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The Potential of Solidarity in Existential Feminist Discursive Methods

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In the following paper I will show, through a myriad of feminist scholars, the nuances of individual freedom and the constraints that come with being an individual ingrained in the cultural context of society and community: as some existentialists call it, the burden of the human condition. There is no possibility of understanding exactly where another individual is coming from, nor complete amelioration of differences; this is because these should not be the aspirations of discourse. Discourse is meant to provide a field for individuals to maintain individual differences and take authorship in defining how transcendence of norms can be broached. Societal gender norms do not determine individual realities, but they do reinforce power structures that are influential on the individual. I will address the philosophical nuances that are apparent around bodies as subject to the cultural location of discourse and the power structures that have historically constructed the notion of gender as it has come to be. I will conclude that through difference, due to the concept of positionality, solidarity is possible as resistance to power structures because of discourse's ability to address systemic injustices.

The research I analyse highlights the nature of subjectivity to emphasize the political importance of subjectivity from the point of view of feminized bodies. I begin with referencing Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, not to revert to a second wave understanding of feminism, but in order to highlight a theme of solidarity in difference that emerges through the flow of research that compels political resistance and potentiality for change in today's discourse communities. The concept of a feminized body emphasizes the importance of the first person perspective because it acknowledges the lived experience of femininity from the perspective of consciousness.

Simone de Beauvoir's most famous statement, "On n'est pas une femme mais on le devient" (one is not born, but rather becomes, woman) shows that the embodiment of a current situation and daily experiences shape individual realities through constructions of properties that are neccessary for a person to be considered a woman (Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 283). *The Second Sex* has been an influential work in feminist theory for its analysis of the way that women are raised to be "woman" by a set of societally constructed standards rather than an essentialisation of properties that define womanhood. Beauvoir's existentialism invites individuals to engage with one's freedom by engaging with social constructions rather than acting as a receptacle for norms defined by others. She examines womanhood through a lens of freedom that is historically constructed as *the other* in contrast to the subject of the masculine. This is a phenomenological approach that addresses womanhood in general not as an immanent condition of being a woman, but rather reasserting subjective conditions that determine womanhood as malleable and contextually dependent. This approach places value on the individual's experience on their own depiction of womanhood as independent though influenced by misogynistic forms of oppression.

To transcend these societal constructs of womanhood according to Beauvoir's approach, is not to want to become a man for his societal status or to become the oppressor for the power status held, but rather it is to realize one's full potential in readdressing one's body as within one's own control. Although the other's perception has real world influence and repercussions, one's body is not dictated by another, the body remains one's own. This readdressing of one's own body tends to be largely an internal shift and may not be so apparent in one's external body; a physical change need not take place towards an ideal or normalized body. In one's actions

navigating society, one can find freedom outside of a masculine norm, however, because this change need not take place externally it is possible that it does not empower another because they may have a different experience of their own embodiment. From infancy on, pervasive societal norms are fed to people about their bodies, these constructions manifest in the way that the body is carried everywhere from the workforce to the pursuit of love. The common thread here is that realization of one's potential is the possibility to define oneself independently. Transcending gender norms by changing the internalization of them is only one way to "realize one's potential," the only way to not accomplish transcendance is to define oneself for another's benefit or approval.

Beauvoir highlights puberty in western cultures and the context that it creates in the individual's life as a way to construct the physical body to think about being woman as *the other*. Beauvoir states that the first period that subjectivity develops is childhood because one's selfhood is not entangled with their sexual partners, but as a necessary exploration of the body and learning one's interconnections with gender norms (Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 283). A repeated theme throughout *The Second Sex* is the discourse regarding the negative effects of menstruation on the rest of a woman's life. Language around the difference in developmental education is important because the feminine is used in conjunction with negatives and secrets, while the masculine is positive and public. The "health talk" regarding puberty for girls begins with the importance of cleanliness around the period and the idea that period blood is a dirty rejection from the body. The burden of pain and reproduction for the rest of one's life is highlighted. Young boys are taught to reach out and grab the world, teased about their "little man" genitalia, and encouraged to give it a name through social practice

(Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 294). On the contrary, girls are not only

taught that their life will be plagued by their own body, but more importantly that they are *the*

other and their bodily functions are not to be compared to that of masculine bodies. Beauvoir

debunks the myth of penis envy, that because penisless people are subject to the power of the

penis they naturally desire what they cannot have. She emphasizes that those without penises can

be empowered in different ways without taking possession of and without hating what societal

structures dictate as powerful.

One contemporary expansion on this phenomenological interpretation of the body and its

impact in social situations is Iris Marion Young's *Throwing Like a Girl,* where she states that the

problem is not feminine movement, but rather the interpretation of movements that are deemed

not masculine is thought of as inherently restricting and debilitating (Marion Young, 44). The

goal of feminine bodies moving through space is not to mimic that of masculine bodies, but

rather to get where they plan on going. The goal of women exercising is not to outrun males

everywhere, but to improve the health and care of her body. Using the phrase "like a girl" in a

negative manner and as a postscript for any type of action (for example, crying or completing

physical activity) denotes a lack or a want to be better, an inherent weakness in whatever action

is taking place. This phrase is applied not only to masculine bodies, but feminized bodies as well

to denote their further lacking and weakness. The phrase acts to not only objectify womanly

mannerisms, but to mock something that is taught to be seen as uniformly weaker. Phrases like

this are misconstruals of language that are used to change the perception of a body by others in

society that does not have innate properties that make it uniformly weaker than that of another

type of body. To conclude Marion Young's analysis, the statement that there are feminized

movements is not a blanket statement in itself, but rather that all movements that do not fit the masculine construction are viewed as similar to one another despite differences.

Judith Butler builds on ideas like Marion Young's and expands research into Beauvoir's phenomenological account of female bodies. In "Gendering the Body: Beauvoir's Philosophical Contribution," Butler articulates where Beauvoir's work leaves questions, specifically around her two claims of the body being a historical figment rather than a biological fact, and the second being the phrase referenced earlier (one is not born, but rather becomes, woman). These points are underlined by the tenet that one's body is a construction reliant on the past for meaning to take shape (Butler 254). By this Butler means that there is no biological definition of one's body that is outside of historic ideas that make one a "woman" in a cultural context of gender norms. It is quite a different point to be born female than to embody norms and practices that make one "woman"; these practices are what have cultural significance and power in communities. Butler continues this discussion to the dynamic nature of *becoming* in daily acculturation of norms that is distinct from molding women in society's hands. *Becoming* can be seen as the relationship between the agent and where they are situated to power with no "teleological end." They are "incessantly renewed" through each social action as a commitment to that action rather than a commitment to a set of standards (Butler 260). This is useful in the account of the body because social practices "constitute an identity rather than reflect one" which makes them malleable objects for the subject, rather than making the individual the object of society (Butler, 259). Thus far I have explored the physical aspects of the body, I will transition to examine the internal processing of the individual's will which can be tied with one's emotions. Rather than exploring

the "unbiased" metaphysical portion of the mind that is sometimes attributed to thinking, I would

like to analyse emotions as the origin of many forms of action include idea production.

Contrary to a generalized patriarchal idea that emotions only act to express female

problems and are inherently unmasculine, some feminists define emotions as a catalyst for action

and reject the idea that pushing emotions away achieves an objective point of view. Allison

Jaggar points to the problem of "unbiased" funding in scientific research in her article, "Love

and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology." Here Jaggar highlights the ways that

scientific funding is rooted in emotional ties such as social norms and sexist language used

throughout medical history. Jaggar states that emotional responses of "subordinate groups" (or

groups who have been historically systematically oppressed) are to be trusted because they

"motivate new investigations" into the problem of intentions that underlie "unbiased" funding

(Jaggar, 154). Emotions and anger in this way can be used as a form of discourse that enable

those who are silenced to speak out about their situation in a productive way that is not erased

through a "rational" perspective.

To supplement the value of emotion in feminist discourse, Elizabeth Spelman's chapter

"Anger and Subordination" points to validating anger within "subordinate groups" as an

identifier of social problems. An emotional response to structural injustices is not simply helpful

as an expression of oneself, but anger can be used as a catalyst to find alternative solutions

(anger turning into blinding rage is not an example of this because it is not fruitful for social

change). Anger can be used as a motivating source for individuals to pursue social change, and it

can also be a unifying force for those who are angry about the same thing: those who act in

solidarity. This sharing of the source of emotional reactions is how I will be approaching

solidarity. Solidarity need not come from identity alone; the sharing of emotional response can promote a unification of action across differences of identity. For example, those who are passionate about animal rights can find motivation and determination from others who are also driven by their anger at institutions that treat animals in an inhumane way. Both accounts of emotions point to ways that emotion can spur inquiry into societal features that should not be taken for granted, but they are not the solution in and of themselves. Thus far it has become clear that changing the narrative construction around the body invites the possibility of individual freedom, and changing the way we think about emotions offers an avenue for solidarity across difference.

One such debate has taken place in existential philosophy, Beauvoir emphasizes the personal context that one finds themself in (particularly in relation to other individuals) more so than her male colleagues, and provides a response to these structural inadequacies that are similar, but she acknowledges the reality of the idea of gender as a fact of lived experience for feminine bodies. The social location that gender construction occupies stems both from individual expressions and the societal condition that individuals are thrust into from birth. Other existentialists find a tension between personal freedoms and duties or demands from outside forces, such as Kierkegaard's anxiety in reconciliation with God and Sartre's recognition that individuals will fail to realize innate freedom in "bad faith." These other existentialists do not address societal structures as either a challenge or empowerment to freedom, and this is their failure to adequately address the nuances of freedom. Beauvoir's work continues to find tension between the effects one has on others and commits her philosophy to the social realities that produce the potential of freedom and discourse between individuals.

This tension reveals that because one is not at the whims of societal frameworks, but rather an active agent in the creation of them, group work and transcendance with others plays a large role in meaning generation. Reciprocal transcendence generates new meanings, but is immaterial and cannot simply be handed from the place of privilege to those that have been oppressed by being perpetually constructed as the other. This is why self-actualization of privileged individuals is necessary in order to recognize the potential of reciprocity. Despite being ingrained in communities, individuals with privilege could recognize the power of reciprocity by actualizing their own subjectivity through holding space; remaining silent and listening in a position of power can be empowering for purposes of solidarity. This is not to be confused with aid that is given to those that need help, but could be looked at as a relinquishing of space and resources that are held by those with societal privilege to those who are looking for it. An emotional catalyst comes largely from the individual's attention about historically constructed structures that are in place in society or from discourse between groups about the structures at hand due to the frame of power. This notion of power is rooted in Foucault's genealogical approach to power; however, I find political hope from his post-structural move to reevaluate foundational structures of society to be buried in Beauvoir's existential contextualization of the origin of gender in socialization. Despite the oblique origin of gender as socialized (Beauvoir explains that there is no concrete historical movement in which gender was divided), the genealogical approach to power helps to explain why societal norms are never complete and have changed considerably since the time of Beauvoir's writing.

Foucault's analysis of power helps to clarify some of the nuances of freedom because a significant influence of personal transcendence is the relationship one has with societal others,

including those with different perspectives. Strangers influence power in society and this in turn influences personal transcendence. I will be looking at power not as a commodity that is limited like food or infinite like air, but as a dynamic relationship that adheres between individuals in society. Power has a historically constructed nature, it cannot be seen standing alone from the context that it is enacted in. An example to highlight the contextual nature of power is the nature of capital punishment in different societies. Because capital punishment allows the state the ability to kill criminals who are deemed unfit to live safely, this example entails a specific ingrained standard of power in the minds of individuals that support this kind of state authority. In some communities, justice is served by all members who are expected to engage with the crimes of others. However, in the United States (through historical creations of specific laws), the power to "serve" justice is reserved for the state. The nuance that is important here and that I would like to pay attention to is that power does not just stem from the state and permeate through groups of individuals, but is also enforced by individuals in their willingness to adhere to these rules or to teach these rules to others.

Rather than conceiving of power as predetermined based on the existence of authority, Foucault interrogates the power of individuals who together sustain and legitimize authority. *The History of Sexuality* is one of the first published works in which Michel Foucault lays out his depiction of power, which will later be the continuity of his oeuvre. In part four of this book he states, "...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society," the situation being that of the individual caught in the web of history and enforcement (Foucault, 93). Power then does not spring forth from an institution (such as a prison, a hospital,

or The White House); power also does not spring forth from an individual with an ultimatum, but rather it is perpetuated by individual actions that work toward the overall systemic goal of the perseverance of power structures that are in place.

It is important to note that though laws and science are not the source of power, they are institutions that impose power on bodies and exert power over discourses (these discourses could be sex, the prison system, gender, and a number of other institutions that have power in their meaning). The source of power is hard to pinpoint because it is not spontaneously produced as a complete entity-- the dictator is not inherently in charge of others and not born with the ability to influence other's choices. Conversely, power is also not an accident; it is no mistake that a number of factors have been taken into account by social actors and actively structured for the ends that will be achieved. Foucault states that, "...there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives," to highlight that power is not all that is sought in its production, rather that there are underlying contextually dependent goals that motivate the creation of power (Foucault, 95). These motivations are intended to regulate, commodify, and oppress bodies to adhere to normalcy by a set of specific standards.

With this in mind, where power is found the opposite will also be found: resistance (Foucault, 95). Because the nature of power dictates that it is imbued in structures as well as actors, it is an inescapable reality. Resistance is entailed in the discourse of power because it is within the context of the power structure that is being resisted. Foucault highlights this ambiguous nature of discourse: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it," (Foucault, 101). Discourse relies on the power that is unfolding in society because it both perpetuates and is

perpetuated by power. This shows that discourse makes it possible to dismantle current power structures and assemble structures that are defined by individuals rather than reliant on historical precedents. One conversation or legislative action are not enough to change social realities, resistance is a continued commitment to reevaluation rather than one unified movement that upends the power structures at play in one final blow. Resistances are found in different stages of development and vary in what specifically they are responding to in "the strategic field of power relations." Liberal feminist discourse is drastically different from black feminist discourse, and both are drastically different from queer ableist discourse. Discourses exist independently from one other with the common goal of reevaluation of power structures. Resistances are a response to the intent of the exchange of power, but they are not doomed as a method of criticism of society's inner workings because each resistant discourse is constantly in flux and attends to different aspects of power in different amounts. Foucault's resistance is not the productive political type that is widely accepted in liberal activism, it is an assertion of multiplicity in the face of pervasive power relations that critiques injustice.

In order to transition to engaging with contemporary feminist discourses, I will apply this Foucaultian notion of power to contemporary western culture's competition that is produced in the workforce around limited economic positions of power. This is example is helpful in analysing the way that power looks in many contemporary feminist works because of the empowerment found for many women in creating a space in the workforce. Through many waves of feminism equality in the workforce has been championed as empowerment, however, this call to action is still being clarified as to what that means through intersecting forms of prejudice and oppressive power relations. It may appear that because there are limited positions

in the workforce, there is also a limit to the total amount of power; however, competition of this nature has created the mirage that work defines oneself. Many institutions reflect this competition which can cause power to feel like it can run out. However, just because someone occupies a position of power that another desires does not mean that the one without the position is not empowered due to their individual potentiality. The possibility of empowerment without assimilation of social status rests in the hands of individual power relations. The myth of power as a force that ravages the weak and rests in the hands of the strong, needs to shift so power is addressed as a constructed entity that permeates many individual realities. This enables social actors to find the possibility of resistance through solidarity with others who identify similar problems within power structures.

Foucault's analysis of power is helpful in analysing the relational nature of power, however, his idea of resistance as reactionary to power falls short in a feminist critique due to its erasable nature. Linda Alcoff addresses the danger of reactionary resistance in her piece "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," the following section will begin to track one of the distinctions that arise between essentialism in cultural feminism and nominalism in post-structural feminism. Here, Alcoff explains the dangers of both philosophical discourses in reaching conclusions in feminist theory that harm the goal of individual freedom. Namely on the post-structural side, Alcoff explains nominalism in this context to refer to the reactionary style of feminism that takes no concrete correspondence between defining feminism and lived experience. When constructing feminist methods of discourse to engage with dismantling power structures, nominalism presents a problematic method of discourse because it loses the ability to have a positive or productive conversation.

Alcoff calls this reactionary method of discourse, or the kind that is without an argument in favor of some type of political action, "negative feminism." This type of negative political reaction to whatever is presented by the dominant culture is destructive rather than constructive. In politics this does not work to create change and progression in gender relations, rather, "Nominalism threatens to wipe out feminism itself," due to its inability to create goals which can motivate people to act in accordance with one another in solidarity (Alcoff, 419).

Negative feminism presents a second type of problem in the erasure of gender as a lived reality because this in turn erases the privileges and struggles that come with uneven dispersion of power due to gender norms. This post-structural move erases categories of gender as reality and reduces gender to a mere word that can also erase the challenges of the lived experience of being controlled by power structures. This is not to say that anyone who is oppressed by power structures is struggling, but purely to highlight the importance of context to evaluate and validate one's reality. As a parallel example, privileges that come with being white in a racialized society can manifest in the economic, patriarchal, and social senses. Conversely, but in the same vein of erasure, essentialism or the boiling down of an identity trait to one characteristic, creates the problem of erasure through the blanket statement that there is a key piece that determines a nature of womanhood. By constructing an unpinnable essence that all women hold without highlighting the distinct experience of lived realities that intersect with other political identities, the goal to unify all women despite their unique discourses creates societal erasure of the situation of women in more disadvantaged situations than others. Negating privilege as an integral aspect of feminist discourse acts to perpetuate the problem of privilege rather than to reconstruct the acceptance of a multitude of identities in the feminist narrative. The blanket

statement that women share a unique nature and therefore share a common goal that can be combated in one way with one voice is fallacious. Speaking out about only certain issues that are brought to the attention of the loudest voice, may negate the possibility of those in silenced positions having the chance to gain visibility by their own standards because essentialism allows this group to define womanhood for others which may not be accurate.

Positionality is the method of discourse that Alcoff reaches, not as a merging of the previous two types, but as a new method that resists the temptations of the two while answering the same dilemma concerning the problem of subjectivity in feminist discourse. The problem is resolved through the championing of the importance of experience. Positionality as a method of discourse is carried out by addressing both the importance of an identity while asserting the individual themselves and their social location rather than broad essential claims. This can be approached through "'identity politics,' a concept that developed from the Combahee River Collective's 'A Black Feminist Statem,'" which states that "one's identity is taken (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action, and as a delineation of one's politics," (Alcoff 431). By speaking from personal experience and examining others through their context rather than presumptions about them, one can engage with others in a way that is both productive and accurate. This can connect to Beauvoir's existentialism from the beginning of this essay because of the importance of the individual and their lived reality. If being born with female genitalia is not a necessary condition for solidarity, and if society does not churn out women who are conditioned to be women in the same way, then the experiences of the individual shape their very conception. This logic contributes to her statement, "Gender is not a point to start from in the sense of being a given thing but is, instead, a posit or construct, formalizable in a

nonarbitrary way through a matrix of habits, practices, and discourses," (Alcoff, 431). Alcoff's

method allows for the expression of one's experience as a subject in relation to societal positions

without prioritizing a "normal" that demands the role of gender in one's life as subject to the

position that one finds themselves in without creating a "normal" that demands adherence from

anyone calling themself a woman.

Alcoff furthers this line of thinking in her later work, "The Problem of Speaking for

Others," when she identifies a method of discourse regarding positionality through her

explication of the problem of authorship. The problem of authorship is when someone from one

societal position speaks on behalf of someone from a different societal location in the hierarchy

of power in an incorrect manner. This can be problematic because it acts as a method of erasure

which can cause further the effects of oppression. Her conclusion is that, "We can de-privilege

the 'original' author and reconceptualize ideas as traversing (almost) freely in a discursive

space," (Alcoff, 28). I find this particularly compelling because she lays a method of discourse

that encourages sharing ideas that "enable the empowerment of oppressed individuals," (Alcoff,

29). She continues to champion the individual's role in discourse by her statement of "(almost)

free" discursive spaces, while also emphasizing the importance of working with others. This is

an important method of discourse that follows previous distinctions discussed such as the

dangers of blanket statements and the importance of the role of the other.

Similar to this idea of positionality, Beauvoir states, "Once again, to explain her limits,

we must refer to her situation and not to a mysterious essence: the future remains wide open," in

the conclusion of *The Second Sex* in order to emphasize the influence of not only historical

concepts, but also the potential individuals hold to define their identity (SS 750). This statement

expands the situation of the individual's subjectivity into their future and highlights one's ever persistent potentiality, without determining one goal that everyone should be working towards. Many scholars have taken the next step in this line of thinking and highlighted concrete ways of how working with others looks and have created a discourse around societal standards.

One such step entails a type of post-structural feminist critique which combines Foucaultian notions of power structures and an analysis of constructionism-where societal structures stem from. Feminist analysis of day to day structures is important for inspiring the action aspect of change in oppressive social structures. This is explained in "The Sex/Gender Distinction and the Social Construction of Reality" by Sally Haslanger through a lens that is tending towards post-structuralism without the Foucaultian rejection of all categories that inform social realities. She states that social constructionism highlights a genealogical approach to gender by examining both the historical context and social structures at play in the enforcement of gender roles. The historical context during which an idea is produced is not arbitrary because it is precisely due to the cultural context and pervasiveness of popular ideas at the time. This social constructionism of an idea differs from that of an object because ideas are reliant on constructions that were created previously, while constructionism of objects is not formed from cultural practices, but from the individual. The individual is a product of constructions of ideas that each person encounters, however, constructionism of objects is distinct because it is the material location of people/objects within the web of ideas (institutions and practices) (Hasangler, pp 163).

Constructions of ideas and constructions of objects are not the only informants of social practices because of the importance of group identities in social settings. Hasangler calls these

group differentiations the *construction of kinds* and highlights the role of kinds in the production

of prejudices and privileges. The social constructionism of kinds draws commonalities (possibly

naturally occuring) that link groups together in categories such as, poverty and disability.

Haslanger concludes that it is important to distinguish kinds because it enables one to "recognize

the interaction between the tool and the reality it purports to track" (Haslanger, 164). Here the

"tool" is identity with a group and the "reality" is privileges or oppressions imposed on groups.

To address the flipside of oppression Haslanger looks to the phenomenon of privilege, Haslanger

states, "And even if I reject many of those norms, I benefit from the fact that they are broadly

accepted" (Haslanger, 165). This is helpful in seeing how these categories that track a set of real

power relations, even if they are constructed and not based in some foundation besides former

constructions. In this way of understanding the descriptions of individual characteristics (or

hallmarks), privilege is largely dependent on the cultural context in which one finds oneself

rather than the individual actions on which one acts. For example, race relations in the United

States rely on white privilege as something that is not reliant on the individual's wealth or class,

but dependent on the acceptance or normalcy that they gain from certain public audiences with

racial biases. This discussion of privilege is crucial to my development of solidarity because

differences in groups and the formation of "identity politics" both lead to discursive power.

Highlighting intersections of oppressive power relations (such as gender, race, disability) proves

to expand further "kinds" of discourses that invite more people to the tensions of addressing a

structural injustice in politics, thus developing a kind of discourse that resists power structures

relevant to more bodies.

In order to identify paths to embodiment of one's freedom and to provide an analysis of societal power relations in regards to gender, how gender roles are enacted in society takes a structural analysis of structural injustice and political action. Identifying how restrictions take place in society will allow one to examine ways to change one's understanding of gender and transcend norms to achieve personal liberation. Serena Parekh begins her short article, "Feminism, Structural Injustice, and Responsibility," by identifying the problem that feminism is trying to address as an individual's strife in structural injustice. Parekh briefly shows the history of feminist scholarship by highlighting the language that has been used by feminist scholars. Language plays a significant role in communication for social-political action because it unifies what a group is arguing and working towards. Language is also a behavior that can take place without critical analysis of what the words that are used actually connote and the effects they have on people. Parekh differentiates intentional perpetuation from passive endorsement of norms in order to highlight how feminism is dealing with a "structural injustice" (Parekh, 621). Older work in feminist scholarship tended to use the word "oppression," but recent work (Iris Marion Young) has tended to move towards using the phrase "structural injustice" as a way to identify gender discrepencies and harmful effects of mysonginistic norms that are embedded in day to day life because of the importance of social context.

Parekh identifies how implicit bias affects how individuals think, but changing the way the individual thinks is an erroneous way to change the structural injustices of sexism (Parekh, 624). In this model, even if the intent is not to cause further oppression, one's actions can still be negative because of the structural flaws that are ingrained in society. Parekh takes the position of Marion Young who in turn endorses Hannah Arendt's idea of a political responsibility of the

individual. An individual taking responsibility for the flaws of the world and taking action in politics holds the possibility to change structures by critically analysing situations that arise as an active member, rather than passively endorsing structural flaws (Parekh, 629). This assertion of one's freedoms takes place in an inherently political atmosphere such as public spaces. The reality of political potential and the tensions of existential individual freedoms need not be at odds here. The existential angst that is produced from the clash of individual empowerment and constrictive realities such as sexism (or other structurally based oppressive forces) is undeniable; however, the potential for solidarity and the will to attempt to reexamine these structures lies within the individual to manifest in concert with others in the political public.

The above listed methods of discourse touch on the fact that the norms and negative effects of certain aspects of a patriarchal society stem from structures in the society rather than an inherent problem with genders themselves or certain privileged populations. Womanhood is identified as an essentialless property that is actively defined by other areas that have created it as a construct. My last section of inquiry will be regarding the other within the same defined category of gender norms. I look to solidarity as a method of discourse that creates an atmosphere of potentiality in transcendence through constant redefinition of societal structures and also finds possibility in the responsibility of the individual.

I will begin this next deconstruction by focusing on the tensions that I have been examining through Foucault, Haslanger, and Parekh: independence and privilege. By turning to Beauvoir's section "The Independent Woman" in *The Second Sex* independance becomes an apparent structure in oppression and privledge. She states, "...the kept woman-wife or mistress-is not freed from the male just because she has a ballot paper in her hands….she remains a vassal,

imprisoned in her condition," meaning that her independence in the ability to vote alone makes little difference to her condition or that of others (Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 721). This is important because feminism has a long history of looking good on paper, but in practice or day to day life it does not reach those who want to ameliorate their situation. Those who march and take activist positions to change the social reality from a position of being oppressed know that attainment of the right to vote alone is not enough to change. Voting on bills that change social rules and asserting one's will to be an involved member in the reality of social structures takes individual critical engagement. To form an opinion and assert one's abilities is to take a stance in political discourse and provide engagement that has the ability to create change; but only if others also take this step of engagement. Only if others also would like to see similar legislature passed can there be enough votes in favor. Only if others are also able to agree to a proposed situation that legislature provides, can a bill become reality. Through discourse, groups can find solidarity by working together to make decisions with the backing of numbers. Critical engagement with the voices of those who share some level of structural injustice through intersections of being *the other* holds the potential to generate new solutions to systemic injustices, without the blanket statements of dogmatic religion nor the facade of solutions in moral imperatives.

Individual engagement with others in the discourse of feminist activism holds the promise of asserting a group decision that counters the roots of oppression in the political sphere of power. Because blind humanism works as a blanket statement of erasure of systems of oppression this is not the assertion that power in numbers can transform all of society. There is hope for systematic change in the action of holding a ballot, not just through voting, but through

the many discourses that change can be organized and constructed. An example is the two party system in the United States - there are only two options (voting democrat or republican) that are enabled by the interconnected system of federal, state, and private corporation funding. There are no complex social situations with a binary of solutions, however; this structure only allows for the choice between two candidates. Through a discursive method of engagement with social problems, issues at hand can be expressed and redefined. These social problems are addressed in and of themselves, and then what follows must be political action in order to construct a different type of social structure. In order to change the structural injustice of feminism, the larger power relations that have been ingrained in politics must also be reexamined. Specific changes on the legislative level are outside the purview of this paper; however, the discourse that holds the potential to engage with higher levels of the government is precisely what this paper is addressing. Change on the individual level and grassroots organization on a larger level begins with the recognition in discourse of the power of positionality, solidarity, and giving space. These methods highlight the potential for political change through use of philosophical models beginning with Beauvoir's existentialism.

The reality of society is constructed through power relations that individuals have the ability to engage with through discourse. This is also not a purely explanatory paper to show what scholars have researched in second wave feminism, rather it is meant to invite the individual to engage in discourse with those who are "different" and refrain from standards of normalcy in regards to gender because those standards do not exist through pillars of womanhood. The purpose of this paper is to highlight why there are no essential or innate standards, and to reflect on the implications of there being no "normalcy" in both power and

gender. The current construction of these standards are detrimental to the individual (regardless of their gender), but need not continue to be this way with the potential of critical engagement with others.

In the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states that brotherhood [sic] between the sexes is important and should be sought because it can change the nature of gender relations. Specifically she says that humanity as a whole is not a species comparable to animals, but a product of history (Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 754). A "war" between the sexes results in focusing on the wrong problems in society, and a combative attitude around gender relations results in the continuation of a power struggle rather than recognition of the other sex as a peer. Transcendence of an individual or a group of individuals (women) does not necessarily cause the loss of another's transcendance. However, essentials in femininity have been perpetuated through the sexes pitting themselves against one another rather than meeting one another on the same playing field. Freedom for women does not cause the loss of freedom for man; liberation is not a war between the sexes, but rather a resilient assertion of the will of the individual (Beauvoir, translated by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 754).

In conclusion, this paper has been an account of the differences in gender creating a social divide of power that have led to a structural injustice. Society in its current stage is by no means at the crux of the issue of gender relations or at the culmination of years of strife and struggle, nevertheless society is at a particular location in philosophical work and sociohistorical context that can lead one to engage with discourse that is relevant to individual context and shared with others. It is arbitrary that individuals themselves are the social actors that happen to have been born in this year; however, due to intergenerational discourses that inform social

reality and the effects of tensions in gender conceptions, one is a major player in the field of meaning making. There are no benchwarmers of life that can sit out of constructing norms and power relations due to the ingrained impact of the individual and the other. Differences in feminist identities are not an indication of inherent failure of the feminist method, but they do point to tensions that arise and need to be addressed independently in discursive circles. Positionality in discourse and solidarity with those who are different both provide a method of engagement with structural injustices that attempts to seek individual freedom with others, without the dangers of erasure.

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