<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The Dishonour of the Disrobed: Politics of the Female Body in the Mahabharata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Rajkumar, Thiagaras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>Rajkumar, T. (2017, March). The Dishonour of the Disrobed: Politics of the Female Body in the Mahabharata. Presented at Discover URECA @ NTU poster exhibition and competition, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/42847">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/42847</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>© 2017 The Author(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Dishonour of the Disrobed:
Politics of the Female Body in the Mahabharata

Motivation:
In the Mahabharata, which is a cornerstone text in the Hindu religion, female characters have traditionally been objectified by men, with little autonomy of their own. Although they are exalted for their virtues, these female characters are mostly valued for their physicality and are almost always exploited in the narratives, either through the misogyny of the male characters or the purposeful subjugation by the male author, Vyasa.

Methodology:
I will offer an alternative reading of a pivotal scene in the Sanskrit Mahabharata, which is the dice game scene where Draupadi, common wife of the Pandavas, was staked as a possession and a subsequent attempt to disrobe her in the royal court was made. Using evidence from the translations of John D. Smith and Kisari Mohan Ganguli, I will analyse the signifiers of the physical body of Draupadi, to raise ethical issues with regards to the status of women in the epic poem.

Findings:
Through my initial studies of the translations, I have learned that the author has used Draupadi in the dice game scene as a catalyst for the Kurukshetra War, which will be fought by the Pandavas against the Kauravas to avenge their wife’s dishonour. I have drawn some significations of her body in order to reevaluate her position as a woman who is central to the machinations of masculine pride:

- The story of Draupadi’s birth from the sacrificial fire as a divine weapon of destruction
- The violation of the menstrual taboo by dragging Draupadi to court while she was on her period
- Draupadi’s status as a reincarnated goddess as a symbol of royal kingship
- Draupadi’s beauty as a mark of her material possession by the men in her life
- The attempted disrobing as a means to lower her status from a royal princess to a slave
- Her gaze as opposed to the male gaze
- Her speech as reinforcement of the plight of women in the Mahabharata

I will proceed to study all or some aspects of the body signifiers in order to ascertain the purpose of her physical violation and the motivations of the author and male characters in the narrative for exploiting Draupadi for their own political means.

Conclusions:
From my initial findings, I find that Draupadi was not so much a feminist figure as what modern Mahabharata scholars like to posit. In fact, I believe that her character was manipulated by the author Vyasa to be a means to an end, so that her actions and words are not to be perceived as revolutionary as much as they are meant to be feeble attempts to save herself in a situation where masculine privilege has failed her. As such, the analysis of the dice game in respect to the body signifiers displayed by Draupadi has led me to believe that male misogyny is the likely root of all dissension, with regards to female oppression in the Mahabharata.