchange of political power is more volatile than ever. Politicians desperately try to cling onto their power to enforce the patriarchy, engaging in gerrymandering and suppressing voters' rights to prevent their power from being exchanged. Much like political power shifts from person-to-person in the United States, blood can be transferred from person-to-person.

Additionally, the physical quality of viscosity symbolizes how the patriarchy is enforced in our society. Blood has a high viscosity, meaning that it has a high resistance to flowing. This represents society's resistance to change. Historically, the patriarchy has been enforced rigidly in the United States, and conservatives are doing everything in their power to keep it this way. As mentioned earlier, they engage in practices designed to prevent people from voting. These

desperate attempts to prevent society from progressing and liberating women are incredibly harmful. Recognizing blood's viscosity enables us to realize that conservatives are vehemently opposed to any form of change that would dismantle the patriarchy; they are trying to keep our society in the past.

Similarly, the platelets in our blood will eventually cause clotting when a person is wounded. The blood transforms itself into a physical barrier that prevents it from flowing out of your body. This is an obvious metaphor for the institutional barriers that prevent change in American society. Again, blood can symbolize techniques like gerrymandering, lobbying, and anti-voter laws that keep those that enforce the patriarchy in power. Therefore, we should attempt to overcome these barriers in our quest to dismantle the patriarchy, which can be accomplished by voting. We should also encourage empathy, open-mindedness in regard to gender identity, and education about how the patriarchy affects others, as these things will also play an important role in disrupting these barriers. By observing how blood clots and acts as a physical barrier, we can recognize the institutional barriers and how they must be overcome. Additionally, blood clots to protect us when we experience physical trauma. This relates to the healing power of activists and other feminist allies who work to protect marginalized people.

Next, blood is also a liquid; it flows freely both out of wounds and between others. This physical attribute can be seen as symbolic of the possibility for our perspectives on the patriarchy to change. While people are typically raised under a certain set of political beliefs, it is possible to change these beliefs through education and debate. Instead of always giving up on people with outdated beliefs, it can sometimes be effective to work to inspire them. Persuading those in power through protesting and other forms of activism is another example of how the patriarchy can be dismantled. Blood's fluidity shows us that change is possible; dismantling the barriers

that enforce the patriarchy upon us is something achievable. While we can often feel hopeless and as if nothing can be done about the patriarchy, blood reminds us to have hope for progress.

Furthermore, blood is opaque. This refers to both a lack of government transparency, and the covert ways that the patriarchy is enforced upon us. Politicians are not always overtly misogynistic (although many are!), but many still pass legislation that negatively affects women. Gender inequality is not always imposed by drastic measures like violence and legislation; subtle and unconscious actions play a significant role in oppressing women. For example, sexist jokes, objectification, unconscious gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and unwanted sexual comments are just some of the innumerable ways that women are made to feel lesser than men. While a single sexist comment may not seem like a big deal to some, the women that regularly receive these comments begin to feel powerless and inferior to men. Blood reminds us of the sneaky, clandestine actions taken to rigidly enforce the patriarchy. By thinking deeply about our thoughts, words, and actions, we can behave in a way that is conducive to women's liberation.

Overall, analyzing Mad Max's blood in the context of the patriarchy reveals information that can be used to dismantle the unjust systems that oppress women. Blood is red, which symbolizes violence and rage. Recognizing this is important because it highlights the history of bloodshed used to oppress women. Furthermore, blood is essential for human life, which mirrors the importance of feminism in our society. Also, blood is warm, representing both a mother's warmth and more generally the contributions of women throughout history. Blood can be transferred from person-to-person, mirroring the way that political power is passed down as time moves forward. Additionally, blood's high viscosity can be interpreted as a metaphor for society's resistance to political change. Blood clots and solidifies, forming a physical barrier, which can symbolize the institutional barriers that oppress women. Next, blood is also a liquid,

which represents the possibility for people's opinions to change, providing hope for liberation from the patriarchy. Finally, blood is opaque, mirroring both a lack of political transparency and the covert ways that the patriarchy is imposed on us. While some may argue that blood symbolizes the sacrifices made by men that enable women to be housewives, I argue that it is more beneficial to analyze the physical qualities of blood in the context of the patriarchy. The physical qualities of blood and its metaphorical connotations provide insights into the sacrifices of women, highlight the workings of the patriarchy and our government, and describe how we can overcome these barriers and create a society that is equitable to people of all gender identities.

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