



The Faculty of Arts and Education

MASTER'S THESIS

Study programme: Literacy Studies	Autumn term, 2023 Open
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Supervisor: Allen Clarence Jones	
Title of thesis: A poetic vision of naked bodies and deviant minds: Examining Allen Ginsberg's references to sexuality and madness	
Keywords: Madness. Sexual references. Cultural taboos.	Pages: 88 + attachment/other: Stavanger, 12. 11. 2023

**A poetic vision of naked bodies and deviant minds:
Examining Allen Ginsberg's references to sexuality and madness**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master in Literacy Studies

November 2023

Abstract

This thesis aims to merge the gap in the literary relevance attributed to Allen Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references and the effects of his portrayals of madness. Through a meta-perspective on existing research and their contextual relevance, I conduct a comparative interpretation of central poems from *Howl* and *Kaddish*. Specifically, this thesis explores the authorial aims and literary effects of Ginsberg's utilization of transgressive sexual references and madness. I aim to show that the poetry's transgressive aspects are deliberate, provocative moves aimed at challenging restrictive societal norms. Gregory Woods and Jonah Raskin established an important autobiographical perspective to Ginsberg's sexual references and portrayal of madness that revealed aspects of the authorial aims of these elements. In contrast, Raymond-Jean Frontain argued that Ginsberg's transgressive references to sexuality and madness were part of a deliberate rebellion against society's attempted restriction of male sexuality. In critique of Ginsberg's portrayal of madness, Loni Reynolds suggested that Ginsberg ultimately failed at his aim at glorifying deviancy. Michel Foucault provided a historical and contextual perspective to the thesis by outlining the historical development of an established discourse on sex that shaped the 1950s societal perceptions of sexuality and cognitive deviancy. Through interpretative readings of *Howl* and *Kaddish* I establish the deliberate authorial efforts to break down restrictive societal structures and undermine cultural taboos. Ginsberg's deliberate flouting of cultural taboos renders his poetry a space void of restrictive societal structures, emancipating the discourse on sex and the culturally protected male body.

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Introduction

In 1956, Ginsberg published *Howl* featuring mad, drug-crazed literary characters seeking drugs, jazz, and homoerotic encounters. In 1961, he published *Kaddish* featuring incestuous references and a mother consumed by her madness. In both these early publications, Ginsberg challenged strongly founded cultural and literary boundaries of acceptable speech. While the effects of Ginsberg's provocative literary moves have been addressed to various degrees in much of the scholarly research published in this field, the research is conducted from largely different perspectives that have yet to be put in connection to each other. There is a substantial gap in the literary relevance attributed to Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references, while his portrayal of madness is both praised as revolutionary and fundamentally criticized. This thesis aims to create a meta-perspective on the existing research dealing with Allen Ginsberg's literary portrayal of sex and madness, with the inclusion of scholarly sources that expand upon the sociopolitical and historical context. I aim to highlight the main trends of the scholarly research that has been conducted on this topic and apply them to interpretative readings of selected poems from *Howl* and *Kaddish*. Specifically, I aim to show that within references to sexuality and madness, topics such as sexual freedom, self-acceptance, politics, social critique, and autobiographical tendencies are brought to the forefront of selected poems. Furthermore, I aim to show that Ginsberg's references to sex and madness are deliberate, provocative moves aimed at expanding societal perceptions of diversity and challenging restrictive cultural norms.

The first chapter of this thesis will be investigating the authorial aims and literary effects of Ginsberg's sexual references. I will be exploring the contemporary cultural reception of *Howl* through Joel E. Black's rendering of the court trial and following public trial. Black states that sexual references played a large role in the negative reactions to the work and that, even after the legal trial concluded that *Howl* was not obscene, oppositionist groups would continue to fight for its removal from the public domain. Gregory Woods widens the perspective provided by Black in his discussion of the literary relevance of references to sex and homosexuality in Ginsberg's work. Woods places himself in opposition to established scholarly critique of Ginsberg's work as a boasting of sex and homosexuality.

Woods emphasizes the autobiographical relevance of Ginsberg's sexual references, arguing that they were entirely necessary to successfully produce the naked, self-revelatory poetry that Ginsberg aimed to write. Outlining important functions of Ginsberg's references to sex, Woods states that the poetry was an important way for Ginsberg to discuss and understand his own sexuality, as well as topics such as love, politics, and sexual freedom. Another central aspect he highlights is the way in which references to sex in Ginsberg's poetry testify to the human experience. On an over-arching level, Woods compellingly states that the emphasis upon sex in Ginsberg's poetry is in fact that of the reader, and not that of the author.

To achieve a more complex picture of the purpose of the sexual references in Ginsberg's poetry I have also included the perspective of Raymond-Jean Frontain who argues that Ginsberg's poetry is a literary aim at emancipating the male body from restrictive societal structures. Rather than agreeing with Woods' argument that Ginsberg's references to sexuality can be defended by establishing autobiographical tendencies, he argues that the sexual references are deliberately transgressive with the aim of subverting societal structures aimed at restricting male sexuality. Indeed, the state's efforts to regulate sexuality in 1950s America is particularly evident considering the concurrent illegality of homosexuality. Frontain terms this move to emancipate the male body as opening the body, which entails freeing the physical body of societal limitations, particularly in terms of sexual freedom. The move to open the male body is described as a particularly transgressive move by Frontain as the male body has remained much more strictly culturally guarded than the female body. Another term introduced by Frontain is grotesque realism, which he defines as a lowering of the ideal to the level of the material and the body. He argues that grotesque realism is used to open the reader's perceptions to society's repressive structures in that Ginsberg's poetry faces the reader with every aspect of humanity. This means of facing the reader with physical manifestations of the human experience also testifies to Ginsberg's aim at portraying an all-encompassing self-acceptance, according to Frontain. To clarify the specific nature of the repressive societal structures that Frontain discusses, I will also be referring to Marko Dumančić who establishes the centrality of the masculine male ideal to Cold War American society and politics. I will then show how Ginsberg appears to deliberately taunt this masculine male ideal in his poetry, thus simultaneously reinforcing Frontain's argument that Ginsberg's poetry functioned as a deliberate rebellion against society's restrictive structures.

The second chapter of this thesis will be particularly focused on the madness aspect of Ginsberg's poetry. As the chapter will show however, sexual references and madness are

largely intertwined in Ginsberg's poetry, reflecting certain historically established perceptions on the topics. To establish a larger context that provides a framework in which Ginsberg's own contribution can be accurately interpreted, I refer to Michel Foucault's "History of Sexuality" that provides a linear presentation of the development of discourses on sex from the Catholic church to the modern-day psychiatric institution of 1950s America. Foucault particularly emphasises the way in which discourses on sex has framed sexuality as an acceptable determiner of a person's cognitive state. Furthermore, he argues that sex has been attempted controlled through shame and regulated through state institutions of power since the establishment of a discourse on sex in the seventeenth century. I will aim to show that while Ginsberg also intertwines madness and sexual references in his poetry, he is challenging the established discourse on sex in his poetry by removing the aspects of shame, judgement and control. As a continuation of the timeline for the discourse on sex outlined by Foucault, I will be referring to Will Stockton who states that while certain developments in the development of sexual freedom have indeed occurred, sexuality remains a subject tied up to the determination of individual's cognitive state. Stockton also sheds light on specific societal structures that impact the way in which societies judge and regulate sexuality. In light of this context outlined by Frontain and Stockton, I will explore Ginsberg's own contribution to the established discourse on sex.

To gain a greater understanding of Ginsberg's poetry's madness aspect specifically, as well as the authorial aims of the literary portrayal of madness, I will be referring to the comprehensive work of Jonah Raskin. Raskin particularly focuses upon the life of Ginsberg, emphasising his personal experiences with madness and their impact upon Ginsberg as well as his poetry. He argues that Ginsberg's mentally ill mother, Naomi, would have profound effect upon him growing up as he would witness her mental deterioration with hallucinations, paranoia, and nervous breakdowns throughout his childhood. While Raskin suggests that many of Ginsberg's childhood experiences with Naomi likely traumatised him as a young boy, he argues that Ginsberg would begin to embrace madness early in his life as a means of justifying his mentally ill mother. Furthermore, he would come to regard madness as something poetic and a sign of having achieved grand insight according to Raskin. The embrace of madness is described by Raskin as evolving into a fascination and even glorification of it, and madness would come to shape many of Ginsberg's ideas and concepts in life and politics. Realising the danger often associated with madness however, Raskin states that in his pursuit of madness, Ginsberg would learn to separate between self-destructive and

creative madness, although he would spend a large part of his life juggling the two. After being sentenced to time served in a mental institution, Ginsberg would gain more time to reflect of madness and gaining personal experiences with it that would later be reflected in his poetry, Raskin explains. While having welcomed a sentence of time spent in a psychiatric institution however, Raskin explains that it would prove much more difficult for Ginsberg to come to terms with the madness in himself, than with that in others. Indeed, the contemporary sociopolitical environment was particularly hostile for homosexuals, leading Ginsberg to believe that his homosexuality was something he had to hide away.

Raskin's book largely emphasises the relevance of Ginsberg life upon his poetry and shows the ways in which Ginsberg's life experiences are reflected in the work, as well as discussing Ginsberg's process of creating the style of poetry that is now known as Beat. In terms of madness, it is particularly interesting to note Raskin's explanations of the way in which madness became not only a creative force for Ginsberg, but also ended up inspiring the very form of his poetry. Indeed, he states that Ginsberg spent years trying to achieve a form and language that would enable him to write the kind of self-revelatory and naked poetry that he aimed for, and madness would turn out to be a central part of that puzzle. Juggling expectations of literary tradition and formal language with his own poetic aims, Ginsberg found inspiration in the notion of breaking free from implied literary constrictions. In Raskin's view, this is what would lead Ginsberg to create the free verse, colloquial tongued, as well as linguistically and thematically transgressive poetry that Ginsberg would become famous for. According to Raskin, madness infused nearly every aspect of Ginsberg poetry, both in its glorification of mad characters, its portrayal of mad experiences and in the overarching thematic presence of madness.

While Raskin largely shows the way in which madness became reflected in Ginsberg's poetry, Loni Reynolds offers a perspective upon the consequences that Ginsberg's literary portrayals of madness would have in his poem "Kaddish". In her interpretation of Ginsberg's "Kaddish", cognitive deviancy takes on the social function that used to be filled by the Victorian freak shows. In a sociopolitical situation that once again led to anxieties regarding physical and mental disabilities, Reynolds states that the Beats resurrected a literary freakshow that would once again provide a space for relating to and rejecting deviancy as a means of processing their own anxieties around deviancy. In his emphasis upon the physical and psychological symptoms of his literary character Naomi in "Kaddish", Reynolds' argues that Ginsberg ends up reducing Naomi to a mere freak and a spectacle. She agrees with

Raskin in that Ginsberg wrote in the aim of de-medicalizing madness and to portray a glorification of the madness in others. Despite these authorial aims however, Reynolds maintains that the consequential effects of Ginsberg's portrayal of Naomi is a reduction of her to her scars and erratic behaviour. She argues that while Naomi is herself attempting to salvage some of her normalcy in the narrative, these attempts are ultimately rejected by the authorial voice of the poem.

Reynolds' interpretation of Ginsberg's portrayal of mad characters is critical as she claims he fails to achieve his aim at redeeming them. Despite what Reynolds' recognizes as unintended negative consequences of Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness, she emphasises the positive effects of a poetry providing the reader with a space to relate to and separate themselves from cognitive deviancy. Indeed, Reynolds' argument largely boils down to the social function which Ginsberg's madness-filled poetry would serve, while criticizing the reduction of his mad characters to mere spectacles. In this thesis, I will aim to show the ways in which Ginsberg does achieve redemption for his characters in a narrative that presents them as transcendent to normalcy while maintaining the argument that his literary characters still partly serve the function of spectacles. The presence of a spectacle in the madness-driven narrative of Ginsberg's poetry appears largely biological, in that it reflects the hard and naked truth about madness and humanity. In emphasizing their physical and cognitive symptoms and suffering, Ginsberg's mad literary characters are being presented in their entirety, without hiding away the uncomfortable.

The final chapter of this thesis will be drawing connections between the presented research of the thesis and considering their implications in a collective perspective. I will also introduce a final source that highlights an important new perspective upon Ginsberg's utilization of transgressive literary moves, and which outlines a link between the other research that this thesis has presented, despite their differences in approach. This connector is the concept of cultural taboos, their social function, and the consequences of deliberately breaking them. Keith Allen and Kate Burridge. introduce the concept of cultural taboos as a part of restrictive societal structures with the aim of protecting members of society from behaviour that might cause physical, psychological, or moral harm. While taboos generally refer to behaviour, Allen and Burridge focus on the cultural taboos applied to language, arguing that language is equally protected and susceptible to corporal punishment as cultural taboos aimed at regulating behaviour. In the case of language, they state that ways in which language is thought to potentially cause harm to individuals is obscurely defined. Generally,

Allen and Burrige states that language taboos are aimed at protecting individuals from perceived moral harm and often refers to the use of profanity and blasphemy. They explain that cultural taboos on language are commonly known as censorship, a state regulated law of what is acceptable speech. As a means of separating state regulation from the attempted regulation of language initiated by individuals within a society, Allen and Burrige use the term censorship for state regulating and censoring to refer to individual's regulation of language. While emphasizing that no absolute taboo exists, which means all cultural taboos are highly subjective, there is a substantial difference in the amount of subjectivity that is applied in state censorship as opposed to public censoring. While state censorship has carefully defined rules and laws that a society should abide to consistently, censoring is much more susceptible to personal whim's, situational factors and moods of the person applying judgement upon a given word or phrase. Indeed, an essential point made by Allen and Burrige is that a person's belief in any given cultural taboo might change from one situation to another. One might for instance find profanity acceptable to a certain degree in an informal social setting, yet unacceptable within a formal, written setting. In terms of state regulated censorship laws, these get changed and redefined throughout history but remain more stable than public censoring. The similar denominator of state censorship and public censoring is the belief that language should be regulated for the sake of the individual's and the community's moral good.

While cultural taboos are never absolute, Allen and Burrige state that male homosexuality is one of the strongest taboos in history and that it is derived from deeply culturally rooted values such as the nuclear family lifestyle. Indeed, they state that non-procreative sex has been deemed a threat to the core cultural value of the nuclear family lifestyle, and that non-procreative sex has long been associated primarily with homosexuals. The threat of homosexuality to cultural values therefore stands particularly strong. In fact, they state that homosexuality has been continuously judged and attempted regulated since the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality. Highlighting important culturally established taboos, Allen and Burrige's arguments reflect many important arguments within the other sources presented in this thesis, while yet again widening the context in which we may view and reconsider interpretations of Ginsberg's literary work. In light of the consequences to flouting cultural taboos, I offer new a new interpretive perspective to the established arguments that will be presented throughout this thesis.

Chapter 1: The interpretative potency of sexual references

The crude and detailed portrayals of homosexual relations in Ginsberg's poetry in many ways act as a demand for the readers' acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexuality. Being written at a time in which homosexuality was illegal and largely detested by general society, Ginsberg's poetry caused a particularly strong reaction upon publication. This chapter will explore Ginsberg's poetry's sexual references from several different perspectives with an aim of revealing the relevance, intentions and effects that these references have on the interpretation of his poetry.

1.1. In the face of obscenity

Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* famously challenged contemporary obscenity laws as the publication defended itself in a court of law against claims of obscenity. Joel E. Black discusses the trial of *Howl* and its publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti in the summer of 1957 in "Ferlinghetti on Trial: The *Howl* court case and juvenile delinquency". He explains that the charges originated from the Juvenile Division of the San Francisco Police Department as part of their overarching mission to remove obscene material from books and other mainstream media. As a result of the obscenity charges originating from the police department itself, Black states that the trial came to concerned itself entirely with proving the obscenity of the poem while disregarding the poem's literary merit and social value. Black emphasizes his own astonishment with the fact that "Ginsberg's depiction of a mechanical and soulless world that preys on innocence [...] and his castigation of Cold War nationalism, barely appeared in a trial that was preoccupied with sexual accounts, references to narcotics, and the effects of both on young people" (28). In other words, in their aim to prove obscenity and the poem's potential effect on juvenile delinquency, the trial focused heavily on isolated references to topics of sex and drugs. On the other hand, the larger perspective of the poem and the underlying topics that are in fact being illuminated appeared to be entirely disregarded. In Black's view then, the obscenity charges and following legal trial of *Howl* boiled down to the incessant search for obscene material by the Juvenile Division of the San Francisco Police

Department and by the prosecutor of *Howl* in court.

While the prosecution argued heavily against *Howl* claiming its boasting of obscene material, the court case would be decided in favor of the publication largely due to a new interpretation of the First Amendment. According to Black, this new interpretation of the First Amendment would free *Howl* of obscenity charges and deem it protected expression due to its redeeming social value. Indeed, Black states that the summer of 1957 marked great developments within efforts to protect freedom of speech and particularly expression that might be deemed obscene. One particularly important event was a new statement on obscenity law, the first in nearly ten years, which was uttered in the case of Samuel Roth who was sentenced for mailing obscene materials. While the ruling in this case stated that the punishment should be upheld because the “‘First Amendment was not intended to protect every utterance’”, Black emphasizes an exception that was carved in the Roth ruling for “‘ideas with even the slightest redeeming social importance’” (34). It was this exception that would prove invaluable in redeeming *Howl* and Ferlinghetti. Black refers to this exception as the First Amendment obscenity test and argues that it was the persecuting lawyer Ralph McIntosh’ failure to prove *Howl*’s lack of redeeming social importance that entirely unraveled his accusations of the poem’s obscenity. Indeed, along with his witnesses, McIntosh relied heavily on defaming *Howl* by emphasizing utterances of obscene or sexual language. Furthermore, the witnesses of the persecution attempted to disregard the poem’s redeeming social importance based purely on their own personal dislike of the poem. The defense team on the other hand, brought in a row of literary experts who testified to the poem’s redeeming social importance, as well as testifying to the poem’s use of anatomical, rather than obscene or archaic, language. As a result, Ferlinghetti’s right to publish *Howl* was upheld by the final verdict of the judge, marking an important development in America’s freedom of speech rights.

Following *Howl*’s victory in court which proved the publication’s legality and denied it being obscene, Black states that the *Howl* case developed from a legal to a public censoring that would reveal the true radicals of the era. He describes the first line of responses to the verdict on the publication of *Howl* as partly a support of the work by the police to clean up obscene materials and partly a support of the poem’s First Amendment rights, as well as Ferlinghetti’s right to publish it. Black states that the second line of responses moved in a more critical direction, leaving the poem scrutinized for its literary merits once again, followed by a line of responses that described the Beat poets as criminals. Black dubs this

critical line of responses “public censure” as they attempt to reverse the court verdict of the publication as having literary value and a right to be published (38). In other words, there was an uproar from a group of people that disagreed with the court ruling on *Howl* and who continued to demand a censoring of the publication. However, Black argues that these efforts to uphold strong censoring laws on publications ultimately revealed that such efforts did not represent the constitutional right to freedom of expression. In fact, Black argues that the continuous persecution of *Howl* by a group of conservative oppositionists would have the opposite effect of what they aimed for. Rather than revealing the Beats as obscene, they proved themselves to be “out of step with law and American culture in the 1950s” (30). In other words, the court ruling on the Ferlinghetti case was a move to strengthen the constitutional right to freedom of expression that was securely established by the new interpretation of the First Amendment. The further persecution of the Beats therefore proved that the oppositionists were working against the rights established in the American constitution, the very foundation for American culture. The attack on the right to freedom of expression was a move rendering the oppositionists the true radicals of the era. Thus, the attempted public censor of *Howl* ended up reversing the roles, proving that the radicals were not Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti, but rather the anti-obscenity activists actively working against the American constitution and its Amendment for freedom of expression.

In response to the concerns around *Howl*'s sexual references highlighted in the legal trial of the work and beyond, Gregory Woods argues in “Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-Eroticism and Modern Poetry” that contrary to popular belief, Ginsberg in fact wrote sparingly on the subject of sex. Woods states that critics have established a belief that Ginsberg's poetry is a boasting of his homosexuality and consists largely of extravagant, overly graphic and overly emphasized homosexual sex acts. Aiming to disprove this prejudice against Ginsberg's work while maintaining its homoerotic relevance, Woods refers to Ginsberg's own aim of achieving spontaneity and nakedness in his poetry. He states that the spontaneous aspects involve “an intimate co-operation between poet (body and all) and poem” and that Ginsberg's work “has involved a systematic rejection of subterfuge and disguise [...] and a refusal of discretion, as if the poem were a body, to be presented either clothed or naked, in part or as a whole” (Woods, 196-197). In other words, Woods aims to establish the close relationship between poet and poem in Ginsberg's work, where the poet's life, experiences and physical body reflect themselves within the poem. The spontaneity aspect emphasizes the natural way in which sex enters the page within Ginsberg's work. As a

natural aspect of being human, sex and sexuality occasionally surfaces within Ginsberg's poetry, along with other aspects of his mind and body. Furthermore, Ginsberg's active rejection of disguise is strongly founded within the metaphor of clothes on the human body. A naked body is far more revelatory than one that is clothed. Within this frame of argument, Woods asserts that the choice of actively emphasizing nakedness or limbs on a naked body is entirely the emphasis of the viewer. The naked, self-revealing and spontaneous literature that Ginsberg offered is therefore a testament to the human experience of the poet including the physical aspects which that involves, but it is not for that reason an extravagant boasting of homosexuality. Woods thus successfully justifies the homoerotic relevance of Ginsberg sexual references in his poetry, maintaining that a perceived emphasis upon sex within the work might instead be the reader's own emphasis.

Having established that sexual references within Ginsberg's poetry is merely testifying to and reflecting the poet's human experience and physical body, the argument of homosexual boasting presents itself rather as a question of restraint and discretion. While sex and sexuality are natural aspects of humanity as well as poetry, there is the notion of discriminating between what is acceptable to speak of, and what is not. Furthermore, there are sensitivities regarding the amount or weight of sexual content that is deemed socially acceptable. As though in response to such questions, Woods states that not only is it necessary for the poet to "take sexuality as one of his subjects" but furthermore, "he must move beyond the barriers of public prejudice, or accept defeat" (197). In other words, Ginsberg's dealings with sexuality within his poetry are necessary, as the avoidance of the subject would take away from the humanity that the poetry testifies to. Furthermore, the insistence that the poet must ignore the boundaries established by public prejudice emphasizes the importance of Ginsberg's openness in terms of homosexuality in his poetry. Indeed, Woods viewed Ginsberg's dealings with homosexuality in *Howl* as effectively breaking down gay stereotypes that frame homosexuality as having to do with debasement and pain, and an autonomy to pleasure and freedom. While homosexuality was certainly not deemed acceptable to discuss in 50s and 60s America, Woods argues that Ginsberg's poetry and its testament to the homosexual experience was not only valuable, but necessary. Rather than entertaining the notion that discourses involving sex need a certain discretion, Woods testifies to the necessity of the poet to write indiscriminately on their own experience, as Ginsberg has done. While arguing that Ginsberg's openness in terms of homosexuality is an important aspect of his poetry, Woods maintains that contrary to the belief of Ginsberg's critics, Ginsberg's poetry is largely

restrictive on the subject. He supports this argument by showing that Ginsberg's poem "Kaddish", which deals with Ginsberg's younger years and coming of age as homosexual, is far less concerned with explicit sexual renderings than what would be expected. Indeed, he claims the poem offers a single line that might be slightly controversial with its phrasings "Matterhorns of cock" and "Canyons of asshole" (Ginsberg, "Kaddish" 16). Even so, Woods explains this slightly crude phrasing as a depiction of a homosexual youth slowly realizing that he is not the only one of his kind. He claims that the topic could certainly justify a lot more than this mere line that it receives in Ginsberg's poem, emphasizing that this restrictiveness exhibits the implicitness and constrictiveness of his authorhood. In fact, Woods argues that "Ginsberg's program includes his sexuality to the extent to which his sexuality has a bearing on his life [and] he highlights his sexuality by verbal and tonal means no more than he highlights, say, his politics or his family history" (198). In other words, Woods argues that there is no particular emphasis upon homosexuality in Ginsberg poetry and that it is only included to the extent of which it has affected his life. Seemingly referring to Ginsberg's performance of his poetry, Woods also emphasizes that sexuality receives no more verbal or tonal emphasis than other topics that were central to Ginsberg's life. In Woods' view then, Ginsberg's sexual references appear rather sparingly in his work and are included as reflection of his human experience.

While he maintains that Ginsberg did not particularly emphasize homosexuality in his work, Woods maintains that homosexuality still had a large influence upon other topics that engaged him. Particularly, he argues that Ginsberg's political views were shaped by his attitudes to sex, with his most central political subject being the illegality of homosexual acts between consenting adults. The state's imposition on a person's love life, controlling who they may love, gives a clear idea of the view of the state from a homosexual's perspective. At a time where publicly demonstrating their right to love would be both difficult and risky, Woods states that the anti-war movement of the sixties emerged with a space for the fight for homosexual liberation. The movement committed themselves to peace and love as a direct opposition to the war in Vietnam. Because homosexual liberation was all about fighting for the right to love, the movement would have no choice but to support them as an extension of their public values. Homosexuals also supported the anti-war sentiment in return as Woods states Ginsberg himself would offer men to claim they had slept with him to make themselves ineligible to fight in the war. Homosexual men were not wanted in the army as they were thought to threaten male stereotypes and masculine virility. According to Woods, Ginsberg's

anti-war strategy also revealed his “faith in an ideal world where men would go rather to bed than to war” (203). Not only does this sentence become extraordinarily literal considering his offer to frame men as homosexual to avoid military service, but it also captures the intertwined relationship between sex and politics for Ginsberg. Indeed, he viewed the army man’s willingness to sleep with another man to escape the war as the ultimate progression from the cold, controlling and repressive state that undermines homosexual love. In other words, a sexual act could signify great political advancement in Ginsberg’s view. It is clear then, that Ginsberg’s perspective as homosexual largely influenced his political view, while equipping him with a political drive to achieve sexual freedom and peace.

Woods argues that Ginsberg’s intertwined relationship between sex and politics functioned as something of a personal sexual politics based on his vision of an ideal world. According to Woods, this personal sexual politics would develop in different stages throughout his life. He claims stage one involved a phase of bisexuality. As Woods explains, Ginsberg made efforts to write about the desire for female flesh, however these efforts were futile in the aim at proving his hunger for it. He describes Ginsberg’s references to women as brief and minimal, stating that “the reference to woman is formal and unenthusiastic, expressive merely of a static idea of desirable women, a theory” (206). In other words, there is a simultaneous dedication to and avoidance of the female body in Ginsberg’s poetry. He sacrifices lines to write of the female flesh but contrary to his aim, the lines end up proving his inability to love women. In contrast to Ginsberg’s enthusiastic references to the male body, his sentiments towards the female become even clearer. In Woods view, Ginsberg’s theory of desirable women remains a theoretical ideal for Ginsberg. Explaining Ginsberg’s strong desire of becoming able to love women as well as men, he suggests it may have sprouted from the realization that to father children he would need to copulate with a female. In terms of his sexual politics however, Woods points to Ginsberg’s realization of the sexism of his sexual orientation. In other words, Ginsberg’s love ideal appears to be anchored in the idea of being able to love regardless of gender. In the first stage of Ginsberg’s personal sexual politics then, he finds himself falling short of his own ideals involving the ability to love regardless of gender.

From a focus on the ability to love regardless of gender, the second stage of Ginsberg’s personal sexual politics involved a larger perspective in its realization that one should be able to love regardless of physicality all-together. Woods explains that this second stage was largely anchored in Ginsberg’s slow approach towards middle agedness. He states

Ginsberg would come to not only accept but grow into this new stage of his life. While first going through the frustrations of bodily changes, such as loosing hair, obtaining a belly and losing the desire for sex, Woods emphasizes that throughout these frustrations Ginsberg was still writing “lusty verses” (207). In other words, Ginsberg may have been frustrated with his bodily changes, but his desire for love never seemed to diminish. Growing into his acceptance of middle age however, Woods emphasizes what he views as a crucial development which strongly impacted the direction of his poetry from here on. Ginsberg expressed his realization that there were more ways to love than engaging in sexual acts. Woods claims Ginsberg started engaging in “carezza [which] allows the formation of a physical, erotic relationship between, for example, two ‘heterosexual’ men; or a ‘homosexual’ woman and man; or a youth and an old-age pensioner” (207). As Wood describes, carezza was a way of achieving deeply intimate relationships that are not halted by sexual preferences or bodily desire. He emphasizes that it is a way of loving another person without the need to necessarily develop a sexual relationship. According to Woods, this new way of loving makes itself evident in Ginsberg’s newer poems, proving his personal growth and development. The perception of what it means to love freely and uninhibited therefore expanded throughout Ginsberg’s life, as he learned that sex was not a necessity for love.

The overarching argument to Woods’ discussion of sexual references in Ginsberg’s work is that Ginsberg’s references to sex and sexuality in his poems function as a glimpse into the personal life of the poet and his human experience. Ginsberg wrote his poetry in a self-revelatory manner, rejecting any societal boundaries or overshadowing prejudices but never aimed to boast of his homosexuality as critics claimed. As many of the arguments used by the prosecution in court against *Howl* to prove its obscenity were related to sexual references and phrasings relating to genitals or sexual relations, Woods discussion on the topic largely echoes the final verdict by the judge in that he deems the topic entirely necessary and appropriate for the literature at hand. Reflecting the poet as a person and his experiences, the references to sex come as a natural aspect and indeed testifies to the poem’s humanity, as Woods argued. Furthermore, the argument that it is the readers’ emphasis upon crude language and sexual references rather than the author’s is particularly interesting as it encourages self-reflection in readers who have found the works overly sexually fixated. In the intent search for obscenity, isolated pieces of text can certainly be interpreted as such. As Woods urges however, the literary work must be seen as a whole for the prevalence, or in fact restrictive occurrence, of sexual references to be judged.

In court, Black stated that the prosecution of *Howl* focused on references to sex, drugs and its negative effects in order to prove the obscenity of the poem. Furthermore, he stated that the prosecution argued the poetry was boasting with such obscenities. In similar lines, Woods states that critics of Ginsberg's poetry have continuously claimed that it features a boasting of homosexuality. In other words, the critical responses to *Howl* have been primarily concerned with the prevalence of and emphasis upon sexual references in the work. In Ginsberg's poem "Sunflower Sutra", Woods' arguments that Ginsberg writes sparingly on sex rather than using sexual references as a means of boasting of his own homosexuality is particularly evident. In other words, it takes little effort on behalf of the reader to recognize the organic ways in which sex infuses Ginsberg's poetry, as well as to understand that the sexual references appear within the poetry for a different reason, and certainly a more complex reason, than to merely boast of the author's own homosexuality.

In "Sunflower Sutra", the human body is presented allegorically and intertwined with both nature and industrialization. Ginsberg uses the image of a "weeping coughing car" poisoning its own organs with its smoke, to enjoin nature and the human body in a symbiosis that is equally detrimental to man and machine (37). The tone of the poem is slightly sinister, and a dusty, polluted world meets the reader:

"the empty lonely
tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what
more could I name, the smoked ashes of some
cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the
milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs
& sphincters of dynamos" (37).

The tin cans seemingly reject their own rusty states with their "rusty tongues alack", suggesting a rejection of their concurrent states (37). Attributing the tin cans with tongues, they are partly anthropomorphized offering the reader a space to relate to the inanimate objects we as humans have both produced and discarded. The authorial voice of the poem then seemingly asks himself how he can be sure that his point comes across, what other examples he might provide to emphasize the suggested sociopolitical critique. The poetic language becomes cruder from this point on, and bodily references are to sexual organs, breasts and asses. This suggests that Ginsberg utilized sexual references within his poetry

partly as a means of getting the attention of the reader. Indeed, the transition to sexual references in “Sunflower Sutra” provide strong contrast in language which alerts the reader, while the poet seemingly moves to a momentary shift in the lens through which he offers the readers a view of the world. The references to the body are intertwined with references to machinery and dirt. This ensures that the references to sexual organs could not possibly be interpreted as having to do with the poets’ attempt at boasting of his sexuality or sex life. Instead, the references clearly have a sociopolitical aim and a serious, thought-provoking tone. They are meant to make the reader consider, and reconsider, the arguments and references of the poem.

Continuing the juxtaposition of the human body with industrialization, the poem intertwines bodily limbs with parts of machinery. The “smoked ashes of some cock cigar” intertwines the male penis with pollution in the form of smoke and ashes, while “cunts of wheelbarrows” gives female attributes to the simple mechanical construction of the wheelbarrow (37). Both these images are powerful in that they both accuse the mechanical world of having its own vulgarity by using “cock” and “cunt” rather than penis or vagina. The poem continues by attributing cars with “milky breasts” and dynamo’s with “sphincters” that might be interpreted as anal muscles (37). Again, the references to human sexual organs do not appear to have relation with the author’s own experience in the way in which it is presented in this section of “Sunflower Sutra”. Rather, it is used as a lens through which the reader is invited to look. Through this lens, the filth and vulgarity of the mechanical world is illuminated. Indeed, Ginsberg describes a dark, dusty, mechanical world with a sense of discomfort and dislike. Despite this, Ginsberg’s focus throughout the poem remains at the beauty of the sunflower that grows and thrives despite its surroundings. He admires the sunflower’s ability to stand so tall in spite of the smut and dirt that has covered it throughout its life cycle, exclaiming as he looks upon it: “all your glory in your form” (37). Humanity is intertwined with nature in the poem, and both are cursed by the mechanical world that humans developed. In short, “Sunflower Sutra” shows that within references to sex and genitalia, the narrative seems void of references to Ginsberg’s homosexuality or sexual experience, and instead, it is sociopolitical critique that comes to the forefront of the poem.

1.2. Emancipating the male body

Providing a different perspective of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references by focusing on Ginsberg's deliberate use and emphasis on transgressive topics in his poetry, Raymond-Jean Frontain argues in "Sweet Boy, Gimme Yr Ass': Allen Ginsberg and the Open Body of the Beat Revolution", that Ginsberg's poetry features open male bodies as a deliberate rebellion against constricting societal norms. Specifically, he argues that the opening of the male body in Ginsberg's poetry effectively rejects society's hierarchal construction of sexuality. This hierarchal construction of sexuality involves the social acceptability and consequential idealization of heteronormativity in contrast to the socially constructed pathologization of homosexuality. The opening of the male body refers to the literary act of freeing the male body of societal restraints, particularly in terms of sexual freedom. Frontain explains that Ginsberg's rebellion against constricting societal norms even involved himself presenting his own body naked in public, as an extension of the same opening of the male body within the literature. He explains that, opening the male body refers to the act of freeing it from all societal boundaries, such as always covering one's body in public and conforming to the heteronormative lifestyle. What Frontain recognizes as the most transgressive act however, is "opening as the site of sexual pleasure the culturally closed male body" (84). In other words, Frontain argues that it is male sexuality which is most strictly guarded by societal norms which renders any move to free the male body from such restrictions particularly transgressive. He argues that this move was continuously insisted upon by Ginsberg, and largely defines much of his poetry. In Frontain's view then, the most transgressive aspect of Ginsberg's poetry was its aims of challenging important social structures in order to free the male body of societal and cultural restraints.

In his discussion of Ginsberg's attempted opening of the male body, Frontain emphasizes the origins of the contemporary notions on the male body that are reflected in Ginsberg's poetry. Frontain argues that the ideas and ideologies that the open body movement is forcefully rejecting are those established in the High Renaissance era. High Renaissance produced what was to become deeply rooted cultural views about sex that based themselves upon the view of individuals as necessarily and consistently separate from others. As Frontain explains, the surface of the body was viewed as representing the borders of a person's

individuality. Furthermore, the body was something finished and limited, and all “that which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off are eliminated, hidden or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed” (85). In other words, there could be no extension of the body in the view of the High Renaissance. The body was a closed off and solitary vessel. Sexual activity thus appears to be an impossibility in this view, as any extension of one’s own body was entirely unacceptable, and any entrance to one’s own body was considered closed off. Engaging in sexual activities would involve a connection and merging of individuals to some degree, a notion that was rejected to the very core. For this reason, Frontain emphasizes the importance of recognizing these established ideas from High Renaissance that create the very foundation to the ideas and ideologies of Cold War America, as it is the epitome of what the open body is attempting to break free from. Indeed, considering these ideas on bodies and sexuality, the opening of the body, not to mention the male body, is a particularly provocative move.

To break away from the strict guarding of the male body and establish a new way of thinking of bodies and sexuality, Frontain points to Bakhtin’s argument that a carnival must be implemented so that the dominating hierarchy can be altered. He explains that the hierarchical structure would be turned momentarily upside down so that by the time the hierarchy was to be reestablished, there would have been modifications to it, and those who are ruled by it would have achieved new perspectives. Explaining how the carnival achieves its effect, Bakhtin explains that the carnival is dominated by what he calls “grotesque realism” and its “essential principle [...] degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract [...] it is a transfer to the material level” (85). In other words, the carnival involves the lowering of ideas and concepts to the material and physical. The physical body and all its limbs are emphasized to an exaggerated degree according to Frontain, as the carnival is ruled not by reason, but by passion and sexual desire. The carnival embodies all that society rejects or constricts, lifting it up as transcendent to the values of society. In short, the carnival is a mere provocation in its celebration of all that society pushes down, with the effect of turning upside down the very hierarchy with which society aims to rule.

While maintaining that the naked body has generally deemed culturally protected, Frontain argues that it is typically the female body that is represented within the discourse of the carnival, generously and unrestrictedly sharing her vagina. While the female body is largely culturally guarded and therefore functions as an element of the carnival, the male body on the other hand is entirely closed off. Indeed, Frontain states that the opening of the male body, and specifically the male anus, is the most subversive act of the carnival. The argues

that the male body is particularly constricted because its opening is seen as the very downfall of civilization. Indeed, Frontain argues that “sodomy is the rejection of society’s civilizing power, a deliberate defilement or sinking back into the dirt from which the species arose” (86). In other words, he argues that engaging in sodomy is considered a deliberate attempt to reject the very ideas that our society has of civilization, as well as a deliberate move to corrupt the civilized man or the society which we live in. Furthermore, he argues that the male body is considered closed off and sodomy deemed entirely taboo because it threatens society’s hierarchical structures, social structures, as well as ideas of cultural refinement. Indeed, society frames heterosexuality, monogamy and the family structure as the picture of civilized refinement. Thus, any divergence from this is a threat to society’s power to regulate these definitions and, from this perspective, a backwards leap into an uncivilized and primitive existence. Within the frame of the carnival then, the opening of the male body as its most transgressive move, works to reject and rebel against the very foundation of societal norms and expectations, as it attacks the core of its hierarchal and polarized notions of civilization and sexuality.

While the opening of the male body threatens certain ideas about civilization as well as society’s hierarchal structures of sexuality, the implications of opening the male anus and celebrating the act of sodomy more specifically shed light to the intricate structures that come under threat. Firstly, Frontain argues that for a man to allow himself to be penetrated by another man effectively means him giving up the power that is attributed to him through the patriarchy. Consequently, Frontain argues that the inherent power of the phallus, the masculine male, in itself comes up for questioning. In other words, notions of inherent masculinity and the foundation of the patriarchy are under direct threat through the opening of the male anus. According to Frontain, these immense ramifications go beyond the momentary effects of the carnival, permanently subverting the social hierarchy. Moving beyond the idea of man’s inherent power and authority, Frontain emphasizes how sodomy challenges the deeply rooted societal ideal of procreation and the family lifestyle. Indeed, sodomy is entirely separated from procreational intercourse in both nature and aim. As Frontain states, sodomy is performed purely for the aim for achieving or giving pleasure. In fact, sodomy is dubbed “the ‘purest’ forms of sexual pleasure” (86). It is considered pure because sodomy is a sexual act that has no other aims than for it to be enjoyed, rather than being a means to an end, such as procreating to create a family. Naturally, this view inherently undermines the highly valued family ideal, as well as the social order more generally.

Celebrating sodomy and the male anus, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's poetry was highly transgressive in its implementation of the carnival and grotesque realism. Particularly, he argues that *Howl* is a good example of the metaphorical use of grotesque realism and its effects on the reader. Indeed, in his dealings with topics of homosexuality as well as individuality and the self, Ginsberg utilizes the physical and material world to speak in metaphors. As a striking example, Frontain discusses Ginsberg's aim to open the reader's perception "through the assertion of an open sphincter. The closing of the doors of perception represents the repressiveness that keeps the body closed as well; opening the male body to intercourse is thus a breaking open the doors of perception" (Frontain, 88). In other words, Frontain argues that Ginsberg utilizes a metaphor in which the opening of the male body, in the sense of sexual intercourse, symbolizes Ginsberg's encouragement for the reader to open their own perception. Furthermore, the metaphor involves the idea that closing oneself off from new perceptions boils down to the exact repressive notions that keeps the male body closed in the first place. In fact, metaphor proposes that by opening people's perceptions of the male body and male sexuality, society's repressive structures would become undone. Grotesque realism thus offers a particularly effective technique within Ginsberg's poetry to challenge the reader's culturally conditioned presumptions on male bodies and sexuality.

Similar to the way in which grotesque realism is used to confront and challenge the reader, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's poetry uses features nakedness and acts of sodomy, both as a means of exposing the individual and as an attack upon society's hierarchal construction of sexuality. He states that for Ginsberg, nakedness was a testament to one's artistic and emotional honesty, and Ginsberg would often show himself naked in public for this reason. Furthermore, Frontain argues that nakedness, as well as sexual liberation and sodomy, were crucial parts of Ginsberg's rebellion against "conformist sexuality", in fact "celebrating sodomy as the ultimate act of liberation". (84). Frontain argues that sodomy and homosexual eroticism are the most transgressive aspects of Ginsberg's literature, and the celebration of sodomy is likely the most provocative. Being viewed as an attack upon a man's naturally given power through the social structure and as a rejection of the civilized society, the featuring and celebration of sodomy in Ginsberg's poetry functioned as a direct attack on society's hierarchal construction of sexuality. By emphasizing sodomy as the ultimate act of liberation, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's mission to ensure social change became all the more powerful, as sodomy can be seen as the most direct opposition to society's hierarchical construction of sexuality and societal norms more generally. Both stripping the body of

clothes, and the act of sodomy, were considered a liberation for the male body, and therefore functioned as both social rebellion and individual liberation. Thus, is through the utilization of grotesque realism that Ginsberg's poetry could achieve its aim of challenging restrictive societal structures.

Within the literary portrayal of the male body and transgressive references to sodomy, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's poetry in fact pushes the reader towards an acceptance of the self. Indeed, Frontain paints Ginsberg's poetry as a celebration of the physical and spiritual self. Emphasizing this as another function of Ginsberg's utilization of grotesque realism, Frontain states that his poetry works as a means of pushing the readers towards an acceptance of the self by portraying every aspect of the physical body as equal. This goes against the more typical notion of viewing private parts and bodily dirt as shameful and taboo. Indeed, Frontain asserts that, in the case of Ginsberg, grotesque realism is not only used as a means of opening the culturally guarded male body, but in fact, it is used in itself as a statement. By applying grotesque realism as a central element in his poetry, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's poetry becomes not only a rebellion against constricted sexuality, but a testimonial to the art of self-acceptance. In fact, Frontain argues that Ginsberg uses both the culturally guarded male body and the taboo topic of homosexuality to achieve a particularly transgressive form of grotesque realism which challenges the reader's presumptions of the physical body and sexuality. As an example, he points to Ginsberg's reference to a "dirty asshole" in his poem "In Society" (qtd. Frontain, 88). He maintains that by forcing the reader to face bodily dirt, the reader is pushed towards acceptance of every aspect of their own humanity. In his emphasis upon the fact that the referenced asshole is dirty, Ginsberg's writing removes the possibility of focusing purely on the socially acceptable or pleasant parts of humanity. Specifically, Frontain argues that by representing every part of the human body as equal, and glorifying them rather than excusing them, the potential for shame being associated with aspects of oneself is entirely removed. Making no distinction between what might be clean or dirty, discreet or provoking, Ginsberg's utilization of grotesque realism effectively embraces humanity in its entirety.

Frontain's interpretations of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references varies greatly from that of Woods. While Woods considered the authorial aim with these references was to reflect his life and experiences, as well as a lens through which he viewed sociopolitical issues, Frontain argues that the primary authorial aim was provocation. This provocation involves the way in which Ginsberg's poetry challenges restrictive societal structures

according to Frontain. Furthermore, Frontain argues that the transgressive aspects of Ginsberg's poetry were part of his deliberate rebellion against sociopolitical restrictions of the individual, particularly in terms of sexual freedom. Woods, on the other hand, seemingly deemed the provocative nature of the poetry as primarily having to do with the reader's own fixation upon sexual references. Finally, Frontain offered a new aspect to the interpretation of Ginsberg's sexual references as encompassing an authorial embrace of bodies that pushes self-acceptance. In order to further explore Frontain's arguments on Ginsberg's poetry's sexual references, I will apply them to my analysis of "Sunflower Sutra". Going back to the poem's stanza 13-14, this time through the lens of the open body and grotesque realism, I will explore Ginsberg's personal stance against society's attempted closing of the male body:

“and those bleak thoughts of death and dusty loveless
 eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the
 home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar
 bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards
 of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely
 tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what
 more could I name, the smoked ashes of some
 cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the
 milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs
 & sphincters of dynamos – all these
 entangled in your mummy roots – and you there
 standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
 in your form! (Ginsberg, *Howl* 36-37)

The first two lines of stanza 13 offer a raw sentimentality that reveals Ginsberg's rejection of society's attempted closing of the male body. Making no distinction between sexuality and other human aspects and needs, these lines effectively portray the devastating effects of this attempted closing, which illuminates Ginsberg's firm stance against it. The emphasis is upon loveless lives lived alone and rootless, with obscure obsessions with death as an end to such

an existence. The sentimentality of these lines brings out the individual within a state politics designed to control the sexuality of the population. The consequences to such politics were emotional suffering of countless revealed or hidden homosexual individuals. While the open body movement is certainly a call for sexual liberation and a celebration of naked male bodies, the movement should not be reduced to its superficial involvement with topics of sex. On a fundamental level, the movement is about the liberation of the individual to live life being who they are without the want or need for disguise, as Frontain also emphasized. Ginsberg shows already in these first two lines that it is the consequences of sexual freedom that he is concerned with, as these are intertwined with every other aspect of the individual on a fundamental level. It not difficult to imagine the effects to mental health for individuals being framed as a criminal or as abnormal for loving someone of the same gender, and it is certainly indisputable that these consequences move far beyond the realm of sexual gratification. Sexual freedom mirrors an individual's freedom more generally, as humans are inseparable from their fundamental needs for connection. In these first lines then, the open body appears to be presented by illuminating the consequences of society's imposed closing of the male body.

While the emphasis upon the consequences of a state denial to love whom one loves certainly shows Ginsberg's stance on the topic, as well as proving his very good reasons to feel so strongly on the subject, Ginsberg's rejection of society's attempted closing of the male body is particularly emphasized by the poem's use of grotesque realism in the following lines. Specifically, the poem uses grotesque realism to challenge the ideas of a contemporary society that suppressed the sexual freedom of homosexuals. Through the same means, the poem also empowers the homosexual by demanding the reader to face their existence and inherent vigor. A clear example of the poem's use of grotesque realism is the line "the smoked ashes of some cock cigar" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). By lowering the abstract idea of homosexuality to the material level, in its reference to a penis, the poem moves away from the purely abstract and figurative. While "cock" is a material, bodily reference, the juxtaposition with its "smoked ashes" is what allows the sentence to remain partly figurative as the penis is likened to an disembodied, inanimate object being used for pleasure (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). It is this intertwined relationship between the abstract and the material which allows the poem to make such an outrageously crude and powerful stance against a society attempting to repress homosexuality. The use of grotesque realism removes any element of shame because it allows the poem's crude directedness, such as in the phrase "cock cigar" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). As a

result, taboo aspects of homosexuality are being unapologetically celebrated. Rather than attempting to merge with societal expectations of what it means to be a man, and what a family should look like, the poem instead focuses entirely on the pleasure aspect of homosexuality. In other words, the message of the poem involves a complete disregard of societal expectations and an unwavering celebration of the individual, both of which are made particularly clear through the poem's utilization of grotesque realism.

Stanzas 13 and 14 are brimming with examples of grotesque realism which offer rich images for interpretation. Looking at the poem with a particular focus upon Ginsberg's societal and political stance and relation to the open body movement, the images of "the home-pile of sand and sawdust" as well as "rubber dollar bills" and skin of machinery" all work as a lowering of the abstract ideas related to the subjective value of objects and the societal obsession with consumerism (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Being surrounded by "sand and sawdust" and "rubber dollar bills" seem to be offering a critical perspective upon the way in which people surround themselves by material things and pieces of paper as though they are the most valuable things a human could achieve (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). This critical perspective offers the reader the opportunity to reflect and look inwards upon their own value system, perhaps with more objectivity than what is possible when we see the world through the lens of state ideologies. The phrase "skin of machinery" intertwines humanity with machinery, suggesting that under the layer of skin there is a machine at work rather than the abstract notion of the human soul (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). This suggests that Ginsberg saw the average person of society as operating like a machine, blindly following instructions and going through life without self-reflection or awareness of their individuality. This is a particular stance against the anti-individuality pushed by contemporary Cold War American society. By using grotesque realism to discuss the importance of individuality and the lack thereof in general society then, the poem removes any element of idealism or condensation, offering instead a critical viewpoint to the reader to come to their own realizations.

Continuing to look at the examples of grotesque realism in stanza 14, the reader is invited to reflect upon contemporary society and the ways in which the closed body and human ego reveal themselves. The poem asks the reader to consider the inner realm of "the coughing weeping car" with its "guts and innards" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Not only does this suggest that the car itself is being polluted by human design, coughing from his own fumes, it also asks the reader to consider the state of the inner organs of ourselves that we do not see with the naked eye. The outward coughing may indicate blackened lungs and suffering

internal organs. This image is perhaps thought to strike some fear in the reader, as they are asked to consider and re-consider they own behavioural patterns and even addictions, such as smoking. The poem continues its grotesque realism with the image of “empty lonely/ tincans with their rusty tongues alack” which connotes of human loneliness and self-loathing (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). As we may walk right by some rusty tincans with no further thought to where they came from or considering picking them up for the sake of environment, so may we also pass on by the lonely, ragged looking fellow man on the street. It appears that Ginsberg is suggesting that the average man of contemporary society did not offer much thought to their fellow man, and particularly not if they were visibly on the outside of society. Indeed, the rust of the tincans can be likened to the ragged beard or smutty clothes of a homeless person sitting on a street corner. The poem is offering deep reflection upon complex, abstract ideas of human closedness within a society, and the effects of the actions of each individual.

As the poem continues, Ginsberg asks himself what more he could name for the sake of emphasizing the point that the poem is making or is trying to reach. He offers the reader the images of “the smoked ashes of some/ cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the/ milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs/ & sphincters of dynamos” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Here the grotesque realism is entering the realm of the physical body and intimate body parts. Rather than following the festive discourse that Frontain suggested as almost elementary to grotesque realism however, Ginsberg’s use of grotesque realism in these lines instead continues on the same note as the previous stanza, with a gloomy and ominous atmosphere that demands the reader’s attention and encourages fundamental self-reflection. The phrasing “cock cigar” could be interpreted along the lines of a festive discourse when considered as an isolated piece of text, however its “smoked ashes” brings the images back into the realm cold reality (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Rather than being offered as an image of enjoyment, the “cock cigar” is another polluting factor of the poem (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The “milky breasts of cars” attributes mechanical objects with the ability of the female body to ensure the survival of their babies, thus threatening the idea of the mother as a detrimental factor in their babies’ lives (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Indeed, the mechanical world, driven by consumerism, could already provide the baby with the same nutrition as the mother of the baby could herself. In other words, the grotesque realism is utilized to shed light upon the effects of the mechanical world and consumerist society upon individuals and the way that it interferes with our natural instincts, such as breastfeeding.

In addition to discussing the effects of the mechanical world and consumerist society,

Ginsberg's use of grotesque realism is also entering the discussion of homosexuality. Rather than discussing abstract ideas about homosexuality, the poem faces the reader with physical aspects of homosexuality. For instance, in the images of "a cock cigar", "worn asses out of chairs" and "sphincters of dynamos", the physical sexual aspect of homosexuality is implied (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). They connote promiscuity, pleasure and a particular focus upon anality. All these aspects were considered particularly transgressive at the time but are still presented openly to the reader. Rather than a focus purely on the body however, the mind and soul of the individual is also brought in and intertwined with the body-aspect:

"all these
 entangled in your mummied roots—and you there
 standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
 in your form!" (37).

"all these" refers to the previously presented descriptive phrases that connote both the negative consequences of a mechanical, consumerist society, and that simultaneously enter a conversation of homosexuality (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Indeed, these subjects are intricately intertwined in the poem, the critical sociopolitical perspective is influenced by thoughts on homosexuality, and vice versa. This complex world view demanding the reader's reflections upon contemporary society is described as "intertwined in your mummied roots" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The poem continues "and you there", directly addressing the sunflower as though it was a person (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The roots of the sunflower are then described as being intertwined with all the sociopolitical issues that the poem has critiqued, while maintaining that the sunflower maintains its inherent glory despite the conditions it has grown up in. In short, this section of the poem offers another perspective of analysis that moves beyond sociopolitical critique by intertwining notions of humanity through the utilization of an anthropomorphized sunflower.

It appears that the sunflower symbolizes both the homosexual individual, as well as the social and political issue of homosexuality in the poem's contemporary society. Attributing all these issues to this symbolic sunflower then, the personal and sociopolitical issue of homosexuality in Cold War America is in many ways getting humanized, as opposed to the systematic refusal of homosexuality by state and society, based on pre-existing ideas of human sexuality and the family structure. Indeed, as a double metaphor, the sunflower itself is being humanized in the poem, as is the sociopolitical issue that it represents. The poem

continues “and you there/ standing before me in the sunset” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). As a direct call upon the poem’s symbolic sunflower, it is described as “standing before [the author] in the sunset” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The sunflower appears to be described as in the spotlight, but for a limited time, as the sun is setting in the background. “all your glory in your form” the poem continues, as a celebratory worship of all that the sunflower represents (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). Thus, these lines effectively show Ginsberg’s embrace of the open body, while creating a sense of urgency for the issue of homosexuality to be reconsidered and reflected upon in contemporary politics and society, so that positive change can be made to lives of homosexuals. The poem also gives a nod to Ginsberg’s acceptance of the human body more generally, as it states: “all the glory in your form” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The form connotes of a naked silhouette, standing before the speaker in sunset. This single line connotating of a glorious naked silhouette being presented to both writer and reader not only speak to Ginsberg’s view of the natural body stripped of clothes as testifying to one’s openness and honesty, but furthermore, it emphasizes Ginsberg’s complete embrace of the human body.

What I would argue are among the most potent, powerful lines in terms of self-acceptance, which Frontain also writes about, in “Sunflower Sutra” are fittingly at the end of poem, and they talk about the ability to accept the self and the naked body by realizing its inherent value and internal beauty. This supports Frontain’s argument that Ginsberg’s poetry aims to reveal how every human body is equally beautiful and valuable, and that only by facing the dirt can we embrace its glory. The poem reads:

“We’re not our skin of grime, we’re not our dread

bleak rusty locomotive, we’re all

beautiful golden sunflowers on the inside” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 38).

The poem suggests that our dirty or worn exterior does not define the human that is beneath its skin. Furthermore, it states that we are not “our bleak rusty locomotive” which appears to refer to external factors like societal progression and industrialization (Ginsberg, *Howl* 38). In other words, the poem suggests that the inherent value of a human exists on its own merits and is not, or should not, be altered by exterior factors. Furthermore, in the poem’s separation between external factors and the internal self, there is an underlying message that more emphasis should be placed on the internal human experience more generally. Rather than necessarily suggesting that one should put effort into loving one’s physical body in the way that we are today familiar with in body positivity campaigns, the poem rather suggests that

this effort should be focused inwards. There is an implied sense that this inward focus and acceptance of the self will lead to acceptance of our physical bodies, because of the realization that the body is not what makes a person. Regardless of physique, the poem states that “we’re all/ beautiful golden sunflowers on the inside” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 38). Within Ginsberg’s poem, the historical application of judgement and control on bodies is replaced with embrace, and humanity is emphasized in both spiritual and bodily form.

1.3. Taunting notions of a male ideal

Frontain’s argument that Ginsberg writes a deliberate transgressive literature that challenges important societal structures and values depends upon the understanding of the sociopolitical situation in which Ginsberg wrote. Highlighting important state ideologies that largely shaped the society that Ginsberg found himself a part of as he began his writing career, Marko Dumančić highlights the centrality of the masculine male ideal. Specifically, Dumančić argues in “Spectrums of Oppression Gender and Sexuality during the Cold War”, that the masculine male ideal would come to function as a recipe for homosexuals to camouflage themselves as norm-conforming citizens of general society. Indeed, he states that the masculine male ideal’s permeation into marginalized communities such as homosexuals emphasize the impact that this state ideology came to have on society. Furthermore, Dumančić claims that because the masculine male ideal became so strongly implemented into societal and political structures, it came to inhabit a particular power to push down those who did not conform. This means that in homosexuals building their identities on state ideologies that might grant them societal acceptance, an inherent consequence was that they would start marginalizing members of their own community who did not conform. Another important consequence of homosexual’s attempted merging with the masculine male ideal, according to Dumančić, was that homosexuals would come to be considered an invisible threat as they could no longer be easily identified from heterosexuals based on stereotypical looks and mannerisms. In fact, what came to be viewed as homosexuals masking as masculine, heterosexual men was deemed a direct threat to the masculine male ideal itself. This is because the notion that homosexuals could mask themselves as norm-conforming heterosexual men went directly against the reassuring belief that gay men would necessarily “externalize feminine behavior” (Dumančić, 192). In other words, it was believed that gay

men would outwardly portray feminine attributes and therefore be easily told apart from masculine, heterosexual men. The move by some homosexuals to adopt Cold War ideologies in order to be accepted by mainstream society therefore led to great anxiety because it meant that homosexual men were successfully camouflaging as it were, with the rest of society under the guise of gender normativity¹. As a paradoxical effect of the sociopolitical internalization of the state ideology that Dumančić refers to as the masculine male ideal then, fears and prejudice against norm-nonconforming citizens became intensified as members of the homosexual community began masking their non-conformity by outwardly portraying masculine traits.

As homosexual men began breaking down the gay stereotype and gaining societal acceptance by disguising themselves in masculinity, Dumančić argues that the sociopolitical anxiety related to the topic of homosexuality was intensified. Indeed, he argues that by successfully merging with mainstream society, the perceived threat of homosexuality was all the more dangerous as it could no longer be easily identified and regulated. Specifically, he argues that as homosexuals moved from visible to invisible threats, the topic of homosexuality and communism began mirroring each other. Indeed, the notion of communists planning or executing secret attacks on American government, which was a great concern at the time, intensified the anxieties surrounding the invisible homosexual. Dumančić also emphasizes how this mirroring of perceived threats led to a sense of being surrounded by enemies, as he states that “Cold War paranoia about external Communist enemies and internal homosexual threats closely mirrored and reinforced each other” (192). In other words, the Communist enemies as external threats and the homosexuals as internal threats not only mirrored each other by seemingly being capable of secretly infiltrating American society and politics, but they also intensified each other as the anxiety of invisible threats grew more substantial. Dumančić emphasizes the perceived threat of homosexuals to the masculine male ideal as particularly concerning to Cold War American government in particular, as it threatened an image of a strong, masculine state defense. In short, Dumančić’ presentation of the masculine male ideal emphasizes both the centrality of anxiety within the sociopolitical environment of Cold War America and the particular role that this anxiety would play in the contemporary distortion of the perception of homosexuality.

From an overarching perspective, Cold War ideologies worked as an opposition to the

¹ The effects of Cold War ideologies on America’s homosexual community are addressed in more detail by Loftin (203-205) and Hansen (79-93).

open body movement that Frontain discusses. The accumulation of anxiety that became directed towards homosexuals as a group led to the hostile environment that homosexuals would endure throughout America's Cold War era. Within this context, homosexuality was often hidden and denied in fear of punitive repercussions. This context emphasizes both the transgressive nature of Ginsberg's literary move to open the male body and the mere sociopolitical importance and relevance of this move. In fact, Ginsberg's simultaneous embrace of masculinity and homosexuality makes his literary move of opening the male body particularly compelling. For this reason, I will be applying Dumančić' arguments regarding the relevance of the masculine male ideal to both the homosexuals community of Ginsberg's society and to Ginsberg's opening of the male body to my analysis of "Sunflower Sutra". As established, Dumančić points to idealized masculinity as the primary influence pushing homosexual individuals to mask themselves within general society, and any threat to this ideal induced great societal anxiety. Homosexuals embodying the masculine male ideal induced particular anxiety as they moved from easily detectable to invisible threats. In Ginsberg's poetry we see quite clearly a rejection of Cold War America's restriction of the male body in its unapologetic embrace of the homosexual body in all its dirt and glory, and with an unapologetic merging of homosexuality with virile masculinity.

To explore Ginsberg's literary rejection of Cold War America's restriction of the male body through the lens of the masculine male ideal then, I will return to the section of "Sunflower Sutra" that this chapter has focused its analysis upon. As Dumančić argued, succumbing to the ideologically embedded notion of a masculine male ideal was crucial for gaining acceptance as a homosexual in Cold War America. In what seems a response to this idea, the poem reads "the smoked ashes of some cock cigar [...] wornout asses out of chairs" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). With a sense of virility and vigor, which Dumančić mentions as typical characteristics of the masculine male, Ginsberg professes the exuberant use and offering of the male genitalia and anus in the poem. Using the figurative image of a "cock cigar", the poem suggests the penis should be enjoyed as one would a cigar (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). This metaphor also appears to be a celebratory nod to the, at the time, prohibited act of sodomy. While the poem does not directly reference homosexuality, this interpretation is strongly suggested. For instance, the phrase "wornout asses" alludes to the act of anal sex which was typically associated with homosexuality (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). The fact that these asses are "wornout" also suggests that what is being described is promiscuous relations (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). While already being "wornout" and overused, the asses are still "out of chairs",

suggesting that they are still engaging in sexual relations (Ginsberg, *Howl* 37). This might be a way of showing how strongly Ginsberg wished to push back against the attempted regulation of people's sexuality. Simultaneously, it portrays with which vigor and persistence certain masculine, homosexual men were engaging in what was deemed entirely incompatible with the masculinity ideal of the era. Virility and vigor were specific traits thought to reflect the norm-conforming masculine males. By describing homosexuals as inhabiting the very same traits then, the very idea of an idealized masculine male is clearly being taunted. Indeed, in this poem, the inferred homosexual characters are equally conforming to and rejecting this ideal. The poem's inferred masculine and promiscuous homosexual characters thus serve to taunt the concept of an ideal and inherently heteronormative masculinity, by proudly celebrating its characters' open bodies in spite of societal taboos. In short, "Sunflower Sutra" essentially taunts the masculine male ideal, thus attacking the core of the marginalizing culture and politics of Cold War America.

Chapter 2: Constructed narratives on deviant minds

The central themes of sexuality and madness are not only defining of Beat literature but are presented entirely intertwined in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg. This reflects the interconnectedness of sexuality and madness in the state efforts to regulate deviancy in Cold War America. Homosexuality was deemed a symptom of cognitive, and even physical, deviancy. This chapter will dive deeper into the state's implemented consequences and punishments for being identified as homosexual or otherwise divergent to societal norms. Foucault describes in detail how the issue of sex and sexuality developed from being considered a moral issue, to a medical and psychological issue. Throughout the history of the discourse on sex presented by Foucault however, the main constant is that sex and sexuality has been and remains something to be judged, treated and systematically handled by institutions of power. As this chapter will reveal, Ginsberg's poetry consciously enters into the established discourse on sex, exploring sex and madness from a perspective void of shame and judgement in an aim to change notions of deviancy.

2.1. Challenging the established discourses on sex

To understand the structures behind the discourses on sex that dominated in America leading up to Allen Ginsberg writing his most famous contribution to American literature *Howl*, it is necessary to look at the main defining discourses on sex that have developed within institutions of power since the seventeenth century. Michel Foucault outlines the main developments of the discourses on sex in “The History of Sexuality”, where he argues that these discourses emerged from practices within the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century with the aim of controlling and regulating sex. Specifically, he argues that the discourses on sex originated from the Catholic Church’s practice of confession that not only demanded all bodily sins to be revealed, but which also condemned individuals for their revelations. With the authority and power of the Catholic church however, every good Christian felt inclined to confess to everything relating to what was regarded as sinful desires of the flesh. In the confession, people were encouraged to speak about sex continuously and in incredible detail. In fact, Foucault asserts that an imperative was created as a result of the religious practice’s idealization of confessions of everything relating to sex, which involved that one should not only confess to illicit sexual acts or desires, but one should aim to transform everything relating to sex into discourse. Foucault fittingly describes this development as the beginning of the Western man’s obsession with turning sex into discourse. Thus, the Catholic church’s practice of confession introduced the beginning of a discourse on sex encouraged and systemized by institutions of power.

Paradoxically, although sex was to be spoken about and pursued to its very root in confession, sex was still not to be directly named. In other words, within the regulated discourse on sex initiated by the church, there was a simultaneous silencing and censorship of the topic. Foucault states that this in turn gave rise to societal norms that enforced this regulation of the discourse on sex, as they came to determine not only what words or statements that were deemed socially acceptable, but also where, when and with whom the topic was appropriate to discuss. Particularly interesting is Foucault’s acknowledgement of the authority of the appropriated language pushed by the church. Indeed, by implementing this appropriated language, he argues that sex was “taken charge of” within a discourse that eradicated any possibility for ambiguity, without ever being directly named (1504). This emphasizes another important point made by Foucault, that even within the silences, a certain

discourse is being produced. Within the censoring of sexual discourses, sex was “taken charge of” because certain aspects of sex became illicit and transgressive to discuss (1504).

Simultaneously, the appropriated language being pushed as the accepted mode for discussing sex functioned to steer the discourses on sex in the direction of the Catholic Church’s choosing. The church effectively put themselves in charge of the private sphere that is an individual’s own sexuality and sex life. Using sin and silencing as regulatory forces the Catholic church gained power not only over people’s sexual life, but more importantly, they gained authoritative power over people’s own perceptions of sexuality through the imperative that all relating to sex must be revealed in confession.

While sexuality was largely controlled by the catholic church from the seventeenth century onwards, Foucault asserts that the discourse on sex belatedly permeated the medical institution towards the end of the nineteenth century. At this point, he claims it has become an unavoidable issue for the medical institution to publicly involve themselves in. Indeed, Foucault points out that the medical establishment, which one might expect to be better prepared to take on the topic of sexuality, hesitated to speak up on the issue. He quotes the French medical doctor Auguste Tardieu who announced that he had long hesitated to bring up this “loathsome picture” in his study (1506). While suggesting both an unprecedented moralism and hypocrisy evident in such a statement by a medical professional, Foucault maintains that the essential point is instead the medical institution’s eventual recognition that this hesitation would have to be overcome. Indeed, using the phrasing “loathsome” not only revealed openly the sheer reluctance of the medical institution’s entrance into the discourse on sex, but also their indifference to the notion that their attitude would be publicly recognized (1506). Foucault explains that entering the discourse on sex was unavoidable to the medical institution by this point, which appears to be the only reason they finally obliged to do so. It is interesting to consider this open reluctance because it sent a signal to society that the medical institution feels either uncomfortable or incompetent in handling one of the core human aspects that is sex, while also revealing an inherent negative attitude towards the topic. Thus, as the discourse on sex finally entered the medical institution, a reluctance was publicly overcome, serving as an initial statement on the topic.

In addition to overcoming their reluctance to engage in the discourse on sex, Foucault explains that there was also an expectation for them to deal with the topic publicly while avoiding the moralizing division of illicit and licit sexuality practiced by the Catholic Church. While the church’s judgement of sexuality based on ideas of morality was to be avoided, the

judgement of sexuality continued within the medical institution. The judgement of sexuality merely shifted from a moral perspective to an administrative perspective. Rather than condemning aspects of sexuality however, Foucault maintains that the medical establishment spoke of sex as something to be “managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all [...] sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered” (1506). This point is essential to the discussion of the history of sexuality as it emphasizes the interlinked relation between establishments of power and authority, and sexuality which would continue to develop until our own contemporary time. While sex was certainly accepted as a valid aspect for judging a person’s physical health or normality, it was equally so an aspect considered particularly important to remain under the regulative control of institutions of power. The presumptuous notion that the control of the discourse on sex was for the “greater good of all” reveals a lack of consideration for the individual and sexual freedom (1506). Furthermore, suggesting that sex should be managed in its entirety by an institution of power moves shifts the focus of the discourse on sex from mere judgement to including the aspect of authoritative and invasive control of the individual. In the permeation of the discourse on sex into the medical establishment then, the regulatory force of religious judgement shifted to a secular judgement involving authoritative power and the aim of achieving control over individuals’ thoughts, acts and impulses in terms of sex.

Following the permeation of the discourse on sex into the medical institution, was its subsequent permeation into the psychiatric institution. Foucault argues that with this development of the discourse on sex as becoming a psychiatric issue, came a larger emphasis upon the perceived dangers of deviant sexuality. In the psychiatric institution’s aim at distinguishing such dangerous sexual deviancies, their focus varied anywhere from onanism and frustration, to so-called sexual perversions. Sexual perversions involved all sexual drives and acts that were deemed deviant to the constructed and defined idea of sexual normalcy, meaning monogamous, heterosexual, marital copulation. Combined with a similar development within criminal justice where deviations from the norms regulating sexuality became punishable by the courts, Foucault explains that sexuality became a foundation for determining medical and psychological diagnoses that were to be investigated, regulated and treated. He also points out that sexual deviances such as sodomy, rape and incest were regarded as equal grounds for punishment by the courts. In fact, Foucault maintains that deviant sexuality came to be penalized as “‘heinous’ crimes and crimes against nature” (1510). These phrasings reveal the large degree of judgement that was placed upon

individual's sexual leanings and preferences. In other words, the transition from a religious to a secular regulation of sex did not eradicate the judgement upon individual's sexuality, but merely shifted it from one perspective to another. Furthermore, the insistence of the courts that sexuality deviating from the constructed norms were "crimes against nature" entirely undermines the larger cultural context of sexuality and normalcy (1510). Indeed, it is commonly known today that ideas about sexuality are largely culturally shaped, rather than inherent, natural distinctions. Sticking to a largely narrowed view of sexuality then, the psychiatric establishment and the courts construed sexual deviancy as unnatural and as going against human nature. In the permeation of the discourse on sex into the psychiatric institution then, the issue of sexuality came to be an issue of mental stability or normality, and the judgement upon individual's sexuality was intensified with the threatening repercussions of the courts.

Through these new discourses that developed, from that of the Catholic Church, to that of the medical and psychiatric institutions, Foucault asserts that a new norm of what healthy sexual development should look like was constructed and defined. Furthermore, he states that these new discourses on sex indeed created an increased awareness of the dangers of sex and sexuality. This in turn created even more reason to keep talking about it, Foucault asserts. In fact, he argues that this development, with its subsequent explosive development of discourses on sex led to a shift in focus, from the heterosexual couple to what was construed as deviant sexualities, such as homosexuality. He asserts that while sexually deviant individuals were still certain to be condemned, the sexually deviant were also noticed and listened to for the very first time. Foucault also explains that registers specifically designated for the recording of rules distinguishing between normal and deviant sexuality were established. Thus, sexuality deviating from the defined normative sexuality was more easily recognized from this point onwards. However, sexually deviant individuals becoming more easily identifiable also put them under even greater scrutiny than previously. For instance, the medical institution speculated that homosexuals had abnormal genetic instincts, and labelled homosexuals as sexual degenerates. In fact, Foucault asserts that the homosexual went from being characterized as a proneness to engaging in the act of sodomy, to being viewed as though it was an own species: It "became a personage, a case history, and a childhood [...] a type of life [...] and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (1517). As Foucault asserts, there was no aspect of an individual or their life that was considered unaffected by their homosexuality. This view of homosexuality as an all-

permeating trait of these perceived afflicted individuals emphasizes the constructed view of homosexuality as having to do with a deeply rooted and wrongful drive or nature. More than just a sexual leaning, homosexuality was considered a “type of life” (Foucault, 1957). It was viewed as a behavioral pattern and a personality trait that led an individual to lead a specific kind of lifestyle. Lastly, the suggestion that homosexuality also constituted a biological deviancy, where the anatomy and physiology was assumed to be different to that of a heterosexual individual, suggests the extremity of the medical and psychological institution’s attempts at pathologizing homosexuality. With the development and dispersion of the discourse on sex then, the focus upon certain deviant sexualities such as homosexuality came under even greater scrutiny and therefore came to be increasingly condemned, rather than attaining a wider understanding of such sexualities.

Within Ginsberg’s poetry, elements of the history of the discourses on sex outlined by Foucault are recognizable, although oftentimes this history of institutions of power exercising regulatory power over individuals is rejected or inverted. For instance, the imperative implemented by the Catholic church to put everything relating to sex into discourse is on the one hand upheld, as Ginsberg’s poetry certainly offers a plethora of descriptive passages on the subject. On the other hand, sex is discussed in an entirely different way to that which the Catholic church demanded. The language is direct and accurate in its descriptions as evident already in his first publication *Howl*. For instance, *Howl* contains phrases such as “seeking jazz or sex or soup” where sex is named casually as a part of this descriptive phrase, as opposed to being omitted and silenced as demanded by the Catholic church (Ginsberg, 12). Homosexuality is also openly referenced, such as in “who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly/ motorcyclists, and screamed with joy” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 13). Not only is sex openly and crudely named once again, but furthermore, a deeply rooted notion of homosexuality is being challenged. Rather than succumbing to the notion of homosexuality as deviant and pathological, Ginsberg emphasizes the pleasure aspect of homosexuality. Not only did they enjoy their homosexual encounter, but they also “screamed with joy” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 13). This short phrase alone testifies to Ginsberg’s fundamental rejection of state regulatory measure in terms of individual sexuality, and certainly his rejection of the notion that homosexuality should be associated with shame, be cured or silenced. Indeed, his poetry rather empowers the homosexual along with the outsiders of society more generally by taking charge of his own narrative and entering the discourse on sex.

Rather than succumbing to the established discourses on sex that treats homosexuality

as inferior to heterosexuality, Ginsberg portrays perceived deviancy as transcendent to normality. This reversal of society's deeply rooted hierarchal constructions of sexuality and deviancy more generally is a central aspect of Ginsberg's poetry, where his deviant, mad characters are glorified. For instance, Ginsberg's poetry glorifies the homosexual which was particularly transgressive in its contemporary time where homosexuals were not only exposed to sociopolitical rejection, vilification and pathologization, but even thought to potentially weaken the country and its military by defying American masculinity. Despite the contemporary hostility against those who failed to conform to the norm, Ginsberg's homosexual literary characters are often protagonists and always unapologetic for all that shapes them. The second large and transgressive topic raised often in Ginsberg's poetry is madness. Madness is equally glorified as homosexuality, and often the subjects intertwine as a reflection of how the psychiatric and medical institution dealt with these issues. In "Howl", Ginsberg responds to the view and treatment of madness in contemporary society, and particularly the treatment offered by psychiatric institutions:

“who [...] presented themselves on the
granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads
and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding in-
stantaneous lobotomy,

and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin

Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psycho-
therapy occupational therapy pingpong &
amnesia (*Howl* 18-19)

In these lines, mad characters are described as suicidal and desperate for help, begging for the invasive psychiatric treatment the lobotomy ("lobotomy"). This extreme demand might be emphasising the degree of these people's madness while also illuminating the madness within the very concept of using lobotomies as psychiatric treatment at all. Being denied lobotomies, the poem continues to list all that they were instead offered. Invasive treatments and drugs are listed, ending with "pingpong & amnesia" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 19). The phrasing ping-pong appears to be criticizing how many different medical treatments these patients ended up being shifted between without sufficient grounds ("ping-pong"). Ending the phrase with amnesia

offers insight into the consequences of these invasive psychiatric treatments. Indeed, within this section of “Howl”, the mad characters are portrayed suffering and desperate, and unable to receive appropriate psychiatric help. Consequently, the narrative offers clear criticism of the psychiatric institution by suggesting that they, rather than rehabilitating patients, injures them with lobotomies and amnesia.

Continuing the emphasis upon the consequences of the psychiatric institution’s treatment of the mad, the poem reads:

who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic
pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,
returning years later truly bald except for a wig of
blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible mad-
man doom of the wards of the madtowns of the
East” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 18-19)

The first line describes a dire protest against the psychiatric institution’s treatment of them as patients. The “symbolic pingpong table” appears to refer to either a person or a treatment method that is framed as a singular experience by the borders of a single table, which emphasises the fact that they were put through a list of different treatments. It is also implied that while they succeeded in overturning this “one symbolic pingpong table”, much was still not achieved in terms of the improvement of their general treatment (Ginsberg, *Howl* 18). The poem then reads, perhaps ironically, that these mad proceeded to rest in the state of catatonia. Rather than suggesting rest, catatonia suggests enduring seizures, such as epilepsy (“catatonia”). Seemingly jumping ahead in time, the poem continues by stating the mad has now returned to the psychiatric institution, but this time bloody, crying. The psychiatric institution is now dubbed “the visible mad-/man doom of the wards of the madtowns of the/ East” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 19). This phrase expresses the volume of madness within the psychiatric institutions which again suggests that treatments were unsuccessful and that rather, patients ended up more severely hurt and struggling, and forever returning to the psychiatric institutions when normal life made their own lives impossible to live.

In Ginsberg’s poetry, the established discourse on sex is challenged by reversing the narrative of institutions of power that deviancy should be regulated and treated by state institutions. Indeed, the poem rather provides a narrative illuminating the horrifying

consequences of state institution's medical interventions of mentally ill patients. While institutions of power had a narrowed definition of normal sexuality, Ginsberg explored taboo subjects such as homosexuality, sodomy and even incest. This is particularly evident in his poem "Kaddish" which he wrote about his mentally ill mother, Naomi:

"One time I thought she was trying to make me come lay
her – flirting to herself at sink – lay back on huge bed that
filled most of the room, dress up round her hips, big slash of
hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions,
appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like
hideous thick zippers – ragged long lips between her legs –
What, even, smell of asshole? I was cold – later revolted a little,
not much – seemed perhaps a good idea to try – know the
Monster of the Beginning Womb – Perhaps – that way. Would
she care? She needs a lover." (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 24)

This section of "Kaddish" is incredibly complex as it deals with not only Ginsberg's own sexuality but also his mother's mental illness, his mother's invitation to have sex with her and his own contemplation of accepting the invitation. Furthermore, the female body is not only emphasised in an almost medical manner, noticing body parts and scars from operations and abortions, but it is also turned into an obscure myth containing the "Monster of the Beginning Womb", seemingly referring to the woman's ability to birth children (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 24). Finally, Ginsberg asks himself whether his mother would mind that he lay with her as he concluded that, after all, she needed a lover. In the spirit of the catholic confession, Ginsberg created his very own, self-sufficient confession in "Kaddish" where no priest is asked to forgive his sins, but rather, the reader is invited to witness him turning what the church would call sins into tales of transcendent and revelatory experience. Thus, while confessing to the reader the details of what was likely a highly traumatic event in his own childhood, Ginsberg simultaneously breaks down the barriers that should control and mute such confession within the Catholic church. Indeed, rather than confessing to a priest and atoning for his sins, Ginsberg reveals his experience publicly, openly and without shame. He does not appear to

view is own experience as a sinful act by himself or his mother, but rather views it as some enigmatic occurrence that offers transcendent personal or spiritual revelations.

In sum, Ginsberg's poetry clearly enters the discourse on sex by offering strongly emphasized critique on the way in which cognitive deviancy is attempted regulated and treated by state institutions. The poetry openly discusses topics that are pathologized in the established discourse on sex, with a language that differs largely from that urged by state institutions of power. Indeed, "Kaddish" openly talks about incest revealing Ginsberg's willingness to openly discuss largely taboo topics that are typically associated with wrongfulness and shame. Ginsberg's poetry appears in many ways as an attempt at altering the direction of the discourse on sex. Indeed, the development of the discourse on sex is both acknowledged and reversed within his poetry, while also offering a new way of talking about sex that is void of shame, judgement, and regulation.

As a continuation of the history of sexuality that Foucault describes up to the eighteenth century, Will Stockton argues that sexuality continues to be an aspect of judgement of individuals' psychological normalcy or deviancy in contemporary times. He introduces the term "scientia sexualis" in "Discourse and the History of Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Practice and Queer Theory", referring to the continuous attempt of institutions of power to monitor and discipline individuals based on their sexual leanings (171). Stockton maintains that "scientia sexualis" is what makes up what Foucault calls the established discourse on sex, in that it involves the imperative of putting everything relating to sex into discourse (171). He argues that this is important because the emphasis upon the wide range of discourses on sex that have developed throughout the recorded history of sexuality work to challenge the institutions of power's attempts at establishing unfounded, heteronormative truths about sex. Similarly, he maintains that Foucault's incorporation of psychiatry and psychoanalysis into the history of sexuality is viewed by many queer scholars as effectively undermining the authoritative power of psychiatry and psychoanalysis as institutions of power, to communicate universal and often "heterosexist 'truths' about sex" (172). In other words, Stockton argues that placing psychiatry and psychoanalysis in its historical context within the topic of sexuality denies those institutions their authority to communicate a singular discourse that frames normative sexuality as sexuality conforming to norms of, for instance, heterosexuality. Despite this, Stockton maintains that the act of judging individuals' mental state based on their sexual leanings remains. He concedes with Foucault's argument that the judgement of people's sexuality came under scrutiny in a much wider sense with the secular

appropriation of the topic of sexuality, rather than becoming minimized. In Stockton's view then, the judgement of people's mental state continues to be tied up with sexuality and is only challenged by the insistence of putting the history of sexuality into a larger perspective of discourses that have developed over the past centuries.

Expanding upon the consequences of sexuality being regulated through state institutions of power, Stockton brings in a larger cultural perspective while extending the historical context up to contemporary times to problematize the development of the discourse on sex. As a testament to the current state of the discourse on sex and state institution's regulation of sex, Stockton refers to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Specifically, he points to the fact that while homosexuality was no longer classified as a mental disorder from the year 1973, aspects of sexuality continue to be regulated and pathologized. As examples, Stockton states that individual's identifying with the opposite sex, as well as certain sexual fetishes such as sexual sadism remain pathologized by the DSM. In other words, sexuality remains a means of determiner of psychological deviancy. In Stockton's view, this continuous pathologization of sexuality is based on a wrongful assumption of sexuality from an essentialist viewpoint as being an inherent feature of human beings that can be "analyzed without attention to cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences" (173). It is this, he argues, that has led to contemporary scientists' attempt at finding the so-called gay gene, or of psychoanalysts' attempt at finding the cause of homosexuality as a deviation from normal psychosocial development. Indeed, Stockton maintains that cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences must be considered when dealing with issues of sexuality, such as homosexuality. This is because sexual normalcy is defined in different ways in different societies. It is the constructed societal and ideological norms within each society that determine whether homosexuality is construed as a natural parallel to heterosexuality, or a deviancy from the heterosexual norm. Linguistic differences also play a role in framing sexualities, in that homosexuality, for instance, might be spoken of in derogatory terms within a society that views it as a sexual deviancy, thus enhancing the separation between heterosexual normalcy and deviant homosexuality. In other words, the contemporary judgement of construed deviant sexualities reveals an ignorance to the cultural and linguistic factors that have played, and continue to play, a large role in the construction of the defined sexual norm that limit sexuality in its separation between what society views as normal and healthy, or deviant sexuality.

In light of Stockton's findings on the attempted regulation and judgement on sex and

sexuality, the relevance of the major themes in Ginsberg's poetry is further supported. These findings also emphasize Ginsberg's contribution to the discourse on sex in that he offered a perspective that differed from the established discourse in major ways. Removing shame and judgement, Ginsberg aimed to explore with open-mindedness and to embrace deviancy rather than support society's rejection of it. In addition to challenging the discourse on sex by, for instance, thematizing homosexuality, Ginsberg also challenges the established discourse on sex linguistically. As Stockton established, linguistics plays a large role on society's perception of sex and sexuality. By turning the topic of homosexuality into a conversation about pleasure rather than shame, Ginsberg offers a new linguistic approach to discussing sex and sexuality. These elements of Ginsberg's poetry are particularly evident in *Howl* where he writes:

“who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly
motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim,
the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean
love,
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rose-
gardens and the grass of public parks and
cemeteries scattering their semen freely to
whomever come who may” (13)

These three stanzas are a very clear example of the in which Ginsberg turned the discourse on sex into a celebration of bodies and sexuality. In direct opposition to the notions of the established discourse on sex that deviant sexualities should be rejected, Ginsberg's discourse celebrates homosexual love, sodomy and promiscuity. In terms of linguistics, these stanzas are filled with colloquial terms such as “fucked in the ass”, “who blew and were blown” and “balled” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 13). By maintaining a colloquial tongue on the written page, Ginsberg's poetry comes off as naked and direct. This emphasizes the removal of shame or disguise, sex is celebrated in an open, uninhibited manner in direct opposition to the established discourse on sex. The transgressive nature of Ginsberg's poetry thus stems largely from its thematic opposition to established societal norms aimed at restricting individuals' sexual freedom. While the established discourse on sex upheld by state institutions of power has continued to view sexuality as a marker of cognitive deficiencies, Ginsberg's contribution

to the discourse on sex was and continues to be an important oppositional force to established narratives of shame and judgement.

2.2. Deconstructing cultural perceptions of madness

In “American Scream: Allen Ginsberg’s howl and the making of the beat generation”, Jonah Raskin argues that Ginsberg lived the persona of the madman as a justification for his mad mother. He makes this argument in his discussion of the way in which Ginsberg’s literary work was strongly influenced by both his parents. Raskin states that the influence of his father would have a slightly paradoxical effect in Ginsberg, as he would spend his early writing years deliberately going against the tradition that his father represented for him. Raskin states that Ginsberg’s father represented literary conservatism which provoked Ginsberg to push against this tradition and to expand literary boundaries. In other words, Raskin claims that Ginsberg rebelled not only against his father, but against the boundaries of literature and conservatism. The influence of Ginsberg’s mother on the other hand, was in the form Naomi taking the place as Ginsberg’s mad muse, and representing a fragility that he felt the need to justify, according to Raskin. To achieve this, he states that Ginsberg began taking

“on the persona of the madman. It was his favorite role – the role he played when he wrote *Howl* and when he read *Howl* in public. He was the modern mad poet, speaking for all the madmen and madwomen the world over” (Raskin, 27).

In other words, Raskin argues that the madness which Ginsberg represented in his life and poetry was a constructed persona, and a reflection of the madness in others. On the other hand, Raskin emphasises Ginsberg’s own love for the mad persona and how his representation of madness became a voice for mad people all over the world. Ginsberg embraced the madness in others and lived his own kind of madness as a part of this embrace. In Raskin’s view then, Ginsberg’s poetry would come to be shaped by the way in which he opposed his father and attempted to justify his mother’s mental illness, resulting in a literary embrace of madness.

Although Ginsberg came to represent the embrace of madness, Raskin emphasises that madness was also the cause of childhood trauma for Ginsberg as a result of growing up

witnessing his mother's mental state gradually deteriorating. According to Raskin, Naomi suffered from paranoid schizophrenia which led to episodes such as nervous breakdowns, some of which Ginsberg witnessed in his younger years. Raskin explains that a consequence of witnessing his mother's mental state deteriorating, Ginsberg began contemplating death at young age. Experiences such as his mother attempting to seduce him also led Ginsberg to think about the body to a large degree. Raskin emphasises the experience shared in *Kaddish* where Naomi invites Ginsberg to come lay with her and mentions a reference to a similar scenario in "Howl" where Ginsberg wrote "with his own mother finally fucked" in the first draft which was later changed (qtd. in Raskin 32). Suggesting that this original phrase of "Howl" refers to some inappropriate, sexual scenario having played out between Ginsberg and Naomi, and that it is likely a separate scenario from that mentioned in *Kaddish*, sheds light to Ginsberg's childhood traumas. In fact, Ginsberg's own revision of the poem, removing the reference to his mother all together, suggests that he might have had second thought on the degree to which he felt comfortable revealing certain traumatic childhood experiences. As Raskin explains, it would take time for Ginsberg to be able to talk about and share details of his childhood with Naomi, and even still, many details would never be shared. The very first case of madness that Ginsberg would witness then, was largely destructive and traumatising, and would only be partly revealed in some of Ginsberg's literary works.

Despite the trauma Ginsberg endured while growing up with a mentally ill mother, Raskin explains that Ginsberg would grow up to not only idealize madness, but even long for it. He states that Ginsberg saw madness as a mystery, and as a proof of a person's grand insight. Furthermore, he writes that Ginsberg viewed his mother as too fragile and pure for the cruel world around them and therefore sought some utopia in her mind. In fact, Raskin states that Ginsberg even saw Naomi's madness as something poetic and that, in his view, Naomi's ability to see beyond the material world is what led to her madness. Raskin makes it clear however that madness was a price Ginsberg was more than willing to pay to be able to see the world as his mother, as he saw both cause and consequence as transcendent conditions. In fact, Raskin argues that Ginsberg's perceived notion of universal insight and madness as two sides of the same coin made him long for his own madness so that "he might become a mad poet, a visionary poet" (31). In other words, Ginsberg's embrace of madness was anchored in a belief that madness transcended normalcy, as well as a dream of becoming a certain persona and a certain kind of poet. He wanted to project madness to the world through his poetry that was inspired by the madness that surrounded him, or that he surrounded himself with, his

entire life. Raskin's account of Ginsberg's childhood thus explains not only the root of Ginsberg's fascination with madness, but also highlights the very notions of transcendence that caused him to glorify madness his whole life.

Within both his fascination and fear of madness, Raskin states that Ginsberg learned to cope with its effects in the ways that his father had dealt with his own struggles, by turning it into poetry. Indeed, Ginsberg's father would be his earliest mentor, teaching him to read and write poetry according to Raskin. Most importantly, he would teach Ginsberg to "turn pain into poetry, or simply turn to poetry" (Raskin 36). In other words, Ginsberg's father would teach him the use of poetry as a means of dealing with his pain and difficult experiences. Like his father, Ginsberg would not only begin using poetry as a means of processing his experiences and emotions, but furthermore, Naomi would become a central muse within his poetry. While Naomi is particularly visible within the lines of Ginsberg's poetry then, his father certainly played a large role in the direction of Ginsberg's literary career early on. From this point on, Ginsberg would appear to follow the advice of always turning to poetry in the face of difficulties.

As an extension of Ginsberg's contemplations on madness and the influential significance of turning pain and experience into poetry, Raskin argues that Ginsberg came to see poetry and the youth's refusal to conform to literary or cultural constrictions as the recipe for necessary sociopolitical revolution. He emphasises the effect that the use of atom bombs had had on contemporary society, and perhaps particularly to Ginsberg's generation. Raskin describes it as a terrifying new reality and states that Ginsberg concerned himself to a large degree about the topic of the atomic bomb, both despairing and searching for solutions. According to Raskin, Ginsberg came to the conclusion that the only solution was to be found within creativity and "juvenescent savagery" (68). In other words, Ginsberg saw the solution within the young generation and their disregard for societal and literary limitations. The solution to the current state was to be found within the generation that opposed everything that the current sociopolitical state represented and imposed upon the individual. Raskin also fittingly shares a quote from Ginsberg in his book where he states his belief that all the healthiest citizens were turning into hipsters, drug addicts and poets. This image of what made a healthy citizen certainly clashed with the characterization that general society would likely offer, but it supports fully Ginsberg's argument that contemporary society was in need of juvenescent savagery and their creativity. Madness and poetry would continue to go hand in hand for Ginsberg then, offering to him both comfort and sociopolitical perspectives and

solutions.

Despite Ginsberg's embrace of the madness around him, Raskin states that he would not be able to embrace what he considered his own madness, his homosexual leaning, until years later. Indeed, while Ginsberg's poetry is famously self-revelatory and famous for its depictions of homosexual relations and open male bodies, Raskin asserts that Ginsberg was hiding his own homosexuality until around 1950. Up until then, he states that Ginsberg was writing symbolistic poetry with symbols that were practically indecipherable. This had much to do with the notion that his own homosexuality had to be hidden and disguised from not only society, but even from himself. In fact, in explaining Ginsberg's notion of himself and his homosexuality Raskin writes:

“His own naked self – most of all, his homosexuality – seemed so shocking and so antithetical to social norms that he kept it hidden. It was abhorrent to his own father and terrifying to the conventional part of himself. His only recourse was to smuggle it into his poems, so he disguised his naked self, camouflaged it, and buried it” (73)

This fear of exposing himself and his sexual leaning is an incredibly strong contrast to his later work and openness as a public figure. In fact, it proves an explosive development of self-acceptance and ability to disregard the judgement of others. The almost immediate transition from hiding who he was in fear of judgement to opening his own body and representing the mad and sexually liberated, both as a persona and by applying it as a transgressive and transcendent theme throughout his poetry, is evident in his first literary publication *Howl*. As Raskin describes, *Howl* gives a voice to the mad, the drug addicted, the outsiders of society, the sexually uninhibited and the homosexuals. It is like he at one moment decided to reveal every aspect of humanity as he saw it, and the result was *Howl*. While it may have taken longer to accept the perceived madness in himself than that in others then, Ginsberg's eventual embrace of the Self appeared absolute by the time he published *Howl*.

Ginsberg is described as practically obsessed with the topic of madness through Raskin's descriptions, and as a result, he states that Ginsberg would seek it out both in himself, in others around him, and in the literature he read. As an example, Raskin writes about one of Ginsberg's acquaintances Herbert Huncke who, while sometimes writing poetry, spent most of his time stealing, hustling, and abusing drugs. He explains that Huncke would be influential to Ginsberg in several ways, for instance on the topic of deviant sex and sexuality which Huncke would inform Ginsberg on. Interestingly, Ginsberg even accepted that Huncke would steal from him at times, even though he was not particularly happy about

this behaviour. Raskin describes this as Ginsberg's early realisation that he found the criminal much more interesting than the average, law-abiding citizen. Raskin also writes that Ginsberg began to feel himself "slipping into an inescapable kind of insanity – an insanity he longed for" along with Huncke (83). This phrasing of slipping into insanity depicts the way in which the madness that Ginsberg longed to bask in could just as easily absorb him. This aspect of danger that accompanied madness appears to have been part of what sparked such fascination in Ginsberg. Indeed, Raskin states that the insanity which Ginsberg felt himself slipping into was both inescapable at that point and simultaneously longed for. In other words, Ginsberg acknowledged the danger of madness yet continued to indulge in his fascination of it.

Shortly after Ginsberg experienced madness' threat of consumption, and thus seemingly a consequence of it, Raskin states that Ginsberg was having a very difficult time and his creativity was taking a hit. It appears Ginsberg might have been dealing with some degree of depression as Raskin explains he admitted to Kerouac that he no longer wanted to live yet was not able to take his own life. Instead, he began going to gay bars, Raskin explains, and amid suicidal thoughts and homosexual encounters Ginsberg achieved a clarity of mind that allowed him to gain new perspective upon his creative work. According to Raskin, he came to the realization that his poetry was too impersonal and indirect, using symbols and the voices of others rather than letting his own voice through. This was a breakthrough for Ginsberg because, as Raskin states, he now knew exactly the kind of poetry he wanted to write. Raskin explains that "His goal as a poet was to make his writing an authentic reflection of himself" and, in Ginsberg's own words, to "find a style, a form and a language wholly suited to what I really think" (qtd. in Raskin 84). In other words, Ginsberg's realization that he wanted to write poetry that was "an authentic reflection of himself" required both "a style, a form, and a language" that supported that aim (qtd. Raskin 84). As Raskin explains, it appears that the necessity for a renewal of these elements was arising for Ginsberg, thus marking the very beginning of the literary development that would lead Ginsberg to what is today recognized as Beat poetry. Raskin emphasises that Ginsberg's first publication still was years in the future, yet he implies that Ginsberg was finally on the path that would lead towards the creation and publication of *Howl*. Through Ginsberg difficult period then, his creative struggles would pave way for an entirely new approach to poetic writing.

Following what may be considered a break-through for Ginsberg's writing, Raskin states that Ginsberg would continue to juggle literary expectations with the poetry he aspired

to write. Indeed, Raskin states that the only person who was supporting Ginsberg in his new-found interest in experimenting with form and language was Jack Kerouac. Aside from the support of Kerouac, Ginsberg felt pressured to conform to the norms of poetic writing, which involved preserving the English language and letting through the voices of earlier writers in his own writing. Raskin explains that after another period of struggle in terms of attempting to create the sort of poetry he dreamed of writing while juggling the expectations of him as a writer to conform to tradition, Ginsberg was left with the feeling of a lack of support around him. According to Raskin, he then came to the idea of creating a society of poets like him, who were writing in secret and going against the established norms of literature and society. While he certainly wanted to maintain a sense of form in his poetry, Raskin states Ginsberg wanted to write in “the form of madness, the form of the visionary” (86). In other words, the realization that he wanted madness to play a central role in his poetry was now made. Madness should shape the entire poem, it should determine the form in which all else is presented in the poem. This is a crucial moment in Ginsberg’s literary career because it explains the birth of the madness aspect of Beat poetry more generally, and the importance of madness to Ginsberg and his poetry. In his aspiration to write a new kind of poetry then, Ginsberg left behind conservative expectations of poetic writing and instead began surrounding himself with people that supported his strive towards poetry inspired by madness.

In addition to establishing Ginsberg’s longing for madness, Raskin provides an example from Ginsberg’s life that proves the very length to which Ginsberg was willing to go in order to get one step closer to his madman persona. Raskin states that the whole ordeal was the consequence a car trip Ginsberg took with some friends which ended in an accident in which the driver fled the scene. Ginsberg, seemingly in some condition of shock, went back to his apartment where the police would later show up and find stolen goods that was stored there by his friends. According to Raskin, Ginsberg confessed to all charges and seemingly welcomed the prospect of a suitable punishment for his crimes. He even admitted to using marijuana and to being homosexual, both of which were considered crimes. In the end, Raskin explains that Ginsberg was allowed to serve his punishment in a psychiatric institution, rather than jail, as no criminal charges were made against him. Raskin states that Ginsberg’s reaction to the court’s conclusion was that “he had acted like a madman and now he would be treated like one. ‘The punishment literally fitted the crime’ [Ginsberg] wrote in his journal” (qtd. in Raskin, 90). Ginsberg’s madman persona was taking shape, as he himself stated he was treated like a madman and would serve time in a psychiatric institution with

other mad men and women. Not only did this experience support Ginsberg's longing to become a mad, visionary poet, but it also provided material for several poems, including "Howl", according to Raskin. What this story proves, perhaps more than anything, is that Ginsberg became willing to serve time in an institution for the mentally ill simply because it took him one step close to the creation of his madman persona and madness inspired poetry.

Not only did Ginsberg's experience at a psychiatric institution allow him to come closer to the madness he sought after, according to Raskin it would also provide specific material for Ginsberg's upcoming poetry publication, *Howl*. Specifically, he states that the idea of a mad protagonist, or rather hero, began taking shape during Ginsberg's stay at the psychiatric institution. Furthermore, he states Ginsberg got more familiar with ideas of the madman and madhouses, and that these end up becoming central symbols to Ginsberg as they infused his poem "Howl". Raskin explains that:

"The anonymous hero of *Howl* – the 'who' that appears throughout the first section and that has been 'destroyed by madness' - is an archetypal madman [...] Then, too, in *Howl*, America is an 'armed madhouse'. [...] the madhouse metaphor [...] enabled him to fuse his own persona as a madman with his mother's madness and it infused his poetry with a powerful myth" (92).

This quote by Raskin encompasses all the important ways in which madness would come to shape, and even create the foundation for, Beat poetry such as *Howl*. The madman is described as the "anonymous hero of *Howl*" and as characterized by the fact that madness has destroyed him (Raskin 92). In other words, the madman persona that would enter Beat poetry as the hero of the story was a person struggling to the point of devastation by mental problems. Furthermore, Raskin states that the madhouse became a central metaphor for Ginsberg because he viewed it as a means to combine his own madman person with the madness of his mother, to create "a powerful myth" which Raskin explains would infuse *Howl* as well (92). The use of the madhouse metaphor to describe America is particularly useful in demonstrating its potency in making sociopolitical commentary. The image of America as an "armed madhouse" emphasises the image of madhouses as state organs of force and control, and as capable of being used as weapons (Raskin 92). On the other hand, "armed madhouses" also connotate of the madhouses in themselves having weaponry in the form of invasive treatments (Raskin 92). From a larger perspective however, it becomes evident that madness was truly starting to shape Ginsberg, and as a result, his poetry. From a mad, protagonist hero, to a thematic dedication, madness came to define Ginsberg's poetry in

important ways.

In addition to outlining the progression of Ginsberg's obsession with madness from childhood onwards, Raskin emphasises a particularly crucial point in his life where he would come to the conscious realisation of the danger that madness could pose. Specifically, he argues that Ginsberg's thoughts on madness would move from a subconscious level to a conscious contemplation which would involve a realisation that madness did not fall in just one category. Indeed, Raskin states the Ginsberg would come to realise the gap that existed between what he would come to consider "the good kind of madness and the bad kind of madness, creative madness and self-destructive madness" (152). While, as Raskin has established, Ginsberg would long for a creative kind of madness throughout his life, he would also come to realize the detrimental effects that the self-destructive madness could have on an individual. Indeed, Raskin explains that Ginsberg experienced the suicide of a friend of his shortly before the death of his mother, Naomi. This had him thinking more deeply about madness and led to the poem *Kaddish*. Ginsberg also contemplated the madness of his friend Neal Cassady, concluding that "What seems to have driven him madder than anything else was his own unresolved sexuality. 'My mind is crazed by homosexuality'" (qtd. Raskin, 152). This suggests that Ginsberg saw a particular importance in being true to himself as a reflection of his aim at writing authentic poetry, as to write authentically, he had to come to terms with his homosexuality. Ginsberg's realization that madness could be both a good, creative force and a bad destructive force thus clarified his personal and literary direction, along with the realisation that the authenticity he craved in his poetry demanded complete his acceptance of the Self.

As the madness aspect of his poetry was taking shape, Raskin states that Ginsberg's search of a new form and language that would enable his poetic vision would also begin bearing fruits as he became acquainted with poet William Carlos Williams. He states the two made contact after Ginsberg left the psychiatric institution, which made Williams' view of a writer's literary freedom a particularly powerful thought as a contrast to the constricted existence in the institution. Raskin further explains that Ginsberg would begin to look up to Williams and wanted to write in a similar way to him, however he also wanted to free himself from the "stilted language of the academic world" (102). Ginsberg contemplated and discussed these ideas with Williams, according to Raskin, who would inspire Ginsberg to free himself entirely from what Ginsberg perceived as imposed literary limitations, involving poetic form and language. As Raskin explains, Ginsberg felt that the only way he could reach

the self-expression he strived towards was by moving beyond the restrictive language and form of traditional poetry. Specifically, Raskin states that Williams proclaimed the author's right to "absolute freedom", stating that these words would prove particularly inviting to Ginsberg, indeed they would prove "prophetic", as a contrast to his experience of constricted freedom at the psychiatric institution (103). In other words, Williams' proclamation of "absolute freedom" became a prophecy supporting Ginsberg's mission of a self-expressive and authentic poetry (Raskin 103). Another central piece of the puzzle that would form Ginsberg's Beat style poetry took shape and was coming together with the larger picture of Ginsberg's poetic mission.

Despite Ginsberg's personal and literary progression that steered him towards his vision of a mad, authentic poetry, Raskin states that Ginsberg would hit a new rough period psychologically which once more led him to a creative halt. This time, Ginsberg sought therapy which landed him by a Dr. Philip Hicks. As Raskin explains, Hicks would turn out to play an important role in Ginsberg's personal transformation and in the early developments that would lead to *Howl*. Specifically, Raskin states that Hicks helped Ginsberg overcome his writer's block and to accept himself more fully. As Ginsberg gained a larger acceptance of the self, Raskin explains that Hicks noticed Ginsberg's writing began flowing again. Ginsberg learned to take pride in his own authorhood, and to fully accept his homosexuality, according to Raskin. This allowed him, among other things, to complete the famous Six Gallery reading of *Howl*. Furthermore, Raskin states that Hicks helped Ginsberg deal with his childhood trauma and his fear of falling into self-destructive madness as he had witnessed his mother do. Raskin refers to Hicks who also stated that Ginsberg had a deep-rooted fear of becoming mad in the same way as his mother had done, although Hicks did not share this fear. In addition to the therapy sessions with Hicks, Raskin argues that the writing of *Howl* would itself turn out to be therapeutic experience. Once again, Ginsberg's rough patch would end up proving highly fruitful both to his self-development and to his poetry.

While suggesting that Ginsberg would come to find the writing of *Howl* a therapeutic experience and that he was coming to terms with aspects of himself through psychiatric therapy, Raskin argues that he would still prove his reluctance to entirely exposing himself through the poem's narrative. He supports this argument by stating that, rather than placing himself together with Carl Solomon as mental patients at the madhouse in "Howl", Ginsberg separated himself from that role. Indeed, Raskin argues that Ginsberg took on the role of a doctor working to diagnose Carl Solomon, rather than admitting to having been a patient by

the psychiatric institution alongside him. Indeed, despite having met as patients, Raskin states that Ginsberg never specifically admits to having been a patient at the psychiatric institution himself in "Howl". In fact, Raskin suggests that Ginsberg used Carl Solomon to tell his tale of the experience at the psychiatric institution without openly sharing his own part in that story. According to Raskin, Ginsberg would later come to terms with this literary move himself as "he realized that while he sacrificed Solomon, he simultaneously protected Naomi" (156). Raskin also adds a quote from Ginsberg who explains what had, seemingly subconsciously, provoked his actions: "I'd used Mr. Solomon's return to the asylum as occasion for a masque on my feelings toward my mother, in itself an ambiguous situation since I had signed the papers giving permission for her lobotomy" (qtd. in Raskin, 157). In other words, it appears that in Ginsberg's struggle to come to terms with role he had played in Naomi's lobotomy, he struggled to position himself within the narrative of madness as he wrote "Howl". Raskin explains that this explanation was given by Ginsberg in 1986, placing his explanation 30 years after *Howl* was published. It appears evident that there were emotionally potent reasons as to why Ginsberg felt the need to write about madness publicly through another person's perspective in his poetry. Furthermore, these renderings emphasise the centrality of Naomi in the depth of both Ginsberg's fascination with madness, and his fear of it.

What becomes particularly evident through Raskin's rendering of Ginsberg's life and dealings with madness both the centrality of his mother Naomi, as well as the amount of time and effort that Ginsberg would need to spend to achieve a complete acceptance of himself. Naomi was the cause of Ginsberg's childhood trauma from witnessing her breakdowns and mental deterioration, as well as becoming a central figure within Ginsberg's glorification and justification of madness. By seeing his mentally ill mother as someone having achieved grand, visionary insight and containing a sensitivity that rendered her too fragile for this world, madness became a poetic myth of transcendent wisdom and creativity. On the other hand, she represented the self-destructive kind of madness that would cause Ginsberg to come particularly wary of ending up in the same state. During Ginsberg's journey towards achieving the creative madness he idealized, Raskin emphasises how Ginsberg's own inability to accept himself would come to the surface as a creative block, stopping him from fulfilling his poetic vision. Indeed, as Raskin stated it would take psychiatric therapy for Ginsberg to develop a larger acceptance of himself and regaining his creative flow. Within his embrace of madness and continuous hunger for new mad impulses then, Ginsberg discovered a reluctance to truly accept himself amid memories of the madness that progressively consumed his

mother throughout her life.

In large opposition to Raskin's perception of Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness as a glorification and embrace, Loni Reynolds argues that rather, Ginsberg uses deviant characters in his poetry as spectacles to the reader's gaze. Specifically, in "The Mad Ones and The Geeks": Cognitive and Physical Disability in the Writing of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg" she explores Ginsberg's portrayal of cognitive disability in his poem "Kaddish", arguing that the literary representation of cognitive madness is objectifying and renders Naomi the spectacle of the narrative. In order to pursue the reasonings behind this central argument, Reynolds pushes the importance of establishing the normativity of Ginsberg himself, as a contrast to the way in which disability is being represented and interpreted in his literary work. Aiming to reconsider Ginsberg's own outsider identity then, she agrees that his homosexuality and drug use did position him as somewhat of an outsider to society, while emphasising that he remained far more normative than his mad literary character Naomi. She points to his position as a white, formally educated man as characteristics separating him from the truly deviant or non-normative characters that he wrote of. Another important element to have in place before we diver deeper into the presented argument of Reynolds, is the theory she uses in this discussion. She presents her paper as an analysis of the depiction of cognitive disability in Ginsberg's literary work "from the perspective of disability theory: defines disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social injustice" (qtd. Reynolds, 154). This information is relevant as it emphasises the fact that cognitive disability is considered the consequences to an individual suffering from social injustice, rather than being attributed to the individual as an inherent shortcoming. There is a certain grace in this perspective, and it seemingly relates to the way in which cognitive disability was portrayed in Beat poetry as well.

Reynolds's particular aim is to explore whether the Beats' representation of cognitive disability functions empowering or marginalizing to their cognitively disabled literary characters. In her discussion, she refers to the freak shows of the 1940s that used to display physically disabled individuals as spectacles for the purpose of entertainment. She states that after 1940, the freak shows were no longer considered appropriate entertainment and disabled individuals instead became medicalized and institutionalized. Reynolds explains that these freak shows served two main functions, firstly as a display of difference that "reassured viewers of their normalcy" and secondly as "safe spaces for viewers to identify with difference" (155). In other words, the freak shows enhanced the gap between normativity and

outsiderdom by displaying individuals exhibiting physical deviancy as a means for normative individuals to reassure themselves and cope with notions of deviancy. While these freak shows went out of fashion, Reynolds argues that a new need for the freak show would arise as the second World War and the various “bodily horrors” that was inflicted upon individuals in the twentieth century was causing an increasing sense of “anxiety around embodiment and able-bodiedness” (156). In other words, there was an increasing sense of threat to normativity and able-bodiedness as soldiers would return injured from the war and news of horrific treatments of humans became known. Reynolds argues that this development demanded an outlet of anxiety which was ultimately filled by the Beat author’s resurrection of the freak show within their literature.

As the Beat writers resurrected the freak show in their literature, Reynolds argues that once again an audience was invited to observe the freakshow’s portrayal of deviancy in order to deal with their own relationship to deviancy. Specifically, she states that the Beat writers would identify themselves with their deviant characters to some degree but that the reader also gets the chance to get “a rare glimpse of the Beat writer taking on the normative position, defining himself against the ‘freaks’ he claims to represent and encouraging the reader to do the same” (Reynolds 156). In other words, Reynolds argues that there are aspects of Beat literature in which the writers essentially reveal themselves in taking on a normative position that allows them to emphasise fundamental differences between themselves and their deviant characters. Not only does she suggest that the Beat writers took this position in terms of their deviant literary characters, but she suggests that the reader is also encouraged to take on this same perspective and recognize themselves as normative in comparison to the deviancy of the literary characters presented. In Reynolds’ view, this proves that the literary portrayal of deviancy ended being equally problematic to the physical freak shows, in that the deviant characters become exploited for the sake of the narrative. Despite their aim at portraying madness in a positive manner then, Reynolds argues that the depiction of the Beat writer’s deviant characters still produces problematic results.

In the case of Allen Ginsberg’s poetry, Reynolds argues that cognitive disability is portrayed as an alternative to normativity and mainstream experience. She acknowledges that Ginsberg did have personal experiences of madness both in terms of his mentally ill mother and his own experience of being institutionalized. She also states that in important ways, Ginsberg does achieve a positive representation of Naomi within the narrative’s elaboration on her mental condition. Despite this, she maintains that ultimately, Ginsberg’s “taboo-

breaking openness renders her as a freakish spectacle” (Reynolds 165). In other words, Reynolds suggests that because of Ginsberg’s disregard for societal taboos and unrestricted openness in terms of Naomi’s life and suffering, Naomi is rendered a “freakish spectacle” regardless of the author’s intents of a positive portrayal and glorification of the madness it depicts (165). This plays into the arguments made by Garland-Thompson that Reynolds presents in her paper, that emphasize the function that female bodies had in the original freak shows where their bodies became exhibited as “grotesque icons of deviant womanhood” (qtd. Reynolds, 165). In Reynolds’ view, this statement is largely representative of the way in which Naomi is presented in “Kaddish”. Specifically, she argues that “Kaddish” lacks awareness of the implications of the poem’s exposure of Naomi. In Reynolds’ view then, Ginsberg’s “Kaddish” fails to offer a just representation of its deviant literary character Naomi primarily because of the poem’s revelatory nature.

In her discussion of the consequences of Ginsberg’s portrayal of Naomi, Reynolds argues that rather than madness entering the foreground, it is Naomi’s body that becomes the central focus of “Kaddish”. Specifically, she argues that Naomi’s body is emphasized in its opposition to the concept of the ideal female body which would encompass aesthetic beauty and maternal qualities. Instead, Reynolds suggests that Naomi’s body is presented in a medical manner as wounds and scars of operations are emphasised. Furthermore, she argues that each aspect of Naomi’s body that becomes emphasised in “Kaddish” relates to its abnormality and is described as if they are not a natural part of her body. She states that Naomi’s body is “laid bare to the gaze of the reader; as a compendium of fractured pieces, it is objectified, denied integrity” and that to find redemption she must “be identified with the male authorial voice, the non-disabled, and the traditionally feminine (Reynolds 166-167). In other words, Reynolds argues that Naomi’s body is portrayed as void of any innate integrity in the narrative’s emphasis upon the collection of broken, abnormal pieces of her physical self that are objectified and sacrificed to the reader’s gaze. In clearer terms, she suggests that Ginsberg reduced Naomi to a freakish object of the narrative for the reader’s gaze to feast on. Furthermore, Reynolds suggests that no redemption is offered to Naomi lest she succeeds in encompassing the demands of the male authorial voice and the normative, feminine ideal. In other words, Naomi is denied redemption in her own state, and must conform to societal expectations to be granted her redemption in the end.

Functioning as a contrast to the way in which Naomi is portrayed through the authorial voice of “Kaddish”, Reynolds discusses certain phrases by Naomi that have been included in

the poem. She states that these quotes of Naomi were affirmations of herself as a good woman, a mother, and a nurturer. In other words, Naomi herself would attempt to assimilate to the feminine ideal. In reaction to these attempts, Reynolds states that Ginsberg, as the narrating voice of the poem, would emphasise Naomi's limitations rather than encourage her attempts at assimilating. As a specific example, Reynolds mentions the section of "Kaddish" where Naomi is described as vain because she aims to emphasise her lips by using lipstick. This action by Naomi was a clear assimilation towards the feminine ideal in Reynolds view, yet she suggests that "Naomi cannot transcend her status as cognitively disabled spectacle; the authorial voice limits her potential to break down gender boundaries or to conform to them" (167). In other words, Ginsberg's authorial voice as he labels Naomi as vain for applying lipstick, works to deny her the chance of escaping the narrative's reduction of her as a "disabled spectacle" (167). In Reynolds view then, Naomi rejects her own role as the deviant spectacle of "Kaddish" but is refused any opportunity to escape her deviant role by the authorial voice of the poem.

It is useful to include Raskin's emphasis upon Ginsberg's personal experiences with destructive madness, and his separation of this from creative madness, in the deconstruction of Reynolds' argument that Naomi is entirely reduced to a spectacle in "Kaddish". Specifically, it is useful to consider the narrative of "Kaddish" in light of Ginsberg's conscious relationship to the difference between destructive and creative madness. The deterioration of Naomi's mental state which is depicted in "Kaddish" is particularly evident in the section where Ginsberg's authorial voice describes that Naomi would often walk around naked in the house, stating that it would make narrator notice her smells while uncomfortably trying to avert his gaze. This creates a tense atmosphere with the inuendo of a sexualized Naomi intruding upon her son. On the following stanza, Naomi's body and sexually inappropriate behaviour towards her son is described in much larger detail. Ginsberg writes about how Naomi was "flirting to herself at sink [...] dress up round her hips, big slash of / hair" (24). The image depicted of Naomi in this stanza is that of an irrational, erratic and perhaps wicked mother. Naomi flirting with herself indicates that she is not in her right mind. Within the narrative's emphasis upon Naomi's mental state lies an important authorial defence of her character. Indeed, by declaring Naomi's insanity she becomes a victim to her mental illness as the narrative depicts her slowly being consumed by its symptoms. Indeed, the narrative of "Kaddish" can be interpreted as depicting the linear development of Naomi's mental illness. What begins with an uncomfortable situation that suggests that Naomi would

often behave in an inappropriate manner around her son escalates to more severe behaviour. It is once the revelation is made that Naomi invited her son into bed that she appears for the first time to be consumed entirely by her madness. In this depiction of Naomi's mental illness, the severe damage it has on the individual is thus exposed, as her madness is ultimately portrayed as consuming her entirely.

Rather than reducing Naomi to a spectacle then, Naomi functioning partly as a spectacle in the narrative arises from Ginsberg's attempt at revealing the detrimental consequences of self-destructive madness. In his revelation of that he is aware of the detrimental consequences that madness can have, he brings in a larger perspective and notion of caution in his embrace and glorification of madness. As Raskin explained, Ginsberg grew up watching his mother being slowly consumed by her mental illness, leaving traumas and a need for therapy to move past his fear of falling victim to the same disease as her. Despite this, Ginsberg continued to chase after and glorify madness in his poetry, and as his literary persona, viewing it as transcendent to normalcy and as a creative and poetic quality. In other words, the separation between self-destructive madness and creative madness is as clearly depicted in his poetry as it became in his real life. Even in *Howl* there are literary characters depicted in their suffering at the hand of madness, often in terms of drug induced madness. The element of the spectacle is important then, as it is a part of Ginsberg's aim to depict the true image of what madness might look like, and how it might affect the individual. Naomi partly serves the function of a spectacle in "Kaddish" as a reflection of Ginsberg's personal experience growing up with a mentally ill mother, yet she is not reduced entirely to this function.

Contrary to Reynolds' argument, I argue that Ginsberg rescues Naomi from the threatening objectification of her as a mere spectacle. Specifically, he retrieves her humanity within his authorial embrace of Naomi, emphasising the way in which the world had caused her to suffer:

"a telegram from Gene,

Naomi dead –

Outside I bent my head to the ground under the bushes

near the garage – knew she was better –

at last – not left to look on Earth alone – 2 years of

solitude – no one, at age nearing 60 – old woman of skulls –
 once long-tressed Naomi of Bible” (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 31)

This paragraph describing how Ginsberg received the news of Naomi’s death offers depicts his compassionate embrace of his mother. He writes that he “knew she was better” after finding out she had died, suggesting that he knew how much she had suffered while she was alive (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 31). He also writes that she was no longer “left to look on Earth alone”, suggesting she had seen the world in a way that others were not able to (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 31). As Raskin wrote, Ginsberg believed his mother was visionary and poetic in her madness, or rather, her ability to perceive this grand vision led to her madness. Ginsberg also describes that Naomi had spent the last two years in complete solitude, suggesting a sentimentality over the fact that she had become so isolated due to her condition. Lastly, he describes her as having become “old woman of skulls” while recognizing all she once was, such as “long-tressed Naomi of Bible” (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 31). Death has reduced her to bones, yet the memory of a poetic, spiritual being remains, partially through his memories of her reading the Bible. This whole stanza is filled with compassionate embrace of Naomi in all her form. This shows that Ginsberg’s aim was not to reduce his mother to a spectacle, but rather, to show the degree to which she would suffer at the hands of a sickness that gradually consumed her mind.

The literary defense of Naomi goes beyond the sentimentality that lies within an exposure of her suffering, in fact “Kaddish” portrays Ginsberg’s glorification of madness within the same narrative that exposes its potential consequences to the individual. As Raskin explained, Ginsberg viewed madness as visionary, poetic and transcendent to normality. To show the way in which Ginsberg’s literary freakshow paid tribute to and glorified madness, I want to look again at the section of “Kaddish” which describes Naomi’s naked body:

“big slash of hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions,
 appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like
 hideous thick zippers – ragged long lips between her legs –
 What, even, smell of asshole? I was cold – later revolted a little” (Ginsberg, 24)

These lines clearly show what Reynolds argued reduced Ginsberg’s characters to mere spectacles in that Naomi appears reduced to her scars from operations. Furthermore, the description of her “ragged long lips between her/ legs” and “smell of asshole” can certainly be

interpreted as serving a spectacle-function, in that the reader become a spectator to Naomi's scars, wounds, genitals and even smell as she is portrayed blotting her naked body to her son (Ginsberg, *Kaddish* 24). While this example largely plays into Reynolds argument that Naomi is being reduced to a spectacle offered to the reader's gaze, she is not entirely reduced to this function. Indeed, her humanity is equally emphasized in the poem, and Ginsberg's embrace of her madness in all its form is also evident. Already in the following lines reading "seemed perhaps a good idea to try – know the/ Monster of the Beginning Womb" Ginsberg treats Naomi's erratic behavior as reasonable by even considering her proposition (*Kaddish* 24). Rather than condemning her acts he responds in an almost neutral manner, contemplating his response to her irrational invitation. By treating Naomi as reasonable, even in the moments she appeared the most clouded by her mental illness, Ginsberg successfully projects his embrace both of Naomi and of madness more generally.

Throughout "Kaddish", Ginsberg proclaims his embrace of Naomi which frees her from being reduced to her mental illness in the narrative, even in the sections where she is subjected to particularly graphic descriptions. Indeed, Ginsberg even positions himself proudly alongside her in "Kaddish" with phrases such as: "(mad as you) – (sanity a trick of/ agreement)" (13). Ginsberg calling himself as mad as Naomi removes any distance between her and himself, signifying his embrace of her entirety while protecting her integrity throughout the poem. Furthermore, the statement that the notion of sanity is a mere "trick of agreement" sets a premise for understanding the portrayal of madness throughout "Kaddish" (Ginsberg 13). Indeed, it replaces the entrenched idea of madness as having to do with medicalization and diagnostics with the idea that sanity is merely an inconsistency to the culturally constructed and agreed upon framework of what normality looks like. This renders madness equally so a mere culturally constructed concept. By establishing the premise that sanity and madness are intangible, cultural, social and political constructs, the narrative is freed from the reader's inclination to diagnose its characters or medicalize the narrative of madness.

As established, Ginsberg framing himself as equally mad to Naomi helps him emphasise the premise that madness is a mere social construct, but it also works as a contrast to Raskin's argument that Ginsberg would take on a diagnosing role over Carl Solomon in "Howl". In fact, Raskin's argument that Ginsberg took on a diagnosing role in "Howl" rings similar to Reynolds' argument that Ginsberg reduced Naomi to her mental affliction in "Kaddish". In both arguments, there is an implied distancing between Ginsberg's authorial

presence in the poems and his literary characters. Some sections of “Kaddish” might support some degree of distancing between Ginsberg’s authorial presence in the poem and Naomi, for instance in the section describing Naomi’s naked body in which Ginsberg participates in the events graphically depicted primarily as a spectator. Throughout the description of Naomi’s behavior, he describes his own thoughts and observations of Naomi without ever admitting to his own actions. In other words, it is merely the erratic behavior of Naomi that is in focus, Ginsberg never actively engages nor actively disengages from what happens. On the other hand, the fact that Ginsberg provides such a detailed description of Naomi’s body with “dress up round her hips, big slash of hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions, appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like hideous thick zippers – ragged long lips between her legs” proves his engagement within the narrative (*Kaddish* 24). Rather than averting his gaze as he described himself doing in the end of the previous stanza, he appears to have been analyzing Naomi’s body as she pulled up her dress and invited him to bed. As previously established, he also reveals his contemplations regarding her invitation to lay with her. As Ginsberg admits to having considered Naomi’s proposition without feeling particularly revolted by the notion, his own part in the scenario appears almost as delusional, or mad, as his mother. He contemplates the consequences of engaging in his mother’s deranged idea of intimate relations with her son proving his participation in the mad ideas of his mother and simultaneously disproving the theory that he reduces Naomi to a spectacle by taking on a normative position. Rather than reducing her to a mad spectacle, he practices the values behind the premise he set at the beginning of the poem, that madness is merely an opposition to the socially constructed notion of sanity. Rather than following such constructs, he actively engages with Naomi in an attempt at acknowledging her humanity free from derogatory labels. Ginsberg removes any distance between himself and Naomi in “Kaddish” and, in doing so, ultimately portrays his authorial self and Naomi as equally mad.

Chapter 3: Poetry void of restrictive cultural taboos

This thesis has established central perspectives on Ginsberg’s literary portrayal of sex and madness, as well as establishing important elements of their historical and contemporary context. The final chapter will firstly explore the significance of central arguments highlighted in the first two chapters and their comparative relevance. Secondly, I will be introducing the

theory of cultural taboos and establishing its relevance to the general research on this field, as well as its relevance to Ginsberg's aims and the literary effects of his portrayal of sex and madness. I will show that in his deliberate disregard of central cultural taboos, Ginsberg establishes a literary space void from restrictive societal structures.

3.1. Establishing a comparative perspective

In Black's discussion of the initial reactions to Ginsberg's *Howl*, the obscenity trial and subsequent public trial that followed, the topic of censure comes to the forefront. He stated that references to sex and drugs were the main reason for the obscenity charges against *Howl*. In court, the prosecution relied on defaming the work by emphasizing the references to sex and drugs and disregarding all other elements of the poems. The legal defence countered the defamation tactic by highlighting the redeeming social importance of *Howl* which brought the publication under the protection of America's First Amendment law regarding the freedom of speech. Despite the court ruling that *Howl* fell under the right of free speech, Black states that what he calls a public trial would continue the object to the publication based on the original obscenity charges. While Black asserts that the public trial proved unsuccessful in their aims at removing *Howl* from the public domain, it is interesting to consider the underlying implications of the public trial. Black himself rephrases the public trial as a "public censure" which clarifies the objective of this oppositional movement (38). Unsatisfied with the state's stance on the censoring of *Howl*, oppositionists organized themselves in an aim at taking public censoring into their own hands. To speculate based on the sociopolitical context that this thesis has established, cultural norms and state ideologies are likely underlying the oppositionists' reaction to the references to sex and drugs in *Howl*. While Black has restricted the scope of his paper to the initial reactions to *Howl* in the 1950s, it does raise issues that might likely remain today to some degree.

Woods widens the context outlined by Black by establishing scholarly criticism that has continued to shape interpretative opinions on *Howl*, and other work by Ginsberg. He states that the references to sex in Ginsberg's poetry has continued to be criticized, primarily due perceptions of these references as having to do with an authorial boasting of sex and particularly homosexuality. This highlights once again the culturally anchored unease that Ginsberg's literary sexual references has continued to face to different degrees, and in different contexts. Indeed, both groups of the general public as well as members of the

academic world have been presented by Black and Woods as experiencing unease with the contents of Ginsberg's literary work. Having established a line of criticism that has been upheld in terms of Ginsberg's literary work, Woods asserts his aim at proving that this criticism is unfounded. Indeed, he states that contrary to the established belief of some scholars that Ginsberg refers excessively to sex and sexuality, his poetry is instead largely restrictive in such references. In other words, rather than containing an unnecessary abundance of sexual references, Woods claims Ginsberg's poetry is highly restrictive on the topic of sex from an autobiographical perspective. In his view, coming of age and discovering one's own homosexuality would surely justify a much larger literary emphasis than what it received in Ginsberg's poetry. Aside from reflecting aspects of Ginsberg's life, Woods states that sexual references would also prove a lens through which Ginsberg highlighted sociopolitical issues, and that sex would even turn into a personal sort of politics for Ginsberg. In his own sexual politics, Woods states that Ginsberg would explore his own sexuality and perspective on sex in an aim at achieving an impartiality towards sex and love that moved beyond physical desires. Most importantly however, Woods concludes that the sexual references included in Ginsberg's poetry are a testament to his success in composing the poetry he idealized, one that is self-revelatory and authentic to the human experience.

Applying Woods' arguments to an interpretive reading of "Sunflower Sutra" I was able to identify the organic way in which sexual references organically infuses Ginsberg's poetry, establishing both the poem's autobiographical aspects and its potency in executing sociopolitical critique. Specifically, I found evidence of Ginsberg's references to the contemporary American politics that aimed to restrict sexual freedom. In line with Woods' argument that Ginsberg's poetry is in fact restrictive on the topic of sex, I found that the poem's utilization of sexual references offered a wide interpretative foundation entirely separate to the topic of sexual relations. Indeed, "Sunflower Sutra" has a serious and almost ominous atmosphere throughout the poem which emphasises the gravity of the topic that the poem is discussing. More specifically, the poem intertwines bodily references with references to dirt and machinery which clearly undermines the notion that sex and sexuality are included in the poem for the purpose of boasting. Rather, the references are highly thought-provoking and pushes the reader to look beyond the sexual or bodily aspects of these references. In fact, I found that the sociopolitical critique stood much stronger in this poem than the autobiographical tendencies did. Rather than referring to the personal experiences of the poet, sexual and bodily references appeared to be used as a lens to view the world through, to

illuminate certain aspects of the human experience and the human influence on nature. Through this lens, the filth and vulgarity of the mechanical world come to the forefront. Indeed, Ginsberg describes a dark, dusty, mechanical world with a sense of discomfort and dislike. Despite this, Ginsberg's focus throughout the poem remains at the beauty of the sunflower that grows and thrives despite its surroundings. By intertwining humanity with the nature polluted by the smut and dirt of humanity's industrial developments, thought provoking sociopolitical critique and a foundation for ecocritical studies are established, while Ginsberg's own sexuality or sexual experiences are entirely void from the poem's narrative.

Frontain extended upon the authorial aims and effects of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references in his poetry, suggesting that the poetry's most transgressive references were part of Ginsberg's deliberate rebellion against restrictive societal structures. Society's hierarchal, constrictive structures refer to the power of societal norms, as an extension of state ideologies, to push a defined norm to general society. Individual's ability to conform would determine their hierarchal position in society. Hierarchal societal structures would for instance position heteronormative men portraying traditionally male characteristics above homosexual men in this social hierarchy. Similarly, cognitive normality was placed above cognitive deviancy. In other words, deviants to the established sexual and cognitive norms were deemed the lowest on the societal ladder in Ginsberg's contemporary society. The restrictive nature of these hierarchal social structures has to do with the societal pressure of conforming to established norms. In other words, all members of society are encouraged to pertain to the same ideals and values, rejecting any aspect of themselves that does not conform.

Within Frontain's argumentation that Ginsberg's poetry was a deliberate rebellion against contemporary society's restrictive, hierarchal structures, Ginsberg's literary rebellion against society's attempted closing of the male body is particularly emphasized. Specifically, he argues that Ginsberg utilizes grotesque realism in his poetry to open the male body. He argues that the opening of bodies in a society that aims to restrict individuality is a highly transgressive move as it is a direct opposition to societal norms and expectations. The male being perceived with inherent power through society's patriarchal structure, sodomy and male anality is emphasized by Frontain as the most transgressive literary references in Ginsberg's poetry. Indeed, Frontain states that male anality was considered a man's renunciation of the power attributed to him through the patriarchy, as well as a direct opposition to established cultural norms. Furthermore, sodomy celebrated sexual pleasure for its own sake, opposing the established cultural value of the nuclear family, and the norm of sexual intercourse as

primarily a means of reproduction. Through his homoerotic references and naked male bodies then, Frontain argues that Ginsberg broke down the societal restrictive structures that aimed to repress the male body.

Frontain emphasises grotesque realism as a central literary move implanted by Ginsberg in order to achieve his sociopolitical critique of Cold War American society and to break down society's repressive and hierarchal structures. He explains grotesque realism as a lowering of the abstract and ideal to the level of the material and bodily. Rather than writing directly on the topic of sexual freedom or constrictive societal structures, Ginsberg revealed and opposed these sociopolitical issues through a literary emphasis on body parts, homosexuality, and sexual pleasure according to Frontain. As a part of Ginsberg's utilization of grotesque realism, Frontain emphasises the way in which Ginsberg makes his readers face bodily dirt. He argues that this particular move was part of Ginsberg's aim at pushing a complete acceptance of the Self and one's humanity. Specifically, he argues that Ginsberg presented bodily dirt and taboo, intimate body parts in a narrative void of shame or hierarchal views on aspects of the human body to remove the aspect of shame commonly connected with bodies. In other words, in Frontain's exploration of Ginsberg's opening of the male body and utilization of grotesque realism in his poetry he finds that the poetry becomes a potent sociopolitical commentary while simultaneously attempting to push an acceptance of the body that values all bodily aspects equally. Interestingly, the hierarchal perception of the human body seemingly remains today. Considering that sexual organs are generally taboo to discuss or show in public, whereas the face or hands are acceptable, there is foundation for more research into the underlying structures behind this notion, and their prevalence in modern society. Outside of potential contemporary relevance, Frontain asserts that Ginsberg's poetry had a largely sociopolitical aim that was executed primarily in its transgressive sexual references.

Applying Frontain's argument to "Sunflower Sutra" further proved Ginsberg's opposition to society's attempted closing of the male body in his emphasis upon the detrimental consequences to the restriction of men's sexual freedom. I also found that Ginsberg particularly emphasised the way in which individuality is strongly connected to the physical bodies in the open body movement, as he emphasises the human need for individual freedom and for humanly connection. I also found that Ginsberg utilized grotesque realism in a way that illuminated his personal stance against society's attempts at repressing homosexuality. One particularly potent stanza of "Sunflower Sutra" intertwine humanity with

machinery which offered a very specific view of human society. Indeed, Ginsberg appears to portray people who have merged with societal expectations as operating in a mechanical manner, blindly following society's demands. This functions as a very clear stance against the anti-individuality pushed by contemporary Cold War American society. By using grotesque realism to discuss the importance of individuality and the lack thereof in general society removes any element of idealism or condensation from the narrative. Grotesque realism also effectively reveals certain societal structures by reframing intangible societal notions as physical manifestations. Lastly, I looked at the poem's references to Ginsberg's aim of pushing an embrace of the Self and physical body. In my interpretation, "Sunflower Sutra" offers an analogy in which humanity is compared to a sunflower that grows into its beautiful physical form despite its dirty and mechanical environment. While on the one hand, connotating the effects of industrialization upon nature, the poem might also be comparing the sunflower to the parts of society that did not conform to the norm. In this scenario, the outsiders of society are depicted as thriving despite their hostile external environment. In both interpretations however, grotesque realism is central to the poem's depictions of a sunflower reaching bloom against the odds.

Expanding upon the restrictive societal structures discussed by Frontain, I referred to Dumančić' discussion of the masculine male ideal. He argued that the masculine male ideal was a core state ideology and implanted societal value that shaped the way in which men were expected to look and behave. The stereotype of homosexual men was the direct opposition to the masculine male ideal as they were expected to inhabit feminine traits and mannerisms. While homosexual men were viewed as a threat to the masculine image of America in a time of political tension, a new concern would take over as homosexual men seeking societal acceptance began building their looks and identities to fit into the masculine male ideal. This birthed the view of homosexuals as invisible threats, mirrored by the invisible threat of communism. This caused the anxiety regarding homosexuality to grow substantially, causing an even more hostile environment for homosexual individuals. Exploring the role of the masculine male ideal in Ginsberg's poetry, I found that Ginsberg appears to be deliberately taunting the masculine male ideal. In "Sunflower Sutra" there a several phrases referencing aspects of homosexual pleasure, such as sodomy. He also appears to be referencing promiscuous sexual relations that has commonly been associated with gay communities, seemingly rejecting society's attempted regulation of sexuality. These references to homosexual pleasure are juxtaposed with the masculine characterisations intertwined within

this sexual narrative. This juxtaposition of homosexual pleasure and masculinity taunts the masculine male ideal because Cold War ideology considered homosexuals as inherently feminine and thus as a direct threat to this ideal. The homosexual characters of Ginsberg's poetry equally conforming to and rejecting this ideal then, its very legitimacy comes into question. Furthermore, by combining the criteriums constituting the ideal masculine male with homosexuality, Ginsberg's poetry disproves Cold War gay stereotypes while threatening the attempted sociopolitical segregation of society as he encompasses the invisible threat in his narrative.

The second chapter, aimed at the exploration of Ginsberg's portrayal of madness, highlighted important ways in which sexuality and madness is intertwined in his poetry, as a reflection of societal notions of sexuality and madness. Foucault's "The History of Sexuality" provided a useful insight into the development of the discourse on sex from the seventeenth century onwards. This development is relevant because it provides insight into what has shaped the foundation of the discourse on sex that was prevalent in Ginsberg's time and which he arguably attempted to reform in his poetry. While Foucault goes in depth on each influential period on the discourse on sex, the overarching developments move from the church's use of sin and confession, the attempted medicalization and systematic management of sex by the medical institution, and finally the impact of the psychiatric institution which would use sex to form opinions on a person's cognitive abilities. What remains consistent is the judgement and attempted regulation and control of people's sexuality by institutions of power, and the way in which they have had the primary influence upon the development of the discourse on sex. Foucault goes into detail explaining how even private conversations between individuals would be largely shaped by the rules applied to the discourse on sex by institutions of power. Throughout the history laid out by Foucault, sex and sexuality has been a category consistently split into smaller categories of illicit versus licit. As an extension of the judgement aspect, the illicit versus licit perspective allowed institutions of power to take it upon themselves to regulate and administer sex for the greater good of society, and to punish or medically intervene upon individuals who fell within the illicit category. It is towards the end of the timeline of Foucault's exposition of the discourse on sex that homosexuality becomes a highlighted topic. He argues that from this point on, homosexuality would begin receiving particular attention and with it, judgement. This was a consequence of the increasing focus upon the perceived danger of deviant sexuality, such as homosexuality. In this period, homosexuality was viewed as a sexual perversion and part of the category of

sexualities deemed “crimes against nature” (1510). As proof of the severity of judgement placed on any sexual act considered illicit, Foucault explains that sodomy was seen as equally bad as rape and incest. In a contemporary perspective, this comparison is hard to fathom.

As an important aspect of the established discourse on sex that Foucault outlines, the permeation of this discourse into the psychiatric institution is particularly relevant to the scope of this thesis. At the time of Ginsberg’s first publication, homosexuality remained illegal in America and was thought to indicate both physical and cognitive deviancies. Furthermore, Ginsberg’s mother would spend her life in and out of psychiatric institutions as she dealt with severe mental illness. These factors explain the particular focus found upon the psychiatric institution’s handling of sex and madness in Ginsberg’s literary work. Indeed, perceived cognitive deviancy was not only subjected to diagnostics and treatment, but was often subjected to punitive measures and spoken of in derogatory terms. Foucault further states that upon the permeation of the discourse on sex into the psychiatric institution, a new norm was constructed. This norm aimed to provide a definition of what was considered healthy sexual development, so that sexual deviancy would be more easily identified. In other words, the marginalizing effects of the state institutions of power’s attempted regulation of sexuality continued to intensify as any individual falling outside of a carefully constructed norm would be rendered deviant and in need of state regulatory measures. Furthermore, Foucault argued that a defined norm on healthy sexual development worked to shift the focus from healthy sexuality to what was construed as deviant sexualities. Homosexuality therefore came into particular focus, among other perceived deviant sexualities. Along with this new focus on homosexuality homosexuals became more carefully listened to, but also came under greater scrutiny than before. Homosexuality became conceived as an infliction to do with a deeply rooted and wrongful nature. Most strikingly was the emphasis upon the medical establishment’s speculation that homosexuals had a very own anatomy and physiology. Coming of age as a gay man as the discourse on sex permeated the psychiatric institution, Ginsberg’s forceful rebellion against these established, restrictive, societal structures appears not only justified, but warranted.

Aiming to place Ginsberg’s poetry within the context of the discourse on sex, looking particularly at the way in which his discourse positions itself within established perceptions of sexuality and madness. In *Howl*, I found that many elements outlined by Foucault on the discourse on sex are recognizable within the poem. For instance, the poem alludes to the way in which institutions of power have exercised regulatory power over individuals based on

their sexual leaning. This constrictive regulation of sexual freedom is rejected in *Howl* as the narrative inherently rejects established rules and norms established throughout this history of the discourse on sex. A primary understanding was that while all relating to sex should be talked about and confessed, one should never refer directly to sex or sexuality. Within the discourse on sex and its urge for people to discuss sex, there was a simultaneous silencing in terms of accepted terminology or subjects. These rules are clearly rejected in the poem as sex, homosexuality and details of sexual acts are directly named and openly discussed.

Furthermore, rather than following the notion of homosexuality as constituting deviancy and abnormality, *Howl* instead empowers the homosexual by emphasising homosexual pleasure and the homosexual experience. In *Kaddish* Ginsberg's narrative also shows traces of the Catholic confession, although rather than seeking atonement, the practice of confession is inverted into a self-sufficient, public confession void of shame or regret. A particularly clear example is *Kaddish*' reference to incest, as Naomi invites her son to lay with her. In confessing to the reader what appears to reflect a traumatic childhood event, Ginsberg breaks down the barriers that were established to control and mute such confession outside of the Catholic church.

Beyond implied rejections of the Catholic church's establishment of an imperative to put everything to do with sex into a discourse riddled with shame and judgement, Ginsberg's poetry contains a plethora of more direct references to the permeation of this discourse into the psychiatric establishment. Within the sections that have particularly focus on the psychiatric institution's exercise of power over individuals, madness becomes the central topic. While intertwined with homosexuality as a reflection of the way in which contemporary society connected these two characterisations, Ginsberg's narrative pays particular attention to the treatment and attempted management of madness. In *Howl*, sections of the narrative are dedicated to the mad characters of the poem seeking help from the psychiatric institution suicidal, desperate, urgently demanding lobotomies. This depiction of what it was like to be mentally ill, or framed as mentally ill, in Cold War America. Rather than being offered lobotomies, they are described as ending up juggled between treatments, drugs, and practitioners rather than receiving responsible help. This list of the treatments offered in the psychiatric institution ends with amnesia, emphasizing the actual outcome of these invasive psychiatric treatments. While *Howl* embraces its mad characters as holy, they are simultaneously portrayed as suffering from an all-encompassing, self-destructive madness, within a system that utterly fails them. The psychiatric institution's role in the regulation of

sex and mental illness is thus largely criticized in *Howl*.

In my interpretation of *Howl* and *Kaddish*, I found substantial evidence to support the claim that Ginsberg's sexual narratives are shaped by the history of the discourse on sex, particularly in its rejection and attempted inversion of this discourse. From the judgement and silencing of the Catholic church to the medicalization and invasive treatment established by the psychiatric establishment, Ginsberg's narrative reflects the development of the discourse on sex highlighting the increasing severity of judgement, punishment, and attempted regulation applied to sexuality. Intertwining a reflection of, - and rebellion against contemporary society, *Howl* reflects the hostile environment that homosexuals were living in and rebels against it through depictions of homoerotic pleasure. In *Kaddish*, incest is brought up seemingly as another rebellious response to the attempted silencing of the sexual discourse. In his own contribution to the discourse on sex, Ginsberg eradicates the central regulative aims and hierarchal perception of sexuality and replaces it with a celebratory embrace of bodies and sexual pleasure.

As a continuation of the history of sexuality that Foucault describes up to the eighteenth century, having published "The History of Sexuality" in 1990, Stockton argues that sexuality continues to be an aspect of judgement of individuals' psychological normalcy or deviancy in contemporary times. Stockton published in 2017, thus extending the perspective with 27 years. He firstly emphasises the relevance of Foucault's work of putting the discourse on sex into a historical perspective, arguing that this works to undermine the authoritative power of institutions of power to communicate a subjective, heteronormative perspective on sex as universal truth. In other words, Stockton argues that placing psychiatry and psychoanalysis in its historical context within the topic of sexuality denies those institutions their authority to communicate a singular discourse that frames normative sexuality as sexuality conforming to the norms of heterosexuality. Despite this, Stockton maintains that the act of judging individuals' mental state based on their sexual leanings remain. He concedes with Foucault's argument that the judgement of people's sexuality came under scrutiny in a much wider sense with the secular appropriation of the topic of sexuality, rather than becoming minimized.

Stockton claims the judgement of individuals based on sexuality remains, he does emphasise some developments that have taken place since Ginsberg's literary publications. In terms of the medicalisation of homosexuality he states that homosexuality remained registered as a mental disorder in America until 1973 according to the American Psychiatric

Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). In other words, while Ginsberg grew up in a sociopolitical situation where homosexuality was considered both a mental illness and a criminal offence, he would experience adulthood as these judgements upon homosexuality became officially removed. The removal of homosexuality as a mental sickness by the DSM proves societal and cultural progression in terms of sexual freedom. In his discussion of the way in which homosexuality was long perceived in America, Will emphasises the centrality of "cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences" between societies that view homosexuality differently (173). In other words, he aims to emphasise that only real difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality is the way in which each society views these sexualities, which is shaped by their culture, language and ideology. Indeed, the masculine male ideal that served a central role to Cold War American ideology did not match well with homosexuality, which might be one explanation as to why homosexuality was so harshly judged. Discussing the linguistic factor upon societal perceptions of sexuality, Stockton states that the way in which homosexuality is spoken of shapes the way in which general society perceives it. In other words, if a society generally talks about homosexuality in a derogatory manner, homosexuality will become perceived as an inherently beneath sexuality that is framed in a positive manner. In *Howl*, I found that Ginsberg is challenging the derogatory linguistic framing of homosexuality, as well the restrictive sociopolitical structures more generally.

Turning to an in-depth, autobiographical perspective, Raskin looks at the way in which madness shaped Ginsberg throughout his life. He writes about how Ginsberg grew up watching Naomi's mental health deteriorating, along with nervous breakdowns and frequent visits to the mental hospital and undergoing psychiatric treatment. Raskin states that while his childhood was surely traumatising to some degree, Ginsberg's response was to seek ways in which he could defend his mentally ill mother. This led to Ginsberg's personal and literary embrace of madness in Raskin's view, as well as to his aim at creating his own mad, literary persona and to surround himself by madness in every shape and form. In fact, Raskin argues that one of the central aspects of madness which evoked fascination in Ginsberg was Ginsberg's own perception of madness as indicative of a person's grand vision, fragility, and poetic quality. Despite his fascination with madness, Raskin states that Ginsberg experienced a simultaneous fear of it. Indeed, Ginsberg would come to experience both its capacity to destruct and its capacity to set free and offer new perceptions.

Despite his complete embrace of the madness in others, Raskin states that Ginsberg would long struggle to come to terms with what he perceived as his own madness, his

homosexuality. Raskin explains that in his earlier work, Ginsberg would go to great lengths to disguise his homosexuality. He wrote symbolistic poetry with symbols that Raskin calls almost indecipherable. He explains that the reason for this was that Ginsberg was influenced by the notion that homosexuality had to be hidden and disguised from society, and even himself. It took him psychiatric therapy to reach the point where he no longer felt ashamed of and in need of hiding his sexual leaning. As a result of his new-found self-acceptance achieved largely through therapy, Ginsberg wrote and published *Howl*. This literary work shows Ginsberg's explosive self-development in several areas, while also laying out his embrace of madness in both its self-destruction and its visionary poetic revelations. Another central aspect of *Howl* in Raskin's view, was Ginsberg's time spent in a psychiatric institution. Raskin explains that Ginsberg seemingly welcomed his punishment of time served at a mental institution as a chance of creating his mad, literary persona. While this experience would inspire much of his poetry, he explains that it would have a particularly profound impact on "Howl". Not only did this experience shape the madman persona that became the hero of "Howl", but the poem would also feature and become dedicated to another patient which Ginsberg became close with, Carl Solomon. Within Solomon's role in the narrative of "Howl", Raskin did still point out indicators that Ginsberg had not entirely reached a point of full self-revelatory transparency. In general terms however, through the process of writing and publishing *Howl*, Ginsberg would develop a self-acceptance allowing him to remove his disguise and reveal himself openly in his poetry to a much larger degree than before.

The other central aspect of "Howl" which Raskin emphasises is the poetic language. He describes the long path it would take for Ginsberg to move from the academic, traditional language he felt pressured into using, to the language we see in his published work. A central development in terms of language occurred as Ginsberg left the mental institutions and became acquainted with writer William Carlos Williams. Williams would encourage Ginsberg to make use of his writer's right to "absolute freedom" (103), words that resonated particularly well with Ginsberg as a contrast to his recent experience of having his freedom constricted at the mental institution. Williams also became a support of Ginsberg poetic mission of a self-expressive and authentic poetry. What we see as a result of his linguistic developments in "Howl" is a language reflecting that used in a casual, spoken, youth setting. The language includes curse words and crude characterisations and references, rather than pretentious symbolisms or academic language. This is a fundamental aspect of Ginsberg's poetry and, as Raskin states, central to Ginsberg's ability to write the sort of poetry he aimed

for. A poetry that was naked, self-revelatory and self-expressive. In short, Raskin points to two central elements that make up Ginsberg's "Howl": madness and language. Madness infused the poem and function both as an overarching theme, in addition to shaping the form of the poem. The literary language became Ginsberg's key to uninhibited poetic expression.

In strong contrast to Raskin's compassionate and autobiographical perspective upon Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness, Reynolds writes about what she calls cognitive disability in Ginsberg's literary work, arguing that the literary representation of cognitive madness in Ginsberg's work is objectifying and renders Naomi the spectacle of the narrative. She points in particular to the way in which her body and cognitive illness as consistently brought to the forefront of Ginsberg's narrative, suggesting that Naomi ends up being objectified and offered as a "freakish spectacle" to the reader's gaze (165). Indeed, Reynolds argues that *Kaddish* was part of a literary resurrection of the Victorian freak shows and that it would fall consequence to the derogatory display of its spectacles as the original freak shows. While disability was displayed for entertainment, she argues that the freak shows simultaneously served a necessary social function of allowing the audience a space to both relate to and separate themselves from disability. Despite positive authorial aims however, Reynolds maintains that Ginsberg's portrayal of Naomi in "Kaddish" renders her a freak and a spectacle offered to the reader's gaze for shock and entertainment. This harsh interpretation of "Kaddish" is anchored in Reynolds' perception that the narrative effectively objectifies Naomi both because her physical and mental deviancy are at the forefront of the narrative and because her own attempts at escaping this portrayal are rejected by Ginsberg's authorial voice in the poem. Without agreeing with Reynolds' general argumentation, I find the analogy of "Kaddish" functioning as a freak show in which Naomi functions as a spectacle a useful perspective in determining the variety of effects of Ginsberg's portrayal of madness.

In my application of the arguments made by Raskin and Reynolds, I found that rather than reducing Naomi to a spectacle, Ginsberg in fact embraces her in her entirety. Furthermore, I found that in Ginsberg exposure of Naomi's cognitive disability and physical body, it is the detrimental consequences of self-destructive madness that come into the forefront of the narrative. Indeed, the narrative of "Kaddish" functions both to separate self-destructive madness from creative madness, and to offer some justification for Naomi's affliction. He portrays Naomi's suffering as weakness of the world she lived in while lifting her emphasising her transcendence to the normative world in his embrace of every aspect of her body and mind. No aspect of Naomi appeared to be shielded away from, instead he exposes

even the darkest and most taboo aspects of her humanity as parts of the literary embrace of her entirety. In fact, this exposure rings particularly similar to Frontain's argument that Ginsberg faced his readers with a dirty asshole, portraying it as equal to any other body part, as a means of pushing a complete embrace of the Self. Similarly, what is seemingly Naomi's most cognitively clouded moment depicted in "Kaddish" as she invites her own son to lay with her, appears represented in equal measure to the rest of the poem. Furthermore, Ginsberg's authorial voice continuously engages with Naomi without judgement for any actions, words or her cognitive state. The facing of dirt is therefore expanded in "Kaddish", to include the cognitive deterioration and its consequential darkness, as well as the wounded, suffering female body. Instead of aiming to objectify Naomi, the narrative exposes important aspects of her human experience, testifying to the authorial embrace of her entirety.

3. 2. Defying the taboo

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the authorial aim and literary effects of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references and madness, it is necessary to consider the role of the literary language. The sources presented in this thesis have to various degrees highlighted the relevance of Ginsberg's literary language. Raskin explained that language was a central piece of the puzzle that had to come together for Ginsberg to be able to write the kind of poetry he aimed for, a self-revelatory, naked poetry. Language also played a central role in *Howl's* obscenity charges, according to Black. Indeed, the prosecution aimed to highlight crude references to sex and body parts in order to prove the obscenity of the work. Frontain explains Ginsberg literary language as having to do with grotesque realism and a means to push his readers to face the dirt as part of his message of self-acceptance. Reynolds' seemingly finds the language particularly crude and overly descriptive in the depiction of Naomi in "Kaddish", while Woods found the use of crude sexual phrases as an organic occurrence in a poetry that reflects the author's coming-of-age and coming to terms with his homosexuality. As a natural extension to this thesis' aim at exploring the portrayal of sex and madness in Ginsberg's poetry then, I want to look closer at the transgressive nature of the language that defines this portrayal.

To expand upon the role of the literary language of Ginsberg's poetry, I am referring to Keith Allen and Kate Burridge's «Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language» where cultural taboos are highlighted as significant restrictive structures in terms of both

behaviour and language, mirroring the aims and effects of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references and madness that have been established so far. Allen and Burrige state that taboos are created when restrictive societal structures come in place to regulate the behaviour of individuals that might cause harm to themselves or others. The consequences for not behaving according to societal taboos might therefore lead to a range of problems, including physical suffering, corporal punishment, or exclusion from general society. Allen and Burrige emphasise that while societal taboos stand strong within each given society, an absolute taboo does not exist. Indeed, each society defines their own taboos, therefore taboos will change according to different societies, times, and circumstances. In their argumentation, they present a philosophical predicament with which they aim to show how taboos can be recognized or flouted by the same person at slightly different points in time:

“if Ed recognizes the existence of a taboo against patricide and then deliberately flouts it by murdering his father, is patricide not a taboo for Ed? Any answer to this is controversial; our position is that at the time the so-called taboo is flouted it does not function as a taboo for the perpetrator. This does not affect the status of patricide as a taboo in the community of which Ed is a member, nor the status of patricide as a taboo for Ed at other times in his life. Our view is that, although a taboo can be accidentally breached without the violator putting aside the taboo, when the violation is deliberate, the taboo is not merely ineffectual but inoperative” (Allen and Burrige, 10).

This example emphasises the subjectivity of societal taboos while also showing the way in which a taboo can be put aside by one individual at one moment in time, while it remains a taboo for them at other times of their life. Indeed, they argue that when a taboo is deliberately violated it is not only “ineffectual but inoperative”, which means that the taboo is at that moment in time out of function for that person (Allen and Burrige, 10). They emphasise that the taboo remains in this person's community but ceases to exist in that moment merely for that one person who has deliberately chosen to ignore it. While societal taboos exist in different forms in different societies then, Allen and Burrige argue that they exist for the purpose of protecting the individuals of each given society from various types of consequences. Despite this, an individual within a society might choose to flout a taboo at some point in time, at which point the taboo will be out of function for that person. Essentially, Allen and Burrige argue that while cultural taboos are put in place to protect members of a society from perceived consequences, at any time that an individual deliberately flouts a cultural taboo, that taboo is no longer operable to that person.

As an extension to cultural taboos applied to behaviour, Allen and Burrige emphasise that it is also applied to language behaviour. They state that language taboos are equally protected to taboos that deal with other behaviour, in that both social and legal consequences might follow a breach of the taboo. The regulation of language is more commonly spoken of as censorship which puts limitations to the freedom of expression. Allen and Burrige define censorship as “the suppression or prohibition of speech or writing that is condemned as subversive of the common good” and state that the problem with language censorship “lies in the interpretation of the phrase subversive of the common good (13). The point that Allen and Burrige are making here, is that while some taboos have straightforward reasons behind them, such as that murder is taboo because it leads to death, with language taboo the potential harm is much more obscure. Indeed, the judgement of what sort of language might put the common good of a community in jeopardy is highly subjective to the point where individuals within the same community might draw very different lines between accepted versus unaccepted speech. Allen and Burrige emphasise that the censorship of language commonly refers to the censorship of profanity and blasphemy with the notion that it will protect people against their moral harm. The notion is therefore that certain language use might damage the morality of the speaker and might negatively affect the community as this person spreads such morally dangerous speech. In short, the subjectivity inherent in determining language taboos makes the distinction between accepted and taboo speech particularly hard to determine, and to defend.

While maintaining that language taboos are equally protected to behavioural taboos, Allen and Burrige argue that censorship on language is entirely futile because people intent on flouting it will do so regardless of state efforts to regulate language through corporal punishment. Not only will individuals who are intent on flouting language taboos continue to indulge in prohibited speech and writings but furthermore, Allen and Burrige state that when literature becomes banned to uphold language censorship the demand for that literature increases. Specifically, they argue that when something becomes publicly banned it creates an interest that largely vanishes once the ban is lifted. In addition to institutionalized censorship, Allen and Burrige introduces the word censoring as referring to not only the institutionalized censoring of words but including also the individual’s participation in this practice. To emphasise the difference between censorship and censoring, they state that all “kinds of tabooed behaviour are subject to censoring, but only certain kinds are subject to censorship – for instance, child pornography is subject to both censorship and censoring, but picking your

nose in public is subject only to censoring” (Allen and BurrIDGE 24). In other words, societal taboos are upheld not only by state institutions, but by each member of the community that choose to uphold a specific taboo in a specific time and situation. While separating censorship from the censoring carried out by individuals however, Allen and BurrIDGE emphasise that neither category escapes the subjectivity of the beliefs and preferences that a censor possesses at that moment in time. Indeed, as previously stated, one person might agree with a societal taboo at one moment, yet deliberately disregard it in another. While there are clear differences between state censorship and private censoring then, both categories are subjected to a large degree of subjectivity and unpredictability.

Discussing taboos from an overarching perspective, Allen and BurrIDGE state that homosexuality has been one of the most strongly taboo subjects throughout history. From being condemned in the Bible, homosexuality has continued to be attempted regulated by societal taboos and by implementing death penalties for sexual acts commonly associated with homosexual intercourse according to Allen and BurrIDGE. They state that homosexuality would be considered a pathological condition up until the 1960s, yet the sociopolitical situation would not begin to shift until the 1970s as “gays and lesbians identified themselves as oppressed minorities and there was a drive to come out (like debutantes) and declare their homosexuality in public” (Allen and BurrIDGE 156). In other words, the homosexual community would begin to demand their space in society after a long history of being marginalized and oppressed based on strongly rooted cultural taboos. In fact, Allen and BurrIDGE describe homosexuality as one of the strongest taboos that have existed throughout history because “in most cultures, the strongest taboos have been against non-procreative sex and sexual intercourse outside of a family unit sanctioned by religion and lore or legislation (145). In sum, the long history of rendering homosexuality taboo is deeply culturally rooted and bases itself both on the biblical condemnation of homosexuality, the threat of non-procreative sex that endangers the value of the nuclear family lifestyle, as well as various taboos applied to sexual acts often particularly associated with homosexuality.

By looking at Ginsberg’s literary work and the scholarly sources presented in this thesis through the lens of cultural taboos provided by Allen and BurrIDGE, it becomes clear that an essential function of Ginsberg’s poetry is to flout cultural taboos aimed at restricting individual freedom, and particularly homosexuals. Using the lens of cultural taboos, we can achieve a better understanding of what Black referred to as the public trial that followed the legal trial on *Howl*. Indeed, this public trial refers to the phenomenon that Allen and BurrIDGE

calls private censoring, in which private individuals attempt to censor language use based on their momentary and subjective opinions on the taboos at hand. While taboos are always subjective as Allen and Burrige determined, state regulated censorship must certainly abide to more long term established taboos that have consensus in the given community and that is upheld if laws are in place to protect those taboos. In the case of private censoring however, an individual's position in terms of a specific taboo might change from one moment to the next or be different based on the specific situation at hand. For instance, obscenity activists protesting against the publication of *Howl* might have done so based on their opinion that it is taboo to use profanity in a literary work yet might have deemed it socially acceptable to use profanity in a private, informal setting. In light of the arguments presented in this thesis that much of the provocative literary moves in Ginsberg's poetry was deliberate, Ginsberg likely expected, and half hoped for the reactions that the publication received. As Allen and Burrige fittingly pointed out, a state ban on a publication merely increases its demand. In flouting cultural taboos, literary conventions and testing the extent of the First Amendment's then, Ginsberg's poetry received large attention and with it, a large audience for his literary rebellion.

The argument that Ginsberg broke down societal taboos with the publication of *Howl* is further supported by Frontain who argued that Ginsberg's poetry functioned as a rebellion against societal restrictive structures, and in particular the closing of the male body. Allen and Burrige discussed the particularly strong taboo placed upon homosexuality, a topic that is particularly highlighted through Ginsberg's literary opening of the male body. In other words, Ginsberg was flouting the taboo of homosexuality in his poetry which, as an extension to Allen and Burrige's argumentation, means that the taboo is not functional within his literary work. This also suggests that the taboo of homosexuality is eternally non-existent within Ginsberg's poetry as its illegitimacy has been thoroughly established. In his aim at changing societal restrictive structures aimed at closing the male body then, one can already conclude that Ginsberg's literary efforts were a success in that they created a space where those structures are no longer in effect. His poetry became a haven for those who felt that societal taboos were constricting their freedom. On an overarching level, Ginsberg breaks down the very hierarchal societal structure put in place to regulate sexuality in his poetry, by taunting the heteronormative, masculine male ideal. In his flouting of deeply rooted cultural taboos, Ginsberg's poetry thus created a space void of the restrictive societal structures that they represent.

In challenging restrictive societal structures, Ginsberg's poetry also flouts taboos on cognitive deviancy. It appears that in Reynolds's argument, Ginsberg's flouting of cultural taboos had detrimental effect on his literary character Naomi. Indeed, she points to what she considers an overly exaggerated focus upon Naomi's condition in "Kaddish", as the poem openly discusses Naomi's cognitive state through detailed descriptions of its physical manifestations. Reynolds's argument suggests that because Naomi is depicted through a narrative actively flouting cultural language taboos, her dignity is rejected, and she is rendered a mere freak and a spectacle. In contrast, my interpretive reading of "Kaddish" highlighted the way in which the poem's narrative appears to be illuminating Naomi's human experience through a narrative that moves beyond established taboos aimed at restricting conversations on topics such as cognitive deviancy. Allen and Burrige have established that cultural taboos are established to protect individuals from harm. Seemingly testing this hypothesis, Ginsberg's flouts established language taboo on cognitive deviancy, incest and sex as he openly narrates Naomi's life and experiences from his perspective. Whether the hypothesis is proven, as Reynolds would suggest, or challenged as per my own findings, might merit further research. The hypothesis concerning the justification of cultural taboos aside, Ginsberg's narrative certainly flouts language taboos in "Kaddish", achieving more freedom in a narrative exploring the detrimental effects of madness on the human mind and body. Within this discourse, there is also an inherent aim to subvert the established discourse on sex upheld by institutions of power to judge, regulate and restrict individual's sexuality.

Within the flouting of language taboos in Ginsberg's poetry, important societal structures are challenged, and narratives on sex and madness are allowed to expand beyond established norms of acceptable discourse. To explore more closely the centrality of language taboos in Ginsberg's poetry, I will be applying the theory of cultural taboos to "Footnote to Howl", while establishing connections between Allen and Burrige's theories and the central arguments presented in this thesis. "Footnote to Howl" provides a particular literary simplicity that works to illuminate the purity that it is alluding to, in that the word holy carries the narrative from beginning to end. This repetitive use of the word holy, combined with its featuring of other important elements highlighted in this thesis, makes the poem particularly potent to this analysis. Introductory, the poem reads:

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy!

The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand

and asshole holy! (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27)

The first lines seemingly stand out in bold on the page as some optical illusion, emphasizing the potency that it is attributed with. Furthermore, these first two lines function as an announcement that an important message will be delivered, awakening the reader's attention. The exclamation points after each "Holy!" creates a sense of urgency while the reiteration emphasises the potency of the word uttered (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Following the initial two lines, the word "holy" continues to be used throughout the poems as a proclamation of the consistent message: All is, and all are holy (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). This is a message full of sociopolitical tension that challenged both past and contemporary notions of social acceptance, normality and worthiness. In fact, "Footnote to Howl" is disagreeing with central social structures that depend upon hierarchical notions and a segregation of the public based on their abilities to conform to societal norms. By proclaiming that "The world is holy!", hierarchies and segregation has no place (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). The world is portrayed as inherently good. While good is a highly insufficient interpretation of Ginsberg's use of the word holy in this poem, it does offer one aspect of what the word connotes. The word is used to justify the inherent worthiness and transcendence of its receiver. The soul is described as holy, just like the "skin [...] nose [...] tongue and cock and hand and asshole" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). There is no hierarchal presentation of body parts in terms of their holiness, they are presented as equal. Culturally speaking, genitals are considered taboo while the skin, nose and hand are socially acceptable to discuss. In other words, in merely granting genitalia equal emphasis to the skin and nose in the narrative, cultural taboos are being challenged. The same cultural taboo is highly challenged by the use of the colloquial word "cock" as opposed to its synonym, penis. The word penis is not subjected to the same cultural taboos as it is the preferred reference in anatomical and medical settings (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Lastly, the mention of "asshole" breaks cultural taboos both in terms of its association with homosexuality and because it is often thought of as a dirty body part (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). This line therefore rejects society's hierarchal view of body parts by presenting the asshole as equal to skin, nose and hand. It offers the reader a new perspective on the physical and spiritual Self where soul and body are equally holy, equally good, worthy and significant. In other words, it is supporting Frontain's argument of Ginsberg's aim at portraying a complete

acceptance of the Self.

The colloquial phrasings and direct references to body parts deemed culturally taboo are particularly provocative in light of their utilization of grotesque realism. Indeed, the references to body parts as in “tongue and cock and hand and asshole”, is a perfect example of Ginsberg’s utilization of grotesque realism (*Howl* 27). Ginsberg discusses self-acceptance and rejects societal structures and notions by lowering abstract ideas to the physical and bodily. Societal critique is being made between the lines, through a narrative of physical bodies. With the theory presented by Allen and Burridge we can presume that the cultural taboos that are flouted in the poem are rendered non-functional, assuming Ginsberg’s flouting of cultural taboos is a deliberate act. The utilization of grotesque realism renders cultural taboos on bodies ineffectual as it requires the freedom of physical, bodily discussion. In other words, Ginsberg’s utilization of grotesque realism in “Footnote to Howl” works to abolish cultural taboos within the frames of his literary work, thus effectively executing the literary work’s inherent social critique. The physical and bodily narrative works as a foundation for Ginsberg’s literary sociopolitical critique and rebellion. The effect is a space void of cultural taboos, filled with naked bodies, acceptance, and celebrated deviancy.

In terms of the poem’s celebration of deviancy, this is particularly evident in the lines reading:

“Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy

Kerouac holy Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cas-

sady holy the unknown buggered and suffering

beggars holy the hideous human angels! (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27)

As a continuation of the narrative’s message of embrace, individuals that would be labelled deviant by general contemporary society and state institutions are proclaimed holy. Ginsberg has also included his own name in the list of holy characters, thus presenting himself as a part of the group of the holy and deviant. Solomon, the literary character from “Howl”, follows Ginsberg’s own mention, along with other central members of his social circle. The poem continues by presenting them all as equally holy to “unknown buggered and suffering/ beggars” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Individuals who are suffering on the streets, homeless, forced to beg strangers for pocket change that might feed them another day is a complex narrative that is seemingly subjected to some degree of cultural taboo as well. Suffering and homelessness rarely frequenting in social discourse indicates that it is likely regulated by

cultural taboos, or that the topic evokes discomfort. More importantly, the reference is an acknowledgement of individuals living on the outside of general society. In place of judgement, Ginsberg portrays outsiders as equally holy to himself and his social circle. In other words, the narrative embraces outsiderdom and places himself and his social circle within this same category of society-

The embrace of outsiders to general society, as well as Reynolds's spectacle function, can also be identified in the line "Holy my mother in the insane asylum" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Reynolds' argument that Naomi was consistently reduced to a spectacle in Ginsberg's narrative in "Kaddish" can be applied to this mention of Naomi as "my mother in the insane asylum" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Naomi is mentioned first as "my mother" which emphasises Ginsberg's positioning of himself alongside Naomi, thus contradicting the argument that Naomi is being reduced to a spectacle in light of Ginsberg's adoption of a normative position (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Naomi is then described as a patient of a psychiatric institution. Her literary character is thus defined as partly mother and partly mentally ill. I argue that this balance suggests that Ginsberg aimed to show his embrace of every aspect of his mother, including those that were considered taboo to discuss. Indeed, it might be the taboo aspect of cognitive deviancy that made Reynolds' argument that Naomi was reduced to a spectacle so plausible. By describing Naomi's cognitive state and its consequences in detail, the taboo and uncomfortable comes to the forefront of the narrative. Rather than Ginsberg reducing Naomi to a spectacle however, it might be true that, in the spirit of Woods' own argumentation, it is the reader's emphasis rather than the author's. In other words, it is arguably the reader who interprets Naomi as reduced to a spectacle who is becoming too focused on the negative consequences of her cognitive disability, rather than looking for the embrace and glorification of her which is arguably also evident in "Kaddish". Indeed, in the example at hand, she is placed alongside himself, his friends and all people and things holy, as equally holy in all her madness. Despite Naomi in part functioning as a spectacle in the narrative of "Kaddish", the openness of her cognitive condition works as part of the authorial embrace of madness and outsiderdom.

Within the poem's discourse of embrace and outsiderdom, the opening of the male body is also identifiable in the following line: "Holy the cocks/ of the grandfathers of Kansas!" (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Following the festive discourse of the grotesque carnival explained by Frontain where genitals are a central aspect, the poem emphasises "the cocks of/ the grandfathers of Kansas" as holy, rather than these men themselves (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27).

This might be interpreted as a celebration of the masculinity of the older generation, or perhaps Ginsberg's vision of his own social circle in the years to come. The use of the crude, colloquial "cocks" suggests a refusal to conform to societal taboo regarding literary language or polite speech (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). More importantly, the emphasis upon male genitalia in this phrase is a clear example of the way in which Ginsberg opened the male body in his poetry by disregarding cultural taboos on male sexuality. The phrase is particularly potent in its reference to grandfathers as the sexuality of older men is less often discussed which might again suggest that there are underlying taboos on male sexuality being challenged. By juxtaposing "cocks" and "grandfathers" in this phrase, the sexuality and virility of men is being emphasized as an inherent, lasting masculine trait (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). This line receives no more emphasis than any other line in the poem and is not followed up with more extensive detail, thus reflecting the organic way in which the opening of the male body is infused into the poetry. Cultural taboos are broken down within Ginsberg's flouting of them in the narrative and therefore receive no justification or explanation. Within Ginsberg's literary work, the male body is portrayed as open, and male sexuality as unrestricted.

In sum, I found that Allen and Burrige's discussion of cultural taboos worked to illuminate some important literary aims and effects of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references and madness. Specifically, I found that Ginsberg's flouting of cultural taboos appears a deliberate act which consequently renders the taboos at hand out of function in his literary work. The effects of Ginsberg's literary flouting of cultural taboos are an open, unrestricted discourse on sex and madness. Within such a narrative, the reader's perceptions are being challenged as they are faced with aspects of humanity that cultural taboos typically conceal. For instance, body parts are represented with disregard to the hierarchy established by cultural taboos. This means that genitalia are spoken of in equal tone as, for instance, hands and face. Furthermore, the male body presented as open challenged the contemporary view of a closed male body, in light of the illegality of homosexuality at the time. In terms of madness, restrictions on acceptable discourse are being challenged to such a degree that Naomi appears partly as a spectacle of the narrative in "Kaddish". The narrative of both "Kaddish" and "Footnote to Howl" simultaneously embraces Naomi, however. Along with every deviant character portrayed in Ginsberg's poetry, "Footnote to Howl" proclaims them holy, creating a notion of deviancy as inherent holiness and transcendent to normality. In short, the literary effects of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references and madness, in light of

the theory on cultural taboos, is a cultural and sexual revolution that challenges established notions on sex and madness anchored in restrictive, sociopolitical structures.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the authorial aim and literary effects of sex and madness in Allen Ginsberg's poetry collections *Howl* and *Kaddish* by establishing a meta-perspective upon research that has been conducted in this area. For the sake of clarity, I focused primarily on Ginsberg's literary portrayal of sex in the first chapter and the aspect of madness in the second chapter. Chapter one of this thesis established the primary concerns that erupted as *Howl* was published in America to look closer at the way in which Ginsberg's literary representation of sex and sexuality was received in its sociopolitical circumstance. As Joel E. Black explained, *Howl* was freed of its obscenity charges due to a new interpretation of the First Amendment that defines the right to freedom of speech. *Howl* was ruled protected speech and not obscene in state court yet, as Black describes, a public trial would follow where members of the public protested the publication. The obscenity charges were primarily concerned with the work's references to narcotics and homosexuality. According to Gregory Woods, the references to sex in *Howl* would continue to be scrutinized as he positions himself as an oppositional voice to an established scholarly critique that Ginsberg's poetry contains an unnecessary number of sexual references, and that they serve to boast of his homosexuality. Woods' defense of the sexual theme, language and homosexual references in Ginsberg's poetry provide a justification of these literary aspects and the transgressive nature of the poetry is attempted minimized. A central aspect to Woods's argument is the authorial relevance to Ginsberg's poetry. Indeed, he ties the sexual references strongly to Ginsberg's personal experiences, thus arguing that they are entirely justified, and even minimized, within the poetry. What becomes particularly highlighted by Woods and Black is the urge to defend Ginsberg's poetry by justifying its transgressive elements.

Moving against this argument that the poetry has merits despite its transgressive aspects, Jean-Michel Foucault offers a perspective in which Ginsberg's poetry functions as a literary attempt at social reform and sexual revolution to which the transgressive aspects of the poetry are fundamental and deliberate. In other words, rather than justifying the transgressive or the poetry's references to sex, Foucault argues that the poem is deliberately

transgressive and provocative, and that Ginsberg uses sexual references as a literary tool. Specifically, Frontain argues that Ginsberg's poetry represents the opening of the culturally closed male body in its celebration of male bodies and sexuality. Frontain suggests that references to homosexuality, and particularly sodomy, are the most transgressive aspects of Ginsberg's poetry, and that they are particularly potent in his rebellion society's attempted closing of the male body. In other words, Ginsberg's poetry is deliberately rejecting established societal values and structures according to Frontain, in its celebration of sexual freedom and homosexuality. Furthermore, Frontain emphasises Ginsberg's use of grotesque realism as an element of the opening of the male body. This refers to Ginsberg's use of physical, material references in his discussion of ideas and values, such as sexual freedom. In other words, the crude language that has received strong reactions since the publication of *Howl* is explained as a literary tool that enables Ginsberg's sociopolitical critique. Lastly, Frontain also argues that Ginsberg's poetry pushes an embrace of the Self by representing all aspects of the human body as equal, thus rejecting the socially constructed notion that body parts fall into a hierarchy based on their social acceptability. Applying Frontain's arguments to Ginsberg's poem "Sunflower Sutra", it became clear that rather than boasting of sex and homosexuality, the poem offers complex sociopolitical critique where various elements of the contemporary sociopolitical situation are being highlighted. In other words, the transgressive themes and language of Ginsberg's poetry have potent meaning and are deliberately utilized in the form of grotesque realism to talk indirectly about ideas, values, perceived injustice, sociopolitical shortcomings, and self-acceptance. Ginsberg's poetry therefore proved itself particularly powerful in its utilization of transgressive literary tools and elements, rather despite them.

Both for the sake of context and to reveal in more detail the specific societal structures that Ginsberg is argued to have been rebelling against in his poetry, I looked to Marko Dumančić' paper that emphasizes the centrality of the masculine male ideal to Cold War American society. He explained that the masculine male ideal played a core role in the contemporary sociopolitical rejection of homosexuals as it was defined as incompatible with homosexuality. The masculine male ideal demanded traditionally masculine attributes and conformity to heteronormative social norms. To be accepted by general society, some homosexuals would begin masking themselves by conforming to the masculine male ideal. According to Dumančić this merely led to an increased fear of homosexuals by society and politics as they became identified as potential invisible threats capable of secretly permeating

the state and society. The anxiety towards homosexuality thus became heightened, and even became mirrored by the fear of the invisible threat of Communist enemies and as a result, the contemporary perception of homosexuality was further distorted. Applying this sociopolitical context and the masculine male ideal to my interpretation of “Sunflower Sutra” I found that in its sociopolitical critique, the poem also gave nods to subversive behaviors such as sodomy in an attempt at demanding acceptance for homosexuals and to push back against society’s attempted regulation of individual’s sexuality. What I found particularly interesting was that the masculine male ideal becomes directly mocked and rejected in “Sunflower Sutra” by the poem’s portrayal of inferred masculine men that unapologetically engage in subversive sexual acts most commonly associated with homosexuality. Ginsberg’s poetry thus not only rejects sociopolitical structures, but openly taunts them.

I opened the second chapter of this thesis with a historical perspective upon the established discourse on sex by institutions of power. Foucault’s outlining of the main historical developments to the discourse on sex by institutions of power show that through history, sex has been something that has been judged and attempted controlled and regulated. While early history had a particular focus on sex as an isolated subject, towards the contemporary lens in which Ginsberg’s poetry is produced, the focus came to include cognitive disability. Applying the historical context on the discourse on sex provided by Foucault to Ginsberg’s poems “Howl” and “Kaddish”, I found that Ginsberg enters into the established discourse in his poetry. Most importantly, Ginsberg’s poetry shows a rejection of the attempted judgement, control and regulation applied to sex by institutions of power. Through his literary representations of homosexuality, the detailed descriptions of promiscuous sexual acts and sexual pleasure emphasize Ginsberg’s glorification of what contemporary society deemed deviant sexuality. Intertwining sex with madness, the regulative attempts of the psychiatric institution are also addressed. The psychiatric institution is described as unable to help those who are portrayed as suffering and begging for their help, yet overly willing to administer harsh treatments. In “Kaddish”, the discussion of incest is particularly potent in establishing Ginsberg’s rejection of norms and regulations aimed at judging individuals. In sum, I found that within the transgressive elements of Ginsberg’s poetry in particular, the established discourse on sex is being critiqued and rejected due to their aims at judging and restricting the individual.

In an exploration of the autobiographical relevance of Ginsberg’s poetry, I referred to Jonah Raskin’s thorough presentation of Ginsberg’s life and its influence upon his writing. He

established that madness would play a large role throughout Ginsberg's life. From witnessing the cognitive deterioration of his mother as a young child, to his own pursuit of creative madness throughout his career, Raskin establishes that madness became a central theme for Ginsberg. As a result, he states that madness would come to infuse Ginsberg poetry, from form to content. According to Raskin, Ginsberg surrounded himself by madness, viewing it as poetic and visionary. While he glorified madness throughout his life, Raskin maintains that coming to terms with his own madness proved more difficult to Ginsberg. He points to examples in "Howl" where Ginsberg is seemingly hiding his own story behind the literary character Carl Solomon. Raskin also refers to Ginsberg's own explanation that his reluctance to reveal his own experience at the psychiatric institution with Solomon was an attempt at protecting his mother, Naomi. In the end, Raskin states that through professional therapy, Ginsberg would learn to accept his homosexuality which he perceived as the madness in himself, as well as to process his traumatic childhood and finally be able to write the poetry that he had spent years trying to form. The publication of *Howl* thus marked enormous progress in Ginsberg's personal life and career.

As a contrast to Raskin's understanding of Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness through an autobiographical lens, Loni Reynolds suggests that Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness worked to reduce his literary characters to their deviancy. Specifically, she suggested that in certain Beat poetry, the freak show was resurrected in order to offer people a place to relate to and separate themselves from the deviancy that began to surround them after the second world war. Within this representation however, Reynolds argues that in Ginsberg's portrayal of Naomi in "Kaddish" she is reduced entirely to her mental afflictions. Within this function, Naomi is offered to the reader's gaze as a freak and a spectacle according to Reynolds, thus satisfying the reader's urge to relate to the deviant while simultaneously assuring the reader of their own normality. In fact, Reynolds argues that Ginsberg himself, as the authorial voice of the poem, also assures himself of his normality beside Naomi. In denying Naomi her humanity and dignity in any attempt from her to reach for a sense of normality, Reynolds concludes that it is the authorial Ginsberg who reduces her to her afflictions for the sake of his literary freak show. While Ginsberg's literary characters seemingly do have the function of spectacles in certain scenes of certain poems, I found that there was room for a much more complex and diverse interpretation of his portrayal of madness. Despite portraying madness largely through the display of literary characters other than himself, this portrayal still offers understanding and acceptance within its crude display

of its symptoms. In the case of Naomi in “Kaddish”, I found that Ginsberg is establishing the effects of self-destructive madness as opposed to the creative madness he would spend years of his life chasing after as Raskin described. In other words, it seems that Ginsberg aimed to reveal the detrimental consequences that madness can have on an individual without shying away from the uncomfortable.

Looking at these scholarly theories collectively I found that cultural taboos appeared to be an underlying theme in all, to some degree. For instance, Woods found the prevalence of sexual references in Ginsberg’s literary language use organic and justified as a testament to the autobiographical background of his poetry. In Raskin’s exploration of Ginsberg’s personal and literary development, cultural taboos around language proved an important barrier to overcome for Ginsberg to write what later came to be known as Beat poetry. Reynolds’ considers Ginsberg’s literary language and narrative overly descriptive in terms of Naomi’s illness in “Kaddish”, suggesting she perceived unease with Ginsberg’s literary flouting of language taboos. To further explore this aspect, I introduced Allen and Burridge’s theory on linguistic taboos. I applied the theory of cultural taboo in a comparative perspective with the central arguments presented in this thesis and applied it to “Footnote to Howl”. In this application, I found that Ginsberg’s “Footnote to Howl” functioned as a glorification of deviancy and outsiderdom in the poem’s statement that all are, and all is “holy” (Ginsberg, *Howl* 27). Within this glorification, there was an equation of body parts and embrace of the naked body, rejecting the culturally anchored hierarchal perception of body parts in terms of their social acceptability. In his use of grotesque realism, I also noticed that Ginsberg was actively flouting cultural taboos in the poem. Consequentially, cultural taboos appeared entirely void in the poem as though a literary utopia for individual freedom from restrictive cultural structures had been established. Judgement and control are replaced with embrace, and humanity is emphasized in both spiritual and bodily form. Revisiting Reynolds’ argument that Ginsberg reduced Naomi to a spectacle in “Kaddish” with this new perspective, I found that rather than Ginsberg necessarily aiming to emphasize Naomi’s sickness and thus reducing her to it, in the spirit of Woods’ argument, the emphasis might rest heavily upon the reader. Indeed, in “Footnote to Howl”, Ginsberg presents Naomi alongside himself and his close friend circle. His sentimentalizes their connection in the phrase “Holy my mother in the insane asylum!” while acknowledging the struggles she had to endure in her life (*Howl*, 27). Rather than being reduced, Naomi appears illuminated as a holy, worthy mother whose struggles Ginsberg witnessed growing up. The exclamation mark at the end of the phrase

further emphasises the pain and frustration that lies within the tale of his mother being locked away in an institution.

Frontain's argument that Ginsberg attempted to open the male body in his poetry is evident in "Footnote to Howl" as well, illuminating particularly well the flouting of cultural taboos that seemingly shapes much of Ginsberg's literary work. Indeed, colloquial language and genital references to older men are organically integrated within the poem's narrative and flow, testifying to Ginsberg's literary disregard for restrictive cultural or societal structures. Furthermore, my interpretative reading of "Footnote on Howl" disproves the notion that the poetry's sexual references are of superficial character or an authorial aim at boasting of his own sexuality. Rather, sexual references and madness prove particularly potent in terms of the poem's societal critique, it's testament to the outsider experience of the so-called deviants of society and in preaching an embrace of humanity in its entirety. Madness is almost synonymous with deviancy in Ginsberg's poetry as it also was in contemporary society, however Ginsberg portrayed madness as transcendent rather than inferior to normalcy. In his poetry, Ginsberg created a space free of judgement and restrictive societal structures, where the outsider is not only accepted, but holy. As this thesis has shown, sexuality is largely intertwined with madness as a reflection of the way in which sexuality came to be used as a means of diagnosing mental illness by institutions of power. Rather than medicalizing or diagnosing his literary characters based on their sexuality however, Ginsberg's poetry rejects society's medicalisation of sexuality and madness. In his utilization of grotesque realism and attempts at emancipating the male body from society's attempted closing, sexual references is Ginsberg's most potent tool. It simultaneously flouts the restrictive cultural taboos aimed at regulating individuals and celebrates the sexual freedom that Ginsberg appeared to idealize. In Ginsberg's poetry, the individual is emancipated and encouraged to expand in body and mind beyond the barriers implemented through societal structures.

In sum, this thesis has established central arguments from the scholarly research conducted on the topic of Ginsberg's literary utilization of sexual references and madness which have been applied them to interpretative readings of selected poems within *Howl* and *Kaddish*. My findings proved that within Ginsberg's poetry, reflecting its contemporary context, the historical development of the discourse on sex, as well as the life of the author, restrictive societal structures and deeply rooted cultural taboos are exposed, rejected and subverted in literary protest. Furthermore, in agreement with Frontain, I found that Ginsberg's transgressive references to sexuality and madness were deliberately provocative and used as a

literary tool to challenge ideas embedded within society's established restrictive structures and cultural taboos. In establishing the deliberate nature of Ginsberg's literary flouting of cultural taboos, these taboos are in turn rendered non-functional within the literary work, creating a space that is void of the restrictive aims of contemporary society. This thesis has thus established that the central authorial aim of Ginsberg's utilization of sexual references was emancipating the male body and pushing sexual freedom. The literary effects of the poetry's sexual references expand beyond these established authorial aims, as they ultimately challenge culturally rooted ideas about acceptable speech, normality and the physical body. This thesis has also established that the central authorial aims of Ginsberg's literary portrayal of madness was firstly an effort to defend and embrace Naomi in her madness, reflecting certain autobiographical aspects. Secondly, this portrayal was an effort to portray a more extensive embrace and glorification of the outsiders to mainstream society in Cold War America. This outsider group consisted primarily of what contemporary society deemed deviants, which included homosexuals and individuals with mental illnesses. The literary effects of the portrayal of madness similarly establish a discourse that moves beyond the restrictions put in place by cultural taboos, both in its thematization of madness, and in the unrestricted and descriptive nature of the discourse. In conclusion, the literary utilization of sexual references and madness in Ginsberg's *Howl* and *Kaddish* are part of an authorial rebellion against the established restrictive structures of his contemporary society. As a result, Ginsberg's poetry successfully constructed a literary space void of restrictive, hierarchal notions of sex, sexuality, bodies, and cognitive deviancy.

Note

1. The effects of Cold War ideologies on America's homosexual community are addressed in more detail by Loftin (203-205) and Hansen (79-93).

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