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Individual and Society

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The short story, “Eight Bites” by Carmen Maria Machado, illustrates the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud’s concept of wishful impulses, as the narrator is an insecure woman who undergoes bariatric surgery for societal approval.

The American critic, essayist and story author, Carmen Maria Machado, in her short story, “Eight Bites,” published on October 3, 2017, addresses the topic of wishful impulses as its lecture discusses the manner in which stereotypes and self-hatred had influence in women’s ideals in regard to their body image. The author argues the fact that the surgery was able to change the protagonist’s body, but discusses that the real thing that she needed to change was her mindset.

A wishful impulse, can be defined as a gratification of a desire, or according to Freud’s Lecture, as a “disguised fulfilment of repressed wishes” (Freud 2222). In other words, the protagonist of “Eight Bites” clearly demonstrates wishful impulses, as her environment was full of ideas that associate femininity or elegance with being “skinny.” She was raised in a world where being fat was more of a crime than murder, so she took those pitiful ideas seriously, as did her sisters. The protagonist’s siblings also ended up realizing bariatric surgery with no medical approval, but by the external approval that they deemed more important; societal approval. “I

was not the first in my family to go through with it. My three sisters had gotten the procedure over the years,” (Machado, Eight Bites). The fact that she believed the surgery to be normal just because her sisters did it as well, exemplifies the ignorance in women’s vision and lack of responsibility during the time.

Eating disorders and fatness. It is one of the subjects more related with wishful impulses. The short story “Eight Bites,” by Machado, takes place in a very cold winter, which in my opinion, represents the oppression the protagonist felt, as in the winter, we can hide our body figure under layers of clothing. Hiding our “true body,” just “proves to be a fulfilment of unsatisfied wishes,” (Freud 2222). It is a typical thought associated with anorexia that is being justified by society within the short story. Another example of this can be seen when the main character describes the way those around her and their nutrition habits, “they angled their forks and cut impossibly tiny portions of food—doll-sized cubes of watermelon, a slender stalk of pea shoot, a corner of a sandwich as if they needed to feed a crowd loaves-and-fishes style with that single serving of chicken salad.” (Machado, Eight Bites). This shows that the main character became obsessed with her figure and was willing to sacrifice anything in order to obtain her dream body.

Furthermore, the narrator becomes disappointed towards the end of the story, as the surgery she had operated on herself separated her even more from her already distant daughter, who disapproves of her mother getting such a complex procedure done, without a medical purpose. Freud, in his lectures, states how these wishful impulses have influence over our mind’s, and some of our actions and life decisions. Clearly the protagonist was being guided by an impulse stemming from a repressed dream, rather than logic and reality. Machado’s purpose

is to recreate what beintba woman in today's world is like, by creating consciousness of the dangers that are consequential to the stereotypes society creates when we glorify one particular body shape, and we associate that physical figure with being "the perfect woman." Even though the decision made by the protagonist was sufficient to her in terms of physique, mentally it was breaking and draining her more than her state before surgery.

Machado adopts a critical tone for her audience, the readers of "Eight Bite," and others interested in the topic of self-esteem and psychological disorders, learns that wishful impulses can lead to poor decision making. At the end of the story, the narrator is still alone and sees that the problem was not her body, but rather her mentality. She notices how empty her life truly is, and how she lost everything for caving in to a wishful impulse, which consequently, led her into a deep depressive state and extreme frustration, as the procedure did not fill her necessities or the emptiness present within her life as she thought it would. However, the main character comes to this epiphany way too late and unfortunately, can not do much to correct her mistake.

In closing thoughts, both Freud and Machado, illustrate the ways that wishful impulses can drive our lives into unnecessary antics and misguide us into poor decision making. The protagonist of the short story "Eight Bites," written by Machado, was a blatantly insecure woman who undergoes bariatric surgery for societal approval, but alas, to no avail, as she ends up losing the most priceless thing that humans have, life. The main character of the story passes away unable to fulfill her repressed dream, and completely and utterly alone drowning in her bitterness and misery, as her abominable decision making, led her to lose the ones closest to her, those who truly held more value in her life than any surgery or ideal body shape she may have wanted to achieve.

**Works Cited**

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