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Mafiosophilia: A Philosophical and Feminist Critique of our Cultural Affection for Mob(ster) Life

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Mafiosophilia

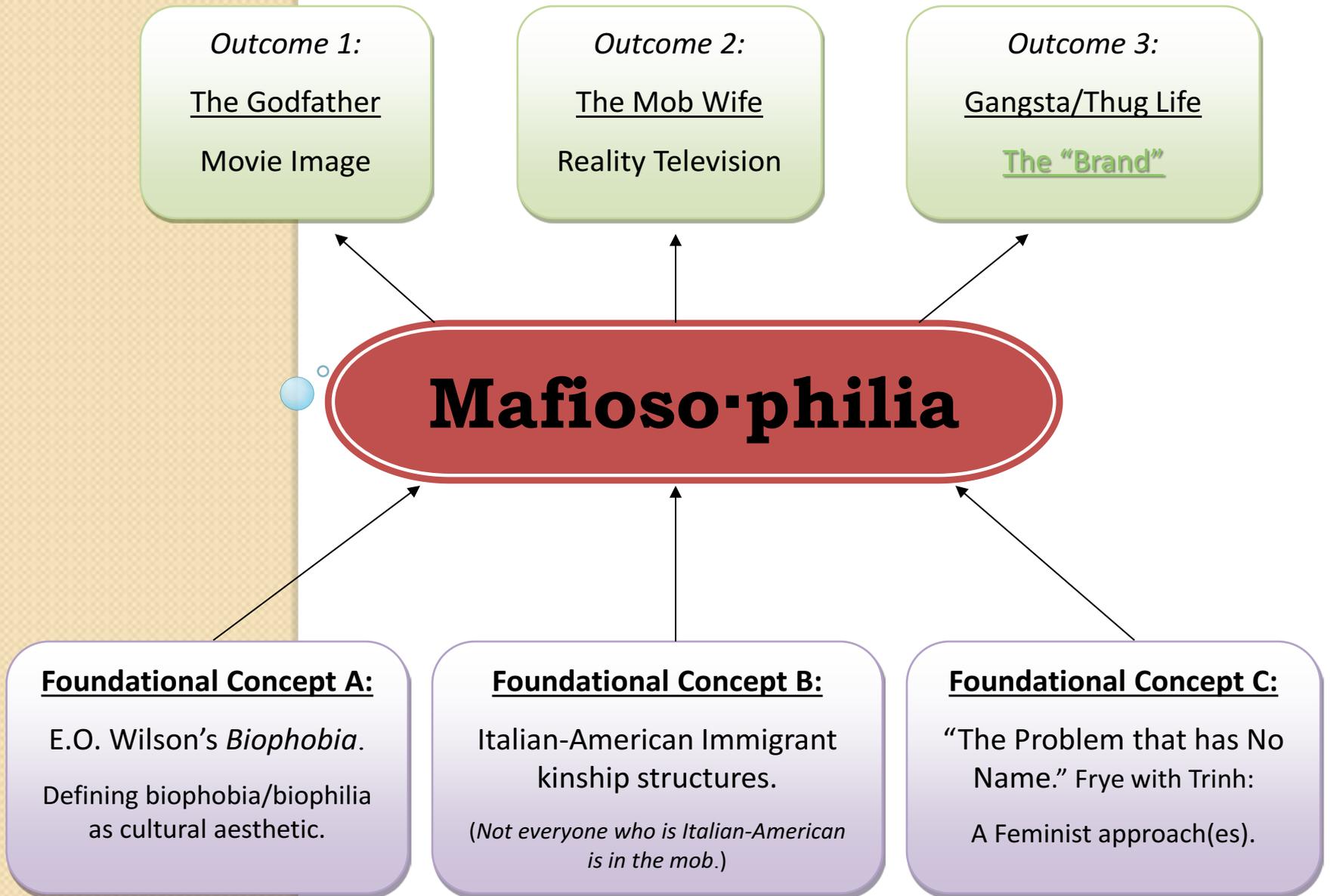
A philosophical and feminist critique of the contemporary cultural affection for ‘mob(ster)’ identity and social relation.

Presentation: PCA/ACA 2012

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Concept A: E.O. Wilson

- Borrowed from Wilson's Biophilia hypothesis: biophilia/biophobia can be supported and manipulated from a complex of practices, then interpreted from cultural symbols.
- David Orr: Approaching this problem diagnostically, "Improper use [of biophobia] begins with ingratitude and disparagement and proceeds to greed, abuse, and violence."
- If "our *philia* is fragile," how might Mafiosophilia also a necrophilia/biophobia?

Concept B: Italian Kinship

- Italian-American Folklore study: kinship tightly structured closeness with *paese* and suspicions of *forestieri, stranieri*.
- V.A. Goddard: Social structures of Naples (and Southern Italy):
 - Emergence of mediators between families and society at large, these figures translated in emigration as *mafioso*.
 - Hostile social environment for poorer Southern Italian communities made family a safe-haven, constituting strong familialism and shaped “codes of honor.”
 - Even up through the 1970s, in Italy, women were expected to marry their first lover (147) or else be shamed. Loss of reputation was greater risk for women coupled without participating in traditional family roles.

Concept C: A Feminist Approach(es)

- Marilyn Frye: “A Problem with No Name”
 - For want of an ‘ism’; instead: “an attitudinal-conceptual-cognitive-orientational complex.”
 - “The phallist can arrange things so that he does not experience females as persons ... thus will [fail] to treat women as persons” (45). The employment of concepts – and the social institutions that seek correct application – construct “a certain collective subjectivity” (49).
 - Women are denied membership in the conceptual community.
- From Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*.
 - A question borrowed: How much have “you and I ... let *that portion of ourselves which does not match the stereotype of the real man* be consumed in our very determination to preserve it”?
- **There remains the problem for women in the imagined and hyperreal ideal of mafioso life: She is either a bride or a puttana; a wife or a goumad.**

Mafiosophilia: Two Tropes

The Godfather Trope

- Paternalism is the first and most obvious power structure both amplified by the media images of mafia culture and in the manifestations of desire for power and status in ordinary individuals.
- Women and children are ornaments for legitimacy with the hierarchy of the organization – as ‘family men’; men in their association – as ‘mobbed up’ – are able to act on behalf of the organization, ignoring civil law while writing a largely unwritten honor code. The primary ethical value in this honor code is loyalty to the family, (read: father and brothers). This loyalty is not necessarily extended to the women and children.

Misogyny and the Mob Wife

- The portrayal of Mob Wife, even when a complex characterization, still has common themes; abuse, servitude, self-abnegation, materialism, and petty loyalties. The play(ing out) of conflict between wife and mistress, the complicity in or ignorance of the husband’s affairs, the ‘naturalization’ of women as competitive and/or conniving, all point to an underlying and acceptable misogyny in Italian-American culture.
- As long as the Mob Wife has cultural and social desirability, then, we might say, we will get what we wish for. This role for women also feeds the phenomenon of the *Jersey Shore*; in which young women (who are not necessarily Italian-American), reiterate the caricature we see in the Mob Wife; amplifying the desire to become these wives or mistresses in the making.

Outcome I: The Godfather

- The movie image mobster as cultural and ethnic prototype.
- The figure of women
- The acceptance of the narrative.
- The morphology of the type.
- Paternalism and Loyalty

Outcome II: The Mob Wife

- Movie models of the dutiful wife.
- Morphology into reality show caricatures.
- Reality Television: from girl to wife
 - *Growing Up Gotti*
 - *Mob wives*
 - *Jersey Shore*
- Measuring social desirability for/of the mafia bride.

Outcome III: Gangsta/Thug Life

- Translations of Italian-American mob ethos into other cultural tropes. The “brand of gangster.”
 - Honor/Respect
 - Name/Signature
 - Women and Property
- Promotion of “lifestyle” is promotion of the narrative internal and external to the ‘native’ group.
- Gendered kinships without change.

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