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### *On Being Objective and Being Objectified*

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# On Being Objective and Being Objectified<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the common themes in feminist research over the past decade has been the claim that reason is "gendered"; more specifically, that reason is "male" or "masculine". Although feminists have differed in their interpretations of this claim and the grounds they offer for it, the general conclusion has been that feminist theory should steer clear of investments in reason and rationality, at least as traditionally conceived. For example, we should avoid an epistemology which privileges reason or the standpoint of reason; we should avoid theories of the self which take rationality to be a defining trait; and we should avoid endorsing moral and political ideals which glorify reason and the reasonable "person" (read: man).

The feminist resistance to ideals of reason has at least two different strands. On one strand, giving reason prominence is problematic by virtue of what it leaves out; our views (and our lives) are distorted by a failure to recognize and properly value what has traditionally counted as "feminine". It is not that reason is inherently objectionable, but allowing ourselves to be preoccupied with the significance of reason reflects a bias towards men, or the "masculine", which feminism ought to challenge.<sup>2</sup> Thus we might aim in our theorizing to integrate "feminine" perspectives and attributes which have been contrasted with reason, or we might recognize an alternative "feminine" reason in addition to the more traditional "masculine" reason<sup>3</sup>.

On a different strand, reason itself is more deeply implicated in our oppression; the problem is not one which can be solved by a shift in emphasis, i.e., by a new appreciation of the feminine.

Offering a positive characterization of this second strand is tricky, for there are markedly different views about how reason is implicated, and what we should do about it. But the core idea is that a

rational stance is itself a stance of oppression or domination, and accepted ideals of reason both reflect and reinforce power relations which advantage white privileged men.<sup>4</sup> On this view the point is not to balance the value of reason with feminine values, but to challenge our commitments to rational ideals.

On the face of it, it may seem misguided for feminists to pursue these challenges. It has long been a feminist project to resist the association between women and the "feminine", and even to question the very categories of "masculine" and "feminine". If feminists now take up the project of revaluing the feminine, aren't we reinforcing rather than combatting traditional stereotypes? Should we not be wary of ideals of femininity which have been defined in the context of male dominance?<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, although it is clear that the rhetoric of reason is often used to marginalize and silence women, an appeal to the value of reasoned debate is a way of opening up a discussion to criticism and the reevaluation of standard assumptions. Because an important element in the traditional conception of reason is the value it accords to honest public debate and self-criticism, women's insistence on standards of reason should be one way to combat the dogmatism which fuels patriarchy. If we reject the value of rational reflection and reasoned discussion, then what acceptable methods are left to criticize entrenched positions and to mediate between conflicting points of view? How are we to construct and evaluate our own feminist positions? Even if there are flaws in traditional accounts of reason, must we conclude that they are hopelessly flawed?<sup>6</sup> This brief glance at some of the issues which arise in considering the claim that reason is gendered shows that we face two huge stumbling blocks: the first is the concept of reason, the second is the concept of gender. Both are highly contested concepts; attempts at their analysis spark profound disagreement. Often it is unclear in the context of debate what account of reason or gender is under discussion, making it unclear who is speaking to whom, where there is disagreement and where not. Given the vast amount of interdisciplinary literature on the issue,

literature drawing from different traditions and speaking to different audiences, the task of sorting through the discussion seems intractable.

In what follows I will pursue the following strategy. In the first part of the paper I consider what it is for a concept or a point of view to be "gendered". Drawing on the idea that gender should be defined in terms of social relations, I begin with the idea that concepts or attributes are gendered insofar as they function as appropriate norms or ideals for those who stand in these social relations. After modifying and elaborating this idea, I turn to ask whether and to what extent the norms of rationality are specifically appropriate to the role which defines the social category of men. To make progress in answering this question we need at least a working definition of gender. In the second part of the paper I begin by considering Catherine MacKinnon's proposal for defining the social relations which constitute gender. On her view, gender is defined in terms of sexual objectification: roughly, women as a class are those individuals who are viewed and treated as objects for the satisfaction of men's desire. In short, women are the sexually objectified, men the objectifiers. She argues, moreover, that rationality, construed as a stance of objectivity, is an ideal which sustains the inequality of power on which sexual objectification depends. MacKinnon's account of gender has often been criticized for focusing too narrowly on a specific form of gender oppression. But even allowing that there are a plurality of different relations which constitute gender, still MacKinnon's work provides a compelling analysis of one of them. Moreover, working with MacKinnon's concrete analysis of gender enables us to explore in some detail the connections between objectification and objectivity.

Drawing on MacKinnon's critique of objectivity, I undertake to explicate a set of epistemic and practical norms which would, under conditions of social hierarchy, legitimize and sustain objectification. I argue that there is an ideal recommending "neutrality" and "aperspectivity" whose satisfaction under certain conditions contributes to success in the role of objectifier, and is sufficient for functioning as a collaborator in objectification. However, I argue against

MacKinnon's stronger claim that satisfaction of this ideal is sufficient for functioning in the social role of a man. I conclude that the ideal is contextually "gendered", and so a proper target for feminist concern, though it is not in the strong sense "masculine".

Before continuing, let me emphasize that for the bulk of the paper I will try to remain as neutral as possible on the issue of what counts as reason or rationality. My strategy here is to approach the question of whether reason is gendered by way of a better understanding of gender. If there are some epistemic or practical ideals which are gendered, we should determine what they are; whether these ideals are "really" what has traditionally been meant by "rationality", or whether they are currently what we mean by "rationality", is an important question, but not my immediate concern.

I should also note that to my mind, there is something peculiar about engaging in discussion and reasoned debate over the value, or legitimacy, or reality, of reason and rationality. If there is something wrong with our commitments to reason, I doubt we'll find it this way (and I don't know what we could do about it if we did). But this is just to say that in the discussion which follows, I will be assuming that there is at least some minimal conception of reasoning and there are some minimal norms of rationality which are not at stake in the discussion.

## 2. GENDER AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

In order to understand the charge that reason is "masculine" or "gendered", it is important to sketch some of the background work that has been done on gender.<sup>7</sup> It is no easy task even to sketch the outlines of such work, since there are deep disagreements among theorists about what specific account we should give of gender, or whether we should seek to give an account at all. Some of the concerns have even prompted the suggestion that the concept of gender is no longer a useful theoretical tool, and this in turn has raised the spectre of "post-feminism".<sup>8</sup> The project of this paper is (thankfully) a few steps back from that cutting edge, for the charge that reason is

"gendered" or "masculine" arises from feminist views which allow that the notion of gender is at least dialectically appropriate. So I will begin by working briefly through some of the distinctions and themes which the critique of reason draws upon in order to situate the more detailed discussion which will follow.

a. Sex and Gender

For the time being, let us restrict ourselves to speaking of human beings. Let us use the terms 'male' and 'female' to indicate a classification of individual human beings on the basis of anatomical difference. For our purposes it is not important to specify exactly what anatomical differences count, though primary sex characteristics are a place to start. Let us allow that the distinction between males and females is neither exhaustive nor exclusive and that the terms may be vague, i.e., given that human beings display a range of anatomical diversity, we can allow that there are individuals who do not fall neatly within either class, and that there are others who fall within both. Further, let us leave it open whether such an anatomical classification is "natural", or "social", "real" or "nominal". And let us say that two individuals are of different sex just in case each falls within one and only one of the two classes, and they don't fall within the same class.<sup>9</sup> It is a commonplace in feminist research that we must distinguish sex from "gender".<sup>10</sup> In keeping with this research, let us use the terms 'man' and 'woman' to indicate gender difference, (allowing that boys may fall within the gender 'man' and girls within the gender 'woman'). Although it might be that the distinctions of sex and gender are extensionally equivalent, i.e., that all and only females are women and males men, the basis for the gender classification is not anatomical, rather, its basis lies in social relations.

To see the general point, it is useful to consider other straightforward examples of distinctions based in social relations. Consider a scapegoat. An individual is a scapegoat not by virtue of their intrinsic features, but by virtue of their relations to others; anyone, regardless of their bodily features, character, etc. can function as a scapegoat in the right circumstances. What makes you a

scapegoat is the role you play in a social group. Consider a landlord. One is a landlord by virtue of one's role in a broad system of social and economic relations which includes tenants, property, etc. Even if it turned out as a matter of fact that all and only landlords had a closed loop in the center of their right thumbprint, the basis for being counted a landlord is different from the basis for being counted as having such a thumbprint. Likewise for gender, one is a woman, not by virtue of one's intrinsic features, e.g., body type, but by virtue of one's part in a system of social relations which includes, among other things, men.<sup>11</sup> Gender is a relational or extrinsic property of individuals, and the relations in question are social.<sup>12</sup> If gender rests in this way upon the organization of social life, we should at least entertain the possibility that just as a change in social relations could have the result that there are no landlords and tenants, a change in social relations could have the result that there are no men and women, even if there continue to be males and females.

It is natural to ask next: what are the social relations which constitute gender? Here things become theoretically difficult, for although it seems plausible that gender difference appears cross-culturally and trans-historically, we must at the very least allow that the specific social relations constituting gender differ from culture to culture. But the recognition of broad social differences raises the question whether "gender" can be understood as a unitary phenomenon at all.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, there is a theme among feminists that the social relations which give rise to gender distinctions are relations of domination; in particular, they are oppressive to women.<sup>14</sup> However, gender oppression does not typically occur in isolation from other forms of oppression; the social relations which constitute gender will be part of a system of social relations, and such systems also serve to ground distinctions of race, class, etc. What distinguishes those social relations which constitute gender? On what basis (if any) can we meaningfully isolate gender from other hierarchical social distinctions, and gender oppression from other forms of oppression? Are anatomical facts concerning sex and reproduction important for distinguishing gender from other

social categories, and gender oppression from other oppressions?<sup>15</sup>

b. Gender-Norms

There are several strategies for addressing the questions just raised which have been proposed and criticized in the feminist literature. I will return to the issue of specifying what relations constitute gender below. However, before I do so we need to consider a related distinction between "gender-norms", e.g., "masculinity" and "femininity". Gender-norms are clusters of characteristics and abilities which function as a standard by which individuals are judged to be "good" instances of their gender; they are the "virtues" appropriate to the gender.

Because the notion of a "norm" is used in different ways, an example will help illustrate the notion I am relying on. Consider a pruning knife. We can distinguish a good pruning knife from a poor one. A good pruning knife has a sharp hard blade with a comfortable handle; a poor pruning knife might be one which is so blunt that it crushes rather than cuts a piece of fruit, it might be too large to handle easily, etc. Something counts as a pruning knife only if it has features which enable it to perform a certain function, e.g., it must be easily usable by humans to cut and peel fruits and vegetables. We can distinguish, however, between something's marginally performing the function, and something's performing the function excellently. The features which enable a pruning knife to be excellent at its job, e.g., having a sharp hard blade with a comfortable handle, are the "virtues" of a pruning knife. Something which functions as a good pruning knife may function as a poor screwdriver, and (when nothing else is available) a good screwdriver may function as a poor pruning knife. Although having a sharp pointed blade is a virtue in a pruning knife, those same features are not a virtue in a screwdriver. In general, our evaluation of the goodness or badness of a tool will be relative to a function, end, or purpose, and the norm will serve as an ideal embodying excellence in the performance of that function.

Likewise, "masculinity" and "femininity" are norms or standards by which individuals are judged to be excellent exemplars of their gender, and which enable us to function excellently in our allotted



role in the system of social relations which constitute gender. Although I won't be able to make these ideas perfectly precise, the leading idea is that at least some roles have a point or a purpose; to name a few fairly clear examples, consider the roles of teacher, cook, doctor, firefighter, rabbi, pilot, waitress, plumber. For each role there are performances which would count as successes and other as failures; in general, one can do a better or worse job at them. The suggestion is that gender roles are of this kind; and gender-norms capture how one should behave, and what attributes are suitable, if one is to excel in the socially sanctioned gender roles.

In the traditional privileged white Western scenario, to be good at being a man, i.e., to be "masculine", one should be strong, active, independent, rational, handsome etc.; to be good at being a woman one should be nurturing, emotional, co-operative, pretty, etc. For example, I am a woman because I stand in various gender-constitutive relations to others (often whether I choose to or not); however, I am not in the traditional sense a "good woman" because I don't live up to this ideal of femininity. Judged against the standard of such traditional gender-norms, i.e., judged in terms of how I function in the traditional role of woman, I do not excel. Although I don't aspire to satisfying this ideal, this doesn't prevent others from judging me in its terms.

I noted above that there are difficulties in specifying the social relations which constitute gender, especially if we seek to understand it as a cross-cultural phenomenon; these difficulties are echoed and amplified in the project of specifying the content of gender-norms. We should be wary of postulating a single gender-norm for women across culture or even within a cultural group:

...A glance at women's magazines, for example, reveals a range of often competing subject positions offered to women readers, from career woman to romantic heroine, from successful wife and mother to irresistible sexual object. These different positions which magazines construct in their various features, advertising, and fiction are part of the battle to determine the day to day practices of family life, education, work, and leisure...<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, gender-norms vary markedly with race, class, and ethnicity. To use a particularly apt example in the context of this paper, there are studies which suggest that although developed capacities for abstract thought and intellectual activity are part of a masculine gender norm for some privileged groups of men in Western communities, these elements of the masculine norm do not persist across class.<sup>17</sup>

Because our values and the structure of our lives have an impact on each other, the norms and the roles tend to adjust to each other. The acceptance of new roles for women can result in the recognition of new "women's virtues"; and the appeal of new norms can result in changes in social roles.<sup>18</sup> But we should keep in mind that norms and roles can also fall desperately out of sync when the norms remain rigid while social roles change; gender-norms "often take on complex lives and histories of their own, which often bear little resemblance to their functional roots."<sup>19</sup> In the course of these complex histories, norms can become internally contradictory, making it impossible to live up to them, or to structure a coherent life around them.<sup>20</sup> Such incoherence in the norms may indicate that they no longer reflect the allotted social roles, or it may reflect an incoherence in the roles themselves.

In contexts where gender roles are well-entrenched the corresponding norms function prescriptively: not only do they serve as the basis for judgements about how people ought to be (act, etc.), but we decide how to act, what to strive for, what to resist, in light of such norms.<sup>21</sup> This prescriptive force is backed by social sanctions. In aspiring to a gender-norm, you aim to conform your behavior to those ideals which make you especially suited to your allotted role; if you don't aspire to the norm, or if you don't manage to conform, you can expect censure, sometimes mild, sometimes severe. Moreover, those social relations which constitute gender (including, e.g., the organization of parenting) provide a context in which children tend to internalize the locally endorsed gender-norms.<sup>22</sup> Thus, conformity to our proper gender role comes to seem right and good, and perhaps most significantly, internally motivated rather than socially enforced. As a

result, we should expect that socially endorsed gender-norms will reflect and reinforce the local pattern of gender relations.

However, we should also note that the properties which constitute the norms can also function descriptively; some individuals have the properties in question and others do not. In a society where gender-norms are generally agreed upon and well-entrenched, and where individuals are fairly successful in living up to them, corresponding generalizations about the differences between men and women, even about males and females, may be descriptively adequate.<sup>23</sup> Noting such generalizations, there is an unmistakable tendency to conclude that that a women is "by nature" or "essentially" feminine (and a man, masculine). In short, the prescriptive role of the norms is not acknowledged, and gender differences are taken to be natural or inevitable.<sup>24</sup> But this inference is mistaken: even if the generalizations are accurate, this may simply reflect the impact of the norms and the pattern of social relations which underwrites their acceptance.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, the theoretical framework I have sketched emphasizes the prescriptive role of gender-norms, and highlights the fact that gender is grounded in broad social arrangements. Particular traits, norms, and identities, considered in abstraction from social context, have no claim to be classified as "masculine" or "feminine". The classification of features as masculine or feminine is derivative, and in particular, depends on prior social classifications. For example, consider the claim that sensitivity to interpersonal relationships is a feminine trait. In considering this claim we must not suppose that such sensitivity is inherently feminine, or that its status as feminine is determined biologically, or psychologically, or by virtue of its inclusion in an extra-social (be it "natural" or "metaphysical") archetype of Woman. Not only does such reification fail to accommodate the broad cultural differences in the content of gendered ideals; worse still, the reliance on such archetypes masks the fact that the status of ideals as masculine or feminine rests upon an organization of social life in terms of "proper" roles and functions.<sup>26</sup> The ideals are gendered because the roles for which they count as ideals constitute gender.

I stress this dependence of gendered ideals on social arrangements because it highlights one issue in the problematic of justifying social arrangements. Ideals present themselves as standards or excellences to be valued; if we assume that the "right" ideals are given by authority, e.g., nature or God, then it is tempting to justify a distribution of social roles by virtue of the opportunities they provide to achieve the given ideals. For example, if nurturing is an inherently feminine excellence, and bravery an inherently masculine excellence, then it might seem justified to distribute social roles in a way which facilitates women's opportunities to nurture and men's opportunities to be brave. But if we allow that ideals are functionally rooted in roles and activities, this strategy loses its force. An excellent slave is one who is obedient; and excellent master is one who exercises control. But such ideals of slavishness and mastery do not justify the institution of slavery because the ideals gain their prescriptive force only in a context where we assume the appropriateness (or inevitability) of the social roles of master and slave. In short, an ideal is appropriate only insofar as we are justified in endorsing the social role for which it functions as the ideal; the ideal does not, in turn, justify the role.

This argument is aimed primarily at those who would claim that naturally or transcendently "given" ideals of masculinity and femininity warrant a gendered division of social life. But it is also intended to motivate the concern that the value we accord to masculinity or femininity cannot be easily separated from the value we accord the corresponding gender roles. If the gender roles are oppressive and constitute a system of male-domination, then we should be very cautious in theoretically appropriating either masculine or feminine virtues, even if our intention is to construct a revised ideal of human virtue.

### 3. MASCULINE RATIONALITY

Within the Western philosophical tradition, the capacity to reason has been crucial to accounts of the self, and ideals of rationality have been construed as important elements in normative accounts of knowledge and morality. It is also clear that these ideals of rationality and rational

selves have typically been defined in contrast to what are assumed to be characteristic features and capacities of women: women are guided by emotion or feeling rather than reason; women are not capable of impartiality, or abstract thought; women are more intuitive and closer to nature than men, etc.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, anyone who displays a tendency to diverge from rational ideals (or virtually anything which does so), counts as feminine.<sup>28</sup> It is striking that even very different accounts of rationality agree on the contrast with assumed "feminine" attributes. The significance of this contrast supports the hypothesis that in spite of efforts to cast rationality as a "human" ideal, it is in fact a masculine ideal. That rationality is masculine is explicitly stated in some philosophers, and this assumption also forms a backdrop to common Western conceptions of gender difference which have a deep influence on everyday life.

Insofar as allegedly gender-free accounts of knowledge, morality, and personhood offer ideals defined by their contrast with femininity, patriarchy turns one of its neatest tricks. The reification of masculine ideals as human ideals insures that one's efforts to be feminine will consistently undermine one's efforts to realize the ideal for persons (...morality, knowledge). Women face an impossible choice which carries censure either way: be a good person but fail as a woman, or be a good woman and fail as a person. This is no small consequence. As Judith Butler notes,

The social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they exercise their manhood or womanhood improperly. In so far as social existence requires an unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established gender norms...If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question.<sup>29</sup>

Initially it is tempting to think that the mistakes of this tradition can be easily remedied by excising the problematic claims about women and femininity. For example, one might propose that

conceptions of rational selves and the ideals of rationality need not be defined in contrast to femininity; they can stand on their own as ideals for both men and women. While this proposal acknowledges that rational ideals have been associated with men, and assumed to be masculine, it claims that we can simply reject these associations and assumptions. The traditional conceptions of femininity were misguided: to be a good woman (or a good man) just is to be a good person (in one or another of the traditional senses). In short, the sexism of the tradition is not inherent in its accounts of the self or the role of reason, but in a failure to see that in fact the accounts apply equally well to all of us.

But feminist work on gender raises doubts about this apologetic strategy. If rational ideals have been defined in contrast to feminine ideals, then there is reason to think that underlying these ideals we will find a division of gender roles. As I've already argued, norms are not "gendered" simply by being associated with men and women, but by providing ideals which are appropriate to the roles which constitute gender.<sup>30</sup> Masculine norms are excellences appropriate to a specific social role, and masculine identities are conceptions of self and world which situate and justify one's place and activities in such a role, e.g., by presenting them as appropriate (good, natural, inevitable). If we simply extend masculine norms to everyone, and take the masculine conception of self and world to apply generally, we would seem to be committed to the view that everyone should occupy the social role, and take up the perspective on social life, which was once granted only to men. In effect, this move assumes that what was a model for life within one social category among others, can (and should) become a model for all of us.

The initial worry is that if reason itself is masculine, then simply granting that rational ideals properly apply to everyone, regardless of gender, reflects a bias towards men. We might ask: if the ideals of rationality are ideals appropriate to men's social role, by what right do we extend these ideals to "human" ideals? What are we to make of the ideals appropriate to women's social role, particularly those which are defined in contrast to rationality? Likewise, if philosophical

accounts of self and world only reflect how things seem from the social position of boys and men, and not how things seem from the social position of girls and women, then by what right do we expect everyone to endorse this conception? The concern is that masculine ideals appear to offer, at best, only a partial model of human life. One pressing question is how, or whether, we might remedy such a partial model. Should we aim to integrate the different perspectives?

We can extend and deepen these questions by noting that it is by no means obvious whether it is warranted to extend men's social role, and its corresponding rational ideals and excellences, to everyone. Whether such an extension is even possible will depend, of course, on how one conceives of gender and, in particular, how the ideals of rationality are grounded in gender. But the worry gains focus if we attend to the hypothesis mentioned above that gender roles are defined relationally and hierarchically, e.g., just as someone is a landlord by virtue of standing in a certain (hierarchical) relation to another who is a tenant, someone is a man by virtue of standing in a certain (hierarchical) relation to another who is a woman. Because gender roles are situated within complex social arrangements, we cannot simply assume that it is possible or warranted to generalize masculine roles, or to integrate masculine and feminine ideals.

For example, we cannot coherently extend some social roles to everyone, e.g., it is not possible for everyone to take up the role of being a free slave-owner. For different (very material) reasons, it is not possible for everyone to live the life of pure contemplation "unsullied" by menial labor, and uninterrupted by the needs of the young, sick, and elderly.<sup>31</sup> Other roles, though they can be generalized, we should hesitate to do so: although it is possible for everyone to function as a scapegoat with respect to some group of others, proposing that everyone should function in the role of scapegoat and endorse its corresponding ideals would be misguided. So we should ask, what are the roles for which rationality is an appropriate ideal? What roles are motivated and authorized by a conception of rational selves? In particular, if rationality is an ideal for men's social role, and if gender is defined relationally, then can we coherently endorse rationality without

also endorsing those social relations which constitute gender, and without also endorsing a contrasting ideal for women?

It is important to note that these questions have correlates concerning feminine norms and ideals. For example, if feminine norms of "intuitiveness", "partiality", "situatedness", etc. offer ideals particularly suited to the gender roles of women, we may question whether these feminine norms can be "de-gendered" to free them from their links to social arrangements of gender oppression. This turn which shifts the focus from masculine to feminine ideals raises doubts about the strategies of "gynocentric" feminists who seek to remedy the Western tradition's emphasis on reason by revaluing what are traditionally conceived as feminine virtues.<sup>32</sup> Understanding gender and gender-norms as grounded in social relations, we have reason to challenge not only masculine norms and identities, but also feminine norms and identities. If masculine and feminine ideals can only be realized in social contexts organized by gender relations, or if their realization functions to sustain existing gender relations, then if gender relations are relations of domination, those who seek to end gender oppression should reject both masculine and feminine ideals.

At this stage of the discussion, I have not yet offered an argument which shows that reason is gendered. The points noted early in this section, viz., that traditional accounts of rational ideals characterize them in contrast to femininity, lends plausibility to the claim that such ideals are gendered. But it remains to be shown in what sense, and to what extent, an endorsement of reason functions to sustain oppressive gender roles. In order to provide such an argument, we will need to look at a more detailed accounts of gender and reason. We will turn to this task shortly. However, before doing so we must consider in more detail the relationship between norms and roles.

The questions raised just above suggest two underlying suspicions. The first is that those situated in certain oppressive or problematic roles succeed, e.g., their activities are furthered and sustained, by satisfying the ideals of reason. The second is that those who satisfy the ideals of reason



thereby function in a problematic or oppressive social role, i.e., simply satisfying the ideals of reason is enough to situate you in the role of oppressor. Plausibly, in both cases we would have grounds to question the value of reason, if we are concerned to promote social change. Moreover, these suspicions become specifically feminist if the oppressive social roles in question are gender roles. But these two suspicions need further clarification before we can make a compelling case against the ideals of reason.

So far I have repeatedly suggested that norms or ideals are "suitable" or "appropriate" to specific social roles. Admittedly, these notions remain obscure; although I cannot promise to eliminate the obscurity, it will help to note a couple of distinctions which make a difference in the arguments which follow. As indicated above, I am assuming that some roles have a point or a purpose, and that certain performances in these roles count as successes and others as failures. Further, I will assume that excellence in an ongoing role will require a reliable disposition to perform successfully. Drawing on these ideas we can say that, a norm or ideal is appropriate to a social role just in case, if one functions in that role, then satisfying the norm would make for, or significantly contribute to, (reliable) success in that role. In short, an "appropriate" norm for a role is one whose satisfaction will, other things being equal, take you from merely meeting the minimal conditions for the role to doing a better, or even excellent, job at it.

Promoting excellence in oppressive social roles is something we should aim to avoid, however, we should not assume that the value of a norm can be judged simply in light of its contribution to excellence in a given social role. For example, consider the roles of master and slave. Plausibly "good" masters are those who (among other things) are kind and compassionate towards their slaves. Such kindness on the part of good masters may help sustain the social institution of slavery by encouraging slaves' loyalty and hard work. But the fact that kindness contributes to success in the role of master should not lead us to reject the value of kindness in general; nor should we even conclude that it is wrong for those who are masters to be kind and compassionate

towards their slaves, e.g., suggesting that they should be cruel and heartless instead. We can continue to value kindness, even the kindness of masters, while acknowledging that it is a norm appropriate to an oppressive social role. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that a master's kindness is worrisome insofar as it functions to perpetuate the institution of slavery. And there is something clearly wrong in encouraging individuals to be good masters: in order to be a good master, one must also be a master, and this role we have reason to reject.

As a step towards sorting through these complications, we can note that some norms are separable from the social role for which they are appropriate, and some aren't. One may have features which would contribute to success in a particular role, without functioning in that role, and without that role even being socially available. For example, suppose we were to characterize a good tenant as one who pays their rent on time, and is considerate of others, e.g., does not disturb the neighbors, does not destroy others' property. etc. These features are appropriate to the role of tenant: they contribute to success in being a good tenant, and they serve as standards by which tenants are evaluated.

However, one of the elements in this specified tenant ideal, viz., being considerate of others, is separable from the relations which constitute the social category of tenant. Satisfying this norm does not entail one's participation in the role of tenant because one can be considerate of others without being a tenant. In contrast, the condition that one pay one's rent on time is not separable in this way. One can satisfy the condition of paying one's rent on time only if one is a tenant; in satisfying this norm one thereby satisfies the conditions for being a tenant. If one is not a tenant, then not only is the ideal inappropriate, but there is no way to satisfy it short of becoming a tenant. Similarly, a good teacher reliably informs and guides others in learning, listens carefully, and encourages enthusiasm for the subject matter. Listening carefully is separable from the role of teacher, but reliably informing and guiding others in learning is not. Satisfying the latter plausibly entails that one functions as a teacher (assuming, of course, that one need not be a teacher by

profession to be a teacher).

These examples illustrate two points. First, there are some norms which are such that satisfying them entails one's participation in a particular social role, i.e., they are constitutively grounded in a social role; but in the case of conjunctive norms or ideals, even if as a whole they are constitutively grounded in a social role, they may have elements which are separable from the role.<sup>33</sup> Second, if a norm is constitutively grounded in a social role which is defined relationally, e.g., as the role of tenant is defined in relation to landlords, then satisfying the norm will require that social arrangements provide for such relations. Because of the relational character of the role of tenant, satisfying the tenant ideal requires that someone is a landlord. If the tenant ideal is appropriate to some, then there is a landlord ideal which is appropriate to others. Thus, commitment to a norm which is constitutively grounded in a relational social role presupposes the appropriateness of a contrasting and correlative ideal.

We should note, however, that there is a middle ground between norms which are constitutively grounded in a particular social role, and ones which are wholly separable from the given role. As I characterized the conditions for the constitutive grounding of a norm in a role, it is (conceptually) necessary that anyone who satisfies the norm functions in that role: necessarily, anyone who pays their rent on time is a tenant. However, we should note that whether and how one is situated in a role will often depend on contextual factors; and so satisfying a norm may be sufficient for functioning in a role in some contexts but not others.<sup>34</sup>

Consider first a relatively straightforward example: the ideal life of pure contemplation mentioned above. There is nothing about satisfying this ideal, in and of itself, which makes one dependent on the work of others for one's sustenance and survival. The life of pure contemplation is not constitutively grounded in the role of dependent by virtue of the concepts employed in the ideal: angels could satisfy it without functioning in a dependent role. And yet as a matter of fact, given the material conditions of human life, any adult who comes even close to satisfying this ideal will,

in doing so, function in a dependent role. That is to say, given certain background conditions, satisfying the ideal is sufficient for functioning in the social role of a dependent.

In the case of pure contemplation, the background conditions that we just assumed, e.g., the human need for food and shelter, are very general and, at least to some extent, apply to all of us; but other background conditions will be socially specific. Consider the ideal for an investigative journalist. Plausibly in order to be an excellent investigative journalist one should "relentlessly" pursue and publicize information of concern to the general public. Note, however, that the social roles of those who satisfy this norm will vary greatly depending on their social context. Someone who satisfies this norm under a dictatorship where such journalistic efforts are prohibited by law, will thereby function in the role of a criminal, and will be subject to prosecution. (More importantly, perhaps, those who satisfy the norm in such contexts take up a role of resistance.) However, satisfying this journalistic norm will not be sufficient for being a criminal, or for resistance, under conditions of democracy where journalistic freedom is legally protected. Thus one could realize the same ideal, even in substantively the same way, in two different social contexts and in doing so function in very different social roles.<sup>35</sup>

Let us say (roughly) that a norm or an ideal is contextually grounded in a social role just in case, given specified background conditions, satisfying that norm is or would be sufficient for functioning in that role.<sup>36</sup> No doubt determining whether an ideal is contextually grounded in a particular social role will be a difficult project which will rely on controversial assumptions about the context in question. These difficulties are not typically a focus of attention because norms and ideals are described in terms of clusters of properties which appear to be largely indeterminate with respect to who or what satisfies them, and where or how they are satisfied. (Though, as feminist work has shown, often implicit sexist background assumptions play a crucial role.) We may grant that in evaluating a norm it is important to determine the variety of possible ways that it can, in principle, be realized, and the conceptual limits on its realization. The fact that a norm is

contextually grounded in a particular social role will be noteworthy primarily when the background conditions obtain or are likely to obtain in the context of evaluation. But it is only by considering how norms and ideals are realized in context that we can effectively determine their consequences, and their value, for our thoroughly situated lives.<sup>37</sup>

As I mentioned above, our evaluation of norms goes hand in hand with an evaluation of the roles in which they are grounded. On the face of it, we might think that if a norm is grounded in a socially problematic role, then we should reject the norm; in rejecting the norm we often hope to discourage others from assuming the role. However, if a norm is contextually grounded in a problematic social role, the appropriate move may not be to give up the norm; rather, it may be warranted instead to change the background conditions which connect the norm with the role. For example, plausibly in those contexts in which realizing the ideal of investigative journalist renders one a criminal, we should continue to endorse the role of investigative journalist and its norms, but work to change the social conditions which are responsible for a journalist's criminal status.

Having noted these differences in the way in which norms and ideals might be "appropriate to" or "grounded in" social roles, we can now gain clearer focus on the task of showing that reason is masculine, or gendered. In Section Two I suggested that traits are "gendered" insofar as they make for excellence in socially endorsed gender roles. Although this captures part of the idea, the discussion in this section expands and develops the initial suggestion. I have proposed that a norm is appropriate to a social role just in case if one functions in that role, satisfying that norm would make for or significantly contribute to success in the role. Further, broadly speaking, a norm is grounded in a social role just in case (allowing restricted background conditions) one satisfying the norm would function in the role, perhaps successfully, perhaps not. Let us say that a norm is weakly gendered just in case it is appropriate to a gender role, and that it is strongly gendered just in case it is grounded -- either constitutively or contextually -- in a gender role.

We can now reconsider the two "underlying suspicions" which prompted this discussion. The first

suspicion was that those situated in oppressive social roles succeed, and further their roles are perpetuated, because they satisfy the ideals of reason. The second was that satisfying the ideals of reason was itself enough to situate you in an oppressive social role. If we assume that men's role is problematic -- that it is oppressive to women -- then these two suspicions correspond respectively to the charges that the ideals of reason are weakly gendered, and strongly gendered.<sup>38</sup> But the arguments I've offered show that we must be careful in drawing broad conclusions about the value of reason --or lack of it-- based on the claims that it is gendered.

If we find that the norms of rationality are weakly gendered, i.e., that their satisfaction contributes to success in men's social role, this does not establish that we should reject them wholesale; it may be, e.g., that satisfying the norms of rationality are separable from gender roles and have independent value. Nevertheless, there is significant political import in showing that the norms of rationality are weakly gendered. Consider again the example of a kind master. However laudable individual acts of kindness on the part of masters may be, insofar as these acts contribute to the perpetuation of slavery as an institution, the political consequences of these acts are abhorrent. It is a sad fact about social life that the good we manage to accomplish may, in a broader context, sustain much more severe harm; and this harm is all too often masked by the good deeds which sustain it. If satisfying the norms of rationality enable men to excel in their social role, and does so specifically in a way which perpetuates male dominance, then knowing this is an important factor in unmasking the forces which prevent social change.

Moreover, if we find that rationality is weakly gendered, it does not follow that those who are rational stand in oppressive gender relations; nor does it follow that promoting ideals of rationality, also promotes oppressive gender roles.<sup>39</sup> (One can promote kindness without promoting slavery.) However, if the norms of rationality are strongly gendered, e.g., if they are grounded in men's social role, then one who satisfies these norms thereby functions socially as a man. If the grounding is contextual, we should look hard at both the norms and the particular background

conditions which link the norm with the role. But if men's social role is a role of domination, then finding that rationality is grounded in this role, we can insist that under the specified background conditions satisfying the norms of rationality is offensive.

I'll now turn to consider a series of arguments designed to show that there is an ideal of objectivity which is both weakly and strongly gendered -- in particular, masculine. The arguments I consider are based largely on an interpretation of Catherine MacKinnon's work, though there are points when I employ a rather free hand in reconstructing the main line of thought. My goal is not to do justice to the full complexity of MacKinnon's views, but to draw on her insights in developing a critique of one conception of objectivity. I will begin by explicating MacKinnon's account of the relation which constitutes categories of men and women. I then turn to consider what norms are appropriate to the role defined for men. Following MacKinnon's lead, I argue that there is a cluster of epistemic and practical norms, an ideal I label "assumed objectivity", which contributes to success in men's role, and helps sustain a gendered division of social life. This shows that the ideal is weakly masculine. I then consider her further claim that this ideal of "assumed objectivity" is contextually grounded in men's social role; in particular, I ask whether satisfying this ideal is sufficient, under conditions of male dominance, for functioning as a man. I argue that it is not. Though I do not believe that her arguments accomplish the goal of showing that assumed objectivity is strongly masculine, I will suggest that this ideal is contextually grounded in a different, but still problematic, social role.

#### 4. GENDER RELATIONS: MACKINNON ON GENDER

In sketching some of the distinctions which play a role in recent feminist theory, I intentionally skirted controversial issues which now need attention. In particular, if we are to give substantive content to the claim that reason is gendered, we need an account of the social relations which constitute gender. Allowing that the category of gender is contested within feminist theory, is it possible to chart a path through some of the controversies?

There is a growing trend in current feminist research which recommends that although we should employ the concept of gender in our theorizing, we should not treat gender as a unified category.<sup>40</sup> On this "pluralistic" approach to gender, we acknowledge that gender is constituted through a variety of social relations, without aiming to specify what these relations have in common (perhaps opting for Wittgensteinian "family resemblances"?). In effect, we take gender relations to comprise an irreducibly disjunctive class.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not we accept this as our final conclusion, it is reasonable to grant that, at least at this stage, our theoretical efforts are best spent in exploring the range of relatively determinate relations which constitute gender; and further, we may grant that it is not a criterion of success in our inquiry that gender can be given a unified analysis.

In keeping with this strategy, our emphasis should be on the task of proposing and employing admittedly partial, temporary, and context sensitive gender distinctions. As a result, the charge that reason is gendered will not have a unique substantive content; its interpretation will depend on what gender relations are at issue. In the discussion which follows I will evaluate one instance of this charge, employing MacKinnon's account of gender as constituted by sexual objectification. To simplify my discussion I will often gloss over these limitations, speaking as if the account offers a definition of the relation which constitutes the social categories of men and women as such. I trust that given the allowances just sketched, we can proceed with an acknowledgement of the relevant qualifications.

Catherine MacKinnon's work on gender and objectivity are part of a large systematic project with broad repercussions for ongoing political and legal debates.<sup>42</sup> Her work is deeply grounded in a commitment never to lose sight of the terrible concrete reality of sexual violence against women. MacKinnon's account of gender falls largely within the specific theoretical framework I sketched in Section Two of this paper: gender categories are defined relationally: one is a woman (or a man) by virtue of one's position in a system of social relations.<sup>43</sup> So one's gender is an extrinsic



property, and assuming that we can survive even dramatic changes in our social relations, it is not necessary that we each have the gender we now have, or that we have any gender at all.

MacKinnon's account adds to this background three main claims: (1) the relations constituting gender are, by definition, hierarchical. That men dominate women is not a contingent truth; relations of domination constitute the categories of man and woman. (2) gender relations are defined by and in the interests of men. (3) gender is (in her words) "sexualized"<sup>44</sup>. To quote MacKinnon:

Male and female are created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex and the distinctively feminist account of gender inequality.<sup>45</sup>

Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women.<sup>46</sup>

A theory of sexuality becomes feminist methodologically, to the extent that it treats sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender.<sup>47</sup>

To put the point bluntly: one is a man by virtue of standing in a position of eroticized dominance over others; one is a woman by virtue of standing in a position of eroticized submission to others.<sup>48</sup> The modes and forms of dominance, submission, and eroticization, may vary from culture to culture, context to context<sup>49</sup>; moreover it is not necessary that one be anatomically female to be a woman, or anatomically male to be a man, though of course this is the norm.<sup>50</sup>

But this blunt statement of the point is incomplete, for we need some better understanding of "eroticized dominance/submission" in order to connect it to the idea of objectification, and men's power to define the terms. As I interpret MacKinnon's position, if dominance/submission is eroticized then the submissive participant must be viewed, at least by the dominant participant

(though often by both participants), as being an object for the satisfaction of the dominant's desire. This desire presents her submissiveness to him, and his domination of her, as erotic. (We should keep in mind that on MacKinnon's view it is not because of some "purely natural" male urge towards domination or female impulse towards submission, that subordination in its various forms is found erotic or stimulating. Desire is socially conditioned; locally, the most extreme and effective vehicle of this conditioning is pornography.<sup>51</sup>)

So how is eroticized dominance/submission connected to objectification? For our purposes, there are two points to highlight: first, if dominance/submission is eroticized, then the submissive participant is both viewed as and treated as an object of the dominant's desire.<sup>52</sup> Second, the submissive participant is viewed in functional terms: she is for the satisfaction of his desire. Let us concentrate here on the first point. (I will return to discuss this second point further in the following section). On MacKinnon's view, the relation of objectification which constitutes gender requires both attitude and act. Gender is a distinction of power which is read into and imposed upon women: "Men treat women as who they see women as being".<sup>53</sup> The category of women is, in a sense, that group of individuals onto which men project and act out their desire.

However, we must take special note of the act, for the dominance inherent in gender is not just in the content of the desire, e.g., a wish for dominance. Nor is the dominance merely a matter of projection: of viewing certain individuals through the lens of one's desire to dominate them. For this projection "is not just an illusion or a fantasy or a mistake. It becomes embodied because it is enforced."<sup>54</sup> On MacKinnon's view, one who objectifies another has the power to enforce compliance with his view of them.<sup>55</sup> The power and the force are socially real: according to FBI reports, in the US during 1989, a woman was raped on average every six minutes, nine out of ten women murdered were murdered by men<sup>56</sup>; and a woman was beaten on average every fifteen seconds.<sup>57</sup>

In individual cases, the dominant party who sexually objectifies another need not exercise this

power directly; the force behind the submissive participant's compliance may have been exercised in other contexts, and in indirect ways. Moreover, the dominant party may have and maintain the power to enforce compliance even if in some cases he attempts force and fails; power doesn't guarantee success. But the fact of the dominant participant's real power is a necessary condition for objectification. Because this inequality of power is a condition of objectification, and because gender is defined in terms of objectification, gender is, by definition, hierarchical: those who function socially as men have power over those who function socially as women.

Although gender is defined relationally in terms of social roles which in principle could be taken up by different individuals at different times, (and no doubt in individual cases is), socially these roles have "congealed": it is a particular group of individuals who are assigned the status "man" and others "woman". Broadly speaking, men are male, women are female, and males have the power to dominate females.<sup>58</sup> However, it is important to note that objectification is not "the cause" of male dominance. That males objectify females presupposes that males have power over females; this follows from the conditions on objectification. Moreover, objectifying attitudes, e.g., attitudes which represent females as "sex objects", may function socially to sustain inequality of power, but having such attitudes does not, by itself, give one power. MacKinnon's analysis of gender is not intended to provide a causal account of the origins of male dominance. Rather, it is an account which locates gender within a system of hierarchical social relations; as we shall see, the point of highlighting objectification is to explain how, in certain contexts, male dominance is self-sustaining.

So, in MacKinnon's terms, the social category of women is that group of individuals who are viewed functionally as objects for the satisfaction of men's desire, where this desire is conditioned to find subordination stimulating, and where men have the power to enforce the conformity of those they so perceive to their view of them.<sup>59</sup> Male supremacy grants a particular group of individuals this power over others. It is important to note that on this account women are not defined as those who are submissive, or those who actually satisfy men's conception of what is

desirable; nor are women defined as those who have a feminine identity or who satisfy the norms of femininity, (though this account will enable us to explain why many women will). In effect, what we share, as women, is that we are perceived and treated as sexually subordinate. Our commonality is in the eye, and the hand, and the power, of the beholder.

This last point becomes evident through an analogy between the concept of gender and the concept of meat. What counts as meat varies from culture to culture; the distinction between meat and not-meat is not marked simply by what animal flesh humans can digest (though in some cases the distinction may be co-extensive with this). The class of things which count as meat for a given group of people is determined by their attitudes, desires, appetites. What do the deer, the tuna, and the lamb have in common that the horse, the dolphin, and the kitten lack? The former are (at least locally) objects of socially trained human appetite; they are viewed and treated as objects for human consumption, and their lives are endangered as a result. The category of meat is not a "natural" category; like gender it is social, relational, and hierarchical. Like gender, the category of meat is a "fiction" which humans have the power to enforce, and so to make all too real through practices of domestication, hunting, fishing. As (many) vegetarians aim for a day when nothing will fall within the category of meat, (many) feminists aim for a day when no one will fall within the category of women.<sup>60</sup>

MacKinnon's account of gender, like others which define gender hierarchically, has the consequence that feminism aims to undermine the very distinction it depends upon. If feminism is successful, there will no longer be a gender distinction as such -- or, allowing that there are a plurality of relations which serve to constitute gender, and a plurality of feminist projects, we can say that one goal of feminism is to fight against the sexual subordination which constitutes these categories of men and women. "The refusal to become or to remain a 'gendered' man or woman,...is an immanently political insistence on emerging from the nightmare of the all-too-real, imaginary narrative of sex and race."<sup>61</sup> "To refuse to be a woman, however, does not mean that

one has to become a man."<sup>62</sup>

## 5. OBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIFICATION

Working with MacKinnon's account of gender, and her conception of the social relations which constitute men and women, can we construct an argument for the claim that reason is gendered, or more specifically, masculine? As I sketched above, I will divide this question in two<sup>63</sup>: first, is rationality weakly masculine? That is, considering those who function as men, does it make for or specifically contribute to their success as men? If so, how does it do so? Second, is rationality strongly masculine? That is, does one who satisfies the norms of rationality thereby function socially as a man?

MacKinnon does not often use the term 'rationality', though when she does, it appears that she takes it to be equivalent to 'objectivity'. And most often she applies the terms to stances or points of view: one's point of view is rational, iff it is objective, iff it is "neutral", "distanced" or "non-situated".<sup>64</sup> In a compressed, though typical, statement of her position, MacKinnon claims:

The content of the feminist theory of knowledge begins with its criticism of the male point of view by criticizing the posture that has been taken as the stance of "the knower" in Western political thought...[That stance is] the neutral posture, which [I will be calling objectivity -- that is, the non-situated, distanced standpoint. I'm claiming that this is the male standpoint socially, and I'm going to try to say why. I will argue that the relationship between objectivity as the stance from which the world is known and the world that is apprehended in this way is the relationship of objectification. Objectivity is the epistemological stance of which objectification is the social process, of which male dominance is the politics, the acted-out social practice. That is, to look at the world objectively is to objectify it. The act of control, of which what I have described is the epistemological level, is itself eroticized under male supremacy.<sup>65</sup>

Here MacKinnon claims that the stance of objectivity is the stance of those who function socially as men.<sup>66</sup> This would seem to commit her to the claim that one functions socially as a man if and only if one satisfies the norms of objectivity. Given my readings of her arguments, I think we can charitably recast her point in terms of the conditions for weak and strong gendering: objectivity is strongly masculine because satisfying the norms of objectivity is sufficient, at least under conditions of male dominance, for being a sexual objectifier. And objectivity is weakly masculine since those who function as men are successful in this role, at least in part, because they are objective.

In the next several sections I will concentrate on the charge that objectivity is weakly masculine; I will then turn to the question whether objectivity is strongly masculine. So the question now before us is this: given someone who is a sexual objectifier, what would make for their (reliable) success in that role? In answering this question, my emphasis will be on what makes for an ideal objectifier, bracketing the fact that men are not just objectifiers, but are sexual objectifiers. When we turn to the charge that objectivity is strongly masculine, I will then consider how sexuality figures in the picture.<sup>67</sup>

a. The Epistemology of Objectification

As outlined above, if one objectifies something (or someone), one views it and treats it as an object for the satisfaction of one's desire; but this is not all, for objectification is assumed to be a relation of domination where one also has the power to enforce one's view. Objectification is not just "in the head"; it is actualized, embodied, imposed upon the objects of one's desire. So if one objectifies something, one not only views it as something which would satisfy one's desire, but one also has the power to make it have the properties one desires it to have. A good objectifier will, when the need arises, i.e., when the object lacks the desired properties, exercise his power to make the object have the properties he desires. So if one does a "good" job in objectifying something, then one has a view which attributes to it properties, which it in fact has. Thinking

alone doesn't make it so, but thinking plus power makes it so.

Speaking socially the beliefs of the powerful become proof [proven?], in part because the world actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see. If you perceive this as a process, you might call it force...<sup>68</sup>

Or, as Monique Wittig puts it: "They are seen black, therefore they are black; they are seen as women, therefore they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way."<sup>69</sup>

This suggests that an ideal objectifier is in the epistemic position of (at least) having some true or accurate beliefs about what he has objectified.<sup>70</sup> Such beliefs attribute to the object properties that it has, and these (post hoc) attributions would seem to be as empirical and as publicly accessible as you like.<sup>71</sup> We must note that the possibility of accurate description is not what distinguishes the objectifier's position, or the objective stance, from others: "Because male power has created in reality the world to which feminist insights, when they are accurate, refer, many of our statements will capture that reality, simply exposing it as specifically male for the first time."<sup>72</sup> So we may allow that there is something accurate about an (ideal) objectifier's view of things; moreover, one need not be an objectifier in order to acknowledge such claims as accurate, or, more generally, to make accurate claims oneself.

As I read MacKinnon's view of objectification, however, there is an aspect of illusion in objectification that we have not yet captured. The illusion on the part of the objectifier (an illusion often shared by the objects of his objectification) is that these post hoc attributions are true by virtue of the object's nature, and not by virtue of having been enforced. The important distinction here is between properties which are part of (or follow from) an object's "nature", and those which are mere accidents. This distinction has a long and complex history in Western philosophy, but

there are three themes which are relevant to our purposes here<sup>73</sup>: (i) All objects have a nature or essence; to be an object is (in some significant sense) to have a nature. It is by virtue of their nature that objects are members of kinds or species. This allows that there are also other legitimate classifications of objects in terms of accidental similarity, shared properties, etc., but we should distinguish these classifications from those which group things in accordance with their natures. (ii) Natures determine what is normal or appropriate -- what is natural -- for members of the kind. Natures serve to explain the behavior of the object under normal circumstances. (iii) An object's nature is essential to it, i.e., the object cannot exist without having those properties which constitute its nature.

Returning to objectification, if one objectifies something, one views it as an object for the satisfaction of one's desire. The suggestion I am pursuing is that in objectifying something one views it as having a nature which makes it desirable in the ways one desires it, and which enables it to satisfy that desire.<sup>74</sup> For example, if men desire submission, then in objectifying women men view women as having a nature which makes them (or, under normal circumstances, should make them) submissive, at the same time as they force women into submission. The illusion in successful objectification is not in the reports of its consequences, the women who have been forced to submit do submit; the illusion is in, so to speak, the modality of such claims: women submit by nature.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, the point that men view women as objects is not simply the point that men view women as something to use for their pleasure, as means and not ends. To view women as objects is to view women as a (substantial) kind; it is to view individual women as having a Woman's Nature. As the objectifier sees it, it is distinctive of this (alleged) kind that those features which he finds desirable or arousing in women are a consequence of their nature, and so under normal circumstances they will exhibit these features. As we will consider further below, it follows from this view that women who fail to have those features which men find desirable should be considered as deviant or



abnormal. And if women are to develop in accordance with their nature, we should provide circumstances in which they will have those features. From the point of view of the objectifier, his view of women captures their individual nature; MacKinnon's aims to unmask this illusion: "See: what a woman 'is' is what you have made women be."<sup>76</sup>

So what is the epistemic position of one who successfully objectifies something? A successful objectifier attributes to something features that have been forced upon it, and he believes the object has these features "by nature".<sup>77</sup> In the relevant cases this latter belief concerning the nature of the object, let us call this his "projective belief", is false. But then what role does that belief play? Answering this takes us to the issue of neutrality.

#### b. Neutrality and Aperspectivity

As I've indicated, MacKinnon claims that "neutrality" and "distance" or "non-situatedness" characterize the stance of objectivity, and that this stance functions as the norm for those who objectify others. This gives us little to go on. Neutrality between what? Distance from what? Drawing on several themes in MacKinnon's work, I will aim in this section to motivate an ideal of objectivity, consisting of a cluster of epistemic and practical norms, which is appropriate for the role of successful objectifier.<sup>78</sup> What we are seeking is that set of norms which would effectively and reliably guide a successful objectifier's beliefs and actions, and whose general endorsement would sustain his position of power. We may assume that one in this role is situated in a position of power; success in this role requires maintaining the power to objectify others in an ongoing way.

Consider the objectifier's projective belief that the object of his domination has the properties "by nature" which, in fact, he has enforced. Two questions will guide the discussion: first, what role does this belief play in sustaining the objectifier's position of power? Second, what kind of justification could an ideal objectifier offer for this belief? Clearly these questions are closely connected, for if an ideal objectifier guides his beliefs and actions in accordance with a set of

principles which legitimate them, then one would expect that in a social context where the principles are generally endorsed, his behavior would seem appropriate, and his social position would be (relatively) safe. This allows that in contexts where the principles are not generally endorsed, a good objectifier might still guide his actions by these principles, but his position of power would be more tenuous insofar as others would challenge the principles guiding his behavior.

In following the thread of MacKinnon's discussion, I will pursue the following suggestion: (i) if the accepted norm for practical decision making is to adapt one's actions to accommodate natures, and (ii) if the accepted epistemic norm for determining a thing's nature is to read it off of observed regularities, and (iii) if in seeking regularities we are enjoined to deny or ignore our own contribution to the circumstances we observe, then the objectifier's beliefs and actions will appear "legitimate", and the unequal distribution of power which sustains objectification will be preserved.

As mentioned above, the belief that objects have natures plays a significant explanatory role: an object behaves as it does, under normal circumstances, because of its nature. So, regular patterns in the behavior of objects can and should be explained, at least in part, by reference to qualities of the objects themselves. Moreover, it is not possible to change something's nature. An object's nature is essential to it; a change with respect to an object's nature destroys the object. This suggests that in practical decision making we ought to be attentive to things' natures. It won't do to try to fry an egg on a paper plate; there's no point in trying to teach a rock how to read. Because the world is not infinitely malleable to our wants or needs, reasonable decision making will accommodate "how things are", where this is understood as accommodating the natures of things, the background conditions which constrain our action.<sup>79</sup>

But of course it is a difficult matter to figure out what the natures of things are. If natures are responsible for regular behavior under normal circumstances, it is a plausible strategy to begin by inferring or postulating natures on the basis of observed regularities. Given the assumption that

practical decision making should accommodate "the nature of things", this epistemic strategy has practical repercussions; it also leaves some important issues unaddressed. First, it will matter whose observations count (e.g., only "normal" observers?), how we adjudicate disagreement, and what terms are classed as "observational". Second, if the point is to find natures, the strategy of inferring or postulating natures on the basis of actual observed regularities assumes that ordinary (observed) circumstances are "normal". Allowing for the possibility that current circumstances are not, broadly speaking, normal, i.e., that things are not expressing their natures in their regular behavior, accommodating regular behavior may not be justified by the need to cope with the real constraints the world presents.

The procedure of drawing on observed regularities to set constraints on practical decision making would appear to be a paradigm of "neutral", "objective", or "reasonable" procedure. And yet the ideal objectifier exploits this combined epistemic and practical norm --and its gaps-- to his advantage. I'll offer here only a rough sketch how. We are asked to begin by assuming that actual circumstances are "normal". If we look around us we find that there are rough generalizations which capture differences between men and women; more women than men satisfy the (contextually specific) norms of femininity and have a feminine gender identity which internalizes those norms. Considering those gender categories of men and women constituted by sexual objectification, there are notable differences between men and women in line with the corresponding norms of dominance and submission.

However, if we take such existing gender differences as evidence for the different "natures" of men and women, and so structure social arrangements to accommodate these natures, then we simply reinforce the existing gendered social roles, i.e., we sustain those social arrangements in which men dominate and women submit.

Once power constructs social reality...the subordination in gender inequality is made invisible; dissent from it becomes inaudible as well as rare. What a woman is, is defined in

pornographic terms; this is what pornography does. If [we] look neutrally on the reality of gender so produced, the harm that has been done will not be perceptible as harm. It becomes just the way things are.<sup>80</sup>

Once we have cast women as submissive and deferential "by nature", then efforts to change this role appear unmotivated, even pointless. Women who refuse this role are anomalies; they are not "normal" observers, and so their resistance, recalcitrant observations, etc. may be ignored.

Strangely, against this backdrop it is of no help to insist that women are rational agents capable of freely deciding how to act, for then it simply appears that women, by nature, rationally choose their subordinate role.<sup>81</sup> As a result, there is even less motivation for social change.

These reflections suggest that what appeared to be a "neutral" or "objective" ideal, viz., the procedure of drawing on observed regularities to set constraints on practical decision making, is one which will, under conditions of gender hierarchy, reinforce the social arrangements on which such hierarchy depends. But the argument for this conclusion is still incomplete, for one could object by claiming that observed regularities do not support the claim that women are, by nature, submissive. Straightforward empirical research would appear to show that many of the features the objectifier attributes to women "by nature" are a product of contingent social forces.

This is where the objectifier must resort to a norm of "distance", to a claim of aperspectivity.

Initially it is plausible to offer this as a meta-norm which dictates what claims you, as an effective objectifier, should make about your results: (i) claim that your observations are not conditioned by your social position (though the claims of the subordinate are); and (ii) claim that you have had no impact on the circumstances you are observing -- you see what is happening without being part of it. If you can get others who already accept the proposed norms of neutrality to accept these claims about your standpoint, then your position of power is (relatively) safe.

In effect, if you are going to be successful in objectifying others, the best way to do it is to present

the results of your objectification as "how things are", not to be evaluated and changed, but to be accepted as part of the circumstances we all must accommodate in steering a course through life. The norm of aperspectivity, at least in this context, functions to mask the power of the objectifier, so reinforcing the claim that the observed differences between men and women are a reflection of their natures. By this move the objectifier casts gender differences as asocial and amoral: we aren't responsible for things' natures, so morality has no foothold.<sup>82</sup> And because we cannot change something's nature, there is nothing to be done about it anyway.

So what epistemic and practical role does the objectifier's projective belief play in the ongoing process of objectification, viz., what is the role of those beliefs which attribute to the object her enforced properties "by nature"? In general, such beliefs concerning the nature of things function as a linchpin to convert observation to practical justification; under conditions of gender hierarchy they enable the objectifier to use the observable consequences of his domination to justify his continued domination. But the objectifier's projective claims can function to reinforce his position of power over others only because he works in a context where norms of epistemic and practical neutrality are generally endorsed, and where he has convinced others of his aperspectivity (at least with respect to the object of his domination).

### c. Assumed objectivity

Should we conclude from this argument that theoretical positions committed to "natures" are politically suspect? Should we conclude that those who accommodate empirical regularities in deciding how to act objectify others? I don't think so, but to see why we need to make the argument a bit more precise. In stating the norms of neutrality and aperspectivity at issue, it would be desirable to offer more substantive detail than I will here; such detail can make a difference to the arguments. But in the context of this paper my concern is to state the basic ideas which form the basis for a more precise formulation, not to provide that formulation.

What exactly is the ideal of objectivity at issue, and how is it connected to objectification? Let us

take absolute objectivity to consist (very roughly) of three norms:

epistemic neutrality: take a "genuine" regularity in the behavior of something to be a consequence of its nature.

practical neutrality: constrain your decision-making (and so your action) to accommodate things' natures.

absolute aperspectivity: count observed regularities as "genuine" regularities just in case: (i) the observations occur under normal circumstances, e.g., by normal observers, (ii) the observations are not conditioned by the observer's social position, and (iii) the observer has not influenced the behavior of the items under observation.

The point of absolute aperspectivity is to limit application of the norm of epistemic neutrality: only those observations which satisfy the aperspectivity conditions (i)-(iii) are a legitimate basis for drawing conclusions about the nature of things. We should note, however, that because the objectifier's projective beliefs are not based on observations which satisfy the constraints of absolute aperspectivity, they are not justified by the principles of absolute objectivity. At the very least he fails to satisfy conditions (ii) and (iii). But the ideal objectifier gets around this by relying on a supplemental principle of aperspectivity:

assumed aperspectivity: if a regularity is observed, then assume that (i) the circumstances are normal, (ii) the observations are not conditioned by the observers' social position, (iii) the observer has not influenced the behavior of the items under observation.<sup>83</sup>

Assumed aperspectivity entitles us to claim that any regularity we observe is a "genuine" regularity, and so reveals the nature of the things under observation. In effect, we may apply the principle of epistemic neutrality to any regularity we find, since assumed aperspectivity bridges the gap between observed regularities and genuine regularities. It is the norm of assumed

aperspectivity which enables the objectifier to conclude that his observations (which may be generally acknowledged as accurate) provide a basis for his projective beliefs, i.e., that such observations are a guide to things' natures. Let us call the ideal of objectivity which consists of absolute objectivity supplemented by the norm of assumed aperspectivity, the ideal of assumed objectivity.

The broad question before us is whether and to what extent this ideal of assumed objectivity is "gendered": more specifically is it either weakly or strongly gendered. Let us ask first: is this ideal appropriate to the role of men, i.e., to what extent does it contribute to excellence in men's social role; and second, is the ideal grounded in men's social role, i.e., is this an ideal whose satisfaction is sufficient for functioning as a man?

As I read MacKinnon's argument, we should conclude that the ideal of assumed objectivity is weakly masculine. (We may assume that if the ideal is appropriate to the role of objectifier, it is appropriate to the role of sexual objectifier.) It is appropriate to the role of objectifier in two ways: first, an objectifier who satisfies this ideal will reliably form the projective beliefs required for objectification, and will act accordingly; moreover, a commitment to the ideal would provide him with principles to guide and legitimate his objectifying behavior. Second, if the ideal is broadly endorsed, then it is at least likely that the objectifier's position of power, necessary for his ongoing objectification, will be preserved.

To see these points, remember that we are considering how one who meets the minimal conditions as an objectifier might sustain an ongoing practice of successful objectification, and so become an "excellent" objectifier. It is perhaps easiest to judge individuals' excellence in this role, as in many others, in terms of whether they conform to principles which consistently recommend and justify their objectifying behavior. Objectifiers who conform to the norms of assumed objectivity will qualify, in this sense, as excellent. For example, a man objectifies women by viewing them and treating them as having a nature which makes them what he desires them to be,

and further, has power to enforce this view. As discussed above, objectification occurs under conditions of inequality where some individuals have power over others. It is plausible that under such conditions there will be consequences of inequality evident in observable and regular differences between the unequal parties. But then assuming that men will be witness to these regularities, those men who satisfy the norm of assumed objectivity will have reason to view women and treat women as they appear under the conditions of inequality, i.e., as subordinate. The norms tell us to observe the differences and behave accordingly: see, women are subordinate (submissive, deferential, etc.) so treat them as subordinate (submissive, deferential, etc.). By the standards set by assumed objectivity, such objectifying beliefs and actions are justified. Those objectifiers who conform to these standards will reliably and consistently fulfil their role, given the social power to do so.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, assumed objectivity contributes to sustaining that social power, under conditions in which the norms are broadly endorsed. It is plausible that insofar as you are in a position to justify your behavior in light of broadly shared epistemic and practical norms, then your social position is relatively secure. The relevant regularities which provide the basis for the objectifier's projective beliefs are generally accessible and, we may assume, accurate. So if the ideal of assumed objectivity is generally endorsed, then the inference to the projective belief, and the consequent practical decisions will be broadly recognized as legitimate. Thus a general endorsement of the ideal of assumed objectivity reinforces the objectifier's position of power, and contributes to his ongoing success.

The considerations just offered suggest that the ideal of assumed objectivity is weakly masculine, since satisfying the ideal contributes to success in the role of objectifier, and so presumably to success in the role of sexual objectifier. Should we also conclude that the ideal is strongly masculine? Let me begin by asking whether it is grounded more broadly in the role of objectifier: is satisfying the ideal sufficient for objectifying others? MacKinnon suggests that it is: "...to look at



the world objectively is to objectify it."<sup>85</sup> Let us recall that an ideal might be grounded in a social role either constitutively, viz., if it is not possible to satisfy the ideal without functioning in that social role, or contextually, viz., if given specified background conditions satisfying the ideal is sufficient for functioning in the role. I think we may grant that satisfying the ideal of assumed objectivity is not constitutively grounded in the role of objectifier; our focus should be on contextual grounding.

In considering the ways in which the ideal of assumed objectivity contributes to the success of an objectifier, we saw that under conditions of gender inequality, one who observes regular differences between men and women, and who satisfies the ideal will view women as subordinate, treat women as subordinate, and be justified, by those standards, in doing so. But this is not sufficient, in general, to be an objectifier, or more specifically, to sexually objectify women. I propose that the ideal of assumed objectivity is contextually grounded, not directly in the role of objectifier, but in the role of collaborator in objectification.

To explain, remember that one objectifies something just in case one views it and treats it as an object which has by nature properties which one desires in it and further, one has the power to make it have those properties. (Sexual objectification adds to each of these, two further conditions: viz., the desire in question is an erotic desire, and the desire is for dominance/submission.) Let us say that one collaborates in objectifying something just in case one views it and treats it as an object which has by nature properties which are a consequence of objectification, i.e., properties which are a consequence of the forces sustaining social hierarchy. Collaboration differs from objectification insofar as one may collaborate in objectifying something without viewing it in terms of one's projected desire: one may not find the properties attributed to the object desirable, they may be viewed as undesirable, perhaps simply "natural" or "inevitable". Collaboration also differs from objectification insofar as one who collaborate need not have the power to force her view of things upon them. Nevertheless, collaboration is not simply a passive process of allowing others

to carry on with their objectification; a collaborator shares with both sorts of objectifiers a pattern of thought and action. A woman who views women as weak and inferior by nature, and acts accordingly, collaborates in objectification, though in doing so she need not objectify women.

So if we consider a context of gender inequality, let's say a context where male dominance is widespread, we may assume that there will be generally observable differences between men and women which are a consequence of men's forcing their view of women on women. If one in this context is aware of these differences, and satisfies the norm of assumed objectivity (at least with respect to these observed regularities), then they will view the differences as "natural", and will act to accommodate gender difference. This, I take it, is sufficient to function in the role of a collaborator in objectification. In short, the ideal of assumed objectivity is contextually grounded in the role of collaborator; the relevant background conditions for this grounding are that the one who satisfies the ideal (a) does so in a context of social hierarchy, (b) is aware of the observable consequences of this hierarchy, and (c) applies the norm to these observations.

I state these background conditions in terms of "social hierarchy" rather than "gender hierarchy", because we may allow that there are other forms of objectification besides sexual objectification, e.g., racial objectification; correspondingly, there are other forms of collaboration. The argument just offered suggests that the ideal of assumed objectivity is sufficient for functioning in a specific collaborative role relative to the social context and one's application of the norms. For example, in a context where both racial and sexual domination are in place, one who observes both racial and sexual difference, and satisfies the norms of assumed objectivity with respect to both, will collaborate in both racial and sexual objectification; if one satisfies the norms only selectively, one may, e.g., collaborate in racial but not sexual objectification, or sexual but not racial objectification.

However, we should not conclude that any and every case in which one satisfies the ideal of assumed objectivity, even under conditions of social hierarchy, is sufficient for functioning as a collaborator. This is to say that all three of the above-stated background conditions, viz., (a)-(c),

not just the first, must be met before drawing the connection between assumed objectivity and collaboration. This is because there are contexts, even under conditions of social hierarchy, in which one observes a regularity in something's behavior, assumes that it is a consequence of its nature, and acts to accommodate this nature, without thereby collaborating in objectification.

For example, I observe that watering begonias with ammonia kills them; I assume that this is a consequence of their nature, and I adjust my actions so that I water begonias with ammonia only if I want to kill them. I don't, e.g., try to change the fact that begonias die when watered with ammonia. In this case, the relevant property of begonias is not a consequence of objectification; that they have this property is not due to social coercion. I satisfy the ideal of assumed objectivity with respect to my observations of begonias, but I don't collaborate in objectifying them. It is central to objectification that social facts are treated as natural facts, and so cast as immutable; assumed objectivity legitimates this error. But where the observable regularities used as a basis for drawing conclusions about natures are not the result of social coercion or force, there is no objectification, and so no collaboration in objectification.

Similarly, if I observe that people regularly die when deprived of food and shelter for an extended period, and I take this to be a result of their nature, and also accommodate this fact in deciding how to act, I don't collaborate in objectification. Again, that there are conditions under which we cannot survive is not a consequence of objectification. The important point to note here is that one objectifies someone (or something) only if the properties one takes to be part of its nature are properties it has as a consequence of social forces. The fact that a human organism will stop functioning under conditions of physical deprivation is not plausibly a result of social forces. Again, the element of illusion -- the masking of social/moral facts as natural facts -- which is crucial to objectification, and consequently to collaboration, is missing.

d. Objectivity and sexual objectification

The argument I have just offered for the conclusion that assumed objectivity is contextually grounded in the role of collaborator, falls considerably short of the thesis that objectivity is strongly masculine, viz., that satisfying this ideal of objectivity is sufficient for being a sexual objectifier. It falls short in two important ways. First, I have argued that in a limited variety of cases, satisfying the norm of assumed objectivity is sufficient for functioning as a collaborator, not as an objectifier. Second, I have left sexuality virtually out of the picture. To be fair, I should acknowledge that MacKinnon does sketch an argument for the claim that in being objective one functions as a sexual objectifier.

Let us grant that we are considering whether assumed objectivity is contextually grounded in the role of men under conditions of male dominance. Further, let us say that one takes up an objectivist stance towards something, just in case on the basis of assumed objectivity, one views it as an object having certain properties "by nature", and takes this as a constraint in deciding how to act. The hypothesis under consideration is that if you are an objectivist in this sense, then your relationship to the object is one of sexual objectification. What must be shown is that if one takes up such an objectivist stance towards something then (1) one views it and treats it as having by nature properties one desires, (2) one has the power to force it to have these properties (and sometimes exercises this power), and (3) one desires subordination and finds force erotic.

MacKinnon's argument for this claim relies on three controversial premises (my numbering indicates a link with each of the required points above):

1\*) In general, to view something as an object is to view it as having, by nature, certain properties which one finds useful or desirable: "The object world is constructed according to how it looks with respect to its possible uses."<sup>86</sup>

2\*) One's stance towards an object is objective only if one has made (or makes) it have the properties one attributes to it: "What is objectively known corresponds to the world and can be

verified by being pointed to (as science does) because the world itself is controlled from the same point of view."<sup>87</sup>

3\*) All domination or control is eroticized: "The act of control...is itself eroticized under male supremacy."<sup>88</sup>

So the picture is this: in taking up the objectivist stance towards something, you project your needs/desires onto it (taking the desired properties to be part of its nature, even if it doesn't currently exhibit them); you make it have the properties you project; and you find this control erotic. One thereby sexually objectifies the "object" of this stance. If the social role of men is the role of sexual objectifier, then taking up the objectivist stance is sufficient for being a man.

Although I have only indicated the barest outline of MacKinnon's argument, I will not undertake to explicate it further here. I offered some examples in the previous section which suggest that at least premises (1\*) and (2\*) are grossly overstated. Even more effective counterexamples to these claims could be easily constructed. Further, if we accept MacKinnon's premises, then we lose the distinction between objectification and collaboration; as sketched above, a collaborator is an objectivist who conforms her beliefs and actions to the objectifier's projected reality. But she need not find this reality desirable, and need not have the social power to enforce it. If MacKinnon's premises are accurate, this is not an available position: on her view an objectivist not only desires objects to have the properties she takes to be part of their nature, but is in a position to make them conform to her view. Yet it is mysterious, e.g., why taking up an objectivist stance should be thought sufficient for having such power.

More importantly, however, I think the basic strategy of MacKinnon's argument -- a strategy painfully common among feminist theorists -- is deeply flawed. The strategy is to take a powerful analysis of how the social world has been shaped by male power and desire, and to extend this analysis to the world as a whole. For example, take a powerful account of pornography as a

mechanism by which the social category of women is constructed, and suggest that there are analogous accounts for all categories. But such generalization, rather than strengthening her position, weakens it.

MacKinnon's analysis of gender and sexual objectification is important and effective because it vividly captures the very real power that men have over women, power backed up by violence and hatred and law. In spite of the horror of it, it is empowering to recognize that the threat of male violence has significantly formed the social world as women know and live it. What has been done can maybe be undone. However, if we claim that the power which has determined gender categories is the same power that has determined all categories, then we deflate the social analysis of this power with the simple thought that much of what the world is like is not within the control of people, societies, cultures, languages, etc. In short, in the effort to generalize our insights we lose the contrast between what we do have significant control over, and what we don't. Fortunately we are not omnipotent; we don't have the power "to force the world to be any way [our] minds can invent."<sup>89</sup> Men don't have this power; neither do women; neither do "cultures", etc. The fantasy of such power may be useful in casting our current categories as open to critique, but believing in the fantasy, I submit, is as dangerous as supposing that our current categories capture nature's "givens".

The analysis of gender categories as socially constructed works as a critique of traditional ideas about men and women in part by theorizing the specific mechanisms of social control which are responsible for the observable differences between men and women. It is the contrast between these mechanisms of control, and naturalistic or deterministic causal mechanisms, e.g., mechanisms which are responsible for the observable differences between, say, water and ammonia, that lends support to the hope that social change is possible. There may be a complex social analysis of why we are interested in the difference between ammonia and water, and why we are keen to distinguish them, but it is implausible to suggest that specific mechanisms of social

control are responsible for their difference. If we insist the mechanisms responsible for any apparent natural differences are the same mechanisms as are at work in constructing gender difference, we lose our focus on what social power consists in.

For example, if we suppose that the explanation of gender difference should apply in explaining all differences, then it is plausible to seek a common denominator in the variety of explanations offered. But seeking such a common explanatory strategy distracts the effort for social change; there are two temptations which lead us astray. On one hand, if we note the significance of causal explanation in understanding regular patterns in things' behavior, it is tempting to resort to a social or psychological determinism in explaining gender; thus it becomes obscure, once again, how the power which constructs gender is both optional, and more importantly, subject to moral appraisal. On the other hand, it is tempting to relocate the source of gender oppression in a "pattern of thought" common to all efforts at differentiation, e.g., a pattern which attributes natures to things. This shifts our attention from a concern with the concrete mechanisms of social control, and relocates the problem "in our heads": as if domination and abuse would end if we just stopped the bad habit of thinking that things have natures, (or if we stopped distinguishing things, or postulating unified categories). Worse still, taking our thoughts to be the problem can lead to an intellectual nihilism which deprives us of the resources for constructing viable alternatives to existing social arrangements.

We may grant that the analysis of categories which purport to be natural, e.g., gender, sex, race, in terms of hierarchical social relations, has fruitfully prompted a systematic re-evaluation of all our assumptions about what is natural and what is social, and has highlighted the political import of this distinction. But even if systematic doubt and extra caution are warranted for every case, this not support a wholesale denial of the distinction between natural categories and social categories. Nor does it give us grounds for thinking that a commitment to things having "natures" is anti-feminist; in particular, recognizing that I am not by nature a woman leaves untouched the broader

question of whether I have a nature, and strange as it may sound, whether my nature is natural or not.<sup>90</sup> Generalizing the strategy behind a social analysis of gender across the board may seem a promising way to combat a dogmatic insistence on the immutability of life as we know it. But concrete analyses of socially constructed categories do not warrant sweeping conclusions about "all language" and "all categories", and the hasty generalization of our analyses both theoretically and politically weakens the force of our position.

## 6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Thus far I have argued that there is a complex epistemic and practical norm, what I have called the ideal of "assumed objectivity", which is appropriate to the role of objectifier: realizing this ideal enables objectifiers to be better objectifiers, and its endorsement perpetuates objectification. If there is a social category of men defined by the relation of sexual objectification, --allowing that sexual objectification is not the only relation which constitutes gender categories-- then assuming that someone can be a good sexual objectifier only if they are a good objectifier, the ideal is appropriate to at least one significant gender role for men. From this we should conclude that the ideal of assumed objectivity is weakly masculine.

I have also argued that the ideal of assumed objectivity is contextually grounded in the role of collaborator in objectification. Under conditions of social hierarchy, one who observes the consequences of inequality and applies the norms in assumed objectivity to these observations, will function socially in the role of collaborator. However, I also argued that one can satisfy the ideal of assumed objectivity under these specific background conditions, and not function as an objectifier, or as a sexual objectifier. Thus we should conclude that the ideal, at least with respect to these conditions, is not grounded in men's social role, and so not strongly masculine. Of course this leaves open the question whether there are other gender roles, and other background conditions, with respect to which the ideal is strongly masculine.



What should we make of these conclusions? To what extent do they offer reason to reject the ideal of assumed objectivity? We should begin by noting that the ideal of assumed objectivity consists in several principles: assumed aperspectivity, along with the principles of absolute objectivity (epistemic neutrality, practical neutrality, and absolute aperspectivity). The arguments I have considered, even if they pose a challenge to the value of the ideal as a whole, they do not offer grounds for rejecting all of the constituent principles in the ideal; nor do they offer grounds for deciding which constituent principle, or principles, to reject. What problems the ideal may cause are a consequence of the principles being employed in conjunction.<sup>91</sup> This is important, for it shows that one cannot plausibly use the argument I have outlined against those who endorse something less than the full conjunction of principles. For example, the argument is ineffective against those who accept that things have natures which we must accommodate in our decision-making, but who deny that we can just read natures off of just any regularity that appears; and is it ineffective against those who make quick inferences to natures, but think there's no general imperative to accommodate or respect them.

In introducing the charge that rationality is gendered (in Section Three), I suggested that its being so would constitute a challenge to the Western philosophical tradition's emphasis on ideals of reason and rational selves. Given the arguments just offered, have we a basis for claiming that the traditional commitments of epistemology and metaphysics are male-biased, or that they sustain male domination? Certainly we cannot answer this question without a detailed examination of the philosophical positions which have been offered. However, I would suggest that it is difficult to situate the charge that assumed objectivity is gendered as a critique of traditional epistemology and metaphysics.

Undoubtably philosophers have relied on the ideal of assumed objectivity in constructing accounts of human nature, and in offering moral, political, and epistemological theories; moreover, they have relied on it in ways which are politically problematic. But we must also acknowledge that the

norm of assumed objectivity does not capture a broad range of philosophical ideals of rationality; and it does not do justice to the sensitivity philosophers have shown concerning the problem of postulating natures. Those working within a (broadly) empiricist tradition are happy to rely on observed regularities in forming their theories, but are notoriously opposed to attributing natures to things; those working within (broadly) Aristotelian and rationalist traditions are happy to attribute natures to things, but do not do so on the basis of observed regularities alone. Thus it would seem that important figures in the traditional philosophical canon not only explicitly reject the ideal of assumed objectivity, but also offer resources for demonstrating its weaknesses and for constructing alternatives.

However, even if the conclusion that assumed objectivity is gendered does not provide a direct indictment of those following out traditional projects in epistemology and metaphysics, neither can we rest content, thinking that these projects have been vindicated. For example, we should ask: in what cases does the explicit rejection of assumed objectivity belie a deeper reliance upon it? What are the alternatives to assumed objectivity? Are there other conceptions of objectivity -- conceptions offering weakly or strongly gendered ideals -- playing a role in philosophical theorizing? And are there additional ways that norms and ideals can be gendered beyond those we have discussed?

Having noted some limitations of the arguments considered, we still face the more difficult question of how these arguments bear on our evaluation of assumed objectivity. Given that the ideal of assumed objectivity is weakly masculine, and contextually grounded in the role of collaborator in objectification, should we reject the ideal? Let us return to the examples I offered in Section Three: specifically the examples of kind masters, and journalists whose excellence renders them criminals. In these cases it seemed plausible that we should continue to value kindness and the virtues of journalists, but work to change the circumstances which made for their offensive consequences. Is assumed objectivity an ideal like these? Should we broadly endorse, even abide

by, its norms, but work to undermine the social hierarchy which makes for its offensive consequences?

I submit that we should reject the ideal of assumed objectivity --at least in the unqualified form we've considered it-- for the suggestion that we might endorse it while working to undermine the existing social hierarchy leaves us in an unmanageable position. There are two issues to address: first, should we accept the ideal of assumed objectivity as binding on us: should we accept its norms to guide our attitudes and actions? Second, should we support and value the activities of others who live by those norms, even if we don't? In answering these questions, it matters who is included in the "us", who counts as "we". The "we" I am speaking of, and to, is culturally and historically situated. We live under conditions of social hierarchy, e.g., where one has power by virtue of being male, white, straight...; more importantly, I am assuming that we are committed to changing this.

If we accept the norms of assumed objectivity as binding on us, then our efforts at social change would be, by its lights, not only unmotivated, but unjustified. Because we live under circumstances of social hierarchy, and are aware of the consequences of this hierarchy, the ideal of assumed objectivity would instruct us to collaborate in the existing patterns of objectification: we should view and treat the subordinate as subordinate. In short, our circumstances satisfy the background conditions under which assumed objectivity renders one a collaborator. But in committing ourselves to social change we reject these attitudes and these actions, viewing them as wrong and unjustified. Such a conflict is unmanageable. Faced with such a conflict, assumed objectivity is clearly the commitment to revise. Moreover, if we allow that others, also situated under conditions of social hierarchy, legitimately guide their attitudes and actions by the ideal of assumed objectivity, then this legitimacy will extend to their collaborative activities. But then it becomes obscure on what basis we demand that they change.

In these respects the ideal of assumed objectivity is unlike kindness, and unlike journalistic

excellence; in those cases there is no conflict between valuing the ideals and a commitment to social change. Admittedly, there are actual cases in which satisfying the ideal of assumed objectivity is not offensive, even when its constituent norms are employed in conjunction. And there are times and places where the background conditions are not those of social hierarchy, so satisfying the ideal will not render one a collaborator. But unfortunately, we are not in such a time or place, and endorsing unrestricted application of the ideal will only keep us from getting there.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Elizabeth Anderson, Louise Antony, Susan Brison, Cynthia Freeland, Beth Hackett, Mary Hannah Jones, Elisabeth Lloyd, and Maria Morales, for their encouragement and helpful discussion on the topics discussed in this paper; and for this as well as comments on earlier drafts, special thanks to Charlotte Witt and Stephen Yablo. Thanks also to Wayne Sumner and the Philosophy Department at the University of Toronto for their generosity in making available to me the resources of the University while I was on leave from Penn.

<sup>2</sup> There is an enormous amount of feminist research offering critiques of male bias in traditional disciplines. Important anthologies focusing on critiques of traditional philosophical projects include: Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, eds., Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983); Carol Gould, ed., Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1984); Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross, eds., Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986); Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers, eds., Women and Moral Theory (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986); Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, eds., Women, Knowledge, and Reality (Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989); Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo, eds., Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> A paradigm example of this latter project is Carol McMillan's Women, Reason, and Nature (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982). See also, Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," Feminist Studies 6 (Summer 1980): 342-67. This general strategy has been widely pursued in the context of theories of moral reasoning, often inspired by Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> This line of thought is relatively common among French feminists, and feminist postmodernists. See, e.g., Elaine Marks and Isabel de Cautivron, eds., New French Feminisms: An Anthology (Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985); Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," Signs 11 (1986): 439-56; Jessica Benjamin, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination," in Powers of Desire, ed., A. Snitow, C. Stansell, S. Thompson, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983): 280-99; Evelyn Fox Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1985). Helpful commentaries explicating important themes in this line of thought include: Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (New York: Methuen, 1985); and Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). For a different approach to the same issue, see also Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); and Mary Daly, Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Many feminists have cautioned against theorizing an alternative "feminine" kind of reason. These include: Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), esp. 105; Robert Pargetter and Elizabeth Prior, "Against the Sexuality of Reason," Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Supplement to vol. 64 (June 1986): 107-119; Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," in Feminism/Postmodernism, ed., Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 39-62; Christine DiStefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, 63-82. One alternative to the idea of "feminine reason" has been to locate instead a "feminist standpoint" which offers an alternative to "masculine reason" as well as a critique of femininity. See e.g.,

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Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex, and Power (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1984), and Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983). This strategy too has received sustained criticism. See Sandra Harding, The Science Question in Feminism (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Important work in evaluating feminist critiques of rationality and in reconstructing conceptions of reason include: Helen Longino, "Feminist Critiques of Rationality: Critiques of Science or Philosophy of Science," Women's Studies International Forum, 12 (1989): 261-69, and Science as Social Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); Mary Hawkesworth, "Feminist Epistemology: A Survey of the Field," Women and Politics 7 (Fall 1987): 115-27, and "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," Signs 14 (1989): 533-57; Sandra Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories in Feminist Theory," Signs 11 (Summer 1986): 645-64, and The Science Question in Feminism (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986); Susan Hekman, "The Feminization of Epistemology: Gender and the Social Sciences," Women and Politics 7 (Fall 1987): 65-83; Judith Grant, "I Feel Therefore I Am: A Critique of Female Experience as a Basis for Feminist Epistemology," Women and Politics 7 (Fall 1987): 99-114; Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies 14 (Fall 1988): 575-99; Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard," New German Critique 33 (1984): 104-26; Iris Young, "The Ideal Community and the Politics of Difference," Social Theory and Practice 12 (Spring 1986): 1-26.

<sup>7</sup> Useful papers include, Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91 (December 1986): 1053-75; Jane Flax, "Gender as a Social Problem: In and For Feminist Theory," Amerikastudien/America Studies 31 (1986): 193-213, and Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations"; Donna Haraway, "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary," in her Simmians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1991), 127-48. For important early attempts at defining gender in terms of social relations see also: Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed., Rayna Rapp Reiter, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210; and Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?" in Women, Culture, and Society, ed., Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, (Palo Alto: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), 67-87.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g., Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender Scepticism," in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, 133-56; and DiStefano, "Dilemmas of Difference", esp. 73-78.

<sup>9</sup> The suggestion that sex may not be a binary classification, and that it may be socially constructed appears of course in Foucault; see e.g., The History of Sexuality, vol 1: An Introduction, trans., Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1980). This suggestion has also been endorsed by many feminist theorists. For useful discussions see Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," Feminist Issues 1 (Winter 1981): 47-54, "The Category of Sex," Feminist Issues 2 (Fall 1982): 63-68; Judith Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault," in Feminism as Critique, ed., S. Benhabib and D. Cornell (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 128-42; and Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminisms in the 1980's," in her Simmians, Cyborgs, and Women, 149-81.

<sup>10</sup> This "commonplace", however, is not as straightforward as it may seem, and is not accepted across the board. The distinction between sex and gender has been challenged as presupposing and reinforcing a problematic contrast between "nature" and "culture". See., e.g., Moira Gatens, "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction," in Beyond Marxism? Interventions after Marx, ed., J. Allen and P. Patton, (Sydney: Intervention Publications, 1983), 143-63; Haraway, "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary," esp. 133-34; and Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender". However, it is by no means obvious that in drawing the distinction between sex and gender, one is thereby committed to saying that sex is a natural category; my concern here is to emphasize the social character of

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gender, allowing that sexual difference must also be given a social analysis, one plausibly interdependent with the analysis of gender.

<sup>11</sup> Roughly, An intrinsic property of x is one x has simply in virtue of itself, regardless of the properties of other things, e.g., x could have that property even if it were the only thing existing. An extrinsic property of x is one x has not simply in virtue of itself; x's having the property depends on the properties of other things as well. Intrinsic properties need not be essential and may be temporary.

<sup>12</sup> At this point, in saying that the relations are "social" I mean simply to indicate that they concern certain relations which hold between individuals by virtue of their place in a social system. My point is completely neutral on the issue of whether or not we should be realists about properties or think that all properties and relations are "merely conventional". Any plausible nominalism or conventionalism will have the resources to distinguish social properties and relations from others in the sense intended. See Ian Hacking, "World-Making by Kind-Making: Child Abuse as an Example," in How Classification Works, ed., Mary Douglas, (Edinburgh: Univ. of Edinburgh Press, forthcoming 1992), especially sections 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Important work discussing the ethnocentric and imperialistic tendencies in feminist accounts of gender include: Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Watertown: Persephone, 1983); bell hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Audre Lorde, Sister/Outsider (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You: Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice'," Women's Studies International Forum 6 (1983): 573-581; Elizabeth Spelman, The Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Elizabeth Weed, ed., Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1989); Gayatri Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," in In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1988), 103-17, and her "Feminism and Critical Theory," in In Other Worlds, 77-92. For a useful discussion of ethnocentric bias in the feminist critique of rationality see, e.g., Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist," in Jaggar and Bordo, Gender/Body/Knowledge, 256-69.

<sup>14</sup> For an important discussion of this claim see Catherine MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), Chapter 2. See also, Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations," esp., 45, 49; Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," Feminist Issues 1 (Summer 1980): 103-11; and Wittig, "The Category of Sex," and "One is Not Born a Woman". It is important to note that not all social relations are hierarchical, e.g., being a friend of, is not; and not all hierarchical relations are relations of domination, e.g., although plausibly the relations of doctor/patient, mother/daughter, are hierarchical, they are not themselves relations of domination. Unfortunately, the distinctions between social, hierarchical, and dominance relations are sometimes conflated.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the political interplay between categories of sex and gender see references in notes 9 and 10 above. See also Evelyn Fox Keller, "The Gender/Science System: or, Is Sex to Gender as Nature is to Science?" Hypatia 2 (Fall 1987): 37-49.

<sup>16</sup> Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, 26.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g., Jean Grimshaw Philosophy and Feminist Thinking (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 62.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in some affluent western communities the ideal of the "super-mom" has replaced the ideal of the "homemaker" as a gender norm for women; (is this a new "femininity"?). We

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should also note that gender norms may function differently if women take control of defining the social relations which constitute gender, i.e., being a "good woman" within a women's community may require satisfying very different norms than those traditionally counted as "feminine". Note that feminist resistance to claim that gender categories are constituted by relations of domination is sometimes supported by the thought that the category of women should be defined by and for women in terms of a more empowering self-conception; such a definition would plausibly not employ relations of domination. This constructive project is highly contested, for there is a clear danger of replacing one set of oppressive gender-roles (and gender-norms) with another. One alternative is to resist the construction of gender categories altogether, likewise resisting the consolidation of (at least binary) gender-norms. We might instead recommend a "subversive recombination of gender meanings" (Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, 333); see also Theresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in her Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 1-19.

<sup>19</sup> DiStefano, "Dilemmas of Difference," 70.

<sup>20</sup> For example, the idea that a "good" woman is asexual, combined with the idea that a "good" woman is responsive to men's sexual desire, offers women little room to negotiate a coherent relation to sexuality. For a discussion of such contradictions in the context of moral evaluation, see Kathryn Morgan, "Women and Moral Madness," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary vol. 13 (Fall 1987): 201-25.

<sup>21</sup> However, we should note that norms may entail features which are not in any obvious way under our control; hence our strivings to satisfy the accepted norm may be pointless, and even tragic. Self-mutilation and self-starvation are not uncommon consequences of the felt need to satisfy accepted gender-norms.

<sup>22</sup> A broad range of feminists have been keen to incorporate the suggestion that our conceptions of self and world bear the marks of gender, largely due to the influence of early childhood experience. In internalizing the relevant gender-norms we develop "gender identities"; these gender identities represent reality -self and world-- in a form which motivates our participation in the assigned gender role. The literature on this is enormous. Important examples include: Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Jane Flax, "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics," in Harding and Hintikka, Discovering Reality, 245-81; Evelyn Fox Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science; Naomi Scheman, "Individualism and the Objects of Psychology," in Harding and Hintikka, Discovering Reality, 225-44. For an important critical discussion of this work, see Butler, "Gender Trouble".

<sup>23</sup> However, it is important to note that when gender-norms are well-entrenched, individuals are often interpreted as living up to them even when they don't: a woman may be assumed to be nurturing, weak, or dependent even when she isn't. (Others may make these assumptions about her, and she may also make these assumptions about herself.)

<sup>24</sup> Another temptation prompted by generalizations that women are feminine and men, masculine, is to define the social categories of gender in terms of conformity to idealized gender-norms, i.e., to take the social class of women to consist of those who are feminine. This too is a mistake, but for different reasons. On this view, it is rightly acknowledged that gender differences are the result of social forces; but in taking femininity to be the mark by which one qualifies as a woman, the analysis loses much of its power as a critique of patriarchy's assumptions about women.



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Delimiting the class of women in terms of the standards of femininity treats unfeminine women as not "really" women at all, and ignores the possibility of women's resistance to the norm; worse still, because socially endorsed conceptions of "femininity" will reflect race, class, heterosexual, religious, and ethnic bias, by defining women as those who are feminine we are in danger of repeating the exclusion and marginalization that feminism is committed to redressing.

<sup>25</sup> This point has been made repeatedly over the centuries. See, e.g., John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women, in Essays on Sex Equality, ed., Alice Rossi (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970). We will return below to discuss some of the mechanisms which all too often obscure this point.

<sup>26</sup> For a convincing and engaging discussion of this point see Christine Delphy, "Protofeminism and Antifeminism," in French Feminist Theory, ed., Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 80-109. See also, Iris Young, "Is Male Gender Identity the Cause of Male Domination," in Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), 36-61.

<sup>27</sup> See Lloyd, Man of Reason.

<sup>28</sup> Just about anything can be (and has been) interpreted as exemplifying the norms of femininity and masculinity. Useful examples of the projection of gender norms onto individuals of other kinds is available in feminist work in science (especially biology). See, e.g., Helen Longino and Ruth Doell, "Body, Bias, and Behavior: A Comparative Analysis in Two Areas of Biological Science," Signs 9 (1983): 206-27; and Haraway, Simmians, Cyborgs, and Women, esp. Parts I-II.

<sup>29</sup> Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender," 132.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, many feminist theorists speak as if a concept is masculine simply by virtue of being "associated" with men: "The basis thesis of the feminist critique of knowledge can be stated very simply: the privileging of the rational mode of thought is inherently sexist because, at least since the time of Plato, the rational has been associated with the male, the irrational with the female." (Hekman, "The Feminization of Epistemology," 70.) As should be clear from my discussion thus far, I find this "simple statement" of the thesis too weak to do justice to the depth of the feminist critique; at the very least more needs to be said about the nature of the association, showing it to be more than "mere" association, in order to sustain the feminist challenge.

<sup>31</sup> A wonderful discussion of whether and to what extent philosophical conceptions and ideals of self can be extended to include women, see Susan Okin, Women in Western Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979).

<sup>32</sup> For a valuable discussion and defense of "gynocentric" feminism which is sensitive to these concerns see: Iris Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism, and Feminist Politics," in her Throwing Like a Girl, 73-91.

<sup>33</sup> Note that in defining constitutive grounding in terms of entailment, I am not distinguishing between cases in which the entailed conditions are presupposed by the entailing conditions, (as might be claimed of the tenant example) and those in which they are not presupposed, but count as more straightforward sufficient conditions (as in the teacher example). For classic attempts at characterizing the difference between presupposition and entailment, see, P.F. Strawson, Introduction to Logical Theory (London: Methuen, 1952), and his "Reply to Mr. Sellars," Philosophical Review 63 (1954) 216-31.

<sup>34</sup> We should note that in determining whether a norm is appropriate to a role, parallel issues arise: is satisfying the norm required in any context in order to excel at the role? Or does satisfying the norm contribute, in a given context, to excellence in the role. Because it is relatively common to

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acknowledge the contextual factors in determining a norm's appropriateness to a role, my discussion here will focus on the constitutive/contextual distinction with respect to grounding.

<sup>35</sup> Clearly the journalistic ideal mentioned may be satisfied in a variety of different ways, by a variety of different actions. Two journalists may end up in different social roles because they realize the norm through different courses of action. However, my point here is that even if a journalist were to pursue the very same course of action as in fact she does, but under different background conditions, she could be cast in a different social role.

<sup>36</sup> In offering this condition it is important to note that there has been significant philosophical attention devoted to the problem of articulating and evaluating conditionals which depend upon the specification of relevant background conditions. A classic statement of the problem appears in: Nelson Goodman, "The Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals," *Journal of Philosophy* 44 (Feb. 27, 1947): 113-28; also his *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 2nd ed., (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Co., Inc., 1965). See also, Roderick Chisholm, "Law Statements and Counterfactual Inference," *Analysis* 15 (April 1955): 97-105; J.L. Mackie, "Counterfactuals and Causal Laws," in *Analytical Philosophy* ed., R.J. Butler (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), 66-80. It remains a standing problem how to set limits on the assumed background conditions so that the conditional yields a substantive requirement; in this case the problem is how to set constraints on the background conditions to avoid the result that any norm whatsoever is grounded in a given social role, yet without describing the constraints so that the conditional in question trivially holds. I will not undertake to solve this problem here. I trust that the argument I will discuss below does not depend for its plausibility on working through the details of this issue.

<sup>37</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the contextual grounding of a norm in a role need not contribute to success in that role, and the norm need not count as part of an ideal "for" that role, in the ordinary sense. For example, what makes you an excellent journalist may, under certain conditions, result in your being a criminal, without making you a good criminal. Nevertheless, noting that norms are not only constitutively but also contextually grounded in roles highlights the fact that our "virtues" may unexpectedly cast us in roles for which they were never intended.

<sup>38</sup> However, there is one qualification we must add. It is a complicated matter to determine whether the features which promote success in a social role are responsible for perpetuating the role. Consider doctors: a successful doctor is one who heals her patients. It is tempting to say that healing patients, although required for a doctor's success, is not responsible for perpetuating the role of doctor; it's the fact that people get sick, in spite of good doctors' efforts, that perpetuates this role. However, we should also note that people getting sick can't be all that is responsible for sustaining the social role of doctor, since it is easy to imagine how in contexts where all doctors are bad at their job, the role might lose credibility, and eventually disappear. Thus I suggest that the features which contribute to success in a role will, at least indirectly, perpetuate the role.

<sup>39</sup> This theoretical possibility is important, for it allows us to claim that there may be ideals appropriate to women's social role which are, nevertheless, separable from this role. Just as satisfying some traditionally masculine ideals may not be sufficient to cast one in a man's role, satisfying some traditionally feminine ideals may not be sufficient to cast one in a woman's role. Hopefully, this will allow us to endorse some of the traditional feminine ideals without supporting social arrangements of gender oppression.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," and "Situated Knowledges"; Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender," and "Gender Trouble"; and de Laurentis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies."

<sup>41</sup> For example, consider the relation 'is a mother of'. Employing a pluralistic approach to mothering relations we might claim that one can be a mother of someone either by contributing the ovum from which they developed, by giving birth to them, by adopting them, or by playing a

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certain role in their parenting; in effect, we would claim that the conditions for being a mother are irreducibly disjunctive and heterogeneous.

<sup>42</sup> MacKinnon develops her position on gender and objectivity in: "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, ed., Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-30 (hereafter cited as FMMS-I), [originally published in Signs 7 (1982): 515-44]; "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," Signs 8 (1983): 635-658 (hereafter cited as FMMS-II); Feminism Unmodified (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Towards a Feminist Theory of the State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> I say that MacKinnon's account falls "largely" within the framework, since she is more critical of the distinction between sex and gender than I have been here. Claiming that sex and gender are interdependent, she chooses to use the terms 'male' and 'man'; 'female' and 'woman' interchangeably. See her Feminism Unmodified, 263n5, and FMMS-II, 635n1. Although I will continue to use the man/woman terminology when speaking of gender, in quotation I will leave her terminology as is.

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g. MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 113. Note that this third element in the analysis of gender, i.e., that gender is "sexualized", is what distinguishes MacKinnon's analysis from a broad range of others. As I interpret them, many of the accounts inspired by the thought that the category of women is defined as "other" to men, share with MacKinnon both the idea that gender is irreducibly hierarchical and that our "otherness" is projected onto women by and in the interests of men. As has been frequently noted in the literature, however, there are "other others" besides women. MacKinnon's emphasis on sexuality seems to offer a way of distinguishing the hierarchical categories of gender from other hierarchical categories, e.g., of race, class, etc. But this way of distinguishing gender (and gender oppression) won't work if, as MacKinnon sometimes suggests, all hierarchy is "sexualized".

<sup>45</sup> MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 113-14. See also Feminism Unmodified, 50.

<sup>46</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 6.

<sup>47</sup> MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 128.

<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that on MacKinnon's analysis, eroticized domination/submission is the definition of sex, or at least "sex in the male system", i.e., under male supremacy. (See MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 140). So sex is the relation in terms of which she defines the social categories of man and woman. However, it is also important to recognize that on her view not all loving physical intimacy is sex, (Feminist Theory of the State, 139), and that many other interactions "from intimate to institutional, from a look to a rape" can qualify as sex on her terms (Feminist Theory of the State, 137). Although I recognize the importance of her strategy to define sex in terms of domination, here I am downplaying her account of sexuality and pornography in order to highlight other aspects of her account. I regret that in doing so, my exposition fails to reflect many of the important connections she draws.

<sup>49</sup> MacKinnon herself does not endorse the pluralist approach just sketched; rather, she takes her account of gender to capture the basic structure of all gender relations. However, she does allow that there are cultural variations in the way this structure is instantiated. See MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 130-32, 151; Feminism Unmodified, 53; and FMMS-I, 24n55.

<sup>50</sup> MacKinnon quotes C. Shafer and M. Frye, "Rape and Respect," in Mary Vetterling-Braggin, et al., eds., Feminism and Philosophy (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1982), 334: "Rape is a man's act, whether it is a male or female man, and whether it is a man relatively permanently or

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relatively temporarily; and being raped is a woman's experience, whether it is a female or male woman and whether it is a woman relatively permanently or relatively temporarily." MacKinnon comments: "To be rapable, a position that is social, not biological, defines what a woman is." Feminist Theory of the State, 178, 179. See also, Feminism Unmodified, 52, 56.

<sup>51</sup> For further discussion of these issues in connection with MacKinnon's analysis see Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women (New York: Perigee, 1981), and Intercourse (New York: Free Press, 1987).

<sup>52</sup> On the issue of the intentionality in sexual abuse see Hacking, "World-Making by Kind-Making". Hacking's paper is very useful in understanding how social categories are those which depend, at least in part, on being seen or viewed as categories. He argues convincingly that it is problematic to extend social categories to other times and contexts if there is reason to doubt whether the relevant concepts were available for conceptualizing the categories in question. So, one might argue, in contexts where concepts such as desire, submission, etc., are not available, there is no gender. MacKinnon seems to be sensitive to this issue in claiming (contra the Freudians) that infants "cannot be said to possess sexuality" in her sense (Feminist Theory of the State, 151).

<sup>53</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 172.

<sup>54</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 119.

<sup>55</sup> For an especially clear statement of this claim see, Feminism Unmodified, 233-4n26. MacKinnon contrasts objectification, which requires actual power to dominate, with stereotyping, which need not: "...objectification is the dynamic of the subordination of women. Objectification is different from stereotyping, which acts as if it is all in the head." Feminism Unmodified, 118f. See also Feminism Unmodified, Chapter 2. I take it that individual women can stereotype men, but women do not objectify men (at least not normally, or as easily) because we don't have the social power. Although an analysis of social power is important to flesh out MacKinnon's account of gender, I will not offer one here.

<sup>56</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports for the United States, 1989: 6, 15. According to this report, there were 94,504 forcible rapes (p. 10), where forcible rape is defined as: "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. Assaults or attempts to commit rape by force or threat of force are included, however statutory rape (without force) and other sex offenses are excluded." (p. 14) Needless to say, rape often goes unreported. Credible estimates of rapes far surpass the FBI statistics quoted; some suggest we should multiply the FBI numbers by as much as ten.

<sup>57</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, fact sheet, in "Report on Proposed Legislation S2754," 27. On file with the Senate Judiciary Committee.

<sup>58</sup> On MacKinnon's view pornography is at least locally responsible for conditioning the particular sexual dynamic within which the domination of females is erotic. Yet she says surprisingly little about why it is that females, on the whole, have been marked as women. Her idea seems to be that because dominance is rationalized by biological difference, women's bodies come to be the "location" for gender to play itself out (see, e.g., Feminist Theory of the State, 54-59); however, because there is a general tendency to rationalize domination biologically, other embodied differences (race, age, weight, etc.), can and do provide alternative locations (Feminist Theory of the State, 179).

<sup>59</sup> Using the relation of sexual objectification, the structure of this definition of gender seems to be (roughly) as follows: x is a woman iff there is a y such that y sexually objectifies x; x is a man iff there is a y such that x sexually objectifies y. It is more tricky to define male supremacy. We

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might begin by considering: a social system  $S$  is a system of male supremacy iff for all female  $x$  and male  $y$  in  $S$ ,  $x$ 's being female licenses (via  $S$ 's norms, institutions, divisions of labor, etc.) any  $y$ 's sexual objectification of  $x$ , and it is not the case that  $y$ 's being male licenses any  $x$ 's sexual objectification of  $y$ .

<sup>60</sup> This is not intended as an argument that a consistent feminist should also be a vegetarian (though I do believe that eating animals is, in most circumstances, wrong). Nor am I suggesting that the analogy is perfect; there are admittedly important differences between women and meat. Nor am I arguing that one should never view and treat things as objects for the satisfaction of one's desires; it will surely depend upon what sorts of things, and what sorts of circumstances are in question. The analogy, however, does raise the possibility that, as explicated, MacKinnon's account fails to provide a sufficient condition for being a member of the category of women: if one finds cooking erotic, then it may be that one sexually objectifies food. But if we define women as the sexually objectified, this, I take it, would be an undesirable consequence. MacKinnon mentions that sex is like cuisine, though doesn't suggest that a meal can function socially as a woman (Feminist Theory of the State, 132). One strategy to begin solving this problem would be to add conditions to the analysis of sexual objectification which require intentionality (i.e., the having of attitudes) of the subjugated participant.

<sup>61</sup> Haraway, "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary," 148.

<sup>62</sup> Wittig, "One is not Born a Woman," 49.

<sup>63</sup> It is important to keep these steps distinguished. Even if we are able to establish the strong claim that: if one is a man, then one is a "good" or "successful" man just in case one is rational, we still cannot conclude that: if one is rational then one functions as a man, viz., that rationality is grounded in men's social role. The latter claim requires a separate argument.

<sup>64</sup> For MacKinnon's uses of the term 'rationality', see, e.g., Feminist Theory of the State, 96-97, 114, 162, 229, 232; FMMS-II, 636n3, 645. For the connections between objectivity, neutrality, and aperspectivity see, e.g., Feminism Unmodified, 50; Feminist Theory of the State, 83, 97, 99, 114, 162-64, 211, 213, 232, 248. I will assume that one is objective iff one's stance is objective iff one satisfies the norms of objectivity.

<sup>65</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 50.

<sup>66</sup> See also, MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 114, 121-24, 199, 213, 248-49; Feminism Unmodified, 50-52, 54-55, 150-51, 155,; FMMS-I, 23-25, 27; FMMS-II, 636, 640, 644-45, 658.

<sup>67</sup> There are several points we should be attentive to in considering the ideal objectifier. First, given that objectification requires both ways of thinking and acting, excellence at objectification will require that one meet standards governing both thought and deed. Thus we should expect that the norm of objectivity in question will contain both epistemic and pragmatic elements. Second, one most fully realizes the ideal for those roles which are defined in terms of a power to act when one is exercising that power; e.g., a doctor is one who is able to heal others, but a doctor is most fully a doctor when she is actually healing someone. Moreover, one who excels at such a role should reliably have the power to act, and should be able to sustain their power; e.g., a good doctor reliably heals her patients and sustains this power to heal. Third, one is more likely to succeed in roles which require sustaining a course of action (and a set of attitudes) if one's action (and attitudes) are guided by norms or principles which legitimate them, e.g., even though a good doctor may sometimes rely on hunches or guesses, this works only against the backdrop of her reliance on medical knowledge and practice. This last point is important, for we evaluate attitudes and actions themselves as "good" or "warranted" in light of their relation to principles which are used to justify them.

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<sup>68</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 164.

<sup>69</sup> Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," 48-49.

<sup>70</sup> It is interesting to consider whether being a successful or ideal objectifier places one in a privileged epistemic position with respect to the consequences of one's objectification. Consider an argument that such an objectifier is incorrigible: S is incorrigible with respect to p iff (necessarily) if S believes p, then p is true. Suppose S is a successful objectifier, and S, in objectifying x, views x as F. Since S, by hypothesis, is ideally successful, if x is not F, then he exercises his power to make it the case that x is F; so S's belief that x is F is (or will soon be) true. So it would seem that (necessarily) if S is an ideal objectifier with respect to x, and S believes x is F, then x is F. In short, if S believes that x is F, and x is not (at least eventually) F, then S must not be an ideal objectifier. Admittedly, there are temporal qualifications which disrupt the argument, and divert us from the standard notions of incorrigibility, but the suggestion provides food for thought.

<sup>71</sup> See MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 100: "Of course, objective data do document the difficulties and inequalities of woman's situation."

<sup>72</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 59; Feminist Theory of the State, 125.

<sup>73</sup> An important source for this conception of natures is Aristotle. See, e.g., Physics I-II, and Metaphysics VII-IX. A wonderful commentary on Aristotle's conception of natures is: Sarah Waterlow, Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

<sup>74</sup> Although MacKinnon rarely puts the point in this way, I think making explicit the objectifier's commitment to natures helps in understanding her position. For example, she describes pornography (and some of its horrors) in these terms: "...women's bodies trussed and maimed and raped and made into things to be hurt and obtained and accessed, and this presented as the nature of women..." (my emphasis), MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 147; see also Feminist Theory of the State, 138.

<sup>75</sup> This modality is ambiguously expressed (or obscured) in the verb 'to be'. The verb 'to be' is notoriously ambiguous; there are two uses at issue here. Consider the claim: women are submissive. It could be used to express an empirical generalization: as a matter of fact, all (or most) women are submissive. It could express a fact about women's nature: all individual women are, by their nature, submissive. MacKinnon's arguments highlight problems which arise when this ambiguity is not acknowledged; see e.g., MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 55, 59, 154, 166, 174; Feminist Theory of the State, 98, 122, 125, 204. MacKinnon also suggests a potential ambiguity in the claim: women are equal to men. Again the modality of the verb 'to be' is an issue: to claim that women are equal obscures the fact that women are not actually equal; nevertheless we may allow that women should be equal; see, e.g., MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 39-40, 59, 171, 178-79, Feminist Theory of the State, 163, 231, 240, 242.

<sup>76</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 59. It is important to keep distinct the objectifier's view of women from MacKinnon's own account of gender. Consider a particular woman, Rachel. On the objectifier's view, Rachel is a woman by nature; this is her essence which explains why, under normal circumstances, she is feminine. If she is not feminine (submissive, sexually desirable), it is because circumstances are frustrating and inhibiting her true nature. On MacKinnon's view, Rachel is a woman because she is viewed by an objectifier as having a nature which is responsible for those features he finds desirable, and is treated accordingly. MacKinnon's move is subtle; it uses the intended or perceived definition of a kind to function in the definition of an accident: men take women to be submissive by nature; those whom men take to be submissive by nature (and whom they force into submission) constitute the category of women; but no woman is a member

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of that category by nature.

<sup>77</sup> Of course, the objectifier need not formulate explicitly the commitment to "natures", in particular, to a "Woman's Nature". In the next section I will indicate the epistemic role of an objectifier's projective beliefs; I hope this will be sufficient to illustrate what sort of beliefs might qualify.

<sup>78</sup> My reconstruction of MacKinnon's argument draws primarily from the following chapters in Feminism Unmodified, "Desire and Power": 46-62, "Not a Moral Issue": 146-62, and "Frances Biddle's Sister": 163-97; and in Feminist Theory of the State: "Consciousness Raising": 83-105, "Method and Politics": 106-25, "The Liberal State": 157-70, and "Toward Feminist Jurisprudence": 237-49. Some of the arguments in these chapters originally appeared in MacKinnon, FMMS-II.

<sup>79</sup> On the idea that reasonable decision-making should accommodate "how things are", and that we should "conform normative standards to existing reality", see e.g., MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 34, 164-66, 176, 178; and Feminist Theory of the State, 162-64, 218-20, 227, 231-32.

<sup>80</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 59. See also Feminism Unmodified, 52-53, 59, 155, 166; and Feminist Theory of the State, 94, 99-100, 104, 117-18, 124-25, 128, 163-64, 198, 204, 218-20.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 172; and Feminist Theory of the State, 153-54, 174-75, 209.

<sup>82</sup> Although strictly speaking we aren't responsible for things' natures, within the broadly Aristotelian tradition we are thought to be responsible for seeing that things exemplify their natures as fully as possible. For example, if it is part of a woman's nature that she bear children, then she ought to, and we should "facilitate" her doing so. Thanks to Charlotte Witt for this point.

<sup>83</sup> Although there is considerable vagueness and obscurity in the principles I have suggested, there is one qualification which deserves special note. In my statement of the principles of absolute aperspectivity and assumed aperspectivity, I have relied on the notion of an "observed regularity". In the philosophical literature a "regularity" is typically taken to be a true universal generalization; and an "observed regularity" to be such a generalization for which we have observational evidence. However, as I am using the term I mean to allow that there are regularities which fall short of being universal generalizations, either because they don't strictly hold of all members of the class, or because they only hold for cases which have actually been observed up to a point in time. Those who prefer to reserve the term "regularity" for the stricter usage, might instead think in terms of "observed patterns".

<sup>84</sup> Because here we are concentrating on what is required for being a "successful" or "excellent" objectifier, we must allow that there are objectifiers who meet the minimal conditions for objectification, but aren't guided by and don't satisfy the ideal of assumed objectivity. They do it, but don't do it "well". Objectifying well requires mastering the "art" of objectifying in a sustained and reliable way. If the argument I've sketched is convincing, one won't be an ideal objectifier unless one's projective beliefs are based on observable regularities. "Poor" objectifiers may be highly imaginative, or they may work under conditions where there isn't an established social hierarchy, so the relevant differences between dominant and subordinate are missing. But without (publicly accessible) justification, then it will be more difficult to sustain a practice of objectification, and one's power will be more easily challenged. In short, good objectification may depend on there having been a developed practice of objectification to establish the regularities needed to be effective.

<sup>85</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 50. (quoted above)

<sup>86</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 173; also 307n17.

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<sup>87</sup> MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 122.

<sup>88</sup> MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, 50 (also quoted above). See also her Feminist Theory of the State, 137-38, 147.

<sup>89</sup> MacKinnon, Feminist Theory of the State, 122.

<sup>90</sup> It is important to note that one may be committed to natures without being a "naturalist". Although the term "naturalist" covers many different views, typically naturalists are committed to thinking that natural science has a privileged status in finding natures, and moreover, privilege physical properties over others. But the idea of a "natural" property is ambiguous between a physical property which natural science studies, and a property which is part of, or follows from, something's nature. Plausibly Catholicism is committed to natures, but is not committed to naturalism.

<sup>91</sup> Admittedly, one might argue that each of the principles are weakly masculine because in contexts where the other principles are realized, they contribute to success in the role of men. This illustrates both the difficulty and importance of having clear criteria for what can count as "background conditions". See note 36.