



Female Homosocial Desire in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* (1749)¹

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Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate the same-sex relationships of female characters in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* (1749) as represented in a controlled homosocial setting where homosocial desire is satisfied. This study refers to the concept of "homosocial desire" offered earlier by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to analyse the female characters within the scope of homosociality and explores how "homosocial desire" is exemplified by the patterns of behaviour and discourses that female characters represented through a condensed milieu of subjective manifestations as well as instructed morals. The study argues that female homosocial desire is the primary motive in the acts, behaviors and decisions of female characters searching for a private medium in which they achieve transparent communication with mutual affection by constituting a community of intimacy between the same sexes. The study concludes that released, aroused, gratified or satisfied homosocial desire can be a power of transformation from chaos to harmony, which indicates the healing nature of fulfilled homosocial desire.

Keywords: Sarah Fielding, Homosocial space, Female Homosocial Desire, *The Governess or Little Female Academy*

Introduction

There is a great deal of literature as to the key elements of 18th century social patterns and codes even though some of them have put the situation in relatively pejorative terms. Hartmann (1997, p. 104) particularly underlines the following elements from the 18th century: heterosexual marriage, the incarceration of women to domestic world, women's exclusion from occupational sphere and institutions within a patriarchal social structure. The eighteenth-

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century social settings, however, were structured by homosocial elements as well as heterosocial features. The fictional settings in Sarah Fielding's novels represent these historical and social realms of the eighteenth-century England, providing modern readers with a critical understanding of same-sex relationships at the time. In this paper, therefore, what counts as the core of the arguments regarding the 18th century is that certain principal elements of the eighteenth-century social structure in England were based on homosocial relations.

Sarah Fielding's *Little Female Academy* brings together significant elements of homosociality. In *The Governess*, the setting is a boarding school, "the number of which multiplied rapidly from the mid-century" (Hill, 2013, p. 47). In these schools, girls are educated to be fine ladies (Barker-Benfield, 1992, p. 164). The historical author addresses and advises the prospective ladies (the implied authors) to achieve "Love and Affection for each other" (Bree, 1996, pp. 60-61). Yet, *The Governess* gets beyond "becom[ing] referential and didactic for readers" (Hunter, 1990, p. 93) implying an undercurrent potential of the homosocial circles. Considering the relationships among the girls in the narrative and the female characters portrayed in their stories, it may be argued that the attaining of "true happiness" at this "little female academy" represents a fruitful fictional setting to exemplify female homosocial desire that is revealed to manifest itself in the acts, expressions and discourse of these characters and to transform the mental states of these characters repairing and reforming their sociality.

Historical Background: Female Homosocial Settings

The eighteenth century is accepted as a period of "enormous growth and change" in England (Lipking & Monk, 2000, p. 2045) considering private and social settings pertaining to male-dominated life. Still, eighteenth-century England is a world that is dominated primarily by men, as Porter states (1990, p. 22). In spite of the existence of certain women clubs "devoted to rational conversation" (Porter & Roberts, 1996, p. 50) in the eighteenth-century, the socio-cultural background of female characters remained within restricted female homosocial settings. Women were confined to the domestic world of their houses or boarding schools as represented in the fictional world of *The Governess or Little Female Academy*.

Sarah Fielding's realistic portrayal of social life and characters in her fiction is amalgamated with her moralist concerns like other popular novelists of the era such as Richardson, Fielding and Defoe. *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* portrays a purely female homosocial environment in a boarding school with its nine girls who receive education from their governess, Mrs. Teachum, an obsessed lady representing a paradoxical matriarchal status with authority and privacy aimed at conserving homosocial harmony between these little women. Moreover, the friendships that develop among these girls along with the ones they establish with Mrs. Teachum and two other women out of the school reveal homosocial desire that is stirred, stimulated and preserved in these female characters. Embedded stories told by the girls in the frame narrative promote and support female homosociality that plays an important role in the plot. It is seen that female homosocial desire is the primary motive in the acts, behaviors and decisions of female characters in *The Governess* and that the informal homosocial space created by Mrs. Teachum transforms "rational conversation" into comfortable yet decent and secure communication.

Female homosociality is portrayed as a means for the psychological and educational development of females. This also secures the possibility and opportunity of a collective activity among women. However, providing "both the intellectual and the moral development of girls" (Percy, 2009: 80), the boarding school for girls begins to be popular for the families of the middle class for the education of their daughters (Hill, 2013, p. 47). In these schools, girls are educated to be fine ladies and "to the display of consumerism in deportment, music, and dance" (Barker-Benfield, 1992, p. 164). Being taught by female teachers, keeping company with girls and being busy with traditionally feminine subjects create a totally female homosocial

environment in the schools. The traditional conviction that “boys brought up together become comrades” (Blosser & Bradley, 1997, p. 60) manifests itself differently at the boarding schools for girls. Female homosociality at the boarding schools in Sarah Fielding’s novel gets beyond mere comradeship.

Although the eighteenth century English fiction, as Todd (1980) states, focuses on the romantic relationship between a man and a woman (p. 1), female friendship and same-sex socialization among women is also among the most common themes (Faderman, 1981, p. 103) providing material for the development of the main and sub-plots in the novels. Female fictional characters of this period are portrayed to enjoy the company of other women and to occupy themselves with troubles and well-being of the other female characters. Female friendship affords them to “retire together, away from the corruption of the man-ruled ‘great world’” (Faderman, 1981, p. 103) and “provide[s] them with the understanding and acceptance that they expect but do not always receive within marriage” (O’Connor, 1992, p.73).

In *Women’s Friendship in Literature*, Janet Todd (1980) categorizes fictional female friendship into five: sentimental, erotic, manipulative, political and social (pp. 3-4). The sentimental one is described as “a close, effusive tie” which “aids and saves, providing close emotional support in a patriarchal world” contrary to the heterosexual romantic relation which is likely to cause trouble (p. 3). While there is “physical love” in erotic friendship, manipulative friendship, as Todd states, is the one in which “one woman uses another, controls her and joys in the control” (p. 4). In political friendship, women take action together in order to protest against “the social system, its institutions or conventions” (p. 4). However, social friendship does not require women’s collaboration to act against society rather it makes their integration into the society easier (p. 4). Social friendship help women eliminate the danger of being lost in society and secure a place for themselves among males. In short, no matter which type of friendship is developed among women, it can be stated that they all serve female homosociality in one way or other.

Female friendship provides women with “having fun together,” and “total support” (Coates, 1996, p. 23). For instance, in Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Anna is portrayed to give Clarissa advice about her romantic love relationship that is full of sufferings, misunderstandings and distresses. In the presence of Anna, Clarissa “can momentarily forget the feminine image she must create for a man and relax from the strenuous demands of romantic love” (Todd, 1980, p. 2). Moreover, Sophia in *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding receives the help of her cousin, Harriet when she sets out for a travel to London in order to find her beloved, Tom. As for Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*, the plot is based on story-telling of a group of girls in the garden of their school and thus having fun.

Female friendship’s popularity among women also depends on the fact that women could “be themselves” and could have “a safe place where the imperative to ‘be nice’ does not prevail” (Coates, 1996, p. 25). Women do not have to perform the roles given by men in domestic and social spheres. Furthermore, their friendship is based on an “uncommercial, peaceful, and equal” (Todd, 1980, p. 47) homosocial relationship. And since there is no trade going on between them, there is no managing conflict. Therefore, they have peace and harmony. Both need the other’s love, affection and understanding. It is company of the other they exchange between themselves. They are not governed by hierarchical heterosexual codes to maintain their friendship. They do not bother themselves with the expectations and norms of patriarchal society. However, all these can be observed in intimate, emotional and strong female friendships.

What is more, female friendship presents a secure and comfortable space for conversation between female friends. These conversations may sometimes be the only means to share their

experiences, thoughts and worries. For instance, in *Tom Jones*, when Sophia and her cousin Harriet come together, Harriet talks about her unsuccessful marriage and how she has been misled about the character of her husband, Mr. Fitzpatrick. Sometimes women may be observed to talk just to talk because having a talk means spending time together and providing a chance to enjoy each other's company. They can fall into a conversation just for its own sake or just for pleasure since they do not have to consider "rules or taboos" but they are "free to go anywhere" (Coates, 1996, p. 64).

Some married women attach more importance on their friends than their husbands "in the sense of providing advice, sympathy, intimacy or simply sharing a way of looking at the world" (O'Connor, 1992, p. 84). For instance, in *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), Sarah Scott narrates the story of Miss Melvyn and Louisa Mancel whose friendship is interrupted by Miss Melvyn's new husband who does not accept the presence of a more beloved one than himself in the house (Faderman, 1981, pp. 104-105). The friendship between these female characters resumes only after the death of the husband. This example can be representative in terms of demonstrating the place of female friendship among women.

Female friendship, as Todd (1980) suggests, is "the only social relationship we actually enter in the novel and the only one the heroine actively constructs" (p. 2). Having a friend especially outside the family has undoubtedly something to do with the phenomena of society and its paradigms. That kind of friendship enables the women to make a step out of her family and enter society. Particularly in friendship, women take active participation both in choosing her friend to be (Todd, p. 2) and in the process of establishing the relationship. However, in the case of marriage, it generally turns out to be the family who makes necessary decisions and choices about the so-called partner or the man himself who decides that he is the right person for the woman (Todd, p. 2) and who does not leave any place to the woman to make a decision for her own. For example, Richardson's Clarissa chooses her friend, Anna, on her own but is forced to accept a man as her husband (Todd, p. 2).

Theoretical Background: Female Homosocial Desire

It was Lipman-Blumen (1976) who provides a definition for the term "homosocial" (1976) as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (p. 16). She does not fail to differentiate it from the term homosexual since they are not interchangeable. The term homosocial "does not *necessarily* involve (although it may under certain circumstances) an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex" (p. 16, emphasis in the original). Sedgwick (1985), offering the term "homosocial desire," analysed certain male characters from a number of texts of English literature. She states that she employs the word "desire" similar to "libido" in psychoanalysis. Freud explains "libido" as "the force by means of which the instinct, in this case the sexual instinct, as, with hunger, the nutritional instinct, achieves expression" (p. 729). "Libido" is the name given to the "investments of energy directed by the ego towards the object of its sexual desires" (p. 730). Here, the energy is directed towards object or lack. Socrates states one desires something that he does not possess: "If it isn't lacking, you can't desire it, surely" (Plato, p. 39), which is reformulated by Lacan as "desire" is something that "is produced in the beyond of the demand" (Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 201). In Kristevan terms, homosocial space turns into a womb of the mother, a maternal realm for the characters. In that respect, Sedgwick's "desire" functions in the same way as Freud's "libido," which provides the vital energy and the force for human behaviour. Similarly, "desire" will afford a similar energy and force for human relations. However, the force in desire does not have to be a sexual one as it does in libido. Sedgwick (p. 2) suggests that it is an "affective or social force" and a kind of "glue . . . that shapes an important relationship." From a social perspective, as Foucault suggests "one should not think that desire is repressed, for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes both desire and lack on which it is predicated" (Foucault,

History of Sexuality Vol. 1, p. 81). This means that there is no already present desire that power represses rather it is the power itself that generates desires (Stoler, 1995, p. 165). In this respect, Foucault's power functions like Hegel's desire. However, he again finds the word "desire" itself problematic since he associates it either with lack or repression (Kelly, 2013, p. 119). He prefers to use the word "pleasure" instead of "desire" as he finds pleasure "an empty concept that can have new meanings applied to it" (Kelly, 2013, p. 119) and a concept that is "not over-coded to the same extent" (Kelly, 2009, p. 146) as "desire" which already embodies certain medical and naturalistic implications and suggestions (Halperin, 1997, p. 93). Then, Foucault's consideration of desire as a concept "over-coded" with associations can enable to analyse the naturalistic implications and suggestions lying behind homosocial desire in Fielding's characters. Homosocial desire, in this context, refers to libidinal energy behind the motives and behaviours in the same-sex relationships.

This study, referring to the terminologies of Sedgwick, attempts to trace the elements of "homosocial desire" among the female characters. To achieve this, following Terry Castle "who revises Sedgwick's paradigm in order to theorize a way of defining 'lesbian fiction', and to theorize the question of how desire between women can be imagined and represented" (Herndl, p. 487) in her "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction" (1993), this study raises the question "what happens ...when female-female bonding enters the picture" (Herndl, 1997, p. 488). Therefore, the homosocial circles where women "teach, study, nurture, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interests of other women" (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 3) will determine the scope of the analysis in this study.

Female Homosocial Desire as Represented in *The Governess*

The Governess is said to be intended for moral purposes and moral teaching but it also promotes "[l]ove and Affection" and "Happy society" (Fielding xiii, qtd. in Bree, 1996, p. 62). Mrs. Teachum (technically governing the plot but is not the protagonist) is the one who plays the crucial role in the development of such "a society that is both feminocentric and complete" (Bree, 1996, p. 63-64), namely a homosocially structured society in which she lives with nine girls. Having lost her husband and then her two children, Mrs. Teachum may be claimed to represent the female figure that is deprived of all her responsibilities and duties as wife and mother, responsibilities and socially imposed duties. During the nine years she has lived with her husband, Mrs. Teachum feels pleased to comply with "instructions" that Mr. Teachum gives while "improving his wife", particularly the ones "concerning the education of children" (*The Governess*, p. 7). This part of Mrs. Teachum's life presents a woman who is inferior to man as she is educated through his instructions. Although it seems that she does not have to perform her duties as a wife any more upon the death of her husband, she is observed to preserve her femininity while presenting a caring and devoted mother. She thinks that she has to "conquer her grief, in order to apply herself to the care of these her dear husband's children" (*The Governess*, p. 7). It may be argued that the verbal indicator "husband" demonstrates that Mrs. Teachum regards care of her children as a duty towards her husband. However, the possible homosocial relationship that can be developed between Mrs. Teachum and her "two little girls" fails when she loses them. Interestingly enough it is at this time that she loses her money that will support her in the future and she decides to open a boarding school for girls. In this respect, it may be stated that Mrs. Teachum has to be deprived of all social bonds reinforced earlier by her heterosexual relationship. As in the case of Lysistrata in which avoidance of heterosexual intercourse ensures homosocial nature of the desired community of pleasure, Mrs. Teachum feels "delighted in pleasing them" (*The Governess*, p. 13). Therefore, absence of a heterosexual bond in Mrs. Teachum's private life and content of education in her tutoring serve for female homosocial desire. Moreover, the past lives of each girl are suggestive in terms of representing female homosocial desire and stimulating this desire during their stay at the boarding school.

First person storytelling is an important motif and the stories told by the girls are marked with different earlier homosocial bonds. Only one of them, Polly Suckling, cannot narrate any life story since she is brought to school at the age of five and she hardly remembers her past. Firstly, Miss. Jenny Peace's homosocial bond with her mother before she is brought to this boarding school plays a role in her homosocial desire, which manifests itself in the creation of a character that tries to maintain and promote female homosocial harmony among the girls throughout the novel. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel, she is presented to "try to convince her fellow pupils of the need to acknowledge their faults, participate in the restoration of harmony . . . , and build on this harmony to seek their individual moral improvement" (Bree, 1996, p. 62) upon a quarrel over an apple among the girls. As for her homosocial bond with the mother, it is observed that Jenny loses her father while she is still a baby and is brought up by a mother she describes as "the best woman in the world, and to whose memory I shall ever pay the most grateful honour" (*The Governess*, p. 29). The lack of a father figure around, thus, secures an undisturbed homosocial circle between the daughter and the mother besides Jenny's developing a strong affection for her mother. Jenny's deep affection with her mother's stories show that such tales provide a secure space for the girls. Jenny's only concern is presented as providing her mother with a company that evokes the feelings of luck and joy in the partner. Here the verbal indicator "companion" suggests that the relationship itself, homosocial one in this context, is considered more essential. Jenny states that she takes this decision upon her mother's speech on restoring her "usual cheerfulness" (*The Governess*, p. 33). Jenny's complete obedience to her mother's desires shows that Jenny concerns the homosocial bond with her mother more than her own concerns and thoughts. Moreover, she is not observed to feel resented at her mother's command, rather she considers "[t]his little incident" as "a lesson to me in governing my passions" (*The Governess*, p. 33). This glimpses at Jenny's homosocial desire for her mother. She expresses her happiness at such a bond as follows: ". . . and no girl could be happier than I was during her life" (*The Governess*, p. 33). She owes her "instruction, amendment, and improvement" to "this good mother" (*The Governess*, p. 33), namely to this homosocial bond. However, while their homosocial bond is being determined by a discourse of "fault" executed by the Governess (with the capital letter) their homosocial desire is more likely to be repressed by the mimicry of male discourse: In a scene where Jenny is trying "to convince her fellow pupils of the need to acknowledge their faults, participate in the restoration of harmony . . . , and build on this harmony to seek their individual moral improvement" (Bree, 1996, p. 62) upon a quarrel over "an apple" among the girls. Thus, it can be stated that Jenny's homosociality is punctuated with the internalised moral teaching.

Although Sukey, Lucy, Patty, Nanny and Betty have limited homosocial relations in the past, they are observed to feel no homosocial desire and to go through a miserable life until the restoration of homosocial harmony at school. In other words, they find happiness in their intimate and harmonious relationship for which they are driven by homosocial desire. Miss Dolly Friendly's homosocial desire, however, can be observed in her relationship with Molly, her sister. Dolly describes her feelings about Molly as "very strong affections" (*The Governess*, p. 69). Her fondness for her sister is to such an extent that she is concerned only with Molly's pleasure: ". . . all my delight was to please her; and this carried to such a height, that I scrupled no lies to excuse her faults and whatever she did, I justified, and thought right, only because she did it" (*The Governess*, p. 69). The verbal indicators "delight" and "please" present a female character that derives satisfaction and pleasure from another woman's satisfaction and pleasure. Dolly's emotional dependency on her sister can be interpreted as an outcome of her homosocial desire. This homosocial desire in Dolly, however, affects Molly's psychological development negatively, which can be detected in her growing "so very humoursome" and her "crying only because she did not know her own mind" in addition to her not considering "what faults she

committed” (*The Governess*, p. 69). Moreover, Dolly still harbours the same desire and states that she is motivated by that same desire when she gets involved into the quarrel narrated at the very beginning of the novel. Therefore, it can be claimed that Dolly’s former female homosocial desire for her sister has an effect on her current homosocial relations at school.

The homosocial educational setting provides an informal space in which the girls satisfy homosocial desire liberating their repressed feelings. After the quarrel over the possession of an apple at the very beginning of the novel, peace and harmony is restored among the girls who are portrayed as follows:

They all sat looking pleased on their companions; their faces borrowed beauty from the calmness and goodness of their minds; and all those ugly frowns, and all that ill-natured sourness, which when they were angry and cross were but too plain in their faces, were now entirely fled; jessamine and honeysuckles surrounded their seats, and played round their heads, of which they gathered nosegays to present each other with. They now enjoyed all the pleasure and happiness that attend those who are innocent and good (*The Governess*, p. 24).

The descriptions offered for the girls as “looking pleased on their companions” and preserving “beauty from the calmness and goodness of their minds” reveal physical manifestation of their homosocial desire for each other. The verbal indicators used by the omniscient narrator “pleased”, “calmness” and “goodness” that are used to refer the emotional state of these characters demonstrate satisfaction they feel at fulfilling their homosocial desire. However, the most significant signs of desire and pleasure are manifested through the flowers suggestive of intimacy and closeness. The jessamine flower, for example, associates “love and romance” (*Flower Meaning*) while honeysuckle means “devotion and lasting bonds” (*EHow*). Thus, it is seen that they enjoy and experience “all the pleasure and happiness” as well as homosocial harmony. This homosocial harmony is portrayed in the following scene wherein Jenny brings a basket of apples for the girls to eat:

These she placed in the midst of her companions, and desired them to eat, and enjoy themselves; and now they were so changed, that each helped her next neighbour before she would touch any for herself; and the moment they were grown thus good natured and friendly, they were as well-bred, and as polite, as it is possible to describe (*The Governess*, p. 24).

Homosocial desire can be instigated or stimulated through the relaxing informal homosocial space at school transforming the behaviours and attitudes of the characters. They reveal a progress from antisocial inconsiderateness to individual decency. The female characters become more caring and politer towards each other through the satisfied homosocial desire and achieves restoring harmony. The verbal indicator “friendly” points to social interaction among the characters and shows that the characters are getting socialised repairing their relationship with language that signals rational development. The 18th century context was therefore to a great extent concerned with rational development and “maturity” of the characters. The significance of *The Governess* is due to its emphasis on the female homosociality that paves the way for such maturity. The scene where the girls are portrayed to go for a walk in the garden after the prayers on a Monday morning shows the progress and improvement:

The fine weather, the prospects round them, all conspired to increase their pleasure. They looked to one another with delight; their minds were innocent and satisfied; and therefore every outward object was pleasing in their sight (*The Governess*, p. 147).

The verbal indicators used to describe the scene as “pleasure,” “delight,” “satisfied,” and “pleasing” demonstrate that the female characters satisfy their homosocial desire. Their derivation of satisfaction from this homosocial circle inherently presents each entity surrounding them as attractive and lovely. And they enjoy this homosocial environment so much that they do not let “any disposition that was made to their judgments” cause any resentment to grow among them (*The Governess*, p. 132) with a fear that their homosocial harmony may be disturbed. Their displeasure at such a disturbance can be observed in their reactions upon the appearance of “a troop of soldiers riding by, with these instruments of music playing before them” (*The Governess*, p. 126) and the arrival of the dancing master. Both of them are not welcomed by the girls. While Miss Dolly Friendly expresses the following, “I had rather hear how she escaped (for that I hope she will) than see all the soldiers in the world” (*The Governess*, p. 126), the girls are portrayed to “have wished not to have been interrupted” (*The Governess*, p. 127) after the dancing master arrives. This can be interpreted as their desire for the maintenance of their female homosocial environment and thus satisfy homosocial desire.

Satisfaction of homosocial desire in this context is significant in terms of establishing loving and caring bonds among the girls at the boarding school, which is constantly referred throughout the novel. For instance, Miss Jenny’s following speech after the quarrel – a turning point for the girls – is full of references to homosocial desire:

‘My dear friends and schoolfellows, you cannot imagine the happiness it gives me to see you thus all so heartily reconciled. You will find the joyful fruits of it. . . . Now if you will use as many endeavours to love as you have hitherto done to hate each other, you will find that every one amongst you, whenever you have anything given you, will have double, nay, I may say eight times (as there are eight of you) the pleasure, in considering that your companions are happy. What is the end of quarrels, but that everyone is fretted and vexed, and no one gains anything! Whereas by endeavouring to please and love each other, the end is happiness to ourselves, and joy to everyone around us. . . .’ (*The Governess*, p. 23).

The use of possessive pronoun is significant: Jenny’s address to the girls as “My dear” demonstrates her possessive and friendly attitude towards them. “My”, Jenny shows that there exists a bond between her and the girls. And as a natural requirement of this bond she concerns their sorrow and troubles as if they are hers. Therefore, she is seen to be unable to express her pleasure at seeing the reconciliation achieved among them. In this context, reconciliation means the maintenance of harmony and peace in a female homosocial circle. Jenny defines the psychological advantages of such a reconciliation as “joyful fruits” that may be associated with happiness and pleasure. And she points out that the happiness of others brings more pleasure and one can become happy by making others happy and by loving them. In this respect, considering that the verbal indicators “companion” and “each other” refer to homosocial bonding, it can be argued that satisfying homosocial desire will bring peace and happiness to the girls at school.

Exchange of objects among the girls in a homosocial space signposts a relatively deeper sense of mutual emotive bond between the characters beyond rational economical concerns even though not comparable to “faith, reliance, dependence and trust among the heroes in myths” (Classen, 2010, p. 21). For instance, at the beginning of the novel, Jenny does not mind spending “out of the little pocket money she was allowed” (*The Governess*, p. 24) for the sake of her friends at school. In this respect, Roulston’s argument on the relationship between Miss Melvyn and Miss Marcel in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* is suggestive. Roulston (2010) states that the exchange of money between female friends, not being current in the eighteenth-century fiction, demonstrates “two women [who] see themselves more as an emotional and economic partnership than just a friendship” (p. 199). Then, a similar interpretation may be offered for

the friendship that Jenny intends to develop with the girls, and it may be claimed that Jenny tries to create such kind of partnership with the girls. As Verini (2016) suggests as to the significance of female solidarity, such friendship is brought together with selflessness. For example, she brings a basket of apples so as to provide the girls with the message that it is not objects but people who make life peaceful or miserable (*The Governess*, p. 24). Having aroused homosocial desire in the female characters, Jenny is also portrayed to express her delight at seeing the community all in peace and harmony. For example, when she sees “all her scholars walk towards her hand in hand, with such cheerful countenances”, she decides to “mention to them her pleasure in seeing them thus altered” (*The Governess*, p. 34). The description of the girls holding each other’s hands and smiling can be interpreted as a manifestation of a satisfying and pleasing homosociality. The physical contact between the girls suggests a close and intimate social relationship. And Jenny is portrayed to enjoy this picture depicting a harmonious homosocial circle. The following scene is one other that depicts her in pleasure:

But seeing them so much altered in their manner of talking to each other, since the time they made their little remarks on her story of the giants, filled her whole mind with the most sincere pleasure; and with a smile peculiar to herself, and which diffused a cheerfulness to all round her, she told her companions the joy their present behaviour had inspired her with; . . . (*The Governess*, p. 132).

That Jenny derives “sincere pleasure” from the homosocial harmony indicates her pleasure by means of articulating her feelings of joy at their peace. Moreover, a unique expression of pleasure she wears on her face raises cheerful smiles on the girls’ faces. This mutual satisfaction from the other’s pleasure can be explained as a manifestation of homosocial desire overwhelming mere homosocial structure, which transforms a kind of homosocial bond to a kinder bond.

However, it is not only Jenny who expresses her enjoyment in this female homosocial circle. The girls also are portrayed to enjoy their homosocial bond with Jenny herself. For instance, the scene in which Jenny leaves the girls to talk with Mrs. Teachum may be considered to offer a clear illustration of homosocial desire harboured in these girls: “. . . Miss Jenny desired them all to go thither without her, and she would soon follow them; which they readily consented to; but begged her not to deprive them long of the pleasure of her sweet company” (*The Governess* 95). They define Jenny’s companionship as “sweet company” and feels pleased to be in the presence of her. The verbal indicators “beg”, “deprive”, “pleasure” and “company” all serve the manifestation of homosocial desire in these characters. For instance, the verbal indicators “pleasure” and “company” suggest that the girls derive satisfaction from being accompanied by Jenny, namely from the homosocial bond they develop with her. Furthermore, the verbal indicator “derive” shows that Jenny’s leave causes the loss of a pleasant company, and their firm request for this loss not to last long is provided by the verbal indicator “beg”. For this reason, Jenny finds them in “quite impatient of this short absence” (*The Governess*, p. 95). In this context, Jenny’s absence refers to the loss of a homosocial bond, a loss that stimulates their homosocial desire and makes them demand her return impatiently. They even do not dare to oppose “any proposal that came from Miss Jenny” (*The Governess*, p. 95) probably in fear that they can damage the relation between them. Moreover, these girls who cannot stand being away from Jenny even for a short time are portrayed to shed tears at the news of Jenny’s leaving (*The Governess*, p. 176). In this respect, it may be claimed that the farewell scene is suggestive for the desire to preserve their relationship with Jenny. Miss Dolly Friendly’s following speech can be considered as an expression of the feelings of all the girls: “And must we lose you, my dear Miss Jenny, no we are just settled in that love and esteem for you, which your goodness so well deserves?” (*The Governess*, p. 176). Dolly is seen to refer to Jenny’s departure as a loss, which can be regarded as an indicator of homosocial desire considering that one desires what

he or she lacks. In this context, Dolly and the other female characters are to lack Jenny's companionship. Therefore, there is a repeated reference to this loss. For instance, a similar speech to Dolly's is delivered by Polly Suckling: "Indeed, indeed, Miss Jenny, you must not go; I shall break my heart, if I lose you: sure we shan't, nor we can't, be half so happy, when you are gone, though our governess was ten times better to us than she is" (*The Governess*, p. 177). Polly reveals her desire for the maintenance of Jenny's company and her delight in this companionship while she points out the impossibility of happiness in her absence. Therefore, these girls are presented to regard the days when they receive a letter from Jenny "better employed" than the rest (*The Governess*, p. 179). The intimateness and strength of the bond between them can be clearly interpreted from the following narration:

All quarrels and contentions were banished her house; and if ever such thing was likely to arise, the story of Miss Jenny Peace's reconciling all her little companions was told to them; so that Miss Jenny, though absent, still seemed (by the bright example which she left behind her) to be the cement of union and harmony in this well-regulated society. And if any girl was found to harbour in her breast a rising passion, which it was difficult to conquer, the name and story of Miss Jenny Peace soon gained her attention, and left her without any other desire than to emulate Miss Jenny's virtues (*The Governess*, p. 179).

Desire is directed towards the bond itself, which refers to the presence of Jenny in her absence. The bond signifies the very lack³ in this context as can be seen in the responses of the girls once Jenny's name is articulated. This shows that the girls desire to preserve intimacy and emotional bond in the absence of the desired object. In other words, Jenny still occupies an important place for them even if she is physically absent. In this respect, it can be argued that Jenny acts as a sign for the homosocial desire stirred in the female characters. The verbal indicators "cement," "union," "harmony," and "society" all can be interpreted as a reference to repressed form of energy. First, the verbal indicator "society" indicates the presence of a social formation among the girls at school. This social formation requires social engagement, connection, cooperation, interaction and relationship among them, which inherently brings about homosociality in its structure. Moreover, the verbal indicators "union" and "harmony" suggest a pleasing and satisfying gathering that is made stronger by means of using a conduit, namely Jenny herself. The verbal indicator "cement" points to the presence of a bond that is to be strengthened. Thus, Mrs. Teachum's school is "mentioned throughout the country, as an example of peace and harmony" (*The Governess*, p. 179). In accordance to peace and harmony among these nine female characters, there is also a representation of homosocial desire by means of the relationship between these girls and their governess, Mrs. Teachum.

The bond between Mrs. Teachum and her students can be argued as an example to manifestation of homosocial desire, rather than a bond between a governess and her students. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel, Mrs. Teachum is portrayed to be a governess "who delighted in pleasing" (*The Governess*, p. 13) her students, and she brings a basket of apples with this intention. In return, these girls appear eager "to obey her commands" when "they understood their governess's pleasure" (*The Governess*, p. 92). This mutual concern for the other's pleasure can be interpreted as a manifestation of homosocial desire. In particular, Jenny is presented to comply with Mrs. Teachum's instructions willingly: "Miss Jenny always with great cheerfulness obeyed her governess" (*The Governess*, p. 113). Here the words "cheerfulness" and "obey" are interestingly brought together. First, the libidinal energy is released through "cheerfulness" and then, secondly, it is regulated or controlled by the governing superego asking for "obedience." Here, the girls' display of their love and affection

³ Given in Lacanian terms, but keep in mind that the homosocial desire is based upon Freudian libidinal energy.

for their governess shows her maternal and paternal role at a time. Informal setting elements like flowers in the fields brings about homosocial harmony between the girls and Mrs. Teachum. Such peaceful and happy community is due to the satisfied homosocial desire as implied in the scene: “And as she now saw, by their good behaviour, they deserved that indulgence, she took the little dumpling by the hand, and, followed by the rest, walked towards the house . . .” (*The Governess*, p. 113). This scene wherein Mrs. Teachum is seen to hold this girl’s hand suggests libidinal energy release as well as physical contact between the characters. Moreover, the picture of Mrs. Teachum and the girls’ walking towards to the “house” can be read allegorically: Return to secure realm of homosocial circle.

Conclusion

To conclude, *The Governess* explores the manifestation, representation and satisfaction of homosocial desire in female characters. The narratives themselves are offered to celebrate female homosociality and thus to maintain female homosocial harmony among the girls at school by means of stimulating homosocial desire. Hence, (a) Sarah Fielding’s *Little Female Academy* brings together significant elements of homosociality, teaching and storytelling, (b) Sarah Fielding’s realistic portrayal of social life and characters in her fiction is amalgamated with her moralist concerns, (c) Mrs. Teachum, an obsessed lady representing a paradoxical matriarchal status with authority and privacy. The homosocial space is governed by Mrs. Teachum, who on the one hand stimulates homosocial desire by her selfless, devoted, merciful, generous and “invisible moderation;” on the other hand, carefully determines this space through her controlling, securing, maintaining and decent “Guidance.” (d) When released, aroused, gratified or satisfied, homosocial desire reveals a power of transformation from sadness to happiness, chaos to harmony. What is maintained by the critics and intended by the historical author is the recuperation from antisocial selfishness. The reason behind this cure is the fulfilment of homosocial desire.

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