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The Female Perspective on Self-Worth

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Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Self-Worth

How do we determine the value of ourselves? It is intuitive that our perception of self-worth has an implicit effect on our development as individuals. However, the standalone value of ourselves, or our perception of it, is not what determines our decisions. Whether we are in a job interview, an argument with our parents, or a conversation with friends, our behavior does not depend on the perceived value of ourselves, but that *relative* to our perceived value of others.

We are essentially fully specific and concretely particular individuals, each with our own unique abilities, desires, and concerns. Interpersonal interactions are essentially how we express the understanding of our worth and the desire to preserve it. When we affirm to ourselves that we are worthy of something or someone, we implicitly compare our self-worth relative to the value of other entities. Such comparisons are informed not by our determination, but by our value system informed by our upbringing, education, and societal standards. The comparison of worth in interpersonal interaction hence constitutes the application of self-worth.

This chapter seeks to define self-worth as a concept. I will start with two intuitive ways to conceptualize self-worth and illustrate their flaws. I will then build upon the merits of each of the two intuitive theories to present my definition of self-worth. This definition will serve as the foundation for my discussion of the effect of gender identity and social institutions on self-worth.

1.1 Intuitive but Incomplete Conceptions of Self-Worth

One way to understand self-worth is the moral relation of a person to themselves with regard to their own intrinsic worth, which is based on the structure and attunement of an individual's identity. However, when we apply this definition to interpersonal interactions, we see that basing our self-worth entirely on our intrinsic moral values, or our identities, is flawed. It

ignores the extent to which we are embedded in interpersonal relationships. Humans as moral beings are both separate in their individuality and also connected to other individual selves.

Another way to think about self-worth is related to the Aristotelian ideal of fulfilling one's occupational purpose: a doctor would consider herself worthy if she is good at her job of healing and curing. According to this definition of function fulfillment, a surgeon with a perfect surgical record and low mortality rates would have a higher sense of self-worth than one that is swamped in malpractice accusations because of her lack of skill or focus. Although being good at one's job in the professional world is an intuitive and widely applied criterion for how we judge ourselves, there are two issues with this definition of self-worth.

Firstly, it either restricts the process of self-comparison to a specific occupational specialization or assumes a hierarchy of worth in occupations that is not accounted for. How can a surgeon compare her self-worth to someone working outside of the profession, such as a high-school teacher? One can argue that the surgeon would consider herself to be superior because of the monetary impact she has: her higher salaries justify her perception that her worth is higher than her counterpart as a high school teacher. Another justification centers around the breadth and depth of impact. A teacher might consider herself as having more worth because she influences more people through teaching than a surgeon with narrow expertise through long-hour surgeries. Meanwhile, the surgeon could argue that she has a higher worth because saving one's life is a much more profound impact than teaching someone English. The cross-occupational comparison is not accounted for in the framework of evaluating self-worth based on one's professional success.

Secondly, occupational success is not confined to the public sphere: Many women across all races have centered their lives around work in the private sphere within the unit of families.

Their domestic duties, including keeping the house tidy, raising children, and maintaining neighborly relationships, were the primary obligations informed by their occupation as housewives. Even when women work outside of the home, many take pride in being good mothers by caring for their children or good wives by supporting their husbands. Many women derive a sense of accomplishment from tending to others, in addition to or in replacement of their occupational aspirations in the public sphere. As the division between the public and private sphere is not as clearly defined for women working in- and outside of the household, defining self-worth simply based on the success in one's occupation in the public sphere does not seem fair.

Some may argue that motherly and wifely duties are determined by one's role in society, as opposed to their occupations. Then we ought to also ask: what informs our decision about what to pursue in life? How do we choose to prioritize certain roles over other roles, e.g. our professional occupations? If one's career aspirations are determined by our upbringing and self-agency, and how well we fulfill our occupational duties informs our sense of self-worth, the questions beg: how do we determine what to pursue in the first place? As we are evaluating our self-worth relative to others in personal interactions, are some aspirations superior to others? Does what we decide to pursue inform our self-worth? These questions call for an approach to conceptualize self-worth that encompasses both our intrinsic worth, often informed by our role-appropriate duties, and our functionality as social beings in terms of how well we fulfill our duties.

1.2 Defining Self-Worth

Derived from the Kantian ideals of self-respect, I will argue that there are two folds to the definition of self-worth: recognition self-worth and evaluative self-worth.

Recognition self-worth centers on one's essential nature as a person, which derives from one's membership in a certain class, group, or people, social role, or place in a social hierarchy. Our status in society comes with responsibilities and informs our desires in life. Recognition self-worth determines what goals we ought to pursue and what abilities we ought to develop in order to fulfill our goals that would be appropriate for our roles in society. One experiences increased recognition self-worth when she feels good about herself and/or feels that she is worthy of something because of parts of her identities. A person feeling good about herself because of her identity as a woman, a student of Claremont McKenna College, an Asian, or an American – taking pride in one's gender, occupation, race, or nationality – would be examples of experiencing recognition self-worth. The pursuit of this specific kind of self-worth requires members of society to live by certain standards of worthiness by which they are committed to judge themselves. In acquiring or boosting recognition self-worth – to feel good based on her identity – a person would pursue goals and projects that she deems as appropriate for her identity. If a woman believes that caring for her children is aligned with her identity as a mother, she will feel good about herself when she spends time reading stories for her baby or providing advice for her teenager. She will then proactively choose to pursue motherly tasks to gain recognition self-worth.

Evaluative self-worth rests on an appraisal of oneself in light of the normative self-conception that structures recognition self-worth (Dillon 2003). It is determined by the level to which we fulfill the goals we determined for ourselves based on our identity in the process of acquiring recognition self-worth. It centers on our own judgment with regard to whether we are effective in becoming the kind of person we ought to be. When a person gives back to her neighborhood, contributes to the campus community, or saves a patient's life as a surgeon –

effectively accomplishing her identity-relevant goals – she would receive an elevated sense of evaluative self-worth. If a woman believes that motherhood is one of the most important aspects of her identity, she will attain the maximum level of evaluative self-worth if she excels at motherly tasks. She will then prioritize her ideas of motherly tasks, e.g. spending time with her children or helping them succeed, over other tasks, e.g. working overtime for a promotion at her job.

A person can experience an elevated or decreased sense of self-worth on **both fronts.** When a person performs tasks that she thinks are not fitting for her identity, no matter the extent, she would feel bad about herself, indicating repressed levels of recognition self-worth. For instance, if a man feels that supporting his family is his manly duty but performing housework is debasing for the male identity, he would feel like less than a man when he helps with household chores, indicating lower recognition self-worth. When a person executes her role-appropriate tasks but underperforms – completing them with unsatisfactory outcomes – she would experience lower evaluative self-worth. For the same man who believes that providing for his family is a central part of his male identity, he will feel reduced levels of evaluative self-worth when he works outside of the home but fails to earn a household income.

In determining self-worth, the moral agent involved judges herself according to *her own standards*. A person experiences higher levels of recognition self-worth when she performs tasks *she deems as fulfilling for her identity*; she experiences higher levels of evaluative self-worth when she completes her role-appropriate tasks to an extent that is *satisfactory for her*. In interpersonal interactions, one also determines her worth relative to others based on her own value system. External expectations and standards, e.g. societal and parental, are irrelevant until they are internalized by the moral agent herself.

The comparative nature of applying self-worth accounts for the difference between my conceptualization of self-worth and the Katian idea of self-respect. According to Merriam Webster, self-worth is defined as "a sense of one's own value as a human being," whereas self-respect refers to "a proper respect for oneself as a human being." The application of self-worth is relative and depends on one's judgment of others. One determines her self-worth through the two spectrums of recognition and evaluative self-worth, compares her worth to the agent she interacts with using her value system, and determines her manners/behaviors based on her relative standing in worth. In contrast, self-respect is a stand-alone concept that does not depend on one's judgment of other people: whether or not one has self-respect does not rely on her respect for person A or her disrespect for person B.

The pursuit of the two-fold self-worth informs our perception of not only our worth but also what it is relative to others. The tendency to see oneself as good or not quite as valuable as others constrict our lives, frustrating the quest for self-fulfillment and self-realization (Dillon 1992, 52). As recognition of self-worth heavily relies on what we think is appropriate for our role/identity, socially defined concepts, such as race and gender, play a central role in our evaluation of self-worth. The comparative process of applying self-worth in interpersonal interactions further magnifies the impact of social hierarchy. When we internalize societal ideals as our own values, the conceptualized superiority of one gender, class, or race over the other informs our relative judgment. The following chapters seek to extrapolate the impact of gender identity and patriarchal institutions on the conceptualization of self-worth.

Chapter 2: The Construction of Gender Identity

As I dwell on the determination of my self-worth, I reflect on my mother's perception of her worthiness as being a good mother and wife, and that of my father as being useful to others. Although both views are simple examples of evaluative self-worth – which is based on the Aristotelian ideal of a good life as fulfilling one's function – they serve as a stellar example of the differences in the perception of self-worth between genders. The male perspective encompasses impacts on the societal scale, most commonly through his occupation, while the female perspective focuses on the private unit of family and her impact on specific individuals. Does gender identities have an impact on a person's choice on what to pursue in life? If so, does what we choose to pursue have an impact on our self-worth, in addition to how well we accomplish those goals?

In incorporating the two-fold definition of self-worth, we seek to understand what accounts for the widely recognized gendered differences in self-worth perception. In this chapter, I seek to account for the gendered differences in the perception of self-worth by analyzing the social construction of gender. I intend to combine the social-constructionist and psycho-analytical approaches of defining gender identities to establish the development of recognition self-worth for women. I will first use Sally Haslanger to illustrate gender as a social construct and extrapolate her definition of gender as a social class. I will then incorporate Simone de Beauvior's psycho-analytical definition of women as the Other to present how women internalize the socially defined gender identities and the impact of gender identities on the comparison of worth in interpersonal interactions. Although all individuals compare themselves to others, women's socially defined identities lead society and women themselves to perceive women as inferior.

2.1 Epistemology of the Social Construction of Gender

2.1.1 Haslanger on Gender as a Social Construct

What does it mean to be a man or a woman? When we seek to define something, we ought to first examine the realities that we live in. 102 years after the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, we still contemplate what gender equality entails.[1]

When we look at the world we live in, we see that gender inequality prevails in various aspects of our lives. Wage-wise, a woman typically earns 81.6 cents for every dollar a man earns, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data in 2020. Time-wise, she is more likely to be responsible for unpaid housework in the family unit. During the pandemic, women with children under age 13 spent around eight hours each day on primary and secondary childcare responsibilities compared to less than five hours for men, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey Summary in 2021. Occupation-wise, she is more likely to work in care-taking occupations. The most female-dominated occupation by far is in personal care, e.g. health care assistants and home-based personal workers – 88% female compared to 12% male – according to International Labor Organization's data in 2020.

The classification of gender has long been based on the "natural" and "objective" differences between the genders, which are assumed to be "fixed by nature, and so inevitable, appropriate, or even good" (Haslanger 2000, 83). Society has built political institutions to justify the essentialist classifications of gender and accommodate the natural differences between men and women.

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[1] The Nineteenth Amendment recognized women's right to vote. It states: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Are the gender inequalities we see in today's world inevitable? If gender is defined by unchangeable, natural factors, then the categorization and its accommodating institutions that put women at a disadvantage over men is the only version of reality. If we can prove that this version of reality is socially constructed, and what is socially constructed cannot be the only plausible reality, then we can consider a radically revisionary view of the world (85).

What does it mean for gender to be a social construct? Gender is not only concerned with anatomical differences. Rather, it is a social category whose definition interacts with a broad network of social relations (87). There are two elements to gender's interaction with social relations.

1) "Constitutive construction: Something is constitutively constructed iff in defining it we must make reference to social factors" (87).

As soon as we step away from the essentialist definition of women based on biological features, any other definition of femininity or womanhood would be socially constructed, since we make reference to the relevant social networks for context. When we categorize a person according to their occupation, e.g. when we call someone a professor, we engage in socially constructed identities. We define that person according to her being in a category that has its roots in social relations: the category of professor is not possible without the social network that provides the division of labor and establishes the institution of a university. Similarly, in categorizing someone as a wife, we have to make reference to the social network that provides an institution of marriage (86).

2) "Causal construction: Something is causally constructed iff social factors play a causal role in bringing it into existence or, to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is" (87).

Causal construction holds when one argues gender-coded traits in individuals are influenced by social practices, rather than biology (86). Casual construction is critical in our understanding of the relationship between gender identities and self-worth: "how we are (even potentially) described or classified can have a direct impact on our self-understanding and our actions, because typically these descriptions and classifications bring with them normative expectations and evaluations" (87). Any sort of classification, such as one's gender identity, supplies us with *intention*: given the classification of being a woman, I can become or avoid being feminine. It can also function as a *justification for behavior*: e.g. a woman is rejected from a job post because of her identity as a woman. The two functions together create a feedback loop that pushes individuals to regulate their own behavior and hold others accountable in order to reinforce the division between groups that are on par with the classifications. The standards by which individuals regulate themselves create a system of attribution and response that is then internalized by every member of society.

People viewing gender differences as intrinsic and essential is a product of social construct, as categorized identities 1) create expectations regarding how one's self and others ought to behave, and 2) instill justifications that reinforce societal ideals. Haslanger offers a model for the progress by which gender is socially constructed:

> "The ideal of Woman is an externalization of men's desire (so-called Woman's Nature is what men find desirable); this ideal is projected onto individual females and is regarded as intrinsic and essential to them. Accepting these attributions of Womanhood, individual women then internalize the norms appropriate to the ideal and aim to conform their behavior to them; and, in general, behavior towards women is 'justified' by reference to this ideal. This, in turn, is responsible for significant empirical differences between men and women" (93).

Identity supplying us with both *intention* and *justification for behavior* corresponds with the concept of recognition self-worth. In order to pursue recognition self-worth, one ought to first understand what constitutes her identity and what responsibilities those elements entail. The function of identity to serve as *justification for behavior* facilitates the process of moral agents internalizing societal values as their own. This function perpetuates institutional ideals to the individual level, e.g. assigning certain characteristics and duties to gender identities. The primary means to increase recognition self-worth is to pursue one's role-appropriate responsibilities, which corresponds to the function of socially constructed identities to create *intention*. Once moral agents internalize social ideals, they proactively choose to align their actions to institutional norms through the pursuit of recognition self-worth and identity's function of creating *intention*.

2.1.2 Haslanger on Gender as a Social Class

After establishing gender as a social construct, Haslanger offers her social-constructionist definition of gender as a social class. Haslanger argues that good theories "are systematic bodies of knowledge that select from the mass of truths those that address our broader cognitive and practical demands" (Haslanger 2000, 226). On par with the standards of a good theory, Hanslanger's theory of defining gender sets its *primary goal* as to "identify and explain persistent inequalities between females and males … [which] includes the concern to identify how social forces, often under the guise of biological forces, work to perpetuate such inequalities" (226-227).

There are two primary concerns with providing an explicit definition of gender, which Hanslanger refers to as the commonality and normativity problem. The commonality is

concerned with the definition's scope of applicability. Most intuitively, there is great variance in cultural context across geography and time: the female experience in the U.S. in 2022 can be drastically different from that in Imperial China in 1022 BC. The variances in appearance, such as race and body type, also result in differences in experiences. The overgeneralization of the female experience might overlook important variances and hence put certain groups in worse positions. At first glance, women across time and continents might share nothing more than the intrinsic physical or psychological features of female biologies. However, the goal of Haslanger's conceptualization is not to list the empirical commonalities and differences between females. While she acknowledges their importance, she seeks to develop her theory to be "a tool in the quest for sexual justice" by incorporating two additional goals/standards (228). In response, she incorporates the secondary goal for her framework of being "sensitive to both the similarities and differences among males and females, and the similarities and differences among individuals in groups demarcated by 'color'" to account for the intersectionality of race, class, and gender (226).

The normativity problem centers around the worry of reinforcement: "any definition of 'what woman is' is value-laden, and will marginalize certain females, privilege others, and reinforce current gender norm" (228). If we define women as a group inferior to men, the more widely accepted that definition is, the more likely it is to help perpetuate more injustices on such a basis. Women might feel compelled to conform to the provided definition of womanhood and hence reinforce rather than challenge male dominance. In response, Hanslanger incorporates the third goal for her framework: to create an account that "will track how gender and race are implicated in a broad range of social phenomena extending beyond those that obviously concern sexual or racial difference, e.g., whether art, religion, philosophy, science, or law might be

'gendered' and/or 'racialized'" (227). A framework that accounts for the implications of unbalanced gender dynamics on the institutional level would not reinforce but help undermine the structures of sexual oppression. The two additional goals, combined with her primary goal, serve to establish a theoretical framework that would offer a negative ideal that challenges the societal structure rooted in male dominance (240).

Haslanger's approach centers on the idea that gender is a social class, which addresses the two concerns. She argues that the female bodily features that suggest her biological role in reproduction served for society to identify a person as a woman. The observer would then place that person in social positions of a subordinate nature in multiple dimensions, including the economic, political, legal, and social spectrums. Her subordination is further motivated and justified by oppressive social practices. Her conceptualization of the oppression of one group from another consists of five forms: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and (systematic) violence (231). While one person could be privileged on one front, for instance, the privilege in income as a result of higher social class, she could be oppressed on another, such as lower respect because of her race. Her approach allows the implications of gender identity to account for individual experiences based on the different kinds of hierarchies one finds herself in. Her framework also has broader implications for other systematically oppressed groups, such as the Black experience in contemporary U.S. society.

2.1.3 Haslanger's Implications for Self-Worth Theories

Haslanger's definition of womanhood as an oppressed and subordinate social class helps frame the gender inequalities we see today. Her approach sheds light on how even if women

have the same legal rights as men, as seen in contemporary society, they are still in a subordinate position that is constantly reinforced by societal practices.

Womanhood as a social class is crucial in the analysis of self-worth, as the essentialist nature of one's identity is the cornerstone of recognition self-worth. Recognition self-worth centers on one's essential nature as a person, which derives from one's membership in a certain class, group, or people, social role, or place in a social hierarchy. Constructing the female identity as an inferior social class to males has two implications.

Firstly, for the stand-alone value of self-worth, women would consider themselves to be in a class that comes with expectations of fewer benefits and rights. As Haslanger argues, women are confined by the identity of womanhood and the associated duties as a result, which are defined and reinforced by hierarchical institutions to maintain men as a higher social class with more status and power. Women's recognition self-worth is hence constructed under the pretense that they deserve less than men and they ought to be submissive and inform certain womanly duties, such as working in the domestic sphere and caring for men's wellbeing whether or not they work outside of home. In understanding their essentialist identity as a lower social class, they proactively choose what to pursue in life based on their identities, using the socially constructed identity as the source of intention for what they pursue. The inequalities we see in today's world in choices in occupation and time-spending are women's choice to act according to their identities – an attempt to acquire recognition self-worth – as a result of a social construct that creates and consistently reinforces a gender identity as a lower social class.

Secondly, women's application of recognition self-worth limits their potential for self-realization. Oppression occurs when the investment into a relationship is not equal between the two parties. A woman who internalizes the socially constructed gender identity that considers her

as a lower social class pursues womanly duties, e.g. caring for her family and her husband, in order to increase her recognition self-worth. When the man does not have the same expectations for himself and does not put into the same amount of effort into their relationship, the woman's input then significantly outweighs the male input, leading to the five forms of oppression proposed by Haslanger. Additionally, since gender identity as a social class has implications for how one behaves in various aspects of life, it has more weight than other elements of one's identity, e.g. occupation. In interpersonal interactions, people weigh their perceived self-worth against what they think others are worth. In purring recognition self-worth, a woman then could potentially prioritize tasks that benefit others, including her boyfriend, husband, or children, in front of those that would benefit her exclusively (or have more benefit for her than for the beneficiaries of her womanly duties). The prioritization of womanly duties then limits her ability to realize her potential to develop as a moral agent, e.g. pursuing a passion, leisure time, and occupational success. The socially constructed gender identity here serves as justification for her behavior of prioritizing others' interests over herself.

The implication of Haslanger's construction of gender as a social class has the following impact:

1. A person is assigned the socially constructed identity "woman."
2. She is thereby placed into a socially constructed class, "woman."
3. She is thereby subordinated/oppressed through one or several of Hanslanger's five mechanisms of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and (systematic) violence.
4. She is thereby able to see herself as worthy only of certain goals, limiting her recognition self-worth through using socially constructed role-appropriate duties as intentions and justification for behavior.

2.2 The Internalization of Gender as a Social Construct – A Psychological Analysis

2.2.1 De Beauvoir on Womanhood and Consciousness

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir offers a psychoanalytical approach to understanding gender identities. Similar to Haslanger, de Beauvoir considers gender differences to be social instead of biological. De Beauvoir starts constructing her version of gender relationship by defining the difference between femininity and womanhood. She acknowledges that there are manifest differences between the two sexes: "clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations" (Beauvoir 1989, 14). Although she recognizes the existence of biological differences, she believes that biological differences only account for the distinction between males and females. There is a distinction between femininity and womanhood, as "every female human being is not necessarily a woman" (13). In her view, females refer solely to individuals with certain feminine biological features (e.g. ovaries and wombs) whereas women refer to the feminine identity defined by social views. The same applies to males vs. men.

With the distinction between female and male and between female and women in mind, de Beauvoir introduces the duality between the One and the Other. De Beauvoir argues that just as an individual views the world on her own terms and judges everything around her based on her standards, a group as a whole is also able to view themselves as the default and define other groups relative to themselves. In this sense, a duality exists in most social relationships – the One vs. the Other. One group would first establish themselves as the One, which stands for both the *positive* and the *neutral*. They perceive any other group they encounter as the Other – a group with features that are in some way different from theirs. As the One knows the Other only as a group in opposition to them, they define the identity of the Other in relation to the One, instead

of as autonomous beings. Biological features are the most convenient and hence most common means for a group to establish themselves as the One and to construct the identity of the Other.

De Beauvoir argues that the two are not equal – the Other is constructed to be inferior to the One – in support of her claim on the artificiality of women's inferiority. She borrows part of Hegel's idea of double consciousness to develop the unbalanced relationship between the One and the Other. De Beauvoir argues that the consciousness of a group as a whole, similar to that of an individual, has a "fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness," and hence towards the joint consciousness of another group (17). As one group sets themselves up as the One, they also establish themselves as the sole essential. The One sets the guidelines for how the Other ought to be perceived and the relationship between the Other and themselves. As the One has a fundamental drive to dominate, from the One's perspective, the Other is hence equal to the inessential or the object that they ought to dominate.

De Beauvoir then argues that gender relationship qualifies for the One vs. the Other duality to prove that women are constructed to be inferior to men. Males establish themselves as men – "an absolute human type" – and define women based on their biological differences in relation to men (15). In defining women's identity relative to men, men judge women by their lack of certain qualities. More specifically, women are defined as beings without biological features unique to men (e.g. penises), instead of beings with feminine reproductive organs (e.g. ovaries and uteruses). In this line of reasoning, if men are the default group of human beings, which stands for both *positive* and *neutral*, womanhood would represent the negative otherness or deficiency. Since gender relationship qualifies for the One vs. the Other duality, de Beauvoir proves that women's inferiority is not inherent by arguing that men proactively define their Other – women – in relation to themselves as the inessential and the *negative* based on their biological

differences. Her argument supports her conclusion that women are dominated not because they are inherently inferior, but because women are constructed to be inferior to men.

It is important to note that the group mentality is imposed on individuals through institutional impact. As social and political institutions perpetuate certain ideals that one group is superior than another, individual agents internalize those ideas and judge the world according to these standards. Not every person would consider herself as the One in every scenario. A white woman will consider herself as the One, the default, with regard to her identity as a white person. But she will consider herself as the Other, the negative in lack of certain qualities, with regard to gender.

Why would anyone be content with being the Other? De Beauvoir cites the social institutions of family and marriage as the basis for women's long-established position. She previously argues that the Other is under long-term domination by the One mainly because of two reasons: 1) "inequality of numbers – the majority imposes its rule upon the minority or persecutes it;" and 2) "a historical event – [which] resulted in the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger" (17). Gender relationship is an unconventional application of the One-Other duality because neither inequality in numbers nor a historical event can explain men's long-term domination over women. Why are women dominated by men for most of human existence, even though they account for half of humanity just as men do? De Beauvoir believes that women's subordination throughout history can be explained by women's own inaction to bring about change. She cites two reasons for women's inactions.

Women are unable to change the status quo because of constant reinforcements, which are embedded into the social hierarchy, hence nearly impossible to remove. Throughout history, society is organized in a way that prevents women from uniting as one group in opposition to their dominators – men. Unlike the other Others, women cannot identify the origin of their

otherness, nor do they share ideological commonalities, such as a universal religion or history. Since the beginning of time, society has been organized into units of families out of human's primal nature to reproduce. Familial relations strengthen the alliance between men and women to the extent that it is stronger than the coalition among women. By organizing in terms of families, societal rule constantly reinforces the union between men and women through joint economic responsibility, shared residence, and collective responsibility for their offspring. Social patriarchy is determined by those in power – in this case men – and forces a woman to be more closely united to her oppressor than with her fellow women. In this sense, women's shared identity as the Other, or even as the suppressed, can never be strong enough for them to organize as one unit against their dominators, let alone to fundamentally change their position as the ones being dominated.

Even if they become able to initiate change, women are unwilling to change the status quo because they themselves benefit from being the Other. For women, striving for radical changes in the social hierarchy could lead to the loss of current privileges, which is related to their dependency on men. Within a marriage – the way a family and hence society is formed – a man respects a woman as a wife and a mother. She is treated with less hostility inside of the home because of their shared interests and responsibilities. Outside of marriage, or when a man is in conflict with a woman, "his theme will be the existing inequality, and he will even take it as justification for denying abstract equality" (24). By adhering to the current social structure – to be married to a man as opposed to being in conflict with men – women experiences less male hostility. They also enjoy material protection as a result of entering the social contract of marriage. They are expected to take on fewer breadwinner responsibilities, which further prevents them from competing with men and experiencing male hostility outside of the household. Based on the arguments above for lack of action on women's side to bring about

changes to the current patriarchy, de Beauvoir concludes that women have long been dominated by men because 1) the social institution of family units prevents women from organizing to revolt against men; and 2) the social institution of marriage protects them from male hostility to some extend.

The key elements for De Beauvoir's argument lie in the relativeness and cohesion in group thinking. On both the individual and group level, individuals tend to think about themselves relative to others. For the One, the Other as a group is inferior because of the subordinate social identities informed by their biological features. It is hard for a man to think of a single woman as superior to himself on all fronts when the One-Other mode of thinking constantly reinforced by societal practices deems women as a group as inferior. De Beauvoir's conceptualization of gender as a socially constructed identity, centered around the One-Other framework, correlates with Haslanger's definition of gender as a social class. The two definitions of gender identity from Haslanger and De Beauvoir combined explain the persisting inequalities between genders we see today.

De Beauvoir's analysis of the psychological aspect of consciousness also sheds light on the human psychology of value determination. We determine our values relative to whom we engage with. When the female gender identity is constructed to be subordinate and inferior to men, it informs how women value themselves and their decisions in life pursuits. Her analysis on women's constructed inferiority adds strength to the claim that women are likely to prioritize tasks that would benefit other agents, including her husbands and children, in pursuing recognition self-worth. As they 1) unconsciously see themselves as the Other – lacking positive qualities, inferior to their male counterparts, and serving at male pleasure, and 2) internalize the womanly duties constructed and perpetuated by social institutions based on the skewed gender

ideals to maintain male superiority, their pursuit of recognition self-worth would, in fact, limit their development as independent moral agents.

2.2.2 The Development of the Feminine Psychology

De Beauvoir argues that womanhood is an artificial identity constructed in the context of social patriarchy; to "become" a woman, an individual must "share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity" (13). De Beauvoir's psychoanalytical analysis on the mother-daughter relationship sheds light on how a girl comes to internalize societal standards forced upon them from a young age.

In a traditionally gendered household with the father as breadwinner, the socially constructed identity as the Other is constantly reinforced throughout a girl's formative years by the social relations around her so that she internalizes such identity. As a child in a heterosexual household where the father is the provider, the mother holds an inferior economic position in the family.

Her mother serves a vital role in forming her consciousness. Most mothers view their daughters as a double of themselves. Therefore, there are two ways a woman can approach the mother-daughter relationship: she either "hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double;" alternatively, she "tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered" (496-497). As the daughter ages, the latter part of the mother's approach will increasingly prevail because of the conflicts the two women have. On one hand, the daughter wishes to claim independence from her mother, which leaves the mother 1) jealous of the possibilities faced by her daughter and 2) furious over renouncing her privilege and her authority over another human being. A woman can only find

the pleasure of feeling absolutely superior, in a way that a man feels towards a woman, in her children, especially her daughters (497). On the other hand, the mother does not want her daughter to replace her in the family. Once the daughter can perform housework as well as an adult, the father or the other men in the family might consider the daughter to be fit for the womanly tasks of housework. Such recognition debases the mother's understanding of her own consciousness and value, showing her that her value to others is recognized through the general and mundane function of housework, which makes her replaceable.

The implicit hostility from the mother will lead the daughter to consider her mother as a rival. Throughout a girl's life, her mother strives to please her husband by performing the tasks of a housekeeper, keeping an attractive appearance, and sometimes using her daughter or her other children to keep her husband at home. Consequently, the young girl views her father as the head of the household and identifies him as the object of her pleasing, as inspired by her mother's constant efforts to please. The concept of dependency on men is constantly reinforced by her household structure and the superiority her male counterparts have over her. She becomes to associate femininity with appealing to men when she sees that all the privileges she and the other women in her family have are because of their relationship with men. The girl witnesses the challenges women face in the public sphere in competing with men and that in the private sphere in appealing to men. The public institutions and private organizations of the family lead young women to consider their self-worth in relation to their appeal or usefulness to men. She not only internalizes her inferior identity as an Other but also infers the practical implications of her otherness: appealing to men is a task that she cannot avoid in life and hence becomes an essential element of her femininity. In all spheres of life, her function as a woman will always be partially

focused on serving the interests of men, as it is the primary way for her to acquire socially recognizable things in life.

2.2.3 De Beauvoir's Implications for Self-Worth Theories

Haslanger provides us with the framework for understanding the effects of gender as a social construct on women's self-worth. Women are taught by societal standards and social institutions to consider themselves as a lower social class. In pursuing recognition self-worth, they form an idea about what to pursue in life based on a standard forced upon them by society.

The psychological impact of the constructed gender identity from De Beauvoir sheds light on the process in which women internalize those societal standards forced upon them from a young age. Through the One-Other mentality, women internalize that men inherently have more power in society because of their monetary means and assertiveness. More importantly, men have more power *over* women. Women long thought that men are more suited for occupational pursuits in history. As society progresses, many of us still think that men are more suited at least for certain occupations. Many fields are still dominated by men, primarily because of the pursuit of recognition self-worth by both genders, which is informed by what pursuits in life would be role-appropriate. Within male-dominated fields, women are often paid less. Most women do not take the situation for granted, but they fail to challenge the dominant status of men. In challenging male domination of an industry or unequal treatment, a woman works against her socially defined identity as a woman, which would lower her recognition self-worth.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

Derived from works by Sally Haslanger and Simone de Beauvoir, Chapter 2 established gender as a social construct and explored how women come to internalize those constructed ideas. It points to the role of social institutions, including family and marriage, in perpetuating the social construct.

The central conclusion is that because of the way gender is constructed, women limit their potential for self-fulfillment by pursuing recognition self-worth. Gender has been defined in such a skewed way that it requires women to put others in front of themselves, in order to make themselves feel *good* about themselves as women.

The exploitation of one group by another occurs when there is a difference in expectations. The underlying cause for oppression is the unequal expectation for men and women. Women are obligated to care for their family members and even prioritize family interests over their own, while men are expected to be independent and not to show emotion. The male identity is socially constructed not to put anyone else's interest in front of their own. In striving for independence, financial success, and prioritizing their well-being, they are acting in accordance with identity and will experience boosted recognition-worth. In contrast, these goals are not appropriate for the female identity, which would reduce recognition self-worth for women. A woman has to struggle between pursuing her self-interest and her self-worth, which is a grave injustice.

My argument is not that every individual woman views herself as a lower social class or as absolutely inferior to men. These ideas might not sit right with a lot of people from all gender identities, including many readers of this paper. People can get past what they intuitively know or are explicitly taught through education and personal reflections.

However, the central argument is on the role and function of institutions. We started the definition of gender by examining the reality that we live in. The female identity as an oppressed social class and the inferior Other explain the persisting gender inequalities we see today, backed up by empirical data. Social institutions are built upon these oppressive ideas and constantly perpetuate and reinforce male dominance. The maintenance of these ideas by societal institutions – political and social – is cause for alarm. As the next chapter progresses, the paper would extrapolate the impact of the social institution of family in preventing women to act and informing their evaluative self-worth.

Chapter 3: Role of the Family

Growing up, I thought I had the perfect mother. In addition to holding a full-time job, she offered me constant companionship, took care of me physically, and gave me unlimited emotional support. In thinking about any woman as a perfect mother or wife, we fall into the trap of evaluating someone in terms of how well she fulfills the functions associated with her familial role. In the previous chapter, Simone de Beauvoir cited the organization in family units as the core reason for women's inability and unwillingness to change gender dynamics.

In this chapter, I will first demonstrate the harms of the public-private dichotomy in obscuring the cyclical nature of gender inequalities using Susan Moller Okin, hence proving the broader political harms to women as a group. Moving onto the individual level, I will further prove how the unequal division of housework affects the political standing of a woman with another aspect of Okin's work.

I will then move on to the analysis of how family units, with their organization and division of labor based on gender, lead to the perception of lower self-worth for women. The evaluation of self-worth here is assumed to be two-fold: we evaluate the worth of an individual, including ourselves, through an inherent element of worth associated with one's identity and how well one fulfills the functions ascribed to her role, either in the public or private sphere. I will use Simone de Beauvoir to argue that the patriarchal organization of a family unit also cast significant psychological harm to a woman, as the ascribed roles have an intrinsically lower value. In fulfilling the patriarchally defined functions as a mother and a wife, her sense of self-worth would be oppressed. I will then argue that the duties or functions assigned to women with the family can also be considered inferior, hence lowering the second element of her self-worth.

3.1 Effects on the Maintenance of Constructed Gender Identities

There are two fundamental assumptions for this analysis: the existence of a public-private dichotomy and the definition of success based on economic success. The dichotomy between the public and the private sphere is a core element of liberal thoughts that makes intuitive sense. The public sphere refers to the "world of political life and the marketplace," whereas the private sphere features the family and refers to the "domestic world of family life and personal relations" (Okin 1989, 111). Additionally, societies around the world, despite varying cultural contexts (e.g. U.S. vs. China) and market structures (controlled economy vs. capitalist economy), have an emphasis on economic success as the criteria for success. Just as one's income and net worth have a significant effect on her social standing, role in society, and power, they also have effects on individuals within the unit of a family. The target of the analysis would be focused on heterosexual couples with dynamics primarily defined by sex-differentiated marital responsibilities.

3.1.1 Societal Harms from Public-Private Dichotomy

The public-private dichotomy is concerned with a woman's work outside the home and their economic power as a result. When human capital theorists analyze women's participation in the labor force with voluntary choice as the sole basis for their decisions, they ignore the power differentials within the family (Okin 1989, 147). The organization of society in family units prevents women from viewing men – their husbands – as adversaries, as stated in Chapter 1. The purpose of the family unit is to unite the interests of a heterosexual couple and their offspring, prompting every member within the family to focus on the aggregate good of the family. However, underneath the surface of a united front, each individual is assigned a role and certain

duties. Therefore, there is potential for the oppression of one over the other even within the family unit, as "where there are distributions, whether of responsibilities, rights, favors, goods, or power, there is potential for justice and injustice" (114).

Traditionally, men are assigned the role of the provider, whereas the wife is often the primary caretaker. The assigned roles have a strong influence on what husbands and wives think and how they behave (141). The assignment of men as the provider constantly reinforces the domination of men in marriage. They have considerable power in making decisions for the family unit as a whole and on the decisions made by each member within the family. Their economic superiority gives them the power to view the question of whether a wife works solely based on a cost-benefit analysis featuring the family's aggregate costs and benefits, instead of that for the woman alone (147). Okin proves that the traditional patriarchal conception still very much dictates how people behave today by citing a survey from Blumstein and Schwartz: 34% of husbands and 25% of wives do not think that couples should share the responsibility of breadwinning, whereas the numbers rise to 64% and 60% when asked if wives should work with small children at home (141). The label of "provider" reinforces patriarchal domination by granting men greater ability to enforce their wills in the private sphere (141, 153).

In viewing the aggregate good of the family, human capital theorists often overlook three important elements (147).

1) The independent interest of each individual within the family. When the wife stays at home to take care of the family, the children might benefit from quality care and the husband from less domestic duties. Even though the aggregated effects for the family unit is positive, the independent interest in career advancement, human contact, and self-fulfillment from contributing to society from the woman as an independent being is ignored or underestimated.

2) The influence from income differentials. Even though the wages any family member earns could benefit all members, the earning power of each individual has an effect on her decision-making power on expenditures and leisure.

3) The potential for the abuse of power. With the previous two points, the one with higher earning capabilities might be motivated to abuse her power to secure more benefits for herself individually by exploiting the other members, sometimes even in the name of the aggregate good for the family unit.

The organization of society in family units unites the interests of each family member. However, they also leave room for the oppression of one over the others. Benefit for one does not always lead to benefits for other members. The gendered division of familial roles, together with the public-private dichotomy of society, perpetuates women's constructed identity as inferior to their male counterparts. The male breadwinner role gives him the power to undermine a woman's decision-making power and benefits in the family, which leads to less potential for her to pursue economic opportunities to change the situation. The unequal power relations pervade in both family and the workplace and the two form a cyclical relationship to reinforce each other (147). Conclusively, the division of labor within gender-structured family units "raises both practical and psychological barriers against women in all the other spheres of life" (111).

3.1.2 Individual Harms from Unequal Division of Housework in Private Sphere

To further explain the role of the family unit, Susan Moller Okin develops an argument on the harmful effects of unpaid housework that is disproportionately distributed to women. Okin analyzes the harms of the unequal distribution of housework on women from two axes: quantity and quality. She argues that predominantly houseworking wives are likely to work the same

hours as their husbands in terms of quantity, especially in the early years of child-rearing (150).

In families where both husbands and wives work full-time, women work more hours and

perform a higher proportion of unpaid labor than their male counterparts (154). Furthermore, the

qualitative features of housework put wives at an even more disadvantageous position.

Compared to other jobs, housework is boring and unpleasant, has highly unscheduled work

hours, and provides little to no exit options (151).

Despite having quantitatively and qualitatively disadvantageous features, domestic labor

is also defined by the lack of pay. Housework consists of both chores and "the nurturance and

socialization of the next generation of citizens" (151). As measured by the two-fold metrics,

housework requires just as much, if not more, physical and intellectual input in terms of both

quality and quantity, as compared to other jobs with predominantly male participants.

Meanwhile, men typically have the ability to opt-out of housework at home, as their role as the

provider yields greater ability to enforce their wills. Under the influence of traditional gendered

concepts about the distribution of critical social goods and power imbalance inside of families,

housework has been disproportionately forced onto women and hence become a kind of labor

unique to women. In contemporary society, the standard criteria for judging the value of labor is

by assigning a monetary amount – wages – to the work one performs. Institutional policies and

personal perceptions ignore the value of the woman's input in the household through the lack of

pay for housework. In denying to recognize the value for women's labor input in the private

sphere, our patriarchal society (a) reduces women's power and influence within the family, (b)

makes women's social status more dependent on that of their husbands by decreasing their

standing in the workforce, and (c) creates significant harm for women as a group at a larger scale

in the long run (151).

Just as the injustice women experience at work pushes their occupational aspirations to be more "domestically oriented," the unjust treatment they receive for their labor input in families will result in economic dependency that limits women's ability to compete in the workforce with men without domestic obligations (148). Gender imbalance in the workplace and families perform cyclical interactions to reinforce gender inequality, as "a cycle of power relations and decisions pervades both family and workplace, and in qualities of each reinforced those that already exist in the other" (147). The lack of pay for domestic labor and lower pay for professional labor reinforce the suppression of women in both the public and private sphere, further elevating men's standing both at home and at work. Traditional concepts about labor, including those featuring gendered distribution and view domestic labor as unproductive/undeserving, have hence become an institutionalized tool to reinforce the suppressive patriarchy that benefits men.

As Okin argues, women's contribution to domestic labor is not considered as productive while creating enormous benefits for men. The societal expectations about the primary duties for households are divided along gender lines, where wives are expected to perform "a range of unpaid 'services' for their husbands" and children (139). The disproportional distribution of childcare obligations on women affects women's choice about the extent and field of their education for the next generation, as family is the primary place of education (142). Okin refers to a large-scale study that found high school girls are less likely to aspire to the most prestigious occupations and exhibited lower levels of confidence about attaining their goals compared to boys (142, 143). The gendered occupational structure also creates disadvantages for women competing in the workforce with men without many domestic obligations for promotions (148). In a society where monetary means are the primary criteria for determining one's value, the public/private divide and the disproportionate distribution of housework work together to

undermine women's valuation of their self-worth and their prospects for achieving their full

potential in life.

3.2 Effects on the Determinations in Domains of Self-Worth

Chapter 1 detailed the ways we evaluate our self-worth: 1) recognition self-worth: intrinsic worth associated with our identities and informs the role-appropriate pursuits in life; and 2) evaluative self-worth: acquired self-worth, the extend to which we fulfill our role-appropriate pursuits in life. Additionally, there is a comparative nature to self-worth: in interacting with others, we do not think of ourselves as worthy or not on our own. Rather, we reach a conclusion after comparison with regard to the other entities we are engaging with.

With a gender identity constructed to be inferior to men, the first element of self-worth – recognition self-worth – which derives from the inherent value associated with her identity, is lower with respect to that of men. As explained by an analysis of Okin's work, we can also see the unequal power dynamics within families, exemplified by a woman's limited decision-making power over her individual life due to assigned familial roles based on gender and the decision metrics focused on the aggregate good for the family unit.

Simone de Beauvoir explores the psychological effects of their role in family units as mothers on women. As detailed in Chapter 2, women are raised to be feminine throughout the various stages of their teenage life. They benefit and suffer from their femininity. Societal constructs constantly reinforce the gendered identities through practices and institutions, which create disadvantages for women who do not conform to gendered norms. Women who choose to work compete with men at disadvantaged positions and have less time for appearances because of their work hours. In comparison to their peers who enjoy the benefits of the spared competition and more time away from work (even though not necessarily for themselves), women are prompted not to abandon the feminine aspect of their identity.

The second major element of self-worth is evaluative self-worth: one's ability to fulfill one's role-appropriate duties. When a woman marries, she is assigned the role of the wife, the domestic housekeeper responsible for maintaining domestic relationships with other family units. Once she has a child, she becomes the mother, in addition to her identity as a wife. As women's biological features make the propagation of the human species possible, society creates the norm of considering motherhood as women's natural vocation. The duties of child rearing, in addition to the domestic duties detailed by Okin, puts a woman's fulfillment of her role as a mother in opposition to her other desires as a person. With such contradiction, societal view, reinforced by both men and other women around a woman, pressures her to prioritize her more natural role: as the mother. Even though she fulfills her purpose as a mother and a wife, a woman constantly finds herself in "a state of nervousness and acrimony," as her work as a housekeeper does not have the economically recognizable value in society's point of view (Beauvoir 1989, 526). For a woman, the work she does as a housekeeper does not give her salvation, nor does it justify her existence, even though she is compelled to conform to society's expectation to be a naturally good mother. With a woman's limited economic freedom and her own demand for herself to be a good mother, "she lacks the means requisite for self-affirmation as an individual; and in consequence her individuality is not given recognition" (526). From the functional point of view, even though a woman fulfills her function as a mother well, her perception of her self-worth in the second regard is still limited, as her duties as a mother contradict her aspirations as an individual person.

Chapter 4: Limitations and Response

4.1 Limitations

4.1.1 Women are working

While the first two chapters offer a compelling argument for the female perspective on self-worth, the analysis is primarily focused on the traditional family structure with men as the earners and women as domestic caretakers. There is a major flaw in the argument: Most women are not domestic caretakers. 56.76 percent of women aged 15 and older are actively participating in the workforce in the U.S. and the percentage can be up to 83.89 percent in developing countries in Africa, such as Rwanda. Women do go to work and nowadays even more than their male counterparts. Women now comprise more than half of the U.S. labor force at 50.04 percent – there are 109,000 more women working than men – as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2020.

However, women are confined to certain occupations and receive less pay. Even though women are participating in the workforce, they tend to concentrate on certain occupations, which generally pay less. Compared with men, women are far more concentrated in office and administrative support jobs. Across all occupational categories, the three most common jobs for women were registered nurse ($1,240), elementary and middle school teacher ($1,085), and secretaries and administrative assistants ($777). Collectively, these occupations employed 6.3 million women in 2020, representing 13 percent of women in full-time wage and salary jobs.

Even when women are in the same occupation as men, they face unequal pay, sexual harassment, and limited access to promotions. Within the professional category, though, the proportion of women employed in the higher-paying jobs is much smaller than the proportion of men employed in them. In 2020, 11 percent of women in professional and related occupations

were employed in the relatively high-paying computer (median weekly earnings of $1,423 for women and $1,738 for men) and engineering ($1,382 for women and $1,626 for men) occupations, compared with 48 percent of men.

Among women, race plays a central role in their experiences. Black women are more likely to work outside of their families. For instance, in 2019, Black women's labor force participation rate was 60.5% compared with 56.8% for white women, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Even in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, their labor force participation rate was 58.8%, compared to 56.2% for women overall. They are also more likely to be paid less. Black women earn 63 cents for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men, whereas white, non-Hispanic women earn 78.7 cents. Most strikingly, Black women are also more likely to experience gender-based violence, such as workplace harassment. Black women filed sexual harassment charges at nearly three times the rate of white, non-Hispanic women and are disproportionately represented among women who filed sexual harassment charges across all industries, according to a new National Women's Law Center (NWLC) report that analyzes sexual harassment charges filed by women in the private sector between 2012 and 2016.

The inadequate assumption that women are primarily domestic caretakers falls apart for more than half of the women in the U.S., with Black women most actively participating in the workforce and disproportionately receiving the most amount of unjust treatment and the least amount of monetary compensation. In this chapter, I will use Kimberle Crenshaw to outline intersectional identities and injustice as the underlying reason for the differentials across races shown in empirical data. I will then use Patricia Hill Collins to offer a Black feminist critique for why the proposed theory on self-worth in chapters 2 and 3 is not applicable to Black women, featuring the public-private dichotomy.

4.1.2 Crenshaw on Intersectionality

As empirical data demonstrates, Black women face more difficulties in the workforce as compared to women of other color and their Black male counterparts. What accounts for the multilayered injustice they face both as a woman and a Black person? How can we better understand this phenomenon?

Kimberle Crenshaw provides us with a useful analogy for thinking about identities and their implications in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.* She compared discrimination with traffic accidents at an intersection. Just as a traffic accident "can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them," a Black woman can be injured by either gender or race discrimination, and sometimes both (Crenshaw 1989, 149). If society or the legal system address injustice towards a Black woman only when the act can be classified as racial or gender discrimination, it would be the same as calling an ambulance in a deadly traffic accident only when the responsible party and the level of responsibility have been correctly identified. Instead of calling an ambulance for the victim only after the driver responsible for the injuries is identified, our institutions should look at a hurt person and call the ambulance no matter what.

The traffic accident analogy is an illustration of what has happened in the American judicial system with regard to injustice toward Black women. In the current judicial system, Black women can only receive legal relief when they are able to attribute their claim to either race or sex (but not a combination of both) and receive none when they cannot achieve so. Crenshaw reconstructed the single-issue framework by citing court precedents featuring Black

women as plaintiffs. Crenshaw cited *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*. as the case that denied Black women's identity as "a special class to be protected from discrimination" (141). She argued that the court's refusal to classify Black women as a specific class of protected minorities "did not contemplate that Black women could be discriminated against as 'Black women' or did not intend to protect them when such discrimination occurred" (142). *DeGraffenreid* laid out the foundational framework for the judicial system to examine cases of discrimination as "a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both" (141).

With the conclusion that Black women have to fit into either racial discrimination or gender discrimination to be protected, Crenshaw used two additional cases to illustrate the difficulties Black women face in gender and race discrimination cases. In *Moore v Hughes Helicopter, Inc.*, the court questioned a Black woman's ability to represent all females, as "[Moore's] attempt to specify her race was seen as being at odds with the standard allegation that the employer simply discriminated 'against females'" (144). Additionally, the court also prevented the plaintiff from using data on "overall sex disparity in supervisory and upper-level labor jobs", hence drawing a clear distinction between the Black women's identity and a woman's identity in general (148). Crenshaw argues that such a distinction is used to prevent Black women from restoring their rights, instead of securing their rights. *Payne v Travenol* is a case where the court refused to allow the Black women to represent Black males and declined to extend its ruling to Black males, out of "fear that their conflicting interests would not be adequately addressed" (147). If Black women 1) can only file a complaint based on either gender or race discrimination and 2) lack the ability to represent all females (e.g. white females) or all Black people (e.g. Black males) from the judicial point of view, the judicial system has hence

become an institutionalized tool to exclude Black women from defending their rights. Sticking to categorical analyses in the judicial system turns court systems into institutional actors that completely obscure Black women's experiences and guarantee that their needs will seldom be addressed (150). Crenshaw argues that the categorical method of analysis qualifies as a top-down approach: injustice can only be addressed when it can be classified into a single category that is defined from a higher level. Her analysis sheds light on the role the legal institutions play in perpetuating and maintaining racial and gender oppression.

4.1.3 Collins' Black Feminist Critique

Kimberle Crenshaw's analysis gives us insight into the intersectional nature of identities and the injustice that can occur as a result. Black women face injustices both because of their gender and their race on a day-to-day basis. One of the most important elements of the self-worth analysis is the assumption that women are expected to work inside of the private home. In order to pursue recognition self-worth, women proactively choose tasks aligned with their female identity, which is to focus on taking care of the family. In order to excel at her womanly task, she will prioritize her family and spend most of her energy and time inside of the household, which accounts for what we see in the traditionally gendered household.

However, the theory is very much based on what we see in white households in the U.S. What happens when the woman *have to* work just for the family to survive financially? Patricia Hill Collins could offer a Black feminist critique that the public/private divide has problematic implications for Black women and cannot be applied to them in reality. Black women are more likely to work outside of their families, especially when we take the injustice Black men face in finding jobs that can support the whole household into account. They are also more likely to be put in lower-paying jobs, where the pay gaps persist even when researchers from the U.S.

Department of Labor control for educational levels. Even though the identity of a woman comes with certain expectations, they are not the same for Black women. Black women are expected to take care of their family, husband, and children, but they are also expected to work outside of home. This implication challenges the impact of the proposed self-worth theory: does the damaging effects of pursuing recognition and evaluative self-worth for women go away when women are expected to work outside of the family?

Collins argues that the public/private dichotomy is confined to a traditional family. She defines a traditional family as 1) being formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, 2) consisting of heterosexual, racially homogeneous couples who produce their own biological children, and 3) having a specific authority structure with the father earning an adequate family wage and the mother focusing on care-taking duties (Collins 2000, 47). It is only with a relatively fixed sexual division of labor, wherein women's roles are defined as primarily in the home with men's in the public world of work, that the separation of work and family exists in the traditional family.

There are two implications of the traditional family ideal that are problematic for Black women. First, the assumed split between the "public" sphere of paid employment and the "private" sphere of unpaid family responsibilities has never worked for U.S. Black women. Under slavery in the U.S., Black women worked agricultural jobs without pay in the public sphere and had their family privacy routinely violated. Even with slavery abolished, many Black women continued to work as domestic workers in non-Black households. More than 150 years after slavery was abolished, 21 percent of women working as "personal and home care aides" are Black, according to The Status of Black Women in the U.S. report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in 2017. Their duties primarily include household chores and taking care of the children of their employers. They are supposedly working in the public sector of society as their

labor benefits individuals outside of their own household. However, they often receive exploitative pay and experience sexual harassment in the work environment. Since their workplace is also considered to be somewhat private by the rest of society, they have little power to defend their rights in what appears to be the public sector for them. Therefore, even in the public sector, Black women do not share the commonly assumed basic rights in the workforce as non-Black females and Black males, primarily because of the historical context of slavery and the resulting occupational focus on domestic labor. Second, the public/private binary separating the family households from the paid labor market also act as the basis for gender ideology. If society assumes that real men work and real women take care of families, Black women become less "feminine," as 1) they work outside the household, 2) their work takes them away from their children, 3) they compete with men for paying jobs (47).

Collins also argues that the economic reality of Black families makes the public/private dichotomy inapplicable to Black women. For most Black women who work outside of their home, their goal is not to achieve economic parity with their Black male counterparts, but to secure an adequate amount of income to support the household. When Black men cannot find jobs that would offer them a household income, married Black women are then forced to work for pay. Even when Black women endure harassment and violation in their jobs, especially in domestic service, they are unable to do so because of the family's need for economic support.

In addition to the need for substitutional income, Black women also face limitations in exiting the exploitative workforce because of the inconsistency in employment for Black men. Black men employed in low-skilled occupations, such as manufacturing, typically received wages higher than the wages earned by their wives working in domestic service. However, because of the competition they receive from White male workers, they face a higher probability and frequency of being laid off (55). In contrast, even though Black women receive lower wages

in their domestic service jobs, they are more sustainable in the sense that the wages are more dependable and predictable. In order to guarantee that a family can survive economically, Black women are sometimes forced to stay in exploitative jobs because of the difference in pay and reliability of pay their Black male counterparts face in the job market. When they are forced to work for pay, they are not in the assumed role of a domestic wife, potentially making the impacts from a public/private dichotomy inapplicable for Black women.

Even though many Black women are forced to work because of insufficient household income and consequently face challenges exiting exploitative work environments, they have a pursuit outside of their household. Chapters two and three extrapolate the harmful effects of pursuing self-worth in limiting women's potential for self-realization. If women are forced to work outside of the home, they then 1) have increased voice inside of the home because of their financial contributions, 2) have the additional element of occupation in their identity, which could prevent them from being completely consumed by the element of gender identity to some extend. From Collins' perspective, Black women that work outside of the home ought to be more protected from the harms of pursuing self-worth than women who conform to gender expectaction by working primarily inside of the family.

4.2 Response

4.2.1 Response to the Black Feminist Critique

Contrary to what Collins might argue, the pursuit of self-worth is even more problematic for Black women because of their intersectional identity. As discussed in Chapter two, the pursuit of self-worth is problematic for women because their role-appropriate duties can be contrary to their self-interest. The same line of logic can be applied to other oppressed groups in society.

Societal expectations, derived from socially constructed identities and perpetuated by social institutions, create a double consciousness for oppressed groups. In pursuing self-worth, they need to choose tasks that are appropriate for their socially constructed identities. When society deems one as unworthy of certain aspirations in life, the agent's decision to pursue these aspirations needs to develop a value system that is separate from what they are taught. But through interacting with other social beings around them, which could be strangers or their family, they are constantly reminded of the socially constructed expectations for their identity.

Stereotypes are a means for society to perpetuate and maintain the dominance of one group over another. For a white person, going to education is considered appropriate for her identity. She boosts her social standing and self-worth by effectively completing her education. However, for a Black person from a low-income community, the decision to go to college can be a struggle. She has to consider her family's wishes for her to be around her family and contribute to her local community by getting a job in the area. But she also has established her value system that education would be beneficial for her own self-interests. Going to college could increase her self-worth according to her value system, but has the opposite effect in the value system instilled in her by society, which she has to constantly fight against.

There are many stereotypes associated with Black people. Even to this day, racial discrimination assigns the label of having lower intelligence and being suitable for physical labor to Black people in general. Black women are often considered as sexualized beings – facilitated by the creation of the hyper-sexual seductress Jezebelle – which makes them more vulnerable to sexual abuse, assault, and harassment. When they are assigned these negative labels by society, Black people, especially Black women, struggle with what society expects from them and what is good for their self-interest. When a Black woman works extra hours for a promotion at work, she risks being viewed as a bad mother, even when she would provide additional household income. When she leaves her low-income neighborhood to pursue higher education, she risks being viewed as betraying community that raised her. When she points out sexual abuse by a Black man, she risks being viewed as hindering the advancement of the Black community. The conflict between what is good for one's self-interest and what aligns with her role-appropriate behaviors is even more intense for a Black woman, as she experiences intersectional oppression because of both her race and gender. In conclusion, the self-worth theory still applies to Black women, even when they work outside of the family. Their pursuit of self-worth is even more problematic because of the additional layer of social expectation based on their race.

4.2.2 Proposal for Solution

Based on the intersectional nature of identities, Crenshaw argues that in order to address any problem, we ought to first focus on the experience of those who experience intersectional oppression. Since feminist theories deem Black women as their respective constituent, they need to take Black women's intersectional experience into account and abandon the approach of considering "experiences [as] relevant only when they are related to certain clearly identifiable causes" (Crenshaw 1989, 166). The same applies to Black liberationist politics; in terms of

defending the right of a group as a whole, both Black liberationists and contemporary feminists ought to defend Black women as part of their constituents, instead of excluding them with regard to the source of their difficulties (166). Therefore, Crenshaw proposes a bottom-up approach to discrimination, where society's efforts begin with "addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit" (167).

Following Crenshaw's argument, the solution to the harms of pursuing self-recognition for women ought to be proposed from the intersectionality perspective. I would argue for reimagining empathy as a non-gender-binary concept. Empathy has been taught to people of all genders in society as a womanly trait: women are supposed to be kind and caring, whereas men are supposed to be composed, logical, and goal-oriented. The ability to care and emphasize should be universalized across genders. Better ability to emphasize with each other would have two implications.

Firstly, it would enable a conceptual adjustment to self-worth by incorporating an additional element of communal impact. Empathy requires people to stop caring exclusively for themselves and consider the impact of their actions on others. Empathy as a non-gender-binary concept would create conceptual room for building appraisal self-respect on communal activities and achievements, thus moving society toward more integrative and mutually supportive social arrangements. The inclusion of communal impact in evaluating self-worth qualifies as a bottom-up approach, since it benefits the intersectionally oppressed groups the most. The racially privileged need to consider the impact of their actions on the groups that are oppressed based on their race. When individuals reiterate the idea that Black people have less intellectual capacity or that Black women are sexualized beings, they ought to consider: what is the communal impact of my action? What impact does this have on the people around me, in addition to benefits for

myself? If we help everyone in society internalize that empathy is not gender binary but universal for all humans, we could incorporate communal impact into the evaluation of self-worth. Everyone ought to consider contributing to a broader community as a means to advancing recognition self-worth and would want to excel at caring for others in the pursuit of evaluative self-worth.

Secondly, empathy as a non-gender-binary concept could incorporate domestic duties and responsibilities as appropriate for the all gender identity, especially for men. Caring for one's family ought to be a universal concept, instead of one that is designed exclusively for women. In pursuing recognition self-worth, men would also need to care for the private unit of families. They ought to take care of more domestic duties in order to pursue recognition self-worth, which would levy the burden on all women, especially Black women and working women, who need balance between work and life. Men would also get a higher sense of evaluative self-worth in excelling at those tasks associated with the domestic sphere.

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