Daughters of the Enlightenment: Reconstructing Adorno on Gender and Feminist Praxis

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This article offers a reconstruction of Theodor Adorno's work as it concerns sex/gender and feminist praxis. Although the prevailing interpretation of Adorno's work conceptualizes its relationship to women as one of either exclusion or essentialism, I argue that both the reading of Sade's Juliette in Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as a number of Adorno's aphorisms in* Minima Moralia*, present complex feminist claims and commitments. Max Horkheimer and Adorno position Juliette as a subject of the Enlightenment, forestalling the possibility that women* qua *women are potentially utopian figures. I utilize Adorno's work in* Minima Moralia *to show that he—far from excluding or essentializing women—was interested in metaphorically capturing the subjective conditions developed by a system of binary sex/gender within a heteropatriarchal society. Indeed, one can find an iteration of queer theoretical commitments in* Minima Moralia*. As a result, I argue that he displays a number of straightforwardly feminist commitments: that a liberated society requires the disambiguation of sex from gender, affirming the nonnaturalness of our social sex/gender regime, and claiming that all subjects as gendered subjects are damaged by living within a heteropatriarchal society. Lastly, I provide preliminary evidence of Adorno's critique of (neo)liberal feminist praxis.*

> [T]he mortification of the flesh by power was nothing other than the ideological reflection of the oppression practiced on them.
> —Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*

> The optimism of the left repeats the insidious bourgeois superstition that one should not talk of the devil but should look on the bright side.
> —Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*

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In his, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, Simon Jarvis claims, "Adorno has no elaborated theory of gender and kinship. The attempts to deal with gender in his work are improvised applications of a theory of domination in general" (Jarvis 1998, 86). This is, to put it bluntly, one of the most sympathetic readings of Adorno's work on gendered and sexualized oppression.

Scholarship concerning Adorno's theoretical work on gender and sexuality focuses largely on two main themes. The first is a critique of Adorno alleging a vicious essentializing, on his part, of the concept of women as damaged or incomplete subjects. The second is an attempt to appropriate Adorno's writings on women in order to put forward a positive feminist project: often focusing on women as a locus for utopian visions and the promise of a liberated future. Many of these projects focus on the relationship of women to other concepts in the constellation of nonidentity, such as beauty, nature, other animals, and sublime love. These concepts appear as "quasi-utopian" or "impotently utopian." Insofar as they signal the possibility of a better future, "women" are unable to create it. Simply "becoming women" cannot liberate us.

My aim in this article is twofold. First, I aim to contradict the characterizations of Adorno's work as an endorsement of the social situation of women as "other." Such arguments either ignore large portions of textual evidence to the contrary or fail to recognize that Adorno is engaged in *representing* the degraded situation of women in heteropatriarchal society, rather than *endorsing* it.

The second aim is to reconstruct what Adorno does have to say about the wrongness of being a gendered subject under heteropatriarchy. Adorno has much to say about the social and political project of "women's liberation"; however, it is, in general, negative. Adorno's conception of liberation (understood along the general line of freedom or emancipation) is focused on the notion of negative utopia: a determinate negation of a resistant world that appears natural (compare Benhabib 1986; Allen 2015). As Rahel Jaeggi explains it, "We cannot say how a liberated society would live, but we can analyze objectively what prevents it from doing so" (Jaeggi 2005, 75). Such an analysis seems akin to a kind of consciousness-raising. But for Adorno, consciousness-raising is simply the precondition of emancipation. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for liberation. We cannot theorize the way in which life is damaged without first identifying the damage *as* damage. However, simply understanding that one is being damaged does not itself complete the critical work of developing a determinate negativity via critical thought on the systems and structures that create and demand that the damage occur. In other words, knowing one is damaged does not undo the damage inflicted.

In this way, Adorno's determinate negativity concerning the alleged naturalness of women or the "feminine" gestures toward the possibility of an emancipated way of embodied life. That is, Adorno's work can be interpreted as developing an iteration of a queer feminist politics. Despite this negativity, Adorno's claim that women are subject to a domination that is experienced as such implies that they are capable of something like class consciousness.[1] As part of the constellation of nonidentity, women are not fully subject to what Weber calls the iron cage of reason. Women are not, then, required to "set" themselves against emotional experience of the world via

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Enlightenment reason, which is "the human being's emergence from self-incurred minority" (Kant 1996, 17). It is for this reason that Adorno sometimes claims that women are infantilized but are no freer for it. This enables (but by no means necessitates or requires[2]) them to develop a kind of situated knowledge by virtue of subjective positionality, a position that is captured by what Paula Moya calls "epistemic privilege," or "a special advantage with respect to possessing or acquiring knowledge about how fundamental aspects of our society (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) operate to sustain matrices of power" (Moya 1997, 136). I show, though, that epistemic privilege as such cannot bear the full weight of the critical project of women's emancipation, as Adorno argues in *Problems of Moral Philosophy* that action is impossible without consciousness, but consciousness itself cannot liberate us (Adorno 2001, 167).

This article proceeds in two parts. First, I reconstruct a negative feminist project from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here, I read Horkheimer and Adorno's adoption of Juliette as a critique of morality. It shows that contrary to the general perception, women as such are included in, subjected to, and subjectivized by the dialectic of Enlightenment. Second, I utilize Adorno's work in *Minima Moralia* to show that Adorno—far from excluding or essentializing women—was interested in capturing, via metaphor, the subjective conditions developed by a system of binary sex/gender within a heteropatriarchal society. In his aphorisms, Adorno makes several critical feminist points: highlighting claims that sex and gender should be disambiguated, that neither sex nor gender belong to first nature, and that all subjects *as gendered subjects* are damaged by heteropatriarchy (seeming to endorse the existence of what Judith Butler, later, develops as the "matrix of intelligibility"). To that extent, I tease out the nascent threads of what could be called Adorno's queer feminist commitments. Lastly, I connect these two discussions and argue that his work contains the threads of critique against liberal feminisms aimed toward inclusion (for example, Okin 1989; Nussbaum 1999) *and* threads of critique against neoliberal feminisms seeking to politicize women's economic dominance (for example, Slaughter 2012; Sandberg 2013).

On Juliette: The Daughter of the Enlightenment

Feminist scholarship on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) often maintains a focus on one of two aspects: the relationship of Odysseus to Penelope and Circe or the exclusion of women from the dialectic.[3] Patricia Mills reconstructs the myth of Odysseus with a female character, Medea, in an attempt to show the ways in which recognition functions for women's subjectivities (Mills 1987). Mills develops this retelling due to the supposed absence of women as subjects in *Dialectic of Enlightenment (DOE)*. Alternatively, Andrew Hewitt's essay, "A Feminine Dialectic of Enlightenment? Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited," argues that women are included in *DOE* precisely by means of their exclusion. Their inclusion, in this sense, is an instrumentalization of femininity as having positive utopian potential (Hewitt

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2006, 69–96; compare Lee 2005). On this account, women (both as subject and concept) are not subject to the dialectic of Enlightenment precisely because of their position within the constellation of nonidentity. This is one way in which women are reconstructed as impotently utopian figures: free from the bipolarity of the dialectic, they are supposedly able to transcend Enlightenment reason and morality via subversive identity. However, this "feminine" retelling can tell a liberatory story only at the cost of ignoring Horkheimer and Adorno's explicit inclusion of women within the dialectic.

To discuss the place of women within the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as necessarily part of the triad of madonna (Penelope), whore (Circe), or lack (understood as either castrated or simply excluded), is mistaken. The interpretations of the *DOE* that rely on women as being excluded as subject or as concept fail to take into account the excursus "Juliette, or Enlightenment and Morality."[4] Juliette, as a figure, accounts for far more conceptual space in the text than either Penelope or Circe, who are positioned only in their relation to men in general and Odysseus in particular. Sade's character of Juliette appears in relation to morality as such, rather than masculinity or men, and accounts for as much theoretical and interpretive space within the text as Odysseus.

Juliette is characterized by Horkheimer and Adorno as a modern mythic figure; there is no representation of untamed first nature in her story. Yet, like Odysseus, she attempts to constitute her own subjectivity by a means that will necessarily destroy it. Her method is an ecstatic sexuality and a perverse pleasure in subversion (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 83). They describe Juliette's boundless appetite for sexual relations as perverse, violent, and a means of war. War is always fought against an enemy, and so Juliette's sexuality is a weapon of antagonism against civilization. It is a "lethal love" that does not destroy civilization, its mere object. Rather, it also destroys its subject who relies on civilization for her subjective constitution. This is how we see Juliette as a mythic figure lacking myth. She does not attempt to dominate nature, as Odysseus does, but to dominate civilization: the true source of both her subjective constitution and her domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 88–89).

As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, "the *chronique scandaleuse* of Justine and Juliette . . . is the Homeric epic after it has discarded its last mythological veil: the story of thought as an instrument of power" (92). As the subject of "the story of thought as an instrument of power," Juliette discloses the possibility of what Foucault later describes as "the politics of the scientific statement," or "what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal régime of power" (Foucualt 1980, 112–13). Juliette shows that relations of thought are also relations of power, and thus relations of control. It is not Juliette's womanhood that constructs the potential for a quasi-utopia, but Juliette's understanding that thought exists within regimes of power and thus serves as a precondition for the manipulation of social or cultural conditions.

Juliette allies herself with science, reason, and logic. She takes up the pursuits and triumphs of the Enlightenment understood as masculine subjectivity. In this

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alignment, Juliette performs what can be best described as a form of gender nonconformity. She is a co-participant in the pursuit to "dominate nature boundlessly, to turn the cosmos into an endless hunting ground … [which] shaped the idea of a man in male society" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 206). She refuses the gendered expectations of her as a woman but does not do so by opposing herself to them; she merely neglects to take them up. In doing so, she asserts herself as a subject outside the triad of Madonna, whore, and lack.

The excursus on Juliette contains some of the resources for a feminist critical theory. In Juliette's successful liberation of herself from patriarchal institutions, she is caught up within the domination imposed by the logic of the Enlightenment. She utilizes Kantian reason in a way that, according to Enlightenment principles, is purportedly unavailable to her as a woman. Horkheimer and Adorno posit Juliette as a figure who utilizes the master's tools: "she embodies … intellectual pleasure in regression, *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the joy of defeating civilization with its own weapons" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 74). They go on:

> She manipulates semantics and logical syntax like the most up-to-date positivist, but unlike that employee of the latest administration she does not direct her linguistic criticism primarily against thought and philosophy but, as a daughter of the militant Enlightenment, against religion. (76)

Juliette functions within the masculinized morality of the Enlightenment: a morality that lacks a strong affective element or "feminine" characteristics such as compassion and care. "As a good philosopher she remains cool and reflective" (81) and in taking up the masculine philosophical discourse, Juliette *has* subverted the domination of patriarchal logic that defines itself by her exclusion from it (Lloyd 1984; Hewitt 2006, 164).

For Horkheimer and Adorno, "woman" is particularly connected with art, morality, and sublime love insofar as they are "masks of nature, in which nature reappears transformed and becomes expressive as its own antithesis … in its distortion it manifests its essence" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 207). "Woman" seeming to represent untamed nature shows the ways in which conceptually she has been constructed as artifice through structures and systems of domination. Juliette cannot be understood as "representing" the natural any more than Odysseus, with his cunning domination of nature (and attendant self-sacrifice), could be understood as a "representative" of nature (87). Such a move does double duty: in neglecting womanhood and femininity, Juliette does not reject it, and therefore does not recreate it as something that ought to be rejected. She refuses to affirm the positivity of masculine subjectivity and recreate her womanhood as a cipher for masculine domination.

It would do violence to Juliette's character to categorize her as a man because she represents masculine archetypes. She takes up Enlightenment masculinity and uses its own logic to plant the seeds of its destruction. This comes to bear on Horkheimer and Adorno's awareness regarding concepts of gender as themselves mythic, irrational, and constructed structures mobilized for the purpose of domination. To the extent that Juliette actively subverts assigned feminine roles without denouncing her

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own womanhood, her subversion can be understood as liberation from patriarchal force. Juliette's subversion of socially enforced feminine roles liberates her, but liberates her into the same dominating logic to which men are subjected: the totalizing domination of Enlightenment reason, subjectivity, economics, and liberal politics.

Taking up the masculine logic of the Enlightenment subjects Juliette to the same self-alienation and domination to which Odysseus falls prey: a futile attempt at self-constitution through domination of nature, which in turn dominates him. This serves, at the very least, to show that it is insufficient to think that women could serve a simple utopian function by virtue of their patriarchal domination (Buck-Morss 1977, 28–36).[5] The moment of potential liberation, made possible by epistemic privilege that is derived from status as a member of an oppressed group, is nothing more than liberation into the same structures of domination acting on men. Thus, while the story of Juliette shows that thought is an instrument of power, it also shows that thought alone is insufficient for liberation. The excursus on Juliette is in part a precaution against the possibility that women's liberation hinges on the subversion of patriarchal gender roles and the adoption of "masculinized" roles by incorporating reason, logic, and scientific thinking within a program of domination. Further, it shows that *contra* the common claim, women, subjugated differently, find themselves subjugated by Enlightenment reason nonetheless.

Juliette's subversion, accomplished in the application of Enlightenment reason, cautions against thinking that dominated groups hold a simple utopian potential by virtue of their domination. This is not to say that they do not hold a kind of "epistemic privilege" by virtue of their partial domination. However, to claim that they have an unbridled utopian potential of thought is to fail to take seriously the totalizing domination into which they are liberated, even if they can be liberated from their domination by a highly fractured structure, such as patriarchal logic. Thus, feminist appropriations of Adorno that rely on "woman" as nonidentical, and thereby being a potential site of utopian liberation, are mistaken (Flower MacCannell 1999, 141–60; compare Fraser 1995, Hewitt 2006). Woman, as a concept, is not part of a constellation with nature, art, and beauty because these are utopian, but because these concepts are all inadequate to their objects. This is merely a recognition that a conceptualization of women never adequately captures what it is to be a living, socially situated, and embodied woman.

Insofar as "woman" is a social category signaling the absence of a masculine subject, the weight of the representation of all those things not-masculine is forced upon her socially by a "male logic" (of patriarchal domination and control of women); feeling, biological nature, art, morality, and love become paradigmatic of women and vice versa (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 206). These associations forced upon women, as noted by Horkheimer and Adorno, far from being an ontologization of women, are noted as being "a degrading agency" in a patriarchal society. That is, Horkheimer and Adorno are not, here, participating in essentialism but rather displaying the mechanics that create it and providing a criticism of it.

The feminist lesson of Juliette is a warning against the kind of liberal egalitarianism that argues that we ought to strive for equality of persons by assimilation into a

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world structured by bourgeois patriarchal logic. This influence can be shown in some feminist work arguing that feminism must be able to do more than simply ask, "equality of what," and provide an answer to that question (Cornell 1992, 3–5). Juliette takes up the master's tools and uses them to dismantle the master's houses: those related to morality. This highlights the way in which Kantian reason functions as an instrument for calculation without end; because it has no proper object Juliette is able to replace it with her own, thus showing the heteronomy that undergirds Kantian autonomy (Comay 2006). Horkheimer and Adorno's negativity, here, highlights that Juliette does nothing but liberate herself from patriarchy into other forms of domination: a liberation that is at once not liberatory.

Horkheimer and Adorno can be seen as criticizing the institution of Enlightenment morality (and the bourgeois logic that sustains and requires it) in the excursus on Juliette, but Adorno moves on to the explicit critique of heteropatriarchal social institutions in *Minima Moralia* (2005). Through *Minima Moralia* (MM), we can see that Adorno has a developed theory of gender and feminist praxis that is concerned not merely with morality or marriage, but with the inclusion of women in Enlightenment spheres (such as bourgeois liberal politics and formal capitalist production) from which they were previously excluded.

Reading *Minima Moralia* through *Dialectic of Enlightenment*[6]

In what follows, I examine Adorno's oft ignored and numerous writings on women in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (Adorno 2005) by heeding Gillian Rose's warning that "Adorno … has thus been read far too literally" (Rose 1978, 16–17). To this end, I broadly reconstruct Adorno's writing in MM with regard to sex/gender under heteropatriarchy to highlight its critical and emancipatory moments. But first, I would like to situate the discussion in the context of a letter that Adorno wrote to Erich Fromm, dated November 16, 1937. In this letter, Adorno asks Fromm to undertake a critical empirical project concerning the subjectivization of women in Nazi Germany. Though it appears that such a project was never completed, the letter makes Adorno's intentions plain. He writes:

> I imagine this will culminate in a critique of "the feminine" in the way this term is affirmatively used today society [*sic*]. After it has been reduced to the mechanism of its production one could show what kind of ideological function this term actually exerts …. Needless to say that this work should not be seen as an "attack" on women but as their defense against a patriarchal society that made them what they are today and that they can employ for its own ends just because they are what they are. (as quoted in Zeige 2003)

In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno completes some of the micro-level analytic work that such a project would involve, by laying bare the institution of patriarchy in the service of a negativity that "determines what should not be" (Jaeggi 2005, 75).

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As such, MM in particular reflects the various and contradictory ways in which the concept "woman" and women themselves have been developed.[7] Themes include fear or pain regarding sex (sometimes rape) and its inverse in the hypersexualization of heterosexual women. It is the fault of a heteropatriarchal society that, on the one hand, a woman's confidence is dependent on men for their attention and sexual approval, while on the other hand, it is socially denigrating to be a woman. Thus, both a woman's shame and confidence derive from the same place: her relation to men. In fact, according to Adorno the entirety of the feminine character is attributable to masculinity, as the negative imprint of domination:

> The feminine character, and the ideal of femininity on which it is modeled, are products of masculine society . . .. Where it claims to be humane, masculine society imperiously breeds in woman its own corrective and shows itself through this limitation implacably to be the master. The feminine character is a negative imprint of domination. But therefore equally bad. (Adorno 2005, 95)

The temptation here is to reduce Adorno's dialectical theory of the concept of woman to a positive normative appraisal of the domination of actual women via Enlightenment social spheres, for example in the family, the workplace, and liberal politics. To do so is to take what is essentially a dialectical descriptive project—that of outlining the various ways in which life and living have been damaged irreconcilably, creating social contradictions under which real living is impossible—and mistake it for Adorno's approval of the situation of bourgeois patriarchal domination of women. It is important to note, for example, that Adorno stresses the faint rightness of the woman's attempt to assert subjective agency in the face of masculine sexualized violence (to say "no"), even if the attempt is fruitless and futile (Adorno 2005, 90–91). Rather, the concept of "woman" functions as a subjectivity of remainder.

In MM, Adorno highlights the social construction of individuality, claiming that it is a mistake to argue that "what is biologically one must logically precede the social whole," because "it is only isolated by force and its contingency is held up as a standard of truth" (Adorno 2005, 154). That is, the nature of the individually constituted subject does not necessarily precede the social conditions in which it finds itself. The individual subject is forced, rather, to be individual *by* the social whole itself.[8] Although this passage is often interpreted to inflect the process of subjective individuation under Enlightenment reason, it also has implications for the faulty biological determinism of normative binary sex and gender assignment. Often, binary sex is taken to be a biological necessity that logically precedes the developed strictures of gender socialization. Yet the supposed biological necessity of subjective constitution does not proceed naturally, that is, without force. Adorno addresses the point explicitly in his letter to Fromm while discussing the "biological" basis of femininity, saying, "one can do without a substructure or mechanism of identification, which anyway would be hard to prove" (as quoted in Zeige 2003). Here, Adorno explicitly endorses that sex is no more biologically necessary (or belonging to first nature) than

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gender, and as such, neither can form a necessary mechanism of identification with the feminine.

He continues this line of argument in *MM*:

> If the psychoanalytical theory is correct that women experience their physical constitution as a consequence of castration, their neurosis gives them an inkling of the truth. The woman who feels herself a wound when she bleeds knows more about herself than the one who imagines herself as a flower because that suits her husband. (Adorno 2005, 95)

Women's status as castrated or "defective" as signified by menstruation is, according to Adorno, a social mutilation. Menstruation is not, literally, the product of a wound. Rather, Adorno highlights that pathologization of it is itself the production of cis women as defective.

Butler, who reads psychoanalytic theory in much the same way, says, of "gender critical feminism" or trans-exclusionary radical feminism: "I reject totally the characterization of a transwoman as a mutilated man. First, that formulation presumes that men born into that sex assignment are not mutilated" (Williams 2014). Here, we see the mirror image of Adorno's psychoanalytic claim: it is not merely women (trans or non-trans) who find themselves mutilated. As Susan Stryker puts it, "to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself . . . can summon up all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness. My transsexual body literalizes this violence" (Stryker 1994, 250). Adorno can be interpreted as highlighting just this psychosocial mutilation by virtue of being born into a system of forced sex/gender assignment, while still recognizing that we are not all equally forced to confront the psychosocial wounds it inflicts. The woman who affirms her menstruation as a wound, like the trans person who affirms themself as a cyborg or monster, identifies the illusion of naturalness, and its damage, in their forced gender assignment and socialization—creating the possibility of a productive politicization. The pathologization of menstruation points us toward the positive: that the infliction of binary, and normative, sex and gender assignment prevents us from inhabiting a liberated society.

Adorno also insists that women are not the only ones mutilated by heteropatriarchy, but that we are all mutilated differently. He describes the "tough baby" who participates in the logic of machismo (a masculinity based on sexualized violence, akin to Juliette's subjective constitution):

> The joys of such men . . . have altogether something of the latent act of violence. By all appearances, this is threatened to others, though he has long since had no need to do so, sprawled on his easy chair. In truth it is past violence against himself . . . unlike wine, every glass of whiskey, every puff on the cigar still recalls the reluctance, which it must have cost the organism, to accustom itself to such powerful stimuli. (Adorno 2005, 45)

Adorno describes the "tough baby" as someone who performs masculinity in a way that shows the "conspiracy of all men with each other" (45): a heteropatriarchal

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masculinity developed in and for domination. Going on, he claims that the tough baby's subjective constitution "is nothing other than repressed homosexuality, which emerges as the only approved form of what is heterosexual" (45). The tough baby, in his desire to show his manliness and reject any sign of "feminine weakness," destroys himself rather than the other: a repressed homosexuality standing in for the destruction of the self who is so desperately masculine that he cannot care for a single man, not even himself. The dialectical inversion of the man who loves his masculinity as violence is that he does so by directing this violence against himself. To highlight the negative effects of the heteronormative gender binary as deleterious not merely to the woman who sees herself as a wound, but to the man who sees himself as "the tough guy," displays an apt understanding of the violence of heteropatriarchal constructions of gender and socially enforced gendered behavior. Here we see patriarchal domination as it affects all people, not merely women—no one is left undamaged by the enforcement of normative sex/gender (Heberle 2006, 5).

The social construction of sex and gender binaries lurks throughout Adorno's depiction of wrong life in *Minima Moralia*. Far from endorsing a problematic concept of "women" as "feminine" or as "natural," Adorno points to the social contradictions inherent in understanding women in heteropatriarchal ways, an understanding of what women are as "for men" and delineated by men: the unnatural woman. To this end, he criticizes Nietzsche for equivocating between women and the feminine, highlighting that performed aspects of gender do not normatively map onto bodily differentiation, but are rather effects of patriarchal domination, writing:

> He fell for the fraud of saying "the feminine" when talking of women. Hence the perfidious advice not to forget the whip: femininity itself is already the effect of the whip. The liberation of nature would be to abolish its self-fabrication. (Adorno 2005, 96)

Adorno is constructing what we often take to be a double-bind of women's subjectivity as it exists under conditions of patriarchy: women are at once expected to make themselves into natural women, but may do so only through the artificial disciplining of patriarchal logic. He says:

> The lie consists not only in the claim that nature exists where it has been tolerated and adapted, but what passes for nature in civilization is by its very substance furthest from all nature, its own self-chosen object. The femininity which appeals to instinct, is always exactly what every woman has to force herself by violence—masculine violence—to be: a she-man. (95–96)

It is here that Adorno admits he both does and does not know what a woman is: it recalls the problematic features of an essentializing identity politics that demands women construct their constitutions appropriately while at the same time serving as a mask of nature that proves its antithesis. Woman and the feminine as concepts, thus developed in and for patriarchal domination, will, according to Adorno, never be adequate to the lived experience of a woman—echoing Butler's claim that

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> Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary. This is not to say that the term "women" ought not to be used or that we ought to announce the death of the category. On the contrary, if feminism presupposes that "women" designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability. (Benhabib et al. 1995, 50)

Woman as a concept is seemingly designed to signify an object that exceeds it. As Nancy Fraser puts it, "no one is simply a woman" (84).

Adorno notes that there is nothing natural about the affirmation of the nature of women: the nature of women within a heteropatriarchal society is, in fact, constructed by masculine violence. One cannot, according to Adorno, find feminist liberation in either the turn to traditionally masculine roles nor via the artificial adoption of femininity. In pointing out that the so-called nature of women displays its antithesis, he echoes Beauvoir's oft-quoted claim that no women are born, instead all are made. This coheres well with the contemporary claim that we do not need an essentializing (and thereby exclusionary) definition of "women" in order to have solidarity among women differently situated by race, class, empire, gender identity, and sexuality.[9] In other words, he highlights a contemporary feminist problem: the need to build solidarity after identity. However, Adorno offers no solution, as his dedication to a negative ethics precludes such solutions. Yet what Adorno does offer mirrors what Seyla Benhabib refers to as the "anticipatory-utopian" moment that is essential for a normative critical theory. Adorno articulates the aim of critique as pointing toward what is both missing and needful: an emancipated society, which "would not be a unitary state, but the realization of universality in the reconciliation of differences … [and] conceive the better state as one in which people could be different without fear" (Adorno 2005, 104).

Here, Adorno articulates a kind of nascent queer theory, one aiming toward a world in which inclusion (as assimilation or *via* a false universalism) is not the fundamental aim, but rather the proliferation of difference absent fear (compare Muñoz 2009, 54–64; Williams 2014). This can be understood as an iteration of queer theory because, as David Halperin puts it, "it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" (Halperin 1995, 62). Further, the subject position for Adorno remains, here, un- or under-defined: cohering to Lee Edelman's claim that queerness "can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (Edelman 2004, 17). Difference absent fear, that which is missing, would enable and entail the uncoupling of bodily differentiation from enforced norms of sexed, gendered, and heterosexual behavior. This concretizes the aim of Adorno's criticism of heteropatriarchal norms and some forms of feminist praxis: to show the way in which inclusion itself constitutes and covers over a "bad equality," rather than disrupting or criticizing the conditions that create it.

As formal subsumption transitions to real subsumption, women's sociopolitical situation is no longer revealed as one of victimhood; instead it further obscures their

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domination under the guise of inclusivity. Adorno states this explicitly: "The admittance of women to every conceivable supervised activity conceals continuing dehumanization …. Instead of solving the question of women's oppression, male society has so extended its own principle that the victims are no longer able even to pose the question" (Adorno 2005, 92). Under patriarchy, as in the bourgeois family, women are dehumanized as objects, literal sites for reproduction or sexual satisfaction: dehumanized insofar as they are no longer particular persons, but are "wives" or "mothers." Under the capitalist mode of production, the situation is no better. In fact, it may be worse for women. As workers, women are liberated out of the strict legal, cultural, and social control of patriarchy into a domination both different and more encompassing: that of being the object of labor for a capitalist economy. This, of course, elides the fact that women of color have already been coded as objects of labor for a capitalist economy by virtue of their race (Collins 1990).

Capitalist domination, unlike that of domination in the family, is so normalized, so much a part of economic and political life that the question of women's oppression no longer appears. This, indeed, is what Fraser claims happened with regard to second-wave feminism (Fraser 2013). The dream of liberating women into the workforce, ensuring equal opportunity in education that has as its goal efficient workers and equal opportunity in the workplace, is a reproduction of the mistake of failed workers' movements, which Adorno was quick to criticize (Rose 1978, 87).

It is precisely these conditions that Adorno wishes to critique. While discussing Henrik Ibsen's characters, Adorno notes that the granddaughters of the nascent feminist movement, who he refers to as "ferociously efficient imbecile[s]" (Adorno 2005, 93), fail to see heteropatriarchal domination where it really exists. As such, they unwittingly herald their own doom: insisting that their grandmothers are hysterical while vying for inclusion in bourgeois life. All the while, they fail to see the liberatory potential of a hysteria that identifies the sources of domination. Hysteria, here, is not madness but epistemic privilege. It is a tool enabling us to "create the conditions in which we can properly formulate questions about how we should live our lives today … in resistance to the forms of bad life that have been seen" (Adorno 2001, 167–68). The hysteric sees and hears what others do not: "bad life" or domination. Meanwhile, the hysteric's actions work to keep the domination of both herself and the bourgeois woman at bay.

This shows that Adorno in some sense accounts for the problem of capitalist exploitation in his critique of liberalism. Here, I argue that his critique of liberalism ought to be extended in some ways to ordoliberalism as a nascent form of neoliberalism. In *Birth of Biopolitics,* Foucault describes how liberalism cedes way to ordoliberalism (an individualist reaction against Nazi policies of total state control), affirming the transformation from formal subsumption to real subsumption, writing,

> the initial formula of liberalism: let us establish a space of economic freedom and let us circumscribe it by a state that will supervise it—the ordoliberals say we should completely turn the formula around and adopt

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> the free market as organizing and regulating principle of the state, from the start of its existence up to the last form of its interventions. (Foucault 2008, 116)

Ordoliberalism further develops into the neoliberal condition; it is precisely the mediating socioeconomic factor leading to "the overall exercise of political power [that] can be modeled on the principles of a market economy" (131). Because of this connection, one can see not merely threads of the critique of liberalism (and liberal feminisms), but of nascent neoliberalism as ordoliberalism (and neoliberal feminisms). As the ferociously efficient imbeciles abandon their hysterical grandmothers, they participate in a primary neoliberal mistake of taking economic success or capitalist logic and extending its principle as if it were capable of proving liberatory.

Importantly, the subjective position native to both of these forms of sociopolitical organization is the same: *homo economicus*. Given this historical and subjective connection, Fraser specifically highlights the dialectical relationship between some forms of feminist praxis and (neo)liberal subjective constitution insofar as they each pass into the other as their double. She claims:

> The point, of course, is not to drop the struggle against traditional male authority, which remains a necessary moment of feminist critique. It is, rather, to disrupt the easy passage from such critique to its neoliberal double—above all by reconnecting struggles against personalized subjection to the critique of a capitalist system that, while promising liberation, actually imposes a new mode of domination. (Fraser 2013, 225)

Here, one can see that Sade's Juliette is not unlike Ibsen's women characters (specifically Nora Helmer, but also Hedda Gabler): they each show that resisting domination cannot be done with the bid for equality or via competition. Succeeding in attaining equality as an individual is merely success in attaining equality of domination. These characters show that simply critiquing personalized subjection (either by one's husband or one's priest), absent a critique of capitalism, welcomes new modes of domination. As Adorno puts it, "it is not without reason that Ibsen's women are called 'Modern'" (Adorno 2005, 93); they show us that there is a totalizing equality within unfreedom (94). The "modern woman" who liberates herself from patriarchy into subjection as *homo economicus* is as unfree as the man who occupies the same subject position.

Although these arguments have not been a thoroughgoing analysis of all Adorno's work on sexuality and gender, they serve to provide the basis for tracing Adorno's feminist commitments. In Adorno's work, one can see the nascent beginnings of a feminist critical theory that argues against (neo)liberal cooptation of feminist praxis. At the same time, Adorno's focus on the unnaturalness of sex/gender assignment coheres well with, and itself articulates, an iteration of a queer feminist position. Aporetically, he argues that sex and gender should be disambiguated, as they are nonnatural instruments of domination. As such, the critique points us nonprogrammatically toward the anticipation of a world without heteropatriarchal domination in which bodily differentiation is not tied to the enforcement of normative sex, gender, and heterosexed behavior.

Notes

I am grateful to Max Pensky, Aaron Bell, the participants in Pensky's Critical Theory Independent Study at Binghamton University, the audience at Eastern Society for Women in Philosophy, and three anonymous *Hypatia* reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions for this article.

1. Andrew Hewitt claims that Adorno and Horkheimer, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, appear almost nostalgic for a certain type of patriarchal society because it is one in which domination is experienced *as domination*. If domination is capable of being experienced with the awareness that it is indeed domination, then those who are subjugated know something about the world, via experience, that the dominated who do not experience it *as such* do not know (Hewitt 2006, 81).

2. Adorno points out, in multiple texts, that ideology works in such a way that those who are the most oppressed often become the most ardent defenders of the structures and systems that serve to oppress them: for example, "It would be poor psychology to assume that exclusion arouses only hate and resentment; it arouses too a possessive, intolerant kind of love, and those whom repressive culture has held at a distance can easily enough become its most diehard defenders" (Adorno 2005, 53). He makes similar claims in his letter to Fromm, noting, "one could show what kind of ideological function this term ['feminine'] actually exerts and, by this, demonstrate even in psychology, the system converts its real victims into a source for its protection" (as quoted in Zeige 2003).

3. There are some notable exceptions: Lisa Yun Lee's *Dialectics of the Body* both praises work that contributes to the sense that there is little for the feminist to recuperate from Adorno, yet in the end she declares that there is much more room for feminist scholarship on Adorno than has been previously discussed (Lee 2005). Additionally, Robin Truth Goodman takes on the question of public and private life in Adorno from a feminist perspective in *Feminist Theory in Pursuit of the Public* (Goodman 2010, 125–58). However, neither works toward a comprehensive reconstruction of Adorno's theory of sex and gender in relation to heteropatriarchy, as I do here. In *Grand Hotel Abyss*, Stuart Jeffries tackles the problem of the exclusion of women from the Institute for Social Research. He claims that although there were no women theorists involved in the Institute (up until Angela Y. Davis met Herbert Marcuse), those who were involved (including Adorno) were theoretically interested in the problem of patriarchy as it related to anti-Semitism in particular (Jeffries 2016).

4. Two comments: A number of texts have been written concerning the Second Excursus, though none focus on Juliette *as a woman*. They generally focus on the relationship of Kant, Sade, and Nietzsche with regard to morality and instrumental reason (Bernstein 2001; Comay 2006). Second, there is evidence that this chapter of the *DOE* was written largely by Horkheimer, betraying Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that the text is a collaborative enterprise. I take them at their word in claiming that the project is the result of collaboration, if for no other reason than to provide evidence that Adorno endorsed the claims as they appear even if he did not develop them himself (Horkheimer and Noerr 1987). In that sense, they are Adorno's theoretical and political commitments.

5. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno sets out to argue against Lukács's sophisticated theory of class consciousness. Here, Adorno claims that Lukács reduces all dialectics to

reification—thus mistaking the actual cause of human suffering to be reification rather than bourgeois logic and social structures (Adorno 2007, 190–92). Insofar as Adorno explicitly argues against the possibility for "class consciousness" to serve a utopian function of liberation from the totality of capitalism, analogically, "gender consciousness" cannot serve an unbridled utopian function from heteropatriarchy.

6. J. M. Bernstein argues that to really understand the thesis of Adorno's ethics requires a reading of both *Minima Moralia* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; I follow his suggestion that the theoretical framework of *DOE* is intended to structure the aporetic account of ethical life developed in *MM* (Bernstein 2001, 76).

7. *Minima Moralia* is laced throughout with themes of masculinity/femininity and manhood/womanhood. Adorno discusses these themes explicitly in Adorno 2005, aphorisms 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 72, 73, 108, 109, 111, and 152. There are many more instances where he discusses these themes implicitly. I focus here mainly on his explicit claims about the wrongness of gendered subjectivity under heteropatriarchy.

8. Compare Judith Butler discussing Adorno's moral philosophy "there is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning" (Butler 2005, 7). This is also inflected in contemporary debates concerning the idea of transindividuality (Read 2016).

9. The class-based view of the conceptualization of women is, itself, not internally uncontested. This is why I describe Adorno as highlighting the nature of the debate, but taking it no further. One could argue that he sees the contradictions, but lacks an interest or ability to see them through productively. See the debate among Talia Bettcher, Sally Haslanger, and Katherine Jenkins on the blog *PEA Soup* (Bettcher 2016).

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