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Habits of Resistance: Feminism, Phenomenology, and Temporality

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PREFACE

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents, for planting seeds and always tending carefully to them.

To the women in my family, for showing me how to make things.

To my father, for your curiosity and irreverent humour.

To my mother, for all the small things you do everyday and for always knowing what to say.

 (And to you both for your boundless love.)

To Aron, for believing in me.

(This is for you.)

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ABSTRACT

Feminist resistance to gender oppression, while surely a collective political project, has an important individual dimension. Individual resistance most often takes the shape of self-transformation where one works on the self to change desires, attitudes, and practices. I argue that paradigms of self-transformation that rely on willpower or increased self-knowledge for change can responsibilize oppressed persons when changing proves difficult, which frustrates feminist ends. Because of this I argue that habit deserves increased attention from feminists working on personal resistance to gender oppression. I analyse a range of contexts in which habit appears and I underscore its temporal character in order to render intelligible problems in feminist theories of resistance. I work from the assumption that habits have both a negative and a positive quality—they can keep us stuck, but they also provide the ground from which we can change. While habits have been theorized as the reason for a lack of social change, I argue that habit reveals to us that much of how we are constituted is actually our personal control. I argue that paying closer attention to habitual constitution reveals that there are both multiple kinds of habits and also multiple strategies that can change them. At the same time as I argue for increased attention to habit, I build a relationship between lived experiences of temporality and how social forces produce meaningful temporal narratives. In this sense, I engage with our habits of time. I situate this project in contemporary feminist theories and draw on the phenomenological and existential traditions drawing primarily on the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. My overarching concern is not to say what habit *is* or what habits we *should* have, but rather to see what habit *does*.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Habits of Resistance

It is extraordinarily difficult to imagine an analytically usable language of habit, in a conceptual landscape so rubbled and defeatured by the twin hurricanes named Just Do It and Just Say No.

(Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 140)

The persistence of habit, its tendency to constantly haunt and upset both the philosophers of freedom and scientists of necessity, is…connected to the persistence of that realm of knowledges that, while not science-free, are definitely considered, even by their practitioners, as marginal and of low status. Habits are the material upon which kindergarten teachers and speech therapists work.

(Mariana Valverde 41)

Introduction

In the tradition of "the personal is political," feminist philosophers have emphasized the project of resisting oppressive gender norms both through collective movements and through individual strategies. When we resist norms of gender that are also *part of us* we run into many philosophical tensions: what are we *doing* when we change ourselves? What parts of the self do we change when we undertake these projects and how? To begin to answer these questions, I propose a feminist theory of individual resistance to oppression that centres on habit in order to respond to various problems arising from theories of resistance as personal transformation, especially those that rely on the will and knowledge as primary agents of change. The goal of this project, then, is broadly two-fold: to offer various insights into habitual experience; and to argue that the insights I draw out are useful for making sense of various puzzles arising from feminist resistance and more narrowly, projects of self-transformation. Habit becomes especially important to theorize when taking into account normative attempts to

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change our social world and ourselves because it seems as though habit, on some

readings, holds *back* change and frustrates attempts to bring forth new social

worlds. I turn to habit because by contrast I think it offers ways around these

difficulties—that is, it enables new ways of being that can serve individual

resistance.

Habit is and continues to be an aporia in philosophy. Even philosophers of

habit often refer to it as such, specifically in terms of the inability to demarcate

habit's relation to one's biological instincts, conscious decision-making, and

social conditioning. Elizabeth Grosz reflects on habit:

> Habits exist somewhere between the necessity of ease and the
> torment of need, one side directed to making the world readily
> habitable, and making the living being at home in the familiar; the
> other directed to a trajectory of infinite repetition, a tic, an addiction,
> a limitation and constraint on life (220).

Eve Sedgwick agrees with this ambivalent characterization of habit:

> A banal but precious opiate, habit makes us blind to—and thus
> enables to come into existence—our surroundings, ourselves as we
> appear to others, and the imprint of others in ourselves (139).

It is against this backdrop that I suggest taking habit as a central concept of

analysis is useful for reframing specific projects of feminist self-building. In this

dissertation I consider various strategies and sticking points for individual

resistance to oppression in order to shed light on habitual constitution and to

reshape projects of resistance in the first person.

While I argue that habit is an integral concept for any theory of resistance,

paying closer attention to the possibilities habit affords us will alter the kinds of

resistance strategies that we think are possible. My approach to habit will be to

draw on existential phenomenology throughout this dissertation, though I do not

limit myself to this school of thought. My framework suggests that subjects have a distinct perspective on their place within social systems and narratives and that they possess the ability to make meaning of their situations. Reflecting on habit, I have come to understand the importance of theorizing it in connection with temporality—that is, our lived experience of time. Subjects of resistance must be understood as both habitual and temporal and doing so has implications for projects of resistance—i.e., what can be changed and how should we undertake change? In order to theorize these connections I pay special attention to how the passage of time and our social and cultural narratives of temporality complicate how we experience habits and thus possibilities for change.

I. Forming Habit

I begin this work with the assumption that the majority of our actions and practices are habitual. What this means is an open philosophical question, as habit has many interpretations and philosophical traditions have investigated habit in different ways. To have a habit is to have an embodied relationship to one's environment that is repeatable, that happens over time, and that is in some sense maintained by one's temporal and spatial involvement in the world. Further, habits have an affective texture. The experience of performing a habit articulates a specific emotional arc: excitement, disappointment, release, achievement, and so on. Indeed, affective attachment to habits is an important dimension for theorizing the difficulty and ease with which we are able to change and create new habits. Habits can signify certain pathologizations. Addictions are often described in habitual terms—a smoking *habit* or a cocaine *habit*. We also talk about habits as

repeated actions that are not pathological, like having a habit of leaving cupboard doors open. Lexically, habit has two usages as a noun. One *has* a habit (singular noun) but actions can be performed *by force* of habit (mass noun). This shows how thinking about practices in the abstract leads to giving habit power as a singular force.

The etymology of 'habit' demonstrates the connection between external significations and the building of capacities and a self. The Old French, *abit*, referred to one's dress or attire and later became indicative of a person's character and practices. The transition from dress to character is revealed, for example, in how a nun wears her habit to manifest her devotion to God. Also from the Latin, *habitus* (condition, appearance) and *habere* (to have or consist of) the modern usages of habit show the connections among outward significations and personal practices—the coming to have a character based on how one keeps oneself. The Greek *hexis* also stems from a sense of having. Important for Aristotle's philosophy, *hexis* denoted the stable disposition of a thing and it especially denoted character or virtue when referring to a person.

Colloquially, one might talk about oneself as a "creature of habit." Actions may be done by "force of habit" and one can later "kick the habit." Self-help gurus Steven Covey touts *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) and others such as Charles Duhigg offer strategies to hone *The Power of Habit* (2012). The prevalence of self-help genre's focus on habit shows that what habits one *should* have, how to *acquire* them, and how to *change* existing habits are problems for us. They have existential bite. Habits are dispositions acquired through repetition over time, while some portray habit as mere mechanism or as a

reflexive, unconscious, and unthinking force in action, which leads to reading

habit as autonomy denying and *ipso facto* antithetical to a moral life (Carlisle 43).

Gail Weiss identifies wide and narrow senses of habit: in the narrow sense, she

offers small, singular actions like brushing one's teeth; and in the wider sense, the

examples she uses are actions like choice of novels or relationships pointing to

trends in one's decision-making over time that build a personality or character

(*Refiguring* 78-9). In either sense, to think of a habit as singular one must divide it

out of one's continuous stream of embodied temporal experiences.

Another important feature of habit is that it centres the relationality of

selves. Habits are experienced in the first person, but they are acquired, adapted,

intensified and changed in relation to others. Clare Carlisle argues, following

Spinoza, that: "[W]e contract habits not only inwardly but from those around us,

catching their mannerisms, accents, intonations, modes of dress, and even

character . . . this permeability shows that we are irreducibly social" (1).

Similarly, Rosalyn Diprose argues: "Habit is how one's body holds and transmits

an ethos to others" (160). When theorizing habit in contexts of oppression it is

important to understand how and when one is more or less open to the habits of

others. Openness to habits may signify our social understandings of who counts

as *human*—that is, who gets a certain form of recognition within their

community, or on this reading, whose habits we would like to share. As Judith

Butler argues, in many contexts people close themselves off from others because,

in her example of the cultural aversion to (dis)ability, we worry that someone

else's vulnerability will become our own ("Interdependence" 207). Relationality

has been productive for feminist and anti-oppression theory because two

important claims follow from habits not being completely up to me. First, if I am constituted through the habits of others then I can reduce my identification with habits and perhaps gain a kind of distance from them. Second, relationality underscores my role in shaping the habits of others, thus through relationality I come to understand my existential responsibility for supporting and influencing the habits of others.

Theorizing habit draws attention to daily practices, to the personal and mundane levels of self-building. This focus on the everyday finds an echo in socialist and Marxist feminists who draw attention to the mundane practices of reproducing daily life through domestic labour. As feminized and hence devalued aspects of life, domestic and caring labour are the practices required to produce subjectivities. In her critique of the formations of modern housework, Angela Davis offers an historical materialist understanding of domestic labour through the example of pre-industrial North American women's domestic work aimed at production. She worked as a "spinner, weaver and seamstress as well as a baker, butter-churner, candle-maker and soap-maker" (226), whereas modernized housekeeping is less productive in its washing, cleaning, dusting, folding, and so on. It is negative—eliminating dirt. Davis argues that by our standards the pre-industrial housewife would be a sloppy housekeeper (226). The social environment in which we meet our basic needs shape our possibilities for habit formation. Imaginatively connecting to the pre-modernized tasks Davis describes show just how habitually lost we might be if we were transported to another time. The example of changing household practices reveals the intimacy of habits and

how they require training and environmental and relational supports to be maintained.

Mariana Valverde gives a genealogy of Alcoholics Anonymous and the social transformation from thinking of alcoholism as a drinking *habit* to a disease of the *will*. She draws attention to these small practices and how they have been undertheorized in philosophy and underinvestigated in the psy-disciplines:

> From the inebriate homes that sought to reform habit by removing drinkers from their haunts and placing them in rural retreats, to AA's project to cobble together techniques for living one day at a time, the actual business of replacing the habits of heavy drinking with habits of health has continued to use and create techniques for personal reform that rely neither on theory, nor on preaching but rely on modest rearrangement of one's living space, one's daily routines, one's trivial little habits of the soul. These practices for reforming the soul have gone largely unnoticed by the psy experts and have been totally ignored by philosophers (38).

Part of the argument I am pursuing in this work is that changes in one's living space, routines, and "trivial" little habits can be powerful. This level of analyzing practices can go against the tendency to see one's agency in the world as a heroic "rising above" or "breaking from" one's habits. Drawing our attention to these smaller practices reveals again the duality of habits—that they can be solidified and stubborn, but that they are supported in various ways by things that are under our personal control.

According to Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek's analysis, habit can be interpreted as a superficial custom or an "empty gesture" that signifies a deeper rule. Habit is the surface of deeper cultural agreements. This psychoanalytic approach treats habit as preserving politeness and bonds of custom. For Gabriel and Žižek, habits are mysterious because they hold together ambivalent modes of

cultural prohibitions. The thought experiment they give is the following: if during a hypothetical speech of Joseph Stalin's a person were to stand up to criticize Stalin, he would be corrected. If a second person, however, were to stand up and ask why it is prohibited to criticize Stalin he would be in more trouble than the first person because he would have spoken the custom, which is more prohibited than the violation of the custom. They write:

> This brings us to one of the possible definitions of a madman: the subject who is unable to enter this logic of "sincere lies," so that, when, say, a friend greets him "Nice to see you! How are you?", he explodes: "Are you really glad to see me or are you just pretending it? And who gave you the right to probe into my state?" (114).

For Gabriel and Žižek, habit holds rules of social acceptability together with the solicitation to *break* certain rules: for example, when a particular food is labeled unhealthy it thereby creates a solicitation to eat it. If the food was poisonous or was a serious threat, then it wouldn't be prohibited as a mode of solicitation. Habit is, then, a veneer of social "getting along," it is just "what is done" without a spoken reason. While I do not undertake a psychoanalytic reading of habits, I think this reading of habit is interesting because it shows how socially conditioned habits of politeness can operate to discourage questioning of the status quo and thus reinforce deeply shared yet unspoken cultural agreements about shared norms for acceptable behaviour.

Reading habits as embodied we can think of them as a way of holding oneself that is often termed "personality" or "character." Wilhelm Reich's controversial take on psychoanalytic therapy focused on the level of embodied personality for analysis (147). One's attitude or character can be evidenced, Reich argued, in the way a person walks, their facial expressions, posture, and in other

mannerisms like tight shoulders, a stiff upper lip, distant eyes, and so on. Reich's

technique was to read people's ease or tension, sharp or loose movements, and he

paid special attention to how people were able to embody sexuality (145-7). This

view is interesting because it draws attention to bodily ways of being that are

often unnoticed.

The habit of smoking shows the difficulty of parsing the levels of

experience and meaning habits can have. As an exemplar of a habit that is

difficult to break—an addiction—but not always considered pathological,

smoking is integrated into daily routines, directly into one's body, and one's

social relationships. Sartre writes of his experience of quitting smoking:

> Some years ago I brought myself to the decision not to smoke
> anymore. The struggle was hard, and in truth, I did not care so much
> for the *taste* of the tobacco which I was going to lose, as for the
> *meaning* of the act of smoking. A complete crystallization had been
> formed. I used to smoke at the theatre, in the morning while working,
> in the evening after dinner, and it seemed to me that in giving up
> smoking I was going to strip the theater of its interest, the evening
> meal of its savor, the morning work of its fresh animation. Whatever
> unexpected happening was going to meet my eye, it seemed to me that
> it was fundamentally impoverished. . . . In order to maintain my
> decision not to smoke, I had to realize a sort of decrystallization; that
> is, without exactly accounting to myself for what I was doing, I
> reduced the tobacco to being nothing but itself—an herb which burns.
> I cut its symbolic ties with the world (*Being and Nothingness* 760-
> 761).

If the cognitive associations that go along with smoking—relaxing, taking a

break, social time, enjoyment, personal space, freedom, and so on—are thought

outside of the embodied and social relations that sustain them, we might

recommend that to quit smoking a person just interrupt and retrain thought

process that initiates the habit of smoking. At the level of embodiment, breaking

the habit can be worked with by "tricking" the body into thinking that it is still

performing smoking *acts*; lollipops, gum, electronic cigarettes, food, and so on can substitute the bodily momentum that the pre-established embodied smoking habit provides. The habit of smoking can be analysed at the level of social groupings that may be tied to locations or times where one usually smokes (e.g., co-workers on a smoke break).

Like many habits, a reductionist view can be taken that reduces a smoking habit to brain chemistry: addiction is observable in terms of particular brain patterns of activity or a chemical dependence on nicotine. But smoking is also a lived way of being in the sense that someone undertakes a smoking *project* of self-building potentially in terms of sociality, rebellion, risk-taking, being easy-going, and so on. Smoking can also be understood as a way of gaining group acceptance into, for example, a class, culture, gender, or other social system that might include smoking behaviour as valued. Smoking also has a temporality that affects all of these levels in different ways. It can signify a break time (or "me time"), as in a time between events—it breaks a workday into durations and rhythms. A rhythm is defined as a habitual temporality—a way of experiencing living time towards accomplishing a practical task—a beginning (in this case, lighting up), a middle (dragging and ashing), and an end (extinguishing). Smoking is also heavily encoded with a cultural temporality and the corresponding taboo in terms of health risks and "premature" death. Particularly, white middle-class norms produce a cultural temporality that frames smoking as acceptable *in the past* and that one should know better *now*. These norms mark the continued smoker as not working with *progress* both in terms of their smoking and in terms of their lack of willpower to quit.

II. Resisting Habits

The object of critique for feminist analysis is patriarchal power, but *individual* resistance targets localized effects on subject formation and everyday possibilities for action. Feminist resistance to gender oppression necessitates not just a better understanding of social forces (institutions, governments, medical and judicial authorities, family structures, etc.), but personal transformation that examines habit formation, habit sedimentation, and habit transformation. To resist is to go up against power, and to take on individual resistance is to go up against the power of one's habits.

To be effective, resistance must contend with strong social forces geared towards continuing the past into the present. The continuation of the present is accomplished through an ethos—a collection of society's beliefs, anxieties, ideology, religions, institutions, and political economies (Hekman 1990; Diprose 1991). The weight of socialization, education, history, tradition, and so on work against resistance, and for subjects to "overcome" this weight it seems that they require a heroic amount of willpower, if that is indeed the driving force for change.

I aim to draw out the double meaning of habits of resistance: we can foster a kind of resistance that uses habit to change the self, but habits also resist change. Though I think there is a distinction to be made, it may be helpful to think of the ways in which the two notions overlap. If there are forces one is struggling to change internally or externally, changing them takes the form of resistance. There is a pulling, dragging, or tearing that makes it difficult to move against the established momentum of power. When this force is within us, it may be the force

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of habit we resist. The two senses of "resistance," though conceptually distinct, come together in embodied experience and make the resistance that habits produce in lived experience exemplify, or perhaps shed light on, the resistance we might want to enact *against* social forces that we want to change. The feminist, contextualized phenomenological approach I defend and enact in this dissertation holds together these levels of experience, and it is thus well suited for shedding light on projects of resistance.

To return to my example of smoking, psychological research on willpower and smoking suggests that quitting smoking is easier if a person is not overburdened with making decisions that deplete willpower in other areas of their life (Baumeister and Tierney 38). These studies suggest that willpower is far from a permanent, inexhaustible, and steady force within the self: it is subject to fatigue, it is finite, and limited. Willpower also requires particular social and bodily factors to recharge such as sufficient food and rest. Devoting time and energy to quitting smoking can deplete one's resources for decision-making and taking care of the self in other ways. I discuss this finding from psychological literature because though few theories of resistance will say that one ought to use willpower to change, my intuition is that in the absence of a set of practical strategies for habit change, willpower is smuggled into many imperatives for resistance. Feminist resistance often asks that we change ways of thinking and acting and as Sedgwick cautions, in the absence of an analytically useable language of habit, asking that we refuse, shift, push back and resist oppression can unwittingly support willpower as a driving force for change (140). When this occurs, as I will argue, theories of resistance frustrate their own ends.

One question that circles back throughout this dissertation is: What *is* the role of increased awareness for self-change? Conscious investment is required for change but it is not always sufficient. Some theorists of habit have argued that to change habits one needs to cultivate a meta-habit of attentiveness to one's habits. But *knowing* my habits in more detail may not offer insights about how to change them. My investigation into habit seeks to find other necessary conditions for change.

Consider the recurrent feminist project of trying to feel less bad about one's body—an especially salient feminist project that I return to throughout this dissertation. As a woman this can be both a feminist endeavour and a personal one. It is political insofar as one resists the diet and weight loss industries and a history of valuing women based on appearance. It is also personal because one has her *own* experience of struggling with diet culture and body shaming which means that one's negative feelings are experienced as deeply personal. Many theorists of resistance consciously or unconsciously focus on the cognitive aspect of bad body feelings and offer decision-based strategies especially through first-person narratives about "deciding" to love oneself. Many popular cultural narratives, and especially feminist ones, compound this problem because they do not pay attention to the force of habit. Samantha Murray, in her work on fat activist communities, offers a critique of the common stories of "changing one's mind" about the value and beauty of one's body (159). Her critique focuses on the inadequacy of a decision-based or "voluntaristic" model of self-transformation and her critique squares broadly with my intervention that is sceptical of implicitly willpower and decision-based models of resistance.

In her work, *The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (2006), Shannon Sullivan draws on numerous philosophical traditions to understand habit, including psychoanalysis, pragmatism, and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. The overlapping conceptions of habit create a cross-fertilization between schools of thought as diverse as there are kinds of habits to have. Sullivan identifies social patterns of habits, specifically "whitely" habits that operate both independently of a subject and intentionally *through* the subject in a way that does not blame the holder for the acquisition of the whitely practice, but instead holds her responsible for *repetition*, always maintaining that the whitely habit can change. Sullivan focuses on how habits of whiteliness are unconscious because she argues we have shifted from a time of *de jure* racism—when racism was propped up by written laws of segregation—to a time of *de facto* racism where racism has morphed into subtle and insidious microaggressions as well as institutional practices that on the surface appear to *promote* equality. Society continues to be structured according to white supremacist values where whiteness shapes white people's understanding of themselves, garners structural advantages for white people, and operates largely in an invisible way. Thinking of white privilege as a habit offers a dynamic theory of change and repetition for one who struggles for a less racist self. Sullivan's work is a signal of growing interest in habit as a tool for social change and anti-oppression theory.

Though I have so far emphasized the positive role of habit to enable change, I think it is important for theories of resistance also to simultaneously take seriously how habits become rigid and block our ability to change. For example, lamenting the reticence of habits to change, Lumsden writes:

> This is why, when so many arguments have been raised within the
> public space of reasons about problems with the industrialized
> farming of animals or consumerism, there has been very limited
> change in behaviour. The failure of these reasons to succeed in
> changing behaviour shows the limitations of the Kantian model of the
> space of reasons as the comprehensive model for norm generation and
> legitimation, but, more importantly, it shows the power of habit as a
> determination of identity (73).

Lumsden evokes "habit" as a mass noun here and underscores its determining force. Habit, as I have sketched, is lived through repetitions in time and within a specific context. Habit is an ambivalent aspect of embodiment because we might experience the "force of habit" as both a positive aspect of embodiment (habits help us to complete routines, perform daily tasks, and so on) and a negative aspect of embodiment (habits keep us stagnant, make us repeat past actions and resist our efforts to change). My use of habit for feminist resistance is an attempt to work *with* this ambivalence in order to enable self-transformation better. In my second chapter I discuss some of Félix Ravaisson's arguments that habit is both a negative and positive aspect of embodiment. He also writes that habit is the necessary ground from which we are able to form new habits. Lumdsen writes of Ravaisson:

> [H]abit brings the past into the bodily character of the subject,
> predisposing it to act unreflectively in certain ways, thereby freeing up
> its cognitive potential for new experiences. Habit provides the
> condition for this openness since it allows the subject, through the
> dispositions that it entrenches in it, to free itself for the future (63).

I can only change myself if I have habits that act as the ground for my project of transformation, but I also depend on my power to form further habits in order to cultivate a changed self.

While I focus on individual experiences of habits and individual resistance projects, I do not maintain that habits are acquired only by individuals or that individual resistance projects are the most strategic or effective forms of resistance. With Pierre Bourdieu, I agree that many of our stereotypical movements and practices flow from something like a "habitus." He writes:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (72).

The habitus is useful for thinking about how habits can be tied to social locations and yet how they exceed the individual. The habitus points to the statistical regularities we see in the habits of groups. For example, it is not solely an individual habit to be disgusted by fat bodies, to privilege white bodies, and so on; neither are these habits produced by an enduring and necessary structure outside of individuals.

The regularity of the habitus is produced through complex networks of dialectics between the individual and the social. One mistake of understanding the constitution of sociality is to think we create the external wholly through internal changes (the free will) or that the external fully determines subjectivity (deterministic social construction). Bourdieu argues that the habitus has a "principle" of its ethos—producing a felt sense of the "reasonable" and the "unreasonable" (77). The regularity of the habitus produces this common sense or

reason. This forms the practical evaluation of certain situations—situations in

which what looks like judgement is relying on the principle of the ethos and

reasonableness given through habitus. Whether something is a reasonable thing to

do is determined by whether it is considered a real possibility. Drawing on Marx,

Bourdieu argues:

> If I have no money for travel, I have no need, i.e. no real and self-
> realizing need, to travel. If I have a vocation to study, but no money
> for it, I have no vocation to study, i.e. no real, true vocation (77).

It is not reasonable to have a need for travel if one has no money. Rather than

reason setting ends for us, Bourdieu suggests that a pre-established

reasonableness determines what is felt as a possible end. I might think, for

example, that it is a difficult choice between becoming a philosopher and

becoming a novelist. If I choose one, then I am refusing the other. But, it is only

because I am interested in both that I refuse one. I do not refuse "what is anyway

refused" because it does not occur to me to refuse to be a professional basketball

player or a deep sea diver. The ethos has not presented these as options to me

with any validity. The way that I make practical estimations about my success in

the various careers mentioned are practical estimations that:

> Give disproportionate weight to early experiences: the structures
> characteristic of a determinate type of conditions of existence, through
> the economic and social necessity which they bring to bear on the
> relatively autonomous universe of family relationships, or more
> precisely, through the mediation of the specifically familial
> manifestations of this external necessity . . . produce the structures of
> the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and
> appreciation of all subsequent experience (78).

If our early experiences are constituted by racist, sexist, and classist social ideals,

then in light of Bourdieu's theory, changing ourselves seems like a very difficult

task. I turn to habit because I think it is a sticking point for many theories aimed at changing the self and thus I undertake to unpack habit to get at what underlies these difficulties.

III. Phenomenology and Habit

While I am engaged with phenomenological thinkers, I draw largely on phenomenological insights to reframe philosophical dilemmas rather than giving a primarily descriptive phenomenology of habit. Shannon Sullivan in her writing on habit suggests that:

> My gendered bodily habits can be seen in my gestures, which express my bodily style. My style, which emerges from and appears as/in the gestures that I make, is not some sort of veneer that is layered over my body. Rather it is a fundamental characterization of bodily comportment itself ("Reconfiguring Gender" 28).

Phenomenological approaches to experiences are geared to investigate something like a foundational level of bodily comportment. Phenomenology, broadly construed, names a method of doing philosophy that takes our consciousness of the world as our starting point for doing philosophy. In order to distinguish their approach to experience, phenomenologists narrow their focus to "lived experience." They focus on consciousness as it is *lived* because our opening or having of a world is ontologically prior to and presupposed by knowledge pursuits for the *causes* of experience to explain and predict behaviour. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that the phenomenological point of view treats experience as first belonging to a *person*, in that it pays attention to one's "interiority." By contrast, he writes, "[the] study of exteriority, [. . .] is *anatomy*. The synthetic reconstitution of the living person from the standpoint of a corpse is

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physiology" (*Being and Nothingness* 457). A specific example of the philosophical import of lived experience is the difference between visual consciousness and ophthalmology. The study of vision *requires* visual consciousness and visual consciousness is not reducible to ophthalmological truths. Phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty would even caution against thinking of visual consciousness as separable from other forms of our consciousness (e.g., proprioception, touch, auditory consciousness) because in lived experience our senses are never divided.

Though there is disagreement within the phenomenological literature about how lived experience should or can be elucidated, phenomenology generally underscores how lived experience is ontologically prior and presupposed by explanatory theories of experience. Phenomenology thus posits a *foundational* experience that is *pre*-theoretical; in some sense it is ontologically prior to other forms of philosophical reasoning. Contemporary analytic philosophers such as Thomas Nagel refer to consciousness as it is lived as the *what-it-is-likeness* of consciousness. This does not entail relativism about experience, but rather offers a new way of understanding the commonalities between subjectivities—i.e., that we share a common metaphysical *condition* rather than a nature. Metaphysical conditions are the conditions of possibility for experiences like ours: the necessity of being born, dying, finitude, other consciousnesses, and most importantly the task of having to create ourselves (Holveck 199).

Phenomenology owes much of its approach to the Kantian tradition. According to many philosophers after him, Immanuel Kant effected a kind of "Copernican Revolution" because he rethought foundational philosophical

approaches to the human mind. Former methodologies—both rationalists and empiricists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—focused on how our minds conform to objects in the world either via reason or the senses. Kant changed directions, arguing that in some sense objects conform to our minds (e.g., space and time as forms of our intuition), thus "human consciousness contributes the structures of the world as it is experienced" (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 53). What this opens up, then, is an area of philosophy concerned with analyzing and describing those structures of the mind that both shape and act as the conditions of possibility for organized experience (e.g., how is it that I understand and experience myself as spatially and temporally extended?). The collected conditions of possibility for an organized and understandable experience have been called a "universal self" or a "transcendental ego" (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 53), and phenomenological method developed particular methods of self-observation to illuminate the transcendental ego.

For Edmund Husserl, phenomenology offers a new kind of foundation for philosophy—an *egology*. Undertaking egological investigation one describes the immanent mental processes that, taken together, constitute consciousness of the world. To describe the immanent mental processes of the transcendental ego, we must shift our attention from our everyday practical involvement with the world—what Husserl called the "natural attitude"—and instead take a particular reflective stance towards the operations of consciousness. Phenomenologists do not aim at proving the *reality* of the external world, nor are they mere sceptics. They are rather interested in describing the structures of our consciousness as the conditions of possibility for experience. In the natural attitude we operate

according to a "general-thesis," which is both a belief in the existence of the world and that the present will continue in the same manner as it has before (Schlimme 97). In other words, in the natural attitude we are engaged in practical tasks. Backing off from the natural attitude is required for phenomenological reflection on the operations of consciousness and so we "remove" ourselves— what Husserl calls the *epoché*—and take on the "phenomenological attitude." In the *epoché* we abstain from "a stand on validity, value, or existence," which "shelves," "brackets," or "puts out of play" our beliefs about the world (Husserl, *Shorter Works* 367). We then describe the processes and operations of the transcendental ego's intentional connection to its objects apart from any position on the reality of the object.[1] Observing mental operations reveals that consciousness is inextricably tied to its objects (the intentionality thesis).

Phenomenology has been accused of being a version of introspection, and concerned only with the internal processes of the mind. Sara Heinämaa responds:

> [Phenomenology] is about the ways in which we *relate* to the world
> and its beings. The phenomenologist takes a *step back* from the world,
> suspending his belief in the reality of the world and its beings. The
> aim, however, is not to examine oneself, but to become aware of one's
> involvement in the reality of the world, that is, the constitution of the
> *meaning of reality*, and one's attachments to this reality ("Beauvoir's
> Phenomenology" 21).

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[1] Husserl writes: "In *transcendental-phenomenological reflection* we deliver ourselves from [straightforward consciousness or the "natural attitude"], by universal *epoché* with respect to the being or non-being of the world. The experience as thus modified, the *transcendental experience*, consists then, we can say, in our *looking at* and describing the particular transcendentally reduced *cogito*, but without participating, as reflective subjects, in the natural existence-positing that the originally straightforward perception contains or that the Ego, as immersing himself straightforwardly in the world, actually executed. . . . The proper task of reflection, however, is not to repeat the original process, but to consider it and explicate what can be found in it (*Cartesian Meditations* 34).

Thus the "self-observation" of phenomenology is more akin to observing how consciousness opens on to the world. For Husserl, to observe intentionality we "glance back from the side of the object to the side of consciousness and pursue the general existing connections" (*The Paris Lectures* 16). Phenomenology breaks down the privacy of introspection because intentionality holds the world and consciousness together.

Sartre was eager to clarify that the *epoché* is not access to a transcendental ego as substance. While reflection does give us a perspective on ourselves, it does not give us access to a substance *apart* from intentional consciousness. Sartre attributes this view to early Husserl and to Descartes. He asks, if the cogito reflects and doubts upon *itself*, then what is the I that doubts? Hazel Barnes explains Sartre's argument:

> The Cartesian cogito is reflective, and its object is not itself but the original consciousness of doubting. The consciousness which doubted is now reflected on by the cogito but was never itself reflective; its only object is the object which it is conscious of as doubtful. . . . [I]f the Cartesian cogito reflects not on itself, but on pre-reflective consciousness, then in order for there to be self-consciousness, it might seem that we should need a cogito for the Cartesian cogito, and another for this cogito and so on *ad infinitum* ("Introduction" xi).

Sartre concludes that we ought to end the regress by positing a *pre*-reflective cogito—a consciousness that is one and the same with its knowledge of self and to admit that the ego cannot "observe" itself. For example, if I am involved in the task of sweeping the floor I also implicitly *know that* I am sweeping the floor. Thus, consciousness *has* the permanent mark of selfness, and so even self-reflection does not get us a purely *external* perspective—I can take my ego as an object of reflective consciousness, but I am not separate *from* the ego as I reflect

on it. In this way, reflective consciousness is involved in producing the objects of reflection. Taking the ego as an object of reflective consciousness, for Sartre, involves in some sense reflectively creating an ego—it is not known through observation.

Sartre further illuminates the layers of consciousness with the transitive/intransitive distinction in grammar. In "consciousness of self" we need the preposition "of" to make the transition between consciousness and self; this is Descartes' *cogito*, and it is taken as an object of reflection. But if we bracket the "of"—as in, "consciousness (of) self"—then we are implying that there is no separation between consciousness and knowing that we are conscious (it is *reflexive*, not *reflective* in nature) and how can we reflect on *this*? Sartre writes: "[F]or if my consciousness were not consciousness of being conscious of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table, without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious—which is absurd" (*Being and Nothingness* 11).

Phenomenological method allows us to describe the experiences we have of objects in their *givenness* (i.e., as we experience them) so that we can describe how our consciousness is structured in order to have such experiences. According to Husserl, the method of inquiry should be suited to the object of inquiry; he argues that the method of approach for understanding conscious experience should not be an epistemological approach like Descartes's, but a description of what consciousness lays bare. In phenomenology, he argues, like in science, we should avoid "interpretive constructions" and describe experience *exactly as it is*. Sartre's scepticism about whether we "look" at an ego through reflection denies

the ontological possibility of fully getting out of the dual structure of consciousness to "pure" transcendental experience without distorting what we are trying to describe in some way. Much of the tradition after Sartre becomes less about describing the immanent structures of the ego and their connection to objects, and more about describing the natural attitude, or how experience comes to us pre-reflectively in order to build a picture of the constants and variables in lived experience across varying subjectivities and contexts.

This brings me to Simone de Beauvoir's existential phenomenology, which has deeply shaped my thinking. In her review of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir gives a phenomenological reading of philosophers' attempts at maintaining philosophical distinctions belied by experience:

> The world having been torn from the subject, and the subject pushed outside the world, it becomes impossible to possess the world and oneself at the same time. Some throw themselves resolutely toward the foreign things and strive to forget that they are losing themselves; others choose a turning inward toward oneself, but it then seems to them that the rest of the universe escapes them. One of the great merits of phenomenology is to have given back to man the right to an authentic existence, by eliminating the opposition of the subject and the object ("Review" 160).

Eliminating the opposition of the subject and object flows from figuring consciousness as intentionally and internally connected its object. One important dimension of the "philosopher's distinctions" that oppose subject and object is the mind/body separation. Sartre writes:

> [T]he body can not be *for me* transcendent and known; the spontaneous, unreflective consciousness is no longer the consciousness *of the* body. It would be best to say, using "exist" as a transitive verb—that consciousness exists its body. Thus the relation between the body-as-point-of-view and things is an *objective* relation,

and the relation of consciousness to the body is an *existential* relation *(Being and Nothingness* 434).

Thus, for Sartre and Beauvoir, the phenomenological perspective gives back to the philosopher her body as primary, foundational, and living. Many of Beauvoir's texts draw out not only these foundational questions, but how they are lived in contexts saturated with cultural and social meaning and constituted in relation to structures of power in a society.

I also take from the phenomenological tradition the notion of the lived body. For Husserl the body is the living subject position from where I live my life. He uses *der Leib* to refer to the body, which translates to "the living body" whereas the body conceived reductively is *Körper* (Bell 208). The lived body is the self-organizing domain of my experience *of* the world and *as* of the world. It is my living boundary that allows me to distinguish myself from the world and it provides the *boundary through* which I experience the world (Lindemann 279). Beauvoir's concept of the lived body reveals the body as able to express certain bodily possibilities. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir builds on this idea by describing how gender affects the lived female body. She asks, which possibilities are encouraged and which are foreclosed for a lived female body in the context of male power? One of Beauvoir's many examples is menarche. It has a bodily basis but it has social meanings that represent its value. She writes:

> [I]t is because femininity means alterity and inferiority that its revelation is met with shame. . . . In a sexually egalitarian society, she would envisage menstruation only as her unique way of acceding to an adult life; the human body has many other more repugnant servitudes in men and women: they easily make the best of them because as they are common to all they do not represent a flaw for anyone; menstrual periods inspire horror in adolescent girls because

they thrust them into an inferior and damaged category (*The Second Sex* 329).

For Beauvoir, menarche can be experienced in various ways based on the subject, her body, and the cultural significations that shape her situation. The difference between the lived body and the non-lived body is *ontological*: "the body is not a brute fact. It expresses our relationship to the world…[I]t *determines* no behavior" ("The Ethics of Ambiguity" 41).

Beauvoir's approach to philosophical problems in *The Second Sex* continues to draw on Husserl's insistence that our first-person experience is a critical standard for the *kinds* of questions that philosophy may legitimately pose. Husserl explains a "critical standard" in relation to one's phenomenological experience of comprehending meaning over time. The philosophical problem of comprehending meaning over time—that is, how is it that my ideas can be combined and thought together with ideas I am not currently contemplating?—only crops up because a certain kind of philosophical reflection on experience synthetically produces this dilemma. In experience we do not actually have this problem, because the past meanings are "present" to consciousness even though they are not *current*. Once again, a philosopher might ask, "but how is that possible?" to which Husserl responds that explanations are not necessary: common sense never questions in this manner (Sokolowski 531-2). In first person experience, meaning just *is* comprehended over time. Since phenomenology considers meaning only as it is experienced by a *person,* there is no problem of meaning comprehension over time.

Phenomenologists regularly come back to the standard of how something is experienced in the first person as the limit on starting points for philosophical reflection. For Beauvoir, before we are able to take on a theoretical point of view, we are first a "spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts" ("Pyrrhus and Cineas" 93). The emphasis on our spontaneous involvements and how we choose to act brings us closer to an existential phenomenology. According to Iris Marion Young, existential phenomenology "aims to speak from the point of view of the constituted subject's experience, in ways that complement but do not duplicate the observational or interpretive methods of Foucault, Butler, or Bourdieu" (8). Existential phenomenology takes seriously the interpretations of these thinkers, but its focus is not to describe how experience should primarily be understood by pointing to larger social systems or cultural representations or even operations of power, but rather to illuminate how subjects live and make meaning within their particular subject positions.

A phenomenological approach to habit considers it to be one of the conditions of possibility for openness to the world. For Merleau-Ponty, habit has a dual character or function—it allows us to become familiar and engrossed in an environment so that we can focus on new tasks, and it creates a generality in the body whereby we can use our habits to ground new movements in unfamiliar situations. Habit is a familiarization with one's environment that "yields instinctive understanding of one's situation" (Weiner 343). One way to think of learning habits is that it is incorporating bodily possibilities that are adaptable to situations beyond the initial context of learning. We become familiar with an environment and do not notice what is mundane and right under our nose.

Familiarity and generality hold together like the foreground and background of a gestalt. Because I am familiar with a particular environment, I am able to generalize against this background of familiarity. For Merleau-Ponty, generality and familiarity characterize the method of habitual *in*habiting of the world—a process that he describes as *haunting* space (332).

The interplay of generality and familiarity allows us to understand why conscious *knowledge* of oppression and good intentions to change one's involvement in oppressive structures may have little effect on how we form habits in an environment over time. Inhabiting is a style of being geared to each individual but created out of the pre-personal social and cultural formations one finds oneself in (or out of the *anonymous* in Merleau-Ponty's terminology). We can change how we inhabit space by either a change in our physical environment, or by developing a new way of inhabiting via the interplay of familiarization and generality. If we have not yet developed a way of generalizing in unfamiliar surroundings, then it makes sense that knowledge would be of limited use for forming new practices and possibilities. Knowledge, having a general character (in the sense of generalizing the concreteness of lived experience into language) is the domain of abstract thought and without support fails to create capacities in the body. In other words, while the mind can grasp new significances (e.g., learning a new word), for change to manifest in action we must understand a new significance *and* build bodily capacities that make that significance general enough to be a habit.

IV. Habits of Time

Thinking is most at a loss *when it tries to say what time is.*

(Christina Schües, "Introduction" 2)

My thinking on habit and resistance has been marked by the return of time as integral for understanding habit. Not only does it take time to acquire a habit (thus time is indispensable for processes of self-change) but habits have their own duration in lived experience: habitual actions are the completion of a series of changes that have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Time, however, comes to us mediated by social meaning and structures. While temporality is our experience of having a past, being in the present, and projecting ourselves into a future, society provides multiple forms of *temporal meaning*, some more literal than others. Biological "clocks" tick. "Premature" aging takes hold. We can feel young again if we revisit the past. We all have a past, a present, and a future, albeit of different sizes, and we all experience duration. Some of us, however, have different temporalities based on our class location, gender, sexuality, race, size, and so forth. Our organization of time is filled with potential meanings as we make sense of ourselves as having a past and a future. We have goals and attachments in the present that determine and shape how we experience the "now" and we anticipate a futural horizon based on what we can legitimately expect, and what we feel is possible. In this way, social and cultural narratives affect how we view our life chances and thus influence how we experience time.

Habit can be theorized outside of its temporal context, but then we are asking ontological questions—what are habits?—rather than phenomenological ones—*what is it like* to have a habit? I want to read these two levels more closely together than they typically are—what can habits *be* and how do we *experience*

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them? When focusing on the personal aspects of lived habits we see that to have a habit is to have a particular relationship to time—anticipation, duration, and the completion of a habitual arc (i.e., a beginning, middle, and end). Our sense of urgency, the punctuation of events in our temporality, our expectations, our possibilities, and other temporal operations of lived experience give texture to our lives.

Julia Kristeva draws on Nietzsche to describe two forms of *anterior* temporal modalities—cursive and monumental—and argues that they are traditionally connected to female subjectivity ("Women's Time" 17). Cursive time is the linear time of history, which is connected to women because:

> there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance* ("Women's Time" 16).

For Nietzsche, monumental time is the enshrining of historical events or people through monuments, which "leads to a continuous repetition and revision of the grand narratives of cultural history" (Emden 10). Kristeva describes monumental time as that which "englobes these supranational, sociocultural ensembles within even larger entities" ("Women's Time" 14) and connects to women especially in terms of:

> religious beliefs, [which] perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via dormition (according to the Orthodox faith) or via assumption (the Catholic faith) ("Women's Time" 18).

For Kristeva, monumental time rarely connects with passing linear time because of the strength of the cultural memory it cultivates. Kristeva suggest that feminist movements were in part an attempt to claim a place in linear time that would renegotiate monumental time ("Women's Time" 18). For this reason, Kristeva is quite critical of feminist movements for being a "power-seeking ideology" (*Powers of Horror* 208).

A phenomenological approach to time configures it as basic in experience before it is carved up into meaning (e.g., past, present, and future) by reflective consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty, time is always a constant passage, there is no "now" without a "before" and an "after" necessarily and internally connected to it (482). Time is then a field of presence. Going through our daily tasks calls upon us to allocate time for durations:

> This moment that I spend working, with, behind it, the horizon of the day that has elapsed, and, in front of it, the evening and night—that I make contact with time, and learn to know its course (483).

For Merleau-Ponty, time is best thought of as a kind of milieu: "I do not think of the evening to come and its consequences, and yet it 'is there,' like the back of a house of which I can see only the façade" (483).

Recent psychological literature on how people manage their time shows that people often avoid changing themselves because they are focused on short term "mood repair" (e.g., checking Facebook, taking a nap, eating carbohydrates) and not the long term consequences of behaviour (Sirois and Pychyl). The same studies show that people have an easier time changing themselves when they intervene at the level of their temporal experience and avoid short term actions. Specifically, researchers recommend that subjects stretch the salient features of

decision making into the future in order to be more successful at self-regulation (i.e., focus on the long term goal, not the short term one). If subjects were reminded that in the future they will be happier that they completed the important task at hand, they were significantly less likely to engage in mood repair behaviours. Because I am focusing on how habit is important for projects of resistance, temporality crops up at just this level—how does the length of time it takes to complete a task affect what I think is possible?

Schües notes that we come into a world that is already temporally structured according to certain determinations and durations. These temporal structures divide temporal rhythms and also come to characterize gendered temporalities. The body has a rhythm and there is a rhythm to our cultural temporal locations, but we experience the two as undivided in lived experience. Bodily energy rhythms (e.g., "early birds" and "night owls") and physiological conditions of bodies produce needs for different times during the day for rest periods as well as different lengths of time for rest. Bodily rhythms, depending on how they cohere with economic and personal demands, are sites of discipline through which social structures produce our felt partitions of time. Schües writes:

> The order of time becomes like a second nature. Different kinds of experience have different conceptions of time. . . . Time is fundamental to human relations, and the sharing of time is essential for them. For instance, caring for another person means adapting more or less to another person's time structure and time order. A loving relationship can be disturbed if the partners have too different time structures and time feelings ("The Power of Time" 68).

"Spending time" with someone who does not share your rhythm of time may be difficult as we may experience each other as too slow or too fast in our accomplishment of tasks and time allocation. Not only do rhythms of time differ,

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we have social and cultural expectations and structures that shape the rhythms of certain groups. Susan Wendell's work on disability and time reveals that the social rhythm of time presupposes a particular body with certain capabilities. "Pace is a major aspect of expectations of performance [and] non-disabled people often take pace so much for granted that they feel and express impatience with the slower pace at which some people with disabilities need to operate" (38).

Expecting particular temporal rhythms from certain individuals—for example, expecting the "double shift"—functions to necessitate an intensified "multi-tasking" rhythm for women. This can reveal the structuring of society and shed light on oppressions. Feminist economist Marilyn Waring collected data using time-use surveys and analysed the gendered time structures in different societies in her work *If Women Counted* (1988). Her study revealed that women's days in agrarian contexts were often marked by multiple overlapping tasks with shorter durations while men's tasks were singular extended tasks. In western capitalist countries, the expectation is still that women multi-task, but these temporal rhythms can be experienced differently:

> Some women see time spent with their children as playful leisure time, and their work in the office as duty, and perhaps as stressful. Others might feel the opposite: time spent with their children is a mad rush, whereas life in the office is quiet, peaceful, and communicative, and hence, a relief . . . no specific activity can be regarded as the source of time's quick passage, or as the source for stress. The root problem is not a particular activity or a lack of time, but the *rhythm of time*. By the rhythm of time I mean the temporal structure of society and of the way activities are to be carried out (Schües, "Introduction" 11).

The temporal structuring of society both forms habits and provides the basis for *changing* habits—if there is no room in our temporal rhythm to work on habits,

then the possibility of change cannot be initiated. Social forces create and maintain our temporal constraints and rhythms and thus the ability to create or retrain certain habits. The habits of temporality we have influence temporal experiences of futurity and anticipation, which are core aspects of how we come to decide which projects of self-building to take on.

Beauvoir writes of the gendering of time in terms of what kinds of projects are undertaken by men and women. Beauvoir's work on gender and temporality in *The Second Sex* draws on the distinction between transcendence and immanence from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Transcendence is creation, discovery, and progress, implying a futurity of extending through space and time, whereas in a state of immanence one merely maintains existence:

> But the wife has no other task save for the one of maintaining and caring for life in its pure and identical generality; she perpetuates the immutable species, she ensures the even rhythm of the days and the permanence of the home she guards with locked doors; she is given no direct grasp on the future, nor on the universe; she goes beyond herself toward the group only through her husband as a mouthpiece. (*The Second Sex* 443).

Beauvoir argues that for men marriage allows them both to transcend (outside the home) and maintain (through women's work in the home), whereas marriage confines women to the domestic and signifies both an enshrining of the past (through reproduction) and a break with the past (leaving her family and becoming part of the man's family) (*The Second Sex* 447). Men's horizons expand into an open future whereas women's horizons are limited to the present, maintenance of life, repetition, housework, and so on (Veltman 120). One's orientation towards her horizon reveals a temporal orientation. If one's horizon is saturated with demands in the present rather than demands in the future, then we

can perhaps gain phenomenological insights into how one's situation is located in networks of power.

A foundational assertion of feminist philosophy is that gender is hierarchical: we assign higher value to male-identified qualities and practices (reason, logic, strength, participation in the public sphere) and lower value to female-identified qualities and practices (emotion, intuition, caring, domestic labour). These hierarchies translate into a temporal order as well. Schües writes:

> [P]ositions low on the hierarchy are temporally very restricted and controlled in comparison to those that are higher. The question of power is: Who controls time? How much time does somebody have? How long does somebody have to wait? . . . And when you consider the question of "who controls whose time?" you can determine the hierarchy of a relationship ("The Power of Time" 68).

Feminine tasks operate largely according to the demands of others whose time is less restricted. Women have been required to adapt their time to the demands of others—especially children and men. Thus how temporal experience is structured by hierarchical social formations reflects power. Not only are there increased demands on women but the time available to devote to those demands is severely limited by a tightened temporal structuring that all but eliminates their "free" time.

V. Habits of Resistance

In my first chapter I engage with feminist theories of autonomy because the tradition of autonomy relies upon central propositions that I intend my turn to habit to challenge—that the will or increased self-knowledge are useful or accurate models for self-transformation. This tradition also opens up interesting

problems for resistance about what my self is and how I can be the one undertaking change at the same time as I am changing. The feminist literature on autonomy tries to mobilize an account of distinguishing between preferences in order to understand which preferences should be resisted—thinking of ourselves as habitual undercuts some of this literature since it often assumes a fixed self. Within this tradition scholars have focused on the value of self-knowledge for autonomy. I engage this literature and argue that while it has limitations it can be bolstered by phenomenological method, specifically in guiding and cultivating certain habits of reflection. Specifically, I supplement Diana Meyers' prescription for increased self-knowledge of oneself as intersectional by arguing that the Husserl's *epoché*, a method of suspending judgments about the reality of external objects, can be useful for self-reflective projects of coming to know how our habits are connected to our intersectional locations.

In my second chapter I bring Félix Ravaisson's view of habit to bear on feminist resistance. Specifically, I focus on how habit can offer ways around feelings of personal failure that can follow from the imperative for feminist resistance. I explain Ravaisson's distinction between actively and passively acquired habits to shed light on different ways of changing habits. I argue that this binary can be strategically adopted to think through situations where we find it difficult to change our bodily practices. To illustrate my point, I unpack the examples of mirror-gazing and "mirror fasting." I think through how Ravaisson's view applies to feminist resistance and how his preliminary but useful binary of active and passive can be strategically adopted to think through the temporal process of personal transformation. In conclusion I argue that it is useful for

feminism to resist acquiring active conscious habits that reinforce feminine norms of bodily appearance.

In my third chapter I analyse a specific phenomenological approach to the question of how cultural formulations affect habits. For this I turn to the phenomenology of time and habit in Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* [*La Vieillesse*]. I turn to this work because Beauvoir describes the connection between temporality and habit while taking into account cultural meanings. This view parcels cultural meanings into specific temporal narratives that create punctuations in our experiences, specifically what Beauvoir terms a "boundary mark" experience. I situate her understanding of temporality in relation to her early work *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. I develop her notion of a boundary marked future that decreases anticipation and rigidifies habits through an increased reliance on the past. I expand upon the boundary mark for a cultural phenomenology where boundary marks are constituted by understandings of our selves in time and not through biological aging alone. Beauvoir's work in *The Coming of Age* contributes to my overall project because it shows that how we live our subjective notions of time directly affects the ease or difficulty of changing our habits.

In my fourth chapter, my engagement with habit takes the shape of engaging our habits of time, or temporality. I engage with emerging fat studies literature that theorizes temporality in connection with resistance to understand what gets called "fat temporality." I argue that the current understanding of fat temporality is limited because it is derived primarily from diet and weight loss norms. I argue that both the act of *eating* and the crisis phenomenology produced by the "obesity crisis" have a temporality that offers expanded notions of resistance. I do this to

shed light on how lived temporality and social and cultural narratives are co-constituting and can produce forms of resistance particular to temporality. I analyse this instance of resistance because it takes temporality as its point of entry, and argue that in order to shift temporal habits, one must simultaneously consider embodied time and wide and co-mingling cultural narratives and anxieties.

Sullivan draws out habits of whiteness where whiteness identifies a system of social privileges and personal biases. Habits of whiteness are trends of habits enacted by white people that enable and enact power over people of colour. This interesting critique foregrounds the social meanings and effects of habits yet it obscures the first-person embodied experience of habits. An inquiry into habit as I propose it will do two things: it will investigate the many capacities and forms of habit available at the level of lived experience at the same time as it inquires into patterns of social meaning. Foregrounding the experience of habits alone also obscures the social dimension and production of habitual patterns. These two sites of obscuring are, I argue, unavoidable but can be mitigated by a mixed methodology that investigates both levels as necessarily interrelated. I submit that there is no meta-methodology that will allow for a pure phenomenological inquiry that doesn't obscure the social, nor a social inquiry that doesn't obscure the embodied experience of having habits.

My approach to framing feminist concerns is varied and interdisciplinary. I draw on the existential and phenomenological traditions and contemporary feminist thinkers. I also draw on media representations, blogs, and sometimes my own personal experiences. I am concerned not only with getting clear about the

concepts we use, but also with how those concepts are taken up in the first person. My arguments are directed at a form of social justice or anti-oppression theory that laments rather than harnesses the power of habit to change selves. I focus on gender, age, and body size in this work, but I have had many productive conversations about these same issues with people who work for animal rights, disability, and environmental and racial justice. Often it is the negative aspect of habit that is underscored because habit's resistance to change can so often thwart even our best conceived resistance strategies. I want to rethink habits because I want to preserve the indispensability of holding revolutionary ideals in a world opposed to them. My critical analysis of problems within feminism is directed, then, at underscoring the necessity of its revolutionary vision.

CHAPTER ONE:

Habits of Reflection: Feminist Autonomy, Intersectionality, and the *Epoché*

Perhaps it will even become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a personal transformation.

(Husserl, *Crisis* §35)

Introduction

Feminism remains focused on the critical project of transforming and resisting oppressive norms of gender. Resisting oppressive norms of gender is most certainly a collective and political project, but it has an important individual dimension. For example, when I am teaching feminist philosophy, students of all genders quickly recognize that not only the relationship between themselves and a gender-normative world but also their own relationship to themselves is transformed by feminism. This experience of coming to know and understand oneself differently upsets established habits but also opens up previously closed avenues of self-questioning and thus offers possibilities for training and expanding one's habits of self-reflection.

Figuring out how and when to change oneself is difficult self-reflexive work, and operations of power in society can especially occlude one's self-understanding that guides this process. One plane of difficulty for self-understanding comes from dominant discourses that obfuscate how one is socially located within and among certain groups (such as categories of gender, race, class, and so on). For example, one discourses suggests a meritocracy where

one's successes and failures are due to his or her own efforts alone. If I want to change parts of myself shaped by sexism, then I must confront the layers of identifications and ambivalences that I might have with my gendered experiences. The project of resisting oppressive gender norms also opens up difficult theoretical questions: can I differentiate internalized norms from those "freely" chosen? And, specifically for the problem of feminist resistance: how do I identify which of my beliefs, preferences, and habits are conditioned by sexism? The questions of how to understand habitual constitution and our social world, and how to differentiate the self that drives change from the self that needs changing, continue to be pressing for feminist philosophy. To put this question in the phenomenological voice that I will be working towards in this chapter: How do I separate the "I" that drives change from the "I" that needs changing?

One set of responses to these difficult questions comes from a constellation of feminist philosophers working primarily in a contemporary analytic register. They have turned to *autonomy* as an organizing concept. "Autonomy" is, minimally, one's capacity to live a life that is recognizably one's "own." At first blush, autonomy appears incredibly *useful* for sorting through which gender norms to resist, because one reading of oppression is that it frustrates an individual's ability to be one's "own" person. If autonomy is the ability to recognize oneself in one's life projects, then any conception of autonomy will presuppose theories of the self, its relation to desires, and a theory of how desires relate to action. These ideas, however, point to prior questions about how gender norms relate to autonomy, especially when one is herself attached to enacting a norm.

Natalie Stoljar, working within this tradition, argues that preferences motivated by oppressive gender norms are *not* autonomous. For Stoljar, these preferences attract "*the feminist intuition*, which claims that preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous" (95). The feminist intuition identifies preferences connected to patriarchal social formations. For example, a woman saying that she wants to have children primarily because her husband *expects* it of her, rather than because it is "her" choice is, on this view, not autonomous. This example problematically tidies the distinction between the expectations of others and one's "own" choice. Further, assuming that a univocal feminist intuition can pick out preferences that are not autonomous overshadows the wide disagreement within feminism as to how patriarchal social formations crop up in everyday practices. In other words, not every feminist has the same feminist intuition.

Because this thread of feminist autonomy focuses on acting on one's "own" preferences, autonomy does similar philosophical work to "authenticity," where authenticity means creating one's self according to one's freely chosen projects and commitments. The specific contribution of *feminist* philosophers to discussions of authenticity and autonomy is that they have paid attention to how oppressive gender norms muddle any account of authenticity. According to some feminist theories of psychological oppression, preferences that reflect sexist norms damaging to women may be fully incorporated into the psyche and experienced as products of one's own will.[2] This is partly because many standard

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[2] Tracy Isaacs has argued that this reading of women's autonomy leads to a paradox of feminist agency: "[G]iven mainstream conceptions of moral agency, women's agency

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interpretive frameworks for self-understanding interpret the self as a unitary

rational self-chooser in possession of an asocial "deep self" immune to identity-

based forces that shape social experience and stratify society. Since oppressive

forces interfere in the persons we are able to be, they then compromise autonomy.

I want to develop answers to a number of questions that come out of this

literature: Can we ascertain which of our preferences are truly "ours" and which

are beholden to sexist norms? If my authentic choice happens to be in line with a

social norm how can I be sure it is my "own" and not an unconscious capitulation

to peer pressure? If feminist resistance requires feminist subjects to wrestle with

these questions, then it seems we will have a philosophically and personally

challenging task ahead.

Further, Susan Bordo argues that the dilemma of finding "true"

preferences is *itself* produced by mistaken assumptions about the origin of desire.

Not only is it difficult to know the origin of desires, it may even be the case that

there is no single origin or if there is, it is unknowable. For Bordo, an ideology of

self-transparency informs the search for *the* origin of preferences, which

commonly leads to the belief that the origin is in oneself. She writes, "In these

constructions 'me' is imagined as a pure and precious inner space, an 'authentic'

and personal reference point untouched by external values and demands. A place

where we live free and won't be pushed around" ("Braveheart, Babe" 193). The

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under patriarchy is compromised. Some have claimed that, in their oppressive social
conditions, women's consciousness is false or colonized in the sense that we participate in
our own subordination. . . . Feminist agency, that is, agency that would be effective against
women's oppression, requires that we be active participants against our own subordination.
The 'properly' socialised woman will lack the ability to take such action to the extent that
she is more concerned with others than herself, lacking control over her life, and dependent
(132-3).

ideology of self-transparency, for example, influences how students in feminist classrooms often understand feminist critique. They frequently interpret feminist politics as promoting the idea that we should follow our "true" desires rather than those produced by sexism. Asking where "true" desires come from, however, points back to a socially constituted, habitual self capable of change over time. Thus our tasks of self-reflection get complicated when the object of our knowledge pursuit is one's habitual constitution.

One way in which Diana Meyers and others have addressed some of these complexities is to argue for the value of increased self-knowledge for autonomy. On the face of it, knowledge appears to address many of these complexities, offering up a standard (the truth) for deciphering which preferences are connected to sexism and how social norms and our choices build selves. This casts feminist resistance crucially as an epistemological project, though projects of self-transformation are not primarily epistemological. The turn to knowledge, especially self-knowledge, however, may pose more questions than it answers—especially if knowledge is taken to be the *ground* for resistance projects. For example, what kind of knowledge is at stake for self-knowledge, and what kind of knower is implied in projects of self-knowledge? In this chapter I follow the implications of using self-knowledge to speak to the worries I have outlined, specifically for how we can come to know ourselves within contexts of oppression.

As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, my turn to habit is an attempt to move away from knowledge and rational-assent based paradigms of resistance; however, here I evaluate what usefulness self-understanding has for

projects of self-transformation. My work in this chapter, then, is partly aimed at revealing the weaknesses of existing knowledge-based approaches but also at gathering theoretical tools for addressing these shortcomings. The direct link between self-understanding and self-transformation is habit: habit offers a target for knowledge, but also reveals that static and verifiable knowledge of the self misses the mark. Habit also offers a way of thinking about our practices of knowing and how it can be difficult to change them.

I begin this chapter with an overview of the feminist autonomy literature that motivates the problem of preferences within sexism. I engage Meyers' position that self-knowledge increases autonomy, specifically her provocative claim that greater engagement with intersectionality—both the theoretical tool for understanding the interaction of *social structures* and the effects that these multiple forces have in creating multiply located *selves*—gets at some of the difficulties in understanding one's own preferences in the first person. I develop her view in light of criticisms of intersectionality and evaluate the example of privilege checklists as a strategy of coming to intersectional self-knowledge. To resolve some tensions coming out of her strategies, I push Meyers' view in the direction of the phenomenological *epoché*. This method is especially suitable for undertaking a self-knowledge project guided by intersectionality. The *epoché* draws our attention towards the relations *between* and *among* our objects of investigation—specifically, for this account, the *relationships between* race, class, gender, ability, size and so on (rather than considering them as individual, discrete social groups). My intuition is that transforming the project of self-reflection can *itself* be a project of feminist self-building that goes to resisting

oppressive gender norms. This project of resistance does not replace the need for collective strategic resistance aimed at larger social systems, but it is an important way of addressing how resistance is a problem for us in the first person. Individual resistance can benefit from thinking of ourselves as primarily habitual because habit upsets any search for a "true self." Moreover, how we undertake knowledge pursuits is itself a habit that can be trained. The broadest formulation of the argument I am advancing in this chapter is that if we begin theorizing from the assumption that our ability to be autonomous is supported by habits, then individual resistance projects require new conceptual tools for analyzing and understanding oneself. First person projects of resistance and self-transformation are important sites, then, for thinking through habit.

I. Feminist Autonomy

Feminist criticisms of the tradition of autonomy, while remapping some of the conceptual terrain, have still held out the value of autonomy because, as Meyers suggests, there is something important in accounting for "the control women exert over their lives under patriarchy, for their opposition to subordinating social norms and institutions, and for their capacity to bring about emancipatory social change" ("Intersectional Identity" 152). Autonomy, as a concept, has complex relationships with ideas surrounding agency, freedom, and selfhood. While agency is minimally a person's capacity for action in the world, autonomy is parsed as a narrower concept that speaks to morally and politically salient features of one's capacity for action. While freedom picks out one's ability to act in the world without constraint, autonomy is concerned with the

independence or authenticity of one's desires (Christman 2). Furthermore,

because of the ways in which different theoretical trajectories have conceived of

the relations among the self, desires, the will, and external influences, there are

many competing conceptions of autonomy. On most conceptions of autonomy,

normative and political claims are entailed because autonomy is considered a

good to be promoted.[3]

Autonomy's conceptual heritage is located in the Kantian tradition, where

one has moral autonomy if she is able to conform her will to a categorical law of

reason rather than a mere hypothetical imperative. Kantian autonomy addresses

whether an agent is able to engage in moral decision-making and actions apart

from contingent desire; thus it points to a certain ability to separate oneself from

one's immediate involvement in desires and preferences (Christman 2-3).[4]

Although others have modified it for feminist purposes,[5] many have criticized

Kant's understanding of the self as overly independent, causally distinct, self-

sufficient, and unemotional, thus as not amenable to feminist theoretical ends.

Paul Guyer argues that, for Kant, the self is engaged in extended projects of

working on itself through time, specifically, training the inclinations so that

reason can more easily guide our moral lives (94). This picture unfortunately

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[3] It is not clear, however, how autonomy should be valued on balance with other social goods. Marina Oshana, for example, argues that autonomy-violating measures should be taken to ensure an informed public to support democratic ideals (107).

[4] The Kantian picture reads failures to change as failures of the will's responsiveness to reason, which Kym Maclaren argues unfairly moralizes agency by dividing people into two categories: responsive to reason (rational), and non-responsive to reason (irrational, and hence moral failures) (25). The moralizing derives from Kant's insistence that only autonomous actions are worthy of moral respect (Guyer 86-88).

[5] See Barbara Herman and Lara Denis for modifications of the Kantian formula. See especially Genevieve Lloyd (1984), Lorraine Code (1991) and Susan Bordo (1987) for extended criticisms of the Kantian picture of autonomy.

treats habits as *impairments* to autonomous action, rather than the necessary

ground from which autonomy springs. If habit is the condition of possibility for

autonomy, then whatever power our will has to guide our preferences is

necessarily connected to our ability to form habits.

Marilyn Friedman argues that within this tradition of autonomy, the

emphasis on *self*-determination and *self*-government often construes autonomy as

ideally enacted when one acts *against* relationships and networks of dependency.

Her primary example is late nineteenth-century French painter Paul Gauguin's

abandonment of his family to pursue painting. Gauguin's actions illustrate how

breaking *from* relationships codes ideals of autonomy as inherently masculine; his

choice to pursue art is rewarded in large part *because* he is male. Part of what

makes this an instructional example for Friedman is that Gauguin did not receive

any recognition for his work in his lifetime, thus his decision seems to be for

himself at the expense of his family and perhaps even himself. Autonomy

conceived as ideally independent of social relationships alienates women who

have not had the material and cultural resources to disrupt their relationships of

dependence, especially their roles as primary caregivers. Were women to act

without reference to others' interests, they would be seen as socially disruptive or

selfish (Friedman 45). Thus we need a theory of autonomy that not only refuses to

venerate breaking relationships, but also does not discount the autonomy-*enabling*

possibilities of relationships.

Meyers and others working within the tradition of autonomy have argued

that the Kantian picture lacks a proper understanding of the social constitution of

selves, since it is based upon an image of the self as a freely choosing and self-

knowledgeable rational agent (Meyers, "Reply" 124). For Kant, agents use reason to test principles and maxims for logical consistency and then use their will to conform their actions to the most rational course of action. Reflecting on this tradition of autonomy, Saba Mahmood argues that the concept of the freely choosing agent is a particularly liberal and Western way of theorizing how freedom can be expressed in the world. Mahmood argues, drawing on the work of John Gray, that the liberal tradition assumes that "the process of realizing oneself is equated with the ability to realize the desires of one's 'true will'" (11). Relying on a deep self that is fundamentally asocial and acultural, this paradigm of autonomy construes sharp *departures* from social coercion or control as paradigmatically autonomous; thus freedom is figured as dominated by social forces *unless* we exercise autonomy. Some feminist philosophers of autonomy reveal a deep investment in the linkage between self-mastery and autonomy when they interpret self-transformation as an exercise of the will *against* social forces. As Meyers and many others working in the feminist autonomy tradition realize, merely acting in line with oppressive norms cannot *prime facie* be a reason to think that one is non-autonomous.

In her study of women's participation in the mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood undertakes close examination of Muslim women's experiences in order to show that instead of concepts such as "true will" and "self-realization," women undertake projects of self-building within irreducibly religious frameworks that emphasize values such as piety, virtue, and hope. For Mahmood, rather than a universal truth for all agents, the liberal linkage from self-realization to one's "true will" is a context-dependent and cultural understanding of freedom. I pull

Mahmood's view into this conversation not to dismiss autonomy as culturally contingent, but quite the opposite, to argue that the project of coming to know oneself is deeply habitual and context dependent and thus one's experience of such a practice deserves all the more feminist attention.

Autonomy has been and continues to be a central concept in attempts to render intelligible women's capacity for action within patriarchy, and thus it offers useful distinctions for thinking about possibilities for feminist resistance. One important distinction emerging from feminist responses to the tradition of autonomy is between *procedural* and *substantive* theories of autonomy. Procedural theories hold that a choice is autonomous insofar as one's decision is the result of a particular kind of reflection (Stoljar and Mackenzie 13-14).[6] For example, drawing on the work of John Rawls, Thomas Hurka argues that to be autonomous one must have different conceptions of the good available to them, they must *know* about them, and they must adequately deliberate (128-9). To return to the example in my introduction of the woman who decides to have children because her husband wants her to, if she can show that she has adequately reflected on this choice, then the decision to act against one's own desires in order to further those of another is autonomous despite historical connections between patriarchal social formations and forced maternity. The possibility of this as an autonomous action might provoke feminist intuitions, which is why Stoljar argues that few if any feminist theories of autonomy are ever

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[6] Working within a model of Rawlsian decision theory, Gerald Dworkin offers an influential example of a procedural account of autonomy (1988).

fully proceduralist. They usually contain some normative standard against which preferences are judged.

The proceduralist points to a certain kind of reflection that both brings the history of one's desires into one's reflective purview, and in some sense "frees" an agent of her socialization such that there are few grounds for the feminist intuition to pick out particular actions connected to patriarchal social formations. Proceduralist theories must reckon with subjects' multilayered subjectivities, as well as the division between parts of the self that reflection *can* critically assess and those difficult to access. Friedman points out that autonomy-conferring reflection should crucially not include coercion. That opens up, however, the prior question of the difference between socialization and coercion (37). Despite the difficulty of deciphering between socialization and coercion, the woman in the above example *still* seems non-autonomous *even if* she adequately reflects. In other words, I am inclined against the proceduralist's hope that autonomy can be effected without regard to the content of one's desires, not because that content must be evaluated against a normative standard, but because reflection cannot be divorced from its content.

In contrast to the proceduralist's emphasis on reflection, substantive theorists argue that autonomy is achieved when desires have the right symbolic or semantic content (Stoljar and Mackenzie 19). Substantive theories of autonomy posit that sexist norms can influence our abilities to reflect and that reflection on one's preferences (even if it adheres to a strict normative standard) is not enough to secure autonomy within oppression. To return to the feminist intuition, a substantive theorist holds that acting according to desires that are the result of

oppressive norms cannot be autonomous. Further, the model for understanding if a desire is the result of oppressive norms is one of symbolic analysis and connecting these meanings to historical patterns and social structures. On this view, the decision to get breast implants, for example, would be analysed in terms of what breast implants signify, how they are produced, their effects on women's bodies and in women's lives more generally. For substantive theories of autonomy, feminist resistance focuses mainly on raising awareness of the influence of sexism on one's desires, in the hopes of problematizing the desires and sparking change usually in accordance with a model of consciousness-raising about the wider context and meaning of one's actions.

While Paul Benson does not advocate a purely substantive theory, he offers a sophisticated account where autonomy concerns not merely the symbolic content of desires, but how subjects regard their own agency (71). He argues that in order to be autonomous, agents must have enough self-respect to feel themselves worthy of answering for their own actions (75). For Benson, "being morally responsible involves being worthy of a certain social standing, that of an eligible participant in various kinds of moral exchange, such as offering reasons, seeking excuse, begging forgiveness, and so forth" (79). In fairly stark contrast to Friedman's example of Gauguin, Benson describes a woman (based on Charlotte Perkins Gilman) who expresses the desire to leave her family and pursue a career as a writer. In response, her family and doctor fear for her sanity and prescribe the "rest cure." Respecting the doctor's judgement more than her own, she believes that she *is* "emotionally deranged" to have considered leaving her family for an artistic career (74). The woman in Benson's example suffers from oppressive

socialization that has undermined her autonomy with regard to a certain domain of her life: she does not regard herself as competent to judge and criticize the relevant norms that have shaped her preferences. She desires an artistic career at the expense of her family—a choice more socially valued in men—which demonstrates that *who* our social norms tell us is autonomous influences who gets to answer for whose actions. Benson's account brings to light how choices within particular domains of preferences (like career and family life) are dependent upon one's level of self-respect and self-worth and how social conditioning affects these goods. This account is substantive because it puts certain constraints on which desires can be considered autonomous—her lack of self-worth was not up to her, and the preferences connected to this lack of self-worth are suspect.

Benson's argument is valuable insofar as it shows that one's capacity for autonomy depends not only on one's position within social forces, but on one's standpoint towards one's own autonomy. If capacities for self-respect and self-worth are necessary for autonomy, then gaining these capacities over time can be a project of feminist self-building. This analysis is aimed at individual resistance projects, especially those that target transforming one's individual relationship to oppressive norms of gender. While substantive theories and the feminist intuition clue us in to domains of preferences shaped by pernicious social forces, they do so at the expense of one's own *perspective* on her preferences (i.e., they entail a kind of paternalism or ascribing false consciousness to women whose preferences are in line with dominant social norms).

One feminist approach to promoting women's autonomy suggests that certain kinds of self-knowledge are necessary and sometimes sufficient for an

increase in autonomy. Since autonomy is an important frame for understanding

resistance and many feminists have turned to knowledge as something that

enhances autonomy, I want to look more closely at how not just true beliefs about

the world, but knowledge *of* one's beliefs, desires, and preferences can be

autonomy-enhancing and thus valuable for resistance. I have already aired my

misgivings about the role that knowledge has in changing actions, yet I am

interested in probing its limits since it continues to be given theoretical priority as

a primary condition of social change.[7] Many formulations of the role of

knowledge for autonomy emphasize expanded knowledge and the purging of

cognitive biases as paradigm methods for increasing autonomy (Bartky

"Sympathy" 177). The logic is that if we *know* more about our desires and how

they relate to social forces, then we are more able to *choose* between and evaluate

our desires—they will not be based on falsehoods. In contrast, Sandra Bartky

argues that knowledge alone is not enough for an increase in autonomy, but that

knowledge must *transform* the knower ("Sympathy" 179). Bartky argues that for

knowledge to transform it has to build new "sympathies, new affects as well as

new cognitions and new forms of intersubjectivity" ("Sympathy" 179).

Transformative knowledge allows the knower to act in new ways (not just think

new thoughts) and, specifically for the concerns of feminist theories of autonomy,

enables the knower to resist.

Meyers argues that self-knowledge is an important dimension of autonomy

because, "[w]hen people are clear about what they truly want, who they deeply

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[7] Eric Schwitzgebel et. al. have conducted studies on normative ethicists to see if their moral
expertise translates into better behaviour. Their studies suggest that ethicists are either equal to
non-ethicists or sometimes they behave worse.

care about, what they genuinely believe in" then they experience a unique kind of satisfaction in being able to act on these beliefs, desires, and values ("Intersectional Identity" 151). Meyers accepts that knowledge useful for feminist autonomy is not abstract, propositional knowledge, but rather a kind of engagement with others as much as it is self-examination. She writes:

> A paradigmatic instance of autonomy-sensitive political engagement is the consciousness raising group. In this context, political practice is never severed from personal insight, and theoretical innovation goes hand-in-hand with evolving commitment. Autonomy is thus a personal and political reality in the making ("Reply" 130).

While knowledge offers us new patterns of belief and it can influence our desires and preferences, knowledge can only become useable if there is a groundwork of habits that are able to adapt to new information. We have habits of knowing— ways that we navigate the world of familiarity and also ways that we generalize from one situation to the next. Meyers' point about coming to know ourselves within oppression is that finding non-standard interpretive frameworks that will disrupt habits will help us to come to know ourselves *differently*. Feminist theories that value knowledge for women's autonomy need to take seriously how ways of acting and knowing rely on habits as the condition of possibility for gaining knowledge. Further, the general strategy of linking feminist autonomy to self-knowledge may need rethinking because of how easily it links self-knowledge and a "true" self. If much of my self-constitution is the result of oppressive gender norms, then discovering my "true self" might reveal to me in greater detail how the self that I have become is in direct tension with feminist goals. Rather than liberating a concealed true self, feminist resistance asks that we transform the self. Thus finding a true self for Meyers is not about finding a pre-

existing thing that we are, but about the processes of coming to know about who we have become. The self that we have become in light of habit is a point at which we can think about undertaking projects of self-transformation for feminist resistance.

At one point, Meyers characterizes autonomy as primarily a set of feelings rather than the will's responsiveness to reason. She writes:

> Roughly, the contrast [between autonomy and heteronomy] that I have in mind is between feeling in control and right in your skin, on the one hand, and feeling at sea and ill at ease with yourself, on the other. Most people are familiar with this contrast, and there are a number of ways in which it may be articulated ("Reply" 125).

This view construes autonomy as directly connected to feeling that one's desires are at least in some ways one's "own." This parallels Kant's argument for the psychological value of autonomy, in which he argues that since we are free beings there is inherent value in the satisfaction that comes from making our own choices. The more we know about ourselves the better we can satisfy ourselves, thus doubling the psychological value of autonomy: we get satisfaction from fulfilling our desires *well*, and we get satisfaction from being the ones who decide *how* to fulfill our desires (Guyer 82-3). Meyers too believes there is a special satisfaction and sometimes exhilaration from experiencing autonomy. Thus, one important dimension of oppression is that it often precludes such an experience of autonomy. As we shall see, this desire to feel like one's actions are one's "own" can *itself* impede adding a social dimension to one's self analysis.

Meyers' definition of autonomy is especially useful when considering the positions of oppressed persons. She argues that those struggling for greater autonomy, among other things, often lack a sure sense of self, that one is doing

what one really wants, that one lives in harmony with an authentic self, and a

sense of wholeness and clarity about one's "desires, beliefs, affections, values,

and the like, and . . . being able to adequately express these attributes in action"

("Reply" 126; see also Meyers' "Intersectional Identity"). One's social world may

not support these goods; in fact, it may directly frustrate their development.

Because oppressive norms are geared towards taking these goods away, if we

recall Benson's example of the connection between diminished self-worth and the

ability to act on one's desires, it becomes clear that developing autonomy in

frustrating conditions poses serious challenges in the first person.

Gail Weiss has written along the same lines as Meyers' account of the

experience of autonomy, describing instead a phenomenology of

*dis*empowerment:

> People who are socially and politically disenfranchised, physically
> and/or psychically oppressed because they are deemed to be the
> "wrong" race, the "wrong" ethnicity, or the "wrong" gender, or to
> possess the "wrong" sexuality . . . may find that the horizons of
> significance that structure the meaning of daily life for their
> oppressors are not salient for them ("Sharing Time" 173).

This feeling relates to autonomy because being able to self-define and live a life

that is recognizably one's own is dependent on a certain amount of shared

meaning and social recognition from others. In other words, shared habits of

meaning contribute to whether you have a felt sense of ease with your actions,

and relationships of power can intervene into this felt sense of ease.

II. Self-Knowledge, Intersectionality, and Privilege

For Meyers, the self is not a deep and abiding thing, but rather the *result* of the exercise of a repertory of coordinated skills that she collectively deems "autonomy-competency" (*Self, Society, and Personal Choice* 76). She offers a list of skills for achieving autonomy-competency: introspection, imagination, memory, communication, analytical and reasoning skills, volition, and interpersonal skills. Autonomy-competency is a skill mobilized when agents become intelligible, dynamic, and integrated selves that are more or less adept at certain aspects of self-definition, hence more or less autonomous ("Intersectional Identity" 174). Being competent to self-analyse, imagine possibilities, communicate with others, and properly reason are the skills that help subjects understand, analyse, and express their selves. Acquiring and fine-tuning these skills makes one competent to act in ways that are properly one's "own." Though Meyers does not intend for these skills to be taken as primarily cognitive, they seem to be largely abstract mental abilities. Considering these skills instead as embodied habits that must be exercised to be developed provides a fuller picture of doing the work of autonomy and by extension, identifying the origins and meanings of preferences. Autonomy-competency is demonstrated insofar as one can do the work of self-defining, self-discovery, and self-directedness.

Part of supporting the feeling of autonomy is *knowing* oneself. Meyers writes: "one must know who one is—one's capabilities and weaknesses; one's values, commitments, and goals; and so on—so that one can make choices that express one's 'true self,' that is, one's 'genuine desires'" ("Intersectional Identity"156). Since the idea of knowing one's "true self" is cashed out in terms

of feeling "at home" and "right" with oneself, self-knowledge can be understood in terms of one's habitual dispositions, routines, and personality. For Meyers, we have to know who we are in order to act according to our self-conception—a self-conception built from one's awareness of habits.

Jennifer Hansen makes the provocative suggestion that "*all habits* are a tacit form of self-knowledge" (72). This means that on at least one reading of habit, our bodies "know" what to do in certain situations without thinking beforehand. This embodied knowing parallels the feeling of being "right in one's own skin" and acting as one really wants. For Meyers, increased self-knowledge for autonomy has two important dimensions that both connect to habit: we need to come to know who we are (our habits) in order to act autonomously, but we also need certain capacities and skills (habits) in order to become the selves we want to be. Hansen draws on William James' discussion of bodies knowing how to perform certain actions (e.g., putting on pants), when we would not be able to explain in much detail how we perform the action (e.g., left or right leg first). The analogy here is to an understanding of how the world works that is not immediately accessible to consciousness. In other words, we have common heuristics for understanding oneself and how the world works to produce certain kinds of experiences. For example, some tacit understandings that structure our understandings of social identities can be things like the myth of meritocracy (or the "self-made man") and something like the widespread belief that a wide array of income groups are middle class. Meyers perhaps does not have habit in mind when she argues for the value of self-knowledge for living an authentic life, but coming to know or understand our habits more consciously can provide a

schematic for increasing self-knowledge—whether that self-knowledge is about what our bodies do, or about how we fit into larger social systems of meaning and power. How do we come to know ourselves better? We cannot just observe ourselves as one visually inspects or touches an object.

Because Meyers and I are both concerned with self-transformation as the work of feminist resistance, it is important to draw out the political dimension of any framework for self-defining, self-discovery, and self-knowledge. Meyers argues, perhaps controversially, that maximum transparency of one's group-identity determinants is necessary for autonomy-competency ("Intersectional Identity" 162). If we do not know how important features of our lives are shaped and determined by our politically relevant group memberships, then we lack a crucial aspect of self-understanding necessary to be autonomous. Otherwise, our self-conceptions are based on misconceptions (falsehoods), and we would lack the ability to reflect in an informed way on those parts of the self that can properly be said to be one's "own" and perhaps those that should be changed. To complete her account of the political dimension of self-knowledge, Meyers introduces intersectionality.

Meyers' turn to intersectionality is broadly a response to questions of essentialism in feminist theory. Essentialism is a charge against feminist theories that rely upon a certain conception of "woman" as an ahistorical, homogenous, and static entity. In constructing these generalities, feminists have tried to legitimate the movement through mobilizing large numbers and making general claims about women's experience of oppression. "Woman" has been deployed in the interests of a select group of women—usually white middle class women—

thus its usefulness for political resistance has often met with the criticism that it reinscribes oppression by excluding those whose interests are different. Theories that are likely to be charged with essentialism are those that attempt to ground political resistance on group or shared experiences. Essentialism has come to name a host of problems of exclusion within feminist theory that arise in part from this search for common ground from which to make political claims. Such claims about women as the subjects of oppression then often constructed coherent and strategic political identities that are now recognized as "'static,' 'absolutist,' 'overdetermined,' and 'universalist'" (Heyes, *Line Drawings* 18).[8] As a result of these criticisms, feminist theory can no longer use a single definition or a free-floating category of "woman" from which to generalize about women's experiences.

The response to problems of exclusion has been to find ways to *include* the many voices of women across differences of race and class.[9] This move, however, risks preserving the idea that the differences among women reside in the "non-woman" part of them (166). Elizabeth Spelman writes:

> If we assume there are differences among women, but at the same time they are all the same *as women*, and if we assume the woman part is what we know from looking at the case of white middle-class women, then we appear to be talking about differences among women even though we actually are talking only about white middle-class women. This is how white middle-class privilege is maintained even as we purport to recognize the importance of women's differences (my emphasis 166).

Thus even "adding" other dimensions to an analysis of "woman" may leave the essentialism of "woman" in place. This leads to what Spelman identifies as the

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[8] For an argument for the claim that women are oppressed *as women*, see Marilyn Frye (1983).
[9] Something that Judith Butler has recently called "identitarian brokering" (*Frames of War* 162).

problem of "additive analysis" where group identity determinants are ranked and ordered in terms of bounded and separate forces: gender, race, class, ability, and so on. On the additive analysis, if one experiences both racial and sexual oppression, these oppressions are conceptually separated and then "added" together, which is usually done in theory by people who are in some position of power. As Cressida Heyes cautions, we must be careful of how "internal mechanisms of different feminist methods [allow for] relatively powerful women [to] reinscribe their own political identities in their feminist theories" ("Anti-essentialism in Practice" 153). For Linda Zerilli, we must make a methodological revision within feminist theory that pays better attention to *which* women we are talking about when we make political assertions ("Doing without Knowing"). This is especially important when devising collective political strategies, but how do these criticisms affect self-knowledge of one's various group memberships as a feminist resistance project in the first person? An intersectional approach to self-understanding, for example, must simultaneously consider how one's racial and class group memberships produce and shape her situation.

As a corrective to problems with single category analyses of oppression, intersectionality has entered feminist theory to name the multidimensional and co-constituting relationships that various axes of oppression bear to one another. Crenshaw et. al have recently written that:

> Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term
> to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the
> solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and
> social movement politics. It exposed how single-axis thinking
> undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and
> struggles for social justice (787).

Even intersectional theories that aim to include "difference" can continue to underwrite hierarchies of race and class because they do not pay close enough attention to how different identity determinants may not be equally important or salient in a person's self-definition (Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision" 28). In other words, while intersectionality may remind us of the overlapping and mutually reinforcing structures of oppression, at the level of one's individual experience, it is difficult to know how each factor is salient in one's individual life experience. Intersectionality is an overly burdened concept that in many ways acts as a reminder to not analyse oppression on a single axis, to not reinscribe power through exclusion, and, for feminist analysis, to be specific about which women we are talking about when making political claims. As such, intersectionality stands in for many ideas at once: interlocking oppressions, multiple forms of oppression, and how they are mutually constituting and interrelated.

Meyers introduces intersectionality along two planes of analysis: first, that since we are constituted according to multiple and overlapping relationships the kinds of selves that we are do not obey a coherent and unitary story; and second, that we come to know ourselves according to the theoretical work that intersectionality accomplishes—that is, explaining how dynamics of power work together. For Meyers, intersectionality is:

> Specific to societies that exhibit certain kinds of social stratification, for it derives from a social-psychological view about how individuals internalize gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity in sexist, homophobic, racist, classist, and xenophobic societies. . . . It emphasizes that people are categorized according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity and that these multiple ascriptions interact ("Intersectional Identity" 153).

Rather than deciphering "true" desires from those compromised by oppression, Meyers suggests using intersectionality as a set of *guiding constraints* on our projects of self-reflection. In other words, one must subject their self-conception to an intersectional analysis to come to see how one's experience connects to social groups.

Doing this addresses the relationship between ambivalent and overlapping layers of oppressive socialization at the same time as one undertakes a project of self-transformation. Meyers argues that understanding intersectionality requires analyzing the social significance of identities and accepting responsibility for one's location within social scripts ("Intersectional Identity" 159). This knowledge project is not neutral (i.e., it is aimed at responsibility and transformation). It is not surprising that the many difficulties in seeing oneself *as intersectional* would then be especially difficult for those who occupy positions of privilege (and more precisely, difficulty in coming to know their position of privilege). Because of feminists' growing appreciation of intersectionality, feminist critique has centred not only on privileges men have and women don't, but it has also become a place where feminist women who experience various forms of privilege (e.g., white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied) identify and discern their privilege in order to reverse its effects.

One criticism of intersectionality is that it has difficulty dealing with how oppression involves power imbalances between different groups. If intersectionality is a place holder for one's various group memberships, we still have to deal with the power imbalances that result from different social locations.

Patricia Hill Collins worries that intersectional thinking can lead to a flattening out of power differentials if all identities are considered similarly intersectional ("Some Group Matters"). Further, Anna Carastathis has argued that intersectionality can even maintain the additive analysis because the concepts that find themselves *at* an intersection are implicitly gendered (male) and raced (white)—and so it is unclear what is accomplished when we collide these concepts at an intersection (28). At best, intersectionality is a reminder that there are always multiple forms of oppression operating at one time, and at worst, as Ladelle McWhorter has cautioned, it may be a way to gloss taking differences of class, race, and gender seriously. She writes: "But if the claim that race, sex, and class intersect is going to serve feminist theory as something other than just a strategy to avoid charges of racism or classism, some form of concrete analysis of what has been called 'intersection' is extremely important" ("Sex, Race, and Biopower" 39). These reservations raise serious issues with the concept itself and Meyers uses intersectionality in a way that does not seem to appreciate these criticisms. The place in her theory that intersectionality occupies is one which flags a type of analysis that *should* take place rather than one that does take place. What does the difficult work of engaging with multiple intersecting forms of oppression at the same time look like? How do we further include understanding how those intersections are themselves in different power relations to each other. I would argue with Meyers that coming to know oneself as occupying a complex intersectional location is a valuable project because it holds the potential to problematize previous self-understandings in ways that, while not perfect, can further the project of feminist resistance.

For Meyers, to enhance autonomy-competency through engaging intersectionality one must "activate competencies that mesh intellect and feeling in order to seek out and assimilate nonstandard interpretive frameworks" ("Intersectional Identity" 167). Many standard interpretive frameworks for self-understanding consist of theories of the rational self-chooser, the bounded, unitary subject, and importantly, the asocial "deep self" immune to identity-based forces that shape social experience and stratify society. María Lugones has argued that the case of being a member of a subordinated group offers experiences of hybridity, and of occupying multiple worlds and translating between them in ways that go against standard interpretive frameworks for self-understanding. She also argues that oppression often gives one a *better* standpoint from which to describe and explain the operations of power in the dominant group—something that is characteristically difficult for privileged members.[10] If knowledge helps to mobilize autonomy, then members of a subordinated group are better positioned to "make autonomous judgments concerning issues of social justice and policy, and hence are better positioned to exercise moral and political agency" (Meyers, "Intersectional Identity" 152). But one's oppression is not always clear to oneself, especially since one's own self-conception may be the result of oppressive forces but experienced as one's own—thus understood as separate from oppression. As my focus is on the individual dimension of feminist resistance, I am interested in how intersectionality can be useful in the *first person* for coming to know oneself better.

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[10] Bat Ami Bar-on and others in the tradition of feminist standpoint theory hold this view (1993).

While experiences of oppression cause a kind of vigilance—one must simultaneously be aware of one's own situation and the interests of those in power—privilege is characteristically difficult for the privileged to perceive. As I am aiming at an intersectional analysis, however, the epistemological gains or weaknesses of one's position are never wholly one or the other. Even those who experience oppression do not know all of the factors of their oppression. The difference here is the difference between knowing about one's position as a woman, but not having a feminist consciousness that connects one's gendered experiences to a set of social forces. Further, one might have a feminist consciousness and want to expand or complicate one's understanding of larger social forces. On the position of the privileged Carastathis notes:

> Not only do people privileged on axes of race or gender consistently fail to identify themselves with their race (white) or their sex/gender (male/masculine), but, moreover, and what in practice amounts to the same thing, they often fail to understand themselves as racialized or as gendered (28).

Those who do not know their privilege seem to have politically important gaps in self-knowledge, thus affecting if and how they can be (according to Meyers) *autonomous*. Carastathis takes this to be a critique of intersectionality because only those with what she calls "hyper-oppressed" identities are considered *properly* intersectional, while those who are privileged in some way have difficulty understanding how aspects of their experience are connected to wider social forces. Thus, the requirement of self-knowledge for autonomy affects the ability of the oppressed and the privileged to be autonomous, but in different ways. The project of reflection for a person undertaking feminist resistance can benefit from a wider analysis of one's social location both in terms of privilege

and oppression. Meyers brings in intersectionality, I think, because of the criticism of feminist resistance as concerning itself with a single axis of self-transformation. This is not a problem with intersectionality, but rather a problem with activating capacities for self-knowledge in people who occupy privileged group memberships. This clarification throws into relief the difference between the difficulty of coming to know oneself as privileged and the *hyper*-awareness of oppression experienced by people in oppressed groups.

Coming to understand one's privilege must work against the habits supported by histories of social reward and obliviousness. To revisit Paul Benson's view, this is the inverse of the problem of decreased self-worth: the privileged have *too much* self-worth such that they do not consider a certain domain of their lives to be socially produced and garnering them unearned privileges. Returning to Meyers' phenomenological definition of autonomy, a privileged person may feel quite "right in their skin" and "sure of themselves"; thus knowledge that pierces through privilege will upset these feelings of autonomy.

To make these arguments more vivid, I want to consider the usefulness of privilege checklists, which aim at increasing awareness of privilege within social justice and activist circles. Within the feminist tradition of defamiliarization, privilege checklists offer various angles on one's social location.[11] Sonia Kruks describes the use of "privilege" among feminists:

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[11] Sonia Kruks has argued that the concept of "privilege" in contemporary discourses inscribes a neo-Kantian notion of an autonomous self who uses reason and the will to change oneself to undo one's privilege (181).

> [A]mong progressives including most feminists, the term privilege is used to describe structural differentiations that variously affect the life chances and well being of large groups, and that do so in ways that produce morally *unacceptable* differences in their levels of well being (180).

The paradigm example of a privilege checklist is Peggy MacIntosh's white privilege checklist (1989). While her checklist originally contained twenty-six items, white privilege checklists have multiplied through numerous authors in different countries and contexts. Some white privilege checklists have up to fifty items. MacIntosh's intention is to reveal what it is like to have white privilege in ways that remain hidden from one's consciousness (10). The white privilege checklist spans a variety of dimensions of experiences and uses first person sentences to prompt the reader to imagine themselves as the 'I' in the sentence. Some items include: "I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed." "I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race." "If my day, week, or year is going badly I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones" (13). Some further privileges MacIntosh catalogues describe feelings of safety and struggles to meet basic needs (e.g., access to housing, friendly/neutral neighbours, being able to question authority without putting one's race on trial), while others involve media and representation (e.g., I will see people of my race represented in the media, I have an opportunity to buy products that reflect my race). Since its release there has been a proliferation of checklists online (e.g., thin privilege, able-bodied privilege, cisgender privilege, male privilege, class privilege, heterosexual privilege, Christian privilege, monogamy privilege, neurotypical privilege, dyadic sex privilege). On one reading, privilege

checklists are not intersectional in that they describe one axis of privilege at a time. They do interesting work, however, because they speak to both sides of an axis of identity: by revealing what it is like to be in the privileged group they reveal the necessary connection to how that privilege comes at the expense of others. Sonia Kruks has criticized the usefulness of privilege checklists as potentially leading to a "guilt-ridden focus on the self" (183). While I do not doubt that they can lead to this kind of engagement, I think they can be encountered in more and less productive ways. I agree with Kruks that privilege checklists must be undertaken with caution, because like her, I am worried that they can lead to "heightening one's feelings of guilt in ways that only lead toward despair, self-hatred, and demobilization" (183).

In describing what a privileged person does *not* experience, checklists offer knowledge of what someone who is oppressed *does* experience. For example, Tish Parmeley's thin privilege checklist has items such as:

> I can be sure that people are not embarrassed to be seen with me
> because of the size of my body. . . . I don't have to worry that if I am
> talking about feeling (sic) of sexual attraction people are repelled or
> disgusted by the size of my body. . . . I will never have to sit quietly
> and listen while other people talk about the ways in which they
> avoid being my size (n.p.).

The checklist model works as a way of relaying knowledge about the self as tied to the experience of others, and thus as embedded in larger social systems. In another direction, checklists can also have consciousness-raising effects for the oppressed, in that one might be subject to oppression and not know it. Reading a privilege checklist, then, can be a way of gaining self-knowledge of one's own oppression.

Many who write on privilege and oppression note that while it is often easy for people to grant that *others* are oppressed, it is difficult to confront and understand one's own privilege. Knowledge of this sort can run up against defenses: for example, one might read a checklist and think it pertains to *other* people in your social group, but that one is immune from participation. In psychological literature this is known as self-serving attribution. This is where one's desire to see oneself as fundamentally good and moral is challenged, and since privilege is coded as inherently unfair, we are invested in not seeing ourselves as holding unearned advantages (Kenyon 207).

Privilege can be especially well-concealed, and can operate despite one's professed knowledge of it. For example, Michael Armato introduces the concept "enlightened sexism" to pick out when one acts in a way that on the surface seems gender egalitarian but actually supports sexism. For example, he argues that this happens in academic contexts where men avow feminism but do so in ways that enact male privilege, resting on a certain form of academic masculinity. He writes:

> On the surface, men who embody academic masculinity appear enlightened and are often considered "good guys," relatively sensitive men who know about "women's issues" and can discuss feminist concerns. I argue that it is precisely the academic men's "enlightenment" that holds the potential to allow them to accrue masculine privileges, while doing little to challenge gender or other inequalities (578).

Armato's example is an academic session on hegemonic masculinity where a senior male professor in the audience displayed dominating behaviours while his *words* were very critical of current gender systems; he used up most of the question period to explain what *he knew* about hegemonic

masculinity with little reference to the panelists, took up large amounts of physical space, used strong language while looking at young women for permission to do so or to warn them in particular about strong language, and so on.[12] Armato notes:

> [The senior male professor's] orientation was one that painted sexual harassers as different from himself and other men in the room, and it was explained in a way that made men who sexually harass women due to their insecurities about masculinity seem silly and governed by rudimentary drives and passions (585).

One of the ways in which this senior male professor displayed enlightened sexism was to establish a strong difference between himself as critical of gender oppression and those who live in the "outside" world, essentially drawing a distinction between those who are dominated by cultural influences and those who have critical distance from them. Checklists likely will not be sufficient for a form of self-knowledge that is practical, as examples like this one illustrate.

Subtle defenses can also block lessons from checklists by exhibiting "attentional bias" by focusing on those list items that are less risky to examine. A sincere interest in self-knowledge that understands oneself as intersectional requires working through not only how, for example, a white woman might be *advantaged* (the white privilege checklist), but also how one might be *disadvantaged* (the male privilege checklist). Both of these projects can foster autonomy on Meyers' view because they contribute to a fuller understanding of one's intersectional location and must be accomplished with one's skills of autonomy-competency. However, it is how we *use* the particular items on each

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[12] I was not at this particular conference, but Armato's description makes sense of many conferences I have attended.

checklist that will attest to their efficacy in weakening privilege and resisting domination. My experience teaching privilege checklists has shown that students focus on small issues that are easily fixed and fairly impersonal. For example, many teachers have reported to me that white students often focus on one of MacIntosh's examples: the ability to buy "flesh" colour bandages that match one's ("white") skin tone. Rather than revealing how a white person has been able easily to buy Band-Aids that approximate her skin tone, deeper questions such as, "why is it that my attention is drawn to the Band-Aid example?" can upset one's feelings of congruence with one's self-understanding. For example, assuming a sincere undertaking to examine one's privilege, the person may be forced to confront how her privileges frustrate her very project of coming to know her privilege.

Interpreting the meaning and effects of one's own privilege presents a unique challenge to the literature on self-understanding's role in autonomy. Reflecting on this difficulty and the inherent challenges in formulating knowledge of the self shows that the project of pursuing self-knowledge will disrupt our habits of knowing in more practical ways than self-questioning and privilege checklists. The kind of habitual knowledge that would be most useful for resisting oppression will address how knowledge claims often operate as an exchange of ideas that are held in place by a number of unspoken agreements. These unspoken agreements, then, are what need to be made explicit to challenge our pre-existing habits of self-knowledge. Zerilli's instructive example demonstrates how feminists have offered counter-claims to "gender realism": the idea that dimorphic sex leads to two mutually exclusive gender roles and that those two

genders should desire each other (i.e., heteronormativity) (Mikkola 77). For example, feminists invoke cases of intersex, or gender non-conformity in attempts to undermine common-sense views. Zerilli questions how effective these counter-claims are in shifting the hold of views about sex and gender in everyday life:

> But what if it turned out that these knowledge claims and counterclaims themselves amounted to little more than window-dressing over prior agreements in judgment about what counts as a woman and what counts as a man? . . . What if our ability to judge these claims and counterclaims were somehow parasitic on a whole series of assumptions that do not enter our frame of reference as objects that can be contemplated, debated, verified, or refuted? What if that frame were the invisible 'scaffolding of our thoughts,' to cite Wittgenstein, the ungrounded ground that doesn't get questioned? ("Doing without Knowing" 130)

These knowledge claims are held in place by practices, desires, affects, and habits, which influence what we are able to bring within our reflective purview (Zerilli 130). To return to the puzzle of privilege and self-knowledge, the scaffolding of our thoughts combined with privilege doubles the difficulty of coming to know ourselves as intersectionally located. We need to question knowledge pursuits themselves that rely on inherited epistemological frames about what qualifies as knowledge, what can be questioned, and what form questioning should take. Phenomenology has resources for this questioning that this particular strand of feminist writing on autonomy has not yet tapped. Phenomenology is especially suited to open-ended styles of questioning that require training and self-reflexive interrogation. Despite my reservations, I concur with Meyers that self-knowledge cannot be improved without attention to our intersectional locations. I also think that privilege checklists, as contemporary consciousness-raising techniques, can help achieve this goal. Given my view of

the relation of self-knowledge and habit, however, I think that techniques

borrowed from the phenomenological tradition can fill a gap in this epistemic

project.

III. The *Epoché* and Habits of Reflection

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is currently undergoing reevaluation in

terms of its usefulness for feminist philosophy (Cf. Fisher and Embree 2000;

Heinamaa 2003, 2006; and Weiss 1995, 1999). Once eschewed for his emphasis

on universal essences of experience, the method that began with his thought has

been repurposed, at the same time as his later writings on embodiment and

community are being reevaluated. In what follows, I argue that the

phenomenological reduction or *epoché* is useful for the kinds of reflection that

would reorient projects of self-understanding. The question I am pursuing is this:

can the phenomenological method help one know oneself as intersectional in

ways that boost autonomy? More specifically: how can Husserl's *epoché*, a

method intended to suspend judgements about the existence of certain entities in

space and time, be useful for *intersectional self-knowledge* and ultimately

feminist philosophy of autonomy aimed at self-transformation?

Phenomenological reflection is reflexive—meaning that while it can be

used to reflect on one's social location, it points back to the self as *involved* in

constituting one's perspective on one's social location. Focusing on one's

involvement in constituting the context of meaning in which we understand our

experiences changes the reflective project of self-knowledge. Instead of

considering the self as an isolated and static object of knowledge, we can

reconceive it as necessarily partial, limited, and as inherently tied to the objects of consciousness (including and importantly, one's location within multiple intersecting social forces). This turn alone reformulates the kind of self-knowledge that is possible since it implies that knowledge of the self is not gained from the position of a neutral external observer. For Husserl, the phenomenological method goes beyond and beneath our everyday involvement with the world, or what he called the natural attitude, and takes a critical reflective standpoint on our intentional involvement or lived experience (Edie, 79). This critical reflective standpoint is a way of taking a step back from the natural attitude and putting inverted commas around our "taken for granted" understandings.

The process of putting "out of play" or bracketing the natural attitude is what Husserl termed the "*epoché*," or the phenomenological reduction. This is distinguished from the eidetic reduction where one removes all that is contingent in an experience to find the *essence* of a thing, and from the abstractive reduction where one abstracts from all that is intersubjectively constituted and one can then observe pure "ownness" in consciousness (Bell 163, 216). Neither of these would be helpful for examining habit for my own project: the eidetic reduction treats habit as an abstract property of individuals in general, which does not take into account one's perspective. The abstractive reduction takes away the culturally relevant aspects of one's psyche, which are central to my analysis.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the *epoché* does not remove us from our practical involvement in the world, but rather it, "slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (xv). In thus

reflecting, we can observe ourselves, but never as fully detached from existence-positing—that is, we do not observe ourselves as detached objects, but we can only glance from the object of consciousness back to ourselves to try to examine and describe our intentional involvement. Phenomenology tries to tell the story of how consciousness is experienced in the first person and by highlighting our intentional involvement in our own experience; it points to limitations on self-examination. Our self-knowledge projects must be sensitive to the kinds of beings that we are—temporal, conscious beings who are intentionally tied to our objects of consciousness and thus implicated in their constitution.

One reading of the task of gaining self-knowledge through reflection is that it is a certain kind of *introspection*. Introspection poses problems phenomenologically because, as Sartre argues, if the ego were an observable and distinct reality, then consciousness could be indifferent to objects in the world, including the ego under observation. He maintains, however, that this cannot be the case because consciousness is never indifferent to its objects (*Transcendence of the Ego* 60). Sartre argues that the observational target of phenomenological reflection—the ego—is not discovered, but is given only *through* reflective consciousness. Again, the phenomenological move here is to show that there is a prior lived experience to the production of an ego in reflective consciousness. Thus, the condition for the possibility of self-knowledge is reflective consciousness. For Sartre, this means that the ego has a secondary reality—it is a product of reflection. Sartre writes: "Thus the Ego appears to consciousness as a transcendent in-itself, as an existent in the human world, not as *of the nature of consciousness*" (*Being and Nothingness* 156). Thus, we are locked into a partial

and limited position of self-knowledge and one's unknown privileges further complicate this problem. Not only is one's constitution as privileged prior to one's self-understanding, but its presence further precludes pure self-observation.

Because of the impossibility of pure observation, Sartre revised the task of the *epoché* in his own work. Rather than putting aside the natural attitude, Sartre asks that we *describe* the natural attitude because it is ground-level for descriptions of experience. For Sartre, our everyday involvement in the world does not hide a deeper reality, but rather, is ontologically prior to any further descriptions. Even if we cannot attain pure self-observation, the *epoché* retains its usefulness in focusing reflection on the everyday taken-for-granted relationships of involvement with our world, asking that we put into doubt the idea that how we perceive the world *is in fact the way that it is*. I highlight Sartre's reading of the *epoché* because it stresses how we are implicated in the creative process of coming to know ourselves, *and* that we are able to gain insight on our everyday involvement through suspending some of our involvement in everyday tasks. Thus self-knowledge is not a knowledge project modeled on certainty of the senses or rational truths, but rather a project of self-creation where as we observe and describe, we are also building a self picture over time. Thus we are simultaneously engaged in two projects at once: in undertaking to know ourselves we are able to change ourselves.

The *epoché* asks that we take a step back from previous self-understandings and investigate ourselves anew. While Meyers values the *feeling* of autonomy, it is not clear that the *knowledge* she is interested in for fostering autonomy-competency comes from a phenomenological reduction. Indeed, most

of her suggestions for intersectional knowledge are abstracted from lived experience. The phenomenological method offers an experiential knowledge of oneself that can be guided and cultivated. It is open ended and enacted within a limited perspective in time. The phenomenological practice of self-knowledge that I expand upon below is one of paying close attention to and training our capacities for reflection.

Simone de Beauvoir argues for the personal and political importance of the *epoché*: for example, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* she writes that, "phenomenological reduction prevents the errors of dogmatism by suspending all affirmation concerning the mode of reality of the external world, whose flesh and bone presence the reduction does not, however, contest" (14). The existential tradition is rife with examples of coming to understand oneself as participating in and able to challenge the dogmatisms and universally imposed values of parents, religion, and political ideologies. The intersection of existentialism and phenomenology provides a forum for considering our political responsibility when we self-reflect. The *epoché* is especially important for this. Debra Bergoffen writes:

> Aware of the impossibility of ridding ourselves of all assumptions, we can turn our attention to the past and detail the ways that sexist, racist, and other naturalized prejudices compromise the *epoché*. Noting how/that past prejudices have been overcome (assuming that they have), we can, in congratulating ourselves on learning to see what did not seem to be there, remind ourselves that we are no more capable than those before us of recognizing the limits of our vision. We can refuse to become complacent (283).

Attempting the *epoché*, for Bergoffen, reveals that we are never neutral observers, but are constituted through networks of privilege and domination. Coming to this

knowledge, then, provides a moment to reflect on one's responsibility and complicity within these networks.

My turn to the *epoché* is at once phenomenological and political. It is phenomenological because any project of self-understanding must be done in the first person, coming to find and know oneself through ways of questioning, examining, adopting other views, and looking at and behind and between objects of observation—in this case, our*selves*. In the political sense, the *epoché* can use intersectionality as a model because it points to the interrelatedness of social groups—it brings our attention to the relationships between race/class/gender/ability/etc., rather than considering them as individual discrete objects.

An example of a contemporary application of the *epoché* is Lisa Guenther's work on phenomenology as a practice of liberation. She writes that the method can be used to reflect on how our spatial involvement reveals layers of meaning beyond what is immediately perceived. Guenther illustrates this claim with a sketch of a proposed development for Nashville's downtown. She asks that we try to see how this picture sustains and maintains a system of mass incarceration in the United States. She writes:

> Now you have to perform the phenomenological reduction. Shift
> your attention from the individual objects that appear in the scene
> (the condos, the people, the cars, the trees) to the *relationships* that
> constitute their meaning. In order to do this, you have to
> acknowledge your own perspective on the scene. What do you
> foreground, and what do you consign to the background as
> unimportant? What are the horizons (spatial, temporal, and social)
> that frame your perception of this scene? Where are the absences in
> relation to which certain things present themselves as given? How
> does your own personal history, and your own habits of perception,

shape the way you look at this image? ("Phenomenology as Practice").

There are a number of foundational phenomenological questions in this excerpt that probe at one's relation to social systems *and* one's self-relation. In asking for the gaps in one's habits of self-perception and the absences that underwrite one's perception, phenomenological method aims to upset our entrenched habits and train new ones in strategic ways. This application of the phenomenological method requires not only that we attend to our habits of perceiving our*selves*, but also to our spatial habits and how we understand ourselves as connected to others through space. Shifting from reflecting on individual objects of consciousness to reflecting on the self's connection to how those objects are perceived is useful for thinking about how and why one finds oneself reflecting in particular ways and at particular moments.

The *epoché* activates the process of applying and seeking nonstandard interpretive frameworks, which can reveal how our involvement with the world has blocked not just the *seeking* of alternative interpretive frameworks, but also the possibility of *realizing* that we might need to seek out other interpretive frameworks. My social location affects the difficulty with which I can know how I am related to other people who occupy more or less similar intersectional locations to me. Because of this, I must be suspicious of the very *process* of seeking alternative frameworks, noticing how the background of my thinking contributes to and sustains how I am able to reflect. Thus phenomenology is perhaps a more radical self-examination than Meyers intends. It has the benefit, however, of not glossing over the complexities of coming to intersectional self-

knowledge, and of probing at the intersection of relationships of constitution and networks of meaning. Once again, the self is not a knowable static thing that can be transformed through reflexive work. Rather, the very project of coming to know oneself is self-transformation.

Meyers gives us an example of coming to a self-definition in the form of an Italian-American woman considering abortion. The woman is described as engaging in reflection on her political, religious, and family commitments. She is given an abstract quality, not an interior sense of reflection—nor is there any sense of guided reflection according to a method of good practice. This makes sense if we are promoting reflecting on the social positions of *others*, but if we are promoting self-definition, then attention needs to be paid to what it is like to take on this position of reflection in the first person. This is why I think a politically geared *epoché* can act as a technique for promoting autonomy—we are better able to perceive the parts of ourselves that are not immediately perceptible and we are able to work on ourselves towards certain kinds of politically motivated knowledge projects such as intersectional self-knowledge. The fictional person Meyers imagines is not given a specifically self-reflective process that accounts for the ambiguity of descriptive/epistemic/creative involvement in reflection, and neither is she given a method of reflection sensitive for undertaking this process in the first person. This speaks to the difference in method between Meyers' and the existential-phenomenologist tradition. This is why the existential phenomenologists have often focused on first-person accounts of living or historical persons' thought processes and experiences of self-reflection. In order to advance self-knowledge, the process by which this is gained must be

compatible with the kinds of self-knowers we can possibly be. Meyers' imaginary woman does not have a perspective in her own self-reflective process—only a normative output. An important shortcoming of many philosophical positions on privilege and oppression is that they do not pay attention to how lived experience is ontologically prior to reflective consciousness.

I want to consider more deeply one aspect of a checklist for male privilege. Consider the checklist item that if a man is being subjectively evaluated for an opportunity, then all other things being equal he will be perceived as more competent than a woman. Certainly something like this varies by situation, but let's assume that there are cases where a woman has experienced this in the past, say in terms of job interviews, chances for promotion, grades in high school and university, and in family contexts where there were both men and women performing similar tasks and the men received more praise and acknowledgment. The first layer of questioning with respect to the phenomenon of gender-biased evaluation is even whether one's experience is connected to one's membership in a particular social group at all. Before making a judgement about whether it is true or not that a woman has been evaluated harshly, we need to shift attention from the *objects* in the situation (e.g., interviewees, training, experience) to focus on the *relationships* among these things and my own perspective in the situation. This means attending to how I differ from those I am evaluating. Do I see an affinity between myself and the person evaluated? Do I consider one candidate as more serious than the other? The undertaking here would be investigative, but would also not search for the "right answer" (of what really happened), but for a

way of understanding that far from being a neutral bystander, implicates one in networks of meaning beyond oneself.

This is still quite abstract. Let us return to the example of the woman who is deciding whether or not to have children and decides to do so *for* her husband. There are many different levels of involvement she would be considering that are covered over in saying that she makes the decision "for" her husband. While she considers possibilities, taking her self as an object of knowledge and asking, the question "What do *I* really want?" shifts one's attention from finding the "I" or true desire, to the relationships between the relevant people and things involved. How am I invested in the outcome of this decision? What kinds of rewards or punishments (real or imagined) do I think come along with the decision? How do these factors relate to my personal history? Surely without practice, these questions may feel quite alien.

To return to Benson's view, the *epoché* can be of special use. In considering not just how I am complexly intersubjectively located, but whether a preference is something that I should resist, I can ask whether I feel like I am competent to make this decision. Is this something that I feel undermined about from the outset? Do I think this part of myself is not up to me? Do I feel like I can answer for these actions? With the emphasis on reflective capacities as a process of coming to know oneself we might find that rather than searching for certainty with one's self, we are really taking a risk, or that our choices may be reflecting a felt sense of "right in one's own skin" as in Meyers' description of autonomy. Exercising autonomy-competency in the way Meyers suggests should lead to the conclusion that what one really wants is a product of a certain kind of reflection,

rather than a process of discovery. If we take this assumption to our methods of self-reflection, then we will see our own involvement in coming to know ourselves. This is taking responsibility for self-knowledge in contrast to looking for "true" desires or symbolic content. While we are searching for feelings of "right in your skin" and "ill at ease with yourself" we should be suspicious of these feelings because we can be at home or at ease with parts of ourselves produced through oppression.

While what I have proposed about phenomenological method does not guarantee enhanced self-knowledge, I do think it begins to provide a method for feminist philosophers of autonomy who value both self-knowledge and knowledge of one's social location. The phenomenological method may seem as highly cognitive as some of the skills that Meyers advances, but it has the advantage of valuing a first-person perspective on the training of these capacities—it takes into account the secondary reality of reflective consciousness. I hope to have shown that the conscious questioning and self-examination present within the phenomenological method provides for two forms of transformation: first, it transforms the knower by allowing them to act in new ways (new methods of self-questioning); and second, by emphasizing relationships between meanings it lays important groundwork for building new "sympathies, new affects as well as new cognitions and new forms of intersubjectivity" (Bartky, "Sympathy" 179).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have engaged with feminist autonomy because it continues to be an important paradigm for understanding how freedom is expressed through action. Habit appears because it underlies our ability to be free in the world, and the active cultivation of new habits (such as habits of reflection) can be a process of resisting oppression. I followed Diana Meyers' thinking that self-knowledge is necessary for autonomy, but must have a social and political dimension in order to be *authentic*. She unpacks the social and political dimension of self-knowledge by turning to intersectionality. While intersectionality is an overly burdened concept, I think it offers strategic inroads for fostering increased social and political knowledge. As an undertaking of knowledge in the first person, I addressed whether and how privilege can block one's self-understanding, highlighting the difficulties in coming to know oneself as intersectionally located, especially in terms of oneself as privileged. I offered the example of privilege checklists as a contemporary practice of coming to understand privilege, and evaluated the kinds of knowledge they offer. I then offered an adaptation of the phenomenological *epoché* that addresses some of the problems with Meyers' turn to intersectional self-knowledge for the privileged. While self-reflection is not more important than coalition building, solidarity, and strategic political organizing, it addresses the specific dimension of individual attitudes and habits of those who are trying to resist oppression and those who do not but should.

In my next chapter I show how getting to know the self through changing oneself holds surprises and revised strategies for change. I frame resistance

projects with Beauvoir's view of ambiguous ethical situation. I work through

problems that arise from the feminist prescription to change the self and the forms

of consciousness to which this can give rise.

CHAPTER TWO:

Hold a Mirror up to Habit: Feminist Resistance, Ambiguity, and Félix Ravaisson

The true focus of revolutionary change is never the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within us.

(Audre Lorde 123)

Since the attempt to expunge one's own last vestiges of obliviousness to race, or insensitivity, can never be brought to an adequate closure, "working on oneself" may heighten one's feelings of guilt in ways that only lead toward despair, self-hatred, and demobilization.

(Sonia Kruks 183)

Introduction

In a 2010 speech to St. Francis College, public feminist Jennifer Baumgartner explains that women often ask her if they can be a feminist and still wear thong underwear and make-up or have body image issues. She paraphrases that women say to her, "I'm not sure how I can contribute to the world in an activist way. [. . .] Can I call myself a feminist? Am I good enough?" She reduces this to the key question, "Can I be a feminist and still be myself?" Hilary Davis expressed a similar sentiment in 1991:

> The possibilities of resistance in everyday life may be overwhelming for the feminist. [. . .] Only active resistance to [sexist] practices can destroy the existing sex-gender system which oppresses women. As feminists, we are asked to reject the "trappings" of femininity such as makeup, dieting, and depilation. We are told to reject our society's "compulsory heterosexuality," "pronatalism," and the "romantic ideology" which tells us that someday our prince will come. We break our silence and reject traditional feminine standards of docility and good behaviour; we talk back, we shout, we curse, we get angry (78).

Contemporary feminist philosophy is rarely as blunt as the recommendation of refusal of feminine trappings, but this message continues to be familiar in a

contemporary feminist ethos. Baumgartner gives a seemingly mundane, but I think quite contentious answer that yes, one can still be one*self*, just with a feminist consciousness. This advice, though personally reassuring, is unhelpful for feminists who look to her for guidance because it glosses over how coming to a feminist consciousness *changes* one's lived experience and it bypasses the normative politics of feminism that requires one to change.

Coming to a feminist consciousness makes established habits a first-personal problem, as the young feminists' question to Baumgartner demonstrates. Thus how to approach those habits is an important point of feminist concern. How do we understand processes of self-making when social forces include oppression? What kinds of responsibilities do we have for the selves that we are in contexts of oppression? In short, feminist politics does not ask the impossible—that we become unrecognizable to ourselves—but, as a normative project, feminist politics entails examination and reorganization of our habitual selves. As Sandra Bartky has argued, a shift in perspective on our self and our social world is not only normative for feminism, it is entailed by the having of a transformative consciousness:

> [T]he feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as
> intolerable, as to be rejected on behalf of a transforming project for
> the future. . . . Feminists are not aware of different things than other
> people; they are aware of the same things differently. Feminist
> consciousness, it might be ventured, turns a "fact" into a
> contradiction ("Toward a Phenomenology" 254).

This can be especially troubling when the object of one's consciousness is one's own habits and constitution. Feminist consciousness can turn towards the self and

one can feel a particular form of guilt, or "feminist shame" for one's oppressive

constitution and one's inability to affect radical and immediate change (Davis 78).

Examining habits is an important dimension of political responsibility

generally, but it also coheres with the feminist insistence that the personal is

political. One important difficulty that arises from the feminist imperative for

resistance is knowing how and when to apply a feminist politics in everyday

situations. Bartky recalls buying Christmas toys for her nephew and niece and

belabouring whether she should buy the "correctly" gender marketed toys. Thus

coming to a feminist consciousness can cause everyday situations to become sites

of resistance and often "tests" of feminist commitment. Further, she argues that

we set ourselves up for feelings of low self-worth when "we fail and the price of

failure is self-reproach and the shame of having copped out" ("Toward a

Phenomenology" 435). Any politics of resistance should be worried if paradigms

of political responsibility foster feelings of failure and low self-worth in the

people it aims to liberate.

The lived experience of failure to live up to one's political ideals can

produce a phenomenology unique to subjects of oppression in part because so

many techniques of oppression are themselves geared towards undermining

agency and self-worth. Subjects of oppression, already struggling with feelings

of responsibility for their own liberation, can have feelings of failure and

complicity for just participating in everyday life. Rather than enacting liberatory

consciousness, feminist consciousness can become a consciousness of our*selves*

as *failures*. Much like the women who approach Baumgartner, my feminist

undergraduates often describe themselves as "bad feminists" who are not radical

or committed enough. I hear from my students and colleagues that they think

they are "cop-outs," they are fake or phoney, they "cave in." In other words, they

are cowards who are not worthy of the mantle of feminism. Davis confesses:

> I am unable to abandon the feminine adornments of makeup, earrings, and
> fashionable clothes. In fact, I would go so far as to say that I feel powerless
> and invisible without these embellishments. Even more troubling, I cannot
> give up the evils and illusions of romantic love (80).

The very fact that this domain of desire and pleasure appears as *contra* feminism

and a personal failing to purge oneself of one's oppressive constitution raises

several red flags.[13]

How does feminism provide a framework for rendering these experiences

intelligible as failures? One particularly recurring example is the disconnect

between negative feelings about one's body and the feminist commitment to

resist bodily normativity. In an eerily consonant chorus, I hear from friends how

both failure to transcend bad body feelings and pleasure in acting in accordance

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[13] Critics have objected to my outlining of the problem of feminist failure as a problem with
feminism, arguing that rather than being problematic, this experience constitutes morally *valuable*
shame for participating in patriarchy when one knows better. Drawing on objections from moral
philosophy of the emotions, philosophers such as Jeffrie Murphy argue that morally appropriate
shame can and should motivate us to change ourselves (338). This is, at least in part, an empirical
question of whether shame actually motivates towards moral betterment. I do not take a position
on the moral import of shame, but I do think that if moral shame is valuable, then one of the things
it should do is enable action to mitigate against that which causes shame. Murphy draws a
distinction between inappropriate and appropriate moral shame as the difference between shame
about what is not up to us (inappropriate) and shame about what is up to us (appropriate). Habit
belies this tidy distinction. One's constitution through oppression, while not being *initially* chosen,
is changeable with creative and strategic methods when thought of as a habit.
     Side-stepping the immediate political problems with telling women in particular that
shaming is or can be a good thing for them (think here of slut-shaming and body shaming), it is
possible that shame can be the result of a particularly useful form of self-questioning. But the
point here is that the problem of feminist failure I have identified pertains to the reduction of one's
feelings of being able to be effective in the world. The shame I am identifying more closely
mirrors what Bartky has called "oppressive shame." Oppressive shame is the result of women's
lowered status in society rather than their violation of moral norms. For her, this shame is a
"pervasive sense of personal inadequacy" (*Femininity and Domination* 96). Specifically in this
case, the oppressive shame is not just of one's sexist constitution, but also of one's inability to live
up to ideals that are not immediately possible in a pervasively sexist world.

with norms of femininity doubly make them "bad feminists."[14] At this point

Davis asks a stronger version of the question I am motivating here: "[I]s the

feminist prescription to compulsively resist mainstream culture psychologically

harmful for the feminist?" (80). The charged language of "compulsion" is related

to Davis' experience of everyday resistance practices resulting in "isolation and

economic jeopardy" (80). In other words, for her, resistance seems to be over-

mandated without enough context-sensitivity.

My question in this chapter is: how can we both explain and combat the

collapse into inaction and shame characteristic of feminist failure? I think this can

be accomplished by first centering an understanding of oneself as habitually tied

to oppression at the same time as one undertakes to resist it. To do this, I analyse

Félix Ravaisson's work on habit to make sense of the feminist project of resisting

the feminine practice of mirror-gazing. I show how Ravaisson's work on habit

makes sense of the contemporary feminist practice of "mirror fasting" as a

practice of oblique habit change that leads to surprising self-discovery. In

addition, I draw on Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity to argue that our existential

situation contributes to the problem of feminist failure, specifically the ambiguity

of negotiating self-building between an oppressive situation and one's

transformative political ideals. These arguments are directed at my larger concern

that feelings of failure that can follow a feminist politics should be understood as

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[14] At the risk of either too much anecdotal evidence or a kind of vicious self-reference, I have had
reactions to this paper that conform exactly to the problem of feminist failure. I offer a critique of
the practice of mirror-gazing and have had the challenge that either I am making women feel bad
about their attachment to mirrors, or that they have previously felt bad for not being able to resist
the mirror. In the former case, that is exactly the reading of resistance that my analysis of feminist
failure aims to avoid and in the latter case, it confirms the ubiquity of feminist shame.

a consequence of oppression that should be addressed as seriously as resisting

oppression itself.

I. Ambiguity and Feminist Resistance

Drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre, Bartky notes that experiencing a raised

feminist consciousness mirrors what the existentialists described as an ambiguous

ethical situation. In the tradition of existentialist ethics, ambiguity refers to being

caught between competing demands without a clear resolution. Ambiguity most

generally in Beauvoir's existentialist ontology refers to three essential moments:

"the existent's experience of itself in the world; its fundamental ethical relation to

others; and the temporal unity of existence between past, present, and future"

(Keltner 201).[15] Beauvoir writes:

> Existentialism strives to hold both ends of the chain at the same time,
> surpassing [*dépassant*] the interior-exterior, subjective-objective
> opposition. It postulates the value of the individual as the source and
> reason for being [*raison d'être*] of all significations and all colors, yet
> it admits that the individual has reality only through his engagement in
> the world ("What is Existentialism?" 325).

I turn to ambiguity because I think it accounts for the experienced contradictions

in lived experience of being both a subject of oppression and a subject of

resistance. Beauvoir's existential feminism asks us not to search for what is

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[15] Beauvoir is also intervening between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's disagreement over ambiguity. Whereas Sartre's oppositional ontology (being and nothingness) strikes ambiguity as an interplay of two totalities, Merleau-Ponty figures ambiguity as ontologically constitutive. Wilkerson explains Merleau-Ponty's contrast from Sartre: "Our ambiguity consists in being *both* psychic and physical, *both* for-itself and in-itself, *both* passive and active, in being the common ground of each side of a duality without being reducible to either, and our ambiguity spawns all these dualities in a continual process of temporal deployment" (228). Beauvoir's account of ambiguity seems closer to Merleau-Ponty's. The difficulties inherent in "both/and" thinking are part and parcel of Beauvoir's concept of ambiguity. She refers to Kierkegaard as the first philosopher of ambiguity, referring to the passionate disjunction, or the passion necessary to confront ethical dilemmas as requiring struggle with ambiguity.

wrong and how to fix it, but rather it pushes us to accept "incertitude and even confusion as the achievement rather than the failure of feminist theory and ambiguity as the vital condition of feminist politics" (Zerilli, "Feminist Theory without Solace" n.p.). Thinking of ambiguity and feminist politics as *vital* means both as necessary and as a politics lived in the first person. In bringing the problem of feminist failure to ambiguity, I am searching for a vital condition as well, pushing feminism towards being liveable for subjects who undertake resistance in its name.

Ambiguity, like habit, underscores the ways in which we are both habitually tied to a sexist world, and able to resist it. Much like habit, however, ambiguity does not yield to definite description, because, as Monika Langer notes: "Ambiguity separated from experience is no longer ambiguity" (90). We can unpack some of Beauvoir's thinking on ambiguity by consulting the four antinomies that we negotiate in making sense of ourselves and our projects: 1) we are both *of* the world and *conscious of* the world; 2) we are each individuals and also members of collectives; 3) we appear to ourselves as of sovereign importance, yet we feel ourselves to be insignificant; and 4) we experience a feeling of continuity and infinity, yet we know that we are mortal ("Introduction to an Ethics" 289-90). To live an ambiguous ethics, according to Beauvoir, is to understand how these antinomies create existential struggle and we must, in the face of tension, choose practices knowing that uncertainty and confusion are constitutive of our existential situation.

For Beauvoir, a guiding principle of the ambiguous life is to avoid subsuming one's projects into only one aspect of ambiguity in an attempt to make

decisions easier. Holding ambiguity as both a constitutive feature of existence and as a guiding principle for choice is especially difficult for women, because as Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, the mystification and objectification women face constitute the meaning of their embodiment as subsumed by one half—as always the inessential. She describes the denial of women's ambiguity as a key feature of their oppression. Beauvoir weaves together an existentialist ethic and an account of oppression in *The Second Sex* by explicating in brilliant detail the ways in which "experience of oppression [. . .] can vitiate the ambiguity of existence by disallowing the individual the opportunity to give more than one meaning to her situation" (Weiss, "Challenging Choices" 248). The social meanings of woman collapse ambiguity as women are compelled to represent and embody the devalued half of each antinomy. Woman is nature, she is not individuated, she is politically insignificant as she is relegated to the domestic and the trivial, and she represents finitude and death.

If we reformulate the four antinomies specifically for the existential situation of feminist consciousness we can think more deeply about the existential situation of feminist resistance. To hold ambiguity as paramount means recognizing that one may not know all the ways in which one is constituted by a patriarchal world, but that one is responsible for how one undertakes one's project of self-constitution.[16] One may consciously hold feminist principles, but that doesn't mean that the world hasn't shaped one in sexist ways. One might take on

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[16] This reading of ambiguity and feminism is in tension with the broadly existentialist ontology of the individual. Contexts of oppression frustrate individual responsibility, but ambiguity should if not sidestep this problem, then offer preliminary resources for reformulating the existentialist ontology of the individual (Weiss, "Challenging Choices" 243).

the responsibility of resisting patriarchy and purging oneself of oppression, yet one's own self-transformation is rather insignificant and politically fairly inert unless it is used as a means to reach out to others whose habits and ways of being are interdependent with one's own. These reformulated antinomies reshape the work of "the personal is political" by holding both levels and guarding against one at the expense of the other.

One aspect of ambiguity derives from the temporal situation of unfolding a past, present, and a future simultaneously—specifically for resisting oppression and for having a world we want to bring into existence over and against the pull of the past. Beauvoir writes:

> When I envisage my future, I consider that movement which, prolonging my existence of today, will fulfill my present projects and will surpass them toward new ends: the future is the definite direction of a particular transcendence and it is so closely bound up with the present that it composes with it a single temporal form (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 115).

Changing ourselves and our social world for Beauvoir entails a break with the past and the cutting of the continuity of time. Like Beauvoir, I consider temporality to have two contemporaneous meanings: it is both the aspect of our being through which transcendence holds together present and future into a single consciousness, and it is an existential attachment through which our projects are realized and given meaning. Though we may imagine feminist futures, our existential situation is of a present unfolding. Thus the burden of feminist failure is internally connected to one's experience of time. Robyn Weigman picks up on this temporal aspect of resistance. She writes:

> The void at the heart of the language of "the political," "social change," and "justice" is an effect not of indecision or imprecision,

then, but of the complex temporality that structures the field of the imaginary: where on the one hand the disciplinary commitment to the political is borne in the historical configuration of the present while being bound, on the other hand, to the scene of the future in which the projection of the materialization of justice is forced to live (84).

Thus our temporal situation can produce feelings of inadequacy and yet it carries that towards which one's ideals aim. Resistance is in need, then, of a stronger appreciation of temporality not only because change takes time, but because our ideals are of the future when our embodied temporal situation holds together past, present, and future.

II. The Woman in the Mirror

I would like to bring this conversation about feminist resistance to the example of mirror-gazing. A normative achievement of white western femininity is to be beautiful and feminine. One particularly pernicious consequence of these norms is a reading of women as narcissistic and overly attached to appearance and adornment of the body. In the history of western art, many female nudes (for example, Peter Paul Rubens' *Venus*) depicts a woman gazing at herself in a mirror, offering the presumed male spectator permission to look at her. In this way, the mirror is used to establish both a self-relation and a relation to others. In many nudes, the addition of a mirror in the hand of the portrayed woman signifies that she is also a spectator and the artist labels her vain (as in Hans Memling's *Vanity* 1485), trivializing and moralizing feminine narcissism. Diana Meyers traces this reassignment of narcissism to women through a similar art tradition, arguing that such stereotypes "encode a no-win feminine psychodynamic of eroticized estrangement from self—a subjectivity of self-doubt, perplexity, and

frustration that defeats authentic narcissistic agency" (*Gender in the Mirror* 100-101). For Meyers, the eroticization of self-estrangement limits one's potentially agency-enhancing self-recognition and self-relation in the mirror.

Toward the end of the 19th century the proliferation of household mirrors heightened women's abilities to self-circumspect. In her 1997 work *The Body Project*, Joan Brumberg discusses how the availability of mirrors changed experiences of pimples and facial blemishes from a primarily tactile experience to an increasingly visual one (66). New technologies such as magnifying mirrors with different lighting capabilities and magnification settings, as well as digital cameras now multiply and enhance the ways in which women can see themselves.

Contemporary attachment to mirrors has reached young girls as well as women. Disney princess movies model not only mirroring but self-development and the access of power outside of the home through beauty (Birnie Henke et al. 229). The evil queen in *Sleeping Beauty* who asks "who is the fairest of them all?" encapsulates the competitive nature of mirror-gazing. Haunting the youthful, fresh beauty of the princesses in these movies are the older, ugly, sometimes fat, cruel, and jealous step-mother or queen figures. In setting up these dichotomous depictions of women, princess culture encourages girls to use mirrors and beauty to *become* women—to negotiate their entry into womanhood while their mothers use the same mirrors to stay youthful (Orenstein 139). Mattel, the company that makes Barbie, makes a Barbie Magic Mirror and a Barbie Mirror Digital Camera "to make self-portraiture even easier" (the front of the camera is also a mirror). While girls are able to seek power and fulfillment outside of their appearance in mirrors, the mirror retains its importance for its symbolism of heterosexual

romantic fulfillment and self-identification—in it one prepares to be seen within a matrix of heterosexual desire (Birnie Henke et al. 241).

Another contemporary instance of mirroring is reality TV shows that force women (and some men) to look in the mirror and "get real" about their weight or fashion blunders.[17] This trope suggests that the mirror offers knowledge, that it contains a universal message of beauty—the truth of the self that we need to "see." In this context, self-surveilling subjects seek more and more detailed imaginings of their own bodies, searching for the truth of the self on the surface of the body. Mirror-gazing is a way to self-police the transgression of norms of feminine physical appearance—for example, containing bulging flesh, colour-coordination, hair volume, reducing wrinkles, and so on. Mirrors are also used in "reveal" moments on televisions shows like *The Swan* that disclose a new, better self to itself. I think mirroring continues to be an important dimension of feminist concern because the mirror is a location of gender creation, but also especially because it is most often a *negative* evaluative tool—in it one looks for flaws, transgressions and failures.[18] Meyers agrees that the mirror is a place to experience the contradiction between one's self and one's beauty ideal. The mirror then is experienced as "you are how you look and you are how you will never look" (*Gender in the Mirror* 124).

Mirror-gazing is just one way of checking oneself against ideals. Body checking, a broader term that includes mirror-gazing, can be weighing oneself

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[17] For example, the popular TV show *What Not To Wear* has a "360° mirror test" where participants are put in a small room made completely of mirrors as the first step in their journey towards transformation. The mirror is used as a mandated negative experience where one sees the horror that their appearance has always been.

[18] Though I do not rule out that in some moments it might be positive. There are also cases where mirror checking is required for norms of safety, respectability, and professionalism.

with a scale repeatedly, pinching the fat on one's thighs, checking one's face for symmetry and proper make-up application, and so on (Alfano et al.). These behaviours are part of the general population's experience. When they are exaggerated, however, they are sometimes considered symptoms of a mental illness now known as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). The nature of body checks is also gendered, as male body checking focuses on bicep flexing, abdominal muscles and comparing muscle tone to other men (Walker et. al., McCreary et. al.). Too much body avoidance is also a symptom of BDD—for example if one wears baggy clothes and avoids looking at one's body. The question becomes, what is the right amount of checking? How can we know we have the "right" relationship to our appearance? Women must negotiate the line between either too much or too little body checking and may then feel increased anxiety when the practice of body checking is brought into the domain of feminist concern—doubling down on the anxiety. A feminist critique is relevant here because prolonged mirror-gazing can enact oppression through the increased association of women with appearance, the increased visual consumption of women's bodies, and the disciplining of women's appearance according to hegemonic ideals of beauty. If mirror-gazing is oppressive—and I think it often is—it is especially insidious because it is enacted by the individual on herself. Mirror-gazing can thus be a self-perpetuating site of oppression.

Despite this critique, I hold open the possibility that mirror-gazing can be politically positive. Ann Cahill agrees that normative beautification experiences are often negative, however, she recounts a gathering with her sisters where they experience appearance and beautification as positive:

> In the nonhierarchical, communal beautification experience, women gather to care for each other, to delight in each other's bodies and artistic abilities, to gain self-confidence in their appearance, in ways that emphasize the relevance of their own relationships. The time that women devote to beautification may, then, serve to forward rather than thwart feminist aims (53).

Cahill is however quick to point out that these kinds of communal, feminist experiences are hard to come by. Unlike the solitary example I have in mind, these women gaze in mirrors together as well as mirroring for each other. The women participating in the experience that she details question the meaning of beauty as they beautify, have established loving relationships with one another, and are all avowed feminists.

Meyers also retrieves a positive account of self-relation through mirroring practices because she thinks that there is an irreplaceable self-recognition in the mirror that can foster rather than hinder women's agency. She recalls her pre-pubescent relationship with the mirror during her ballet practices. She writes:

> Of course, ballerinas care about how they look. I did, but I cared because I wanted to learn to perform in a way that would be worthy of an audience. That meant dancing well, not admiring myself (or hating myself) in the mirror (*Gender in the Mirror* 99-100).

Because of her experience of accomplishment and skill-building with the mirror, Meyers thinks that mirroring experience can be recuperated for feminist ends and that narcissistic agency (how she refers to women's mirroring experience) can only be recuperated if beauty is no longer the aim. Furthermore, "women's mirrors must be relegated to the status of tools and furnishings. How much one uses or notices other utilitarian and/or decorative appurtenances is optional, and how much women use or notice mirrors must become optional, too" (*Gender in the Mirror* 146). My critique of mirror-gazing works within Meyers' framework

because these two conditions are far from being realized and a better description of how the habit of mirror-gazing operates can be in service of this normative goal.

My critique of mirror-gazing is meant to underscore the meaning of mirroring practices, not to enforce that one necessarily abandon one's attachments to enact a kind of feminist moral purity. This is not to say, conversely, that our pleasures and practices are beyond question. Different people have attachments to certain practices that are of differing strengths—in other words, it may be easier for some than others to change themselves. I suggest we read this as different kinds of habit rather than a disagreement over whether finding pleasure in an activity is what makes it right or wrong for feminists to resist. Different habits help explain why for some these practices can be easily abandoned once coming to a feminist consciousness, whereas for others they can become a site of self-reproach and feminist failure. With this brief feminist critique of mirroring in hand, if changing mirroring practices is an enactment of feminist resistance, we need to understand further how the habit of mirror-gazing operates in order to offer new ways of resisting it without the trap of feminist failure. For a useful framework for understanding habit change, I turn to Félix Ravaisson.

III. Changing Habits with Félix Ravaisson

In his 1837 work *Of Habit*, the formerly obscure (in anglo-philosophical circles) French philosopher Félix Ravaisson provides a meditation on habit drawing on Aristotle, Maine de Biran, Joseph Butler, and others. His slim volume is credited with influencing such philosophers as Henri Bergson, Martin

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Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and more recently Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz. Ravaisson offers an understanding of habit that investigates the conditions that make habitual beings possible, generating insight into habitual experience. In the search for understanding resistance to and strategies for changing habits, Ravaisson gives us a picture of how repetition and continuity produce habits and further how habits produce dispositions in us that resist change.

My reading of Ravaisson illuminates how the problem of feminist failure can be reframed in light of habit. Specifically, Ravaisson offers up three concepts that are useful for the present project: passively acquired habits, actively acquired habits and consciously actively acquired habits. These three distinctions are strategic starting points for thinking about habit transformation in greater detail. These are not phenomenological distinctions, although his descriptions of them as points on a continuum speak to how habits operate in multiple ways in lived experience. For Ravaisson, the acquisition of a habit may be achieved through different processes over time. Thus we should not merely ask *whether* we have a habit and *what* action the habit brings forth, but we can also ask *how* it is that we came to have the habit, garnering crucial information about the conditions that sustain it. This account provides, then, a way of thinking about how different people have different experiences of performing and resisting the same habits and how added attention and reflection are not the only strategies for change, and further, they may not be the most effective. To preview, we may both mirror gaze at the same body parts and we may judge them for the same negative qualities, but we have acquired our habits differently, perform them at different times and

contexts, and they hold varied meanings and thus require varied strategies for transformation and will result in different experiences of change.

Ravaisson's philosophy of habit is a metaphysical picture of the world that understands habituation as belonging to vegetal, non-human animal, and human life. For vegetal life, some plants better absorb nutrients, and take on a certain "temperament" from their environment. Over time all living beings adapt to environmental conditions, even those that may be detrimental to health: "one becomes accustomed over time to the most violent poisons" (63). Because our environment affects us in our composition, health and movements, what we are habituated to becomes the very condition of our health. Not yet distinguishing between human and non-human animals, Ravaisson gives a preliminary definition of habit: "a disposition relative to change, which is engendered in a being by the continuity or the repetition of this very same change" (25). Habit is a disposition in us that is calibrated based on the amount of continuity and repetition we have experienced of a change. Living beings can be changed either by their own initiation or they can be modified by the inorganic realm. In the latter case "if the change does not destroy it, it is always less and less altered by that change" (31). For example, swimming in a cool lake the body adjusts to the temperature and it becomes less noticeable.

All living beings are changing, which is the substrate of habituation, but Ravaisson argues that in the "higher forms" of life there is "a greater variety of metamorphoses, a more complicated organization, a higher heterogeneity" (33). Because of this, animals and other "higher forms" of life must have an ability or faculty on which external objects can make an impression so that beings know

where to move in space. Performing more complicated tasks of movement

requires complicated impressions from and through which we navigate the world.

We must be more receptive to the impressions coming from the world in order to

perform more complicated movements.

Nature has facilitated the growth of spontaneous beings and humans are

the most able to control their habituation just because they form habits.

Distinguishing habit from instinct by a matter of degree, habit is the dividing line

between the will and one's nature, it is the "infinitesimal *differential*, or, the

dynamic *fluxion* from Will to Nature" (59), hence habit is a kind of second

nature.[19] This movement from will to habit or "second nature" is how we are able

to shape and train ourselves. The habits we gain from directing the will towards

action show themselves when the habits we have retain the form of the

intelligence that spontaneously guided them. This is in direct contrast to

understandings of habit as mere mechanism with no intellectual activity. In one

of many Thomistic turns, Ravaisson claims that our movements become fused

with the initiating willed activity and that the fusion of habit creates a necessity

or "*law of the limbs*" which is also at the same time a "*law of grace*" (57).

Echoing Aristotle, Ravaisson clarifies:

> [Habit] is the final cause that increasingly predominates over
> efficient causality and which absorbs the latter into itself. And at that
> point, indeed, the end and the principle, the fact and the law, are
> fused together within necessity (57).

Habit, the very same thing that turns a continued activity into a disposition in us,

is that which assures us of solid moral character after continued action (69). As

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[19] For an exposition of a similar concept in Hegel's work and how it directly relates to Ravaisson, see Simon Lumsden (2013).

good actions are repeated and the sensations weaken we develop tendencies. The

tendency to perform good actions takes over and we are increasingly able to

enjoy the good actions that we perform. Just as the end of movement can inhere

in our being by becoming a habit, the idea of the good "descends into these

depths, engendering love [in the powers of the soul] and raising that love up to

[the good]" (71). Guaranteeing that love will accompany the idea of the good,

Ravaisson declares that: "It is God within us, God hidden solely by being so far

within us in this intimate source of ourselves, to whose depths we do not

descend" (71).

Ravaisson's view puts forward the exciting claim that the more habits we

have, the more we are able to be spontaneous in the world.[20] This is Ravaisson's

"double law" of habit:

> [C]ontinuity or repetition dulls sensibility, whereas it excites the
> power of movement. But it weakens the one and excites the other in
> the same way, by one and the same cause: the development of an
> unreflective spontaneity, which breaks into passivity and the
> organism, and increasingly establishes itself there, beyond, beneath
> the region of will, personality and consciousness (53).

Ravaisson insists that this cannot be explained through a modification of the

organs of sensation, nor through an intensification of the powers of our will.

Dulled sensation "frees up" the will and consciousness for other endeavours, and

the activity that is produced becomes more agile. Habit is able to produce a kind

of contradiction—that is, the more precise we are in our movements, the more our

reliance on the will decreases. The more impressions that are used to navigate the

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[20] Mark Sinclair gives a detailed historical argument that Ravaisson is following Maine de Biran
(1766-1824) on this point (69).

world, the more frequently they must be produced, and so they weaken receptivity to the world and through that weakening movements are increasingly initiated independently of the impressions that originally guided them. In humans, because the connection between action and reaction is then being weakened, there is a need to posit an organizing "center with the capacity to measure and dispense force" and this "center" is the capacity for judgement, the soul, and the "first light of freedom" (31). Self-consciousness bursts forth: "the same being at once acts and sees the act; or, better, the act and the apprehension of the act are fused together. The author, the drama, the actor, the spectator are all one" (39). These faculties combine with our ability to move in the world and thus we have an "excess of power in relation to resistance. The relation and the measure of both the power and resistance are present in the consciousness of *effort*" (43). Habits rush in to facilitate a decrease in the effort necessary to navigate the world and consequently we are able to be more agile and perform movements according to tendencies in us that "no longer await . . . the commandments of the will but rather anticipate . . . them" (59).

Though he draws an initial distinction between passive and active, Ravaisson argues for a continuum between active and passive habits. On Ravaisson's view, habits are passively acquired when we have become accustomed to a certain sensation.[21] Becoming accustomed to a sensation creates a need in us and this need is felt as an activity that "calls for [the sensation],

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[21] Ravaisson traces the distinction between active and passive habits to Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1736) and Sinclair makes the connection between Ravaisson and Hume through Butler because Hume acknowledged the influence of Butler on his thinking through of custom and the passions (Sinclair 68).

invokes it; in a certain sense it implores [it]" (51). Ravaisson's example is of rocking a baby to sleep. The rocking is what induces the sleep; through repetition and continuity sensation becomes dull and unnoticed. The baby's sleep then depends on the rocking. For Ravaisson, continuity and repetition of sensations from our environment destroy the sensation—in other words, "we no longer feel the rocking." Passively experienced sensations then awaken desire in the person for whom the sensation settles within consciousness (53). The sleeping baby is not in control of the conditions of her sleep, and when there is no longer the rocking she depends upon, she feels the change abruptly and desires its continuation. This may explain why changing passively acquired habits may not be experienced as an active struggle but as abandonment or exposure. This discomfort, according to Ravaisson, is caused by an increase in physical receptivity to new sensations. Our receptivity had been diminished through the continuity and repetition of the previous sensation, and when the sensation ceases, we find our receptivity surges. This sharp increase in receptivity to new sensations may explain why feelings of anxiety or being overwhelmed come with changing habits. This heightened awareness of everyday situations, previously taken for granted, changes once one comes to a feminist consciousness. Things that were beyond our notice are now a problem, receptivity surges, and we are burdened with new information through habit disruption.

When we actively undertake repeated sensations consciously, we develop precise abilities to know and judge our sensations. Ravaisson's example is the measured active consumption of wine to decipher different qualities of flavour in the wine. If we drink like this, then we become a connoisseur. This reading of

habit interprets body checking in terms of how conscious the undertaking is. The more one body checks consciously and actively—keeping the environmental conditions as constant as possible—the more we are able to judge every hair, freckle, stretchmark, and wrinkle with a finer degree of discernment.

The added conscious attention to actively pursued sensations involves, on Ravaisson's view, the understanding and the imagination. Over time, the conscious undertaking negates itself and thus less conscious attention is needed for it to be maintained as a habit. It becomes an unconscious skill or ability. Ravaisson writes:

> [The] more the understanding and the imagination exert themselves
> on the successive synthesis of ideas or images, the easier this
> becomes for them and the more their exercise becomes prompt,
> assured and precise; at the same time, it becomes a tendency that is
> more and more independent of the will (73).

Ravaisson's account of habit, then, possesses a middle or third term that transfers a habit from a passivity into an activity (Sinclair 74). Mirror-gazing can be precise in the skills it produces of judgment and discernment, and has the effect of being more independent of the will once we are, so to speak, connoisseurs of our bodily appearances. We can perform body checks and judgements from a habitual place of knowing how things should look and feel rather than consciously directing attention to our appearance. This is similar to the perhaps overly sharp distinction Jennifer Hansen has made between a skill and a habit:

> Although skills become habitual, not all habits are skills. Habits are
> automatic, preconscious, predictable, coordinated, consistent
> activities. Skills are habits, but distinctive from them because they
> are practiced abilities. Skills required a conscious intention to
> develop them and hours, weeks, or years of effort to master (71-72).

The amount of time and effort that goes into developing a habit may at first glance seem to increase the perceived work of changing a habit. Ravaisson's account provides tools to show that this is not necessarily so: conscious attention is not the only or even most effective way to cultivate habits.

By contrast to a conscious actively acquired sensation, we can actively undertake sensations with little conscious attention. This is the case of wine drinking—an active undertaking—while engaged in other activities, such as an engrossing conversation. In this case we do not develop further abilities to judge what we are sensing. Without the conscious attention and judgement towards our actions our sensations become "more and more confused, and increasingly [escape] memory, reflection, and consciousness," thereby dulling a previously sharp skill or failing to acquire a skilled habit (73). In this case, I look in the mirror with little degree of attention and I may feel like I don't know what to do with myself. My powers of discernment are dull, as I have not developed the skill of a connoisseur.

These three distinctions—passively acquired habits, actively acquired habits and consciously actively acquired habits—are strategic distinctions rather than bounded and wholly separate. In our lived experience, habits are a combination of activity and passivity with more or less conscious attention—thus the need for multiple strategies for changing habits. Reading Ravaisson on habit, Clare Carlisle argues that we should deal with an unwanted habit by leading it "back to the sphere of consciousness, for only here can it be influenced by reflection and the will" (141). But this is only for consciously creating a habit. We have the ability to frustrate and change habits in ways other than weakening

receptivity through repeated impressions. Carlisle's reading of Ravaisson focuses primarily on his account of habit change as guided and directed by the will. Her reading, perhaps accidentally, squares broadly with other philosophers influenced by the Kantian tradition of autonomy where the act of reflection is central to gaining critical distance from one's habits and thereby bringing them under one's control.[22] Advising awareness, though potentially effective for changing a habit, does not address the embodied resistance we feel when trying to change. Recall here the discomfort of the baby whose sleep is disturbed by a disruption in the rocking. I have drawn on Ravaisson's view because it shows how theorizing habit change must take into account how diminished sensations create needs in us, how affective responses make changing difficult, and how environmental conditions sustain habits. Advocating awareness as a primary or even an important agent for change slips easily into the problem of feminist failure because it carries an implicit understanding that once we are aware of our habits they are thereby under our control.

How might we use Ravaisson's distinctions to undertake changing an entrenched habit such as mirror-gazing? The pervasive nature of mirrors and reflective surfaces in our environment make it seem as though body checks have a substantial passive component. The judging and criticising involved in body checking, however, makes it appear as a conscious and active undertaking. These levels are operating simultaneously. If we foreground the passive components of body checking, we can imagine removing mirrors from our environment. For example, a friend went tree planting in northern British Columbia for many

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[22] Lumsden traces this view through to neo-Kantians such as Christine Korsgaard (66).

months. At the camps there were no mirrors and few reflective surfaces and only film cameras. When she came back from tree planting for a rest as well as a hot shower, she described to me the jarring experience of entering her hotel bathroom. She saw movement in the mirror and had to reflect on the image and consciously try to self-recognize. Without mirrors in her environment to sustain her habit of seeing the reflection in the mirror as herself, she became estranged from her reflection. Tree planting had changed the primary way in which she experienced her body. Instead of primarily seeing her body from the outside, as an image that she projects, she acquired the habit of experiencing her body as a site of labour, a locus of physical capacity. It took many months to unhinge the relationship between her self-identity and mirrored reflection—an unintended consequence of life as a tree planter. This example shows that self-recognition in the mirror depends on a certain environment as well as active engagements for its continuation.

Unlike cases of "mirror fasting" which I discuss below, my friend lost a habit without intending to—perhaps this says something about her relaxed approach to her appearance, although we cannot know that without inquiring into the experience she had of losing the habit when first in the camp. She may have been otherwise preoccupied enough not to notice the "abandoned" feeling of the change, which would show that if we are engaged with other affectively encompassing tasks, it can mitigate the feelings that attend losing a habit. After a sustained period of time without mirrors, she returned to a world where she was to see herself from the outside again, to regain and rehabituate mirror-gazing skills that connect her to beauty ideals and self-recognition. For my tree planting

friend, her ambiguity revealed itself to her as not only of the world as an example of feminine appearance, but also as conscious of herself and once again able to make meaning of herself in the mirror.

While most of us cannot escape mirrors and reflective surfaces in the way my friend did, her story tells us something about how to undo habits. Her time away from mirrors was an opportunity to come back to mirror-gazing with more or less reflection and more or less imagination and conscious attention. Because of her period of suspended habits, it may be easier for her to change her mirror-gazing practices if she so desires. Treating one's practices as connected to an environment, a temporality, and affects can move the problem of feminist failure outside the self, while enabling more strategic change and also avoiding harsh self-criticism if and when changing proves difficult.

An objection can be raised here that the discernment of gradations of flavours in wine are not like the discernments we make of ourselves in the mirror.[23] Tasting wine and discerning flavours as an act of consuming an external object is not like self-recognition and self-negotiation in the mirror. Further, one might object that the discernment we perform in the mirror has more to do with recognition and negotiating identity than aesthetic qualities. Especially to those who emphasize a psychoanalytic reading of mirroring, it may seem as though a reading of mirroring as a habit is not deep enough to explain our psychological attachment to how we appear to ourselves. In other words, mirror-gazing is not like drinking wine.

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[23] I am grateful to Michelle Meagher for bringing this to my attention.

This objection does not fully appreciate how women and girls are trained to see themselves as objects; they are asked from a young age to strive towards a perfect self-portrait and self-image. Normative feminine training is geared directly towards seeing oneself as a passive object that is to be looked at even if that project fails. Unfortunately, the analogy holds at least in the relevant way— that is, treating oneself as an object (even if that is not all we that we are) is an important aspect of feminine norms of appearance.

IV. Mirror Fasts, Resistance, and Temporality

Some feminists have gone on "mirror fasts" in an attempt to change negative emotions they have in response to evaluations in the mirror.[24] Mirror fasts are avoiding all mirrors, reflective surfaces, cameras, and photos for a specific amount of time. On her blog *The Beheld*, Autumn Whitfield-Madrano—a self-described feminist—writes about the meaning of the anxieties she experienced while mirror fasting. Her intention with mirror fasting was to "loosen the grip that self-consciousness has had on [her life]" (*The Beheld*). She writes that going on a mirror fast enabled her to see that she used mirror checks to form a self-assessment to guard against others' judgements. Intending to change her relationship to beauty ideals, along the way she learned something specific to her ambiguous situation.

During her mirror fast, she noticed a man look at her on the subway and she found herself unable to make sense of the gaze:

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[24] Another example of this is Kjerstin Gruys's blog and book project, *Mirror Mirror off the Wall: How I Learned to Love My Body By Not Looking at it for a Year*.

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> I found myself *utterly clueless* as to what he was thinking, and therefore how to feel about it. …
>
> Had I looked in the mirror earlier that day and formed a self-assessment of how I looked, I'd have chosen one of these options without even considering the others. I'd have done it so quickly I wouldn't have realized there *were* other reasons someone's eyes might have landed on mine. When I stripped away the mirror, though, I had to see that I'm rarely reacting to other people's actual appraisal of me. I'm not even reacting to my interpretation of their appraisal. I'm reacting to my appraisal of myself, using perfect strangers as my proxy (*The Beheld*).

Whitfield-Madrano's experiment revealed to her that she lacked reliable habits for reading other people's body language—her increased receptivity due to her lack of habit in this instance connected her to her intersubjective vulnerability. Her mirror fast brought her dependence on the mirror to her sphere of consciousness and it revealed to her how she was disconnected from intersubjective life. This indirect consequence of the mirror fast is surprising given her intention of changing bad body feelings. It makes good sense, however, if we use Ravaisson's view, because we do not always know what layers of habit have become incorporated in us and how they support and rely on other habits.

Without the mirror, Whitfield-Madrano lacked subjective certainty. In other words, she had used the mirror as a tool to diminish her ambiguity: it closed her off from others by giving her security from the gaze of others, reifying her status as an individual who is in complete control of her worldly self. She writes that:

> [W]ith the mirror project I've really had to trust people, and myself. You start realizing that maybe this vision you have in your head about what you "really" look like—this idea of, "Oh, you might love me and think I'm beautiful, but *really* I'm not"—is faulty. Giving up the mirror is giving up the idea that your own image of yourself is the only image that's real or even meaningful (*The Beheld*).

Changing herself felt more like *losing* control than gaining control. Intending to change bad body feelings, she came at her habits obliquely to find they had layers of meaning that were inaccessible before habit disruption. Before her mirror fast, and without knowing, Whitfield-Madrano substituted her intersubjective vulnerability for individualistic and subjective certainty afforded her by the security of her habits. This reveals how changing habits is a process of self-discovery at the same time as it is a process of change. Changing habits for Whitfield-Madrano consisted in bringing others into a trusted intersubjectivity in place of her habits of negative self-judgement. She did not try actively to change a habit via awareness or willpower. She changed it by focusing on it less, giving it less time, and less active and conscious attention. In response she experienced waves of layered meaning. Space is freed up for new encounters and projects in place of her former habits. Mirror fasting is interesting for feminist resistance because it shows an indirect route to changing feelings about our bodies. Taking time away from the mirror to feel anxiety and habitual disruption can promote reconsideration of the meanings we give to our bodies and concomitant emotions while providing an entry point into changing ourselves over time.

Ravaisson's three distinctions have an integral temporal component because repetition and continuity require time. Repetitions must be given moments and durations and continuity requires that the repetitions resemble each other. The ambiguity of living a simultaneous past, present, and future is diminished as mirror-gazing promotes a relation between present self and future appearance. Cahill, following Sandra Bartky, writes, "Time is clearly one way in which the process of beautification is gendered. . . . Far from being something

natural or innate, it is a state to be striven for, a state that takes planning, careful

work, and a significant investment of time" (51). Bartky argues that the time

women allocate to bodily "improvement" reveals how insidious our negative

feelings about the body are in its "natural" state (*Femininity and Domination*

70).[25] Attending to the temporality of habits gives us a clue to the content of the

habit. I check my teeth in the mirror before leaving my house—a habit that has a

specific temporality, it is just-before-leaving, it is quick. If I engage in drawn out

and repeated body checks, however, the duration of the habit is different. I can

also notice the times of the day when I check the mirror and for how long—where

does the habit factor into my daily rhythm? Further, I may think about other

environmental factors like where the mirrors are and if I am alone, expecting

others, and so on. In the instance of checking my teeth, the body check I perform

is to check my teeth only, whereas in the second instance I have a drawn-out task;

I am looking to examine my shape or face and to see what it is doing in the

mirror. While it seems that ensuring that there is no spinach in my teeth is also

conforming to a norm of appearance, it is not undertaken in a measured and

conscious way, at least not in the paradigm case. Ravaisson's understanding of

habit underscores the temporal dimension of a project of resistance and asks us

what kinds of durations and repetitions we dedicate to certain activities. The

answer provides an entry point for changing habits, and disrupting the habit

reveals layers of meaning previously obscured.

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[25] Bartky also notes that the time we allocate has implications for how we conceive of women's agency within feminine norms of beautification: "feminine bodily discipline has [a] dual character: On the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at the end of a rifle, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of beauty" (*Femininity and Domination* 75).

Conclusion

Thinking habits with Ravaisson is useful because it shows that we can think less about how to "break" a habit consciously and more about the contexts that bring habits forth—that is, we can find opportunities to shift the conditions of habit repetition in order to shift bad body feelings. On this view, resistance might be as preliminary as shifting a habit from an active conscious habit to a distracted habit in order to render incrementally our powers of discernment dull. A body checking connoisseur could opt for small changes in her environment or temporal life that may garner profound results. If body checking is focused on specific body parts like legs or thighs, removing full length mirrors, while anxiety-inducing in the beginning, allows powers of discernment to become desirably rusty and the removal of the mirror altogether guards against actively "willing" resistance against temptation. Another possible route to "de-connoisseur" ourselves is to stand in front of a full length mirror and look as much as possible without judgement, or perhaps along with encouraging others, allowing *them* to train your powers of self-discernment in new ways.[26]

Sara Ahmed is not the first theorist to notice that projects of resistance are often frustrating:

> People often say that the struggle against racism is like banging your head against a brick wall. The wall keeps its place, so it is you who gets sore. Struggling against racism means being willing to labor over sore points. Not only do we need to labor our points, as a laboring over sore points, but we also might even need to stay as sore as our points ("Killing Joy" 591).

"Staying sore" is a recommendation that must be made within careful limits. In

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[26] "Mirror Exposure Therapy" is a treatment for body image disturbances and it consists of mindful and non-judgemental exposure to mirrors. See Selwyn Delinski & Wilson (2006).

one sense, staying with projects of resistance even when they are difficult is a virtue, but only insofar as that difficulty does not become a consciousness of failure that stalls action and hinders empowerment. In another sense, Ravaisson's description of affects of abandonment or exposure that attend habit change can be revalued because they stand as evidence that one is undertaking a transformative change.

While the imperative for resistance does potentially contribute to problems of feminist failure, it is important to remain committed not just to revising resistance strategies but also to resistance as a normative goal of feminism writ large. Kathryn Morgan writes:

> [Feminist resistance] is a struggle that must, if we as feminists are to live any sort of integrated life, affect the most intimate, personal, and private domains of our lives. If our commitments do not permeate these domains, we end up with a deeper, more dangerously schizophrenic life as a public feminist and as a private sub-human (92).

For Morgan, one's personal integrity is on the line when we disaggregate our feminist politics from our practices of self-building. An oppressive constitution that undermines self-worth should be resisted, and resistance practices should not make feminists responsible for their failure to purge themselves of their oppressive constitution.

Both Bartky's work on oppressive shame, and my own thinking about feminist failure is informed by feminist students' responses to what we teach about feminist critique and resistance. What I have argued about feminist resistance and the problem of feminist failure can potentially extend to thinking about feminist pedagogy and storytelling about our feminist history because it

often creates ideals and moral lessons for feminist thinking and resistance. Zerilli

argues that the search for essentialism in feminist texts—most notably in Simone

de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—is one example of the search for certitude (rather

than ambiguity) in feminist resistance. She writes that how we symbolically

produce Beauvoir reveals the tensions in our thinking between the character of

feminine subjectivity and feminist politics:

> Our rhetorical productions of the good (feminist) Beauvoir versus the
> bad (not so feminist or not the right kind of feminist) Beauvoir are
> symptomatic of our reluctance to accept a feminist theory without
> solace, by which I mean a feminist theory that refuses to yield the
> identities of victim and victor, oppressed and oppressor, and,
> consequently, a feminist theory that resists our understandable but also
> potentially dangerous desire for directives in the face of social
> injustice ("Feminist Theory without Solace" n.p.).

Beauvoir's life and work is an ambiguity much like the ambiguity of both being a

feminine subject and having a feminist consciousness. Zerilli argues that the

search for solace come out of our existential struggle with ambiguity. I argue

further that the search for solace leads to its opposite—feelings of feminist

failure. Zerilli's suggestion that we should think of ambiguity as a vital condition

for feminist politics reformulates imperatives for personal resistance to account

for present entanglements and entrenched habits as the *starting point* for political

resistances. Appreciating ambiguity blocks the problem of feminist failure

because it reformulates a subject's understanding of how and when one can

change oneself. If feminist strategies for resistance are indexed to ambiguity and

habit we can be more productive in changing ourselves and our social worlds in

the long term and more successfully enact liberatory consciousness.

Underscoring the environmental conditions and temporal durations of the activities we want to change are useful strategies for changing our habits and so I suggest that Ravaisson deserves attention from feminists working on resistance. Correcting thoughts that attend body checking, as taught in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, is helpful, but our thoughts are only part of what sustain and maintain habitual life.[27] Undergoing personal change must be thought of as a temporal process. It takes time to undo habits, and so "failing" to live up to feminist norms should be understood not as a failure to purge oneself of patriarchal influence but rather as taking place within a process of habit transformation, one in which our habits must be explored—how are they acquired? What meanings do we attach to them? What kinds of attention do we give them? What situations and temporalities do they rely upon?

Ravaisson's view lends further support for the thesis that habit is the ground from which we are able to build and change ourselves. I have undertaken this reading of Ravaisson because I think his view on habit showcases how reflection and the will are not the only and not even the most strategic models or frameworks for changing ourselves. Ravaisson's view also goes to the effectiveness of holding multiple strategies for habit change by unpacking a problem of feminist resistance that I have identified as the problem of feminist failure, showing that not taking multiple strategies into account can support

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[27] One habit feminists might want to consider on this model is reading meaning off of the bodies of others. We might also use Ravaisson to think about ways that our powers of discernment can be honed for the scanning of non-normative bodies to confirm their transgressions of bodily norms. It might also be interesting to think through how we intersubjectively sustain and maintain habits with others. Indeed, the few ways in which I know how to discern and measure my own appearance were skills developed under the tutelage of other girls in front of bathroom mirrors in my youth.

theories of over-investment in reflection and the will, thus compounding one's

frustration and shame with one's oppressive constitution that one wants to

change. My next chapter shows how temporalities specifically relate to habit and

how cultural anxieties and social norms affect temporality and possibilities for

habit change.

CHAPTER THREE:

Aging, Habit, and Temporality in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*

> *Thus the very quality of the future changes between middle age and the end of one's life. At sixty-five one is not merely twenty years older than one was at forty-five. One has exchanged an indefinite future – and one had a tendency to look upon it as infinite – for a finite future. In earlier days we could see no boundary mark upon the horizon: now we do see one 'When I used to dream in former times,' says Chateaubriand, harking back to his remote past, 'my youth lay before me; I could advance towards the unknown that I was looking for. Now I can no longer take a single step without coming up against the boundary-stone.'*

Simone de Beauvoir (*The Coming of Age*)

Introduction

At first blush, it may seem counterintuitive to turn to an existentialist phenomenologist such as Simone de Beauvoir for insight into habitual experience. Beauvoir offers patterns of flight from freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), but rather than habits, she argues that styles of being such as nihilism or passion are ways of approaching our freedom. A nihilistic style of being, for example, is one where in the face of no universal values the person makes action itself her end—conquest, adventure, speculation, and so on spur the nihilist on towards action without a fixed end or content (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 58). In *The Coming of Age*, Beauvoir moves her existential expertise beyond styles of being and describes a phenomenology of habit in relation to temporality, the rigidity of habits, and the negotiation of openness to new actions.

The view she offers in *The Coming of Age* sheds important light on temporal experience that explain how habits can resist change in ways that are useful for the problem of feminist resistance. To explain Beauvoir's understanding of habit in *The Coming of Age*, it is necessary to frame her

discussion of the role of temporality in transcendence within her larger corpus, in particular, her early work, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. I unpack Beauvoir's account of habit and temporality, specifically how habit can function as a "lifeless requirement" in experience. I draw out her insight that death acts as a "boundary mark" in lived experience. In *The Coming of Age*, Beauvoir shows that habits carry their own flexibility or rigidity in relation to the temporal meaning they carry. I argue with Beauvoir that we should pay careful attention to the temporal meaning of habits in order to understand how they resist change. In the final section, I apply Beauvoir's insights about habit and temporality to feminist problems of resistance. I extend her insights about changes in temporal experience in the case of aging to specific norms of femininity associated with time. Feminized subjects are supposed to be vigilant against markers of time such as wrinkles, age spots, grey hair, etc., and hold onto or cultivate characterological markers of youth such as lighthearted relationships, adaptability, and other feminine charms. Women have distinctive experiences of social markers of time such as getting married, building a career, relating to family members, and having children. Beauvoir offers a phenomenology that helps to make sense of the temporal content of these social norms. Using Beauvoir's notion of a boundary mark I argue that understanding how norms of femininity affect temporality is necessary for a critique of how gender oppression limits possibilities in feminine experience. Beauvoir's view is interesting because it brings together both social meanings and different phenomenological experiences. My argument is aimed at grounding feminist resistance of hegemonic notions of futurity in ways that politicize temporal norms.

I. Phenomenology and Experience

In working through Beauvoir's phenomenology, I am engaged in a similar project as Johanna Oksala who is recuperating a philosophical understanding of experience for feminist theorizing. I am mindful of Oksala's two criticisms of phenomenology. First, she points out that phenomenology posits rather than establishes universal essences of experience, which can only be accomplished by denying the context of experience. Second, she argues that phenomenology is insensitive to the ways in which the structures of experience are due to cultural patterns in our ontology that *produce* subjectivities in stable and predictable ways ("A Phenomenology of Gender" 230). Oksala argues that we should usher in an era of post-phenomenology where "it is more helpful to start by reading anthropological and sociological investigations, medical reports . . . and psychological studies . . . than by analyzing one's own normatively limited experiences" ("A Phenomenology of Gender" 238). Oksala's insight is instructive for a feminist philosophy of experience as it foregrounds the ways in which methods of reflection are historical and that it is necessary to take into account social mechanisms that produce the meaning of experiences.

My position is that Beauvoir's phenomenology meets these criticisms head on. Beauvoir is an entry point for recuperating the phenomenological method for feminism because her method appreciates the importance of what the knowledge-producing disciplines have had to say about our social world and how

it affects the ways in which we do philosophy.[28] Beauvoir compiles

understandings from anthropology, sociology, medicine, and psychology in the

first half of her two major studies: in part one of *The Second Sex*, "Facts and

Myths," and in *The Coming of Age*'s part one, "Old Age as Seen from Without."

The second halves of these two works entitled, "Lived experience" and "Being-

in-the-World," respectively, give a variety (though not a globally representative)

study of first-person perspectives; the sheer length of her studies show her

dedication to investigations beyond her normatively limited experience. In turning

to Beauvoir's phenomenology of aging I aim to bring fresh perspective to

feminist theories of experience. Her phenomenological approach to aging can

garner valuable insights for understanding the struggles of the aged in much the

same way a phenomenological understanding of gender is useful for feminist

theory.

II. *The Coming of Age*

The first half of *The Coming of Age* compiles cultural meanings of aging

in different societies ranging from Ancient Egypt to Beauvoir's present day. Just

like *The Second Sex*, *The Coming of Age* begins with a chapter on biology. The

biology chapter in *The Second Sex* focuses on the development of biological

designations and what the biological science have had to say about sexual

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[28] It also is not clear that we ought to maintain a firm distinction between phenomenology and anthropology, and other human sciences. Eva Gothlin writes, "we must also be aware that the signification of the sexed body is always dependent on how the body as situation is concretely lived and disclosed, a disclosure that in turn is related to a situation of significations already given. . . . It is thus no coincidence that when Beauvoir describes sexual initiation, for example, she relates a whole spectrum of different ways to live it, ways that are dependent on the general cultural situation and the specific situation of an individual woman, a situation that, in turn is dependent on her relationship to her parents, previous erotic experiences and so forth" (56).

difference, reproduction, the gametes, and sexual selection. Similarly, *The Coming of Age* focuses on the development of the science of aging and its competing theories. She begins with Galen's theory of the humors that described old age as an illness in which the humors lost the heat and moisture they require to stay healthy. She also considers mechanistic theories wherein the body ages just as the parts of a machine get worn and break down. She sketches vitalism where age weakens the vital principle along with late 18th century theories that attributed physiological changes associated with old age to the deterioration of the sex glands (*The Coming of Age* 20-25). Unlike in *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir argues against the theories of biology by showing their internal inconsistencies and masculine biases, in *The Coming of Age* she is rather neutral in her presentation. She details physiological changes associated with aging and hormonal changes. She laments the non-phenomenological research style of psychology, noting that empiricist methods of inquiry are impoverished in their understandings of the situations of old people because they do not understand it as an existential situation negotiated in the first person (*The Coming of Age* 32).

In *The Coming of Age*, as in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir reveals at the end of each chapter of the first section a glimpse of the philosophical conclusions to come later in the work. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir reminds us that it is not the givens of biology that determine experience, but the ways in which they are taken up in a particular society.[29] In speaking of the ethnographical data Beauvoir

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[29] "But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the *Other*? The question is how, in her, nature has been

argues that the "decline" of old age is related to the ends that society proposes in light of its economic, spiritual, and political goals (*The Coming of Age* 86). The reverse also applies: "by the way in which a society behaves towards its old people it uncovers the naked, and often carefully hidden, truth about its real principles and aims" (*The Coming of Age* 87). Old age is a dense transfer point where society's values are revealed, embodied and proliferated. Beauvoir writes:

> [The aged man] is a subject, one who has an intimate inward knowledge of his state and who reacts to it. . . . [Becoming old] is just something that happens [and the] plurality of experiences cannot possibly be confined in a concept or even a notion. But at least we can compare them with one another; we can try to isolate the constants and to find the reasons for the differences. . . . To be sure, the state of the aged has not been the same in all places and at all times; but rising through this diversity there are constants that make it possible for me to compare various pieces of evidence (*The Coming of Age* 279).

The constants that Beauvoir isolates do not describe essential phenomenological experiences that hold true for all lived bodies, but rather that we all have a common situation—*that* we age. However, a common situation carries with it no guaranteed experiences of temporality, the body, the social meanings of aging, or intersubjective encounters made possible by aging.

The first chapter of the second half of *The Coming of Age*, "The Discovery and Assumption of Old Age; The Body's Experience," details different ways in which we can assume the "general fate" of old age. Cast in terms of a crisis akin to finding out there is no God, the discovery of one's old age is "particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as an alien or foreign species: 'Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?'" (*The*

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taken on in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of the human female" (*The Second Sex* 48).

Coming of Age 283). Aging is incremental and is difficult to perceive day to day.

The general fate of old age is one that we confront in relation to others, but we

must assume and live it in the first person. Beauvoir writes: "Since it is the Other

within us who is old, it is natural that the revelation of our age should come to us

from outside—from others. We do not accept it willingly" (*The Coming of Age*

288). The general fate of age is experienced as an Other within us, made apparent

to us by the reactions of others to our aging and how we make meaning of

ourselves as changing. Beauvoir demonstrates how different understandings of

aging shape lived experience, in particular our self-reflective understanding of

ourselves in relation to our gender, profession, relationships, and cultural context

more generally.

Beauvoir argues that aging is an experience of a shrinking future and a

weighty past and that this temporal change alters habitual experience. Beauvoir

argues that when anticipation of the future diminishes, we are more likely to rely

on the weight of the past through habit. Aging alters our habitual lives because, as

the future appears less sizeable and thus less accommodating to both new, short-

term, and long-term stable projects, our habitual involvement with the world

becomes more sedimented and predictable. As the past increases in size it takes

on temporal weight behind transcendence. It is a growing practico-inert that

escapes us and marks our past activities in the world.[30] Because of the predictions

of life span produced by combining age and social conditions, the aged have an

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[30] Beauvoir relies on Sartre's concept of the practico-inert in this chapter: "He defines this as the whole formed by those things that are marked by the seal of human activity together with men defined by their relationship to those things: as far as I personally am concerned, the practico-inert is the whole formed by the books I have written, which now outside me constitute my works and define me as their author" (*The Coming of Age* 372-3).

awareness of the approximate age at which they will die. The youthfully

experienced future is indefinite and ambiguous and it shrinks as the end of life

becomes a nearer and more vivid reality. Instead of an intellectual

acknowledgement of death, or experiencing a present fear of an abstract death, or

even retrieving our ownmost possibility for being as in Heidegger's being-

towards-death, aging *changes* the horizon of our future because we experience it

as containing a boundary mark.[31]

There are many ways to experience a boundary marked future. Old people

tend to talk about death as a near reality, it is more likely that they have

experienced the death of friends and relatives, and thus they feel their "time"

coming near as well. More experiences of loss can result in a loss of self that

reconciles old people with their death. Of her own experiences of loss, Beauvoir

writes: "In the monuments to the dead that stud my history, it is I who am buried"

(*The Coming of Age* 367).[32] The boundary mark as metaphor, but also as

phenomenologically real, marks the future as limited *now*, not as limited

eventually, which is how a young person experiences her death. At times,

Beauvoir aligns experiencing boundary marks with biological processes of

degeneration, which implies that our experience of temporality corresponds to the

body's life cycle. This may be due to Beauvoir's privileged life in that she sees

the temporality of life as corresponding closely to natural or biological aging. We

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[31] For Heidegger death is our ownmost possibility because no one can die in our place. There are many things that we do that others can leap in and do for us but no one can take away our dying. This is significant because we can reorient ourselves towards authenticity if we retrieve our ownmost possibility by making ourselves aware of our being-towards-death (295-96).

[32] Here she is talking about her friends Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Alberto Giacometti. Her loss of memory is a loss of self: "wiped out too my arguments with Merleau-Ponty in the gardens of the Luxembourg, at his home, at mine, at Saint-Tropez; gone those long talks with Giacometti and my visits to his studio" (545-6).

can think of many other social and cultural factors that intervene between a subject and her life expectancy: war, poverty, oppression, illness, trauma, etc.

Beauvoir argues that as we age we experience time differently because of the presence of boundary marks in the horizon of our experiences. When experiencing bodily changes associated with aging and making meaning of that situation one feels like his life is finished, "and that he will never re-fashion it. The future is no longer big with promise: both this future and the being who must live it contract together" (*The Coming of Age* 377). The future is no longer big with promise for a being who has been made redundant by cultural conceptions of aging, material conditions changing over a lifespan, and the decline of the body. As we age, our limitations (both real and imagined) change in quality, which alters anticipation and habitual experience.

III. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*

Beauvoir's description of aging and temporality tells us more generally about a phenomenology of anticipating the future. In her early works she criticizes doctrines of infinity and the eternal, revealing her early preoccupation with temporality. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* Beauvoir asks the preliminary existential question: "Why act at all?"—that is, "What ends can we genuinely set for ourselves?" Beauvoir begins with two stories that act as frames for her project. First, she recounts the story of Pyrrhus and Cinéas:

> Plutarch tells us that one day Pyrrhus was devising projects of conquest. "We are going to subjugate Greece first," he was saying. "And after that?" said Cinéas. "We will vanquish Africa." – "After Africa?" – "We will go on to Asia, we will conquer Asia Minor, Arabia." – "And after that?" – "We will go on as far as India." –

"After India?" – "After India?" said Pyrrhus, "I will rest" – "Why not rest right away?" said Cinéas (90).

This story teaches that there is no rest; our being is always transcendence. There is always an "and after that?" Since each end achieved is also a point of departure, we are necessarily always setting new ends.

The second story is of a young boy who cries when he learns that his concierge's son has died. His parents scold him for crying: "After all, that little boy was not your brother" (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 92). Beauvoir cautions that this teaches a dangerous lesson to the boy. This teaches that the bond between the boy and the concierge's son could possibly not-be. It throws into doubt *why we care about our brothers at all*. Surprisingly, Beauvoir agrees with the boy's parents and praises Albert Camus's character Meursault in *L'Étranger*, because he denies the imposition of pre-given ties between people. What makes this ontological lesson dangerous is that the child is unprepared for this information. The boy assumes ties between himself and others. He has not incorporated the existential and societal norms of moral separation. Beauvoir writes:

> [Man] would like to spread out his place on earth, to expand his being beyond the limits of his body and his memory, yet without running the risk of any action. But the object facing him remains, indifferent, foreign. Social, organic, economic relationships are only external relationships and cannot be the foundation of any true possession (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 92-3).

Because transcendence is a nothing it cannot give us ends; we must take up our transcendence and engage with others and the world in order to forge new connections.

The story of Pyrrhus and Cinéas shows that there are no pre-given ends. We find our ends and ourselves only in the concrete ties we make:

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> Only that in which I recognize my being is mine, and I can only
> recognize it where it is engaged. In order for an object to belong to
> me, it must have been founded by me. It is totally mine only if I
> founded it in its totality. The only reality that belongs entirely to me
> is, therefore, my act; even a work fashioned out of materials that are
> not mine escapes me in certain ways. What is mine is first the
> accomplishment of my project; a victory is mine if I fought for it
> (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 92-3).

Cinéas cannot remain ashore as a bystander and congratulate himself for the victories of Athens. He can take credit for neither the accomplishments of humanity nor his place in a religious master plan. He cannot genuinely claim either of these ends because they are too abstract and do not give concrete ends. They offer no guidance in the first person.

Beauvoir begins by considering (and subsequently rejecting) ends that humans have given themselves as necessary. She considers God, Humanity, Pleasure, and Creativity; she argues, for example, that we cannot genuinely destine ourselves towards *Humanity* as pre-given. She argues this not only because humanity cannot furnish a collective noun with real content, but because like many other "pre-given" ends: "[Humanity] is never completed; it unceasingly projects itself toward the future. It is a perpetual surpassing of itself; an appeal in need of a response constantly emanates from it; a void in need of fulfillment is constantly being hollowed out in it" (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 106). Beauvoir concludes that Pyrrhus was right from the beginning:

> The paradox of the human condition is that every end can be
> surpassed, and yet, the project defines the end as an end. In order to
> surpass an end, it must first have been projected as something that is
> not to be surpassed. Man has no other way of existing. It is Pyrrhus,
> and not Cinéas, who is right. Pyrrhus leaves in order to conquer; let
> him conquer, then. "After that?" After that, he'll see (*Pyrrhus and
> Cinéas* 113).

Beauvoir concludes that we act because our transcendence is continually compelling us into the future; inaction is impossible, there is no rest in the heart of our being—we are beings of "far away places," as she quotes Heidegger. How, then, should we set ends for ourselves that are true expansions of our beings, as opposed to projects that limit our being? We only have a genuine project when we expand our being via throwing ourselves into a future alive with possibility.

If it were possible to experience a world without future meaning and possibility then:

> flowers are no longer made to be plucked and smelled, paths no longer to be followed. The flowers seem made of painted metal; the countryside is no longer anything but a façade. There is no longer any future, no longer any surpassing, no longer any enjoyment. The world has lost all of its depth (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 97).

We need practical engagements to be open to us in our lived experience. The child who tries to reduce himself to the instant—to take the future out of his lived experience—"withdraws into a corner and says 'I don't care about anything.' But soon he looks around, he fidgets, he gets bored" (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 97). The fidgeting that we experience is disquietude in being, the pull of transcendence that is experienced as the future coaxes us with anticipation. We experience future as always *somewhere else* (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 97). Beauvoir's view here is ambitious in holding that we cannot fail to find the world this way—a view that she modifies in *The Coming of Age*.

IV. Changing Times

The discussion of temporality in *The Coming of Age* reveals *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*'s author as optimistic and perhaps naïve about experience remaining

similarly saturated with possibilities. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Beauvoir

universalizes experience of the future-directedness of our projects when she

writes:

> Since man is project, his happiness, like his pleasures, can only be
> projects. The man who has made a fortune immediately dreams of
> making another…The goal is a goal only at the end of the path. As
> soon as it is attained, it becomes a new starting point (*Pyrrhus and
> Cinéas* 99).

All goals are equalized here, and when achieved they all equally begin new paths.

The aged individual, however, experiences her transcendence towards the future

and growing practico-inert behind her *differently* than the youth of *Pyrrhus and

Cinéas*; thus each goal is unequally experienced as a new starting point—as life

advances, the experience of transcendence changes. Beauvoir writes in *The

Coming of Age* that when we are young, small amounts of time feel like a

lifetime, a ten-month school year like an eternity, which she attributes to the

exhausting detail contained within the memories of youth. When we age,

however, we remember whole years by recalling merely a few important dates.

For the aged, the memory that spans years—stretched out in the past,

intermittently marked by major events—changes the ways in which we

experience the future. The future becomes a place that makes little impression on

us; there will be little for us to dwell on. She writes:

> Young people's memories give them back the past year with a wealth
> of detail that spreads over an enormous extent: they therefore suppose
> that the year to come will have the same dimensions. When we are
> old, on the other hand, few things make much impression on us; the
> passing moment brings little new, and upon that little we do not dwell
> for long. As far as I am concerned, 1968 may be summed up in a few
> dates, a few patterns, a few facts (*The Coming of Age* 375).

Beauvoir's experience of memory and expectation changing with age results in a change in anticipation. Aging brings less possibility because of how much the present makes an impression on us in memory.

The lifeless future of aging quashes youthful anticipation. This affects anticipation for the future, thereby increasing the individual's reliance on habits in—and also in the service of—the present. This phenomenological change rigidifies habit, which furthers resistance to changing habits. Youthful anticipation is an experience of the future as about to bring important changes or upheavals of who we are with new "experiences, intoxicatingly delightful, or hideous, and one emerges transformed, with the feeling that the near future will bring about a similar upheaval" (*The Coming of Age* 375). For the aged, however, "the weight of the past slows [the elderly man] down or even brings him to a halt, whereas the young generations break free from the practico-inert and move forward" (*The Coming of Age* 390). The weight of the practico-inert solidifies the grip that habit can have on the aged, which makes transcending the weight of the past even more difficult.[33]

Perhaps Beauvoir intends to explain how aging has a specific duration— that is, we experience a phenomenology of intervals that signify changes in time periods in our lives (e.g., an afternoon, a summer, a youth). In general we experience shorter intervals when we are young, but when we are older change is more gradual and thus intervals have a longer duration. Duration is not

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[33] Helen Fielding has argued that the rigidity that Beauvoir posits for the aged in *The Coming of Age* does not necessarily entail emotional rigidity, but rather that the aged person can repeat habits in the present for the purposes of deepening the feelings that they have associated with the habitual movements. I think she is right that the emotions we have are not necessarily entailed by the rigidity of habits.

determined necessarily by biological age because the anticipation of youth and its correspondent shorter intervals is available through an upset in habitual life, something available at any age. When we travel, for example, we experience upheaval and detailed memory because travelling upsets our habitual existence and routinization. We can compare the duration of travel with the duration of youth. In travelling we are engrossed in new environments and unable to predict what the future holds. Quoting Eugène Ionesco's *Journal en Miettes*, "two days in a new country are worth thirty lived in familiar surroundings, thirty days worn and shortened, spoiled and damaged by habit" (*The Coming of Age* 376).

Changes in temporality are gradual and difficult to notice, but Beauvoir's contribution to a phenomenology of aging is that boundary marks upset temporality is marked ways. Boundary marks shape the ways in which we experience our habitual lives, projects, relationships, memories, and existence generally. We realize that we have passed a half-way mark in our lives: "the whole of a long life is set and fixed behind us, and it holds us captive" (*The Coming of Age* 373). The past pulls on the present and the bigger the past gets the more difficult it is to project ourselves beyond it. In *The Coming of Age* Beauvoir gives countless examples of people who have a heavy past and difficulty projecting beyond it. This difficulty or resistance is heightened even further when we stake our onto-security on strict continuity of the past into the present.

Beauvoir uses the example of the scientist whose research is rendered out of date by new research that comes after his "time" as a leader in his field. She gives examples of professors who would prefer to forge the results of their research so as to retain old knowledge paradigms rather than adapt themselves to

new research findings. There is no reason to adapt ourselves to a future with no promise, we must hold on to what we have in the present and its connection to a past in which we are invested. Thus, we hold ever more firmly in our grasp habits that we repeat and enshrine in lived experience. Beauvoir also gives us the example of the politician whose political beliefs are made irrelevant because of changed material conditions. Confronting the impossibility of continuing the past into the future, the politician's outdatedness can be read as resistance to "keep up with the times" and adapt to the new present. When habits enshrine the past in the present it is because they express the limit of transcendence as determined by the social value of life and contributions to society's aims.

The temporal dimension of Beauvoir's work can be useful for projects of feminist resistance and personal transformation. Her account implies that if one clings to certain habits it may not be because one has a weak will, but rather because of the particular social meanings inherent in our temporally burdened situation—how one experiences boundary marks relative to that domain of life expectations. For Beauvoir, there is nothing inherently wrong with being out of step with the present, but when one clings to a past outstripped by present demands, one's resistance to change can be attributed to how one's temporal experience has rigidified habits. When habits prove difficult to change they can be described at the level of one's existential situation as either burdened by the past, or outstripped by changing times. Beauvoir writes:

> The aged man's inward experience of his past takes the form of
> images, fantasies and emotional attitudes. He is dependent upon it in
> still another way: it is the past that defines my present situations and
> its outlet into the future; it is the admitted fact, the base from which I

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project myself and which I must go beyond in order to exist (*The Coming of Age* 372).

In other words, how we experience the size of the past is not merely an intentional connection we make via memory, it is a phenomenological structure that affects how we transcend in the present. Beauvoir admits this is true at any age—that is, we derive all of our cultural tools and meaning from the past. A more general and cultural past beyond one's life history, then, also pre-exists the individual within a culture and is then incorporated into present projects.

The past is not always stultifying in the present. Beauvoir writes that one can incorporate the past into a present project and thereby keep it living. However, if one has passed a boundary mark and no longer keeps the past alive in a project, one may repeat actions just because they were performed in the past. Beauvoir calls this a "lifeless requirement." Her example:

> Playing cards every afternoon in a certain café with certain friends is a habit that in the first place was freely elected and its daily repetition has a meaning. But if the card-player is angry or upset because *his* table is occupied, it means a lifeless requirement has come into existence, one that prevents him from adapting himself to the situation (*The Coming of Age* 396).

Beauvoir offers us a way around this dilemma. Following Sartre, she writes that it is our connection to the future that determines whether the past is living or not. She gives examples of a kind of temporal bad faith. For example, a man asserts solidary with his youthful self and thus attempts to resist aging.[34] Beauvoir writes: "They set up a fixed, unchanging essence against the deteriorations of age, and

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[34] Here I recall the character Al Bundy from the TV sitcom "Married with Children" where every so often Al would take out his old football helmet and trophies and assert that he is still the football champ who scored three touchdowns in a single game. Of course, this draws groans from his family (because he is old) and laughter from the audience (because we all have a relationship to our youthful self that can enshrine "the good old days").

tirelessly they tell stories of this being that they were, this being that lives on inside them" (*The Coming of Age* 362). By contrast one could take on one's aging as a concrete project, for example cultivating oneself as a grandmotherly or grandfatherly figure where the cultural norms of that ideal shape one's interests and projects.

Touching a boundary mark can close off possibilities for adapting our habits to new situations. The past can swamp the present with lifeless requirements when the future is no longer alive with possibility. This can be exacerbated by what Beauvoir calls "social time"—the temporality of values in a particular cultural context. Beauvoir find's Émile Zola's character Baudu in *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) as rich with insight. Baudu has invested his being in his shop and when a changing political economy outstripped the need for his services, he experienced this change as devastating.[35] He saw the death of his future in the redundancy of his shop. Beauvoir finds this character rich with insight:

> If Baudu had been younger he would have wanted to modernize his shop and he would have done so. But this shortness of his future and the weight of his past close all outlets to him. His shop was the reality in which he had his objective being: once it is ruined he no longer exists – he is a dead man under suspended sentence (*The Coming of Age* 385).

Though it is social time that outstrips Baudu, he is subject to this meaning *because* he has aged. The changed social time he lives combines with embodied

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[35] Beauvoir appears confused about who owns the shop in Zola's novel. The owner of the shop is Octave Mouret and Baudu is a shop girl.

temporal situation to change his style of existence—for Beauvoir, he is now "a dead man under suspended sentence."[36]

Oksala's challenge that phenomenology tends to create universal claims insensitive to cultural conditions is met here by Beauvoir. She gives examples of people who avoid boundary marks altogether; reaching a boundary mark is thus not a universal experience of aging. She acknowledges, for example, how some societies have different material conditions that produce their relationship with the future. Arguing with Marx, she suggests that in "repetitive societies" a person can "live on" in the family farm, their children, and any other place her labour is focused. We can avoid touching a boundary mark if we live on in projects that we anticipate will persist into the future, even if we cannot be sure that these projects do persist. In so-called "repetitive societies" the aged could have lived on in younger generations. These societies valued elders quite differently. They were considered repositories of experience; their existence achieved "the final stage of a continual advance . . . life's highest pitch of perfection" but this belies how aging appears in western capitalist society, in our time or in Beauvoir's. She quotes Sainte-Beuve, "We harden in some places and rot in others: we never ripen" (*The Coming of Age* 380).[37] With the advance of technology and changing material conditions the aged person finds himself out of date. To move himself

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[36] Similar conclusions can be drawn from contemporary examples. Imagine a baby boomer who has learned to use email through Outlook for professional reasons who would resist his workplace's transition to gmail even though it has far more features, is more user friendly, and could streamline his work. Younger generations, who are more used to changing online platforms would not experience the same difficulty to adapt.

[37] Sainte-Beuve was an important literary critique in France's nineteenth century. Friedrich Nietzsche responds to him as a philosopher in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889).

forward he muſt "perpetually be tearing himself free from a past that holds him with an ever-tighter grasp: his advance is slow" (*The Coming of Age* 391).

My larger project is to examine how habit can frustrate while at the same time provide the conditions for the possibility of resistance, and Beauvoir's view is thus helpful for thinking about when it is difficult to change ourselves. Habits can be made rigid when one's past is large and when it persists in the present with a lifeless requirement. Many norms of gender can be thought of as lifeless requirements. Cultural conditions and gender change how we experience ourselves in time, which affects habitual life, our transcendence into the future, and our relationships with the generations around us. Beauvoir is committed, however, to the view that even if it is possible to have a culture that prevents us from touching a boundary mark, our phenomenology of time roughly tracks biological age. Social time can speed up aging, as Zola's Baudu exemplifies. Society makes variable not just time, however, but death as well. Beauvoir's explanation about how to keep the future alive once we have touched a biological boundary mark offers insights about how to negotiate other boundary marks such as those related to gender and sexual difference.

The touching of a boundary mark can be understood as an existential depression that demands a response.[38] How do we keep the future alive so that we can expand our project at any biological or cultural time? How can this insight about boundary marks be used to change our habits? Beauvoir offers a promising solution when she writes that the strength of the norms in our environment can

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[38] For an interesting Husserlian phenomenology of depression as habits of self-accusation, see Schlimme (2013).

safeguard us from depression or an over-reliance on habit initiated by a boundary-marked future. She explains that "categorical imperatives arising from the past retain all their strength: this piece of work must be finished, that book written, these interests safeguarded. When this is so, the elderly man starts a race against time that leaves him not a moment's respite" (*The Coming of Age* 379). Therefore the present can be saturated with goals even within sight of a shrinking future. This reveals a remarkable consistency with what she wrote in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* twenty-seven years earlier:

> The writer is impatient to have finished a book in order to write another one. Then I can die happy, he says, *my* work will be completed. He does not wait for death in order to stop, but if his project engages him right into future centuries, death will not stop him either (*Pyrrhus and Cinéas* 113).

Further, the future can be re-enlivened in the present when we take on projects that we can be sure will go beyond our death. As one's future expands beyond biological life, anticipation may re-enliven in the present. Beauvoir gives the example of planting a tree that outlives us. When we take on projects that go beyond our death, our labour survives and possibilities in the future can be re-enlivened. In light of an increasingly precarious future for humanity (global climate change and ecological collapse), this projection to the future through temporally extended projects is both a promising and limited strategy.

If the existential depression that results from a boundary mark experience has ethical implications, they appear at the level of re-enlivening possibilities. How and when should we re-enliven imperatives from the past and what can we do when social and political forces impede this retrieval? Revisiting the categorical imperatives that once strengthened transcendence can resuscitate old

possibilities and help to retrieve them from depression and hopelessness. The scientist who does not adapt his scientific paradigms to keep up with the present could revisit the categorical imperatives that once kept him thirsting for discovery and open to whatever exploration the scientific method may bring. If retrieval of possibilities is possible, my suspicion is that we can connect with past imperatives by performing past habits in ways that mimic when they were living requirements. Like planting a tree that outlives us, we can extend our future quantitatively and towards others. Perhaps through habit, repeated action can bring us to a time when our future was large and shared and we can trigger the lived body's memory of a vibrant future.

Beauvoir shows that there are many different ways in which the past can come to us: "I call to mind some scene that happened long ago, it is fixed against that background like a butterfly pinned in a glass case: the characters no longer move in any direction. Their relationships are numbed, paralysed" (*The Coming of Age* 366). She also writes: "The past is not a peaceful landscape lying there behind me, a country in which I can stroll wherever I please, and which will gradually show me all its secret hills and dales. As I was moving forward, so it was crumbling" (*The Coming of Age* 365). While it is true that the past is quantitatively growing as we age, it is false that the meaning of the past is then guaranteed: "the meaning of the past event can always be reversed" (*The Coming of Age* 366).

Turning to the past to retrieve imperatives as a way of countering resistance to change, however, may be complicated when we are over-invested in one particular possibility that overshadows new possibilities. An example would

be a professional athlete who, due to a career-ending injury, can remember the past and experiences it as primarily saturated by narrow imperatives for high-performance sports.[39] Beauvoir acknowledges that revisiting the past does not necessarily give us what we seek because we experience the past in the present *qua* past. We never get back the freshness of when the past was the present:

> There are many things that we are powerless to summon up but that we can nevertheless recognize. Yet this recognition does not always give us back the warmth of the past. The past moves us for the very reason that it is past; but this too is why it so often disappoints us – we lived it in the present, a present rich in the future towards which it was hurrying; and all that is left is a skeleton (*The Coming of Age* 365-6).

Further, imperatives of the past have to contend with selective memory (e.g., the imperative of high performance sports overshadows other things that were once important) and the relationships of strength that different imperatives have with each other (e.g., the norms of achievement in sports might be of a different strength and importance than those of family or education and thus deaden those around it). When we are heavily invested in a particular imperative—past, present or future—it can be afforded special status in lived experience. This investment serves to establish the ways in which we make meaning out of our situation and other norms that guide our experience. Beauvoir neglects to explain how imperatives that keep us steaming towards the future can also keep us reticent to change. While it may be useful to revisit the past for categorical imperatives to re-enliven our future, the ideals that we retrieve can themselves cause a reticence to change because the ideal may be exclusionary.

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[39] I am grateful to Janine Jones for bringing this example to my attention.

Beauvoir's contribution to a phenomenology of aging is that the experience of time, more than any consciousness of our *death*, makes us aware of our finitude. In the face of a large past, the aged face the difficulty of transcending the past and anticipating a future of investment in possibilities. Beauvoir's idea entails that because of the weight of the past behind the old, their transcendence beyond it may be that much more valuable.[40] That is, a transcendence that creates new habits in spite of a weighty past is a higher existential achievement. It is easier for the young person to pick themselves back up when the chips are down because the past is easy to slough off in favour of a new present, but for the old, the burden of the past is so great that transcending may seem like a phenomenological impossibility.

V. Boundary Marks and Gender

Beauvoir's view goes beyond a pragmatist's reading of habits that focuses on educating the young because the old are *necessarily* more rigid. Beauvoir's view—because it centres the *existential situation* of aging—does not distribute one's ability to change among categories such as "the old" and "the young." Her view extends beyond calendar age because the aged can have any number of attitudes towards their past, or they can travel and have new experiences that defy stagnant habituation. Her view extends to the situation of the young because it is possible for anticipation to be diminished in cases of boundary marks determined by the values and political economy of a society. These extensions prompt us to

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[40] I am indebted to Shannon Musset for pointing out this consequence for Beauvoirian transcendence.

investigate boundary marks that are not related to biological death. I will now take this insight to think through a feminist phenomenology of temporality and habit that shows how norms of gender shape the lived experience of time for feminine subjects.

The boundary mark in Beauvoir's work is relative to culture, though our existential situation shares common features. It is universal *that* we age, but *how* we age is not. Since it is the *how* that is phenomenologically relevant for understanding experience, Beauvoir has found a way to take cultural conditions and explain how experience can be affected in predictable ways. If cultural conditions are materialized when existents make meaning of their situation, then it is possible to extend the concept of a boundary mark past our biological body as dying and towards our cultural body as dying.[41] In much the same way that the boundary mark of age is inflected by culture, cultural narratives and political processes can effect an experience of our body that exceeds the "pre-theoretical" body of biology, and gives us a cultural body with a life of its own.[42]

A general example of extending boundary mark experiences and the resultant change in temporal experience can be thought through narratives of economic pressure in our current historical moment of late capitalism. We live under intensified norms of economic achievement, and a boundary mark might be missing a career or entrepreneurial chance or "blowing it" at a job interview. Since the economic collapse of 2008, for example, the possibility of attaining a

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[41] For a related phenomenology in a different embodied social and political context, see Lisa Guenther's (2013) work on solitary confinement.

[42] Here I am following Judith Butler who argues that we cannot talk about a "pure" material body outside of the operations of power that produce bodies as intelligible (*Bodies that Matter* 9).

middle-class economic position has been further foreclosed. Performance pressure narratives tells us that if we have failed to "make it" by attaining upward mobility perhaps by age 30 (unless 30 is the new 20), then future possibilities contain a clear boundary mark—if it has not been passed. Given the range of economic and environmental crises unfolding and gaining momentum from neoliberalism, possibilities for one's future life plans are becoming devastatingly narrowed as legitimate insecurity spreads about current everyday living arrangements being unrecognizable in a few short generations. Much like Baudu, who is outstripped by changing technology, current environmental crises threaten to make our daily lives drastically different. I take up one branch of this thinking in my next chapter where I elaborate obesity as a form of social crisis that affects lived experience, though not in quite the same way or to the same extent as global climate change. Regarding gender, a specifically white, heterosexual, and upwardly mobile norm of femininity reads that if women fail to find a man to marry by a certain age, then they are destined to become childless failures. As in Beauvoir's account of aging, we can imagine these "failures" as losing anticipation for the future because they experience passing a crucial—and yet culturally produced—juncture in life where the death of possibilities can cause the rigidity of habit that makes one "set in their ways."

Being "past one's prime" also relates to female embodiment and experiences of time. Writing against Kant's account of external, linear, and objective time, Michelle Bastian describes her experience as differently marked by gender exactly because of something like a boundary mark experience. She writes:

> [M]y experiences suggest to me that all parts of time do not belong to the same time. My time is marked by ruptures. Upon turning 30, I was forever divided from the possibility of being a woman who enacted a timely procreation and instead became the 30-plus woman who can only procreate in an untimely fashion, having spent too much time on selfish occupations such as postgraduate study (219).

For Bastian, her experience of cultural boundary marks is inflected by her gender and a timely age of procreation. Beauvoir's view is that how we experience our possibilities is dependent on how we experience ourselves in time; we are more adaptable to new situations when the future appears to us as abundant. In the case of shrinking possibilities for procreation (for numerous and some dubious reasons) gender norms create double binds on women's time because they are often subject to economic and procreative pressure around the same biological age.

Temporality often recedes into the background until we have experiences that challenge our notion of steady, sequential time. What the boundary mark experience does is jolt us out of our everyday involvement and flatten out anticipation in unpredictable ways. The personal experience of passing a boundary mark, experienced as a lived awareness of time, is informed by our cultural notions of time. Christina Schües argues that we need a phenomenological investigation into feminine temporal embodiment as well as spatial embodiment. Referring to Iris Young's influential writing on the phenomenology of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality in "Throwing Like a Girl," Schües asks how the girl who throws the ball experiences her temporality ("Introduction" 7). In Young's essay, Schües argues, feminine bodily experience is of the lived body as "both subject and object for

itself at the same time and in reference to the same act" (38). This is because girl children are discouraged from experiencing themselves as pure presence to the world—always as subject and object as seen from the outside according to norms of feminine appearance and feminine spatiality. Many of Young's examples have to do with taking up space—for example, constricting one's bodily space. The temporality of feminine bodily experience can perhaps be added to this spatial feminine phenomenology. How do some feminine subjects experience temporality when they must make meaning of their experience in light of norms of femininity? If properly feminized subjectivity means vigilance against physical markers of age, then resisting rigid gender normativity means resisting specific formulations of temporal meaning.

Gendered norms continue to direct women's energy and resources towards marriage and thus it continues to attract feminist concern. Marriage is saturated with temporal norms about one's age and process of finding and securing a marriage partner. Beauvoir formulates a strong critique of marriage in *The Second Sex*. She writes, "Thus for both parties marriage is a charge and a benefit at the same time; but their situations are not symmetrical; for young girls, marriage is the only way to be integrated into the group, and if they are 'rejects,' they are social waste" (*The Second Sex* 441). Women's role in coming to be married reveals their situation, "[the young girl] is *married*, *given* in marriage by her parents. Boys *marry*; they *take* a wife. In marriage they seek an expansion, a confirmation of their existence but not the very right to exist; it is a charge they assume freely" (442).

Sara Ahmed has argued that the promise of future happiness is used to

direct women towards marriage. She writes:

> One of the primary happiness indicators is marriage. Marriage would
> be defined as "the best of all possible worlds" as it maximizes
> happiness. The argument is simple: if you are married, then we can
> predict that you are more likely to be happier than if you are not
> married. The finding is also a recommendation: get married and you
> will be happier! (*The Promise of Happiness* 6).

According to Ahmed, marriage is both a happy object because it makes one

happy, and it is a happiness-cause in the sense that mere proximity to marriage

causes anticipatory happiness. And also since wealth accumulation has not made

people happier, our society then continues to locate happiness in "certain places,

especially marriage, widely regarded as the primary 'happiness indicator', as well

as in stable families and communities" (*The Promise of Happiness* 7). Social

pressure to marry creates a temporal horizon for women that orients them towards

the "what" of happiness, which is marriage to the right person at the right time.

Using Beauvoir's insights we can investigate a phenomenological reading of

feminine temporality as having an anticipatory dimension of passivity in terms of

waiting: representations of girls as "waiting" for Prince Charming to wake them

up, waiting to become a wife, a mother. To be validated by male authorities

affects the temporal horizon of feminine experience by constructing it as out of

their hands:

> We cannot always close the gap between how we feel and how we
> think we should feel. To feel the gap might be to feel a sense of
> disappointment. Such disappointment can also involve an anxious
> narrative of self-doubt (Why am I not made happy by this? What is
> wrong with me?) or a narrative of rage, where the object that is
> "supposed" to make us happy is attributed as the cause of
> disappointment. Your rage might be directed against the object that
> fails to deliver its promise or it may spill out toward those who
> promised you happiness through the elevation of some things as good.
> We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments ("Killing

Joy" 581).

I reread the affect alien through a temporality of anticipation—not only are we
not made happy by what was promised, but the promise does not deliver on a time
of beginning or opening horizons but it actually narrows a horizon by limiting
possibilities.

This affective gap is reflected in self-help literature. For example, in *1001
Questions to Ask Before You Get Married*, the author shares the following
anecdote:

> On my wedding day, my 82 year-old grandmother pulled me aside
> and, in a voice that was almost a whisper, said, "When I got married,
> all I did was cry for the first two years!" A few hours later, my new
> husband's grandmother came up to me and said, "Dear, now that
> we're family, I would like to share something with you. . . . When I
> got married, all I did was cry for about two years!" Since my
> grandmother doesn't speak English and my husband's grandmother
> doesn't know a word of Spanish, I knew they weren't in cahoots
> (xiii).[43]

How society views marriage can be a boundary mark, something worth grieving,
something that limits possibilities, diminishes anticipation and possibly rigidifies
habit. It is ironic and perhaps shocking because, especially for women, it is
supposedly when life "begins."[44]

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[43] Beauvoir writes about this in surprisingly similar ways: "It is not only in vaudeville that one
sees young women returning in tears to their mothers on their wedding night: psychiatric books
are full of this type of account; several have been told to me directly: they concern young girls, too
well brought up, without any sexual education, and whose sudden discovery of eroticism
overwhelmed them" (*The Second Sex* 459).

[44] This may be characteristic of completing many different defining achievements in one's life. I
have heard many comparisons to the grief that comes with completing a major life stage (e.g.,
having a child, achieving tenure, finishing a degree, and so on). This seems to be a reaction to how
these events are often figured as offering some *relief* from one's existential stress, but since, as
Beauvoir underscores, each end is a beginning, these accomplishments actually create an open
horizon where one must begin anew.

A feminist expansion of Beauvoir's insights can take a toehold at this point: we can politicize the creation and experience of boundary marks. Many women with whom I have discussed this paper have read the boundary mark of aging as comingled with beauty ideals for women. A characteristic feminine experience is to guard against physical markers of temporality. Moreover, a norm of femininity is to be vigilant against "premature aging" (an ambiguous temporal concept itself). I have been told that it is never *too early* to start a night time skin care regimen, not to touch your eye lids and eyebrows too much (encourages wrinkles), and to be vigilant against any sign of aging, be it cellulite, dark skin spots, grey hair, wrinkles, and so on. The everyday practical suggestions from other women combine with advertisers who play on women's fear of premature aging and being "past one's prime." The same norms do not apply to men—indeed, the distinguished older man trope is constantly resurfacing.

Guarding against, for example, pre-mature aging can be seen as a socially enforced boundary mark experience.[45] Being "past one's prime" can act as a boundary mark when so much social legitimacy and value is derived from youthfulness and norms of appearance. As well as physical appearance, boundary marks can mean being past the age of having an agreeable personality. Worrying about becoming bitter or depressed, lonely and isolated if we are single at a certain age can reveal another gendered dimension of temporal meaning. Temporal meanings about creating heteronormative family units, not wanting to be an "old parent," and balancing career norms of promotion and greater job

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[45] Unless of course one attends an "age management clinic," which are becoming increasingly popular. Age management treatments are largely facial injections and hormonal treatments.

security as one ages create and maintain boundary marks that can contribute to a

decreased anticipation if they are not achieved within the right time frame. Even

if these temporal norms are not incorporated in embodied experience, they

provide a normative centre to negotiate within or against. I hope this expansion of

Beauvoir can provide a phenomenology of boundary marks as culturally

negotiated, which can ground a political critique of how they are constructed,

distributed, and how they can contribute to limits on possibilities.

Conclusion

If we take Beauvoir's method of cultural phenomenology seriously, time

shows itself when we have experiences such as "running out of time," "time

flying," and one's "biological clock" ticking. Even though our experiences are

always temporal, the temporality of experience often recedes into the background

until we have experiences that challenge our notion of steady, sequential time.

The personal experience of passing a boundary mark, experienced as a lived

awareness of time is informed by our cultural notions of time. To bring Young's

insights to those from feminist phenomenologies of time, we can think about

women's experiences as caregivers without enough time to themselves. If

women's spatiality is limited and their time belongs to someone else, how does a

boundary mark experience operate in this situation? If women experience

themselves as lacking personal time, a kind of phenomenological exhaustion can

occur when a future horizon is frozen, occupied by the time of others, and

predictable. A feminist politics of the futurity of women's horizons is then

necessary and this is what, I have suggested, a reading of Beauvoir's corpus can provide.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Temporality and the "Obesity Crisis"

Little in late-twentieth-century U.S. culture has given any inkling that it might be possible to live *as a fat woman. Die as a fat woman, yes. Die* because *you're a fat woman, unquestionably. It is all too easy to find images of fat shot through with warnings about one's impending death—images of revulsion, images in which fat bodies are fragmented, medicalized, pathologized, and transformed into abject visions of the horror of flesh itself.*

(Le'a Kent, 133)

Introduction

Thus far I have been spelling out various points at which it is useful to think about habit and temporality for accounts of individual resistance to oppression. There is a growing body of scholarship that addresses the position of fat people as oppressed and as resisting oppression.[46] Stigma about body size, drawing momentum from the "obesity crisis" is growing, sparking various resistance strategies often from those whose bodies are taken to be the cause of this crisis.

As literature analysing the dominant discourses and critical responses have grown, many writers have noted that fat oppression and fat resistance strategies have an interesting relation to time, or to a "fat temporality." Works that engage fat and temporality do so primarily by focusing on culturally ubiquitous "before" and "after" photos of weight loss narratives, arguing that the pervasiveness of these images makes fat bodies uninhabitable in the present and often result in a lived experience of temporariness. Resistance strategies directed at these

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[46] I use "fat" in this chapter to describe neutrally a certain kind of body. There are, however, degrees of fatness and some fatness is more proportional (or normative) than others and fat is always already gendered and raced. Much like its use in the fat studies and fat activist communities, I use the term as a family resemblance term that picks out non-normative bodies marked by size attributed to body fat. Not all fat *people* would agree with my use, but all fat people are subject to some kind of social categorization based on the fat on their bodies.

narratives aim to "occupy" the present and refuse temporariness. For example, fat activists assert that they are not "before" pictures, nor are they "temporarily embarrassed thin people."

In this chapter I advance three related arguments: first, that the fat temporality sketched in current fat studies literature relies too heavily on the temporality of diet and weight loss norms; second, that eating itself has temporal meaning that contributes to fat temporality; and third, that the "obesity crisis" supports a crisis phenomenology that could render intelligible a wider range of resistance strategies than currently imagined. I engage with this particular area of the fat studies literature to think more deeply about how lived temporality and social and cultural narratives of time enable particular forms of resistance proper to lived time or temporality.

In my first section, I sketch the fat studies literature on discrimination and stigma and how this literature draws out an overly narrow notion of fat temporality. In section two I offer a reading of the temporal meanings of fatness, obesity and eating to argue that certain ways of eating have specific and contextually located temporal significances that connect us to imagined times. In section three I offer a phenomenological reading of the crisis of obesity. Finally, in section four I consider other forms of fat temporal resistance enacted within fat activism. The broadest argument I am advancing here is that analysing a particular form of resistance that takes temporality as its object must simultaneously consider a phenomenology of time and consider cultural narratives and anxieties. Bringing these different levels into conversation, I argue,

offers important insights about the difficulties of shifting temporal habits in the first person and thus important insights about resistance.

I. Fat Stigma and Temporality

One guiding question in taking up obesity in this chapter is: How can a dominant discourse, such as the contemporary discourses of health and body size create and complicate possible temporalities for situated subjects? Current social anxiety about the health of individuals and nations has created what Kathleen LeBesco has called a "moral panic." She writes:

> Moral panics are marked by *concern* about an imagined threat; *hostility* in the form of a moral outrage toward individuals and agencies responsible for the problem; *consensus* that something must be done about the serious threat; *disproportionality* in reports of harm; and *volatility* in terms of the eruption of panic ("Fat Panic and the New Morality" 73).

Many fat studies authors have directed their energy towards changing disproportionality in reports of harm[47] and explaining how medical and public health authorities are managing and producing obesity.[48] The eruption of panic over the prevalence of obesity has embedded temporal meanings that I sketch in this chapter in order to show the complicated relationship between one's first-person experience of time and cultural narratives with temporal meaning. For

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[47] Glen Gaesser debunks many studies that have underpinned current "obesity epidemic" discourses that rely on the Body Mass Index in his book *Big Fat Lies: The Truth about Your Weight and Your Health to Your Health*. Paul Campos is engaged in a similar project as Gaesser in his book *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to Your Health*. A more recent skeptical engagement with obesity science is Michael Gard's *The End of the Obesity Epidemic*.

[48] Michael Gard and Jan Wright's edited volume *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality, and Ideology* and Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood's edited volume *Biopolitics and 'The Obesity Epidemic': Governing Bodies*, contain essays that describe in close detail the techniques of obesity management and the discursive authority of public health and medicine produce and maintain consensus that obesity is a serious social threat and on what should be done about it.

example, under the spectre of the "obesity crisis" the future is given as dystopic and spoiled should we continue along a slippery slope of ever-increasing body size, thus how one inhabits a body in a cultural context is an embodiment of one's position within this crisis. These worries for the future, I argue, suggest that fat panic is connected to current papering over of lingering and morphing eugenic impulses operating in our cultural moment. Fat panic encourages certain kinds of (healthy because thin) bodies by evoking the fear of a physical "backslide" of populations. It is against this backdrop and with an eye towards the project of understanding possibilities for individual resistance that I advance a reading of temporalities promoted by fat panic, specifically how they both create and foreclose possibilities for resistance, especially those enacted by fat activists.

As I have argued in Chapter Three, social and cultural narratives that contribute to our anticipation of our own future affect us differently based on embodied experience (as gendered or as aging). In this case, discrimination against fat people affects anticipation for the future:

> The various forms of *discrimination* that fat people experience, in
> schools, at doctors' offices, in the job market, in housing, and in
> their social lives, means that effectively their *life chances*—for a
> good education, for fair and excellent health care, for job promotion
> and security, for pleasant housing, for friends, lovers, and life
> partners…in other words, for a good and safe life—are *effectively
> reduced* (7).

Several questions arise from this posited decrease in anticipation: if fat people experience a climate of reduced life chances, can we generalize about a phenomenology of fatness? What kinds of effects does discrimination of this sort have on lived experience? To draw on Beauvoir's notion of the boundary mark, a decrease in anticipation could result from awareness of these reduced life chances

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whether or not that awareness is connected to the causes of discrimination outside of the self. In other words, being fat might itself be a boundary mark experience that weight loss is represented as being able to counteract.[49] Thus, losing weight may be as much a temporal project as it is a project of body transformation. In addition, the displacement of hope for the future seems especially salient for fat people who experience amorphous future health threats that evoke their premature death.[50]

Building on the account of fat people as discriminated against, Amy Farrell draws on Erving Goffman's work on stigma to explain some of the stigma fat bodies carry. For Goffman, stigma is directed at bodies that communicate a kind of failure—social, cultural, personal, religious, reproductive, productive, and so on. As Farrell notes, fatness has been and continues to be a "*discrediting attribute*, which people go to *extraordinary extremes* to eliminate" (6). Because of the meanings of fatness beyond the physical presentation of a fat body, stigma is not only physical but characterological—"a person is gluttonous, or filling a deeply disturbed psychological need, or irresponsible and unable to control primitive urges" (6). Fat people cannot hide from the stigma attached to their bodies even if they wear the most flattering clothes for their shape, squeeze into slimming undergarments, and prune and preen every aspect of their hair, nails, and accessories. The fat on fat bodies discredits the person, and in order to get social credit back—to enjoy the equivalent "standards of polite and respectful

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[49] And it might actually have phenomenological effects of reversing a boundary mark experience. For example, many people who lose weight feel younger and often describe it as a "new beginning."

[50] Ragen Chastain argues that much of this is interpersonally accomplished through the tool of "Vague Future Health Threats" against fat people, which is, "you may be fat and healthy now, but it will catch up to you someday" (24).

behaviour" (6) that their thin counterparts do—fat people in most cases must

portray themselves as working towards reclaiming the social credit they lack.

They must be seen as at least *trying* i.e., dieting.

Samantha Murray follows Eve Sedgwick when she posits a collective

"knowingness" about fatness. She writes:

> As members of Western society, we presume we know the histories of
> all fat bodies, particularly those of fat women; we believe we know
> their desires (which must be out of control) and their will (which must
> be weak). This constant "silent presumption" in *knowing* certain
> bodies reifies the culture of knowingness (134).

The knowingness that undergirds fat stigma is both propositional knowledge ("S

knows that P") as well as implicit understanding. Even propositional knowledge,

as Alexis Shotwell argues, is "thoroughly enmeshed with other forms of

understanding—feeling, somatic experience, skills and competencies,

presuppositions and common sense" (2). In other words, the knowingness about

fat bodies is a habit because it is not often in propositional form; this kind of

implicit knowledge "provides the foundation from which we reason, or is

heuristically unspoken. . . . [T]his form of understanding goes without saying or is

contingently unspeakable" (4). The knowingness about fat bodies need not only

be resisted at the level of propositional knowledge (debunking stereotypes) since

habit frustrates a reason-responsive view of ourselves as agents. If we are

dependent on the heuristically unspoken, how do we access and thus shift implicit

understandings of fat bodies? Because much of the current context of fat stigma is

entrenched by the heuristically unspoken, resisting these stereotypes and

stigmatizations is an interesting place to think through resistance.

Much of the resistance to fat stigma centres on resisting weight loss narratives in particular. Our visual culture is saturated with "before" and "after" images of weight loss, as well as heartfelt first person stories of weight loss; scholars have identified this as producing "fat temporality" (Murray 2005, 2008; Levy-Navarro 2012). My question is, what kinds of anticipation can one experience if they are not *in the right time*? If one's body is constructed as "to be changed" and as not legitimate in the present, then it affects one's lived experience. Le'a Kent writes:

> As in the before and after pictures, the fat body is endlessly present in its representation as *past*. It is drawn back, recalled, referred to again and again, only to be cast out again; and through that casting out, it forms the margins defining the good body, the thin body that bears the mark of the self's discipline (136).

For the newly thin, the past is where their fat selves are, haunting the present with the threat of weight *re*gain. For the currently fat, the future is when life "begins" because they will realize their "true" thin future self. Or, one might have a thin self in the past that they are trying to become again and they may mark that as "the real me." The struggle to maintain a "break" with the past or to "bring" the future to the present from the past shows how body size affects temporality predominantly in terms of discourses of who the "real" you is or who you want it to be. When these narratives are used as death threats one may quite understandably feel like one has less long to live, like she needs to "hurry up" and get thin, disavowing one's present for a better future.

Samantha Murray describes fat temporality in terms of the necessary impermanence of the fat body:

> The fat body can only exist (however uncomfortably) as a body aware of its own necessary impermanence. Consequently, in experiencing my fat body there is a sense of suspension, of deferral, of hiatus. One is waiting to become "thin," to become "sexual," waiting to *become* (155).

Feeling like the form of one's embodiment is temporary can affect temporal experience in terms of future projects, relationships, and other life trajectories because it takes the phenomenological weight out of the present and puts it into the future. Because the fat body is figured as a "before" picture with the potential to melt away fat to reveal the "authentic" thin person, the body is figured as either in a process of transformation or just before a process of transformation. A fat body thus affects one's relationship to time.

I am offering an analysis of social norms and anxieties, which is not to be conflated with a necessary experience. Yofi Tirosh explains fat temporality:

> Most people perceiving themselves as fat experience the center of gravity of their identity in their imagined, post-transformation future. Often, they experience the present as a limbo between a thinner past in which things were right and a future that will restore this longed-for past. Or, if they were fat for as long as they can remember, the leap is from a past that should be carefully analyzed to trace the reasons that brought about their fatness, to a future of miraculous metamorphosis into thinness. Weight loss is conceived as an act of restoring or finally finding the true self, whose emergence will bring with it confidence and happiness that are deficient for many fat people (301).

While I think what Tirosh has said sheds light on the different experiences and temporalities, I do not think it is right to theorize fat temporality as primarily connected to weight loss narratives. There needs to be an understanding of a subject's experience of multiple and contradictory meanings of these temporalities, acknowledging that they are not totalizing. For example, one might diet not to lose weight primarily but to maintain a size at which they are most

comfortable, which might still be quite fat. This does not hang on magical

thinking or a loss of true self, it may primarily be losing "winter weight" and

getting down to a size that fits the majority of one's wardrobe, though one's

reasons cannot easily be divorced completely from dominant discourses of weight

loss. Further, there should be an understanding that diet and weight loss industries

are not the only forces affecting the lived and cultural meaning of fatness. As I

will argue, there are economic, gendered, and larger social pressures that affect

lived experience beyond before-and-after temporality.

    I think Levy-Navarro's investigations of before-and-after temporality are

interesting because she surveys how subjects make meaning of their experiences

by reading dieting's culture of confession:

> The successful dieter, in making her confession, divides her life into
> two completely distinct stages and, indeed, selves. There is the
> "before" of her former fat self and the "after" of her new thin self. . . .
> Oddly, no matter how much she traces the progress of her diet, the
> diet is, ultimately, understood in terms of timeless moments in which
> she discovers that she has once-and-for-all achieved this "new me"
> she so desperately desired. Such narratives are, then, apocalyptic in
> the sense that they focus on this absolute break with the past (even as
> they also implicitly recognize that they must struggle to maintain this
> break) (344).

Levy-Navarro is analysing dieting futurity in particular—how does dieting extend

to and attempt to construct a future for dieters? Fat subjects experience fat as

intransigent because of its present disavowal but also its corrosive effects limiting

their future possibilities. The future feels as though it *is* sharply divided, which

burdens the decision-making present—continue on this way and *die,* or embrace

the temporariness (by dieting) and live.

I have offered this overview of fat temporality because I think much fat studies literature has focused too heavily on before-and-after temporality without considering how these temporalities work with broader social meanings and narratives about obesity. This may in part be due to the focus of fat studies literature on critiquing diet and weight loss industries, but it does not capture a broad range of possible fat temporalities and thus offers a narrow view of resistance to fat oppression. There is more temporal meaning available in our discourses of managing food, exercise, and larger social projects that can contribute to and shape fat temporality.

Much of what fuels these temporal norms is what Talia Welsh defines as the "good health imperative," which adds urgency to weight loss norms, but also extends to all bodies. The good health imperative claims that "our modifiable behaviors should be directed toward improving our physical well-being for our own good, as well as that of others" ("Healthism" 34). A healthy or health*ier* future is tied to economic norms, too, as health is defined in the workplace as the ability to work at least 40 hours a week. Further, the good health imperative intensifies eugenic anxieties about future health, future persons, and future collective well-being. In light of surveys suggesting that 11 percent of parents would terminate a pregnancy if they could be certain it would result in a fat child (Louderback 25), our new consumer relationship with eugenic technologies, even if imaginary, make it clear that the problems of the past—quests for racial purity and genetic superiority—are still with us. Anecdotal evidence that fat women are encouraged to terminate a pregnancy because their doctors exaggerate the *maternal* health risks asks fat women to collude in their own biological dying

out.[51] They are asked to take on the good health imperative to ward off obesity in future generations.

Under the auspice of the good health imperative, the future must be protected against fat children, and maternal fatness has become an important object of study in research on fertility and fetal health.[52] An increased number of studies on the connection between stillbirths and maternal fatness show our preoccupation with saving children from killer maternal fat. In one article, researchers investigated the relationship between obesity and stillbirths. They conclude that obesity increased the risk of stillbirth but they admit they cannot say what mechanism was responsible for the increase because they did not control for other factors:

> 40% of the 2000 Australian stillbirths a year are preventable if a woman loses any excessive weight, has children earlier and gives up smoking. . . . That's 800 babies a year which could be saved if we were able to remove these three modifiable factors (Flenady n.p.).

The rhetoric of maternal fatness paints it as a choice, a choice to be avoided. It is put on par with smoking and having children later in life.[53] The tone of the article and the invocation of dead babies implies that fat does not just kill, it might *murder*.

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[51] First person stories of scare tactics used against pregnant fat women can be found here: http://fathealth.wordpress.com/category/pregnancy/. Although not all are told to abort, the exaggerated health effects of "excess weight" on top of pregnancy weight are used to discourage women from pregnancy (before and after they become pregnant).

[52] This is most certainly what Foucault called "biopolitics" (243) or the use of political means to control life (239). For Foucault, in the 19th century, sovereign power expanded from not only the right to kill or let live, but also to "make" live or to "let" die (241). Jan Wright and others have argued that the "obesity" epidemic more closely resembles a "biopedagogy," which describes "the normalizing and regulating practices in schools and disseminated more widely through the web and other forms of media, which have been generated by escalating concerns over claims of global 'obesity epidemic'" (1).

[53] Geriatric pregnancy is temporal marker that medical authorities modify.

If the future is where the moral high ground is and what we are fighting for when we critique our social behaviour and try to overcome present hardships, a temporal position is created for those who are signified as holding us back. In the present, fat people threaten to hold us still or even move us backwards as they bear the brunt of fears of degeneracy when discourses of fat panic are deployed. If now is a time of crisis, a crisis of agency (e.g., fat people cannot control themselves or their food intake), or a crisis of social organization (e.g., fast food, video games, automobiles, and so on), then this affects the story we want to tell about what it takes to meet present challenges.

II. "Obesity" and Time

If cultural norms and anxieties shape possibilities for lived experiences of time, then aging is not the only domain of inquiry that garners insight into temporal and habitual experience. Social and cultural norms of time percolate in everyday conversations: don't worry about the *future*, live in the *now*. But we are supposed to *plan ahead* and *be early*—keep calm and *carry on*. Eating is especially saturated with temporal norms. Consider the norms around breakfast food (only certain foods are to be eaten in the morning), night time snacks (they are considered to be the cause of weight gain), as well as weight loss suggestions like ingesting the majority of calories before noon, or not eating after a certain time of day (no carbs after 2pm!). Even exercise norms reveal how crunched we are for time (three minute abs). Because fat people are presumed to eat too much and not make time for exercise, they are figured as having a temporality with short durations: less time (if any) between eating events; *fast* food coupled with

not enough time between meals; the imagined fat person eats repetitively, obsessively, mindlessly, too often, and too late. Pleasure-seeking, the fat person has an improper temporality. She has not fully incorporated temporal norms of eating and thus has a bad food-time sensibility, or so common sense understandings of fat lives purport. These temporal norms of food and body size confront people of all sizes, but are especially salient for fat people whose bodies are taken as *evidence* of an improper temporality.

In the following sub-sections I sketch obesity's temporal meanings at the cultural and social levels. I have separated these meanings into the untidy articulations of past and future. Meaning spills over to the past and future affecting each differently and creating ambivalent and ambiguous meanings. This way of interpreting time as politically instrumental has precedents. Some social groups or nationalities have come to occupy tenses in relation to the temporal definitional power of Western expansion and exceptionalism, which carries the torch for the future. This is evidenced in terms like "first world" and "developed nations." Western exceptionalism is secured by claiming the future, both the moral high ground and the "best plans" for the future. To understand the temporal meanings of obesity is likewise to investigate the cultural story we tell about the past, present, and future of body size in society.

Past

> *Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food.*

> (Michael Pollan 148)

In her work *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo America: A Genealogy,* Ladelle McWhorter has offered a Foucauldian genealogy of changing eugenic priorities as part of contemporary contexts of racism and homophobia. She argues that in the mid-20th century, eugenics shifted from typological thinking, which targeted particular racial characteristics (i.e., physiognomy) to population thinking, which emphasized particular variations that exist across racial groups like "strength, vitality, high intelligence, and socially valued conduct" (247). After the Holocaust, American eugenicists learned not to judge people based on race alone, but "to be more specific about exactly what was wrong with the people so judged" (248). This new and more specific form of eugenics focused on (among other things) supporting "families likely to produce children who would be intelligent, hard-working, sane, temperate, and moral," discouraging families likely to promote the reverse (249). McWhorter makes a convincing case that the "family" would become the semantic substitute for race—organizations formerly labelled eugenic changed their names to "population science" and "human geneticists" (250).

Amy Farrell argues that fatness has been used as a signifier for lacking fitness for progress in many ways. During the time of American suffrage, feminists and anti-feminists used fatness to lampoon the other side of the political divide. Suffragists, who represented themselves as "young, white, and alluringly slim" (85), represented their conservative opponents as "aging, fat, and old

fashioned" (101). Anti-suffragists represented suffragists as "fat and big-lipped, two signifiers of a primitive body" (92). Some postcards and cartoons from that time represented suffragists as fat and masculine while others evoked explicit racist anxieties by drawing "explicitly on the stigmatized image of the Hottentot Venus, suggesting that voting was primitive, uncivilized and undesirable" in proper white women (93). Farrell writes:

> Suffragists chose to latch on to the 'older,' 'fatter' typology to represent the anti-suffragists, I would argue [because] those two physical characteristics—old and fat—could be powerfully harnessed to 'say' that the anti-suffragists were out-of-date, regressive women whose points of view threatened progress. Being older meant that one was outmoded. Being fat meant that one had degenerative characteristics. Neither was good in a modern world (102).

Fatness has a history of signifying maladaptation for public life and atavistic traits whether in the service of the future or to hold the past into the present. Fatness disturbs the proper order of gender and race for progress as it signifies either maladaption to one's environment or degeneracy.

In his book *Obesity: The Biography* (2010), Sander Gilman argues that the obesity crisis is a moral panic brought about by changing meanings of body size and shape. In the present, obesity is figured especially as related to a specific understanding of the past—a healthy past when we knew and exercised moderation. Tapping into nostalgia for the distant past are diets like the "Paleolithic Prescription."[54] Gilman writes:

> Eat like our Paleolithic ancestors, say the advocates of the Paleolithic Prescription, and you will be healthier and more morally attuned to the world. It is the claim of the return to the natural that is seen as the

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[54] Not to mention diets that claim "naturalness" such as "eat clean" diets and "whole food" diets that try to resist industrialization (the future) through eating. This is ambivalent because fat people's desires are presumed to be out of control, thus not transcending nature.

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answer. Almost everything offers that promise now. But only as long as the strict guidelines of civilization as to health, cleanliness, adequate labeling, workers' rights, and fairly traded foods are not compromised (something I am sure that Paleolithic people could not have imagined during their extremely short, brutal, and disease-plagued lives) (171).

Michael Pollan also advocates reconnecting with as far back as our Neolithic ancestors, and while this seems quite sensible when it comes to distinguishing food from what he calls "foodish" products, it uses the past as a place from which eating in the present should be modelled (149). Despite the lived ambiguities of trying to connect with the past through eating, the past maintains its pull on the present: it says that in the past we ate well and were thin. One way of getting back to this past is to manage our temporal situation. Popularized by Carlo Petrini, the "slow food" movement also temporally combats the fast and mindless eating of fat people.[55] Slow food does not just position itself against fast food, but as an alternative to overly hectic, stressful, contemporary conditions of global capitalism. The fat person eats fast, but moves slowly. It offers a lifestyle response to our food environments using a European pastiche of France, Italy, and Greece as emblems of pleasureful, slow, and ethical eating and connection with community through rural living. This rise in nostalgia for the past before modern industrialized food reveals a deep temporal ambivalence: while we believe in a modern future, we long to visit the past. Probyn has written that in the present "it is seemingly impossible to avoid the television programmes and the food pages of newspapers or glossy magazines that promise a return to the real things of life through eating" (3).

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[55] There has been a proliferation of "slow" movements aimed at resisting the increasing pace of life: "slow cities," "slow travel," "slow design," "slow parenting," and "slow money."

Obesity is often cast as a modern disease—a result of over-industrialization—and figures "pre-modern" societies—especially Eastern societies (or societies that are part of what is now termed "the global south")—as pre-obesity crisis. The recently coined term "globesity" refers to the idea that obesity is an export of the modernized and excessive West, with McDonalds as its global ambassador. One problematic assumption is that obesity in other countries is thus *a result* of Western expansion. When the future is cast as Western it is constructed against an East of a different tense—it is in the past, more traditional, with stronger cultural ties. We can thus imagine a brown future, but not a fat one—or if we do, it is dystopic.[56] Gilman argues that obesity is not a new social phenomenon, but rather a human variation whose meaning has changed over time. The present obesity crisis is the "most recent version of an obsession with bodily control in society and the promise of universal health through all forms of medicine" (xiv). In this vein, when obesity *cannot* be managed, its presence signifies the failure of the promise of technology, a failure of the future.

Future

The futural meaning of obesity is solidified through temporal narratives of progress—directly connecting to a better future. Further, the battle over body size in the future is largely taking place through obese or future-obese children. Meme Roth, an anti-obesity pundit, says on her blog, "Let's finally recognize obesity as

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[56] Self-appointed anti-obesity crusader Meme Roth has said in an interview with Bill O'Reilly that "If I'm China and I'm India, and I'm looking out economically at this country, I'd say, 'You know what? Keep your processed foods. You American, you get fatter, you get sicker, and we're on the way.'"

abuse—abuse of our children, abuse of ourselves—and together take action."[57]

Roth also champions the analogy of obesity with smoking, coining the term

"second-hand obesity."[58] Embedded in this term is a call to protect the "abused"

fat child from her misguided parent(s). Richard Carmona, former surgeon general

of the United States, has underscored the national security threat of obesity

because it depletes available military recruits in coming generations. In a 2003

speech Carmona said, "computers, TV, elevators, close parking spots, fast food,

and microwave dinners [are] among the aspects of everyday life imperilling the

health of the nation" (n.p.). Fat children frustrate the future of the nation by

revealing its wartime vulnerability. Charlotte Biltekoff writes:

> The simultaneous threats of obesity and terror also converged to
> produce a sense that danger lurked within the most mundane aspects
> of daily life in the U.S. while the fear of impending terror attacks
> turned backpacks, garbage cans, delivery trucks and running water
> into potential weapons, the discourse of the war against obesity
> located deadly threats in grocery stores and on dinner plates (33).

The fear of terror attacks combined with fears that we are no longer fit to protect

ourselves brings a threatening sense of urgency into the present. Fat people not

only disappoint their fellow citizens by not losing weight, they threaten to

destabilize the future for a nation slowly losing its competitive edge.[59]

We are asked to experience urgency at the impending future in order to

fulfill our role as good citizens. Carmona also said on National Public Radio that

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[57] http://www.actionagainstobesity.com/NationalActionAgainstObesity/NAAO.html

[58] The analogy between smoking and obesity is offered by Rosemarie Tong as a reason to continue to stigmatize obesity so that the successes in reducing smoking can also be achieved with obesity. Talia Welsh argues that eating is a different phenomenological experience both because of the bodily processes it involves, but also because it is necessary for life. It is a way of being in the world that cannot just be "quit" as one quits smoking ("Fat Eats").

[59] In her piece, Charlotte Biltekoff fully fleshes out the social implications involved in the fear of the obesity of the United States' military reserves and recruits. This fear is heightened, she argues, because of the disproportionate representation of Blacks, Latinos and the poor in the military (33).

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the obesity epidemic is akin to the September 11th attacks. "Obesity is the terror

within. . . . Unless we do something about it, the magnitude of the dilemma will

dwarf 9/11 or any other terrorist attempt."[60] We do not fight obesity as one might

fight against another country. We do so by raising the spectre of moral panic,

much like other "social wars" such as the "war on the middle class" or the "war

on marriage." In order to fuel the "war on obesity" there must be widespread

social agreement that it is in some respects legitimate. Gilman writes that obesity

panic is "anxiety about social instability" (xiii). The social instability feared in

this instance is the degeneration of a population into lazy, unproductive, and sick

drains on society (from the political right), and environmental catastrophe,

unbridled consumerism, and unethical eating (from the political left).[61] These

fears solidly intersect with racist and ableist anxieties about keeping national

bodies fit, productive, and reproductive. Given the present recession, economic

statistics are effective artillery against fat people, especially concerns that they are

unproductive in the workplace.[62]

Lee Edelman has written that the figure of the Child gives politics its

horizon and that queerness threatens this horizon when it challenges traditional

family formations and reproduction. Queerness, according to Edelman, names

"the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by

which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3).

Reproductive futurism is that which imposes "an ideological limit on political

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[60] http://articles.latimes.com/2006/mar/02/nation/na-briefs2.1
[61] For the latter argument, see Cafaro, Primack et al.
[62] Even though research shows no significant connection between somatotype and productivity
(LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies?* 55), thought there *is* good evidence to show that fat people are paid
less for equal work (Ford and Baum).

discourses as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (2). For Edelman, a fight for the future is a fight "for our children—for our daughters and our sons" (3). The value of children, like health, is mobilized in politics in ways that can be unqualified and adapted to the ends that society sets for itself. The Child has become a flashpoint for the obesity epidemic because obese children threaten the figural child seen as potential citizen and thus the future good of the nation. Fat children, then, provide visual identification of parents who are *not* fighting for the children.[63] Melissa Harris-Perry has identified Michelle Obama's childhood obesity initiative, "Let's Move," as a public way of managing the future citizenship specifically for racialized populations. While many fat activists are critical of the "Let's Move" campaign, Harris-Perry explains Obama's initiative in terms of negotiating not only the hypervisibility of the black bodies of Obama and her daughters but also of the pathologization of black motherhood as responsible for so many social ills (283).

Judith Butler writes in *Bodies that Matter* regarding gay marriage that "the child figures in the debate as a dense site for the transfer and reproduction of culture, where 'culture' carries with it implicit norms of racial purity and domination" (110). The figure of the obese child similarly haunts the reproduction of culture and the value of whiteness. LeBesco writes:

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[63] While I think Edelman's view does a good job of displacing dominant discourses of "innocent children" as the substance out of which ideal citizens are molded, I think with Power (2009) that he has overinvested in the Child as *the* horizon of politics.

> If fat people are understood as antithetical to the efficiency and
> productivity required to succeed in our capitalist economy, then their
> presence haunts as the specter of downward mobility. Big, profusely
> round bodies also provoke racist anxieties in the white modern West
> because of their imagined resemblance to those of maligned ethnic
> and racial Others; fatness haunts as the specter of disintegrating
> physical privilege in this case (*Revolting Bodies?* 56).

Obese children must be prevented because they are figuratively and concretely burdened with the normative striving of the nation and culture to remain competitive and on track with progress. Fat children, once the object of ridicule and perhaps humour, now act as confirmation of the loss of the American competitive edge. A future welfare recipient, the fat child is an object of grief. In "letting ourselves go," we lose the promise of the next generation (Hartley 63).

An example of preventing fat lives is another public health campaign targeting childhood obesity. The state of Georgia launched a "Strong4life" campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of childhood obesity. These posters featured unhappy fat children in black and white with red letter "WARNING" and various phrases. These ads contained messages about how children come to be fat: "Big bones didn't make me this way. Big meals did." "Fat prevention begins at home. And the buffet line." "Chubby kids may not outlive their parents." Death is foreshadowed, but also future disease: "He has his father's eyes, his laugh, and maybe even his diabetes." Gender is also invoked in the media campaign: "It's hard to be a little girl if you're not." The recurring theme in not just these campaigns but many others is the idea that these messages are bringing a kind of "tough love." The ads directly target racialized groups, as all but two ads have racialized children in them. Thus, with the stakes this high, moral, social, and political panic about rising obesity rates seem justified.

III. Crisis Phenomenology

The discourse of obesity that includes the temporalities I have discussed is often referred to as the obesity crisis. It expands previous notions of fat temporality but also offers us ways of thinking about resisting oppression that targets one's experience of time. In this section I outline a phenomenology that is specific to the form of a crisis—namely, increased urgency in the present because of a drastic projection for the future. I turn to Sartre to articulate crisis phenomenology as an inverted religious conversion: instead of positive feelings of hope because of a glorious future, we have negative feelings of fear or dread in the present because of a projected dystopic future. This crisis phenomenology, much like before-and-after temporality, is experienced by people in all body sizes, but is experienced differently if one's body is currently the one figured as a cause or location of the crisis.

I have thus far blended the phenomenological and the social and cultural, and my approach to 'crisis' will continue this method. While one can experience a crisis in the first person (a tragic accident), one can also experience a social crisis (economic collapse). These come together when one's body *itself* is registered as a social crisis, as with obesity. Stuart Murray offers a quick but informative history of how the term 'crisis' moved from its first English use in medical writings in the sixteenth century, to a signification external to the body:

> Since its early signification, ["crisis"] has become increasingly abstract, figurative, unmoored from the body. Today, ever faithful to the Cartesian turn in the seventeenth century, we tend to think of "crisis" as an *external* event to which we are called to respond (ethically). "Crisis" has become an external challenge to one's inner life, moral rectitude or integrity—the internal conditions of a "critical" response (289).

'Crisis', however, retains its location in the body if that body is fat.

How is the "crisis" of obesity experienced? I think it can often promote an experience of urgency in the present that demands a moral response. Sartre's account of radical conversion captures how knowledge can change our temporal experience. A radical conversion is a jarring experience that floods our consciousness with norms, and for him, it is the first moment of ethicality. He describes radical conversion as "an abrupt metamorphosis of my initial project" (*Being and Nothingness* 598). Bourdieu draws on this account as well, explaining it as an awakening of a certain type of consciousness "produced by a sort of imaginary variation—the power to create the meaning of the present by creating the revolutionary future which negates it" (Bourdieu 74). For Sartre, in a religious conversion we imaginatively create meaning in the present of a future that affects present experience by marking it as temporary. The religious worldview Sartre has in mind here is one that negates the present world; thus, one does not need to take it into account when deciding what to do. The religious conversion negates this world as contingent and fleeting and replaces it with a truer, universal and eternal world of meaning. This changes one's relationship to the future because we lean away from the present and towards the future.

In contrast to a religious conversion, crisis experience affects our relation to the future as marked by ominous and looming events. In a crisis we experience heightened anxiety in the present about an unpredictable and drastic change to our future, usually a near future. Instead of a positive religious future that negates the present, consciousness of a crisis is of a dystopic or nihilated future that marks the

present as temporary as well: the good times will *soon be over*. Crisis experience can be thought of as a phenomenological anchoring in the present that forces awareness of ourselves in time. This future rushes into the present with the same fervour as a religious conversion, but it produces a feeling of heightened anxiety or dread (depending on how you cope with crises) rather than an expectant or happy form of anticipation. Unlike in a religious conversion where God makes the future certain and just, crises bring unpredictability especially in terms of a moral demise and thus phenomenological anticipation is of a negative and erratic future. Since obesity marks the backslide of populations, a crisis of agency, environmental crises, and so on, it has become a way of rattling the present with a future that must be avoided.

Experiencing a future of gloomy and capricious experiences that unnerve the present burden it with urgency and intensify norms that are considered valuable for avoiding such a future. As a crisis for social stability and for our understanding of which bodies do what, obesity threatens taken for granted ideas of which bodies represent agency, which are (re)productive, which are healthy, and so on. It is tempting, in light of crises, to reverse the looming future and imbue it with, for example, faith in God, technology, the enduring human spirit or some other saving force. To bring the analogy of conversion and crisis together, there are religious groups who are strengthening their religious faith to "save" society from the obesity crisis. Lynn Gerber, in her book *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*, unearths the contemporary co-mingling of the Christian weight loss and ex-gay ministries in Evangelical America, which employ the rhetoric of controlling desires used to discipline homosexuals in service of weight loss.

According to the rhetoric of Christian weight loss, fat people are choosing to be fat and they need to get their desires under control in order to honour God properly. Sexual orientation as well as body size are matters of personal responsibility for which we answer to God.[64] God is weighing in on the obesity epidemic, the crisis is of the soul, and eternity is at stake.

In "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, and Lateral Agency)," Lauren Berlant has argued that a particular form of experiencing crisis is unique to the "obesity crisis." She terms "crisis ordinariness" a long drawn-out crisis with no end in sight. According to Berlant, we live in a time of ordinary crisis because managing crises (whether real or imagined) is our new sense of *getting by*—our ordinary time has been flooded by episodic times of crisis. Her view contrasts with the account of crisis phenomenology I have offered because, for Berlant, the urgency we feel in the present is not experienced as urgency anymore—it is our new base rate of anticipation, we continue to feel these crises but more and more often and thus cannot respond to them as we would to individual crises. According to Berlant, the crisis of obesity is one of many contemporary crises (economic, environmental, and so on) that cause crisis fatigue. She writes:

> Even as [the rhetoric of crisis ordinariness] often makes bizarre intimacies between unthinkable harshness and the ordinary work of living on, it becomes a way of talking about…how the rhetoric of crisis effects a slippage or transfer of the notion of the urgency of a situation to the level of the temporalities of the lives of those who are deemed the locus of this crisis (761).

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[64] One of the many texts she analyses is authored by noted self-hating homophobe Ted Haggard, who has a weight loss book *The Jerusalem Diet* (2005).

The mention of obesity contains a call that requires a response: obesity is urgent. Berlant points to the connection between the lives of those figured as in crisis and the cultural phenomenon of crisis rhetoric.

A cultural technique for accomplishing crisis phenomenology occurs with the advent of image altering software in which a thin person can see how they might look fat. On the lifestyle-turnaround show "Last Ten Pounds" the contestant is shown a graphic image of what they would look like if they gained ten pounds a year for five years. The contestants are supposed to experience this as a "wake-up call"—it is supposed to motivate them.[65] They know, however, that the future shown to them is not a guarantee—it can be avoided if they follow the food and exercise plan offered. Instead of feeling dread at the future, the contestant is shown this abject fat figure so that may avoid this future possibility. They are prompted to feel an intensification of diet and exercise norms in the present. Similarly, in the BBC television show, "Honey, We're Killing the Kids," the producers use face aging software to make the contestants' children fat but they add blemishes, rotten teeth, excessive dark shadows under the children's eyes, and sometimes they just say the child would be dead within a certain number of years. The parents are shown a possible future that is necessarily scary and disgusting. While this may feel like a unique experience that is only about diet and exercise, it is actually another way of shaming fat people and enacting a crisis phenomenology for their "sins." These shows put the "fear of God" in

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[65] Also supposed to motivate the contestants on this show is a walk down the "hall of shame" where the fitness experts have displayed a month's worth of the contestant's typical food. The food is gawked at and the contestant is shamed accordingly.

participants, recapitulating temporal religious norms around the fear of an afterlife in hell—the fat body is a death sentence in this world and in the next.

IV. Fat Resistance and Temporality

Moving between the obesity discourse to a phenomenology of fat temporality requires thinking through the connections between cultural meanings and one's experience of those meanings. Following Bonnie Mann, I am addressing the conundrum of how we can pay attention to lived experience and macrostructures at the same time. Macrostructures are impersonal and yet we live them in the first person (80). For Mann, it is the imagination that links the lived body to the social imaginary, where many of our understandings of obesity exist. While being represented in a positive light in one's culture does not guarantee an end to prejudice against one's social group, being positively represented often *reflects* one's already valued status. For Mann, not only do we exist in large-scale structural relationships, but how we exist in relationships of meaning within our social imaginary functions to produce a felt sense of legitimacy that makes common practices possible and that evokes deep-seated allegiances with others (87-88). Given that the majority of representations of fat people are negative (to say the least), I suggest these representations contribute to a general phenomenology of *illegitimacy*—not being able to build a self of one's own in the present. Because the rhetoric of the obesity crisis locates the crisis in the bodies of fat people it can further produce a felt sense of illegitimacy in fat people. This can be described as draining society of its resources, lack of productivity, a feeling of

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being too much.[66] For Butler, representations that create and reflect our social imaginary construct what we think is possible. She writes:

> [F]antasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons (*Undoing Gender* 28-9).

The legitimating effect that a social imaginary can have on lived experiences is differentially distributed according to what kinds of bodies are valued in society.

Because of the focus on representation and fantasy, much fat activism has focused on celebrities and media representations to guide resistance strategies. LeBesco groups fat public figures into three types depending on their relationship to diet and weight loss norms. I think we can read these categories according to a specific normative temporality of fat activism—namely, that mandated resistance is to reject before-and-after temporality and temporariness. The three categories are the "Out and About," the "Silent Type," and "Traitors" (*Revolting Bodies?* 92). Out and about are fat people who refuse weight loss and the forced impermanence and future-directed wish-fulfilling nature of a thin future—they are unapologetically fat.[67] LeBesco's example is Camryn Manheim's

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[66] Susan Bordo explores this feeling of being "too much" in relation to the experiences of anorectics in *Unbearable Weight*, which she argues derives from the situation of women in general who are not supposed to take up space. While I agree that women are not supposed to be large, strong, or fat there is a different way in which a fat and a thin person experience too much-ness. Judith Moore, for example, writes about how she was too fat for love (97, 101). This meant not just that she shouldn't take up space, but that her taking up space precluded her participation in particular social formations —in this case, romantic and familial love. In the case of being "too much" as Bordo writes, a woman experiences herself as brimming over the category of femininity that aims to restrain bodies and subjectivities. In the case of the fat person, too much is too much flesh for full social recognition.

[67] In the fat activist community, Roseanne Barr was a much championed "out and about" until she lost weight and had bariatric surgery. She is now considered a traitor. See Beth Bernstein and

autobiography *Wake up, I'm Fat!*, in which she offers a quite typical story for fat activists who resist fat temporality:

> Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. All my life I was waiting for my life to begin, as if my life were somehow way up ahead of me, and one day I would just arrive there. I've wanted to write a book for ten years now, but I was waiting. Waiting to be thin, so I could write about what it was like to be fat and how I emerged the righteous champion: the conqueror of my fat!
> But a few years ago I finally realized something. My life was not way up ahead of me. I was standing smack dab in the middle of it. In fact, I was standing on the corner of "Life" and "You better get going, Camryn," and the way I saw it, I had two choices: I could either cross that street or just keep waiting for a few more years of green lights to go by (2).

This forced "either-or" is characteristic of many "out and about" and fat activists' stories—this "either-or" is *also* used to get people to *lose* weight—it conjures a future that promotes a crisis phenomenology.

"Silent types" discuss diet and exercise tips, but never as they apply to *them*, presumably as a way not to feed into weight shame. Because they do not address it, their fat is visible but silent and it would be rude to speak of it. "Traitors" are so labeled because they lose weight even after they use their fat to build a fan base. LeBesco's example is Star Jones, who admitted in 2004 to having bariatric surgery in 2003. One could just as easily put Ricki Lake and Carnie Wilson in this category. A more contemporary example is Jessica Simpson, a singer turned reality TV star whose public battle with her weight landed her an endorsement deal with Weight Watchers.[68]

Matilda St. John's invective, "The Roseanne Benedict Arnolds: How Fat Women Are Betrayed by Their Idols."

[68] Unlike many diet commercials, Simpson's series of commercials featured her *before* weight loss. In her commercials she says, "I'm on my way" and "My body, like my life, is a work in progress. But I'm getting there." Diet and weight loss companies while largely promoting freedom and control in the 1980s and 1990s (see Bordo 1993) now feel the weight of backlash against the

One direction of resistance to temporariness has taken on the form of "coming out" as fat in the fat activist community. Originally emerging from Eve Sedgwick's work with Michael Moon, Abigail Saguay has written that "coming out as fat involves a person who is easily recognized as fat affirming to herself and others that her fatness is a nonnegotiable aspect of self, rather than as a temporary state to be remedied through weight loss" (13). Fat activists who refuse temporariness through non-dieting are trying to shift the meanings of fat temporality and possibly affect their temporality in the renegotiation.

One response to temporariness is to affirm oneself as worthy of respect and legitimacy in the present. Kent writes, "Shifting the relations of embodiment gives fat women a way to stop living their bodies as the 'before' picture and to begin to have a body that is valuable in the present" (131). Further, Ragen Chastain, a popular writer and fat activist writes:

> Ask fat people to consider that they deserve, and can demand, to be treated respectfully in the body they have now, even if they want to lose weight.
> Remember, because this is important: No matter where you are today, there are options out there that allow you to love yourself, and pursue health and happiness with the body you have now, whether or not you want to change that body (9).

Focusing on pleasure, happiness, and taking care of oneself in the present is a way of renegotiating dominant weight loss temporalities. LeBesco's three simplified categories impose a normative temporality on fat activism that suggests that only the "out and abouts" are properly temporally situated. Some fat activists have started online campaigns stating "I am not a before," demanding that their

shame that diet ads have caused women (largely through the widespread *success* of some feminist arguments) and currently focus more on self-acceptance, self-love, and "lifestyle change" in order to set themselves up as responses to paradigms based in deprivation and self-hate.

embodiment not be split into a sad past and an imagined future happiness. I am ambivalent about strategies like this. On the one hand, they release an idea and a representation into the social imaginary to be circulated and recirculated, perhaps finding someone else who is also engaged in negotiating their lived sense of time. On the other hand, one cannot remake their temporality through photoshopping words onto a jpeg. Refusing temporary embodiment and a thin future can engage one's burden of fat temporality, but it cannot be changed by fiat.[69] Changing our temporality takes place through multiple negotiations and it is always open to revision.

Refusing temporariness is ambivalent because bodies are *inherently* temporary, precarious, and especially relevant for this line of thought, they often change size over time. I am most concerned with using "refusal" as a model for changing temporalities. Not only does this paper over the complexities of self-transformation, it supports a picture of the self as changing through an exercise of the will. Further, mandating refusal belies the habitual connection one might have to the practices and beliefs that underwrite these discourses. Many fat activist narratives reiterate the trope of "deciding to love your body," and most identify a turning point or epiphany as being responsible for the change.

Much like Manheim's story above, there is a norm within fat resistance to "declare" body love both as the acid test of good fat activism, and as a refusal of stigma from the outside world. More ambivalent narratives describe this as an ongoing struggle, but in fat activist communities there tends to be little space for

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[69] In her work *The 'Fat' Female Body*, Samantha Murray gives an extended critique of what she terms "voluntarism" in fat activism, i.e., "deciding" to love one's body, and so on. All other references to Murray's work are to her article "(Un/Be)Coming Out?: Rethinking Fat Politics."

the airing of bad body feelings.[70] Many within that community share in smaller

intimate ways that the pressure to refuse stigma is exhausting and that the

demands for resistance within these communities requires a kind of super-human

strength. Recalling the problem of feminist failure, volitional accounts of personal

transformation and resistance can lead to these feelings of diminished self-worth

and self-reproach. The fat activist "refusal" model asks that we fundamentally

change how we experience our bodies *in time* when our habits *of time* must be

undone over time and with multiple strategies to shift old habits and create new

ones.

These narratives of change parallel what I have said about Sartrean

conversion. In an article for a campus newspaper, Quetzala Carson was

interviewed about her "conversion" to fat positivity. Journalist Kate Black writes

about Carsen:

> She was naked, sitting alone on a hotel room carpet, depressed and
> filled with hatred when she quietly came to an epiphany about her
> self-view. Her dad had recently passed away and she was preparing to
> perform at We Day, a leadership conference for teens. Looking at
> herself in the mirror, she realized it was time to make a change—and
> it had nothing to do with the numbers on the scale.
> "Who am I to stand in front of these kids and tell them to change
> the world? Who am I to do all this stuff if I'm just hating on myself?"
> she asked herself.
> "That was the moment where I decided that I need to love myself
> and believe in myself so I can go on to be a good person," she says
> (n.p.).

This narrative uses what is usually a grammar of conversion for weight *loss* that

ends in the decision *not* to lose weight, but rather to be a good person. This hint at

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[70] Similar experiences are reported within disability activist circles. The social model of disability
(in short, the idea that disability is produced through certain spatial, medical, social, and economic
arrangements) is so dominant, it becomes difficult for a disabled person to acknowledge
experiences of physical pain, fatigue, or wanting medical intervention.

narratives that connect "good bodies" to "good people" and "bad bodies" to "bad people" but here, she *makes* her body into a "good body" so that she can be a "good person." This attempts to wipe out ambiguity of bodily feelings for a moral imperative (and again, "for the children"). While the form of the moral imperatives is the same, it also forces an either/or choice much like weight loss norms, but in this case, the either/or is to be a hypocrite or love your body. These recurrent narratives mark a moment in time as able fully to purge oneself of years of bad body feelings. As I have argued in Chapter Two, projects of transforming bad body feelings must avoid volitional models of personal transformation.

Losing weight *is* an effective way to negotiate one's temporality, albeit in ambivalent ways: it puts one on the right temporal track with social progress and people who lose weight often report feeling younger because of it (Levy-Navarro 349). I want to suggest, however, a reading of losing weight as a response to the temporal burden of temporariness. Losing weight constitutes a response to the temporal burdens of temporary embodiment—meaning that we can lose weight and then be in the body we occupy in the present. Weight loss and dieting are practices of time in that we bring forth a particular future through certain practices in the present and those practices constitute a temporal renegotiation. It is thus no surprise that people who lose weight talk about their life as "new" and "just begun."[71] They may be experiencing their first feelings of legitimately occupying the normative cultural temporality of the present.

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[71] Dieters often describe their lived rhythm of time as speeding up as their increase in energy means they also speed up: "now more vibrant, energetic, and smart, they were before sluggish and dull" (Levy-Navarro 350-1).

Living in the "thin future" for a fat subject can be a project of making

one's life more liveable in the present—a way of responding to a future of

impending crisis. Under the weight of cultural figurations of one's own flesh as

personally and socially threatening, the fat person can live *anywhere but* the

future. A fat person may revisit the past if they were previously thin. A time

before they were fat can take on increased importance as the place before "things

went wrong." The counterfactual past sneaks in to our present as an instantiation

of a lost future and a desire to reckon with that loss. Negotiating oneself in

response to a longer thin future or a shorter fat future can divide our

understanding of our lived future timelines—it may be worthy of grief to kill the

thin timeline if it has taken on phenomenological importance. Thus as a form of

resistance, declaring oneself as "out and about" is not an attractive option without

smaller negotiations that lead towards changes in temporality.

Michelle Meagher has argued that one consequence of fat pride

movements is that they have: "forced a mainstream political correctness that

encourages people to keep their disgust to themselves. Rather than

acknowledging and confronting disgust, disgust itself has been rendered

disgusting and shameful" (29). One way of meeting this criticism is with

resistance strategies aimed at wider understandings of fat temporality. Meagher's

notion of confronting disgust takes one's habitual disgust reactions as salient and

as powerful in a way that a refusal alone cannot mitigate.

Melissa Brittain and Lucas Crawford's video "Elephant in the Room" is a

fat resistance strategy that riffs on "the heterosexual questionnaire" which, much

like a privilege checklist, functions to reveal to heterosexuals the number of

invasive and uninformed questions that queer people are often asked. The original

questionnaire asks questions such as: "When and how did you first decide you

were heterosexual? . . . Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex? . .

. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality?" (n.p.) In "Elephant in the

Room" Crawford, who is fat and genderqueer, is seen in close frame casually

taking pleasure in eating and drinking many foods considered stereotypical and

stigmatized for fat people: burgers, chips, donuts, tarts, and ribs, and drinking

Mountain Dew and chocolate milk. Crawford and Brittain read in voiceover:

> Do you have *slender* trouble? . . . Is it possible your slenderness is a
> phase you will grow out of? . . . Are you afraid that you will catch *the
> obesity*? . . . Why do you slender people feel so compelled to seduce
> other people into your *lifestyle*? . . . Are you afraid that inside of every
> slender person there is a fat person waiting to get out? (n.p.)

Rather than resisting a fat temporality of before-and-after, Crawford is seen

casually eating foods that are especially identified as "causing" the obesity crisis,

yet there is no "crisis" in the video. The video, rather, calls on the viewer to

confront feelings of crisis and disgust. The viewer is invited to want to stop

Crawford's eating—to take away the food. The viewer's anticipation is toyed

with as they expect Crawford to have a shameful relationship to food, and instead

Crawford eats contentedly, smacking lips, and at times looking happily at the

food before consuming it. We see pleasure in eating—we see no crisis at all.

Brittain and Crawford suggest that it is one's fears of fatness, fat pleasure, and fat

eating that are the elephant in the room, rather than Crawford.

Another fat resistance strategy that confronts disgust and disrupts crisis

temporality in an interesting way is found in the work of performance and mixed

media fat artist Cindy Baker. In her work "Personal Appearance" she makes

personal appearances as a plush mascot persona of her likeness. The mascot suit is a cartoon version of Baker and it is about the size of a mascot for a professional sports team. Baker's mascot counterpart has a smiling face with bright red lipstick, large glasses, and various vibrant coloured outfits. The mascot suit is lively, cuddly and approachable. Baker makes personal appearances in public spaces; events, art openings, and so on. She opens herself up to closer scrutiny (by drawing attention to her mascot self) while keeping a safe distance from vulnerability (by remaining silent inside the costume). Not only are participants not sure who is inside the mascot, they are not sure *for what* she is a mascot.

While some people approached Baker in the stereotypical sense of fat women as hypersexualized, for example, men (mostly) would look up her skirt and grab the mascot breasts and some even put their tongues in the mascot's mouth. One of the common things people do with mascots is hug them—they are they to cheer people on, to liven up public spaces, and to entertain. Baker's "Personal Appearance" is interesting because it takes a fat body and makes it loveable and *unthreatening*. Baker breaks down layers of crisis by inviting people to hug her, to touch the mascot, and affectively engage with a smiling fat woman in a "muumuu." While performing as herself, Baker experienced people reacting to her quite differently than usual. Rather than fear and avoidance of her fat body, people came up to her and offered to touch and hug her and were made happy by her appearance. This reveals one way in which some of the crisis of fatness can be renegotiated and disrupted—through new and creative engagements in time and space.

Conclusion

Fat temporality carries with it a number of specific aspects—crisis phenomenology, near-death or foreshortened future, before-and-after ambiguity, temporariness, and fat/thin timelines negotiated through dieting. As a child and young adult I remember hearing that it is "hard on your heart" to be fat. I remember fear of exercising as a young adult because I believed my heart would "give out." While foreclosing on the health benefits and pleasures of exercising, this led to a fundamental mistrust of my own body's capacity for *life*. The closing off of possibilities for fat people results from a phenomenology of crisis that can affect lived sense of time and thus the kinds of projects of habit change they believe they can undertake. If my heart is soon to go out, then what kinds of dreams can I have for the future? This worry about health is connected to weight and diet, but also to one's temporality more generally—how long will I live? What can I hope for? Reviving hope for the future is a vexed strategy because it is too often purchased at the price of the abjection of lives figured as *threats* to the future, be they fat, queer, poor, racialized or disabled.

CONCLUSION

Feminist resistance is often recommended at the end of a diagnostic critique of a repressive gender phenomenon. Rarely is resistance *itself* theorized. This is perhaps because resistance is always local and contextual. But within recommendations *for* resistance, similarities do emerge, and without a careful appreciation of the existential situation of holding revolutionary ideals and being habituated to a world of oppression, voluntaristic and epiphany-based ideologies too often fill in the gaps. My students often equate resistance with *acknowledgement*. I ask them questions such as: how do we counteract the invisibility of domestic labour? They come back again and again with the recommendation that it needs further acknowledgement by those who do not "see" it. This is symptomatic of what I have been arguing is an over-investment in theories of change as instantaneous, based in rational assent, or increased knowledge. Perhaps my question is the problem. Perhaps I should ask: how do we change our environment, our temporal rhythms, and our projects such that domestic labour as we know it and as we do it changes?

Several questions arise from what I have offered here: what can be done with the insights I have offered about habit and resistance? How do these insights fare when travelling to other contexts, other habits, other perspectives? What kinds of resistance strategies are effective and possible within the pictures of habit I have sketched? While I critically analysed a few illuminating but narrow contexts where habit and resistance intersect, I believe some larger directives can be surmised. I have argued that if we affirm the importance of lived experiences of habit across subjectivities, this work must be done in context and with an

account of temporality. This direction of thinking is aimed at some theories of the self that underwrite theories of self-transformation and imperatives for feminist resistance. Not only are projects of self-transformation beholden to habitual possibilities in time, but also failing to appreciate this can *itself* lead to problems such as feminist failure. Habits vary widely from person to person, but they also vary in terms of their supports for each individual and how one makes meaning of her situation. Thus, my analysis entails that the results of projects of habit change cannot be fully known in advance. They cannot be entirely controlled by the will or navigated by reason: projects of habit change, then, are projects of *possibility*.

In light of this reframing, I have asked myself frequently during the writing of this dissertation: what are we asking for when feminists suggest individual resistance to oppression? What would the *success* of an individual project be? I ask these questions because I think without them projects of self-transformation as resistance can move into dangerous territory—individualizing oppression and advocating a facile "lifestyle politics." My worry is that individual and voluntaristic resistance paradigms over-responsibilize individuals for resisting their oppression, but the objection is that in continuing the project of individual resistance I have over-invested in the individual as *the* unit of resistance to oppression. The lifestyle politics objection is similarly directed at individualization but underscores the ways in which self-styling changes are taken to be politically resistant choices, but they in effect reflect an apolitical project of the self. One overarching danger in these objections is that once oppression has been individual*ized*, resistance is conceived as *merely* an individual change, and

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one accordingly does not reach out to others. Thus, one's projects of self-change are politically inert lifestyle changes.

Neoliberal policies and governments that emerged in the late 20th century certainly value and promote forms of subjectivity where enterprising and entrepreneurial self-management runs counter to organizing and integrating functions essential to the welfare state (Binkley 92). The enterprising and entrepreneurial self is engaged in self-centered projects of advancement and individual expression (usually through purchasing products and career advancement). Further dangers arise when neoliberalism of this sort is espoused by self-described "feminists" such as Sheryl Sandberg, whose 2013 book *Lean In* is a manifesto for women that rehearses feminist arguments in a neoliberal tone. She encourages women to counteract gender inequality by working hard, "getting over" internalized barriers (i.e., the gendered confidence gap), and by *leaning in* (i.e., not "dropping out" to become a stay at home mom) (Rottenberg 3). Promoting habitual change as resistance to oppression in this climate can easily be co-opted by neoliberal and postfeminist forces. My view is that despite these risks, some level of individual transformation is required by political resistance projects such as feminism and that an analytical foregrounding of habit, especially one focused on the individual's perspective on habit change, is useful for these projects.

I have been arguing that habit *itself* is a precondition for acting in new ways and it is understandable if this inadvertently plays into a neoliberal framework. Elena Cuffari argues for the value of habit transformation going so far as to call capacities for habit transformation *themselves* a virtue (549). For

Cuffari, transformability of habits is good because it promotes development,

learning, and the expansion of possibilities (536). Also, in reading Beauvoir's *The*

Coming of Age, Cuffari thinks the transformability of habits guards against the

social displacement of older people. She writes:

> If habits are experienced as lived ambiguities capable of ameliorative
> transformation, then conscious habit cultivation offers a situated
> practice of resistance to stagnation. Indeed, the formation of habits
> that are ameliorable to transformation may be seen as an ethical
> practice of openness and as crucial to the pursuit of justice as
> understood by Beauvoir and Dewey (536).

Not only are certain unchanged habits required for changing of other habits, the

conscious cultivation of habits, as I have been arguing, is not the best method for

habit change. Cuffari's suggestion that one consciously create a habit of openness

to new habits is empty without a method, environment, or context that supports it,

and thus, willpower and rational-assent based paradigms are poised to fill in the

gaps (thus responsiblizing old people when actively cultivating habits of openness

proves difficult). Furthermore, the social marginalization of old people *should not*

be remedied from the direction of *their* habitual flexibility. Their marginalization

is a product of a rapidly changing society that does not allow them fully to define

and create their situations. Their situation *is* one of many drastic changes to which

they are adapting: changing biological bodies, loss of friends and family

members, loss of political and social relevance and security, and so on. To

recommend that old people, within their situation of marginalization and the

changes just mentioned, increase their habitual flexibility seems to not value

highly enough the security of a routine (which is represented negatively, as

"stagnation"). In short, virtues of transformation and adaptability seem contingent

on a particular political economy that *requires* adaptability and near constant self-change.

Perhaps what I have said in response to Cuffari seems regressive in that I uphold complacency or conservatism by valuing habits of security. For example, Lumsden has argued for a stronger political entailment than Cuffari: that habit transformability is useful because its opposite (i.e., stagnation) entails greater violence and tragedy when societies change (61). Recall the professor who does not keep up with changing knowledge paradigms in Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*. Change is required of him because his knowledge is in tension with current paradigms. When he holds on to his out-dated beliefs he has brought a lifeless or inauthentic requirement into the world. His rigid habits are a problem *because* they no longer match the world in which he finds himself. He could, however, merely get out of the way of new paradigms and lecture on his work as a historical lesson, or he could keep his beliefs in place and simply retire. Holding on to a large amount of his past recalls the weight of the practico-inert that provides habitual security but also establishes the difficulty of many projects of transcendence. The rigidity of sedimented habits seem problematic when they function to reinforce unearned privileges and oppression. Thus adaptability itself is not a value, but only adaptability towards a particular normative goal.

Sara Ahmed has recently written that taking on oppositional politics such as feminism can be a process of *becoming fragile* ("A Killjoy in Crisis" n.p.). For Ahmed, we can become tired and weary over time because the project of feminist self-building requires substantial resources:

> There can be risks to becoming oppositional; to having a sense of oneself as always struggling against something. If you are used to having to struggle to exist, if you become used to having others oppose your existence, if you are used even to being thought of as oppositional, those experiences are directive ("A Killjoy in Crisis" n.p.).

Problems of resistance such as feminist failure must be navigated because when oppressed individuals experience critical consciousness as consciousness of themselves as failures the very possibility for collective political action is radically disarmed. One might become fragile especially when she does not have an analytically useable framework of habit for projects of individual resistance, specifically a framework that acknowledges how habitual sedimentation is both resistant to change and the conditional of possibility for new habits.

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