

CARE, GENDER INEQUALITY AND RESISTANCE: A FOUCAULDIAN READING OF  
CAROL GILLIGAN'S ETHIC OF CARE

by

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## **Abstract**

Through a Foucauldian reading of Carol Gilligan's ethic of care, this essay answers the following question: How can we explain the persistence of gender inequality in Western 'post-sexist' countries where formal equality has been achieved, and what should be done in order to eradicate these inequalities? A Foucauldian reading of Gilligan's work can enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of power that continue to oppress women in 'post-sexist' countries, and the 'tools' in later Foucault's work can be used in order to develop a project of resistance against gender inequalities. In the first part, I join to Gilligan's work the key concepts of the Foucauldian genealogy of the subject in order to demonstrate how these concepts can help to explain the constitution of the 'female gendered self' under capitalist patriarchy and to highlight the mechanisms of power that reproduce gender inequalities. I demonstrate that a key factor that explains these inequalities is the discrepancy between this 'female gendered self' and the values that are rewarded by patriarchy. In the second part, I use the tools present in Foucault's later works about ethic and the care of the self, especially the concepts of 'techniques of the self' and 'practices of freedom', to explain how these mechanisms of power could be changed so that gender relations would become more equal. I argue that women have to change their current normalizing techniques of the self related to care into practices of freedom, for example through consciousness-raising, in order to develop a political project against gender inequalities.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, and independent work by the author, Gabrielle Levesque.

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## Care, Gender Inequality and Resistance: A Foucauldian Reading of Carol Gilligan's Ethic of Care

In the United States and in Canada, gender discrimination is prohibited and equal pay is compulsory since, respectively, the adoption of the Equal Pay Act (1963) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), and that of the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977). Even though these rights have been granted for decades, there is still an important gender wage gap in both countries: in the United States, a woman earns 0.77\$ for every dollar a man earns, and this proportion falls to 0.72\$ in Canada (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2013a; Statistics Canada 2011a). These statistics suggest that formal equality in terms of political and economic rights might not be enough to ensure practical gender equality. Many feminists have now come to that conclusion, including Seyla Benhabib: for her, to fight against woman's oppression, "it is no longer sufficient to demand women's political and economic emancipation alone; it is also necessary to question those psychosexual relations in the domestic and private spheres within which women's lives unfold, and through which gender identity is reproduced" (Benhabib 1987, 171).

A feminist work that gives us precious insights on these 'psychosexual relations' that could explain the persistence of gender inequalities is that of the psychologist Carol Gilligan. In *In a Different Voice* and *Joining the Resistance*, Gilligan offers an interesting thesis on the effects of patriarchy on women's psychology. After having studied the 'voice' of a number of American girls and women, she concluded that there is a distinct 'female' voice that is silenced in a world where the masculine values of autonomy, independence and competition prevail. Because of their differential psychological development resulting from prevailing patriarchal gender relations, girls and women have a relational sense of self, and they have a preference for communication, care for others, and contextualized moral judgments. However, since all these

characteristics are devalued under patriarchy, women are forced to silence themselves about what they know, that is, the importance of relationships and care for human life<sup>1</sup>.

In this essay, I will try to answer the following question by using Gilligan's insights: How can we explain the persistence of gender inequality in Western 'post-sexist' countries where formal equality has been achieved, and what should be done in order to eradicate these inequalities? Since both parts of this question involve the concepts of power and resistance, I will answer it by using some of the tools in Michel Foucault's work. I will demonstrate that a Foucauldian reading of Gilligan's work can enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of power that continue to oppress women in 'post-sexist' countries, and that we can use the 'tools' in later Foucault's work in order to develop a project of resistance against gender inequalities. My analysis will thus be similar to the projects of some feminists like Sandra Bartky and Susan Bordo, who have studied the effects of the patriarchal disciplinary power on the female body (Diamond & Quinby 1988). My main contribution is to study to impact of this disciplinary power on the 'female psychology' by rethinking Gilligan's work through a Foucauldian reading.

In the first part of the essay, I will join to Gilligan's work the key concepts of the Foucauldian genealogy of the subject in order to demonstrate how these concepts can help to explain the constitution of the 'female gendered self' under capitalist patriarchy and to highlight the mechanisms of power that reproduce gender inequalities. In the second part, I will use the tools present in Foucault's later works about ethic and the care of the self, especially the concepts of 'techniques of the self' and 'practices of freedom', in order to explain how these mechanisms of power could be changed so that gender relations would become more equal.

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<sup>1</sup> While Gilligan points to patriarchy as the main source of the devaluing of care and of the excessive valuing of independence and competition, I will refer here to a specific type of patriarchy, i.e. capitalist patriarchy. The norms of independence and competition are more by-products of capitalism than of patriarchy because they result from market pressures, but they are still deeply intertwined with patriarchy because they contribute to devalue 'female' values and characteristics.

The methodology that I will use is based on Bent Flyvbjerg's conception of the role of a 'phronetic social science'. I will try to explain "how power works and with what consequences" in the field of gender relations, and "to suggest how power might be changed and work with other consequences" (Flyvbjerg 2001, 140). There is a normative goal to my work, which is to suggest how we can live in a world where there is "as little domination as possible" (Foucault 1997a, 298). My objective, then, is to offer a Foucauldian reading of Gilligan's work that draws upon some of Foucault's key analytical insights. Foucault's genealogical works can help us understand the mechanisms of power that are at play in our world, and his ethical works can help us understand how they might be changed. That is why I will use the key concepts of both aspects of his work.

Gilligan's goal in her research, and mine in this essay, is not to 'essentialize' women's identity. One of Gilligan's main claims is that the female 'self' is produced by patriarchy. Thus, I will use the vocabulary of 'gender' identity, in order to refer to the "differential construction of human beings into male and female types", which is "a social and historical process" (Benhabib 1992, 191). However, gender is not seen here as a 'social construction' that is opposed to a 'true' sexual identity. The interpretation of sexual difference is itself a social process, and "sexual identity is an aspect of gender identity" (Benhabib 1992, 191). Hence, I will use the terms *gender identity and relations* to refer to the socially constructed division between male and female, which is itself based on a certain construction of sexual differences.

Another possible critique to my analysis is the exclusion of the diversity of experiences of those who are socialized as women. However, I acknowledge that there is no 'unitary' female self across social differences, and that these differences among women matter a great deal. At the same time, I see a certain relevance to focusing on what women generally have in common, that

is, a “tendency [...] to give care”, while bracketing the complications introduced by other differences (Gilligan 1993b, 213). As many feminists have argued, “all women [...] are affected by the inequalities posed by [care] work” (Kittay 2001, 529), and even a post-colonial and transnational feminist such as Chandra Mohanty suggests that all women are disproportionately affected by changes in policies related to care, even though we must be attentive to intersectionality of class and race (Mohanty 2003, 526-7). My analysis is thus based on “the assumption that there is something common to the experience of all human beings who are socialized as women in North American culture and to those who identify as women”, even though differences among women matter (Comerford & Fambrough 2002, 422). Unlike Gilligan, then, I will speak of women’s *voices* in order to acknowledge both the commonality and the differences of women’s experiences.



## **2 Gilligan's Ethic of Care and Foucault's Genealogy of the Subject: The Constitution of the Female Gendered Self**

In this first section, I will demonstrate how a Foucauldian reading of Gilligan's work can enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of power that continue to oppress women in Western 'post-sexist' countries. I will join to Gilligan's work the key concepts of the Foucauldian genealogy of the subject in order to show how these concepts can help to explain the constitution of the 'female gendered self' under patriarchy and to highlight the mechanisms of power that reproduce gender inequalities. We will see that a key factor that maintains women in a state of inferiority is the discrepancy between the female gendered self associated with the ethic of care that is 'produced' under patriarchy and the values that are rewarded under the same system. The section will be divided in three parts. First, I will explain Foucault's genealogical method, and focus on his conception of the 'genealogy of the subject'. Then, I will apply the key concepts of the genealogy of the subject to Gilligan's ideas in order to demonstrate how the female gendered self associated with the ethic of care is constituted in relation to a régime of truth, to a field of power, and to practices of the self. Finally, I will explain how the mechanisms of power that constitute the female self contribute to reproducing gender inequalities.

### **2.1 Foucault's Genealogical Method and the Genealogy of the Subject**

'Genealogy' is a method for social criticism that Foucault describes as a "form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history" (Foucault 1980b, 117). In other words, it is a historical method that traces the constitution of certain objects or discourses, without assuming that there is an inherent truth to them, or a true origin that needs to

be deciphered. A genealogy is a ‘history of the present’, a way to understand how “what we tend to feel is without history” is in fact historically constituted (Foucault 1998, 369). It thus seeks to “disturb what was previously considered immobile” and to highlight the “various systems of subjection” that underlie what we take for granted. (Foucault 1998, 374, 376).

Genealogy shows that discourses and objects are historically constituted, that they seem natural because of the intertwining of power and knowledge, and that they have power-effects. By making “the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous”, genealogy opens up new possibilities for alternative acts, gestures, and discourses (Foucault 1987, 113). With the “removal of the tyranny of overall discourses”, this method can emancipate subjugated knowledges, that is, the “local, discontinuous, disqualified, or nonlegitimized knowledges” (Foucault 2003, 8-9). Foucault pictures knowledge as a ‘battlefield’, where competing discourses have different power-effects. The goal of genealogy is to “fight the power-effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific”, to emancipate subjugated knowledges so that they can “struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse” (Foucault 2003, 9-10).

In his later works, Foucault describes his general intellectual project as a ‘genealogy of the subject’. He explains that there are three modes of objectification through which human beings become subjects: discourses that claim the name of ‘sciences’, ‘dividing practices’ that separate the ‘normal’ from the ‘abnormal’ in particular institutions, and the techniques through which a human being turns himself into a subject (Foucault 1982, 777). Accordingly, there are three domains of genealogy: the constitution of the subject in relation to a régime of truth, a field of power, and practices of the self (Foucault 1997b, 262). These domains are intrinsically linked together and are only separable for analytical purposes. Regarding the first domain, the

genealogist should look at the “modern theoretical constitutions that [are] concerned with the subject in general”, or at the theoretical construction of a particular kind of subject. In the second domain, he should look at the “more practical understanding formed in those institutions like hospitals, asylums and prisons, where certain subjects became objects of knowledge and at the same time objects of domination”. Finally, in the last domain, he should “study those forms of understanding which the subject creates about himself” (Foucault 1999, 161). A complete ‘genealogy of the self’ would need to account for all three modes of objectification. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive genealogy, but I will use here the key concepts of Foucault’s genealogical works, especially his conception of these three domains of genealogy.

## **2.2 The Female Gendered Self: A Genealogy**

In this second part, I will apply the key concepts of the Foucauldian genealogy of the subject to Gilligan’s work in order to demonstrate how of the female gendered self associated with the ethic of care is constituted in relation to the three modes of objectification, that is, in relation to a régime of truth, to a field of power, and to practices of the self. In Gilligan’s work, there is evidence that psychoanalysis and moral theory (régime of truth), the ‘capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power’ (field of power), and the techniques of internalization and self-silencing (practices of the self), contribute to constitute the female self in a particular way.

### **2.2.1 The Female Gendered Self and Truth: Psychoanalysis and Moral Theory**

For Foucault, the first mode of objectification is related to the “modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences” (Foucault 1982, 777). These modes of inquiry, particularly human sciences, are concerned with the subject, and claim to possess some truth about this subject as a living being. These modes are ‘discourses’ in the Foucauldian sense of the

term, that is, “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the world of which they speak” (Lessa 2006, 285). As Foucault explains, any discourse is the result of the intertwining of power and knowledge. What is socially defined as the ‘truth’ is a discourse that has more power than others: “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” (Foucault 1980b, 133). Power and knowledge are two elements that need each other: power constantly produces knowledge, and knowledge both needs power and has power-effects. These power-effects are important: dominant discourses can disqualify other types of knowledge, and they also ‘normalize’ human subjects, make them act or be in a certain way. Hence, their power is not that of the law, but that of normalization (Foucault 1980a, 106).

In *In a Different Voice*, we can identify two types of discourses that contribute to constitute the female self: psychoanalysis, a scientific discourse, and deontological moral theory, a philosophical discourse. The analysis of the discourse of psychoanalysis, more specifically of mainstream developmental theories in psychoanalysis, is the main subject of *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan claims that these theories about human development are ‘patriarchal’ because their objects of study are boys, and because they fail to understand the different development of girls resulting from prevailing patriarchal gender relations. These theories draw a scale of development in which the criterion of maturity is *separation*, or the fact of having a sense of self that is independent and autonomous. However, using Nancy Chodorow’s theory, Gilligan shows that girls present a psychological development that is different than that of boys, because their identity is not defined through *separation*, but through *attachment*. The development of boys and girls under patriarchy is different:

For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation (Gilligan 1993a, 8).

For girls, separation comes later than for boys, at adolescence, and is only achieved if girls silence themselves about their knowledge of the nature of human life as a web of relationships. This ‘special knowledge’ should be understood in Gilligan’s work in two ways. First, in terms of psychological development, the fact that girls’ identity is defined through attachment allows them to keep this knowledge until patriarchy induces them to silence themselves, at the time when they enter institutions of secondary education. As we will see, separation is then the result of the social forces that are imposed on girls, when they ‘understand’ that separation, autonomy and independence are the values adopted by the ‘strong’, whereas attachment, relationships and care for others are only for the ‘weak’ (Gilligan 1993a, 124). However, before Gilligan, this different development was not taken into account by mainstream theories in psychoanalysis, and girls’ development, because assessed in ‘masculine’ terms, was considered inferior and deficient.

Second, for Gilligan, adult women also possess this ‘special knowledge’. If girls’ knowledge is the result of their psychological development under patriarchy, women’s knowledge is produced by their particular social positioning under the same system. Indeed, Gilligan’s work shows how patriarchy shapes the “substance of [women’s] moral concern” (Gilligan 1993a, 16). Women are more inclined to grant importance to relationships, to make contextual moral judgments, to prefer communication for solving conflicts, to care, and to have a relational sense of self. As I will explain with the second mode of objectification, Gilligan does not essentialize these characteristics, but attributes them to the power of patriarchy on women, to the norms of femininity that are imposed on them as a result of their distinct social positioning. Since the criterion of maturity in psychoanalysis is separation, all these characteristics that

Gilligan has seen in women are considered cognitively immature. For Gilligan, “psychologists had assumed a culture in which men were the measure of humanity, and autonomy and rationality (‘masculine’ qualities) were the markers of maturity” (Gilligan 2011, 16). Psychoanalysis takes men’s experience as the norm and presents it as universal and neutral, while occluding women’s experience and making it inferior or abnormal.

This discourse of psychoanalysis reflects the dominant discourse in moral theory, the ethic of justice. This deontological moral theory, which has its roots in Kant, “emphasizes notions of duty, obligation, and justice, [...] and holds that the moral point of view is impartial, that moral autonomy depends on resisting socialization, and that moral agents ought to follow universalizable moral rules” (McLaren 2002, 76). The individual is seen as autonomous and rational. These ideals imply a rejection of care, relationships, and contextualized moral judgments. Deontological moral theory thus silences women’s experience of life. This dominant discourse in moral theory is firmly grounded in Western culture and explains why scientific discourses such as psychoanalysis take separation and autonomy as the markers of maturity.

Psychoanalysis and moral theory, interpreted as ‘discourses’, have important power-effects because they constitute the female gendered self in particular ways. As we have seen, for Foucault, dominant discourses have two main power-effects: they can disqualify other types of knowledge, which become ‘subjugated knowledges’; they can also ‘normalize’ human subjects, encouraging them to act or be in a certain way. Both of these effects are present with mainstream psychoanalytic and moral theory discourses. The first power-effect of these discourses is the *disciplining* of women’s knowledge. The knowledge that women gain from their experience is occluded from these discourses. The latter accustom us to see “life through men’s eyes”, and make us miss the different truth that is revealed by women’s experiences (Gilligan 1993a, 6). By

emphasizing autonomy and independence at the expense of relationships and care, they discipline women's knowledge and make it illegitimate. The second power-effect is the *normalization* of the female self through discourses that divide the normal from the abnormal. Psychoanalysis defines girls' development and women's psychology as abnormal, because they do not conform to the 'masculine' ideals of separation and independence<sup>2</sup>. As Gilligan argues, girls and women cannot be considered as simply different, because of the "readiness with which difference becomes deviance and deviance becomes sin in a society preoccupied with normality" (Gilligan 1993a, xviii). As we will see, these 'patriarchal' ideals that are reflected in mainstream psychoanalysis and moral theory contribute to 'normalize' women, who silence themselves and endorse them. In sum, these discourses have certain power-effects on the constitution of the female self: they 'discipline' her knowledge so that she stays silent about what she knows of human life – notably, its relational character – and they define her as an 'abnormal' being that has to be 'normalized'.

### **2.2.2 The Female Gendered Self and Power/Discipline: The Patriarchal Disciplinary Power**

If discipline and power are present in all three modes of objectification identified by Foucault, it is in the second mode, that of power/disciplinary practices, that they are present in their most immediate form. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault introduces his concept of 'disciplinary power', which is a form of power that focuses on the individual *body*. By imposing surveillance and 'coercion' on the body, disciplinary power aims at extracting "time and labour" from every individual body, and at producing 'docile' bodies (Foucault 1980a, 104). Discipline was initially located in particular, local institutions, but its techniques eventually became 'de-

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<sup>2</sup> Psychoanalysis thus implicitly suggests that some female (as well as male) behaviors are normal and that others are abnormal. I will develop on this point in the next sub-section, where we will see that the intertwining of the patriarchal disciplinary power with patriarchal discourses contributes to dividing girls and women between normal and abnormal.

institutionalized’, which leads Foucault to speak of the “formation of a disciplinary society” (Foucault 1995, 216). In this disciplinary society, power is everywhere, in every social relation; that is why we should study “the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault 1980c, 38). As I noted earlier, the power-effect of discipline is not that of the law, but that of normalization. “Disciplinary normalization consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalization consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model” (Foucault 2003, 56). Disciplinary power divides the normal from the abnormal and, through certain practices, tries to make the latter conform to the model of the former.

As Gilligan makes clear in *Joining the Resistance*, the female gendered self is a ‘product’ of patriarchy, or of what I will call the ‘capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power’. She defines patriarchy as the “attitudes and values, moral codes and institutions, that separate men from men as well as from women and divide women into the good and the bad” (Gilligan 2011, 177). Patriarchy values *separation* for men, forces women to silence themselves about the importance of connection, and imposes certain norms of femininity that divide women between good (normal) and bad (abnormal). Even though Gilligan has been criticized for her ‘essentialism’, it is clear in *Joining the Resistance* that, for her, gender differences are the result of the psychological and social norms that patriarchy imposes on both sexes (though she mostly analyzes the norms imposed on women). Gilligan’s work reveals two ‘disciplinary mechanisms’ that constitute the female gendered self. The first one is the model of the ‘perfect girl’ and of the ‘good woman’, which imposes certain norms on their behavior and personality. The second one



is the pressure that girls experience in institutions of secondary education to silence themselves about the importance of relationships, and to accept dominant patriarchal values.

The first disciplinary mechanism is the model of the ‘perfect girl’ and of the ‘good women’, which aims at ‘producing’ these types of girls and women. The model of the good woman, which Gilligan claims is imposed on all women, sets the norms of femininity to which women have to conform if they want to be considered as ‘normal’ and ‘good’. Even though Gilligan could have nuanced her claim by acknowledging that this model might apply differently on different women according to class, race, religion, or sexuality, there is still a general tendency in this model that she has correctly identified. For most women, their ‘goodness’ is defined by their care for others, by the satisfaction of the needs of others prior to the satisfaction of their own needs. “In the gendered universe of patriarchy, care is a feminine ethic, not a universal one. Caring is what good women do [...]. They are devoted to others, responsive to their needs, attentive to their voices. They are selfless” (Gilligan 2011, 19). That is why women’s historical place has been that of the “nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate” (Gilligan 1993a, 17). According to the model of the ‘good woman’, women’s morality lies in self-sacrifice. This model presents an interesting paradox: “the very traits that traditionally defined the ‘goodness’ of women, their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development” (Gilligan 1993a, 18). Indeed, what Gilligan has identified as the substance of women’s moral concern, their care for others, empathy, compassion, etc., are exactly the kind of characteristics that patriarchy seeks to ‘produce’ in women, but they are also devalued under this system.

In Gilligan’s work, we can find two ways through which the disciplinary mechanism of the model of the ‘good woman’ and of the ‘perfect girl’ is enforced. The first one is the

“enormous power of the judgment of selfishness on women’s thought”, which results from the power of the ‘patriarchal public opinion’ on women (Gilligan 1993a, 132). This power is mostly exercised through the social norms that are prevalent in the culture and that are transmitted, for instance, in mainstream discourses about the roles of men and women, in novels for girls and women, etc. The effect of this judgment is that, for women, only two options are possible when making choices: selfishness or selflessness. The good woman has to be selfless, otherwise she is automatically selfish. The second way through which this disciplinary mechanism is enforced is related to the socialization of teenage girls in schools, when they become aware of the model of the ‘perfect girl’. This model, which is ubiquitous in girls’ novels, presents a “girl who is always nice, always generous, who has only good feelings and is good at everything” (Gilligan 2011, 144). Girls at adolescence are under pressure to conform to this model, so that they will later be ‘good women’. This ‘normalization’ occurs chiefly in schools and is enforced by “shaming and exclusion” (Gilligan 2011, 26). Thus, both the judgment of selfishness and girls’ socialization in schools demonstrate the power of the ‘disciplinary patriarchal public opinion’ on girls and women. They divide them between normal and abnormal, and try to bring them all under the first category. They also demonstrate that power is able to *produce* a distinct morality for women.

The second disciplinary mechanism that constitutes the female gendered self is the paradoxical pressure that girls experience, often in institutions of secondary education, to silence themselves about the importance of connection, and to accept the ‘masculine’ values of separation and autonomy. When they enter secondary education, not only are they socialized to become good women, but they should also silence themselves about the truth of what they know by experience, that is, the importance of relationships and care for human life. Gilligan’s studies reveal that at adolescence “girls receive lessons in what they can let out and what they must keep

in” on a “daily basis”; they “are repeatedly told not to speak, not to say anything, or at least not to talk in public about what they know” (Gilligan 2011, 130-32). They are discouraged to say what they know about the importance of relationships, human connection, cooperation, communication, empathy, compassion, etc., and they have to accept the ‘truth’ of the importance of separateness, competition, autonomy and independence, or the values that are promoted under capitalist patriarchy. The reward to deny the fundamental importance of human connectedness is the possibility for the girl to maintain her relationships with others, because she is not characterized as ‘weak’ or abnormal. The judgment of others, other students but also teachers, becomes a form of surveillance, a way to ensure that all girls are ‘normalized’, that is, accustomed to the patriarchal ‘masculine’ values. The female self is thus forced by capitalist patriarchy to silence herself and to accept the values that are socially rewarded, but that do not correspond to her experience of life.

If discipline aims at producing ‘docile bodies’, we see that the capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power also produces ‘docile minds’. Through the two disciplinary mechanisms identified, that is the model of the good woman and the pressure on girls to silence their ‘voices’, the patriarchal disciplinary power constitutes the female self in a particular way. This female gendered self has to conform to the feminine norms of care for others, empathy, etc., while at the same time staying silent on the importance of these values for human life. Discipline thus works through two different forms of normalization. First, it divides women into good and bad, depending on whether or not they conform to the norms of femininity, and all women should try to be classified as ‘good’ if they want to be rewarded by the patriarchal power. Second, it makes *all* women ‘abnormal’, because the norm of care that is attributed to them is in contradiction with ‘masculine’ moral norms; hence, in order to become normal, women should silence themselves.

### 2.2.3 The Female Gendered Self and the Techniques of the Self: Internalization and Self-Silencing

The third and last mode of objectification through which human beings become subjects are the techniques of the self. Foucault defines these techniques as follows:

Techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on (Foucault 1999, 162).

The individual has a certain goal to attain and she uses some techniques in order to conform herself to this ideal; through that process, she becomes a subject. These techniques enter directly in the constitution of the identity of the subject, of her *self*; indeed, they are used by subjects who want to “determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (Foucault 1997c, 87).

As some authors have argued by expanding on Foucault’s incomplete work on the techniques of the self, these techniques can either be practices of freedom (nonnormalizing) or techniques of *self-domination* (normalizing) (McLaren 2001; O’Grady 2004). I will return to the former in the next section; here, I will focus only on the latter because they are important power mechanisms that contribute to the constitution of the female gendered self. Techniques of the self can be deeply intertwined with techniques of domination, especially when the subject internalizes what is asked of her in discourses or in disciplinary institutions. An important disciplinary mechanism that links techniques of domination and techniques of the self is *surveillance*. Surveillance imposes “an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself” (Foucault 1980d, 155). The individual thus exercises domination over herself. Hence, the techniques of the self are never purely

individual because they are embedded in a field of power relations. These techniques are social, and they can be an internalization of the techniques of domination that infiltrate the social body.

In Gilligan's work, we can find two main 'normalizing' techniques of the self that contribute to the formation of the female gendered self. Both of them are deeply intertwined with the disciplinary mechanisms presented above, that is, the model of the good woman and the pressure on girls to silence their 'voices'. These techniques of the self can be thus understood as a self-defeating "set of coping strategies for dealing with sexist oppression" (Puka 1993, 215). The first one is the internalization of the norms of femininity that are imposed through the model of the 'good woman'. The second one is the self-silencing of girls' voices at adolescence, when they understand that they have to accept the 'masculine' values that are promoted by the patriarchal capitalist disciplinary power. Both are techniques of the self in the sense that they are techniques that women use to work on themselves in order to attain a certain goal, which is to conform to the requirements of patriarchy. They are thus 'normalizing' techniques. As mentioned, Foucault's work on the techniques of the self is incomplete, and presenting the internalization of norms of femininity and self-silencing as techniques of the self is an extension of his work. However, this interpretation is consequent with that of some of the feminist authors that have written on the techniques of the self, especially Margaret McLaren (2002) and Helen O'Grady (2004).

The first technique of the self, then, is the internalization of the requirements of feminine 'goodness' and of the judgment of selfishness that are conveyed by the disciplinary model of the 'good woman'. It is the internalization by many women of societal norms about femininity. As Gilligan's interviews have demonstrated, women "construct a world perfused with the assumptions about feminine goodness that are reflected in the stereotypes", and they try to make

their personality and moral choices conform to these assumptions (Gilligan 1993a, 79). In this world, women have to be gentle, generous, selfless, and devoted to others. As mentioned, what Gilligan found especially striking is the power of the judgment of selfishness on women's thought: when confronted to moral choices, women construct their options as an opposition between selfishness and selflessness. Women thus *internalize* the judgment of selfishness that is imposed on them by the patriarchal disciplinary power, and they make it theirs. This internalization of norms of femininity and of the judgment of selfishness is thus a normalizing technique of the self because it makes women work on themselves in order to conform to what is expected of them. As Gilligan argues, this internalization leads women to develop a different ethic, the ethic of care (Gilligan 1993, 100). This ethic is necessary under capitalist patriarchy because care work is needed for the reproduction of laborers and labor power. Patriarchy under capitalist societies thus requires that half of the population cares for others and develop a distinct ethic. Under the ethic of care, "the central preoccupation is a responsiveness to others that dictates providing care, preventing harm, and maintaining relationships" (Kittay & Meyer 1987, 3). The individual is seen as relational, embedded in a web of relationships, and responsible to others. Her autonomy derives from her relationships with others because all human beings are vulnerable or potentially vulnerable. Finally, this ethic acknowledges "that all humans are specific, concrete individuals rather than abstract, generic beings"; moral judgments should hence be contextualized and specific (Hankivsky 2004, 32). The internalization of norms and judgment dictated by the capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power thus leads to an ethic that is different than the ethic of justice. Gilligan has observed it empirically mostly in women, but she claims that it reveals at the same time a certain truth about universal human life, that is, the

importance of relationships and care. As we will see in further parts of this essay, taking into account this different ethic is fundamental for a project of gender equality.

The second technique of the self is the self-silencing of girls' voices at adolescence and the acceptance of the 'masculine' values promoted by the capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power. Indeed, Gilligan's studies have demonstrated a shift in girls' voices at adolescence, a new reluctance to talk about the importance of relationships. Whereas little girls have a sense of self that is relational and construct their moral conflicts in terms of connection, there is a shift in girls' voices at adolescence, when they realize that these characteristics are considered 'stupid', inferior, weak and immature. Girls then experience self-doubt, they are confused and they become reluctant to speak about what they know. They construe their care as a weakness and they conclude that "only the weak care about relationships" (Gilligan 1993a, 124). They silence themselves in order to conform to societal values. This self-silencing often comes with a public rejection of the importance of care and relationships. As Gilligan has documented, some "girls align themselves with the more highly valued masculine traits and denigrate other girls" (Gilligan 2011, 36). They thus come to identify with the patriarchal power, to internalize its demands, and to silence themselves about what they know, just as the patriarchal disciplinary power expects of them.

These techniques of the self are important for the constitution of the female gendered self because they are the mechanism through which the capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power has a strong hold on women. Through these techniques, women make themselves subjects, docile bodies, and docile minds. They do this under techniques of 'self-coercion' that are the result of the intertwining of techniques of domination and of the self. These techniques are especially important because they hide the oppression that women undergo. As Gilligan explains, "the

structures of domination become invisible because they have been internalized” (Gilligan 2011, 28). Thus, the techniques of the self are fundamental for the constitution of the female gendered self and, as we will see in the next section of this essay, they are the most important element on which women can act if they want to challenge the structures of the patriarchal society.

### **2.3 The Female Gendered Self and the Reproduction of Gender Inequalities**

As I have implicitly indicated so far, a Foucauldian reading of Gilligan’s work shows that the discrepancy between the female self that is ‘produced’ under capitalist patriarchy and the values that are rewarded under the same system is a key factor that maintains women in a state of inferiority in countries where gender discrimination is formally prohibited. In all three modes of objectification, we have seen that the female self is constituted through *normalization*, that is, the inducement to conform to a certain model of womanhood, and through the *disciplining* of her knowledge, or of her ‘voice’. In this third part, I will briefly explain how these two mechanisms contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities.

The mechanisms of normalization and discipline both contribute to maintain women in a state of inferiority. Indeed, it is through normalization that the female gendered self is constituted to conform to a model of womanhood, and it is through disciplinarization that the ‘masculine’ values of autonomy and separation can be made dominant; this is so because it silences and marginalizes other values and knowledges. The reproduction of gender inequalities results from the following paradox: whereas ‘good women’ should care for others, care is socially devalued. Women should stay silent about the importance of care and connection for human life if they don’t want to be characterized as ‘abnormal’ or inferior, but they should nonetheless conform to the norms that ask them to care and to be selfless. Women are induced to act in a way that is not



socially rewarded. They fill a devalued role that has to be filled, and they have to stay silent about the importance of that role. As many feminists have argued, care is necessary for human life, and the human being is not the invulnerable and autonomous subject put forward by deontological moral theory and mainstream psychoanalysis; on the contrary, it is a relational, interdependent and vulnerable being (Barnes 2012; Garland-Thompson 2002; Kittay 2001; Sevenhuijsen 1998). Hence, if care is necessary but devalued, and if patriarchy induces women to ‘care’ while silencing themselves about their experience of human life, we can conclude that an important mechanism for the reproduction of gender inequalities is the discrepancy between the female gendered self that is constituted under patriarchy and the values that are promoted by the same system. Through the three modes of objectification, women become these selfless and silent selves that care for others, and they permit the masquerade of the masculinist autonomous self to continue<sup>3</sup>.

Concretely, we can identify two main factors related to the devaluation of care that maintain women in a state of inferiority. The first one is the fact that informal care (or the unpaid care that is given at home) is mostly provided by women. In Canada, women represent 61% of those who provide eldercare; they spend more than the double average time on childcare than men, and more than one and a half times what men spend on unpaid domestic work (Frederick & Fast 1999; Statistics Canada 2011b). This ‘free’ care, however, possesses an impressive economic value: studies have estimates that “incorporating unpaid domestic work would have raised the level of GDP by 26 percent in the United States in 2010”, and that it represents annually \$25 billion in Canada (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2013b; Canadian

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<sup>3</sup> I am referring here only to the masculinist commonplace notion of ‘autonomy’ as meaning ‘independence’ or ‘atomistic individualism’. Some philosophers and feminists, like Diana Meyers, have developed a relational notion of ‘autonomy’ that is much closer to reality, in which individuals get their autonomy in the context of and from their relationships with others.

Institute for Health Information 2010). The fact that women provide this work for free has important consequences: they are more likely to leave paid work, to have part-time jobs, and thus more susceptible to economic vulnerability.

The second factor is the fact that paid care work, a traditional female occupation, is also devalued, and that it pays less than traditional male occupations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “professional women [are] more likely to work in the education and health care occupations, in which pay [is] generally lower. Sixty-nine percent of female professionals worked in these fields in 2009, compared with 30 percent of male professionals” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). The situation is even more problematic in the workforce of in-home caregivers, 90% of whom are women (of these, 56% are women of color) and it is the lowest paid female occupation (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2013b, 2). For many feminists, this “confinement of women” to caring roles is “a primary factor in women’s inequality, exploitation, and subordination” (Simons 1996, 189). As I noted earlier, while the inequalities resulting from care work disproportionately affect poor women and women of color, all women are nonetheless affected by them (Kittay 2001, 529).

Are women condemned to these inequalities, or are resistance and change possible? If patriarchy seeks to produce a ‘feminine ethic of care’, as Gilligan maintains, and if the third mode of objectification, namely the techniques of the self, is necessary in order to produce this ethic, then women have an important role to play in their own subjection. Using Foucault’s genealogical concepts helps to realize what possibilities women have for challenging ‘patriarchal disciplinary power’. A possible project of resistance can emerge from this kind of analysis. If women make themselves subjects through the internalization of the norms of care and through their self-silencing about the importance of care, they can also possibly change these attitudes

and alter the conditions that contribute to their domination. If women refuse to be ‘normalized’ under the model of the good woman, and publicly claim that care is a feature of human life that should concern everyone, they can ‘emancipate’ their knowledge and make it challenge the dominant régime of truth. From a feminine ethic, care can become a feminist ethic that concerns everyone to the extent that it challenges the capitalist patriarchal disciplinary power and the values that it rewards. Even though this ‘feminine’ ethic is produced by capitalist patriarchy, the need for care is a basic feature of human life and sociality; hence, women should use the different ethic that they have and make it the basis for a political project of resistance to their own subjectification. As Sara Ruddick suggests, “although women’s standpoint is marked by the oppression in which it originated, it not only survives its origins, but takes on new political usefulness when transformed by feminist consciousness and politics” (Ruddick 1987, 239). The next section will suggest how a feminist politics can possibly use this standpoint, or this ethic of care, in order to challenge the patriarchal order.

### **3 From ‘Normalizing Techniques of the Self’ to ‘Practices of Freedom’: A Project for Gender Equality**

Few political projects for women’s emancipation based on the ethic of care have been suggested so far, even though some feminists like Eva Feder Kittay and Nancy Fraser have gone in this direction, probably because of the reluctance to perpetuate women’s association with care. Most projects based on this ethic are what Peta Bowden calls ‘feminine’ projects: in contrast with ‘feminist’ projects, their chief goal is to integrate a “renewed consideration” for care and relationships in our societal values and social policies, and not explicitly to liberate women from their subordination (Bowden 2000, 37). In 1993, Mary Jeanne Larrabee wrote that “we have yet to see the way in which care relates to the broadly-defined feminist agenda of opening up possibilities for the positive development and liberation of individual women from the limitations of [their] lives”(Larrabee 1993, 16). Her comment is still relevant today: we have yet to join ethic and politics in order to develop a political project for gender equality.

In this second section, then, I will try to outline what such a project for gender equality based on the ethic of care could look like. I will use the tools present in Foucault’s later works about ethics and the care of the self, especially the concepts of ‘techniques of the self’ and ‘practices of freedom’, in order to develop a project of resistance that would identify how the mechanisms of power presented in the last section could be changed so that gender relations become more equal. First, I will try to bring together the main features of Foucault’s work on ethics and the care of the self and explain how the key concepts in his later work demonstrate that agency, resistance to domination and practices that lead to more freedom are all possible. More specifically, by extending on Foucault’s work and by building on other authors, I will show that one of the keys toward changing current mechanisms of power related to gender is to

change the ‘normalizing techniques of the self’ into ‘practices of freedom’. Second, building on McLaren, I will demonstrate that ‘consciousness-raising’ can be considered as a feminist practice of the self. It could transform the current ‘normalizing techniques of the self’ related to care into ‘practices of freedom’. Going further than her, though, I will explain briefly how ‘consciousness-raising’ has evolved since the 1970s, and what practices can be considered as ‘consciousness-raising’ under ‘third-wave’ feminism. Finally, I will suggest concrete measures that could result from a ‘consciousness-raising’ process based on Gilligan’s ethic of care. Since, as we will see, critical philosophy and teaching are important parts of today’s ‘consciousness-raising’, I will build on the work of some care ethic philosophers in order to present some of the concrete measures that have been suggested so far, that would be susceptible to result from a process of consciousness-raising, and that would lead toward gender equality.

### **3.1 Foucault’s Ethics, the ‘Care of the Self’ and Practices of Freedom**

In this first section, I will explain the main features of Foucault’s work on ethics and the care of the self, and show that one of the keys toward changing current mechanisms of power related to gender is to change the ‘normalizing techniques of the self’ into ‘practices of freedom’. Foucault’s work on ethics is fragmented and incomplete due to his untimely death. It is also, as Foucault himself admitted, unclear about its implications for our contemporary context: indeed, Foucault’s work on ethics is based on a reading of ancient Greek and Roman ethical practices, and Foucault was never clear about its current relevance. However, given Foucault’s intellectual project as a whole and his concern for contemporary social conditions, it makes sense to expand on his unfinished work on ethics in order to derive its implications for the present (Foucault 1997a, 294). Hence, this section is based on a personal interpretation of Foucault’s later works, as well as on the works of other authors who have tried to finish what Foucault had started.

For Foucault, ethics is “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, rapport à soi, [...] which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (Foucault 1997b, 263). It is the “conscious practice of freedom”, and it is simply impossible without the latter (Foucault 1997a, 283). As I mentioned, in order to study ‘ethics’, Foucault goes back to ancient Greece, where “ethics as the conscious practice of freedom has revolved around this fundamental imperative: ‘Take care of yourself’” (Foucault 1997a, 285). The ‘care of the self’ is thus the basis for an ethical life, a way for people to secure their freedom. It is based on three interrelated notions: it is an “attitude towards the self, others, and the world”, “a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought”, as well as “a number of actions exercised on the self by the self” (Foucault 2005, 10). Ethics, care of the self, and practices of the self are thus deeply intertwined for the Greeks: the practices of the self are the way through which the individual transforms himself in order to attain a certain goal; these practices are “rooted in a fundamental attitude” toward oneself, which is the care of the self; and finally, the aim of these practices and of this attitude is to “constitute an ethos”, a ‘rapport à soi’ that would secure the subject’s and everyone’s freedom (Foucault 2011, 338). The goal of the care of the self is therefore to determine what a good and free life for the self and for others is, and how it can be put in practice through practices of the self. It makes people step back from their reality, analyze it, and see how it can be changed in order to increase their freedom.

The care of the self thus is an inherently social practice. “The problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self”: first, since learning the practices of the self requires the help of a master, one always needs a guide, a friend, a teacher, etc. in order to adequately care for oneself; second, one’s care for one’s freedom is also a way of

caring for others' freedom; finally, an adequate care of the self will help one to "occupy one's rightful position in the city" (Foucault 1997a, 287). Through the relationships that it implies, the care of the self gives rise to exchange between individuals and to the formation of institutions, like schools; it thus constitutes a "true social practice" (Foucault 1990a, 44; 51). It makes people connect with one another and discover themselves as part of the human community (Foucault 2005, 538). By expanding on Foucault's work, especially on what he implicitly suggests in his description of the care of the self as a social practice, we can conclude the following: through the socialized individual practice of freedom, the freedom of all can be extended. Foucault's work on the care of the self is thus a way to join ethics and politics, or a way to see how, through their ethical subjectivity, people can have an impact on their social and political context. As we will see, this is a very important insight for feminists.

Foucault's attention to the Greek 'care of the self' is motivated by a desire to reestablish the importance of this principle in our contemporary ethical philosophy, which he claims focuses only on the 'know yourself' principle. Indeed, if both principles were present for the Greeks, the 'care of the self' was always more important than the injunction to 'know yourself', which was subordinated to it. Foucault describes the 'Cartesian moment', along with the impact of Christianity and science, as the event that has reversed the importance of these principles. He claims that this moment had the following impact: "to be capable of truth you only have to open your eyes and to reason soundly and honestly, always holding to the line of self-evidence and never letting it go. The subject, then, does not have to transform himself" (Foucault 2005, 190). In other words, the subject of modernity is a subject of 'true knowledge', whereas the subject of antiquity was a subject of 'right action' (Foucault 2005, 522). Foucault wants to 'bring back' the

importance of right action and work on oneself for ethical subjectivity and freedom, and to disqualify the modern vision of ethics, which locates ‘the truth’ inside the subject.

As we have seen, individuals can work on themselves through practices, or techniques, of the self. These techniques are those “which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations” on themselves, “so as to transform themselves” in order to attain a certain goal (Foucault 1997d, 225). As Foucault implicitly claims, and as some other authors have claimed by extending on his work, there are two types of techniques of the self: normalizing and nonnormalizing techniques (McLaren 2002). The normalizing techniques, as presented in the last section, are those that are intertwined with techniques of domination, that result from the internalization of discourses or disciplinary practices, and that end in self-coercion. The nonnormalizing techniques, on the contrary, are practices of freedom: they aim at understanding “how [our social] context has shaped us, with an eye toward social and political change”, and at creating “new nonnormalizing modes of existence and relationships” (McLaren 2002, 159). These are the ‘ethical’ practices that Foucault seeks to bring back, because they increase people’s freedom.

Foucault’s study of the ancient Greek practices of the self is for him a way to return to a time when these practices were nonnormalizing, when they were “more autonomous than they were later, after they were taken over to a certain extent by religious, pedagogical, medical, or psychiatric institutions”; in other words, to a time when there was no disciplinary power that attempted to normalize the population (Foucault 1997a, 282). The Greek techniques of the self, like self-writing, *parrhesia*, or the recollection of dreams, were all techniques that aimed at increasing people’s understanding and control of their lives, and thus at increasing their freedom. As Jana Sawicki mentions, Foucault’s goal in studying the Greeks is “to retrieve an art of



existence [that would] supplant the moralism and normalization operating in pernicious modern technologies of the self” (Sawicki 1996, 175). Indeed, when these techniques were ‘taken over’ by Christianity, the State, and certain disciplinary institutions, they became normalizing: they lost their autonomy and they became intertwined with techniques of domination (Foucault 1997b, 11). The disciplinary power was then able to “grasp the individual at the level of [her] self-understanding”; the individual started to conform to what this power expected of her; and the practices of the self started to decrease rather than to increase her freedom (Sawicki 1996, 161). The techniques of the self that constitute the ‘female gendered self’ under patriarchy are clearly under the category of the ‘normalizing’ techniques. The internalization of norms of femininity and women’s self-silencing are forms of ‘self-domination’ that decrease women’s freedom. Foucault’s work on the techniques of the self suggests that a key toward more freedom would be to change the normalizing techniques into nonnormalizing ones, so that women’s work on themselves becomes practices of freedom. It also suggests that the way to do this is “to detach ourselves from the already given systems, orders, doctrines, and codes of philosophy” that contribute to dominate us, and “to open up a space in thought for exercises, techniques, tests, the transfiguring space of a different attitude, a new ethos” (Foucault 2005, xxviii).

Foucault’s study of practices of freedom, especially in his very last courses at the Collège de France, focused on the practice of truth-telling, or *parrhesia*. Practices of freedom “reveal the contingent character” of social practices and discourses, and “allow for new possibilities”, new modes of existence and relationships (McLaren 2002, 166). The role of truth-telling is to step back from social conditions and question them, in order to bring to light possible transformations. For the ancient Greeks, truth-telling was mostly exercised through the form of *parrhesia*, that is, through the “free and, consequently, courageous activity of some who come

forward, speak, and try to persuade and direct the others, with all the attendant risks” (Foucault 2010, 157). It was an actual political practice, because it implied that some people, more courageous and politically informed than others, would ‘speak the truth’ to power, and would convince their fellow citizens to change their social conditions in order to increase their freedom. For Foucault, a certain part of modern philosophy, philosophical *criticism*, is the “daughter of *parrhesia*” (Foucault 2010, 342). This kind of philosophy is the “free and courageous discourse of truth”, a “truth-telling in the political game [that] aims to disturb and transform the mode of being of subjects” (Foucault 2010, 388). Foucault situates the start of this philosophical tradition with Kant’s “Was ist Aufklärung?” article, in which the philosopher tries to understand the problems of his time (Foucault 2010, 350). Foucault conceives philosophy as a medium for ‘truth-telling’, as a way to understand our social conditions in order to transform them and increase our freedom. Philosophy is thus a practice of the self. Because an ethical care of the self requires the care of the world, continuous criticism of the world is necessary in order to secure our freedom. That is why Foucault characterizes “the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (Foucault 1997e, 316). Philosophy and truth-telling are ways to work on ourselves in order to increase our freedom.

Practices of freedom are what Foucault considers as the most promising element in order to build a world with “as little domination as possible” (Foucault 1997a, 298). Contrary to the concept of ‘liberation’, practices of freedom suggest that freedom requires constant work and vigilance, and that it is never completely attained. These practices are thus necessary in order to resist domination. For Foucault, possibilities of resistance are everywhere. Indeed, if power is everywhere, in every social field, so are resistance and freedom because freedom is “the

condition for the exercise of power” (Foucault 1982, 790). Thus, possibilities of resistance are immanent in the social body and “it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible” (Foucault 1990c, 96). In that process of collective resistance, as we have seen, practices of freedom, or nonnormalizing techniques of the self, are a key element through which individuals can act on themselves and increase collective freedom by resisting individual domination.

This discussion of Foucault’s later work suggests what women have to do if they want to resist gender inequalities and increase their freedom. Women have to change the normalizing techniques of the self related to care into practices of freedom in order to reflect on their conditions, bring to light possibilities of change, and create new nonnormalizing ways of existence. Through the current techniques of internalization of norms of femininity and self-silencing, many women, as Gilligan says, “are wittingly or unwittingly perpetuating a male-voiced civilization” (Gilligan 1993a, x). Gilligan herself suggests that a key toward gender equality is to make women’s voices heard, instead of silencing them, because of the “crucial role of women’s voices in maintaining or transforming a patriarchal world” (Gilligan 1993a, xii). In *Joining the Resistance*, she proposes a project of ‘psychological resistance’ based on girls’ later encounter with patriarchal gender codes: if encouraged to do so, girls would be able to make their voices heard, that is, to claim the importance of care and relationships. This project, however, is politically weak because it is based on girls’ distinct psychological development and because it makes everything depends on these teenage girls. I argue that what we need is a political project of resistance based on the experience of all women who are associated with care under patriarchy. The goal is not to forget psychology, but to situate it socially and politically. We have to ‘make women’s voices heard’ and to ‘desubjugate’ women’s knowledge of life. The

key is to change normalizing techniques into practices of freedom, so that women stop silencing themselves, start expressing their knowledge of the world, and start building a world in which their freedom is increased and gender inequalities and domination are decreased. The next sections will suggest how such a political project of resistance could take place: first, by presenting consciousness-raising as a practice of truth-telling, and second, by proposing some concrete measures for gender equality that could result from a process of consciousness-raising based on care.

### **3.2 Consciousness-Raising as a ‘Practice of Freedom’**

In this second section, I will build on the work of Margaret McLaren in order to demonstrate that ‘consciousness-raising’ can be considered a feminist practice of the self that could transform the normalizing techniques related to care into ‘practices of freedom’. Going further than her, though, I will also explain how ‘consciousness-raising’ has evolved since the 1970s, and what practices can be considered as ‘consciousness-raising’ under ‘third-wave’ feminism.

‘Consciousness-raising’ is a method associated with second-wave feminism that aimed at linking women’s personal experiences to one another and to global structures of oppression. Developed in 1968 by a group of radical feminists including Kathie Sarachild, ‘consciousness-raising’ was mainly done through meetings between small groups of women: in these meetings based on many rules that aimed at ensuring a respectful communication, women shared their personal experiences regarding jobs, motherhood, sexuality, etc. The goal was to “produce new knowledge about women's lives as a basis for activism” and to foster connections between women (Kelly 2009, 158). By linking personal experiences to global structures of sexual

oppression, consciousness-raising had the effect of ‘depathologizing’ women’s experience, thereby increasing their self-confidence and fostering their political activism, resistance to oppression, and attempts at socio-political transformations. Consciousness-raising was deeply connected with women’s knowledge: it was based on this knowledge and it produced new knowledge for women. Indeed, one of the goals was to ‘make women’s voices heard’, to ‘desubjugate their knowledge’ in order to find a common truth in it that would be a basis for political transformation. It also produced important new knowledge because “many of the works produced by group participants (e.g., *The Dialectic of Sex*, by Shulamith Firestone) are still very well-known” and were major sources of influence for second-wave feminism (Kelly 2009, 158).

According to McLaren, ‘consciousness-raising’ can be considered as a feminist practice of the self. Indeed, because it is a “procedure that helps to determine, maintain, and transform identity with respect to a particular end or goal”, it fits the Foucauldian definition of a technique of the self (McLaren 2002, 145). It is a means for the individual to work on herself in a way that has an impact on her social reality. More importantly, it is a *nonnormalizing* technique, or a practice of freedom, because it makes the individual distance herself from her life, analyzing and criticizing her reality, and seeing how it can be changed so as to increase her freedom. Consciousness-raising is a form of truth-telling, like *parrhesia* and critical philosophy. It makes women step back from their reality, it reveals its contingency, and it brings to light possible transformations. It exposes oppressive structures, the way they affect women’s life, and it seeks to establish how they could be transformed in order to increase their freedom.

Consciousness-raising is an inherently social practice. Women become aware of their condition through their interactions with one another and through the reading of other women’s works. It also gives rise to new relationships between women, and its rules ensure that these

relationships will be based on a mutual sense of recognition. As Comerford and Fambrough argue, “this sense of recognition then provides the fundamental basis for human connectedness and solidarity that are capable of transforming destructive social structures, such as patriarchy” (Comerford and Fambrough 2002, 422). Thus, if consciousness-raising invites women to work on themselves in order to change both their personal and their social condition, these new relationships also provide a basis for socio-political transformation. Because it links women’s personal experiences with socio-political structures of oppression, it makes women realize that ‘the personal is political’. Hence, consciousness-raising links ethics and politics because it invites both personal and social transformation. As women become aware of the global structures of oppression that affects their lives, they become empowered, gain a new self-confidence, and work on themselves in order to resist domination in their individual lives. By increasing their own freedom, individual women also increase collective freedom. At the same time, the new connections and the awareness of a commonality between women’s experiences can foster their social activism and their desire to change both political institutions and social norms. There is thus an intrinsic link between personal and social transformation, or between the ethical work on oneself and the increasing of everyone’s freedom.

This link between personal and social transformation fits well with Gilligan’s vision of a political project based on the ethic of care. Indeed, according to her, “a veritable ethic of care cannot exist without social transformation”, and “the seeds for such transformation lie within ourselves” (Gilligan 2011, 11; 13). Consciousness-raising, by linking the personal to the political as well as ethical work on oneself to social transformation, provides a good way to make women’s knowledge related to care at the center of a project of resistance against gender inequalities. Hence, as a practice of the self, consciousness-raising is a key in transforming

women's normalizing techniques of the self related to care into practices of freedom. If women stop silencing themselves and internalizing norms of femininity and, through consciousness-raising, make their voices about the importance of care for human life heard, they can possibly transform the patriarchal system, increase their freedom, and advance gender equality.

The fact that McLaren only talks about women groups when she describes consciousness-raising is problematic because these groups are now 'outdated' and because, as she admits, they were founded on the assumption that there was a commonality between all women and that differences were not fundamental. As Sowards and Renegar have demonstrated, however, methods of consciousness-raising have substantially evolved since the 1970s. Under third-wave feminism, which they define as "an area of emerging feminist thought [since the 1990s], often embraced by young women and men, that is informed by predecessor feminisms as well as changing cultural conditions and expectations", feminism has confronted new challenges and has consequently adapted its methods (Sowards & Renegar 2004, 536). These new challenges, which include "prov[ing] that gender inequities still exist", have basically increased the need for a wider audience (Sowards & Renegar 2004, 538). Accordingly, under contemporary feminism, new methods of consciousness-raising include the diffusion of personal stories in "public venues like anthologies, books, and feminist magazines"; "women's studies classes and other classes that include feminist components", which build on both students' personal experiences and the works of feminist thinkers; and popular culture and mass media, which sometimes diffuse "messages of empowerment" for women (Sowards & Renegar 2004, 541-44).

Thus, third-wave consciousness-raising doesn't seek to refute the content of second-wave feminism, like the critique of the limitations of the gendered division of labor, but only to adapt its methods to contemporary challenges, in particular to embrace difference and diversity

amongst both men and women. It also resolves the main limitation of the second-wave method, because these methods are based on both the assumptions of commonality and diversity between women. Indeed, it is easier to present diversity when consciousness-raising occurs through the diffusion of stories, in classrooms or in culture, than when it occurs in small homogenous groups of women. Finally, since they still link women's personal experience to general structure of oppression, make women step back from their reality, analyze it and see how it can be changed in order to increase their freedom, these new methods still fit the definition of 'practices of freedom'. They are still ways for women to individually work on themselves in order to resist domination. Consciousness-raising through classrooms also has the same potential for creating relationships between feminists as it does through women's meetings; the two other methods, while they are more 'individualized', are nonetheless still social and can lead to the creation of links between women who start to share the same ideas and want to collectively make their voices heard.

### **3.3 Women, Consciousness-Raising and Care: Measures for Gender Equality**

Consciousness-raising can thus be considered as a practice of freedom, as a way to transform women's normalizing techniques of the self into nonnormalizing ones by making their voices heard and their experiences political rather than personal. In this final section, I will suggest some concrete measures that could result from a 'consciousness-raising' process based on care. These are measures that women could claim and require in order to make their social conditions consequent with their knowledge of the importance of care for human life. Since the works of feminist thinkers are an important part of today's consciousness-raising, I will build on the work of some care ethic philosophers in order to see what concrete measures have been suggested so far that would be likely to result from a process of consciousness-raising and that



would lead toward gender equality. Of course, consciousness-raising is an open process and these suggestions by philosophers are opened to discussion and changes according to women's experiences. They are only suggestions.

A consciousness-raising process based on care would be a process "in which people from a diversity of positions and perspectives exchange values and aims relating to care", with the goal of understanding their reality and of finding new possibilities of existence that would be consequent with the importance of care (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 29). This can be done readily through two of the methods of third-wave feminism consciousness-raising, that is, the diffusion of personal stories and women's studies groups, and possibly through mass media, if women can find ways to challenge the dominant patriarchal values that are conveyed through these media. In this process, the works of feminist thinkers can be a good basis for guiding our thinking regarding questions related to care. According to these works, the goal of a consciousness-raising based on care would be to release women from their confinement to roles of care, to "break the pattern of domination surrounding caring activities" (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 19).

If they stop silencing themselves and start claiming the importance of care, women would, according to the literature on the ethic of care, most likely come to the following conclusion: because care is fundamental for human life, it needs to be both valorized and redistributed. The first step for gender equality, then, is the valorization of care work, or the "public validation of care as a social good" (Williams 2005, 28). Indeed, what we need are norms and policies that 'elevate' care work, both formal and informal, to the same level as any other work. As Kittay claims, we need to give care "the social standing and the income production of what is generally acknowledged as 'work' within our society" (Kittay 2001, 528). We thus need to grant this standing to informal care work, and to enhance currently paid care

work. The second step is the redistribution of care work. According to Nancy Fraser, this has to be done through the deconstruction of gender roles (Fraser 1994, 610). First, the ‘female caregiver model’ has to be replaced by the ‘universal caregiver model’: both men and women should be able to combine paid work and informal care. We need to “promote gender equity by dismantling the gendered opposition between breadwinning and caregiving”, and to leave the breadwinner model of the family behind (Fraser 1994, 611). Second, formal care work should also be redistributed so that it ceases to be considered largely or exclusively ‘female work’. The goal behind this advocacy for a redistribution of care work is to “spread the costs and burdens” of care “more evenly through the population” (Kittay 2001, 537). As Carling & al. argue, if every human being is vulnerable and potentially needs care, then a requirement of any democratic society would be that everybody also provides some of this care (Carling & al. 2002, 135). This would be a major step toward gender equality: for some feminists, “if care becomes an integral part of citizenship, then gender equality, and in particular, the equality of marginalized women who are often charged with caregiving activities, would also be realized” (Hankivsky 2004, 125).

For some feminists, including Ariel Levy and Carol Gilligan herself, the “major bone of contention” regarding women and care is the question of child care (Levy 2009; Gilligan 2011, 49). As Carling & al. have demonstrated by interviewing fathers, they do not see “childcare as their direct responsibility”, and there is still a “strong element of choice associated with a father’s decision to care”; accordingly, these interviews lead them to advocate the development of norms “that required both men and women to contribute financially to their children and to care for them” (Carling & al. 2002, 196; 247). For Levy and Gilligan, gender equality cannot exist within the structure of the so-called traditional family: “if the father works and the mother works,

nobody is left to watch the kids”, and that is why gender equality requires deep social transformations (Levy 2009). Many solutions can be advanced, but it is clear that inducing women to work while continuing to provide the majority of child care is not one of them.

Within the two general orientations of valorization and redistribution of care work, then, what concrete measures could women come to claim through consciousness-raising? I will only give a brief suggestion of what this political project could look like, because the concrete measures have to be decided by women collectively. Regarding valorization, many feminists argue that care work has to be recognized as having the same value as any other work in our society. This implies two things: first, informal care work has to be recognized as work, and second, formal care work has to have the same value as other kinds of work. For Kittay, care work “must be included within a system of social cooperation wherein it is adequately compensated and given the same status and social standing as any legitimate employment” (Kittay 2001, 544). Concretely, this means that informal care work (such as child care, elder care, etc.) has to be paid and that its workers should have the same advantages as other workers, e.g. social security, paid vacation, etc. Kittay advocates “a system of payment (and generous payment at that) for all [care] work”; this system would be financed “from the taxpayer’s dollars, and, where appropriate, from employer contributions” (Kittay 2001, 545). This advocacy derives from the fact that care, when taken out of the house and provided by other people or institutions, has to be paid for. The second measure regarding the valorization of care work is that, not only does it have to be paid, but it also has to be given the same value as other types of work. This is necessary in order to erase the inequalities between care workers and other workers. Since care work is for the moment deeply gendered, its valorization and an adequate financial compensation would be a first step toward gender equality. Women could come to this realization through

consciousness-raising, and they could claim these measures, for instance through the launching of a public debate, in order to change the conditions that contribute to their domination.

Regarding the objective of redistribution, which is fundamental for gender equality, care work must necessarily be ‘degendered’, as well as ‘deraced’ (Kittay 2001, 544). For the question of gender, this means two things. First, the part of care work that needs training (nurse, elementary school teacher, etc.) must be made gender-neutral. This “requires making a public commitment to training young boys, as well as young girls, in caring skills” (Kittay 2011, 544). Second, the care work that is provided within the family also has to be ‘degendered’: in order to do so, men should be encouraged to assume their fair part of care work. As Fraser claims, gender equality requires that we “induce men to become more like most women are now- that is, people who do primary care work” (Fraser 1994, 611). Kittay and Carling & al. also make the same suggestion (Kittay 2001, 542; Carling & al. 2002, 141), and Fiona Williams claims that in order to achieve this goal, we should think of introducing an “element of compulsion to paternity leave. This would ensure both that caring becomes shared, and that employers recognize the entitlement [or more precisely, the obligation] of fathers to engage in caring activities” (Williams 2005, 29). Other concrete measures include the restructuring of the work place and work culture in order to accommodate both men and women in their caring responsibilities. This means introducing flexible working hours, a shorter full-time week, a right to part-time work, the attribution of social security advantages to everybody that contributes to caring work, the right to take a paid or unpaid leave for caring for others without loss of job, etc. The redistribution of care work also means that we have to rethink the distribution of this work between the family, the market, civil society, and the state (Fraser 1994, 600). If we acknowledge that all citizens can be caregiver and worker, then we also acknowledge that women should not be seen as

responsible for all care work and that new social arrangements have to be found in order to accommodate the human need for care. In sum, the redistribution of care work is a fundamental step for gender equality, and that is why women should start to think of ways through which this redistribution can be done in order to increase their freedom and gender equality.

The concrete measures that I have suggested here are only indications of what a political project of resistance following from a consciousness-raising based on care could look like. They are examples of what women could start to claim if they stop silencing themselves, if they express their voices and if they act on themselves in order to change the social conditions that contribute to their domination. Consciousness-raising could help them realize that the devaluation of care work is a factor that maintains them in a state of inferiority and, as a practice of freedom, it could lead them to see what concrete measures would increase their freedom and lead to the construction of a world where there is less domination and more gender equality.

## Conclusion

In this essay, building on the work of Carol Gilligan and using the methodological insights of Michel Foucault, I have tried to demonstrate that women's subordination to men in Western post-sexist countries can at least be partly explained by the effect of capitalist patriarchy on women's psychology, which induces them to care for others while devaluing care as a social good. Analyzing "how power works and with what consequences", I have showed that women's work on themselves through normalizing techniques of the self were an important factor in their domination, and that changing these techniques into nonnormalizing ones, or into practices of freedom, would be key in challenging patriarchy and increasing gender equality. As a political project of resistance against gender inequality, I have then suggested consciousness-raising as a practice of freedom that could make women step back from their reality, analyze it, and see how it could be changed in order to increase their freedom. If women could start a process of consciousness-raising based on care, through women's studies groups, the diffusion of personal stories, or by finding ways to use mass media effectively, they could finally express their voices and claim the importance of care for human life. By analyzing how current conditions related to care contribute to their domination, and how they could be changed in order to increase their freedom, women could come up with some concrete measures that would eradicate gender inequalities. Of course, there are many possible obstacles to this outcome in the current cultural landscape, like the social devaluing of feminism and the fact that men have generally been reluctant in taking more responsibilities related to care. That is why men would probably need consciousness-raising too, and women would have to find ways to convince them to accept their measures for gender equality. This is the only way to achieve more equal freedom for both men and women. If the measures presented in this essay based on the work of care ethic philosophers

are relevant suggestions, it is in the end necessary for women to decide the concrete content of their political project themselves. As Foucault claims, they have to remind themselves that freedom is a 'practice', not a state of being; accordingly, they have to always be vigilant regarding the effects of their actions, and to constantly work on themselves in order to increase gender equality as well as the freedom of all.

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