University of Alberta

Saving Face: Shame and Bodily Abnormality

by

Ben McMahen

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
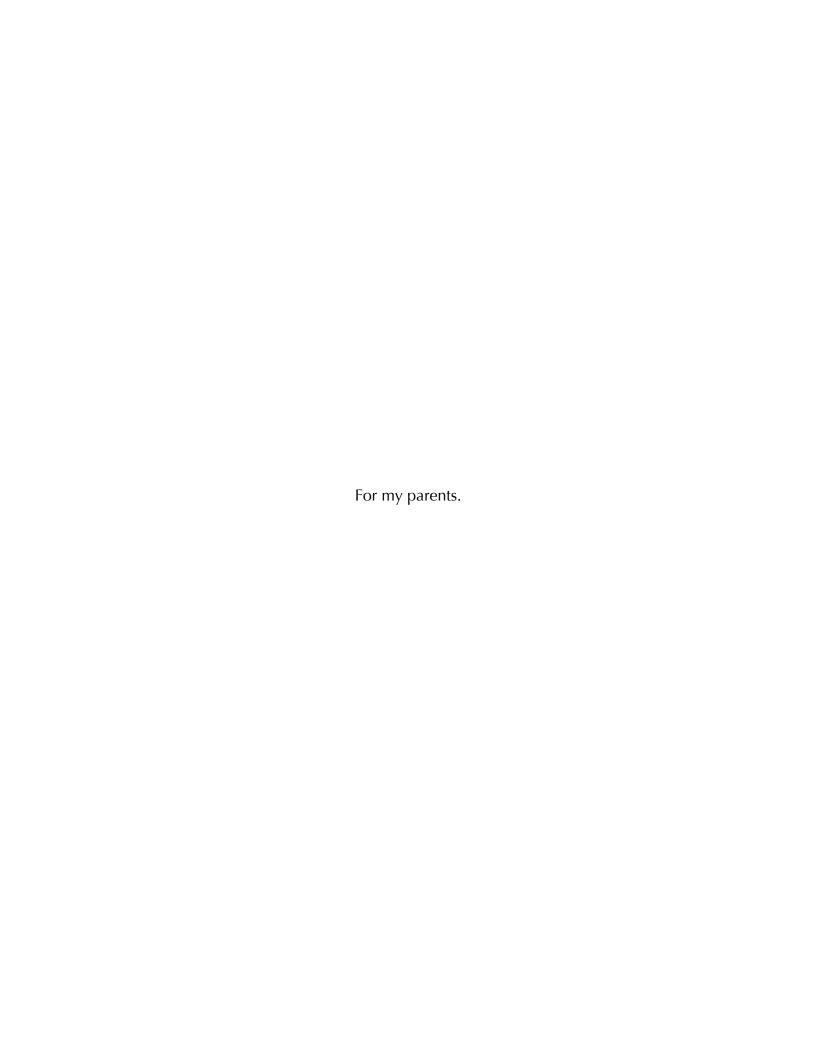in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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For my parents.

Abstract.

This thesis is concerned with understanding the shame that often accompanies acne and acne scarring, as an instance of shame that accompanies bodily abnormality or disability, with the aim of exploring strategies of resistance. (1) I explore the *explanandum* by appealing to the language used by those suffering with acne, and the arguments used in advertisements that sell acne treatments. (2) I consider whether the commercial success of acne treatment products can be explained primarily by the widespread desire to attain a physical ideal, or in the desire to appear "normal." This involves an analysis of "the ideal" and "the normal" more generally. (3) Since normality is inherently related to identity, I claim that desire for normalcy can be partly explained as the desire for recognition. (4) My account of emotion and shame demonstrates the possibility, and difficulty, in transforming our emotions through changes in perception of value, and environment.

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Chapter 1. "I wish I used Proactiv sooner."

> If someone has been condemned to a gladiatorial school or to the mines
> for the crimes he has been caught committing, let him not be marked on
> his face, since the penalty of his condemnation can be expressed both on
> his hands and on his calves, and so that his face, which has been fashioned
> in the likeness of the divine beauty, may not be disgraced.
> —Edict of the Emperor Constantine, ce 316[1]

1.1. Allegra's Sob Story.

"See, I look like I'm twelve,"[2] claims the twenty-one year old Allegra, tears in her eyes, as she holds up a mirror to her face. "I'm a very pretty person, normally… when I… when I can do something about it. And I know I am." The viewer is informed that Allegra has battled acne for four years. "Everything will improve if my skin is better," she claims, "because I truly believe that confidence is everything." The music changes from its melancholic notes to its higher, mirthful tones and we are shown images of Allegra free of acne—hair flowing as she basks in the sunshine at the beach, with a wide, lustrous smile across her face. Being clear of acne, Allegra now describes herself as "a happy girl; a confident girl" followed by her final pronouncement: "This is a confident woman." Only now is her skin "looking the way it should." Finally, she claims, "I am free to just be me."[3]

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[1] Originally cited in Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 172.
[2] "Acne Treatment - Proactiv," Proactiv, accessed July 28, 2011, http://www.proactiv.com.
[3] ibid.

For anyone that has spent hours watching late-night television on channels like MTV or VH1, the source of this highly formulaic, direct-marketing sob-story is probably easily discerned. Allegra concludes, "I wish I used Proactiv sooner."[4]

Proactiv, a company founded in 1995 by American dermatologists Dr. Katie P. Rodan and Dr. Kathy A. Fields, sells a subscription service consisting of a 60 day, three-step skin-care regiment designed to treat and prevent mild to moderate acne. As a product, Proactiv is fairly conventional in its approach to treating acne: its 'Renewing Cleanser' uses benzoyl peroxide—a common topical, over-the-counter compound used to treat acne—as its main active ingredient.

But despite the conventional nature of its product, sales of Proactiv have easily trumped the sales of other acne-treatment products. In 2007 alone worldwide sales of Proactiv approached $850 million with the United States accounting for 70% of those sales. By comparison, in the same year American drugstores only managed $155 million in sales of other acne-treatment products, many of which are cheaper and equally as effective as Proactiv's formula.[5] The CEO of Guthy-Renker, the company responsible for Proactiv's direct-marketing campaign, has claimed that they "own acne," and that Proactiv is the "fastest-growing acne brand in the world."[6] Thus, despite the conventional nature of its product and despite the existence of many similar, cheaper alternatives, Proactiv remains the dominant brand in the treatment of acne.

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[4] ibid.
[5] Natasha Singer, "Why Should Kids Have All the Acne?" *New York Times*, October 18, 2007, accessed July 26 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/18/fashion/18skin.html
[6] ibid.

Its success, then, is built almost entirely out of its somewhat notorious, but highly effective marketing campaign. And this is why Proactiv proves to be such an interesting case study in the analysis of how people tend to think about their acne, bodies, and beauty. Like many effective marketing campaigns, its success often lies in its ability to tap into the culture—to appeal to an insecurity, a desire, or cultural trend that is prevalent or emerging, whether it's a car manufacturer that appeals to the new buying power of the 1950s housewife or the cigarette maker that markets specifically towards the 60s woman with the tagline, "You've come along way, baby." An analysis of Proactiv's advertisements should explain why its marketing is so effective, and this should reveal what aspects of the culture—prevailing ideas of acne, the body, and beauty—that Proactiv successfully exploits.

Part of Proactiv's marketing success might be explained simply in terms of the sheer wealth that Proactiv invests in advertisements on the television and internet. The *New York Times* reports that Proactiv spends over $100 million on advertisements each year—a number that nearly trumps the total sales of other acne products in the United States.[7] Part of its success may also lie in the direct-marketing technique of its advertisements. The thirty-minute infomercials are full of the now standard tropes, whether it's the "before" and "after" images or the "buy now and get a second bottle free" offers. The direct-marketing campaign style affords Proactiv the usual benefits of this oft-maligned, but reliably successful technique: immediate and direct measurement of the success of

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[7] ibid., and Stuart Elliott, "Trying to Move Up From a Fast-Talking, Buy-Now Approach," *New York Times*, May 4, 2010, accessed July 26 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/business/media/04adco.html

individual advertising spots, allowing for measurably beneficial adjustments to the contents of their advertisements.[8]

But these standard marketing techniques are accompanied by a few important innovations that set Proactiv apart from any ordinary campaign. In particular, Proactiv is focused on the prevention and the treatment of individuals with mild acne, or those that might have not even considered themselves to have acne. The emphasis on prevention means that it can be sold even in the *absence* of acne. The application of Proactiv becomes something like brushing one's teeth—you can prevent acne from ever being a serious problem through a diligent and consistent application of the Proactiv formula, just as you can prevent cavities by consistently brushing your teeth.[9] The emphasis on prevention and treatment of mild acne is targeted specifically towards adult women who might experience mild flare-ups monthly before their period, and it is this demographic that proves most valuable for Proactiv.

1.2. Selling Acne.

If one believes numerous recent studies done by organizations like the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) and the American Acne and Rosacea Society (AARS), acne is an increasingly serious problem effecting ever-more people, especially adult women. An article in *The Sunday Times* asserts that the "pimply has replaced peachy as

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[8] For more on the benefits of direct-marketing, see Terry O'Reilly, "A Taste for Blood: Direct Marketing," *The Age of Persuasion*, January 5 2009, accessed July 20 2011, http://www.cbc.ca/ageofpersuasion/episode/2009/03/22/season-3-episode-12-a-taste-for-blood-direct-marketing/
[9] Singer "Why Should Kids Have All the Acne?"

the default complexion of the average British woman."[10] Sally Brown cites a study from

BAD which claims that of women 26 to 44, at least 14% have acne, but the actual figure

could be as high as 50%. Dr. Chu, who specializes in the treatment of acne and acne

scars, cites the mounting stress of modern life, combined with the increased prevalence of

additive and sugar consumption in the modern diet, as reasons for the increase in cases of

adult acne.[11]

Some studies in the United States have confirmed the increasing prevalence of

acne in the adult population, while others, notably, have not. The National Institute of

Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), a division of the National

Institute of Health, claims that approximately 17 million Americans have acne.[12] In

comparison, AARS claims that acne is reaching near "epidemic levels", while the

American Academy of Dermatology claims that 40 to 50 million Americans have acne.[13]

What are we to make of the discrepancy in numbers? Should we believe that acne is

reaching near "epidemic" levels with its prevalence having grown significantly in the last

few decades?

The supposed proliferation of acne might be compared to the history of the

emergence of depression and OCD during the last century.[14] As David Healy explains,

prior to the 1960s depression was thought to be rare. As a result, the market for an anti-

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[10] Sally Brown, "Break out," *The Sunday Times*, July 29, 2007, accessed July 24 2011, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article2130147.ece
[11] ibid.
[12] Singer "Why Should Kids Have All the Acne?"
[13] ibid.
[14] Carl Elliot, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2003), 123.

depressant was seen to be relatively small; there was little interest amongst pharmaceutical companies to produce such a drug because the pool of potential customers was so small. Thus, when Merck developed an amitriptyline in the 1960s to treat depression, it realized that, in order to be commercially successful, it needed to expand the potential pool of customers for the drug. And to do this, it needed to raise awareness about depression.[15] Carl Elliot notes that "Merck bought and distributed 50,000 copies of *Recognizing the Depressed Patient*, a book by Frank Ayd that instructed general practitioners how to diagnose depression."[16] As a result, diagnosis of depression and prescriptions for amytriptaline rose dramatically. The history of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is similar. Before the production of Clominpramine (or Anafranil) in the mid-1980s, OCD was thought to be an incredibly rare condition. Through the marketing of the disease, some studies now suggest that up to three percent of the population has some form of OCD.

Elliot is careful to emphasize that numerous people do genuinely suffer with depression, OCD, or other psychological disorders, and that these people genuinely benefit from the right medications. But his main point stands: "surrounding the core of many of these disorders is a wide zone of ambiguity that can be chiseled out and expanded."[17] It is in the commercial interest of pharmaceutical companies to expand the category of diseases because it expands the potential pool of customers that could potentially receive the drug.

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[15] David Healy, *The Antidepressant Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 75-76. Cited in Carl Elliot, *Better Than Well,* 123.
[16] Carl Elliot, *Better Than Well,* 123.
[17] ibid., 124.

Elliot also argues that the marketing of a disease, like depression, is often disguised such that it doesn't look like marketing.[18] It's often done in the name of charity or for the sake of "raising awareness" so that people can properly diagnose themselves and seek help. For example, Elliot notes that SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline) sponsored a supplemental issue of the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* on the topic of social phobia.[19] The issue was made up of legitimate and valuable scientific articles that explored social phobia in an independent, peer-reviewed manner. But as Elliot notes, SmithKline—the makers of Paxil, an SSRI used to treat social phobia—does not need to sell Paxil. They need to sell social phobia. And journal articles that focus on the diagnosis of social phobia is one way of doing this. By publicizing social phobia, chances are that it will be more widely diagnosed and Paxil will be more widely prescribed.

The same logic applies to the promotion of acne drugs. For example, AARS, which describes itself as "an alliance of dermatology medical professionals dedicated to elevating the understanding and treatment of acne and rosacea," focuses on promoting the public awareness of acne as a real disease.[20] AARS is devoted to informing the public that acne is not a mere disorder of minor inconvenience; it's a real disease and it's reaching near "epidemic" levels.[21] Public awareness is generated through publications, conferences, and notably the creation of an acne awareness month. Acne Awareness Month 2011 was spent informing people about the myths of acne:

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[18] Ibid., 125.
[19] ibid.
[20] "About AARS: American Acne and Rosacea Society," AARS, accessed July 20, 2011.
[21] "Acne and Rosacea are Medical Issues: Many People Aren't Getting the Right Treatment," October 5, 2007, accessed July 20 2011, http://acneandrosacea.org/uploads/medicalissuesoct07.doc.

1.) Acne goes away after high school.
2.) Once acne is cleared you can stop all your medications.
3.) Acne scars are caused by picking.
4.) Spot treating acne pimples is the best way to clear skin.[22]

AARS receives its major contributions from drug companies, including Stiefel ($75,000)

the makers of the prescription drug 'Evoclin Foam' which is used to treat acne, and

Galderma, the makers of Cetaphil, Differin, and Metrogel, which are used to treat acne

and rosacea.[23]

Groups like AARS are consistently careful to emphasize that acne is a legitimate

disease in need of treatment, while downplaying the cosmetic concerns of acne. Dr. Del

Rosso, head of AARS, argues that "one of the biggest myths surrounding rosacea is that it's

purely a cosmetic concern."[24] Del Rosso[25] notes that rosacea is an "inflammatory

disorder—a medical condition and not just a cosmetic concern."[26] When the cosmetic

concerns of acne and rosacea are discussed, they are reframed in medical terms. Del

Rosso, for instance, is quick to point out the psychological difficulties faced by people

with rosacea and acne, and that treatment for acne is a legitimate treatment to avoid or

diminish a distressed psychology.

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[22] "June is Acne Awareness Month," June 20, 2011, accessed July 22 2011,
http://www.chicagodermatology.com/june-is-acne-awareness-month/.
[23] "Corporate Benefactors: American Acne and Rosacea Society," AARS, accessed July 20,
2011, http://www.acneandrosacea.org/benefactors.
[24] "Rosacea — Myths and Realities: An Expert Interview with James Q. Del Rosso, DO,"
Medscape Education Dermatology, March 31, 2010, accessed July 18, 2011,
http://www.medscape.org/viewarticle/719065.
[25] Of note is that Dr. Del Rosso has served as an advisor or consultant for numerous drug
companies, including Galderma and Stiefel. Galderma, notably, sponsors the interview
with Del Rosso.
[26] ibid.

The condition affects how self-conscious they feel; it influences how they feel they're being perceived on their job, not only by their employers or fellow employees but also by individuals who they interact with, especially if they're interacting with the public. Many people report that they think these facial skin conditions are the reason why they didn't get a job or a promotion or a date.[27]

The treatment of acne becomes necessary not for the reduction of physical pain or impairment, but because of the psychological pain and social impairment these relatively benign spots can produce.

The mutual dependence of one's self-presentation and their psychological state, Elliot notes, is now seen as common sense; that a drug used to improve one's self-presentation will improve one's self-confidence is now seen as common sense. "The health of the self and presentation of the self are so mutually dependent that to treat one is also to treat the other."[28] And by reframing the treatment of acne as the treatment of, in effect, a distressed and depressed mental state, the treatment of acne remains in the language of medicine.

1.3. The Language of Acne: Normality and Authenticity.

The users of acne.org, an Internet community devoted to the discussion of all-things acne, often write implicitly of the mutual dependence of their psychological health and their self-presentation. As many users are quick to point out, acne itself can cause some minor discomfort, but the actual physical pain caused by acne is relatively minor and the physical impairment is almost non-existent. Indeed, for those with acne scars,

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[27] ibid.
[28] Elliot, *Better than Well*, 122.

there is *no* physical discomfort or impairment whatsoever. For some of these users, it is

not the acne or scars that they hate; it's that they live in a society that hates acne. "I don't

really have a problem with acne," one user notes. "I have a problem with other people

who have a problem with it."[29] Another user claims to "hate society more than acne,"[30]

while another notes that "[t]o be honest, the acne itself doesn't really bother me."[31] The

hate emerges from the harm acne imparts on their life projects, whether in finding a mate

or a job, and the psychological distress that results. Ultimately, many users claim to hate a

society that discriminates against them over something relatively arbitrary that they can't

control. Beauty is experienced negatively; they are concerned with being deemed ugly by

a society that values a perfect complexion, and most attempts to improve their skin are

aimed at making their skin appear *normal* or the way it *should look*.

This is reflected in the predominance of the language of normality and abnormality

on the acne.org message forum. One teenaged boy who attempted to wear makeup to

cover his scars claims that "I thought it made me look 'normal' but the make-up was

actually worse than the acne."[32] Another user notes that he knows that it is normal for

teenagers to have poor skin, but "a lot of times I convince myself that it's normal… and

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[29] omarcomin, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne? Message posted to
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#
[30] masg, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne? Message posted to
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#
[31] xoxokatherine, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne? Message posted to
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#
[32] 5ive, (2011, June 26). Make up, Acne, Real Self. Message posted to
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/up-Acne-Real-t298392.html&st=20&start=20.

then I go to school and see that the majority of my friends have close to perfect skin."[33]

Acne and acne scars make "me feel like something's wrong with me" and that "I'm destined to forever be a recluse."[34] The examples are numerous: "UGHHH I WANT TO HAVE NORMAL SKIN LIKE EVERYONE ELSEEE I SEEEE!!!!"[35]; "My cheeks aren't as heavy as I always thought - they look totally normal without cysts on them"[36]; "The texture of my skin has also changed already.[37] My skin doesn't hurt anymore and I feel like a normal person; a person with normal skin." Some users with severe acne and acne scars compare themselves to those with "other conditions… missing legs, blindness, people crippled by arthritis."[38] These people often learn to adapt to their disability and live good lives, but still, "nobody chooses to not be 'normal'."[39]

By talking about the removal of acne and acne scars as a *treatment* that aims towards making one's skin *normal* so that it is *cured*, many users explicitly talk about acne in medical terms. Users are often steeped in a very precise language used to classify and treat certain scars[40] — scars are either indented or raised; indented scars can be either

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[33] xoxokatherine, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne?
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html.
[34] captainawesome, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne?
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#.
[35] helpmegetclear, (2011, May 17). Acne sucks so fucking much!!!!!!! >:o, Pissed off.
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/Acne-sucks-fucking-much-t295779.html.
[36] kitkate, (2011, July 19). Why do you dislike acne?
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html&st=20.
[37] "The Acne.org Regimen success stories," Acne.org, accessed July 20, 2011,
http://www.acne.org/success.php.
[38] AmaraG, (2011, July 18). Why do you dislike acne?
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html&st=20#.
[39] ibid.
[40] OursFan, (2003, May 31). Summary of Scars and Treatments.
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/FAQ-SUMMARY-SCARS-TR-t5996.html.

icepick, boxcar, rolling, or macules, while raised scars are either hypertrophic or keloid scars. Cosmetic treatment options are tailored towards specific scar types, whether its skin needling, ablative or non-ablative lasers, dermabrasion, excision, dermal grafting, subscision, TCA Cross, or injectable fillers. Some people spend hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, on treatment options for their acne and their scars—all in the often futile effort to rid their recalcitrant flesh of scars that have caused them so much anguish.

The futility of it is especially frustrating to sufferers who feel judged as being dirty, lazy, or undisciplined—claims based on the assumption that acne is merely a matter of hygiene or diet, and that if one merely improved either then one would overcome their problem with acne. As one user claims, "I dislike [acne] because, yes, I do feel like people fixate on it. I do think people think I may be dirty, which I most certainly am not."[41] And another user notes, "If you are a fatass, then you can diet and exercise. If you are poor, then you get a god damn job. If you're balding, you get a rug. If you lost a leg, you get a prosthetic. For untreatable acne scars, YOU ARE FUCKED."[42] The futility of the treatments combined with the perceived judgment in ethical terms (as being lazy or dirty) is especially frustrating for those with severe acne.

As a result, many people with severe acne and acne scars feel trapped. Their recalcitrant flesh rarely successfully responds to most cosmetic procedures and most people with scars must eventually resign themselves to their continued presence. Many users express an alienation from their skin and their face as it appears with acne or scars.

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[41] lily:), (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne? http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#.
[42] Homer0001, (2009, August 28). life is over because of acne scars. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/life-acne-scars-t239910.html.

The language of authenticity tends to emerge in union. For example, one user who has just been prescribed Accutane, a potentially dangerous (but effective) drug for the treatment of severe cystic acne, claims that "I just want my life back and the real me to come out of hiding."[43] Another user notes that acne was "ruining every aspect of my life and I felt trapped in a face that wasn't mine, yearning to escape."[44] For those that do successfully treat their acne or scars, a rediscovery occurs—people claim to be seeing themselves for the first time since their long struggle began. "On my third month of Accutane, I saw my face - really saw it - for the first time since I was a child."[45] And again, "Now for the first time in 10 years, I feel gorgeous again! I feel that people can see the real me."[46] The true self is identified with acne-free skin; skin *with* acne is seen as an aberration, a condition or disease imposed by fate, trapping the person in a body that they don't recognize as their own. Proactiv's marketing successfully appeals to alienation and authenticity: "I didn't recognize myself in the mirror," one acne sufferer tells us, but with the help of Proactiv "I know that people see me for myself, with clear skin."[47] Purchasing Proactiv helps one become a better, more authentic person. It's a means to portray oneself as one really is. With Proactiv's help those with acne can begin, once again, seeing themselves for who they really are.

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[43] tv_viewer, (2009, December 28). Christine's Accutane Diary, My Second Accutane Course. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/Christine-s-Accutane-Diar-t256862.html.
[44] bumbum, (2009, March 18). how i cured my scars, acne scars. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/cured-scars-t229780.html.
[45] kitkate, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne?
[46] "The Acne.org Regimen success stories," acne.org, accessed July 20, 2011, http://www.acne.org/success.php.
[47] "Donna Carlson, 41," Proactiv, accessed July 15, 2011, http://www.proactiv.com/stories/customer/donna-carlson.php.

1.4. Allegra Revisited.

When Allegra tells the story about her battle with acne and her eventual victory thanks to Proactiv, the viewer is presented with an implicit argument that taps into much of what has been discussed. For starters, it's important that the spot features an adult woman, the demographic that typifies and proves most crucial to the success of Proactiv. Its a demographic that represents what Elliot describes as the "wide zone of ambiguity" surrounding core disorders "that can be chiseled out and expanded."[48] More than that, the advertisement targets these women by appealing to their insecurity as adults with acne: Allegra claims that she looks like she's twelve, and only after she is free of acne is she ready to call herself a "confident woman."[49]

The emphasis on confidence and not beauty is also notable. It frames the desire for better skin as not, primarily, the desire to be more beautiful. Instead, Allegra's desire to treat her acne is driven by a desire to have more confidence. Her implicit argument is that having more confidence is desirable, and that clear skin will give her more confidence. As such, having clear skin is desirable. It repositions the desire to have better skin away from being a purely cosmetic concern, to being a desire to improve one's mental state or moral character. In short, the desire to have better skin is the desire to be a better person.

And in order to have the confidence she desires, Allegra needs to have her skin "looking the way it should," thereby suggesting that her skin with acne looked the way

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[48] Elliot, *Better than Well,* 124.
[49] "Acne Treatment - Proactiv," Proactiv, accessed July 28, 2011, http://www.proactiv.com.

that it shouldn't.[50] This implies that, as an adult woman especially, there is an expectation that one's skin is clear of acne. It ought to be clear, and when it isn't clear, one's skin is abnormal.

Finally, with clear skin that looks the "way it should" Allegra is now free to be herself. "I can just be me," she claims, suggesting that earlier when she had acne, she wasn't really herself.[51] She was, in some sense, alienated from herself. Her "true" self is a pretty, happy, confident woman—not a girl, but a woman. And acne prevented her from being this person, from being the confident woman that she really is.

She can be the authentic, confident woman when she "can do something about it."[52] And Proactiv, as the name suggests, allows her to do something about it.

Ultimately, Proactiv is positioned as an enabler to attain desired consummations, namely, the desire to have clear skin. And the desire to have clear skin is explained in terms of the desire (i) to be more confident, (ii) to have skin look the way it should, and (iii) to more authentically be ourselves. These three are related. In claiming that clear skin will give her confidence, Allegra implies that she lacks confidence—that she experiences shame and embarrassment because of her acne. The shame that she feels when looking in the mirror is constituted by her failure to have skin that looks the way it should, which prevents her from more authentically being herself. This points to the fundamental question that will be at issue for the remainder of this thesis: how does the shame that people experience in the face of acne and scars (or other disfigurements) relate to the

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[50] ibid.
[51] ibid.
[52] ibid.

failures to attain some desired state of being? What are these desired ends and why are they desired? For starters, I will explore the possibility that the shame associated with acne is rooted either in the failure to achieve a physical ideal or what is deemed physically normal. I will then consider how the desire for normalcy, in particular, is linked to our desire for authenticity and recognition. Lastly, I will argue that our emotional states are necessarily constituted by beliefs and values, and that an articulation of our emotional states opens up the possibility of assailing them and, ultimately, changing them.

Chapter 2. Seeking Normality or an Ideal?

2.1. Davis and the Norm-Based Society.

In an effort to explain the popularity of Proactiv, the *New York Times* offers a potential answer: those that purchase Proactive to prevent or treat mild cases of acne are motivated by an intense desire for physical perfection, which is symptomatic of the society at large.[53] In other words, people are obsessed with attaining physical ideals—straight teeth, rock hard abs, large breasts, and blemish-free skin. The increasing popularity of cosmetic enhancement technologies, including surgery and make-up, is ultimately a symptom of the same desire—the desire for an ideal body that motivates millions of people to spend countless dollars and endure painful procedures.

And yet, a quick read of acne.org or a look at Proactiv's advertisements suggests something different: most of those suffering with acne and scars aren't explicitly looking to enhance their skin towards a societal ideal. Instead, it seems, they just want to be normal. Their obsessions are with ugliness and abnormality. They are concerned that their visible anomaly will be a detriment to their social life and their careers. In an effort to attain "normal" skin, many people spend an inordinate amount of money and time on painful procedures that, in many cases, do nothing to improve the body's physical functionality. And companies like Proactiv exploit the desire for normalcy and explicitly position their product as a means of attaining it.

The desire for normalcy (and the exploitation of this desire) appears to be consistent with Lennard Davis' claim that modern society is largely characterized by the

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[53] Singer, "Why Should Kids Have All the Acne?"

emergence of norms and the 'normal' as a means of interacting with and understanding the world. Either we attempt to be normal or we deliberately try to be different. In comparing ourselves to others, whether mentally or physically, we do so on a spectrum ranging from sub-normal to above-average. Indeed, norms are so pervasive that "there is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated."[54] And by explicating this distinctly modern concept, Davis hopes to demonstrate that 'disability' emerges from the 'normal' and is, therefore, also a distinctly modern classification and socially derived relationship to the body.

The crux of Davis' argument takes the form of intellectual history in which he develops the thesis that the modern focus on norms and the 'normal' is a recent invention, rooted in the historical development of statistics and social sciences in the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to this modern 'norm-based' society, Davis argues, was the 'ideal-based' society in which, for example, the ancients were presented with an *ideal* body that was mythopoeic and linked to the gods.[55] This mythic body was composed of ideal components found in mortal beings, but the ideal body itself was, *a priori*, never to be found in the world of mortal beings. "When ideal human bodies occur, they do so in mythology."[56] Davis illustrates his point by appealing to the painting by Francois-Andre

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[54] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 23.
[55] ibid., 24-25. Mythopoeic means "myth-making" — it refers to the distinct stage of human thought, envisioned by Henri and Henriette Antonia Frankfort, that differs from modern scientific thought. It refers to the concrete and personifying nature of ancient thought, as opposed to the abstract and impersonal thought of modern philosophy and science.
[56] ibid., 25.

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Vincent, *Zeuxis Choosing as Models the Most Beautiful Girls of the Town of Crotona.*[57] In this painting, the Greek artist is depicted as lining up the most beautiful girls in town and selecting the best features of each—the eyes of the girl with the most beautiful eyes, the skin of the girl with the most beautiful skin—to create the ideal figure of beauty as represented by Aphrodite. As Davis argues, the

> central point here is that in a culture with an ideal form of the body, all members of the population are below the ideal. No one young lady of Crotona can be the ideal. By definition, one can never have an ideal body. There is in such societies no demand that populations have bodies that conform to the ideal.[58]

Here Davis makes an important (although not explicit) observation about ideals, viz., ideals need not imply an expectation of conformity.[59] The ideal-based view of the body exhibits two primary characteristics: the ideal body is *a priori* unattainable, and there is no expectation that bodies conform to an ideal.

For Davis the primary goal is to demonstrate that the "normal" is a central, albeit unique component of modern society, rooted in a particular history and culture. By attempting to undermine the perceived universality of the "normal" as a mode of classification, Davis wants to explore other means of classifying and understanding bodies and, by extension, understanding alternative conceptualizations of disability. In other words, Davis attempts to demonstrate the contingency of a world-picture mediated by normality—a world-picture rooted in our intellectual heritage and embedded in a particular and popular culture—through an elucidation of its historical development and

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[57] ibid.
[58] ibid.
[59] Here I'm using the term "conformity" in the sense of being similar in form or type.

historical alternatives, namely, the pre-modern ideal-based society.[60] The contingency of

the concept "disability" is revealed if the modern world-picture, upon which it's reliant, is

revealed *as* a picture and *as* contingent. This task of developing a novel picture emerges

from a "disjuncture between the ontological and the ethical" or between "our ways of

making sense of ourselves, on the one hand, and our cares and commitments, on the

other."[61] It's a task that leads Davis to consider the 'ideal-based' society as a real-world,

historical alternative to the 'norm-based' modern society; he elucidates a picture in which

all mortal bodies are deemed grotesque.

Since Davis' thesis emphasizes the modern preoccupation with attaining physical

normalcy, his thesis would appear to refute the *New York Times'* crediting of Proactiv's

success to the modern preoccupation with physical ideals. It's also a thesis that, on first

encounter, seems to explain the language of normalcy that constitutes much of the

discourse surrounding acne and acne scars. On the surface, then, Davis' thesis is

interesting and potentially informative in explaining Proactiv's success and the shame

often experienced by those with acne and acne scars. The failure to attain a desired

normal state, rather than an ideal state, appears to be the main instigator of shame.

But it is telling that Davis uses the ideal of feminine beauty to posit the importance

of the "ideal" in pre-modern society, but largely avoids discussion of feminine beauty in

the context of modern society. Indeed, it is striking the degree to which Davis' account of

an ancient ideal of beauty is useful and explanatorily powerful with regards to modern

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[60] Cressida Heyes, *Self-transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20. My use of the notion of world-picture originates from the work of Cressida Heyes.
[61] Ibid., 20.

notions of feminine beauty. When considering modern notions of female beauty within

this framework, the distinction between the ideal and norm based society—and indeed,

between the "normal" and "ideal"—becomes much more complex.

For starters, Davis claims that in the ancient ideal-based framework of beauty the

mythic ideal is composed of ideal bodily components found in this world as exemplified

in the painting by Francois-Andre Vincent. But in contemplating modern conceptions of

feminine beauty, one can easily reference studies like that of Richard Fleming and Toby

Mayer that claim certain celebrity bodily features are frequently requested by those

undergoing plastic surgery.[62] The eyes of Katie Holmes, the lips of Angelina Jolie, and the

body of Jessica Biel were all popularly requested as ideal features to be replicated.

Fleming claims that their "patients continue to turn to Hollywood to raise their standard of

beauty…" and that their "patients want to look rested, energetic and most of all, youthful

like the celebrities they see in glossy magazines."[63] One could argue that these patients

have become their own artist, lining up the most beautiful celebrities, looking to create

themselves into their own bodily ideal. More recently, a computer programmer has

created software that merges the faces of the world's most beautiful celebrities into what

they claim to be the most beautiful woman in the world.[64] Angelina Jolie, Anne Hathaway,

Charlize Theron, and Elisha Cuthbert are combined to create the most beautiful woman in

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[62] "Plastic Surgery top requests," *Reuters*, January 24, 2008, accessed April 25, 2010, http://www2.canada.com/topics/lifestyle/style/story.html?id=1d7739be-dad4-4794-a157-091593f492f1.
[63] ibid.
[64] John, "Using Science and Technology to Create the Most Beautiful Girl in the World," *The Chive*, January 15, 2010, April 25, 2010, http://thechive.com/2010/01/15/using-science-and-technology-to-create-most-beautiful-girl-in-the-world/.

the world — a computer-generated image as unreal, or mythic, as the ideal figure of Aphrodite.

Furthermore, in noting that the mythic ideal of beauty is unattainable, Davis points to one of the defining characteristics of the modern ideal of feminine beauty; the modern ideal of feminine beauty is, in practice, largely unattainable. The argument is familiar: the practice of using Photoshop and other modern editing software has led to the frequent portrayal of feminine beauty, especially in print-media, that is unrealistic—a process that presents an ideal that is often anatomically impossible if not for all women, then for most women. The appearance of the body is manipulated towards an unrealistic ideal—skin-tone is lightened and the surface blurred of any imperfections, waists are thinned, breasts enlarged, and legs are lengthened.

On the surface, then, it appears as though ideals still play a crucial role in the formation of modern conceptions of beauty and that any account of modern bodily obsessions without reference to ideals would be incomplete. It also suggests that Davis' distinction between an ideal-based society and norm-based society, while not without relevance, fails to capture the complexity that characterizes the relationship between the "ideal" and the "normal." It's a complexity that Davis hints at when he argues, for instance, that the Belgian statistician and sociologist Adolph Quetelet advocates a "hegemony of the middle" that applies to the body as well as moral qualities: "deviations more or less great from the mean have constituted [for artists] ugliness in body as well as

vice in morals and a state of sickness with regard to constitutions."[65] In other words,

Quetelet's work demonstrates that the average itself can become an ideal.

This brings us back to reconsider the question that was posed at the beginning of

this chapter: The success of Proactiv's marketing is ultimately built upon the successful

exploitation of desires, and thus, understanding what makes Proactiv successful is

informative in understanding the desires that surround issues of acne and acne scars. Is the

desire, then, ultimately one of attaining physical perfection (as the *New York Times'* posits)

or is it ultimately one of attaining physical normalcy (as Lennard Davis' thesis would

indicate)? It should be noted that it's entirely consistent to note that some people with

acne (especially those with mild acne) might be motivated out of the desire for perfection,

while others (especially those with severe acne and scars) might be motivated out of the

desire for normality. It's also necessary to recognize the plurality of experiences,

motivations, and desires, including those of people who undergo cosmetic surgery. But we

might also reconsider whether the desire for normality and the desire for an ideal need be

mutually exclusive, or if they could be compatible in some way—a hypothesis that should

be considered in light of Quetelet's claims.

My analysis up to this point has been concerned with demonstrating the

complexity of the problem—a complexity captured in neither Davis' framework nor the

New York Times' hypothesis. It's a complexity that requires a clarification of the "ideal"

and the "normal" more generally, with an aim to understanding our desires to purchase

enhancement technologies like Proactiv. Of primary concern, then, is to explore what the

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[65] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 27.

concepts "normal" and "ideal" mean. What is the desire for the "ideal", the "normal," and where does it come from? Can ideals be normalized, and can the normal, as a statistical average, emerge as an ideal?

2.2. Seeking an Ideal.

2.2.1. Two Visions of Ideals: Scruton and Bordo.

What are ideals and what role do they play in our lives? How are experiences of shame and embarrassment related to our failure to obtain certain ideals? As a starting point, I want to posit two contrasting views of ideals. On the one hand, Roger Scruton emphasizes the ethical importance of ideals as models that motivate us to become better, more loveable people. On the other hand, Susan Bordo emphasizes the regulatory nature of ideals, using the ideal of femininity as a primary example. For Scruton, ideals are an essential tool towards self-improvement and flourishing. For Bordo, ideals can operate as a mask for power and ultimately inhibit flourishing. In order to determine how ideals might operate as regulatory ideals, I want to provide an analysis of ideal-formation itself, as exhibited in Aristotelian ethics, Appiah's ethics of identity, and ordinary-language philosophy.

> On the one hand, then, philosophers like Roger Scruton argue that
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> culture emerges from our attempt to settle on standards that will command the consent of people generally, while raising their aspirations towards the goals that make people admirable and loveable.[66]

As a result, culture imposes an obligation, "in particular, the obligation to be other and better than we are, in all the ways that others might appreciate."[67] Within this framework, ideals operate as a model to be emulated. They are something to aim at and progress towards. They operate by means of reference and comparison, and the revelation of discrepancy. By noting and understanding discrepancies, we can begin to appreciate the

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[66] Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 183.
[67] ibid.

qualities that will allow us to improve ourselves. Just as noting the discrepancies between an average ceramic mug and an ideal ceramic mug will help us improve our mug design, noting discrepancies between ourselves and ideal moral figures will help us to become better people. As Scruton claims, ideals operate by "pointing away from our ordinary imperfections and fallings short, to a world of high ideals."[68] The revelation of discrepancy between oneself and an ideal often results in shame, anxiety, and a deep desire to mitigate the discrepancy, but these emotions are acceptable (even desirable) because they provide a motivation to become better, more loveable people.

On the other hand, ideals have the potential *not* to act as a mechanism for flourishing, but as a mask for power; that is, ideals can operate as *regulatory ideals*, posited as a means of regulation and self-discipline. Indeed, Susan Bordo argues that the ideal of femininity results in destructive, self-disciplinary practices, that result in the production of "docile bodies."[69] Bordo borrows heavily from Foucault and his concept of *bio-power* as expressed in *Discipline and Punish* and subsequent works. Within this framework, Foucault offers an analysis of power that contrasts with the standard model of power in which power is thought to be a form of domination—as a form of repression, emerging from a centralized force, exerted by one party over another.[70] Instead, Foucault argues that power operates on the 'micro-levels' of everyday life, being found "throughout society, inherent in social relationships, embedded in a network of practices, institutions,

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[68] ibid., 184.
[69] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)
[70] Jen Pylypa, "Power and Bodily Practice: Applying the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body," *Arizona Anthropologist* 13 (1998): 21.

and technologies."[71] *Biopower* operates on this level: under the surveillance, regulation, and punishment of social institutions like schools, prisons, and hospitals, the body is habituated to external regulation, working "to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, exert its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls."[72] *Biopower* results in bodily regulation through self-discipline adopted by the individual, and thus results in a type of self-imposed subjugation. It results in the production of docile bodies—those that are subjugated, passive, and productive. As Foucault makes clear, one central feature of power is that it is not clearly imposed by one dominant party over another—that is, it does not emerge from one particular source, but rather is embedded in the norms and discourses of our everyday practices, habits, and social interactions.[73]

 Power is primarily *productive* and not repressive. Indeed, power has its strength because it operates through the production of knowledge and desire. As Foucault writes,

> Power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong that is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it.[74]

Power is strong because it produces a desire in people—a desire to conform, a desire to be feminine, a desire to be masculine—resulting in the self-disciplining of the body. In an effort to be feminine women might diet, weigh themselves, apply makeup, and wear high-

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[71] Ibid.
[72] ibid.
[73] ibid., 23.
[74] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977,* ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 59. Cited in Pylypa 24.

heels. Indeed, power is strongest *not* when exercised through coercion or force, but rather when it operates through desire—through the desire to be other and "better" than we are, through the desire to be more loveable people. And power manages to do this when it masks itself: "its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[75] By making that which is constraining appear desirable, power is able to mask itself.

Utilizing this framework, Bordo looks at three examples of femininity to demonstrate that a desire to conform to ideals often results in an extreme self-disciplining. For starters, Bordo notes that hysteria, which exhibited symptoms of insomnia, nervousness, irritability, and a loss of sexual appetite, embodies nineteenth century ideals of femininity which advocated "delicacy and dreaminess, sexual passivity, and a charmingly labile and capricious emotionality."[76] Similarly, Agrophobia, which is defined as the fear of crowded, public, or open spaces, embodies the mid-twentieth century ideal of femininity which emphasized domesticity and dependency. And lastly, anorexia has emerged with the late-twentieth century ideal of female thinness as perpetuated in the media. Anorexia, in particular, exhibits how the desire to attain an ideal can lead to self-surveillance and self-discipline, all the while hiding its constraining nature behind the illusion of empowerment and flourishing. As Bordo explains, for the anorexic "conditions that are 'objectively' … constraining, enslaving, and even murderous, come to be

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[75] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 94. Cited in Pylypa 24.
[76] Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing,* eds. S Bordo, A. Jagger. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 16.

experienced as liberating, transforming, and life-giving."[77] The anorexic feels that she is in

control, that she is exhibiting self-mastery, all the while subjugating herself through self-

surveillance and self-discipline. Indeed, as Bordo claims, "the disciplinary practices of

anorexia embody the ideal of self-deprivation for women, of limiting her desires,

ambitions, and needs, and thereby reinforce the patriarchal social structure."[78] The ideal

feminine body, which is identified with reduced mobility, weakness and delicacy, results

in a body that is ill-suited to activity outside of traditional female realms. This reinforces

the division between the social and economic life of men and women. For Bordo, this

opens the possibility that "at a time when women are resisting [oppression] by actively

challenging male authority, power is reasserting itself through the ideals of femininity that

render women docile, or in the case of anorexia, even incapacitated."[79]

Numerous feminists, including Bordo, have convincingly argued that ideals of

femininity operate not as a means of flourishing, but are often regulatory, rendering

women docile and incapacitated. This position and the one articulated by Scruton are not

necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do raise the need to evaluate the ideals we

already have—where they come from, how they motivate us, and the emotions that result

from our failure to live up to them. To evaluate these ideals, I want to explore the process

of ideal-formation itself—a process that is illuminated through an understanding of

Aristotle's conception of virtue.

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[77] Bordo, "The Body," 15.
[78] ibid., 29.
[79] ibid., 30.

2.2.2. Aristotle and Ideal-Formation.

To start, let's consider a simple example. In considering our conception of the "ideal" I want to start with our everyday conception of an ideal knife. The ideal knife exhibits characteristics that make it an excellent knife—that is, a knife that has the qualities of sharpness, durability, etc., that allow the user to cut well. Furthermore, the qualities of the ideal knife vary depending upon the task at hand—if used to cut meat then the ideal knife has the characteristics that allow it to best cut meat, or if used for spreading butter then the ideal knife has the characteristics which allow it to best spread butter. In other words, the ideal knife changes upon the circumstances in which the knife is used; that is, the ideal knife is the knife that best performs its function within the context of a project—to cut meat, spread butter onto bread, and so on.

At this point, the analysis of the ideal knife should remind us of Aristotle's account of the virtues. The virtuous man is the man which has the characteristics that allow it to best perform its function. As Aristotle claims,

> It should be said, then, that every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well. The virtue of eyes, for instance, makes the eyes and their functioning excellent, because it makes us see well; and similarly, the virtue of a horse makes the horse excellent, and thereby good at galloping, at carrying its rider, and at standing steady in the face of the enemy. If this is true in every case, the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well.[80]

For Aristotle, the excellent horse is the horse that possesses the characteristics that make it good at performing its function, such as galloping and carrying its rider. The ideal horse is

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[80] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hacking Publishing Company, 1999), 24.

subtly different from the excellent horse; the ideal horse is the *most* excellent horse, just as

the ideal knife is the most excellent knife. For Aristotle, then, it seems as though the

excellent horse is defined in terms of its function or purpose (that is, its *telos*), which is

defined in relation to the human and its project.[81] In other words, the excellence of a

horse is determined in relation to what makes the horse useful for its owner and his

particular projects. Excellence is determined by function, but function appears to be

defined in relation to the human's project. Hence, we talk about the ideal knife *for*

camping, *for* carving, *for* hunting, and so on. As such, Aristotle seems to suggest that with

regard to some objects (like the knife or horse) the function of the object is determined in

relation to a project, and thus, in relation to the human.

    This indicates that an understanding of Aristotle's arguments about the nature of

virtue in the *Nichomachean Ethics* will be useful in the attempt to understand more fully

how ideal-formation occurs.[82] And indeed, it is here that Aristotle's ethics exhibits an

inherent connection between the *essence* of x, the *teleology* of x, and the characteristics

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[81] In effect, I'm arguing that there is ambiguity in Aristotle's text. On the one hand, the example of the excellent horse suggests that the function or *telos* of the horse is defined in relation to the human and its project. This seems to indicate that what constitutes excellence, at least for some objects, is socially constructed; that is, it is defined in relation to the subject and its projects. On the other hand, Aristotle (more commonly) argues that function or *telos* is rooted in biology; that is, the human being's function is rooted in its distinctly rational nature. This suggests a realist picture. I will argue that the history of ideal-formation has demonstrated the tendency to subsume the constructivist notions of excellence into a realist picture—that it is "natural" and recalcitrant. And this explains the necessity to denaturalize gender, which has been the effort of feminists since the days of John Stuart Mill.

[82] The word *virtue* is a translation of the Greek word *arete*—a word that more generally refers to the *excellence* of a kind. As a result, I tend to use the word excellence and virtue interchangeably, with excellence being used to describe objects and virtue being used to describe humans.

that make x *virtuous* or excellent. For Aristotle, if the good knife, horse, sculptor, or eye are determined in terms of their function, then the good human being is also determined in terms of its function. "For just as the good, i.e., [doing] well, for a flutist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and [characteristic] action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function."[83] Aristotle determines the function of a human being by equating the function with its essence; that is, by determining the genus and differentia of a human. As such, the "special function of a human being" cannot be "living" or "sense perception" because these characteristics are shared with plants and non-human animals respectively.[84] As a result, "the remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the [part of the soul] that has reason. … [And] that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason."[85] In short, the essence of the human is also its function and the excellence of a particular human is determined in relation to this function.

Aristotelian ethics operates on the basis that concepts like 'human being,' 'eye', or 'knife' are understood as functional concepts; just as a knife is defined in terms of its purpose or function, Aristotle's *teleological* biology purports a concept of 'human' with an essential purpose or function, viz., to utilize its rational faculty.[86] And just as a knife as a functional concept cannot be defined independently of the good knife, humans cannot be

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[83] ibid., 8. (1097b S9).
[84] ibid., 9. (1097b s13-14).
[85] ibid.
[86] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 57-59.

defined independently of the good human. Therefore, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, the cleavage between normative and descriptive claims is bridged: when making normative claims about functional concepts one is making a factual statement.

Both Charles Taylor[87] and MacIntyre[88] argue that understanding 'human' as a functional concept is rooted in the pre-modern tradition of assigning identity to the self based on one's social position. Within this tradition 'man' is defined by a series of roles that make up his social status—as a farmer, father, soldier, or citizen—and thus, each man has a purpose or function entailed by these social roles. For example, the human being as a firefighter is defined in terms of the *telos* of a firefighter; the ideal firefighter is determined in relation to this *telos*, and judgments about the firefighter ("she is a good firefighter") follow from the factual premises about that firefighter ("she has put out every fire that she's faced").[89] Aristotle recognizes this relationship between social role, *teleology*, and excellence: the leather maker, sculptor, and carpenter are recognized as having a *telos* and that the excellence of a leather maker is determined in relation to this *telos;* producing quality leather is achieving one's good as a leather maker. Within this tradition, Aristotle's primary contribution was to identify a universal good in terms of the *function of a human being*—a good that takes precedent because the leather maker's essential function as a human being, Aristotle argues, is that *of* a human being and not as a leather maker. In short, Aristotle introduces a *biological essentialism*, viz., that a human

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[87] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity (*Toronto: Anansi, 1991), 47.
[88] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 60.
[89] ibid.

being is defined in terms of a unique biological structure that distinguishes it from other animals.

To summarize, Aristotle's ethics highlights the importance of identity in the normative judgment of an entity; to understand what constitutes excellence for an entity necessarily involves understanding what that entity is. In other words, an entity is always judged *as something*—as a firefighter, mother, woman, or human being. And since an individual can be identified (by oneself and others) simultaneously as multiple kinds—as a firefighter, mother, woman, or human being—individuals can be judged by multiple standards in different circumstances. Some of these identities might be deemed more morally relevant than others: for Aristotle, an identification as a human is ultimately the most morally relevant, and thus, our most morally significant notion of excellence is rooted in our identities as humans. But we also judge ourselves by the standards of identities that we take to be most crucial in constituting who we are and who we strive to be. For instance, as a teenager my identity as a soccer player structured much of what I strove to be and my success as a soccer player was my main barometer for excellence. As a student, my identity as a student structures much of what I strive to be and my success as a student operates as the primary means of self-evaluation. At the core of these judgments, either as a human, soccer player, or student, is the supposition that since we can understand the ideal x only if we understand the good x, and we understand the good x only if we understand x, we can understand the ideal x only if we understand x. I can understand what it is to be the ideal human only if I understand what it is to be human,

and I can understand what it is to be the ideal soccer player only if I understand what it is to be a soccer player.

This claim is reflected in J.L. Austin's observation that words like 'ideal' or 'good' are meta-concepts or second-order concepts; that is, the adjectives 'ideal' or 'good' have no clear meaning in and of themselves but only in conjunction with another noun-phrase.[90] There is not *the* ideal (full-stop), but *an* ideal knife, *an* ideal father, *an* ideal human. In this sense, the 'ideal' is similar to many other second-order, meta-concepts in the English language. Austin made this same observation about the concept 'real':

> Whereas we can just say of something 'This is pink', we can't just say of something 'This is real'. And it is not very difficult to see why. We can perfectly well say of something that is pink without knowing, without any reference to, what it *is*. But not so with 'real'. For one and the same object may be both a real *x* and not a real *y;* an object looking rather like a duck may be a real decoy duck (not just a toy) but not a real duck. When it isn't a real duck but a hallucination, it may still be a real hallucination—as opposed, for instance, to a passing quirk of vivid imagination.[91]

In order to answer the question "real or not?" one must first answer the question "a real what?". Similarly, in order to answer the question "ideal or not?" one must first answer the question "an ideal what?" The same observation was made by Frege about numbers: numbers are concepts that apply to other concepts—there is one army, three divisions,

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[90] J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 69. It's less clear if 'ideal' is a trouser-word; i.e., like 'real' a "definite sense attaches to the assertion that something is real, a real such-and-such, only in light of a specific way in which it might be, or might have been, not real." ibid., 70. 'ideal' is a subset of the dimension-word 'good' which "is the most general and comprehensive term in a whole group of terms of the same kind, terms that fulfill the same function," ibid., 71.
[91] ibid.

fifteen regiments, or twenty companies.[92] In order to answer the question "How many?" one must first ask, "How many what?"—that is, one must first supply the concepts being counted, such as army, division, regiment, or company, because the same physical entity might be conceptualized differently. In the same fashion, Kant famously claims that existence is not a real predicate, but is only a predicate of predicates.

Peter Geach argues similarly when he claims that concepts like "good" and "bad" as found in statements like "that is a good knife" are attributive adjectives in which the word 'good' functions as a predicate modifier.[93] He uses the example of 'big' and 'small' to demonstrate how attributive adjectives differ from predicative adjectives: "x is a big flea" cannot be reduced to "x is a flea" and "x is big" just as "x is a small elephant" cannot be reduced to "x is small" and "x is an elephant". In comparison, "x is a red book" can logically be reduced to "x is a book" and "x is red".[94] Compare the statement "x is a red car" to "x is a good car". As Geach writes, "I could ascertain that a distant object is a red car because I can see it is red and a keener-sighted but colour-blind friend can see it is a car; there is no such possibility of ascertaining that a thing is a good car by pooling independent information that is good and that it is a car."[95] For Geach, this demonstrates that "good" (and by extension, "ideal") is essentially an attributive adjective, for "even when 'good' or 'bad' stands by itself as a predicate, and is thus grammatically predicative,

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[92] Zalta, Edward N., "Gottlob Frege", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition),* ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/frege/. See Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, S46.

[93] Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956): 32-42.

[94] ibid., 33.

[95] ibid., 34.

some substantive has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so."[96]

The same can be said of 'ideal'. If we state "A is ideal" in which A is a proper name like 'Heather McMahen' or 'Vancouver', we are still ultimately implying something like 'Heather McMahen is an ideal mother" or "Vancouver is an ideal city". Proper names, Geach argues, presuppose a continuing reference to a universal noun, in this case 'mom' and 'city'. "[I]f the common noun 'X' expresses the nominal essence of the individual called 'A'; if *being the same X* is a condition whose fulfillment is presupposed by our still calling an individual 'A'; then the meaning of 'A is good/bad' said *simplicter*, will be 'A is a good/bad X'.[97] Thus, if 'Vancouver' stands for 'city' then the meaning of 'Vancouver is ideal' said *simpliciter* will mean 'Vancouver is an ideal city'.

In the case of Aristotelian ethics, not only is it true that we can understand the ideal x only if we understand the essence of x, but understanding the essence of x is sufficient for understanding the ideal or good x. If one understands the concept of 'farmer' then one understands what makes a good farmer; one cannot define a farmer independently of the good farmer. Similarly, if one understands the concept of 'human' then one understands what makes a good human. For Aristotle, one understands the concept of 'human' only if one understands its essence and teleology, and for the concept of 'human' this teleology is rooted in biology. As a result, when an essence is conceived as natural or biological it is rendered immutable; thus, a definite sense of the good or ideal human is also reified.

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[96] ibid.
[97] ibid.

This structure of ideal-formation is evident throughout history, for example, in the history of the conception of the ideal woman. As Grosz writes, the societal expectations of women has often been rooted in folk-theories of biological essentialism.

> Biologism is a particular form of essentialism in which women's essence is defined in terms of women's biological capacities. Biologism is usually based on some form of reductionism: social and cultural factors are the effects of biologically given causes. In particular, *biologism usually ties women closely to the function of reproduction and nurturance*, although it may also limit women's social possibilities through the use of evidence from neurology, neurophysiology, and endocrinology.[98]

The argument is familiar: women are women because of distinguishing biological features.[99] Because women have the capacity to give birth to children, they ought to stay home and raise the children; a woman's nature or biological essence shows that she ought to perform certain functions, and the ideal woman performs these functions well—she is the good mother, a good housekeeper, and a good cook. By grounding social obligations in a particular natural, biological essence, the roles are reified. This is the line of thinking that led Luther to pronounce that "[w]omen ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon, keep house and bear and raise children."[100] It results in the concept of the ideal woman as:

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[98] Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," *The Essential Difference,* eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Blomington: Indiania University Press, 1994), 84. Cited in, Cressida Heyes, *Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 30-31.
[99] Heyes, *Line Drawings*, 31.
[100] Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman: Europe 1789-1918* (London: Longman, 2002), 30.

> benevolent from natural sensibility, active from constitutional inclination, amiable from temper… zeal and activity are, in their own places, excellent and essential qualities; but Christian women require to be very cautious, lest even in the midst of praiseworthy exertions, they sacrifice those meet and lowly tempers which are so calculated to adorn and promote the cause they love and advocate. Female influence should shed its rays on every circle, but these ought to be felt, rather in their softening effects, than seen by their brilliancy.[101]

The nature of the woman, grounded in distinguishing biological features, indicates that she ought to stay at home, have children or be a mother.

As Cressida Heyes accurately notes, normative claims about the inferiority of a particular class do not follow from the descriptive, biological claims of that class unless "normative claims are smuggled into the essence-talk itself, as is generally the case."[102] It's an argument that emerges from the disjuncture between normative and descriptive, biological claims; the former value-laden claims do not logically follow from the latter, descriptive claims. Thus, understanding the nature of *x* is not sufficient for understanding the good x unless normative claims are "smuggled" into the descriptive claims. This is, in effect, what Aristotle does by postulating 'human' as a functional concept; inherent in the definition of 'human' is the definition of the 'good human'. For MacIntyre, the same is true with regards to other functional concepts like 'watch' and 'farmer'. Furthermore, the dominant pre-Cartesian world-picture portrays a world and its components, in its essence, as imbued with a *telos* that exhibits the Good or the design of an omniscient God. As Charles Taylor argues, Plato's theory of the Forms mitigates the modern cleavage between

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[101] ibid.

[102] Heyes, *Line Drawings,* 31.

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scientific explanation and moral vision; that is, scientific explanation and moral vision go

hand in hand:

> On this previously dominant view, the cosmic order was seen as the
> embodiment of the Ideas. The physical world around us takes the shape it
> does in order to body forth an order of Ideas. This can be taken itself as an
> ultimate in explanation, as it is by Plato, as ordered for the Good; or it can
> be integrated into Christian theology, and the Ideas understood as the
> thoughts of God. But in either case, the order is seen to be what it is because
> it exhibits Reason, Goodness; in the theological variant, the Wisdom of
> God.[103]

As Taylor concludes, this cosmic order of the sort exhibited in Platonic and Christian

ontology — a view that was dominant from ancient Greece through neo-Platonism,

medieval, and early modern Europe — sets about the purposes of the beings within it. "As

humans we are to conform to our Idea, and this in turn must play its part in the whole,

which among other things involves our being 'rational.'"[104] The human being and other

objects in the world were understood to be an element in a larger, meaningful cosmic

order; each element, therefore, has its own particular *telos* within the larger cosmic order.

To understand the human being was to understand its purpose within this larger cosmic

order. To understand the *woman* was to understand its purpose within this larger cosmic

order. Because kinds were imbued with a *telos*, the project of understanding the nature of

something and what something ought to be, were the same.

The descriptive and normative projects were intertwined until Cartesian

metaphysics and mechanization undermined *teleological* modes of explanation. As Taylor

writes, "Descartes utterly rejected this teleological mode of thinking and abandoned any

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[103] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1989), 160.
[104] ibid., 161.

theory of *ontic logos*. The universe was to be understood mechanistically, by the resolutive/compositive method pioneered by Galileo."[105] Darwin continued this enterprise by offering a theory that explained much of the apparent biological order through a non-teleological explanation. The undermining of teleological explanation resulted in a world-picture with a cleavage between descriptive and normative claims; since the description of nature states what something merely *is*, normative claims about what *ought* do not follow.[106]

But although the pre-Cartesian world-picture outlined by Taylor and MacIntyre is antiquated, it tells us something important about ideal-formation. For starters, there's a notable parallel between Aristotle's conception of the excellent knife and the pre-Cartesian world-picture that sets purposes for beings within a larger cosmic order. The parallel is found in the importance of a *telos* within both systems. The knife and the world are understood to be created by a designer, its *morphe* based upon an *eidos*, for a purpose. The *telos* of both the knife and entities within the cosmic order, emerge in the context of a project, and this project has a subject—whether the project of a man cutting a steak or the project of an omniscient God. The excellence of an entity is determined in relation to the *telos* which gains shape within the context of a project. A notable difference between the two cases is that the pre-Cartesian world-picture is one in which

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[105] ibid., 144.

[106] This also proved important for Aristotle's ethics, especially the Darwinian explanations of evolution that offered an account of human biology that was not teleological. Without Aristotle's teleological biology, it is difficult to see how he can bridge the descriptive and normative gap. And indeed, this has been one of the main concerns of modern philosophers who have attempted to revive Aristotelian virtue ethics. It's also understood to be the source of much of the incommensurability of modern ethics, as famously argued by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.

reality is deemed to be God's project, with kinds and their purposes rendered immutable, while the excellence of the knife is relative to the project at hand and socially constituted. In either case, how the entity is identified and understood to function within the context of a project is crucial to understanding what constitutes the good or ideal x. The question, then, is to what degree this structure of ideal-formation persists despite the disappearance of *ontic logos* from our ontology.

2.2.3. Appiah, Hacking, and the Ethics of Identity.

Despite the disappearance of *ontic logos* from our ontology, the normative implications of the 'natural' are still prominent. This is perhaps no clearer than the ongoing arguments against homosexuality or gay marriage that appeal to its supposed unnaturalness or abnormality. We can, correctly, reject such arguments as committing a naturalistic fallacy and move on. But it seems that such a rebuff isn't entirely enough—that an essentialism of a different kind, one that isn't rooted in a cosmic order, still has important implications for our judgment of an entity. As Aristotle's ethics made clear, the excellence of an entity is determined on the basis of how that entity is primarily identified; that is, a human can be judged as a human, as a woman, firefighter, mother, dancer, etc., and the judgment of x is determined on the basis of how we identify x.[107] For Aristotle, a

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[107] Mark Schroeder presents a potential objection: "it is not, in general, true that if Sue is a thing of kind K, then "Sue is good" means that Sue is a good K. For example, if Sue is a human bieng, but if we are watching her impressive performance at her dance recital, then "Sue is good" is naturally understood as meaning that Sue is a good dancer, rather than that she is a good human being. Similarly, "Bob is good" might mean that Bob is an excellent human being all the while being a terrible dancer." But in such cases, Sue or

person's primary identification is as a human being and, as such, should be judged ethically as a human being.

Furthermore, there is an important sense in Aristotle's writing in which 'function' conveys a certain sense of what things *characteristically* do or can be expected to do; that is, there is a sense of expectation based upon categorization, and one is judged as x in terms of the expectations associated with x.[108] Thus, categorizations themselves—as human, woman, Catholic, black—confer certain expectations even if these expectations are not grounded in some form of biological essence or cosmic order.

The intimate relationship between ethics and identity is reiterated in Kwame-Anthony Appiah's work on the ethics of identity and in Ian Hacking's notion of *human kinds*. Appiah argues that the construction of one's identity is largely dependent upon the adoption of social identities or kinds of persons available in one's society, and that inherent to kinds of persons (whether man or woman, gay or straight, black or white, etc.) are ideas about how particular kinds of people are expected to behave. He appeals to Hacking's 'dynamic nominalism' which posits that "numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them."[109] Hacking distinguishes human kinds from natural kinds on this basis; that is,

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Bob are being primarily identified as *something* within the context of the situation. "Sue is good" implies that Sue is a good dancer within the context of a dance recital.

[108] See the glossary in Terence Irwin's translation of the Nichamachean ethics, page 331. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* 331.

[109] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 24.

human beings are themselves effected by the labels adopted or ascribed to them.[110] It makes no direct difference to the lake itself if it is called an ocean or not, although it might affect how we act towards the lake. In contrast, it makes a clear difference to a person if he is called a pedophile. This is, in part, because he will be treated differently and because human kinds (such as 'pedophile') have moral connotations. But more importantly, as Elizabeth Anscombe argues, a human's intentional actions are done under a description; I must understand a wide range of concepts, for example, to sign a contract. And, as Hacking argues, "as human kinds are made and molded, the field of descriptions changes and so do the actions that I can perform, I.e., the field of descriptions changes and so do the actions that I can perform, I.e., the field of human kinds affects the field of possible intentional actions."[111] As a result, human kinds have what Hacking calls a *looping effect*: since the classification itself of human kinds effects those that are classified, the characteristics of those classified changes, resulting in the classifiers having to change or modify the classification itself.[112]

Appiah builds on the work of Hacking and offers three central features of social identities to demonstrate the ethics and politics of identity.[113] First, Appiah argues that in

[110] Ian Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate,* ed. Dan Sperber, David Premack, and Ann James Premack (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 351-383. And, Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books* 16 (2006), http://fmf.vtu.lt/~ajuska/BIm-08/Bendras,%20seminarai,%20Maple/Genius.pdf.
[111] Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," 368-9. Hacking, "Making Up People," 81.
[112] Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," 366-367.
[113] Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*, 24, 65. Also see Appiah "The State and the Shaping of Identity," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, April 30, 2001, http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Appiah_02.pdf.

order for people to be recognized *as* members of a particular group—women or men,

black or white, straight or gay—these groups need to be part of the public discourse and

identifiable with certain criteria of ascription.[114] These terms are typically known and

have a criteria of ascription based upon stereotypes of appearance, character, and

behaviour. Recognition involves having expectations. As Hacking claims, "to acquire and

use a name for any kind is, among other things, to be willing to make generalizations and

form expectations about things of that kind."[115] Second, social identities are often

internalized by the individual who bears the label.[116] A human might identify *as* a woman,

as black, or *as* disabled, and internalizing these identities shapes one's emotions, actions,

and dictates how one ought to behave or look. A *real* woman might wear particular

clothes, desire to have children, or be able to cook. An ideal woman might appear thin

and delicate, have good mothering skills, and be able to cook well. A desire to be the

ideal woman often constitutes ones aspirations, and a failure to achieve these ends might

result in feelings of shame. Third, social identities result in patterns of behaviour towards

people *as* a woman, black, or disabled person.[117] People are treated *as* x at least in part

because they are identified *as* an x. As Appiah states, "in the current landscape of identity,

the treatment-as that is often in focus is invidious discrimination: … gender, sexuality, and

racial and ethnic identity have been profoundly shaped by histories of sexism,

homophobia, racism, and ethnic hatred."[118] In concluding, Appiah notes that issues of

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[114] Appiah, *Ethics of Identity,* 66.
[115] Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," 361.
[116] Appiah, *Ethics of Identity,* 68.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Appiah, "The State and the Shaping of Identity," 243.

identity are imperative for ethics because identity has crucial implications for how people shape and evaluate their lives; the importance for politics emerges from its implications for how we treat and evaluate others. We judge ourselves *as* a human kind, and we judge others as a human kind.

2.2.4. From Aristotle to Regulatory Ideals.

Before returning to the process of ideal-formation that results in regulatory ideals, I want to briefly summarize the main claims presented up to this point:

(1) Aristotelian ethics and the observations of Austin and Geach demonstrate that the excellence of an entity is determined on the basis of how that entity is primarily identified; that is, *x* can be judged as human, woman, student, soccer player, etc., and the judgment of x is determined on the basis of how we identify *x*. Furthermore, we judge ourselves by the identities that we take to be most crucial in constituting who we are and who we strive to be.

(2) In Aristotle's *teleological* biology and the pre-Cartesian world-picture outlined by Taylor, knowledge of *x* was sufficient to understand the excellent *x* because knowing *x* required knowing the function of *x* within the larger cosmic order. In the pre-Cartesian world-picture, function was determined within the context of God's project and expectations and excellence derive from that function.

(3) Despite the disappearance of *ontic logos* from our ontology, this structure of ideal-formation is still informative. This is reflected in Aristotle's writing in which "function" conveys a sense of what things characteristically do or can be expected to do.

Expectations derive from categorization and one is judged (by oneself and others) as *x* based on the expectations of *x*.

(4) As Appiah emphasizes, when we internalize social identities we also tend to internalize the social norms, expectations, and ideals that accompany the label. We internalize a social identity *x*, and with it, we often internalize an understanding of what constitutes the ideal *x*. And if a conception of what constitutes an "ideal" woman shapes my understanding of what will make me a better, more loveable woman, then internalizing social identities has the potential to shape my desires. The feeling of shame that emerges from my failure to attain a social norm or ideal indicates that the ideal *matters to me*; it's something that I desire. But this raises the question: do the ideals that I desire, that emerge from internalizing social identities and the social norms and expectations that come with the label, necessarily constitute excellence or flourishing? If so, to whom? To explore the possibility that ideals, in shaping our desires, could be regulatory and inhibit flourishing, I want to briefly revisit Aristotle's claims about virtue.

The outline of Aristotle's account of virtue in the previous discussion points to an ambiguity in which Aristotle can be understood as arguing for two independent, but related, thesis about the virtues. On the one hand, Aristotle can be understood to argue that (i) virtue is grounded in the function of the entity, and that this function is determined by the entity's biological essence; that is, the human being is a distinctly rational creature, and exercising this rational faculty constitutes its virtue. In short, Aristotle's teleological

biology grounds ethics in nature, and thus exhibits a form of realism.[119] On the other

hand, at times Aristotle can be understood as arguing that (ii) what constitutes the

excellence of *x* is determined in relation to a subject, its project, and its function within

that project. This knife is the ideal knife *for* cutting a steak; this horse is the ideal horse *for*

carrying its rider. In short, it's an instrumentalist account of the virtues. This sense of

Aristotle's account is captured in Alasdair MacIntyre's reformulation, which attempts to

provide a method for determining the excellence of persons, animals, or policy.

> To call x good (where x may be among other things a person or an animal or
> a policy or a state of affairs) is to say that it is the kind of x which someone
> would choose who wanted an x for the purposes for which x'es are
> characteristically wanted.[120]

According to this statement, the goodness of x is characterized independently of a cosmic

order but in relation to the desires for which a subject would typically choose x. For

example, knives are characteristically wanted to cut and the good knife is the kind of knife

that a subject would typically choose in order to cut. Teleology remains implicit. It's not

one that is grounded in nature, biology, or an *ontic logos*, but one that is grounded

socially within the context of a subject's project. Subject and object are implicit. The

excellence of an object is constituted by the subject's desires within the context of a

project. And furthermore, the excellence of an object is constituted by the desires and

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[119] This is generally the standard interpretation of Aristotle, and I think, ultimately the correct one. But some of Aristotle's examples — like the example of the horse — seem to explain function as emerging within the context of a project. This ambiguity might be, in part, because the *Nichomachean Ethics* is lecture notes. It might also be because the "constructivist" position is applicable to some objects (like a knife, or horse) and not applicable to others, like a human. It's not clear what the relevant difference between a human and a horse would be to distinguish its use.
[120] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 59.

projects of the generalized subject; that is, the excellence which is determined by particular circumstances and particular subjects, if universalized, is determined by that which someone would *typically* choose for the purposes for which x'es are *characteristically* wanted. And since the object can apparently be a person or an animal, the excellence of a person or animal is constituted by its relation to the generalized subject. The implication is that the excellence of a person or animal is derived from their *instrumental role* within the project of a generalized subject. This explains Aristotle's evaluation of the excellent horse: it's the horse that performs well in battle, gallops at great speeds for long distances, and carries the rider well. To call the horse good is to say that it's the kind of horse which someone would choose who wanted a horse for the purposes for which horses are characteristically wanted.

With MacIntyre's thesis understood descriptively as a means of understanding how ideals come into being, we can begin to understand how the ideals we might hold inhibit our flourishing. For starters, the above picture makes sense in determining the excellence of an instrument; that is, it makes sense to describe the excellence of a knife as being determined by the instrumental role it plays within the context of a subject's project. This is because the knife *is* an instrument. But when considering a horse example, we might think differently: the horse that performs well in battle and carries a rider might well be an excellent horse as an instrument for the generalized subject. But it's not clear that this constitutes flourishing for the horse itself. Similarly, if calling a person good is to make a claim about that person's instrumentality within the context of a generalized subject's project, and if I internalize this instrumentalist understanding of what constitutes my

betterment, then I might end up desiring an ideal that does not, actually, constitute my flourishing. Imagine that the good horse, as defined by Aristotle, could internalize the values that make him an excellent horse within the context of our projects. The horse would desire to be that ideal horse—to perform well in battle and carry its rider well—and it would feel shame when it failed to do so.

If this instrumentalist conception of ideal-formation extends to both animals and people, then the excellent woman, for instance, might also be determined within the context of a generalized subjects' project. This relates to Simone de Beauvoir's observation that within a patriarchal culture, women are typically identified in contrast to men as mere objects, while men are seen as bearing the marks of subjecthood and transcendence. Woman is seen as "vehicle for man's desire and delight" and is "that subject whom patriarchy has made the quintessential object of the dominating subject's gaze and thus 'the inessential' 'Other'."[121] Patriarchal society has a woman identifying her body as "carnal passivity," "a carnal object" and that she ought to "identify herself with her whole body."[122] Ultimately, "to feel oneself a woman is to feel oneself a desirable object" but also a weak, passive one—the "fleshly prey" of a stronger desiring subject.[123]

What emerges, then, is a framework that can act as a mechanism in which power can be propagated; the ideal woman, as object, is defined in terms of man and his projects. By internalizing the "ideal woman for man" as "ideal woman" she judges herself

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[121] Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and The Second Sex: A Pragmatist Reading of a Feminist Classic," *Hypatia* 4 (2003), 106-136. 118-19.
[122] ibid.
[123] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second* Sex (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1989), 637. Cited in Shusterman, "Somaethetics and The Second Sex," 118-19.

in light of what might not necessarily constitute her own flourishing, but only her

excellence in relation to man and his projects. The ideal can be manipulated to operate as

a mechanism of power—as a means to mask constraining qualities (passivity, domesticity,

docility) as models to be desired. This was John Stuart Mill's observation about feminine

ideals:

> The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they
> turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. All women are
> brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of
> character is the very opposite to that of men; not self will, and government
> by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of other. All the
> moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current
> sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete
> abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.[124]

Similarly, for Richard Rorty, this demonstrates the way in which language and values can

be manipulated to control people. The language spoken by slaves is controlled by their

masters, and "their ability to make the slave think of his or her pain as fated and even

somehow deserved, something to be borne rather than resisted."[125] Such internalized

ideals act as regulatory ideals that operate not as a means of flourishing but as a means of

suppression.

This argument, although brief, is meant to raise the possibility that societal ideals,

which appeal to our desire to be better and more loveable—have the potential to inhibit,

rather than promote flourishing. This is what Bordo argues, persuasively, with respect to

feminine ideals. And shame often results in our failure to obtain an ideal state—an

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[124] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), 27.
[125] Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1990), 26.

emotion that tends to accompany a sense of deficiency, and provide us with the motivation to become better, more loveable people. To judge whether the shame is justified is, in part, to make a judgment about the ideal that it arises in response to. And this judgment requires a standard that will allow us to determine if an ideal is, in fact, ideal, or if it is regulatory in some sense. Although this task is beyond the scope of this thesis, the above discussion has raised important questions that need to be asked in any such judgment of ideals. If x is an ideal x, for whom is it ideal? If the judgment of an entity is dependent upon our identification and understanding of that entity, then what aspects of that entity are morally relevant for our judgment? Should we appeal to some universal needs of human beings to explain why a conception of the ideal woman is incompatible with what constitutes flourishing for a human? Or should we look to construct new identities, and with them, new standards of judgment?

2.3. Seeking Normality.

> The price of normalcy and the cost of avoiding what is not normal are high, especially when surgical procedures, often repeated, are intrusive, painful, time-consuming, emotionally wrenching, minimally helpful in improving the body's functionality (and sometimes, as in the case of genital surgery, impede function), and expensive. Against all these material and emotional costs are placed the advantages of normalcy, or at least the appearance of normalcy.
> — Eva Feder Kittay[126]

> Why is it that doctors and physicians classify acne vulgaris as a non-serious disease, when it can cause so much depression and damage in someone's life[?]
> — Neos.[127]

2.3.1. "Normal" as a Metaconcept.

In the discussion of ideals, we were ultimately led to some important insights about the normative judgment of kinds. For starters, Aristotle's ethics demonstrates that judgments about the excellence of an entity are based upon how an entity is primarily identified. And whereas Aristotle principally talks about function in terms of a teleological biology, rooted in human nature, there's an important sense in his writing in which function conveys a certain sense of what things characteristically do or can be expected to do. In other words, there is a sense of expectation based upon categorization, and one is judged as x in terms of the expectations and characteristics associated with x. Thus, categorizations confer certain expectations even if these expectations are not grounded in

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[126] Eva Feder Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normality," *Surgically Shaping Children: Technology, Ethics, and the Pursuit of Normality*, ed. Erik Parens (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006) 90.
[127] Neos (September 4, 2011) "WHY CAN"T THEY INVENT A CURE FOR ACNE!?!?!, It's the 21st century!" http://www.acne.org/messageboard/CAN-T-INVENT-CURE-ACN-t303516.html.

some form of biological essence or cosmic order. This is the case with functional kinds and human kinds. If x is a spoon then I have certain expectations about the function of the spoon, and my judgment about the ideal spoon emerges from these expectations. A sense of what is expected or characteristic of a woman might emerge from the perceived function of a woman within the context of the life-project of a male-subject, and the concept of the ideal woman emerges from these expectations.

We can begin to understand where normality fits within this framework. Like the ideal, the normal is a metaconcept; that is, "normal" has no definite meaning in itself but only in conjunction with a noun. In order to answer "is x normal?" one must first answer "a normal what?" "This is a normal spoon." "Bob is a normal child." "She is a normal woman." Even a statement like "Bob is normal" still implies that Bob is a normal child, man, or father—however Bob is primarily identified within the context of the statement.

And when we start to describe what is expected, typical, or characteristic of a child (or other kind) we are using language that evokes what it is to be a normal instance of a kind. A typical child characteristically starts walking between nine and twelve months. A normal child starts walking between nine and twelve months. A child that doesn't walk until after twelve months is atypical, abnormal, and potentially pathological. But if a child starts walking before nine months, would we consider that child abnormal? The child is a statistical anomaly, but does this imply that the child is abnormal or subnormal? Or is that child exceptional, and perhaps even an ideal child?

These questions require us to clarify the multiple meanings and uses of the term "normal." On the one hand, it's a concept that sometimes evokes a sense of mediocrity

and the mundane; the artist doesn't strive to paint a normal painting nor does the rebellious teenager explicitly strive to be your average teenager. For some, the normal state is something to be transcended and improved upon as we work to build ourselves towards a state of perfection. But for others—and indeed, for those suffering with acne and acne scars—normality seems to be the goal. To be normal is to be a healthy, functioning member of society. To be normal is to offer a respite from the stigma and danger associated with being abnormal. To be normal is to fit in. The goal is to explicate these different senses of normality in an effort to explain when and why the normal state is often desirable and why the abnormal or subnormal state is undesirable. And to explicate the different senses of the normal, it will be useful to look at the history of the concept.

2.3.2. "Normal" According to Durkheim, Quetelet, and Galton.

For Ian Hacking the concepts of 'normality' and the 'normal' are products of the nineteenth-century rooted in a particular history and culture.[128] In England, the word 'normal' in the sense of "usual, regular, common, typical" can be traced back to an 1828 translation from a work in French biology, becoming common only in the 1840s. In France, the *école normales* of the French Revolution provided us with the sense of 'normal' which connotes a 'standard' through the application of standardized norms for educating revolutionary citizens. The 'typical' sense of the word became popularized in

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[128] Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 165-66., also Ian Hacking, "Normal People," *Modes of Thought: Explorations in Culture and Cognition*, ed. David Olson, Nancy Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

French primarily through the work of novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac. It was in Balzac's 1833 *Eugénie Grandet* that Mlle d'aubrion's nose was described as "yellowish in the normal state, but completely red after dinner, a sort of plant-like phenomenon."[129] It wasn't long, Hacking notes, before the use of the 'normal state' spread beyond the physical to descriptions of behaviour: *La Cousine Better* (1847), for example, described laziness as the normal state of the artist.

Influenced by Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, Hacking argues that it was primarily in the medical history of the normal/pathological that the sense of "normalcy as typical" emerged. Canguilhem traces the origins of the normal/pathological binary to the work of French physician F.J.V. Broussais (1772-1838) who argued for a continuum between the normal and pathological and that an understanding of each was informative of the other. Within this context, the word 'normal' came to denote the *healthy* state of an organ, contrasted with the *pathological* or *unhealthy* state of an organ. On the surface, the terms are descriptive—the normal descriptively denotes the healthy and the pathological descriptively denotes the unhealthy. But within this context, health is clearly desirable: the healthy kidney, heart, lung, or spleen is clearly desirable over the diseased organ. And since the healthy organ is desirable, in equating the normal organ with the healthy organ the normal state also becomes desirable. Thus, the word 'normal' in the medical context exhibits one of the fundamental features of the normal, namely, that it manages to describe how things *are* but also how they *ought* to be.[130] In other words, the word 'normal' has the ability to simultaneously bridge the fact/value distinction

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[129] Quotation from Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance,*166.
[130] Hacking, "Normal People," 65.

by making implicit normative claims hidden in the guise of descriptive claims. The normal heart is the healthy heart, and because the healthy heart is a desirable heart the *normal heart* is also the *desirable heart*.

The ability of the word 'normal' to bridge the normative/descriptive cleavage can be traced back to geometry in which the *norma* or *normal* is synonymous with *orthogonal,* meaning perpendicular or at a right angle.[131] Within this context, the word 'normal' is descriptive insofar as a line can be normal or not, but it can also be evaluative insofar as an angle can be a right (perpendicular to a line) and a *right* angle (a good angle). Hacking notes that this feature of the 'ortho' carries through to modern medical discourse: Orthodontists straighten a child's crooked teeth and, in doing so, they *right* or improve her teeth. Braces and retainers are used to straighten teeth with the aim at making them normal—a simultaneously descriptive and normative claim about the way children's teeth ought to be. Similarly, Orthopsychiatrists attempt to make a child normal through the study of mental disorders in children, while Orthopaedics are concerned with correcting and straightening the musculoskeletal system.[132]

For Hacking, one of two primary notions of 'normality' emerged from this medical context of the normal; that is, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim promoted a concept of the normal as desirable, a tradition rooted in the works of Auguste Comte and Broussais.[133] Indeed, Hacking argues that Comte was the first to lift the concept of the normal state from the medical discourse and use it to describe society. With Comte, the

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[131] Hacking, *Taming of Chance*, 162-163.
[132] ibid., 162-63., Hacking "Normal People," 65.
[133] Hacking, "Normal People," 67. Hacking, *Taming of Chance*, 168-9.

"normal ceased to be the ordinary healthy state; it became the purified state to which we should strive, and to which our energies are tending. In short, progress and the normal state became inextricably linked."[134] In describing problems with Biology, for example, Comte wrote that it "is now less close to the normal state than it was at the beginning of the century."[135] The normal state came to denote an ideal state; progress aimed towards the normal state. We find these ideas extended and expressed in the work of Durkheim. In particular, Durkheim's functionalist view of the normal is evident in his positing of crime as normal; that is, crime is seen as a necessary, functional entity for a healthy society insofar as punishment of crime reinforces its fundamental values. At its basis, Durkheim is still operating within the medical context of the normal, viz., the normal state is conceived as desirable and healthy.

But there is also an important sense in which the normal describes something as being *mediocre* or *average* and as something to be overcome. Hacking finds this sense of the 'normal' in the work of Galton and traced back to the work of Adolph Quetelet (1796-1874).[136] It was in the 1840s that Quetelet famously envisioned *l'homme moyen*—an image of the average man developed through the measurement of human features with the deviation plotted around the mean. He started with human physical features, like the chests of Scottish Highland regiment soldiers, and moved on to moral and intellectual qualities including suicide, crime, madness, and even poetic ability. For Quetelet, the average body presented an ideal beauty; the normal, conceived of average, emerged as an

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[134] Hacking, *Taming of Chance*, 168.
[135] ibid.
[136] ibid., 168-169.

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ideal type to be desired. It was Quetelet that formulated the BMI initially through the measurement of typical weights among French and Scottish conscripts. Instead of labeling the peak of the bell-curve as merely normal, he labeled it 'ideal', with those deviating either 'overweight' or 'underweight' instead of "heavier than average" or "lighter than average."[137] Thus, while informed by statistics, Quetelet was still working within the medical context of the normal; that is, he envisioned the normal (i.e., typical) as the ideal or something desirable. It was Galton who, while building upon Quetelet's notion of the "average man" (a product of measurement and statistics), affected an important twist: instead of positing the normal as healthy and desirable, Galton equated the normal with the mediocre. Within this tradition the normal state is to be transcended, improved upon, and overcome.

The tradition of Durkheim and Quetelet emphasize an important relationship between ideals and the normal: the normal state and the ideal state can become intertwined, with one, in effect, becoming the other. For both men, the normal emerged as a new ideal: the normal state was the perfect state, and something to strive towards. The perfect good was identified with the normal state.

But within this framework, what are we to make of the atypical that is nevertheless valued? For instance, consider someone like Lynne Cox who has the ability to swim in near-freezing temperatures for sustained periods of time. In a purely descriptive, statistical

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[137] Heyes, *Line Drawings*, 33.

sense, Cox is not typical.[138] Her ability is unusual and an anomaly. But does this make her abnormal? Here, Eva Feder Kittay's distinction between the anomalous and the abnormal is useful.[139] Cox's ability to swim in near-freezing water is anomalous in the sense that it's clearly a unique variation that is atypical of human beings. And yet, her ability is not considered abnormal because it is not considered pathological. The language is important: we are discussing her *ability* and this ability provides increased *function* and, thus, is not seen as requiring a fix. The language continues to operate within the discourse of medicine, the tradition of Durkheim and Quetelet, and we continue to use the language of expectation, function, and ability as they pertain to kinds.

This explains why abnormality is, in effect, equivalent to subnormality. Anomalies considered to be functionally beneficial—those that are considered to be an improvement upon the average—are thought to be mere variation and not abnormal. On this model, Shaquille O'Neil, Donavan Bailey, and Heidi Klum are all statistically anomalous, but are still considered normal. When function is considered, ideals still matter: all three people are considered closer to an ideal that is anomalous, but not abnormal. In short, one is abnormal if and only if one is subnormal.

2.3.3. The Desirability of Normality.

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[138] Eva Feder Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normality," *Surgically Shaping Children: Technology, Ethics, and the Pursuit of Normality*, ed. Erik Parens (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006) 96.
[139] Eva Feder Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normality," 96.

If being abnormal is equivalent to being subnormal, then it starts to become clear why being abnormal is undesirable.

What is deemed abnormal is often the result of a perceived functional inadequacy.[140] The importance of the discourse on functional adequacy is especially evident in disability studies, where disabilities are potentially thought to be abnormal because those with disabilities are perceived to be functionally inadequate or deficient. But as many disabled people are quick to note, function is

> often a socially construed and constructed conception of functional adequacy, both because what may be considered a suitable functional capacity is subject to social negotiation, and because social institutions either promote or inhibit functional capacity by the ways in which they are constructed.[141]

In other words, social practices and institutions *lead* to functional constraints. In a different world, the disabled might be considered merely anomalous and not abnormal.

> The claim that some variations are considered pathologies not because they necessarily entail functional limitations, but because social practices and institutions lead to functional constrains is one frequently made to disability.[142]

Take the example of homosexuality. In many parts of the world, being a homosexual has clear functional repercussions. But these are repercussions are strictly social in origin: the discrimination and stigma, danger, and limitations of legal rights are all functional repercussions that could be rectified if society was different. And, as Kittay notes, "once an anomalous condition comes to have functional repercussions by virtue of social

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[140] Kittay, 97.
[141] ibid., 97.
[142] ibid., 97-98.

intolerance of the anomaly, then the desire for the normal may be seen to be simply the desire for functional capacity, a desire that is hardly puzzling."[143]

The same desire for functional capacity is found in the desire for normality amongst those suffering with acne and acne scars. As illustrated near the beginning of this thesis, most people that suffer with acne are not suffering with the acne itself but are suffering with the stigma attached to having acne. The acne might cause minor discomfort, but the actual physical pain caused by acne is a relatively minor and functional impairment is almost non-existent. Indeed, for those with acne scars there is *no* physical discomfort or functional impairment whatsoever. Thus, people express their hate towards a society that hates acne: "I don't really have a problem with acne. I have a problem with other people who have a problem with it."[144] The functional implications of acne are certainly an issue, but these are seen to be entirely social in origin. Many people complain that acne prevents them from finding a partner, having friends, or getting a job. Their life-projects are harmed by the advent of acne and scars. As a result, the desire to be normal is often the desire for functional capacity—the desire to find a partner, get a good job, or to be social.

And much of the medical literature directed at acne also focuses upon the functional repercussions of acne within a social context. Dr. Del Rosso, for example, was quick to point out the psychological difficulties faced by people with rosacea and acne, with the treatment of acne being presented as a legitimate treatment of a distressed

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[143] ibid.
[144] omarcomin, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne? Message posted to http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html#

psychology and the potential social-impairments that may result. The treatment of acne

becomes necessary not due to the physical pain or impairment caused by these relatively

benign spots, but because of the psychological pain and social impairment that may

result. Again, Kittay proves prescient:

> Even when there are functional aspects to the anomaly, the surgical fix is
> rarely directed at these consequences of the condition, and so the question
> of if and when to engage in surgery is more directed at the functional
> consequences that result from the lack of social value, in other words, social
> stigma.[145]

An interesting cyclical reinforcement is in effect. The thought of being subnormal is often

what results in the psychological distress that many people have, and it results in the

thinking that it will harm their life-projects, whether that includes finding a partner or

getting a good job. But then the psychological distress and social impairment that results

from being perceived as subnormal are used, notably by the medical community, to

reinforce the claim that acne and acne scars are abnormal conditions that legitimately

need treatment in order to be fixed. It's less clear why acne and acne scars might be

conceived as subnormal in the first place, and why this would result in psychological

distress and social impairment. Part of the answer might be found in looking at the

coerciveness or normative-weight of the normal.

As previously noted, one of the unique attributes of the normal is its ability to

simultaneously make descriptive and normative claims, viz., Durkheimian-normality

posits the normal state as a desirable state. In this context, the normal-state is often

posited as an ideal-state, and thus, the normative impositions of ideals would seem to

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[145] Kittay, 98.

apply to the normal. And yet, there is a sense in which 'the normal' has greater normative

weight than 'the ideal'. To accuse someone or something of being abnormal or subnormal

as opposed to being less than ideal is to make a stronger, more coercive claim. To

conceive of having an abnormal body causes more anxiety and self-loathing than merely

having a less-than-ideal body. How do we make sense of this intuition?

Let us recollect how ideals operate: inherently valued, they operate as models to be

aimed at, progressed towards, and emulated. They operate by means of comparison and

the revelation of discrepancy, and through an understanding of discrepancies between

ourselves and the ideal we can move towards improving ourselves. And just as noting the

discrepancies between an average knife and an ideal knife will help us to improve our

knife designs, noting discrepancies between ourselves and ideal moral figures will help us

to become better people. Being made conscious of the discrepancy between oneself and

an ideal often results in shame and anguish, but these feelings are often deemed

acceptable because they indicate a motivation to become a better person.

The normal, as Francis Ewald argues, also operates as a model to be referenced in

which kinds can be measured and compared.[146] Cresssida Heyes explains that the normal

"concerns the production of models and standards against which populations can be

assessed."[147] But within this system of normalization, "there are no absolute standards of

good, perfection, or beauty, only relative measures within a local scale of meaning" which

nevertheless "provide excellent intersubjective communiciative and organizational

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[146] Francis Ewald, "Norms, Discipline, and the Law," *Representations* 30 (1990): 138-161.
The main bulk of the discussion comes from Heyes, *Self-Transformations,* 33-34.
[147] Heyes, *Self-Transformations,* 33.

strategies in the absence of any transcendental values."[148] These models allow for the

measurement of the individual in comparison with the normal and mark her statistical

deviance, establishing the "statistically typical individual and her developmental path"

while positing "a norm and degrees of divergence from it."[149] The revelation of

discrepancy between oneself and the norm often results in shame, anxiety, and a deep

desire to mitigate the discrepancy.

When it comes to ideals, Davis' earlier account demonstrates that they need not

imply an expectation of conformity because they can be recognized as ultimately

unattainable. The Greek ideal of beauty was certainly desired and valued, but there was a

recognition that it was unattainable for any mortal being. There was, therefore, no

expectation that one conform to the ideal. This example demonstrates that ideals are, *a

priori*, valued but do not necessarily imply an "ought" of conformity. Take another

example, that of the ideal knife: it is reasonable to claim that an average, typical knife is

an acceptable knife if it gets the job done. The ideal knife is certainly a desirable knife—it

is something to be valued—but when I look at my knife drawer, I do not necessarily think

to myself that my average knife *ought* to be an ideal knife. Put negatively, I do not

necessarily condemn my average knife for not being the ideal knife. This distinction is

subtle but important: an ideal is valued but this does not necessarily imply that the non-

ideal is deficient.

In contrast, Hacking's analysis demonstrates that Durkheimian-normality posits the

normal as both *desirable* and as *typical*. Within the medical context, if something is

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[148] Ibid., 34.
[149] ibid.

abnormal then it is subnormal. It is diseased. And if something is subnormal then it is deficient of a quality that it needs in order to be normal. It needs to be fixed. The normative weight (or coerciveness) is greater than the purely ideal-based model on the basis of the tension between the *expectation* to be normal and the *desirability* to be normal. If I stand in reference to the normal, I am both expected to be normal and it is desirable to be normal (i.e., healthy, absent of disease). In contrast, if I stand in reference to the ideal, I am not expected to be the ideal but it is desirable. In other words, the normal is expected and desirable; the ideal is merely desirable. Durkheimian-normality imbues the valued, referenced model with a sense of expectation and this accounts for its increased normative-weight. If something is typical then it implies an expectation. If a typical knife cuts meat, then I have the expectation that when I encounter an object identified as a knife that it will cut meat. Whereas it seemed unreasonable to suggest that a knife ought to be an ideal knife, it does not seem absurd to suggest that a knife ought to be a normal, typical knife. The word "ought" here is ambiguous—there is the sense in which "ought" implies "obligation", and the sense in which "ought" implies "expectation." These two meanings are interrelated: when discussing moral obligations that involve agency, one might be *expected and obligated* to take care of an elderly parent or give money to the poor. But because an artifact (like a knife) does not have agency we cannot ascribe it with the obligation to be a certain way, only with an expectation. The distinction is less clear in other circumstances: you might be expected to look a certain way or behave a certain way, but does this imply obligation? The normative weight of the normal implies *expectation* if not always obligation.

2.3.4. The Normalized-Ideal.

While Hacking's analysis of Durkheim-normality demonstrates that the normal state could be posited as an ideal or perfect state to be desired, numerous feminists have argued that through the advent of new technologies the ideal-body has been normalized. Susan Wendell argues in 'The Flight From the Rejected Body' that the advent of new technologies and increased distribution of images results in the increased distribution of images featuring beautiful people that specifically meet ideals of feminine beauty.[150] As Wendell writes, "[n]ow it is possible for the images of a few people to drive out the reality of most people we actually encounter."[151] The apparent norm is skinnier than the actual norm. The apparent norm is blonder than the actual norm. The apparent norm has bigger breasts than the actual norm. As a result, ideals of the female body presented on television become conflated with our conceptions of what is physically normal, "increasing the number of people whose bodies are regarded by themselves and others as abnormal and socially unacceptable."[152] In other words, the ideal body becomes the apparently normal body. The ideal is, statistically, anomalous—an entirely rare set of features belonging to a small minority. Thus, the apparent normal-body is actually an anomalous, ideal body.

Susan Bordo and Catherine Valentine make similar arguments. Bordo notes that digital, computer-altered bodies are unlike any real bodies, and that "our expectations,

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[150] Susan Wendell, 85. "The Flight from the Rejected Body", *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 86.
[151] ibid.
[152] ibid.

our desires, our judgments about bodies, are becoming dictated by the digital."[153] She

argues that our perception is malleable, to some extent, insofar as digital media is training

us to see in a certain way — in a way that makes us more conscious of our "flaws" and in

a way that alters our perceptions of what is normal. Valentine's study of college women

found that many of her students experienced profound guilt, anxiety and self-loathing in

noting the discrepancy between their imperfect bodies and the perfect bodies that they see

on television and in print media.[154] She cites Meyrowitz' notion of the "mediated

generalized other" as avoiding "face-to-face encounters… and is shared by millions of

others."[155] The mediated generalized other is formed through the repeated images of

beautiful women found on television and in print media, resulting in a notion of the

normal body that is anything but normal.

But insofar as the ideal becomes normalized, as argued above by Wendell, Bordo

and Valentine, the ideal is also impinged with the normative weight of the 'normal'; that

is, it is impinged with the 'ought' of expectation to conform rather than mere desire. This

is brought out in Valentine's study: she notes that students experienced profound shame

and anxiety in the face of discrepancy between themselves and the perfect bodies they see

on television.[156] But Valentine notes that it is not the discrepancy between themselves and

the ideal-*as* ideal that causes them profound shame, it is the discrepancy between

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[153] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (London: University of California Press, 1993), xviii.
[154] Catherine Valentine, "Female Bodily Perfection and the Divided Self," *Ideals of Feminine Beauty: Philosophical, Social, and Cultural Dimensions,* ed. Karen A. Callaghan. Greenwood press, 1994. 113-123. 116.
[155] ibid., 118.
[156] ibid., 116.

themselves and the "mediated generalized other," that is, between themselves and the

normalized-ideal that is typically presented through modern technologies. Instead of

thinking that it would be ideal or merely desirable, to have larger breasts, one thinks that

their small breasts are deficient. They ought to, or are expected to have larger breasts. "To

the extent that a woman falls short, she experiences herself as failing to be what she

should be—failing to be the woman that other women in fact are…"[157] Therefore, there is

an increased tension between the ideal (which is largely unattainable) and the normative

weight of the normalized ideal (which is expected).

In other words, the merely valued does not imply 'can'; the 'ought' does imply

'can'. As Kant famously claims, when we say that someone ought to do A then this implies

that the subject *can* do A.[158] We can interpret Kant's claim in a few ways: that it is

pointless to say that someone ought to do A if they cannot, or that it is morally wrong to

say that someone ought to do A if they cannot do A. But the analysis up to this point

demonstrates a dynamic in which someone ought to or is expected to *be* A (have the ideal

body) but cannot be A. Thus, as Susan Wendell suggests, the beauty industry offers itself

as an 'enabler' or the 'can' in this dynamic.[159] Wendell notes that ideals sell products and

services—makeup, cosmetic surgery, weight-loss programs, and clothing are industries

that are helped by the existence of bodily ideals that require the purchase and use of these

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[157] Eva Feder Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normality," 106- 107.

[158] Although the slogan does not explicitly appear in any of Kant's writings, the idea is present in many of his ethical writings. Roger White argues that it's especially present in Kant's proof of the existence of freedom. Roger M. White, "'Ought' implies 'can': Kant and Luther, a Contrast," *Kant and his influence*, ed. George Ross, Tony McWalter, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 1-73, 4.

[159] Wendell, "Flight from the Rejected Body," 86.

products and services. If the ideal is unattainable, and the promise of attainment continues through consumption, and the normalized-ideal presents a weightier normative commitment, then these industries will continue to be funded. The most successful weight-loss program, commercially, is the one that continually fails but always promises to work. The normalized-ideals increase the desire to re-enroll in such programs.

And this helps us answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Is the success of cosmetic products like Proactiv the result of a cultural obsession with bodily ideals, or is it the result of the desire for normality? In short, those suffering with acne and acne scars might, consistently, be desiring merely normal skin in one sense while also desiring perfect skin in another sense. If perfect skin has been normalized through the advent of magazines, television programs, and the Internet, in which everyone shown has perfect skin, then perfect skin becomes normalized. When some users of acne.org claim that all they want is to have normal skin, their sense of what constitutes normal skin is the perfect, blemish-free skin they see on television everyday. And when Proactiv markets their product as a means to achieve normal skin they are not only suggesting that acne is abnormal, but that perfect, blemish-free skin is normal. In makes perfect sense for Proactiv to do this: having acne is not only less than ideal, it's abnormal, and this ensures that people adamantly use Proactiv to prevent or treat their "subnormal" skin.

At this point it is important to recognize that not all motivations for cosmetic surgery or the purchase of enhancement technologies like Proactiv can be reduced to a single narrative—the reasons can be as diffuse and varied as the individuals that produce them. Some people might use Proactiv with the explicit intent of achieving perfect skin,

while others might be motivated out of the desire to appear normal. Some might undergo cosmetic surgery to emulate the lips of Angelina Jolie or the breasts of Scarlett Johansson in a bid to overcome Galtonian-normality and become exceptionally beautiful, while others might seek to reduce the appearance of wrinkles that they feel are subnormal for their age.

This is an important objection and raises the necessary and familiar distinction between *treatment* and *enhancement*.[160] As Wilson explains, treatments "fix a problem" or "make someone well" with wellness being understood as the "normal condition ... to which one is restored."[161] In contrast, enhancements result in someone being "better than well" moving them *beyond* the normal condition.[162] Given this distinction, those seeking enhancement are working within the structure of ideals; that is, they are seeking to improve their appearance towards an ideal and improve upon the Galtonian-normal, mediocre appearance. In contrast, those seeking treatment are working within the Durkheimian structure of *the normal as desirable.* This distinction is often blurred due to the complex relation between ideals and norms, and the relationship between the Galtonian and Durkheimian sense of the normal: Is breast enhancement really an enhancement or a treatment? Do we seek acne scar treatment or skin enhancement? Do skin-care products *cure* wrinkles and return skin to its normal state?

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[160] Robert A. Wilson,"Where Do Ideas About Human Variation Come From: Disability and Sub-Normalcy in Health and Medicine", unpublished manuscript, 2009. 4.
[161] ibid.
[162] ibid. Hence the title of Carl Elliot's *Better than Well* — a book that explores enhancement technologies. Note that I used enhancement technologies with regards to acne treatment products like Accutane and Proactiv. But these products are positioned explicitly as "treatments" and thus, with returning the skin to its "normal" state —which might, as I have argued, be an ideal state.

2.3.5. Normality, Human Kinds, and Recognition.

There's a further sense in which normality is desired, and it relates to our aspiration to be recognized for who we consider ourselves to be. As noted, normal is a metaconcept—it has no definite meaning by itself, but only when used in conjunction with a noun. It can be used in conjunction with functional kinds, like in the description of spoons or hammers, and it can be used in conjunction with human kinds. When we think about what it means for an object to be a normal spoon, it's necessary to think about the typical characteristics and expectations that we associate with a spoon. Similarly, when we think of what it means for something to be a normal woman or child, we do so with an understanding of what typically characterizes a woman or child. The typical woman might be characterized as a mother, as having long hair, a slender appearance, etc., and our sense of what constitutes a normal woman is linked to these expected characteristics. Our identities, and those of others, are shaped by the human kinds with which we identify and with which others identify us, and in order for us to be recognized as members of a particular kind, these kinds need to be part of the public discourse and identifiable with certain criteria of ascription. As Appiah notes, these criteria of ascription are often based upon stereotypes of appearance, character, and behaviour.[163]

Part of our desire to be a normal *x* is the desire to be confirmed or recognized as *x*. Implicit in the desire to be a normal woman is the desire to be recognized as a woman. For Eva Feder Kittay, implicit in her desire to have a normal family is the desire to be

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[163] Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*, 66-68.

recognized by others as a family. "When recognition that one is a family is denied, the acceptance and inclusion of such attitudes and inclusion of such attitudes, understanding, and gestures are not forthcoming and one feels isolated, undermined, and not valued."[164] The confirmation that one is a family requires recognition by others, and such recognition is ultimately dependent upon meeting certain expectations of what constitutes a typical family. As Kittay claims, "recognition requires that we meet and act in accordance with expectations and norms determined by what is normal for that category."[165] These norms, although social in origin are not merely imposed from outside; "they are internalized as our own understanding of what it means to be of that sort."[166] We struggle with recognition when we fall outside of the norms because we fall outside (or on the fringe) of the concepts that make us intelligible to others. As such, when the ideal female body becomes normalized, the woman falls short of what appears to be "normal" and experiences herself as "failing to be what she should be—failing to be the woman that other women in fact are and what a woman must be if she is to be the object of desire."[167] This comes across more fully when someone is described as a *real* woman—a *real* woman has characteristics that constitute a typical woman, and she is, in a sense, more *of* a woman than other so-called women.

We see the same relationship between acne and identity when looking at Proactiv advertisements and the language of authenticity employed by the users of acne.org. Consider the Proactiv advertisement featuring Allegra that was discussed near the

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[164] Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normalcy," 103.
[165] ibid.
[166] ibid.
[167] ibid., 106-107.

beginning of the thesis. Allegra, a twenty-one year old woman, complains that with acne she looks like she's twelve. In order to have the confidence that she desires her skin needs to start "looking the way it should." The language Allegra employs suggests that, especially as an adult woman, there is an expectation that one's skin is clear of acne. It doesn't look the way it should for a woman. And only after her skin is clear is she ready to pronounce that she is a "confident woman." Finally, she is able to just be herself: "I can just be me," she claims. As a result of acne, Allegra's appearance was perceived to be an impediment to recognition. She failed to meet the perceived expectations that adult women do not have acne, and because of that she didn't authentically appear to be herself. Proactiv allows her to be more authentically herself.

But it's not clear why recognition is so important in our lives, and it's not clear why authenticity—as it is oddly construed—is so valued. What does it mean for Allegra to claim that she can finally "be herself"? What does this suggest about the relationship between identity, the body, and society? These are questions that will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Authenticity, Recognition, and Somatic Alienation.

3.1. The Body as a Medium.

What does it mean when one someone suffering with acne claims to "want my life back and the real me to come out of hiding?"[168] Why does the presence of acne cause a person to feel "trapped in a face that [isn't] mine, yearning to escape?"[169] And why do some of those who have successfully treated their acne claim to "rediscover themselves?" "On my third month of Accutane, I saw my face—really saw it—for the first time since I was a child."[170] "I didn't recognize myself in the mirror," another Proactive user claims, but without acne "I know that people see me for myself, with clear skin."[171]

The goal of this chapter is to articulate assumptions about the self and the body that make claims of authenticity both frequent and intelligible, not only for those suffering with acne but for those marketing cosmetic products. Of particular interest are common phrases that appeal to a "*real* me" and the need for others to "see me for who I *truly* am." Do such statements suggest that I cannot, in a sense, be the *real* me? If there is a real me, is there also a false me? On what basis do I determine whether the reflection I see in a mirror is the real me or a false me? The intelligibility of such statements depends on certain assumptions about the self: that there is an "inside" and an "outside" to a person, with the "inside" being identified with the self; that the "outside" can represent who we

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[168] tv_viewer, (2009, December 28). Christine's Accutane Diary, My Second Accutane Course. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/Christine-s-Accutane-Diar-t256862.html.
[169] bumbum, (2009, March 18). how i cured my scars, acne scars. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/cured-scars-t229780.html.
[170] kitkate, (2011, July 16). Why do you dislike acne?
[171] "Donna Carlson, 41," Proactiv, accessed July 15, 2011, http://www.proactiv.com/stories/customer/donna-carlson.php.

are on the "inside" so that others will be able to recognize the individual that we truly are; and that recognition by others for who we truly are on the "inside" is part of an ideal of authenticity that people should strive towards.

I want to start by exploring a picture of the body that is articulated by Richard Shusterman — it's an image with roots in Plato, and it is one in which the body is viewed primarily as a medium.[172] Shusterman explores this notion of the body by first positing the concept of 'medium'. What is a medium? He notes that its etymology (*meson, medius, Mittel, moyen*) suggests that a medium is "something that stands in the middle, typically between two other things or terms, between which it mediates."[173] Since the medium is in between two things or terms, it acts as an interface between two things or terms — it "connects the mediated terms and separates them by standing between them."[174] The medium is a means to an end, but it also stands in the way— "a distance to be traveled between purpose and its fulfillment."[175]

For Plato, the body is a medium that stands in the way of achieving knowledge.[176] In the *Phaedo*, Plato famously argues that the body is a poor medium to truth, and in many instances, stands in the way of obtaining truth. It does so by providing "innumerable distractions," "filling us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get a chance to think at all about

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[172] Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art,* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 144-146.
[173] ibid., 145.
[174] ibid.
[175] ibid.
[176] ibid., 145-146.

anything."[177] Upon thinking, the body will "intrude once more… interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth."[178] The senses aren't to be trusted: they often falsely represent the world, and through them we are often deceived.

Claims like those that wish for others to "see me for who I truly am," reflect the status of the body, its appearance and behaviour, as acting as a medium in the social realm. In other words, such statements assume that the appearance and behaviour of the body has the function of indicating to others who we are on the inside. As a medium, the body acts as an interface between one's internal identity and the recognition from others of one's identity. It is a means to an end, but potentially stands in the way of recognition. If someone feels like a woman "on the inside" but has the body of a man, she often feels the need to rectify this—to have her body modified so that it authentically reflects who she feels she is on the inside. Those struggling with authenticity often undergo arduous and painful procedures to modify their recalcitrant flesh so that their body, as a medium, authentically represents their true self. Cosmetic surgery presents itself as a kind of identity-resolution: their ugly body fails to authentically reflect their inner beauty.

When the body is perceived to act as a medium, a picture of the self that assumes a distinction between *inner* and *outer* emerges—the inner being identified with the self, the outer with the body. Charles Taylor explains the distinction:

> In our languages of self-understanding, the opposition 'inside-outside' plays an important role. We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being "within" us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are "without". Or else we think of our capacities or potentialities as "inner", awaiting the development which will manifest them or realize them

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[177] ibid., 145.
[178] ibid.

> in the public world. The unconscious is for us within, and we think of the
> depths of the unsaid, the unsayable, the powerful inchoate feelings and
> affinities and fears which dispute with us the control of our lives, as inner.
> We are creatures with inner depths; with partly unexplored and dark
> interiors.[179]

The thoughts, ideas, or feelings that we identify as being "within" tend to be associated most closely with the self, while our bodies belong to the world "without"—the world of objects upon which our mental states bear. This dualism is most clearly articulated in the philosophy of Descartes: "[w]e have to objectify the world, including our own bodies, and that means to come to see them mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would."[180]

The distinction between an inner self and an outer body makes it possible to talk about an authentic representation of oneself. As Heyes argues,

> discourse of the somatic individual relies on a distinction between the inner
> and the outer in which the former is conceptually prior to the latter, and an
> a priori truth about the individual. … The concepts of the authentic inner
> and often deceptive outer are incorporated into the structure of the self and
> become the implicit justification for technologies aimed at transforming the
> body.[181]

Within this framework, the body can authentically represent the "true inner self" by means of external transformation—efforts that are undergone in order to avoid painful moments of false recognition. Hence, a transsexual can undergo arduous and painful surgeries and hormone treatments in order to transform his body to meet the societal expectations of a female body. Similarly, Allegra can diligently apply Proactiv in an effort to clear her skin and be recognized as the confident *woman* that she truly is.

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[179] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 111.
[180] ibid., 145.
[181] Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 22.

To summarize: We have a picture of the self that draws upon a distinction between the "inside" and "outside" and privileges the "inside" by identifying it primarily with the self.[182] The body acts as a social medium; that is, it acts as a medium to indicate to others who we are on the inside. This makes claims of "authentic representation" intelligible: my appearance can authentically (or not) portray who I truly am on the inside. And by working on the body we can rectify potential inauthentic representations—we can alter our body so that it accurately portrays our inner beauty or our true gender. When the body, as a medium, fails to authentically represent who we truly are, we fail to gain recognition by others—we fail to be recognized as a "confident woman"—and these moments of false recognition are particularly painful for us.

But why does the transsexual feel the need to be identified for how he feels on the inside? Why does Allegra feel the need to be recognized as a confident woman as opposed to a teenage girl? In other words, why is authenticity valued and why is recognition vital?

3.2. Why Recognition?

Charles Taylor makes the argument in the *Sources of the Self* and the shorter *Malaise of Modernity* that within modern, democratic societies, the need for recognition is particularly strong.[183] There are a number of reasons for this.

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[182] ibid., 21-22.
[183] Charles Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*, 43-50.

First, Taylor articulates the dialogical character of identity.[184] By describing the self as dialogical, Taylor means that it is essentially social in character, emerging from our interaction with significant others who provide us with a sense of our own roles, character, and worth. For Taylor, it is through the acquisition of rich human languages of expression (and by language, Taylor includes not only natural language, but what he describes as the "languages" of art, gesture, love, etc.) that we emerge with an understanding of ourselves and develop a self-identity. These languages, which are necessary for defining oneself, are introduced to us through an exchange with significant others. And therefore, "the genesis of the human mind is in this sense not "monological", not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical."[185]

Second, the ideal of authenticity, which Taylor sees as a particularly modern phenomena, imparts the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization. Each person has his own way of being, as Herder claims, and we must "look inside" to discover our own particular *telos*, our own original way of being.[186] But since the self is dialogical—that is, developed through a dialogue with significant others who provide us with a sense of our own qualities, limits, and roles—"if we fail to gain the recognition of others for what we are, our own sense of self is diminished and impaired."[187] My own sense of identity is crucially dependent upon the recognition of others. And since our own identities are tied to social identities, recognition from wider social groups is also necessary. As Shusterman

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[184] ibid., 32-33., also Charles Taylor, "The Dialogical Self," *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections Across the Disciplines,* ed. Robert Goodman, Walter Fisher (New York: State University of NY Press, 1995), 57-68.
[185] ibid., 33.
[186] ibid., 47.
[187] Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 187-88.

states, "[b]eyond this crucial intimate level, we need recognition from wider social groups with which we interact and against which we measure ourselves.[188]

In other words, my supposedly inwardly-derived identity is, in fact, socially derived—it's derived through the acquisition of rich human languages of expression, including natural language, and the languages of art, gesture, and love, and these languages are obtained through an exchange with others. My own sense of self is influenced by how others perceive me, including the roles, character, and worth prescribed to me. Therefore, in order to fulfill the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization imparted by the ideal of authenticity, I require recognition from others for what I perceive myself to be. Because identity is perceived to be "inwardly" derived, and because identity is not fixed like in instances of pre-modern, socially defined identities, our sense of self does not enjoy recognition *a priori*. It is hidden within us, private, and must win recognition through exchange and possibly fail.

In the project of recognition, the appearance and behaviour of the body operating within a structure of sociality, acts as a medium to make one's inner identity public. Thus, the appearance of one's body can potentially act as an impediment to recognition and, potentially, a failure of recognition. Because recognition can fail, the appearance of the body becomes a crucial instrument within the project of recognition.

But as Heyes convincingly demonstrates, this ideal of authenticity is often utilized as a means of normalization.[189] As she argues,

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[188] ibid.

[189] Heyes, *Self-Transformations, 17,* 99-100.

the idea that our embodied deviances or conformities are or should be expressions of an inner self is, I argue, often deployed not as the gesture toward recognition it wants to be, but rather as a mechanism of docility we should resist.[190]

The language of authenticity is increasingly found in the discourse surrounding cosmetic products, including surgical procedures, braces, and makeup. Invisalign, a company that makes braces, claims that their product is the "clear way to get a smile that shows the real you,"[191] while Sheer Cover, a producer of mineral makeup has the slogan "Let the Real You Shine Through."[192] This is done for a number of reasons: it avoids the language of beauty and conformity that might be associated with the superficial endeavour to make oneself more beautiful, and repositions the choice of cosmetic surgery as one made for oneself. Instead of giving in to the pressures of society, one undergoes cosmetic surgery for oneself. Heyes looks to shows like *Extreme Makeover* to make her point.[193] The show successfully uses narratives and language of authenticity in place of beauty and conformity: an ugly woman isn't transformed into a beautiful woman; the beautiful person "inside" is brought forth outside, so that she authentically represents who she truly is. A man doesn't look in the mirror wishing to be more beautiful, he looks in the mirror seeking "the me that I see inside…"[194] As Heyes notes, "almost all the participants contrast the relative superficiality of looking more attractive to others with the real labor of

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[190] ibid., 17.
[191] *Invisalign – The Clear Alternative to Braces.* [Video]. Retrieved December 13, 2011 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5qbMz13B2M.
[192] Sheercover. Mineral Makeup, Cosmetics, Foundations, Concealers, Powders. <http://www.sheercover.com.au/default.aspx> (accessed December 13, 2011). Guthy-Renker, the advertising company responsible for the Proactiv advertisements, also promotes Sheercover.
[193] ibid., 96-100.
[194] ibid., 100.

eradicating the internalized self-loathing that has marred their relationships and obscured their true personalities."[195]

We can begin to understand the importance of authenticity and recognition within the context of modern, Western society, and understand how language and narratives of authenticity are used to mask processes of normalization that, for instance, aim towards hetero-normative standards. The discourse of authenticity allows cosmetic products to avoid the language of beauty and conformity, with its negative connotations and political implications. And yet, the desire to be "normal" often maintains its place both in the language of those suffering with acne and in the marketing aimed at them. For Allegra, the language of normality exists *alongside* the language of authenticity. How do we rectify the apparent desire to be recognized for who we are on the inside with the apparent desire to just be normal?

Consider Eva Feder Kittay's explanation of her desire to be a normal family despite having a fully-dependent, severely cognitively disabled daughter.[196] For her the desire to be a normal family is linked to the desire to be recognized as a family. As she explains,

> One's family must be recognizable as such to others as well as to oneself. To be a family is to be a part of a social configuration, to share the lives of others not as an individual but as one with ties and responsibilities. As a family, you would want to be included in discussions about the future of your children, about the responsibilities of parenthood, the responsibilities of society to parents and children, and so forth…[197]

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[195] ibid., 100.
[196] Eva Feder Kittay, "Thoughts on the Desire for Normality," *Surgically Shaping Children: Technology, Ethics, and the Pursuit of Normality*, ed. Erik Parens (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 103.
[197] ibid.

Not only is self-recognition difficult when recognition by others isn't granted, but when recognition is denied, one is denied the attitudes and understandings typically provided to a family; "one feels isolated, undermined, and not valued."[198] Recognition by others is necessary for confirmation, and such recognition often necessitates meeting certain expectations of what it is to be a family.

As Kittay notes, the same desires to be a "normal family" can be transferred to other significant aspects of one's identity.[199] If we understand ourselves to be a particular kind of person, we desire for others to recognize it. This is, in part, because the ideal of authenticity, which imparts the goal of self-realization, demands it. But it's also because through "recognition we come to be treated by others in ways that involve us in networks of relationship of which we want to be a part, and which give our lives meaning."[200]

We tend to think of ourselves as individuals, but our individuality is established through an ascription of various human kinds, roles, and groups. And, as Appiah argues, in order for people to be recognized *as* members of a particular group, these groups need

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[198] ibid.

[199] ibid.

[200] ibid. This is an important insight that relates to Rob Wilson's thesis that normality might ultimately function to indicate our likeness to others. We want to be *x* or be part of group *x* and therefore be recognized as being part of group *x*. This requires meeting certain expectations of appearance and behaviour that will allow us to be recognized as a kind of person *x*. It allows us to sort human kinds — whether someone is *like* me or not. As Wilson says with respect to subnormality and disability, "Amongst the most important of the ways in which we make use of such human sorts is in determining whether people are, in some important way, like us. ... Then all it would take for us to end up with the kind of difference between people being marked as sub-normal is for the norms that make someone not like me, i.e., not a member of my group, to be ones that class people who have disabilities or impaired parts as subnormal." See Wilson, 10.

to be part of the public discourse and identifiable with certain criteria of ascription.[201]

These terms are typically known and have a criteria of ascription based upon stereotypes

of appearance, character, and behaviour. Thus, part of the goal of being recognized *as* a

woman, for instance, is the goal of meeting certain socially prescribed expectations of

what it is to be a woman. Given that recognition often requires meeting certain

expectations of appearance and beahviour, and these expectations are tied to our

concepts of normality, the desire for normality becomes linked to our desire for

recognition.

　　When the Proactiv commercial comes on with Allegra claiming that finally, with

clear skin, she is free to "just be me," we can understand her frustration. The appearance

of her body functions as a medium to indicate her true identity to others. Because her skin

doesn't look "the way it should" for an adult woman, Allegra feels that she fails to meet

the expectations of what constitutes the normal appearance of an adult woman. Her

appearance acts as an impediment to recognition — she looks like she's twelve, she

complains, and only after her skin is clear does she look like an adult woman. Proactiv is

presented as a means of transforming her body, of reconciling a discordance, so that it

authentically reflects her true self. By successfully treating her skin, Allegra now looks like

she should — like a normal, adult woman. Finally, she claims, "I can just be me."

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[201] Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*, 66-68. Also see Appiah "The State and the Shaping of
Identity," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, April 30, 2001,
http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Appiah_02.pdf.

3.3. Somatic Alienation and Social Dys-appearance.

When someone suffering with acne claims that they don't recognize themselves in the mirror or that they feel trapped in a body that isn't theirs, it reflects not only a failure of self-recognition but a type of somatic alienation. The body emerges as something foreign and distinct from the self. It becomes a point of thematic focus, held at a distance. It tends to emerge in response to pain—whether that pain is rooted in a failure of recognition, or in feelings of deficiency in the face of normalized ideals—pains that are psychological, but traced back to the appearance of the body. And this alienation tends to coincide with feelings of being "trapped" in a body that cannot be transformed. Skin fails to respond to treatment, and the failure of treatment represents a lack of agency; the body doesn't respond to one's desires and will, but instead follows the inevitable path of necessity. How should we make sense of instances of somatic alienation which seem to emerge not from physical pain, but from the psychological pain associated with abnormality or inauthenticity? A phenomenological account of pain, one expressed in the works of Merleau-Ponty and Drew Leder, will help us understand the nature of somatic alienation, and its relationship to agency and the body.

Leder, working in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Polanyi, aims to provide a phenomenological account of the body that explains the qualities of *dys-appearance*—what might briefly be characterized as somatic alienation.[202]

For starters, Leder cites Merleau-Ponty who claims that the body is distinguished from mere physical objects in part due to its ability to have double sensations.[203] Consider

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[202] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 83-84.

the experience when looking at ourselves in a mirror; upon looking in the mirror, the image that is seen takes on a separate reality: the body seen, and not the body seeing, is perceived in the mirror. Or consider the act of touching my left hand with my right hand: Upon reaching my left hand towards my right, I'm not conscious of my left hand as a physical thing but instead utilize it as a means to explore the surrounding world. I experience my left had as "subject body" and, upon touching my right hand, I feel my right hand as "object body". My left hand experiences my right as a smooth, fleshly mass. But as Leder argues, I cannot "touch it touching" just as I couldn't "see the seeing" when I looked in the mirror. Among the lessons learned from this, Leder claims, is that "insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses."[204]

According to Leder, this indicates that "absence is intrinsic to the perspectival nature of embodiment "[205] Consider Polanyi's concept of the "from-to" structure of experience: when attending *to* a thematic object I do so *from* an underlying set of cues, conditions, and information; that is, I perceive an explicit object only if I do so from clues and information which largely remains absent from conscious experience.[206] For example, when attending to someone's face we typically attend *from* the features of the face (particular lines, shapes, protrusions, textures) *to* the face itself (as happy, sad, anxious, etc.) Within this framework, that which I'm attending *from* disappears from conscious

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[203] ibid., 13-14.
[204] ibid., 14.
[205] ibid., 12.
[206] ibid., 15-17.

experience. The argument parallels one made by Heidegger:[207] I first encounter entities in the world as equipment; that is, I do not first perceive a hammer as a physical entity and then proceed to interpret the function of the entity. Instead, I encounter the hammer as a hammer—as an object "being-for" hammering in nails, "in-order-to" attach two pieces of wood together. This equipment is accessed as ready-at-hand—as a functional entity in relation to other functional entities, to be used within the context of a project. When the hammer breaks, it's experienced as present-to-hand: as a continuous surface with a heavy head and handle. If the hammer breaks, Dasein stands back and looks at the entity from a distance as something with physical properties.

 We can extend this framework to the human body: when it breaks down (through sickness, pain, etc.) it becomes an explicit object of consciousness, and instead of attending *from* the body *to* the external world, the body itself becomes thematized. For instance, when walking down the street I am not particularly aware of the movement of my legs or the sensations of my feet; my body seems to acquire a status of neutral background, disappearing from explicit awareness.[208] But if I have a rock in my shoe that causes me pain, the pain in my foot appears as thematic focus. I attend *to* my foot instead of *from* my foot. According to Leder, this is an example of "dys-appearance" which arises when "the body *appears* as thematic focus, but precisely in a *dys* state—*dys* taken from the Greek prefix signifying 'bad,' 'hard,' or 'ill'."[209]

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[207] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* trans. Albert Hofstadter, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 163.
[208] Leder, *The Absent Body*, 25.
[209] ibid., 77.

When the body becomes an object of thematic focus in the *dys* state, a type of

somatic alienation can occur: I no longer *am* a body, but *have* a body. Shusterman

summarizes:

> But often, especially in situations of doubt or difficulty, I also perceive my
> body as something that I *have* and *use* rather than *am*, something I must
> command to perform what I will but that often fails in performance,
> something that distracts, disturbs, or makes me suffer. It results in *somatic
> alienation* and the denigrating objectification of the body as just an
> instrument (lamentably weak and vulnerable) that merely belongs to the self
> rather than really constituting an essential expression of selfhood.[210]

For Leder, the phenomenology of pain often enacts three primary effects on the body-self

relation. First, somatic alienation often occurs. "My own body may feel away from me,

something problematic and foreign, even at moments of its most intimate disclosure. …

Insofar as the body seizes our awareness particularly at times of disturbance, it can come

to appear "Other" and opposed to the self."[211] Second, pain tends to enact a period of

self-reflection and isolation, or what Leder calls a "spatiotemporal constriction."[212] As

Leder writes, "[w]e are no longer dispersed out *there* in the world, but suddenly congeal

right *here*. Our attention is drawn back not only to our own bodies but often to a

particular body part."[213] And lastly, pain results in a "hermeneutical moment" in which

"suffering gives rise to a search for interpretation and understanding."[214] It's a moment that

is "ultimately involved with a pragmatic goal: getting rid of, or master, suffering. My own

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[210] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-4.
[211] Leder, *The Absent Body*, 71.
[212] ibid., 75.
[213] ibid.
[214] ibid., 79.

body becomes the object not just of perception and interpretation but of action. I seek

medication, physical therapies, whatever will help."[215]

All three responses to physical pain find their expression in those who suffer with

acne and acne scars despite the relative absence of physical pain in both cases. Somatic

alienation is evident when people claim to not recognize themselves in the mirror or

when they claim to be trapped in a face that isn't theirs. Often spatiotemporal constriction

arises in conjunction with somatic alienation, a claim that is best expressed in the

obsession with mirrors; some of those suffering with acne have even started "no looking in

mirror logs"[216] in which they track their attempt to forgo looking in mirrors for extended

periods of time. The problem is common: those suffering with acne are constantly drawn

to mirrors, moving closer and closer to the mirror to reveal more flaws in their face. One

user has an "arms-length" rule when looking at the mirror because his obsession was

becoming too much.[217] And finally, the "hermeneutical moment" is equally common:

either those suffering become intimately familiar with the different treatment options and

seek to transform their skin, or they begin to ask philosophical and sociological questions

about acne, society, and beauty, to understand the source of their shame.

This suggests that these three responses to pain occur not only in response to

physical pain, but in response to psychological pain as well; that is, these responses occur

as a result of the shame that is traced back, and "caused by," the perception of oneself as

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[215] ibid.

[216] UchihaSalah, (2011, March 13). No Looking in the Mirror Log.
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/Mirror-Log-t291304.html.

[217] cvd, (2011, March 4). Addicted to Picking.
http://www.acne.org/messageboard/Addicted-Picking-t290627.html#.

subnormal, inauthentic or deficient. Leder describes this phenomena as social *dys-*

appearance, which involves a thematization of the body in response to social forces,

including the objectifying gaze of the Other.[218] But although the objectifying gaze of the

Other might be responsible for some moments of social *dys*-appearance, the origins are

broader: they arise in moments of shame in which one feels deficient in the face of

normalized ideals, and they arise from the painful failures of recognition.

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[218] Leder, *The Absent Body,* 92-99. He claims, specifically, that social dys-appearance results from the gaze of the Other. But I think this is too narrow. Social dys-appearance is often produced by the self in light of normalized ideals and the (related) instances of false recognition. The gaze of the Other *can* be a source of social dys-appearance, but it doesn't seem to me to be the primary source.

Chapter 4. "I've wished to be more special."

> "What I'm asking is, am I crazy to have this liking for my tail? Am I just covering up something else? If I turn this chance down I'd probably regret it for the rest of my life. You must have wished a million times to be normal."
> "No."
> "No?"
> "I've wished I had two heads. Or that I was invisible. I've wished for a fish's tail instead of legs. I've wished to be more special."
> "Not normal?"
> "Never."
> — Geek Love [219]

> Sometimes we may have learned good things from our experiences(ie dont judge , be more compassionate etc). People with other conditions...missing legs, blindness, people crippled by arthritis do learn to live with these and in some cases adapt very well...but nobody chooses to not be "normal".
> — AmaraG [220]

4.1. Geek Love: The Freak Show.

In Katherine Dunn's novel *Geek Love*, we are told the story of a carnival family that runs a series of freak shows.[221] Al, who runs the carnival, concocts an assortment of drug cocktails for his wife during her pregnancies in an explicit effort to produce deformed, abnormal, or "special" children to be used in their shows. This results in conjoined, piano-playing twins, a midget, albino hunchback, a boy with telekinetic powers, and the undisputed star of the show, Arty, who is born with flippers instead of arms and legs. Dunn uses the world of the freak show to explore the link between identity, deformity, and erotic desire: a stripper considers removing her tail but struggles between the desire

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[219] Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 34.
[220] AmaraG, "Why do you dislike acne?" July 18, 2011, accessed July 25, 2011. http://www.acne.org/messageboard/dislike-acne-t300084.html&st=20.
[221] Dunn, *Geek Love*.

for authenticity and the desire to be normal; Chick, who is born as an apparent "norm" is almost rejected by the family until he's revealed to have telekinetic powers; Oly, the hunchback, only ever wishes that she was more special. Within the world of *Geek Love* values are overturned. Being abnormal is considered desirable, and "others" are referred to dismissively as "norms."

During one of Arty's last shows of the day, he is approached by a "fat woman" who, despite her young age, appears old with colourless, thinning hair.[222] With tears in her eyes she stands up in the bleachers and puts her hands towards his tank. Arty, who has cultivated a quasi-religious following, addresses the woman: "You feel ugly, don't you, sweetheart? You've tried everything, haven't you?" asks Arty. "Pills, shots, hypnosis, diets, exercise. Everything. Because you want to be beautiful?"[223] The fat woman is joined by the rest of the crowd, nodding in agreement. "Because you think if you were beautiful, you would be happy? …Because people would love you if you were beautiful? And if people loved you, you would be happy? Is people loving you that makes you happy?"[224] Again, the fat woman and crowd nod in unison, their eyes stained with tears. But Arty thinks this isn't quite right: "Or is it people *not* loving you that makes you unhappy? If they don't love you it's because there's something *wrong* with you. If they loved you then it must mean you're *all right*."[225] In other words, Arty believes that the fat woman just wants to know that she's *all right*, that there is nothing *wrong* with her, and she's prevented from this

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[222] ibid., 177.
[223] ibid.
[224] ibid.
[225] ibid.

because she believes the advertisements and images that constantly tell her that she's subnormal.

> Can you be happy with the movies and the ads and the clothes in the stores and the doctors and the eyes as you walk down the street telling you that there is something *wrong* with you? No. You can't. You cannot be happy. Because, you poor darling, you believe them…[226]

When Arty ends by asking what the fat lady wants, she replies: "I want to be like *you*."[227]

The world of *Geek Love* is a world in which abnormality does not confer subnormality, deficiency, or pathology. Abnormality is valued because within the project of undergoing a freak-show, it's what draws the crowds and earns the money. A "norm," comparatively, is useless. And this explains much of the book's humour. Typically, one of the main concerns of expecting-parents is that their child will be abnormal, and many parents struggle with the choice of keeping an abnormal baby or not. But Al and Lil exhibit a complete reversal of values: they deliberately concoct various drug cocktails for Lil in an attempt to create abnormal babies and, in the case of Chick, they struggle with the desire to abandon him until his anomalous, telekinetic powers are revealed.[228] And this is what makes the world of *Geek Love* interesting, and potentially informative, from my perspective: it's a world that transcends the abnormal-subnormal equivalence, and in doing so, it opens up a potential avenue for resistance to the forces that tell us that we are deficient, subnormal, and unlovable, without resorting to expensive, painful procedures aimed at normalization. It paints a world in which abnormality is a source of pride instead of shame.

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[226] ibid.
[227] ibid.
[228] ibid., 64-73.

Why does the fat woman want to be like Arty? Because, despite his abnormality—having fins instead of arms and legs, and being the star of a freak show—Arty nevertheless embraces his abnormality and shuns those that would tell him there's something wrong with him. He doesn't feel shame; he believes that he's special. His abnormality is the object of his pride. In fact, he's deeply jealous of anyone, including his younger telekinetic-wielding brother, who might be considered more special than him.

According to Arty, in order to overcome her shame the fat woman needs to stop desiring normality, in part, because no matter the diets and exercise regimes, she will never attain it. She needs to embrace her abnormality. And in order to embrace her abnormality, she needs to enter a world in which abnormality is valued. Because she cannot achieve normality, she needs to change her values by creating an environment that grounds those values. How does she accomplish this? How does she become like Arty? His answer is surprising: she should systematically and willingly amputate her limbs—a process that she and many other followers undergo, happily, with religious fervent. The result is the creation of a cult centered around progressive amputation, striving towards a limbless state.

Arty's advice seems absurd. How could amputation, self-mutilation, make people feel *all right* about their bodies? Could Arty's advice *possibly* be of value to those who suffer shame in the face of abnormality, including those who suffer with acne and acne scars?

I want to argue in this remaining chapter that Arty's advice is informative. Indeed, the above story reflects, roughly, the questions and content that are of concern to me in

this thesis, namely, strategies for overcoming the shame experienced in cases of perceived abnormality. Arty explains the fat woman's shame as being a product of her desires—of her desire to be loved, of her desire to feel "all right," and of her desire for normality. Similarly, I have argued that the shame experienced by those who suffer from acne is rooted in the failure to achieve desired consummations: the failure to conform to normalized bodily-ideals, the failure to meet expectations associated with identities, and the failure to gain recognition for who we take ourselves to be or aspire to be. This project of elucidation has had in mind the basic pragmatist dictum, the idea that academic understanding or theory should be aimed, ultimately, at transforming our experience. And the assumption has been that understanding the sources of shame—that is, painting a picture of the landscape that gives rise to bodily-shame—will provide us with a means of transforming our experiences. This picture will indicate what, precisely, needs to be changed in order to alter our emotional states. And what needs to be changed (by my account and Arty's) appears to be the consummations we desire, whether it's the attainment of an unrealistic physical ideal or the desire for normality.

To explore this idea more fully requires an account of emotion in general and of shame in particular. What are emotions and how are they related to values? How are emotions transformed? And what constitutes shame, in particular, as an instance of an emotion? Is shame necessarily heteronomous, and if so, does this mean that shame is always the product of misplaced values? Answering these questions will allow me to connect the previous accounts of desired consummations with the emotional states themselves, and thereby explore a means of transforming them.

4.2. What are Emotions?

In order to determine what constitutes emotions in general, it is useful to consider what we typically take to be instances of emotions: this list includes shame, guilt, anger, fear, jealousy, hope, gratitude, disgust, love, pity or compassion, joy, and grief, amongst others. How might these be distinguished from mere bodily appetites, such as hunger or thirst? And what characteristics do these emotions share with eachother? One tradition, what Robert Solomon calls the "Myth of the Passions," assumes that emotions are essentially thoughtless feelings that have little connection to our more sophisticated thoughts, evaluations, and ends.[229] These "unthinking forces" are thought to be part of our animalistic nature, distinct from and contrasted negatively to our distinctly human, rational faculty. They seem to originate from the outside, and impinge upon us like external forces, "beyond our control, disruptive and stupid, unthinking and counterproductive, against our 'better interests,' and often ridiculous."[230]

On this view, the emotions share more with the appetites than they do with thought. Thus, changing an emotional state might amount to satisfying the consummations it demands, as in eating to satisfy one's hunger. If this is so, then argumentation and

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[229] Robert Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21. See also, Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24-26. Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 24. Much of my work on emotions is influenced by the work of Charles Taylor, Solomon, Nussbaum, and Jerome Neu. In particular, Nussbaum's view of emotions—which is rooted in the Stoic tradition—is influential to my own.
[230] Robert Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35.

articulation would have little effect on our emotional state. As Sextus Empiricus notes,

"one cannot produce by argument in the hungry man the conviction that he is not

hungry."[231] Part of my effort to refute this picture of the emotions, then, is motivated by the

desire to open the possibility of transforming our emotional states through articulation and

argumentation. By this, I don't mean to advocate a tyranny of reason in which our

emotional states as mindless affect are constrained through reason and strength of will.

Instead, it is to argue that "emotions are not mindless surges of affect, but, instead,

intelligent responses that are attuned both to events in the world and to the person's

important values and goals."[232]

Following in the tradition of Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum, I want to argue

that when we experience an emotion like shame, we experience a situation as having a

certain non-neutral property or import, that is, a property that is of relevance to our desires

and aspirations as a subject.[233] When we experience shame, we experience our situation

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[231] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 35. In *Upheavals*, 130, Nussbaum distinguishes emotions from appetites on the basis that emotions are value-suffused and, to some extent, object-flexible. "Emotions contain, internal to themselves, a thought of the object's value or importance. And indeed, this thought of value is the central way the emotion has of characterizing its object; in other respects, emotions such as fear, grief, love, and anger are very flexible about the types of objects they can take. One may love people or things, one may grieve for an animal or a child—what is crucial to the emotion is the value with which the object has been invested." Furthermore, appetites such as hunger is a push while emotions are pulled; appetites as a result of one's own bodily condition, whereas emotions are "pulled into being by the object, and exhibits rich and selective intentionality." (131) This means that emotions "do go away when the relevant beliefs about the object and about value alter… [and] if the belief is really stably altered, the emotion alters with it." This is used to demonstrate that emotions are more flexible than appetites.
[232] ibid., 37.
[233] Charles Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals," in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 48-49.

as shameful—an adjective that defines the properties of the situation that give ground for our emotions.

This implies that emotions are necessarily *about* something; they have an object. If I'm scared, I'm scared *about* something: I'm scared of that clown, my upcoming defence, or that funny looking dog. If Suzy feels guilty, then she feels guilty about eating the last cookie in the jar, or about stealing the stapler from the office. Due to cases of "unfocused anxiety" or "unfocused fear" in which a particular object is absent, Taylor prefers to speak of emotions as being about "situations" rather than objects.[234] In such cases, the fear is unfocused and its object cannot be fully articulated. There is "a felt absence of an object; a gap where something ought to be."[235] But this felt absence of an object, Taylor notes, is characteristic of the situation which itself constitutes the emotion. While Taylor prefers to claim that emotions are necessarily about "situations," other philosophers including Martha Nussbaum, Robert Solomon, and Jerome Neu, merely subsume "situation" under the genus "object" and, thus, still primarily claim that emotions are about "objects."

Furthermore, as Taylor argues, to experience an emotion is also necessarily to experience an object or situation as having an import. By "import" Taylor means, broadly, that property which is identified in the object or situation as relevant or as providing grounds for the emotion that one experiences.[236] The import and emotion aren't merely correlated, but rather the import constitutes the emotion. Hence, to experience shame is to

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[234] ibid., 48.
[235] Mike J. McNamee, *Sports, Virtues, and Vices: Morality Plays* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 21.
[236] Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals," 49.

experience one's situation as shameful—as failing to meet the expectations of being a

good father, or failing to meet the feminine ideals of beauty, passivity, and domesticity.

This implies that the object of an emotion is an intentional object: "that is, its role

in the emotion depends on the way in which it is seen and interpreted by the person

whose emotion it is."[237] In other words, emotions are about objects *as* experienced or

interpreted by the one having the emotion:

> their aboutness is more internal and embodied a way of seeing. … [It] comes
> from my active way of seeing and interpreting: it is not like being a snapshot
> of the object, but requires looking at it, so to speak, through one's own
> window.[238]

Since emotions are about objects as they are perceived, and since a perception of an

object may be accurate or inaccurate, emotions can be based upon false perceptions. For

example, my fear of a snake slithering before me might be constituted by a perception of

its maliciousness—that it's highly poisonous and aggressive—which could be either

accurate or not. Since my fear of the snake can occur independently of the accuracy of my

perception, this demonstrates that the object of an emotion is an intentional object.

For Nussbaum, since our emotions are constituted by perceptions of objects, and

these perceptions can be either accurate or not, emotions can be charged with

reasonableness or unreasonableness.[239] Consider my encounter with the snake: suppose

that a snake expert has informed me that the snake I fear is highly poisonous and

dangerous, and suppose that I have reason to trust the snake expert; he has proven

trustworthy in identifying other snakes, it's not April fools, and so on. Even if it turns out

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[237] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 24.
[238] ibid.
[239] ibid., 25.

that the snake is not poisonous, it is still reasonable for me to believe that it was dangerous and something to be feared. If, on the other hand, I believe that the snake is poisonous because every snake that I encounter on Tuesdays happens to be poisonous, then my belief that the snake is dangerous is unreasonable even if it turns out that the snake is, in fact, poisonous. Our capacity to charge emotions with reasonableness or unreasonableness makes sense, in part, because our perceptions of objects are constituted by beliefs, sometimes very complex, about the object, and these beliefs can be charged with reasonableness or unreasonableness by some metric of justification. Thus, the accuracy of my perception is related to, but ultimately distinct from, the issue of reasonableness; "reasonableness concerns issues of evidence and reliability, in a way that truth does not."[240]

Since the perception of an object is partly constituted by beliefs about the object, beliefs are partly constitutive of emotions. Aristotle made this claim in the *Rhetoric*: the main tool of the sophist in swaying the emotions of the audience was to convince to the audience to believe certain things about the situation or object in question; a change in belief brings about a change in emotion. If the audience experiences fear at the potential loss of universal healthcare, for example, the sophist could trivialize the importance of healthcare, as a means to reduce fear in the audience.

Furthermore, as Jerome Neu argues, an appeal to beliefs is often necessary to distinguish and define our emotions: "what is most important about my anger is the belief (roughly) that someone has caused me harm… and that without that belief my state (no

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[240] ibid.

matter what my sensations) could not be one of 'anger'."[241] In other words, an appeal

merely to our feelings or physiological affect fails to provide the resources for

distinguishing and defining our emotions. Shame, embarrassment, guilt, and anxiety all

have similar physiological sensations. Since they feel roughly the same, these emotions

can only be distinguished by appeal to beliefs or perceptions of which the emotions are

about.[242] This explains why revelations about the object often alters our emotional state, as

when fear recedes upon discovering that the snake is not, in fact, dangerous. And if an

appeal to belief or perception is necessary to define an emotion or to distinguish one

emotion from another, then these cognitions constitute part of the emotion itself.[243]

To summarize, to experience an emotion is to experience an intentional-object or

situation that is constituted, in part, by our beliefs about the object. But as Taylor argues,

this object has an import; that is, it is non-neutral to us, it matters to us, and it is relevant

to our desires, purposes, and projects. Nussbaum argues similarly when she claims that

"all the emotions involve appraisals or evaluations of the object, and all appraise the

object as significant rather than trivial."[244] If the object of my emotion is trivial, then I

won't fear its loss or grieve in its absence. If I fear its loss despite its trivialness, I don't

perceive the object as trivial. As such, my emotions often reveal the value that I give to

objects. For example, I might not perceive my grandmother's heirloom as valuable, but I

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[241] Jerome Neu, *A Tear is an Intellectual Thing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

[242] This objection is often used against physiological accounts of emotion in the tradition of William James. If emotion is the observation of physiological changes, then one does not have the resources to distinguish between shame, embarrassment, guilt, or anxiety, because they all exhibit roughly the shame physiological changes.

[243] ibid.

[244] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 29.

might grieve significantly upon its loss. Similarly, I might think that I love my wife, but

upon getting divorced any sadness and grief that I might have expected are absent.

Indeed, we "have emotions only about what we have already managed to invest with a

certain importance in our scheme of goals and ends."[245] Thus, the absence or presence of

an emotion might reveal aspects of my moral character: if I don't feel guilt after stealing

money from my ailing, poor grandmother, the absence of guilt reveals that the good of

others, even the good of my grandmother, has little importance in my grand scheme of

values and goals.

Since emotions are constituted by the perception of its object and this perception

involves an appraisal of its object, any articulation of an emotion will ultimately reveal an

appraisal of its object.[246] Through an articulation of my fear of the snake, I might ultimately

reveal that I perceive my life to be of value (to myself or others) and that my death is

undesirable. And since an emotion is constituted by an appraisal of its object, the emotion

itself can be appraised. It can be judged on factual elements; that is, I can argue that it

rests on accurate or inaccurate perceptions of the object, or that beliefs about the object

are held unreasonably. Or I can evaluate the emotion on its appraisal of the object. For

example, in fearing the snake I can (1) question whether or not my perception of the snake

as malicious, poisonous, or aggressive is accurate; (2) question whether or not my beliefs

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[245] ibid.

[246] ibid., 31-32. Aaron Ben-ze'ev argues that the intentional component of an emotion can be understood as cognitive, evaluative, and motivational. On the evaluative front, he notes that "[i]n a state devoid of an evaluative component, or one in which its weight is marginal, we are indifferent. In emotions we are not indifferent, as we have a significant personal stake." Aaron Ben-ze'ev, "The Thing Called Emotion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47-48.

about the snake are held reasonably; (3) question whether the object valued, one's life, should be valued.

The Stoics take the radical approach of questioning whether *any* object external to ourselves, including our bodies and other people, should be valued. Indeed, they reject the attachment of value to any external objects on the basis that our emotional state should not be dependent upon forces outside of our agency. Within the Stoic framework (which includes ontological beliefs with a sharp division between mind and world, agency and necessity) any emotion that results from an attachment to an external object is unreasonable.[247]

Although the Stoic approach to disavowing an attachment to *any* external objects is ultimately untenable and undesirable, it nevertheless provides a useful strategy for both assailing and transforming our emotional states. We can apply this strategy to simple and complex cases, including the shame people often experience in cases of perceived bodily abnormality, notably in cases of mild to severe acne and acne scarring. We might judge the shame some people experience in cases of mild acne, in particular, as being unreasonable. But any such judgment will involve an appraisal of the factual perception of the situation in addition to an appraisal of the values that constitute her emotion. This appraisal requires an articulation of the emotion—an articulation that might reveal aspects of the emotion, factual or evaluative, that might alter the emotion. Indeed, an articulation of the emotion alone might prove sufficient in altering the perception of the object and, consequently, the emotion itself.

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[247] The most important belief being that any object outside of the mind is subject to fate, and ultimately outside of our control.

Before delving into into shame itself, I want to clarify three main points.

1. There's a distinction to be made between the object of the emotion and the cause of the emotion.[248] If my friend is five-minutes late to pick me up, and I get angry with him, then the object of my emotion is my friend. But the cause might more accurately be said to be my poor sleep the night before, or that I didn't get my morning cup of coffee. Often the cause and object of the emotion are the same, but it is important to keep this difference in mind. That is, identifying the object of the emotion and altering one's perception of the object may not, strictly speaking, be sufficient for altering one's emotional state. I might have felt anger even if my friend had shown up on time. With introspection, I might determine that the cause of my anger, is, ultimately, that I didn't get my morning coffee. By rectifying this and making sure that I get my morning coffee (or by weaning myself off of my caffeine dependence) I can potentially alter my emotional state, as opposed to ensuring that my friend arrives at the correct time each day. This raises the importance of "moods". Without my morning coffee I might be left grumpy for the rest of the day, and this mood might leave me predisposed to instances of unreasonable anger. The importance of a trivial situation might be blown out of proportion. Nevertheless, an articulation of my emotion can reveal that my anger is *about* something relatively trivial, and this revelation can reveal my grumpiness. As a result, I can seek to locate the source of my grumpiness, and then ensure that I get my morning coffee without failure.

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[248] Robert Solomon, 63. Solomon defines the cause of the emotion as "whatever event, state of affairs, thing, or person [that] incites the emotion, whether or not this has anything to do with what the emotion is about."

2. I'm employing a distinction between "feeling" and "emotion" on the basis that feelings are import and belief-independent. How can I avoid the pain that I experience when I burn my finger in the saucepan? By not putting my unprotected finger into the saucepan. How can I avoid the emotion of shame? Either by changing the situation as above, or potentially by articulating my shame and changing my beliefs and perception of the object.

3. This reflects, as Taylor argues, that some emotions are subject-referring.[249] Shame is an instance of a subject-referring emotion because it concerns "in some way the life of the subject qua subject."[250] The import ascription of the emotion requires a reference to an experiencing subject. "The shameful," Taylor writes, "is subject-referring because something is only [shameful] for me by virtue of the way I understand myself—or because of the way I see myself and aspire to appear in public."[251] That which is shameful are essentially properties of a subject:

> This may not be immediately evident, because I may be ashamed of my shrill voice, or my effeminate hands. But of course it only makes sense to see these as objects of shame if they have for me or my culture an expressive dimension: a shrill voice is (to me, to my culture) something unmanly, betokens hysteria, not something solid, strong, macho, self-contained. It does not radiate a sense of strength, capacity, superiority. Effeminate hands are - effeminate. Both voice and hands clash with what I aspire to be, feel that my dignity demands that I be, as a person, a presence among others.[252]

Thus, some of our emotions (including shame) are constituted by subject-referring imports, some of which may not be entirely articulated but which nevertheless shape our

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[249] Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals," 52-54.
[250] ibid., 54.
[251] ibid., 53.
[252] ibid.

emotional content. To understand such emotions, it is necessary to articulate the skein of subject-referring imports that constitute them, including assumptions about the subject and its values.

4.3. What is Shame?

Up to this point, I have argued that a complex emotion is constituted by one's perception of its object and that this perception involves an appraisal of its object. Thus, any articulation of an emotion will ultimately reveal an appraisal of its object. How does shame, in particular, fit within this framework? What is the object of shame, and how is it distinguished from other emotions, including embarrassment and guilt? Is shame constituted by heteronomous values or can it be experienced autonomously? These questions need to be answered in order to understand its sources, and thus, in order to explore resistance strategies to the instances of shame felt in cases of perceived bodily abnormality.

As a starting point, consider a basic example of shame. As a high school soccer player, I considered myself one of the best players on the team. But on a crucial penalty kick in an important game towards the end of the season, I missed the goal entirely. I blew it. I performed below expectations, both my own and those of others, and let the team down. What followed was an immense feeling of shame: a sense of failure as a soccer player, as a boy, and as someone that should perform well under pressure. I felt like I had failed my coach who I deeply respected. My instinct was to hide—to lock myself in my room away from my teammates, friends, and coach. The emotion was debilitating, in a

sense, but it was also motivational: I wanted more than ever to become a better player, to

practice endlessly, so that I could live up to the expectations I and others had for myself.

Throughout this, my parents tried to console me by noting that "it was just a game" and

that, in the grand scheme of things, a missed penalty kick didn't really matter.

This example indicates that shame typically involves reflective self-criticism,

directed not merely at what one has done but at who one is.[253] In this case, my self-

criticism was derived from an action insofar as the action was taken to be a reflection of

my deficiency as a soccer player, but the criticism was ultimately directed at *myself*, as a

soccer player, in light of who I took myself to be and who I wanted to be. On this point,

shame differs from guilt: I feel guilt about an action that I have performed, whereas I feel

shame about myself, as a human, as a boy, or as a soccer player. I feel shame, and not

guilt, about my deficiency as a soccer player—a deficiency that manifests itself through

my actions on the field.

Since shame involves self-criticism, it is intimately related to our perceived failure

to meet the expectations or ideals that one has for oneself. As Nussbaum argues, "in

shame, one feels inadequate, lacking some desired type of completeness or perfection…

[and that] one must then have already judged that this is a type of completeness or

perfection that one rightly ought to have."[254] Being a good soccer player wasn't a trivial

goal for my teenage self. Quite the contrary, being a good soccer player was a crucial

component of my identity; my skills as a soccer player were deliberately cultivated

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[253] This is a common observation about shame. For another example, see Michael L. Morgan, *On Shame* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
[254] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 184.

through arduous practice precisely because being a good soccer player was important to me. The experience of shame emerged from my failure to be the kind of soccer player that I expected myself to be, and the kind of soccer player that I wanted to be.

According to Nussbaum, since the self-perceived failure to attain some desired, ideal state is sufficient for emotions of shame to occur, autonomous instances of shame are possible.[255] This accounts for the primitive shame found in pre-linguistic adolescents, and it accounts for a primitive shame that is constitutive of the human condition—a claim reflected in Aristophanes' tale in *The Symposium* in which love is ultimately the search for completeness, perfection, or the restoration of self-sufficiency. Similarly, when pre-linguistic adolescents enter the world they experience shame, having left behind the perceived self-sufficiency of the womb. Thus, for Nussbaum, the element of exposure, of one's flaws and deficiencies, to others is not essential to our primitive experiences of shame; it's ultimately self-directed, and when social elements come into it (for instance, in cases of public shaming) we can better understand it as a form of humiliation.

But for others, notably Kant, the element of exposure is entirely necessary and sufficient for shame to occur; that is, in the Kantian scheme, shame is essentially rooted in heteronomous values, and thus constituted by values which should ultimately be rejected as superficial.[256] For Kant, shame amounts to "losing face." Its values are always superficial because "face" stands on the wrong side of each binary opposition; it stands for appearance against reality and for the outer versus the inner. Since "losing face" only

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[255] ibid.
[256] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 77.

occurs "in the eyes of another, the values are heteronomous."[257] If, as Kant contends,

shame is necessarily heteronomous, and if I simply didn't care what others thought about

me, then I wouldn't experience instances of shame. The Stoics would agree: our "face"

should not be of value because we shouldn't develop *any* attachments to objects outside

of our control. While we might have some sway over "saving face" or "losing face,"

ultimately these values are outside of us and in the control of others.

Suppose that Kant is correct in arguing that shame is necessarily based on

heteronomous values. Does this mean that we should reject any value we place in our

"face"—that is, our standing in public and how we appear to others? I have argued that

we *do* have good reason for cultivating our "face." This is because, as Charles Taylor

argues, the self is essentially dialogical in character, emerging from our interaction with

significant others who provide us with a sense of self. Who others take us to be, in a sense,

constitutes who we are. And thus, without the recognition of others for who we take

ourselves to be, our own sense of self is diminished and impaired. In short, who others

take us to be matters. We already are attached to the recognition of others insofar as this

recognition constitutes who we are and how we identify ourselves. This same observation

also undermines the Stoic attempt to divorce ourselves from attachments to any external

objects, including attachments to other people. This attempt fails to recognize the

necessary and constitutive attachments we have to the people that surround ourselves.

Nevertheless, I want to argue that neither account of shame—either as essentially

heteronomous as Kant argues, nor autonomous as Nussbaum permits—is entirely correct. I

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[257] ibid.

want to argue, as Bernard WIlliams does, that "the basic experience of shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition."[258] This is suggested in the Greek word for shame, "*aidos*" derived from *"aidoia,"* which means 'genitals'—a connection that suggests a relationship to nakedness or exposure, especially in a sexual sense. This sense of shame is reflected in its tendency to incite the desire to hide, as I did when I failed to make my penalty kick. It also reflects the reluctance of people with acne to engage in social situations, to go "naked" without makeup, and the desire to hide behind one's hair.

Does this imply that shame derives entirely from the exposure of oneself, in one's deficiency, to others? Is it merely about being "found out"?

For starters, my soccer coach might have been perfectly understanding about my failure to make the penalty kick. In fact, he probably didn't even care all that much. Again, this reflects my earlier observation that emotions are about an intentional-object; that is, what matters is what I perceive my coach to think. But more importantly, if shame necessarily resulted from "exposure" then instances of private shame could not occur. Williams makes this claim when he posits the following example:

> Suppose someone invites us to believe that the Homeric Achilles, if assured he could get away with it, might have crept out at night and helped himself to the treasure that he had refused when it was offered by the embassy: then he has sadly misunderstood Achilles' character.[259]

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[258] ibid., 78.

[259] ibid., 81. This example is similar to Plato's account of Gyges and the ring that grants him invisibility. Glaucon questions whether any man could be so virtuous as to not perform immoral acts even if he was guaranteed to get away with it. Socrates argues that a man who abuses the power of the ring is morally bankrupt, and represents a failing of character. The truly virtuous man would perform the right actions even if he could get away with it. He would do as Achilles does.

It is not merely his getting caught stealing the treasure that governs his sense of shame; he would feel shame regardless, even if he helped himself to the treasure at night. His character prevents him from accepting the treasure either in public or private, and his unwillingness to accept it in private, especially, reflects his character. To think otherwise is to fail to understand Achilles' character.

Moreover, the element of negative critical exposure is not essential to the experience of shame because shame is dependent upon being exposed to a certain kind of observer with a particular view.[260] What is this view? The view of the observer need not be negatively critical because we can feel ashamed of being admired by the wrong people. Furthermore, shame can be absent in cases of criticism by those we don't respect. This indicates that shame is dependent upon being exposed to a certain kind of observer that we, in some sense, respect. Since the Achilles example demonstrates the potential for private instances of shame, Williams and other philosophers posit the presence of an "internalized" or "imaginary" other. But this "internalized" other need not be representative of some neighbouring, or dominant group, because we need not respect this group. Of primary importance is that certain attitudes are internalized and these are the critical views of those we respect and admire. This indicates that the internalized other is not primarily identified with a specific person or specific group due to proximity or location, but it may be identified on ethical grounds. As Williams argues, the internalized other "is conceived as one whose reactions I would respect; equally, he [or she] is conceived as someone who would respect those same reactions if they were appropriately

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[260] ibid., 82-83.

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directed to him."[261] In short, the internalized other reflects the values that we hold. Exposure matters in light of these values.[262]

But there are cases in which the critical opinions of others matters to us, not because we respect the opinion of this group, but because their opinions nevertheless have implications for our life projects. For example, I may not respect the opinions of the majority, and the cultural norms and ideals that are espoused, but I nevertheless recognize that these norms and ideals have important implications for my life. If I'm a homosexual, then cultural norms matter to me insofar as they encourage discrimination and undermine my legal rights. In being deemed abnormal, the opinions of others matter insofar as it hinders my life-projects of finding a mate or getting a job. I am considered deficient, even if I don't consider myself deficient. But as long as these values aren't internalized, we have the potential to overcome the shame felt in the failure to obtain these dominant social norms and ideals. This doesn't mean that we'll suddenly be happy with ourselves; the revelation that societal ideals and norms still have negative implications for our life might still be enough to incite the emotions of dread and fear.

Ultimately, any analysis of shame "reaches far into who we take ourselves to be, [and] who we hope to be."[263] Shame stems from the failure to be the kind of person we

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[261] ibid.
[262] This account of shame is informative to understanding why Oedipus blinds himself in response to the shame he experiences upon finding out that he has murdered his father and married his mother. His discovery represents a lifting from blindness, so to speak. And now that he knows what he has done, he cannot bare to gaze at himself, in his shame. (I don't mean that he cannot bare to literally gaze at himself, but instead, I mean that he cannot bare to perceive himself for who he actually is.) As a result, he blinds himself. It is his own gaze that causes him shame, and the response is to blind himself.
[263] Morgan, 54.

expect or hope to be. It stems from our failure to meet desired ideals and it stems from our failure to meet the expectations that constitute our sense of normality and identity. Due to the normative-weight of normality, shame can be particularly potent in the face of subnormality, and when ideals become normalized and thus impinged with the normative weight of normality, shame can almost seem inevitable. The project of overcoming shame becomes linked to the project of overcoming our desire for certain ends—ends that are governed by socially inherited norms and ideals. By articulating shame, I can reveal who I strive to be, including the ideals and expectations that I have for myself. Hence, by articulating my shame as a teenager, I revealed that being a good soccer player really mattered to me. My parents tried to tell me that it was "just a game,"; that is, they attempted to relieve my shame by trivializing the ends that I so clearly valued. And upon looking at this in hindsight, my parents were right. It all seems a bit trivial now. And this matters. If I missed a penalty kick today, I wouldn't be ashamed.

4.4. Overcoming Shame.

Given the nature of shame, what can we do to relieve it? The most obvious answer is probably the default: we can attempt to improve ourselves towards the ends we currently desire, have failed to meet, and which constitute our shame. This basic strategy is exemplified in the purchase of enhancement technologies like Proactiv, Accutane, and other cosmetic procedures. I accept that my skin is shameful, and I work to improve its appearance either through disciplined regimes of skin-care or through the purchase of cosmetic procedures. The shame the results in the failure to meet certain ideals, including

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ideals of femininity, often provides the motivation to diet, exercise, or purchase cosmetic products. This "motivation" factor of shame can sometimes be a good thing if the aspired ends are worthy of the label. Indeed, this is the basic thesis of Michael Morgan's *On Shame*: it is necessary to cultivate shame in response to human tragedies, including the Holocaust, in order to motivate us to become more inclusive, ethical people.[264] But in order to determine the moral value of shame as a motivational tool, it's necessary to assail the value or end that constitutes the shame. If shame results in the failure to live up to regulatory ideals—those ideals that actually inhibit flourishing—then shame, while still operating as a motivational tool, is doing so towards an undesirable end. The motivational factor becomes a tool of power. And this is why articulating our experiences of shame and its sources is so important: it reveals the values that give rise to it, opening them up for possible revision and rejection.

An articulation of our emotions has the capacity to transform our emotions. Such an articulation can reveal that the emotion is unreasonable on a factual basis, or it can reveal the implicit, constitutive values, which can be assailed. I have argued earlier in the thesis that the desire for normalcy is, in part, the desire for social functionality which includes getting a job or finding a mate. On a factual basis, I can argue that mild acne doesn't have significant implications for these ends. I can also argue that beauty advertisements are manipulating people into constructing a mediated, generalized-other that does not, in fact, correspond to the average. Even if the state of normalcy is accepted as a desirable end, I can argue that our notion of normalcy is fundamentally skewed. On

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[264] Morgan, *On Shame.* He makes this argument throughout the book, although he makes clear his intent in the introduction.

an evaluative basis, I can assail the internalized social-norms and ideals that constitute our experience of shame. I can demonstrate that social norms and ideals are regulatory; they inhibit flourishing. And lastly, I can argue that even if social norms have important societal-functional implications, it's not necessary to internalize such norms. In rejecting the value of such norms, albeit recognizing their relevant importance, shame can be overcome.

This thesis can find support in Spinoza's claim that thinking about our emotions has the potential to transform them.[265] According to Spinoza, emotions reflect our bondage to the world because emotions emerge from the attachments and value we place in external objects, including other people. To overcome our emotions we need to become less needy—to become self-sufficient and less dependent upon external items that, due to our attachments, dictate how we feel and think. In this sense, Spinoza's understanding of emotions follows in the Stoic tradition.[266] Ultimately, our bondage to the world is overcome through understanding, which provides us with freedom. This same thought is at the core of Plato's ladder of love. As Nussbaum describes it,

> In the Platonic ascent, [the lover] gradually "relaxes" the grip of her "excessively intense passion" through reflection on the many good things that she cares about, and on their underlying unity. All of her reflection is directed toward the good; and it will propel her upward only if she is willing to see the good as essentially unified and harmonious, her initial love as forming simply one piece of a larger whole.[267]

Spinoza's account is similar, but he emphasizes that instead of ultimately looking away from objects, one should take up a new attitude to the particular objects in one's life. This

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[265] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 502-509.
[266] ibid., 507.
[267] Ibid.

"attitude" is one of understanding, and understanding should be directed at our emotions as they pertain to particular objects. For Spinoza, "a passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it," the result being that "the moment an emotion is known to us, the more it is within our control, and the mind is less passive in respect of it."[268] In understanding shame, one can evaluate the sources of shame and the role that it plays in one's life. As a result, "the emotion itself will appear to her with a new clarity, and it will no longer simply inundate her."[269] According to Spinoza, understanding our emotions will eventually lead to philosophy and the natural sciences because our emotions are situated within nature and society. Thus, the project of self-understanding—which involves understanding our emotions, objects, and the world in which they are situated—has the capacity to provide us with the agency to transform our emotions.

4.5. Objections and Responses.

Before continuing with the discussion, I want to respond to three interrelated objections to my account of shame and the emotions. These objections will help develop my account further:

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[268] Quoted in ibid., 508.
[269] ibid.

Objection 1: If, in order to transform my emotions, I merely need to change my beliefs about the relevant object, then transforming my emotions should be quick and easy. But as experience shows, changing my emotional states is often incredibly difficult. [270]

Objection 2: There are clear instances in which emotional states persist despite the relevant changes in belief. For instance, Bob's fear of black people might persist despite his sincere belief that black people are no more dangerous than white people and that it's racist to generalize about the maliciousness of a person based upon their skin colour. Thus, despite being sincerely and unhesitatingly persuaded of the truth of this proposition, Bob's judgment is not reflected in his emotional state. Against his conscious will, he still finds himself attached to old habits of thinking and feeling. If the relevant beliefs are changed, and emotional states persist, then emotions must not consist of beliefs.

Objection 3: Non-human animals and young children experience emotions, but non-human animals and young children are incapable of formulating propositional beliefs. If emotions are constituted by such beliefs, then non-human animals and pre-linguistic children cannot experience emotions.[271]

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[270] (1) If I change my relevant beliefs about the object, then I will transform my emotional state.
(2) Transforming my beliefs is relatively easy and quick.
(3) Transforming my emotional state is relatively easy and quick. (1), (2)
(4) But experience shows that changing my emotional state is not relatively easy and quick.
Therefore, (1) should be rejected.
[271] (1) Non-human animals and young children experience emotions.

The first step in responding to these objections is to assent to the basic empirical

observation of (2) that we can be persuaded by the truth of certain propositional

statements, making sincere, unhesitant judgments of the sort that are relevant to our

emotions, and nevertheless continue to experience such emotions. In other words,

transforming our relevant propositional beliefs is not sufficient for transforming our

emotions. This reflects a broader observation: a sincere judgment about the truth of a

proposition does not always correspond to our dispositions of behaviour. For example, I

might accept the propositional statement "God does not exist" as true, but I might still find

myself praying to God in times of distress.[272] I might accept the propositional statement

"the bathroom is broken" as true, but I might still find myself heading in its direction in

times of need. In such cases, I exhibit a discordance: my utterances indicate my belief that

p, but my dispositions reveal my belief that *not-p*. But I can't believe both *p* and *not-p*.

Can I be said, then, to *truly* believe *p* if all of my dispositions indicate otherwise?

Schwitzgebel appeals to our intuitions and ethical concerns to argue that occurrent

judgment, being convinced of the truth or falsity of a propositional statement, is not

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(2) Non-human animals and young children are incapable of formulating propositional
beliefs.
(3) If emotions are constituted by propositional beliefs, then pre-linguistic children and
non-human animals cannot have emotions.
Therefore, emotions are not constituted by beliefs (1),(3).
See John Deigh, "Concepts of Emotions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of
Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.
[272] Fred Sommers, "Dissonant Beliefs," *Analysis* 69 (2009): 268.

sufficient for belief.[273] If belief is simply a matter of avowal, if "what matters" is that our judgments about propositional statements are correct, then it is "easier than it should be to regard ourselves as free of racist, sexist, elitist, and other objectionable attitudes."[274] Given this view, we risk developing a "noxiously comfortable view of ourselves."[275] For although dispositions often do follow from occurrent judgments—that if I learn that the first-floor bathroom is out of order, then the next time I need to relieve myself I'll go to the second or third-floor bathroom—often in cases of changing our deep-seated, morally significant judgments, dispositions don't follow quite as easily. In such cases, altering our dispositions requires considerable conscious effort and practice. As Schwitzgebel writes, "it takes work to bring one's overall dispositional structure in line with one's broad, life-involving judgments."[276] And if our dispositions remain—if we still fear every black man that we see despite the occurrent judgments that tell us not to—then we are rightfully open to rebuke by others that we don't *really* believe what we avow. If I make the sincere judgment that the opinion of others doesn't matter to me, but I nevertheless still feel

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[273] Eric Schwitzgebel, "Acting Contrary to Our Professed Beliefs or the Gulf Between Occurrent Judgment and Dispositional Belief," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (December 2010): 531-553.

[274] ibid., 546. Schwitzgebel's thesis raises the possibility that we can have knowledge of something without truly believing something. For example, I might know that racism is unfounded, but my dispositions reveal that, in some sense, I don't truly believe the claim.

[275] ibid.

[276] ibid. This reflects that some emotional states are altered relatively easily and quickly when the beliefs that are relevant are primarily factual. If I'm angry at Bob for wreaking my car, but then I learn that he was in no way responsible, my anger is likely to recede quickly. It also reflects that some emotional states that require a change in belief which are connected with deeply held values and beliefs instilled from childhood, the changes in these beliefs are less likely to result in clear emotional change, at least initially. Deeply instilled racial beliefs, for example, might need to be consciously rejected for many years — and such a rejection, such a change in belief, will require significant work.

shame and embarrassment when someone makes fun of my big nose, do I really believe, *simpliciter*, that the judgment of others doesn't matter?

Schwitzgebel's argument is meant to undermine our assumption that sincerely, and unhesitatingly avowing a propositional statement is sufficient for an ascription of belief. Indeed, if emotions are constituted by beliefs and beliefs are essentially an attitude to a proposition, then *objection 2* stands; that is, if emotions are judgments, as Robert Solomon argues, and beliefs are propositional, then emotional states that don't correspond to our propositional beliefs and judgments are deeply problematic. *Objection 1* is based upon the same assumption: if changing our beliefs is as simple as changing our attitudes to propositions, then changing our beliefs would appear to be much easier than changing our emotions. And this incongruence suggests that there is either something wrong with our understanding of emotion or with our understanding of belief. Nussbaum[277] and Fred Sommers[278] argue the later.

Instead of advocating a narrow conception of belief as essentially an attitude towards a proposition, Nussbaum advocates a broader, neo-Stoic account of judgment as an assent to an appearance. According to the Stoics, judgment occurs in two primary stages:

> First, it occurs to me or strikes me that such and such is the case. It looks to
> me that way, I see things that way - but so far I haven't really accepted it. …
> I can accept or embrace the way things look, take it into me as the way
> things are: in this case the appearance has become my judgment, and that
> act of acceptance is what judging is. I can repudiate the appearance as not
> being the way things are: in that case I am judging the contradictory. Or I

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[277] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 37-38, 91, 126.
[278] Fred Sommers, "Belief De Mundo," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (2005): 117-124. And Sommers, "Dissonant Beliefs."

can let the appearance hang there without committing myself one way or another.[279]

Chrysippus argues that assent is always voluntary, and is the assent of "*lekta*, proposition-like entities corresponding to the sentences in a language."[280] Nussbaum rejects both points on the basis that it fails to address *objection 1* and *objection 3*. Chrysippus fails to recognize that assent is not always deliberate; it's shaped by habit and attachment. This partly explains why beliefs can be difficult to overcome especially for pre-linguistic children and non-human animals that have less recourse to voluntary assent. Furthermore, Nussbaum is careful to emphasize that assent is one of appearances; that is, although it may involve the assent of propositions, it's not necessary. Like Fred Sommers, Nussbaum seems to advocate that belief is an attitude to the world.

For Sommers, the Mondial account of belief, which states that belief is an attitude to the world, is contrasted to the Propositionalist account of belief, which states that belief is an attitude to a proposition.[281] Sommers doesn't reject that beliefs can be propositional attitudes—that is, the mental state of having an attitude, or opinion about a proposition, or about the conditions in which that proposition would be true.[282] Instead, he argues that many, if not most beliefs are mondial or propositionless.[283] Indeed, we need not entertain a proposition to be true or false in order to determine the presence or absence of something in the world. And by "world" Sommers means, roughly, a domain under

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[279] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 37.
[280] ibid., 91.
[281] See Sommers, "Belief de Mundo" and "Dissonant Beliefs."
[282] See Schwitzgebel, Eric, "Belief", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/belief/>.
[283] Sommers, "Dissonant Beliefs," 268.

consideration (DC). Thus, the proposition "Alfred is absent" takes the classroom to be the

DC. But we need not entertain the truth or falsity of the proposition "Alfred is absent" to

determine Alfred's presence. As Sommers explains,

> All acts of prehension have an adverbial character. Whatever we prehend,
> be it something in the world or the world itself, we 'take' to be so and
> behave accordingly. Taking something to be so is the sort of thing any
> sentient creature does to objects and events in its environment and—we
> have been arguing—to its environment as well.[284]

The teacher marks Alfred as absent after taking the classroom (DC) to be {Alfred}less. The

mondial belief takes the classroom to be {Alfred}-less, which is to be distinguished from

the true propositional belief "Alfred is absent". [285]

This distinction between mondial belief (belief *de mundo)* and propositional belief

(belief *de dicto*) helps to explain how (3) non-human animals and pre-linguistic children

can experience emotions without holding propositional beliefs, and (1) to understand

cases in which our emotions don't transform as a response to our sincere, unhesitant

acceptance (or rejection) of the truth of a relevant proposition. As Sommers notes about

the former,

> Any animal that is aware of the presence of something or someone is
> capable of mondial belief. Tess, our family's springer spaniel, who may be
> incapable of having propositional attitudes, invariably barks indignantly
> when the mail is being delivered. She seldom actually sees the mailman; I
> assume she takes the tell-tale sounds of his footsteps and of the mail being
> slipped through the slot to be those of the mailman. In turn, those *de re*
> beliefs cause Tess to believe, *de mundo*, that the mailman is at the door.[286]

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[284] Sommers, "Belief de Mundo," 118-119.
[285] ibid., 119. Sommers "Dissonant Beliefs," 270-71.
[286] ibid., 270.

For Sommers, but not Tess, the mondial belief may engender a corresponding propositional belief. And for Sommers, changes in propositional belief can engender a change in mondial belief:

> Consider the believer-turned atheist whose first contacts with theological heresy may have come at the hands of some zealous atheist who shook his belief in the proposition that God exists, thereby eventually bringing about a "loss of faith" in the {God}ishness of the world and a newfound apperception of it as {God}less.[287]

Change in belief *de dicto* will often result in change *de mundo*, but this change might not happen easily. The believer-turned atheist might be convinced of the proposition that God doesn't exist, but in times of distress he might *de mundo* take the world to be {god}full. Similarly, Bob might believe *de dicto* that black people are not more dangerous, but his *de mundo* belief is sufficient for the fear that he experiences. "Seeing as" generally follows from changes in belief *de dicto*, but not necessarily.

The basic tact here has been to broaden the scope of "belief" to permit its ascription to non-human animals and pre-linguistic children, to explain the recalcitrance of certain emotions by appealing to the recalcitrance of certain beliefs, and to understand why emotional states may remain despite conscious and sincere changes in propositional judgment. Indeed, often our emotions have the effect of revealing what we "really believe," "deep down," despite what we may avow. Our emotions often reveal previously hidden, habitual ways of thinking, including implicit beliefs that were instilled at a very young age. Thus, being aware of our emotions can be an important mechanism on the road to self-improvement.

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[287] Sommers, "Belief de Mundo," 119.

That thought and belief can be something deeply habitual and constituted by one's

environment, including one's social environment, is reflected in the works of American

pragmatists in the tradition of Dewey. At the core of Dewey's thought is a theory of

transaction, in which both "subject and object are interactively constituted within a

horizon of social praxis."[288] Transaction involves an "active and ongoing process of

exchange and readjustment between the organism and environment."[289]

> Transaction moulds an otherwise indistinguishable organic mass into
> culturally coherent ways of being by instilling typical modes of movement,
> communication, and appearance. These define the being as human and often
> bear cultural and moral significance, including racial and gender distinction.
> In turn, the organism performs the conditions of recognizability in ways that
> both incorporate and alter its environment.[290]

At the heart of transaction is a rejection of the assumption made in Cartesian metaphysical

dualism, an assumption of the pre-existence of an independent subject that interacts with

the external world. Instead, as Innis notes, this distinction itself arises from the process of

transaction; it's a way of coping with the world, and it constitutes our understanding of

both world and subject. In short, "transaction is an ongoing series of reciprocal events

between two inseparable entities, where each intricately affects and is affected by the

other."[291]

Because of this, pragmatists are careful to emphasize that understanding thought

and experience requires a "historicist and holistic recognition of the ways that changing

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[288] Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists?" *Hypatia* 6 (June 1991), 30.

[289] Sarah M. Stitzlein, *Breaking bad habits of Race and Gender: Transforming Identity in Schools,* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 13.

[290] Robert E. Innis, *Pragmatism and the Forms of Sense: Language, Perception, Technics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2002), 13.

[291] ibid., 14.

times and different political, technological, and economic orders deeply alter experience."[292] Habits, including habits of thought and belief, are acquired through an interaction with the environment which includes social institutions and cultural norms. Certain forms of thought, therefore, can be understood as a form of technic or tool that shapes our perception of the world. These forms of thought, and their biases, can become habituated. As Shusterman argues, the tool's "biases simply get habituated or 'fused' into the agent's subjectivity and behaviour through 'tacit acritical acts of integration' resulting from the agent's constant use of the tool and the tacit acceptance of its biases that is necessary in order to use it."[293]

For Dewey, bad habits can be overcome by bringing our assumptions and biases into conscious deliberation, opening them up for evaluation. This ability—to alter our habits without rejecting 'habit' completely—is the source of our agency. And since an articulation of our emotions reveals many of the assumptions and biases behind them, such an articulation is also a source of agency; it opens up the assumptions and habits that constitute our emotions, for evaluation. Indeed, for Dewey, because both environment and subject are co-constituted, an adjustment to habit has the implication of changing the environment. "Ideally, because habits are 'adjustments *of* the environment, not merely *to it*,' adopting new habits (through a careful process of intellectual reflection…) can change the environmental phenomena that produced the problematic old habit."[294] As such, any process of introspection (including the articulation of our emotional states) leads to our

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[292] Richard Shusterman, "Making Sense and Changing Lives: Directions in Contemporary Pragmatism," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* 19, 1. (2005), 65.
[293] ibid.
[294] Stitzlein, 21.

environment, including our social environment. And, as Shusterman notes, "such critical awareness, when collectively deployed, can become a powerful engine of progressive social reform."[295]

But reform towards what, precisely?

Objection 4: How can we assail the evaluative component of an emotion, that is, charge it with an "unreasonableness" if any notion of "unreasonableness" relies on a historically contingent and culturally relative notion of the "reasonable man."? As history has shown, such norms are often mistaken. A man that judged a woman to be inferior in worth during the 8th century was, by all accounts, reasonable, while in most modern-western cultures he would be accused of being unreasonable.

This objection highlights the importance that any charge of unreasonableness necessitates an investigation into the nature of the values espoused. This points to a bigger problem: the difficulty in assessing values objectively, and the difficulty of constructing a moral framework that is not historically and culturally contingent. This is, roughly, the problem of modern ethics. The assailing of values led the Stoics to argue that any attachment to an external object was misplaced; it's what led Kant to claim that any heteronomous values were ultimately superficial. Ultimately, defending any over-arching ethical framework is beyond the scope of this thesis. But I have nevertheless been operating under the assumption that there is some notion of flourishing and that some societal ideals (including feminine beauty ideals) inhibit this flourishing. A more

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[295] Shusterman, "Making Sense and Changing Lives," 71.

sophisticated, encompassing argument would provide a detailed account of flourishing to determine whether "ideals" were, in fact, ideal.

Furthermore, a more sophisticated account of flourishing would permit us to understand the cultivation of certain emotion states as constituting a crucial component of a virtue-based theory of ethics. Aristotle's discussion of bravery reflects the importance of emotion within his ethical framework. As he argues, "the brave person's actions and feelings accord with what something is worth, and follow what reason prescribes."[296] In contrast, the fearless, brash person isn't brave, but he is "some sort of madman, or incapable of feeling distress, if he feared nothing, neither earthquake nor waves, as they say about the Celts."[297] In other words, the absence of fear does not reflect the appropriate level of fear one should feel in the face of earthquakes or waves. On the other hand, "the person who is excessively afraid is the coward, since he fears the wrong things, and in the wrong way, and so on."[298] Even though the brash person, the coward, and the brave are all concerned with the same objects, what differentiates themselves are their emotions and actions in the face of these objects. The brash fears too little, the coward too much, and the brave just right. "The others are excessive or defective, but the brave person has the intermediate and right state."[299]

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[296] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* 41. See (1115b15-20), and the discussion of Bravery more generally
[297] ibid., 42. (1115b25-30).
[298] ibid. (1115b34-35).
[299] ibid. (1116a5-10).

4.6. Geek Love Revisited.

If shame stems from the failure to achieve the desired consummations, namely, the failure to achieve normalcy, then under what conditions might abnormality be desired? In what possible world might the abnormal state constitute the desired state? The fictional world of the Binewski freak show, as articulated in *Geek Love*, might shed some light on what such a world would look like.

In *Geek Love*, shame is experienced in the face of normalcy; to have a normal body is undesirable and boring, while having an abnormal body is desirable and exciting. This reversal of values is perhaps best expressed in the Binewski parents' complex relationship with their son Fortunato:

> The youngest of the Binewski children, Fortunato evidently serves as chore boy and work horse for the others. He is generally depreciated for his lack of abnormality and has been made to feel dramatically inferior to his "more gifted" siblings. A reversal of the position a deformed child occupies in a normal family. … He is, perhaps, an embarrassment.[300]

The characters of *Geek Love* frequently use "norm" in a derogatory, "other-ing" sense to denote people who are boring and mundane. Non-abnormal children are described as "norm-children." Arty will get "glimpses of the horror of normalcy," which he describes as seeing "innocents on the street… engulfed by a terror of their own ordinariness."[301] Meanwhile, the hunchback protagonist of the novel feels shame because she's not as abnormal, or as "special" as she wished she was. Instead of wishing that she was more normal, she only ever wished that she "had two heads. Or that I was invisible. I've wished

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[300] Dunn, *Geek Love*, 223.
[301] ibid.

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for a fish's tail instead of legs."[302] Arty, who exhibits a bullish pride in his appearance,

advises others to do the same. Those that approach the carnival are told to remove their

prosthetics and uncover their disfigured faces until they find pride in their appearance.

What makes this transvaluation of values possible is the environment of the freak

show itself. In desiring normalcy, we can typically be understood to desire social

functionality for the achievement of our projects. Thus, the normal state is desirable

because it is perceived as being relevant to our other desires and projects. But in the world

of *Geek Love*, normality has no value. People don't come to the freak show to see

someone that is normal, boring, or mundane. Quite the opposite: the freakier you are, the

more people you'll draw. This, in turn, transforms the emotional state, or at least changes

the circumstances in which shame occurs. It occurs not in the face of abnormality, but in

not being abnormal enough. The desire for abnormality replaces our desire for normality.

And this transvaluation of values is made possible by a change in environment. Indeed,

Geek Love is an exploration of what our life would look like if abnormality became

something desirable, and it shows that our emotional states would be altered too.

But what are we to make of Arty's advice to the fat woman—that in order to feel *all

right* about herself, she needs to dismember herself? Arty's advice results in the creation of

a cult in which each member strives, through progressive amputation, to achieve a

dismembered state. In this cult, shame is experience when the self recognizes an

incongruity between what one desires to be, a limbless torso, and what one truly is, a fully

limbed person.

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[302] ibid., 34.

Two aspects of this strike me as important: first, a cult is formed; and second, the cult is exclusive. The cult has created its own system of meaning and value, its own desired state of being that strives towards a limbless body—an end that is completely contrary to standard societal norms and values. To the outside world, this assailment is completely unreasonable, but within the cult it makes total sense. This is precisely the point for its exclusivity. As Richard Rorty has argued, "even individuals of great courage and imagination… cannot achieve semantic authority, even semantic authority over themselves, on their own."[303] One needs to hear their statements as part of a shared practice, to have confirmation that one's statements are not mad ravings, to confirm that you are not a maniac. As such,

> People in search of such authority need to band together and form clubs, exclusive clubs. For if you want to work out a story about who you are—put together a moral identity—which decreases the importance of your relationships to one set of people and increases the importance of your relationships to another set, the physical absence of the first set of people may be just what you need.[304]

There is, of course, danger in this. It's a danger embodied by the cult. It's the danger of the echo chamber, and the potential for the group to convince themselves that something is morally acceptable when, in fact, it isn't. But there's also a liberating element to this. It opens the potential to establish a set of values independently of the social norms that constitute our emotions. This liberation is possible, in part, because emotions are constituted by beliefs and values which are shaped by the environment.

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[303] Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1990), 30.
[304] ibid.

Where does this leave us with Allegra as featured in the Proactiv advertisement at the beginning of the thesis? It ultimately allows us to provide an argument and to give her advice: We can present her with an argument that is based upon the articulation of the shame that she feels, and other people feel, upon looking in the mirror and seeing their acne. We can explain the source of her shame, as it is rooted in the desire for certain consummations, viz., the desire to attain normalcy, which can itself be parsed as the desire for recognition and the desire for social functionality. We can tell her, honestly, that the diligent application of Proactiv might help her clear up her acne and might, therefore, alleviate her shame. But we can also argue, on a factual basis, that the mild acne she has will not significantly harm her life projects, either in finding a boyfriend or in getting a job, and that it will not prevent her from being recognized as the adult woman she takes herself to be. We can show her that, in fact, having acne as an adult is quite "normal" and that she has been made to believe otherwise because of the construction of a mediated generalized other which exhibits normalized ideals. But we can also assail the implicit ascriptions of value in her emotions; that is, we can argue that the ideals she holds are in fact regulatory and inhibit her flourishing, and that the normal state is not, inherently, a desirable state. Overcoming shame will not be easy. It will require a deliberate and conscious effort of introspection, including the habits which permeate her thinking and valuing. And indeed, this might not be enough, especially for someone with severe facial disfigurement. It might require a change in environment, and the creation of exclusive clubs to achieve semantic authority. If changing ourselves also changes the environment,

as Dewey claims, then if enough people change themselves, a change in the environment,

at large, is bound to occur.

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