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EVERYDAY STRATEGIES OF AESTHETIC RESISTANCE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The three papers of this dissertation argue that our everyday aesthetic activities and experiences can be enlisted in our resistance projects. Ordinary decisions about how we get dressed and how we attend to our bodies can, when properly considered, help enable resistance to oppressive conditions or instances. Furthermore, there are some cases when everyday aesthetic activity actually constitutes resistance, rather than merely enabling it. By taking on these roles, everyday aesthetics and body aesthetics help promote our well-being.

The first paper argues that aesthetic attention to embodiment helps those experiencing sexual objectification challenge objectifying narratives. This is possible because aesthetic attention to embodiment both makes subjectivity salient and encourages us to value it. The second paper argues that respectability politics are a significantly aesthetic strategy for anti-racist work. In addition to attending to self-presentation as a part of racial uplift, respectability politics also linked personal beauty and antiracist work. The third paper argues that, although aesthetic labor is often intertwined with injustices and disparities of power, it is also an important mechanism in many kinds of liberatory struggles. Furthermore, aesthetic labor matters to our ability to live flourishing lives.

1. Introduction

The three papers of this dissertation argue that our everyday aesthetic activities and experiences can be enlisted in our resistance projects. Ordinary decisions about how we get dressed and how we attend to our bodies can, when properly considered, help enable resistance to oppressive conditions or instances. Furthermore, there are some cases when everyday aesthetic activity actually constitutes resistance, rather than merely enabling it. By taking on these roles, everyday aesthetics helps promote our well-being in both macro and micro contexts.

The position outlined here contradicts a few related attitudes toward everyday aesthetic activity. First, it denies the idea that everyday aesthetic activity is merely frivolous. Second, it denies that everyday aesthetic activity is itself essentially oppressive or necessarily burdensome. Third, it denies that everyday aesthetic activity is not sufficiently aesthetic, particularly when contrasted with art and art-based activity, or sufficiently meaningful to deserve philosophical attention. The papers use a focus on aesthetic activity in the context of human bodies to refute these positions and advance their arguments. They aim to show some specific ways in which everyday aesthetic, and especially body aesthetic, practices are meaningful qua aesthetic practices, but also ways in which they are ethically and socio-politically significant.

In addition to their projects in aesthetics, the papers speak to issues in feminist philosophy, philosophy of race, and ethics. Because the papers treat human bodies and the experience of being a human in/with a body as an occasion for agency, rather than a hindrance to proper moral action, they aid a larger feminist and anti-racist project of

reevaluating philosophical and cultural approaches to embodiment. Additionally, the second paper, "Respectability Politics as Aesthetic Practice," and third paper, "The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life," draw from *specific* instances and approaches to navigating embodiment and aesthetics under conditions of injustice. While I have more work to do on understanding the way race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and ability affect our relationship(s) to embodiment, aesthetics, and ethics, I hope that the focus on specific events helps to further that project for philosophy as a discipline. (I will discuss future work more fully in the dissertation's conclusion.) In addition, these papers share an interest in the ways philosophy can help us understand and alter our relationships to other members of our communities.

The rest of this introduction will introduce some of the philosophical work in everyday aesthetics and body aesthetics that enables and informs the arguments made in each of the three papers. Then I will move to a discussion of the content and general argument each paper makes.

1. Everyday Aesthetics

As a disciplinary identifier, "aesthetics" often means "philosophy of art." However, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in non-art aesthetic experiences and practices. There are a few important differences between artworld experiences and everyday ones, and, further, some distinctions between everyday aesthetics and aesthetic experiences of nature. I don't want to deny that both art and the natural world can feature prominently in our everyday lives, but I do hold that when art and nature integrate into daily life our aesthetic experience of them is in a different mode than

when they are “special” occasions. The distinction between “special” aesthetic experience and aesthetic experience that can happen any time grounds everyday aesthetics as a philosophical category.

A few other characteristics of everyday aesthetics help differentiate it from art-centered aesthetic approaches. Yuriko Saito differentiates art-oriented aesthetic responses from everyday aesthetic responses partly on the grounds that “unlike the quintessential spectator-like experience of art, everyday aesthetics is diverse and dynamic, as more often than not it leads to some specific actions: cleaning, purchasing, repairing, discarding and so on” (2007, 4). This motivational and dynamic aspect of everyday aesthetics also helps ground Saito’s claim that everyday aesthetics plays an important role in our moral decision-making.

Saito notes that someone might accept the existence of aesthetic experience in daily life, but hold that everyday aesthetics “concerns rather trivial, insignificant, and innocuous matters, not worthy of philosophical investigation. So what if we care about stains and wrinkles on our shirt, personal grooming, and the appearance of our properties and possessions? . . . Don’t these reactions indicate our preoccupation with superficial appearance, rather than with substantial and more important matters, such as political, moral, and social issues? (2007, 54) Against this position, Saito offers a few cases that explain the ways everyday aesthetics “often do lead to consequences . . . that affect not only our daily life but also the state of society and the world” (2007, 55). The cases reflect everyday aesthetics general orientation toward attending to and valuing aspects of our life we are generally encouraged to disregard and disvalue.

Another key feature of the selection of everyday aesthetics literature that is relevant to my work is its comparative orientation. Though contemporary Western philosophy's attention to the everyday is somewhat new, other philosophical traditions have made the everyday their focus. Saito cites Japanese aesthetics as valuing everyday, non-art experiences for their aesthetic qualities and "nurtur[ing] aesthetic appreciation of the mundane" (2007, 3). Confucian texts focus on ritual (*li*), an aestheticized and embodied mode of organizing and living one's life.[1] The result is a philosophy that "advocates for an aesthetic of ritualized social interactions in which participants act on norms of social etiquette" (Mullis 2017, 132). While ritual governs singular circumstances, like meeting a king and mourning one's parents, it also guides practitioners through daily life. The result is not just an aesthetic appreciation of the mundane, but an ethical focus on it.

We might understand everyday aesthetics as a particularly engaged philosophical position. The mingled ethical and aesthetic commitments, and especially the interest in what we ought to pay attention and devote our time to, is best articulated in an exchange from a novel for young readers, *Wise Child*, set in post-Roman Scotland. The titular main character is a young girl fostered by a woman, Juniper. Wise Child is trying to get out of doing her chores:

> "I don't like cleaning or dusting or cooking or doing dishes, or any of these things," I explained to her. "And I don't usually do it. I find it boring, you see."
>
> "Everyone has to do those things," she said.

[1] There is more to be said about the way Confucianism views art practices as contributing to personal development, such that the practices required to master an art form become habitual and permeate the rest of one's life and being, but it is too far afield from the current project. Interested readers can seek out the Mullis article cited here.

> "Rich people don't," I pointed out.
>
> …
>
> "They miss a lot of fun," she said. "But quite apart from that – keeping yourself clean, preparing the food you are going to eat, clearing it away afterward – that's what life's *about*, Wise Child. When people forget that, or lose touch with it, then they lose touch with other important things as well."
>
> "Men don't do those things."
>
> "Exactly." (Furlong 1987, 36-37)

That Wise Child finds the chores she's assigned dull is hardly surprising – given my sense of life in Dark Ages Britain, "boring" is probably a pretty mild way of describing the chores. However, part of the coming of age the book describes is Wise Child's growing appreciation for the chores. They bring her into contact with her material environment, including books, furniture, and clothes, and with the beings around her: Juniper, for one, but also the goats, donkey, chickens, and cats that form a part of Wise Child and Juniper's material community. Wise Child comes to aesthetically and ethically appreciate the features of and beings whose existence intertwines with hers, and in the process, she better understands herself and her world. Wise Child's understanding of and appreciation for her world is another part of her growing up, taking her from a petulant, self-absorbed child to a less-petulant, balanced young adult. She is no longer at war with the practices that keep her alive and healthy, but has integrated them into her self-understanding and ideas about creating a meaningful life.

Everyday aesthetics gives us a way to calm internal conflict about the mundane and tedious practices that our existence often requires. Instead of stoking resentment, it gives us ways to find value and pleasure in maintenance work like cooking and cleaning. By drawing attention to our interventions in our environment, everyday

aesthetics helps ward off carelessness as well as resentment. Many of us may also find our bodies occasions of boring, tedious maintenance work, and the pleasures the body affords either narrowly understood or denigrated – or both. The result can be, similarly, a sense of boredom, resentment, and conflict with something we have only limited power to change. Furthermore, our body sets many of the conditions for our lives, and it is hard to think of something *more* everyday than our bodies. Given these commonalities with our everyday experiences, it makes sense to consider what aesthetic consideration and appreciation might do for our relationship with our bodies and those aspects of our ethical lives dependent upon bodies.

II. Body Aesthetics

Closely related to everyday aesthetics, body aesthetics focuses attention on, well, human bodies as sites of aesthetic experience and practice. At least in some cases, body aesthetics or, as Richard Shusterman prefers, "somaesthetics" is a practice of everyday aesthetics. In other cases, body/somaesthetics is as concerned with art experience as it is everyday experience. In the papers that follow this introduction, I do not focus on bodies in art contexts, though I do use some artworld examples to help explain and color my philosophical analysis and argument.[2]

The relationship between body aesthetics and everyday aesthetics relies, in part, on the fact that "our own body is always available to us for aesthetic assessment . . ., and we assess and respond to the bodily appearances of others both consciously and unconsciously" (Irvin 2016, 2). But in addition to the body itself, we have many non-art

[2] See Lipman 1957 for a preliminary treatment of bodies in art forms.

aesthetic practices that engage or rely on the body: getting dressed, hair styles, tattoos, dance, athletics, manicures, eating, and so on. Philosophers have also argued for understanding bodily experiences as aesthetic, sometimes in ways that are intuitive, such as dancing or getting a massage, but other times in ways that expand the scope of the idea of the aesthetic. For example, Sherri Irvin's "Scratching an Itch" argues that itches and scratches may figure in aesthetic experiences.

Two facets of body aesthetics as a philosophical project are particularly relevant to these papers. First, body aesthetics treats human bodies as sources of meaning and value. Second, this value is not only aesthetic, but ethical and political, meaning body aesthetics often intersects with and speaks to issues of justice. Treating human bodies as worth serious, approbative attention and recognizing their relationship to issues of justice supports a counternarrative to a history of denigrating the body and treating it either as a distraction from or impediment to moral projects. In fact, one thing I aim to show is that bodies and body aesthetics are sometimes central to moral projects that require multifaceted resistance to oppressive structures.

Bodies provide opportunities for multiple kinds of aesthetic value and experience. The above list of different kinds of aesthetic bodily practices and aesthetic experiences helps suggest something of this diversity. I suggest we divide up aesthetic appreciation of the body into two modes: the first considers bodies as objects of aesthetic experience, while the second mode considers embodiment. By embodiment, I mean the first-personal sense of being/having a body. A focus on the aesthetic experience of being embodied offers an alternative to the mode of aesthetic appreciator as observer. Like Saito's everyday aesthetic practice that require some intervention,

thereby making us a participant, a focus on embodiment as an aesthetic experience frustrates the object/observer dichotomy.

Philosophers have found aesthetic value in the sensuous experience of being embodied. Though the aesthetics literature on embodiment is small, its contents are diverse. In addition to Irvin's aforementioned "Scratching an Itch," there are philosophical explorations of the aesthetics of sex (Shusterman 2012a), eating (Korsmeyer 2002, Shusterman 2016), and proprioception, our sense of our body's movements and positioning. Proprioception and its aesthetic significance are recurring themes of Barbara Gail Montero's work. Proprioception features in dancers' evaluation of their movements, "they experience pleasure in moving beautifully or gracefully; they seem to apply aesthetic predicates to themselves merely on the basis of the feeling of movement" (Cole and Montero 2007, 303; see also Montero 2006). In addition to beauty, Montero also relates proprioception to effortlessness – a less prominent but significant aesthetic value (2016). Montero's work is useful for gesturing at ways embodiment can feature in our experience of specific aesthetic standards, values, and concepts, though the approach I will take generally emphasizes the way aesthetic appreciation of embodiment directs us to a better appreciation and understand of our bodies and ourselves. That is, it seems to me that Montero's work ultimately aims at aesthetics while mine ultimately aims at the body. I don't take these approaches to be opposed, but note the difference in hopes it will be helpful for understanding the project here.

Body aesthetics does not always intersect with issues of justice in ways that actually promote justice. In some contexts, particularly where judgments of bodily

attractiveness operate, "aesthetic standards . . . serve a disciplinary function, maintaining oppressive norms of race, gender, and sexuality" (Irvin 2016, 2). However, body aesthetics does not just turn its attention to these oppressive aesthetic norms or the norms of the powerful: it also trains a philosophical eye on marginalized groups' understanding of their own experiences. Sometimes, body aesthetics makes strong recommendations about ways to correct oppressive norms and promote the well-being of marginalized people. For example, A. W. Eaton's "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression" notes the ways our cultural preference for thin bodies harms fat people – but Eaton also suggests ways to reorient our aesthetic taste and cultural preference. Similarly, Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin's "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects: A Feminist Reclamation of Sexiness" present an argument for and suggestion about expanding our idea of which kinds of bodies, and which kinds of persons, we find sexy.

My understanding of what kinds of aesthetic experiences are possible and the ways aesthetic experience enables resistance to oppressive structures relies on the work I've described here. Other issues in body aesthetics will surface in the three papers that form the bulk of this project, but all three papers share an interest in the ways body aesthetics in the context of our everyday life can make us better able to resist certain kinds of oppression.

III. Aesthetic Strategies of Everyday Resistance

In the following papers, I discuss three "strategies" that use the aesthetic to enable resistance to oppression. The first paper looks at sexual objectification and argues for aesthetic attention to embodiment as a way of resisting objectifying narratives, actions,

and experiences. In this paper, the aesthetic emphasizes subjectivity, thereby contradicting and resisting objectification. The second paper looks at respectability politics, a set of strategies for self-presentation (among other areas), originating in African American communities post-Reconstruction, that aim at protecting black women from sexual assault, and now are employed to protect black people generally from police violence. The third paper argues for the significance of aesthetic labor, despite the genuine burdens and injustices related to aesthetic labor. In addition to these injustices, there are prudential reasons, liberatory reasons, and flourishing reasons for retaining and cultivating aesthetic labor as a practice of everyday life.

a. "First-Personal Body Aesthetics and Objectification"

Sexual objectification and the human body have both been a rich topic for discussion in feminist philosophy. The debate about sexual objectification, what it is and what kind of harms it does, informs my paper. However, the argument I make should be acceptable to all participants in the debate. Additionally, the paper incorporates Nancy Bauer's discussion of self-objectification and her adaptation of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "ambiguity." For Beauvoir, humans are basically ambiguous because we are basically both objects and subjects. I use the 1933 Barbara Stanwyck film, *Baby Face*, to investigate self-objectification, objectification, and exploitation.

In addition to discussing feminist work on objectification, the argument in this paper draws from literature in everyday aesthetics and body aesthetics that emphasizes first-personal aesthetic experiences. Because embodied first-personal experiences are so closely linked with subjectivity, they contradict experiences of objectification.

Aesthetically appreciating our embodiment habituates us into valuing these experiences, so we can reliably give them credence.

One worry we might have about resisting objectification is that resistance can devalue the body, since our body is the "excuse" for our objectification, further, some analyses of objectification frame it as a reduction to the body. Aesthetically appreciating the body helps us avoid that trap and allows us to view the body as integral to our subjectivity. However, I also head off this worry by discussing feminist work that emphasizes the ways embodiment is integral to moral agency, rather than external to it. Adopting this understanding of embodied moral agency also helps clarify the ways in which our ethical and aesthetic lives positively influence each other.

b. "Respectability Politics as Aesthetic Practice"

The term "politics of respectability" originates in historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's work on the black church. Higginbotham used the term to describe a set of strategies that members of post-Reconstruction black communities used to ward off sexual assault from whites, particularly white men for whom black women worked in domestic roles. Higginbotham also links respectability politics with racial uplift strategies more generally, a link Victoria Wolcott and Brittney C. Cooper pick up and explore in interwar Detroit and early black feminist thought, respectively. Respectability politics is an interesting intersection for issues in philosophy of race, social and political philosophy, feminist philosophy and philosophy of gender, however it has not received much attention in philosophical circles. Nor have its aesthetic features received much acknowledgment or attention.

In "Respectability Politics as Aesthetic Practice," I argue that aesthetic practices play a significant role in both historical and contemporary versions of respectability politics. I make a few claims about respectability politics, and about the philosophical insights it offers or problems it raises.[3] First, I argue that respectability politics requires an aesthetics of racial/ethnic blandness and is, in significant part, a way of making black women's hypervisible and hypersexualized bodies "invisible." Second, I argue that respectability politics presents a problem for proponents of everyday aesthetics who are interested in the way everyday aesthetics allows us to understand the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. I suggest some ways of understanding this problem, and that focusing on other instances of respect as an aesthetically-communicated attitude can help us find a way out of it.

In addition to Higginbotham's, Wolcott's, and Cooper's historical analyses, I look at contemporary respectability politics used, in particular, by black men to avoid police violence. The paper also considers the ways in which advocates of respectability politics launched a campaign to expand beauty standards to include black women, and considers ways beauty, virtue, and respectability combine with race, class, and gender.

c. "The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life"

The third and final paper picks up on a theme in the preceding two: while aesthetic experience and practice enable resistance to certain kinds of oppression, aesthetic standards also feature in certain kinds of oppression. Furthermore, the collection of everyday aesthetic activities I call "aesthetic labor" may lead us to participate in injustices. On the one hand, expectations for aesthetic labor fall disproportionately on

[3] "Problem" and "insight" are close cousins in philosophy.

socially disadvantaged groups (women-identified people especially, but not uniquely). On the other, our everyday aesthetic labor belongs to the same consumerist, capitalist structures of economic imperialism. So, we might wonder if there are reasons to shuck aesthetic labor altogether.

I argue that there in fact several reasons to perform aesthetic labor. First, prudential considerations often dictate performing aesthetic labor. Second, aesthetic labor has been a central part of liberatory movements. Additionally, aesthetic labor can result in liberatory self-presentation even outside the context of an organized political movement. Third, aesthetic labor promotes our flourishing. I examine a number of personal essays from disabled writers who discuss the ways their aesthetic labor meaningfully and positively impacts their well-being, including discussions of the ways some kinds of aesthetic labor help them to value their disabled bodies. Our relationships to aesthetic labor are highly contextualized, reflecting many aspects of our social positions and personal histories. However, the idea that aesthetic labor positively and substantively impacts our well-being and self-worth runs through a diverse selection of sources and analyses of various kinds of aesthetic labor. I conclude the paper by considering ways people in positions of power can responsibly perform aesthetic labor.

IV. Conclusion

In addition to reorienting our understanding of the relationship between bodies and aesthetic experience, the three papers in this dissertation connect aesthetic and ethical activity through the human body. Presenting aesthetic attention to embodiment, respectability politics, and aesthetic labor as strategies of resistance to injustice and

oppression makes both the ethical and aesthetic insights concrete. The project thus highlights ways embodiment can be central to our ethical lives and allows a fuller understanding of the possibilities for our aesthetic experience and our ethical agency.

2. First-Personal Body Aesthetics and Objectification

Here is something that sometimes happens to a woman when she walks down the street: a man leans in and hisses at her. It feels like something to be on the receiving end of this hiss and intrusion. Here is something that a woman sometimes does when she looks in a mirror: she puts on lipstick. It feels like something to do this, too. Both experiences are, at least sometimes, instances of objectification. In the first instance, objectification is something done to the woman on the street. The second instance is harder to categorize, but looks an awful lot like self-objectification. So, the two examples occupy points at different ends of a spectrum of experiences of objectification (not the ultimate ends of the spectrum, to be sure). It is important to pay attention to the phenomenology, the what it feels like, of objectification. More accurately, *multiple* phenomenologies arise from experiences of objectification. A common thread underlies these experiences. Picking it out, and figuring out what we should do about it, is the primary project of this paper.

The commonality, as I see it, is this: Objectification and self-objectification rely on subjectivity, both that of the objectified and objectifier. Although objectification seeks to wrest subjectivity away from another person, or to somehow deny them their personhood, it requires a subject to be so denied. In the face of objectification, attention to embodied experiences affirms subjectivity. Attention to the embodied experiences of objectified persons draws attention to their subjectivity -- I urge particular attention to the aesthetic facets of felt experiences, thereby turning aesthetic and ethical attention to the human body and the facts of human embodiment. I focus on embodiment in part because the body features so prominently in our thinking about and experiences of

objectification, but also because embodiment and subjectivity intertwine, and because embodiment features prominently (though diversely) in other subjective experience, such as emotion. The ultimate claim of this paper is that the kind of subjectivity we get from aesthetic attention to embodiment helps us resist kinds of oppression that deny our subjectivity and seek to force us to deny it, too.

The rest of this introduction discusses the negative slant discussions of the relationship between the human body as an aesthetic object and as a site of moral agency have historically taken. The negative view of the body's aesthetic possibilities relies on a negative view of the human body tout court; keeping that view in mind helps establish both the motivation for and the history of my project. I also use the rest of this introduction to describe the sections of the paper, introduce some background in aesthetics, and motivate the paper's project.

My argument here is enabled by a frequently observed tension between aesthetics and morality. The idea goes back to very early philosophical works: Plato warns us off poetry, early Buddhists link the appreciation of physical beauty to samsara, and Confucius lamented he had "yet to meet a man who loves Virtue as much as he loves female beauty" (9.18). In the 19th century, Elizabeth Bennet has to learn that Wickham's great personal charm and handsome appearance disguise his self-absorption, as have many heroines before and after her. Within this tradition, the aesthetic generally deceives us on points of virtue, at worst leading us to our doom, and at best merely distracting our judgment and attention from things that really matter.

Alongside the longstanding mistrust of aesthetic experience (which is often sensuous experience), we often find a mistrust of the physical facts of human existence: the body is a prison for the soul in *Phaedo*, while Descartes finds himself unable to distinguish the body from the corpse. Philosophers are not unique in the dubious regard in which they have held the human body – they have both shaped and been shaped by a larger context in which human bodies, and ways of being human that take human bodies as central, are disvalued. Physical labor, for example, generally ranks below intellectual labor in social hierarchies. Physical labor includes both labor that relies on the body (cutting lettuce, building walls) and labor that both relies on and looks after the body (housework, caring for the sick). Even when physical labor allies with virtuous behavior, as in certain Christian traditions, the judgment of virtue relies on an expectation of purification. That is, careful attention to and work with one's own body or the bodies of others is acceptable just in cases where it results in the purification of those bodies or one's own. For example, though many saints are venerated for their work with the sick, this veneration usually tracks the saint's willingness to sacrifice their bodily well-being for the good of others. Similarly, bodily mortification practices, though certainly rarer than in the past, center physical labor and attention to the body, but the practice aims at transcending the body or purifying the soul thought to be trapped within the body. Absent that transcendental context, work with and on the body belongs to socially marginalized groups: racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, some kinds of women, members of the working classes or lower castes.[4]

[4] Sherri Irvin points out that doctors work on the body and society places a high value on their work. I don't know quite how to explain the difference in our attitudes toward what doctors do and other kinds of body labor, but there are a few things inform my thinking about it. First, medical work has become

More recent work, particularly by feminist philosophers, points out special aesthetic burdens borne by members of marginalized groups. Susan Bordo (2004) and Sandra Bartky (1990) critique the late 20th-century ideal of feminine slimness. Janell Hobson argues that black women's bodies are aesthetically and ethically fraught, framed "as grotesque figures, due to the problematic fetishism of their rear ends," facilitating the denial of black women's humanity (2003, 88). In a way, my work relies on these critiques: it seems correct to me that the aesthetic is often in tension with the ethical. However, the goal here is to highlight one particular way the aesthetic and the human body are not enemies, but allies of self-understanding and projects of resistance or liberation.[5] Neither the body nor our appreciation of it is merely something to overcome or negotiate around.

The paper moves from the outside in. The surfaces of bodies, and, significantly, of *other people's* bodies, are readily available to our senses, but especially to sight. So, there exists already a great deal of literature, both scholarly and (overwhelmingly) popular, on the aesthetics of bodily appearances, including how we ought and ought not present our bodies to other people. Surfaces are the most intuitive point of entry for my

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thoroughly intellectualized and treated as a science. This mean it's not clear to me that we do *think* of doctors as people who work with bodies. We seem to think of doctors as people who solve complex biological problems. So, in high-value work on the body, the body is still a "problem." Second, medicine has become a lot more reputable in the last three hundred years. So, while being a doctor has been primarily a masculine job, that job didn't necessarily go to men who were otherwise in positions of significant power. It was certainly a job for the ambitious and the middle-class, but it took some time to get there. Third, the longstanding maleness of the field – though medical school graduation rates in the United States are approaching gender parity, only 34% of professionally active physicians identify as women, according to the Henry J Kaiser Foundation - might help block associations with bodies or mark medicine a special case.

[5] A project with more focus on historical sources would have the time to discuss the ways in which the same texts advocating a suspicion of the aesthetic as a sign of virtue *also*, generally, think aesthetic pleasure and activity (and even human bodies) have an important place in ethical projects. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet's aesthetic pleasure in Mr. Darcy's house and gardens tracks her improved opinion of him more generally, as well as cluing the reader into the fact that this improved opinion is the correct one.

project, capturing experiences of which many people are already aware, both as participants and observers. I am not interested in a hard and fast division between bodies-as-appearances and bodies-as-feelings; rather, I think the phenomenology of embodiment captures both visual and tactile sensation, both our experiences of what we look like and our experiences of being "in" our bodies.[6] For instance, you probably see parts of your body as you read this paper: maybe your hands, maybe the outline of your nose or cheeks. So, although we might think that in order to see ourselves we need to look in a mirror, those of us who can see probably see some parts of our body all the time. Attending to the existing literature, with its emphasis upon the visible aspects of the body, helps lay a groundwork for the presence of the aesthetic in a non-traditional arena. Since I will, with plenty of help, stray even further from the tradition, starting with the familiar and moving toward the novel seems useful. My primary project draws attention to under-acknowledged parts of our experience as embodied moral agents, and so this paper always returns to felt experiences, which are one kind of under-acknowledged experience.

I also organize the paper so it moves through the relevant ways of considering the human body: first as an aesthetic site, then as an ethico-aesthetic site, and finally as a site of resistance. The next section of the paper reviews some work in aesthetics emphasizing somatic experiences as aesthetic experiences. I draw on recent work in aesthetics by Richard Shusterman, Sherri Irvin, and Yuriko Saito, especially, to establish the ways the body itself can be a site of aesthetic experiences, rather than merely the conduit for them. I then turn to feminist philosophy's emphasis on bodily

[6] Indeed, bodily phenomenology captures rather more than that: smells, sounds, orientations, to name a few.

experiences in the context of moral and aesthetic value. Our moral agency is embodied such that developing an awareness of bodily changes and sensations, and their aesthetic characteristics, improves self-knowledge, self-understanding, and our ethical lives. I use work of feminist philosophers such as Iris Marion Young and Nancy Bauer to suggest attention to an aesthetics of emotional experiences serves as a key component of resistance to processes of objectification and self-objectification. As a specific instance of the impact of our aesthetic environment on our moral lives, objectification illustrates the ethical significance of attention to the aesthetics of embodied experiences. Our experiences as embodied humans present a complex union of subject-object experience. We are object, both in the sense that we are physical beings and in that we are regarded by others, and subject – selves, persons, agents. For Beauvoir, this subject-object union is "ambiguity," which Nancy Bauer use to complicate the dialectic on objectification. I argue that the aesthetic can contextualize this ambiguity in a way that facilitates resistance to oppressive structures – even if that resistance is primarily personal and internal. Ambiguity will receive more discussion in Section Four, but I mention the term here to signal the theoretical hook for the following sections' focus on the ways subjectivity and objectivity relate in the contexts of embodiment and sexual objectification.

II. Body Aesthetics: Outside and In

Aesthetic analysis is comfortable in the rather narrow context of artworks and cultural products that might be artworks (television shows). Actually, aesthetic experience is, to borrow a term from Sherri Irvin, pervasive. In this section of the paper, I explore that pervasiveness and outline some aesthetic experiences specific to embodiment,

particularly felt experience. I focus on body aesthetics' recognition of bodily phenomenology (first-personal experiences) as open to aesthetic appreciation and on the relationship between emotional, ethical, and aesthetic lives. Body aesthetics expands philosophy's focus to include aesthetic experiences beyond those traditionally captured by aesthetic analysis, namely art-world experiences.[7] By directing our aesthetic attention to bodies, the things people do to/with bodies, and the experience of having a body, body aesthetics makes conceptual room for an understanding of aesthetic experience as always, on some level, accessible. Our experiences as human beings are fundamentally embodied – our bodies are always with us. Because body aesthetics de-emphasizes the notion of aesthetic experience as separate from or other than our day to day lives, in fact making it central to our day to day lives, body aesthetics occupies a place within the subfield of everyday aesthetics.

Per Yuriko Saito, an aesthetics of the everyday directs attention to "sensuous qualities like size, shape, color, texture, sometimes smell, and the arrangements of parts. After all, it is these sensuous qualities with which we interact on a daily basis that, along with natural elements, make up the world in which we live" (2007, 2). Saito considers the sensuous qualities of quotidian experiences such as preparing and eating food, laundry, and landscaping. Such experiences include "aesthetic tastes and attitudes which often do lead to consequences which go beyond simply being preoccupied with the surface, and . . . affect not only our daily life but also the state of the society and the world" (2007, 55). I explore this effect in greater detail in the next section of the paper,

[7] I don't mean to discount the role the natural world plays in traditional accounts of aesthetics; certainly it has featured prominently in thinking on the sublime.

which details the link between our aesthetic and our ethical experiences; my goal in this portion of the paper is to survey the way body aesthetics analyzes embodiment.

Aesthetic values affect the visible features and practices related to the body. Aesthetic judgments inform what we put on and take off our bodies: clothing, makeup, hair, jewelry, tattoos, fat, skin, perfume. These practices of body modification and care intersect with self-understanding and self-expression. These practices express not only "one's evaluative feelings regarding oneself and what would make one pretty, handsome, sexy . . ." but one's cultural context and relationship to that context (Eaton 2016, 42). Shirley Ann Tate, discussing black women's beautification practices and their experiences navigating racialized beauty standards, writes that "[q]uestions of bodily practices such as those of beauty are always discursive and subject to the gaze of the other" (2009, 18). However, the "gaze of the other" is not definitive of these practices – nor of the practitioners. Tate describes specifically black practices such as wigs and colored contacts, which then filter into white women's beauty practices (or are appropriated by white women) (2009, 25-27). Interpreting black women's beauty practices as "aimed" at white culture norms *misinterprets* these practices. Firstly, white women tend to appropriate these practices and innovations – some white cultural-aesthetic bodily practices are parasitic on black ones – making the direction of influence from black beauty culture toward white beauty culture. Secondly, interpreting any individual woman's decision about self-presentation solely according to a black-white binary is reductive, even in instances such as respectability politics and civil rights struggles, where racial binaries and their attendant social capital are immediately

relevant to agents' decision-making.[8] Not only is the black-white binary insufficient for capturing many social positions with respect to race and ethnicity, but it frames beauty practices against an external backdrop, discouraging awareness of their internal meanings and origins. The meaning of black beauty practices like those Tate discusses originate in black people's views of themselves. The gaze of the other matters, but so does the gaze of the self.

Body aesthetics further expands the scope of aesthetics by presenting felt experiences as aesthetic experiences. Attending to felt experience in this way limns the application of aesthetic idea(l)s to bodies and highlights aesthetic experiences bodies undergo. Writers on body aesthetics direct attention to aesthetic experiences *of* or *through* the body. For example, Irvin draws on a Deweyan account of "an experience" to help clarify why we should aesthetically consider activities such as "run[ning] my tongue back and forth on the insides of my closed teeth" (2008a, 30-31). Irvin has also argued for including experiences of itches and scratches as aesthetic ones (2008b). The scope of our aesthetic experiences is not limited to felt bodily sensations; the felt experiences that involve interacting with the world outside our bodies are also richly aesthetic. Apparently simple features of the world and our experiences of the world, such as the smell of a cat's fur, can be quite complex if fully considered: "[w]hen I lower my face into my cat's fur, my experience has subtle tactile, olfactory, visual, and emotional components" (2008a, 40). The complexity of meaning in this experience occurs in other felt experiences: scratching an itch, or the warm and coercive weight of the feeling of a cat sitting on the bed with you, or the beginnings of a headache. These

[8] See the other papers for a more detailed treatment of these two topics.

cases do not encourage a clear phenomenological distinction between agents and the external world, but emphasize embededness and responsiveness to the world. Although I have discussed the cat cases as ones of bodies interacting with an external world, the division between the experience of body-with-other vs body-itself is conceptual rather than actual, teasing out a specific part of experience to examine it fully.

As our emotional experiences figure prominently in embodied aesthetic experiences, our emotional lives figure prominently in our aesthetic experiences. They also share some similar structural features. Emotional experiences frustrate conceptual divisions between myself and the external world, between the feeling of our bodies and the appearances of them, between our physical and our psychological selves.[9] Many emotional states leave visible signs on our bodies: we smile, we hunch our shoulders, we cry. Such visual effects are intuitively objects of aesthetic evaluation. Facial expressions fit into modes of existing aesthetic evaluation, perhaps because faces are already objects of aesthetic evaluation and labor. Here, I mean "object" both in the sense of "focus" and in the sense of "thing" – faces are both what we appraise and the "raw material" we transform, a relationship that generalizes to the body in general and will matter to the later discussion of objectification. Even our evaluation of faces at rest merges the aesthetic and the emotional using categories suggestive of both aesthetic qualities and emotional states: stern, austere, charming. So, it is also no surprise that we say someone has a lovely smile, meaning their smile is charming and transforms the face, but also suggests and evokes emotional states (happiness). I take these to be

[9] I'm not trying to make any claims about mind-body dualism but refer to the experience of having a body and also a self with qualities that seem to be abstract or non-physical.

evaluations of the visual aspects of the bodily activities that accompany (or constitute) emotional states.

However, I have much more access to the invisible records of the smile: air on my teeth and tongue, the stretch of muscles in my cheeks, jaw, lips, and throat. The emotional context of these physical activities/sensations alters their aesthetic character. The stretch of muscles in a forced smile has a different quality from the stretch that accompanies a joyful one. We might not even notice the tension in our muscles that results from a joyful smile, but find a forced smile unbearable. Our relationships with our bodies track both our understanding of what our bodies *look like* when they do things (an uncertain understanding) as well as what it *feels like* to do or undergo things. The rich and diffuse nature of bodily experience will be important for understanding the phenomenology of objectification and self-objectification.

This division between felt experiences and visible experiences is not especially neat, even conceptually. Our tactile and visual senses are mutually entangled. My smile alters my field of vision as well as *feeling like* something to me. Further, it feels like something to see someone else smile, too. Sometimes it feels like tension easing, sometimes like a lump in the throat, and sometimes it feels like wanting to slap someone. When we find our bodies/selves undergoing these experiences, we learn something about our bodily responses, but we also learn about our orientation to the world around us. Such knowledge has important ramifications for our moral lives. And as I will argue in the rest of this paper, attention to the aesthetic dimension of felt bodily experience underlines subjectivity and, at least potentially, affirms personhood. For some of us, that affirmation might constitute new knowledge, but for others it will at

least be a useful reminder. Such a project could be of special importance to oppressed groups, who have a greater risk of objectification in their daily lives.

Certain groups are vulnerable to objectification and, thereby, suffer moral harm because they do not enjoy the privilege of full moral consideration by the other members of their moral communities. Women, generally, have to deal with sexual objectification in ways that men, generally, do not. People of color and the economically vulnerable (a group that tends to include many women, as well as queer and disabled people, and children) also risk objectification and have limited means of responding to it. Members of these groups experience both the kind of sexual objectification I'm discussing here, and also a more general kind: diminished access to the kind of moral consideration set down in the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative.[10] They are less likely to be treated as anything other than a means to someone else's end. In less Kantian terms, members of these groups are more likely to find other people reduce their existence to the others' own interests, rather than that interactions with others reflect diverse particularity.

In outlining the aesthetic possibilities of embodiment, and the way these possibilities often feature in our emotional lives, I explained how it is that the body can be a source of aesthetic experience beyond the obvious (visual) ways. I also discussed body aesthetics as speaking to various social contexts: race, gender, class – these will be discussed more later in the paper. Throughout this first section, I also kept my case study, objectification in view, focusing for the moment on its social and aesthetic

[10] Wesley Morris's October 2016 *NYT Magazine* piece, "Last Taboo," about representations of black male sexuality offers an excellent account of one kind of sexual objectification black men encounter.

aspects. But the focus on objectification requires a more thorough examination of the way the body, aesthetics included, feature in our moral lives. Objectification, after all, is primarily a moral wrong, not an aesthetic one.

III. The Ethico-Aesthetic Body

So: we have reasons to think of bodily experiences as aesthetic experiences, to consider emotional experiences as intersecting with aesthetic experiences, and to understand there are specific, under-explored kinds of aesthetic value permeating our embodiment. These aesthetic values may track our particular social context, including our racial, ethnic, and gender identities. The aesthetic values may also relate, sometimes quite closely, to ethical values as well. I still need to clarify how it is that our bodies feature in our ethical lives. It is easy to see how they feature negatively: consider your behavior last time you got hungry. But consider, too, handshakes and hugs. Drawing on literature in body aesthetics and contributions from feminist ethics, I argue here that ethico-aesthetic consideration of the body affords a richer appreciation of embodiment and ethics. Framing our bodies as sites of ethical agency, rather than impediments to rational moral actions, allows us to work with our bodies, rather than against them.

An aesthetics of embodiment addresses the convergence of the aesthetic and the ethical. Between them, Sherri Irvin and Yuriko Saito suggest at least two sites of convergence. First, attending to everyday aesthetic experiences can improve our appreciation of the world around us and our moral agency. A new focus on and appreciation for aesthetic experiences already available to us – including the full experience of embodiment – may make us less likely to search, irresponsibly and

unreflectively, for "new goods that make different experiences available. Perhaps we can discover that we already have enough, or even more than we need, to be satisfied" (Irvin 2008a, 42). Second, awareness of the ways our aesthetic values structure decision-making bolsters our self-awareness and transparency. Saito explores the second point in the context of environmental ethics. We have aesthetic tastes for smooth green lawns and bright white cotton t-shirts; acquiring and maintaining these things involves a great deal of money and hard work – but also, Saito points out, significant environmental harm (2007, 54ff). This is a good moral reason to adjust our aesthetic thinking and, thereby, our moral activity. Irvin suggests adjusting our sense of aesthetic value allows us reframe the moral project such that it no longer seems to hinge on self-sacrifice (2008a, 42). For example, we can view reducing meat consumption "as a matter of finding different ways to indulge the tastes that were once satisfied by meat" (2008a, 43).[11] Some of these experiences, such as the lawns, are largely external to bodies, others, such as the food and clothing, more obviously interact with or are incorporated into the body (although there is, of course, nothing in principle stopping you from bodily engaging with a smooth green lawn, and dogs certainly seem to enjoy rolling around on them).

Some accounts make a special place for the body in our ethical lives. Here, I focus on Gail Weiss and Ami Harbin's accounts. Weiss argues for an embodied ethics grounded in "bodily imperatives": "ethical demands that bodies place on other bodies in the course of our daily existence" (1999, 5). Weiss's bodily imperatives, which she contrasts with Kantian categorical imperatives and other abstract or transcendent moral

[11] I've had good luck with chickpeas and smoked paprika.

claims, encompass the "physical and emotional responses that rise out of our complex, concrete relationships with other bodies" (5). Elsewhere, she writes that they "emerge out of our intercorporeal exchanges and . . . transform our own body images, investing them and reinvesting them with moral significance" (1999, 158). The central claim here, as I understand it, is that our self-conception, body included, relies in large part on our relationships with other people. A further key point of Weiss's argument is that relationships with others are bodily/embodied, not the communion of abstract selves at the mercy of their bodies, or the bodies of others. Bodies are central and centered, are integral to personal identity and relationships. Equally important is that the effects of one body on other bodies are reciprocal.[12] Relationships and moral communities have special significance for practices of moral self-cultivation "that can only be experienced and enacted through bodily practices . . .that both implicate and transform the bodies of others" (158). Weiss focuses and begins from bodies in their diverse particularity, not bodies abstracted away from or universalized into iconography (that must be overcome). She finds bodily histories and specific characteristics like age "as a source of respect both for the moral wisdom they can provide as well as for the that way they contextualize" our relationships (158).

Exchanges in the social, rather than the biological, world often seem to sideline bodily imperatives. Death and birth are instances when the biological intervenes in the social with undeniable force. Weiss considers a few examples in her explanation of bodily imperatives: resistance to practices like sex-selective abortion, Simone de Beauvoir's account of her mother's death in *Une morte très douce*, relationships

[12] I don't mean that these effects are always positive, nor are they symmetrical.

between parents and children. Weiss notes that the relationship between maternal bodies and fetal bodies is one case where bodily imperatives are generally acknowledged and understood because "the intercorporeal exchanges between mother and fetus are too striking to be ignored" (1999, 168).[13] The maternal-fetal relationship is recognizably intercorporeal, while in other contexts "the corporeal domain" tends to be "untouched as a distinctive, autonomous realm . . .described . . . in terms of relatively discrete bodies interacting with other discrete bodies" (168). The bodily imperatives of a parent-child relationship include feeding and cleaning the child, the child's need to be fed and cleaned and the mother's need to feed and clean (though of course not all mothers experience these imperatives).

Weiss grounds her explanation of bodily imperatives in Beauvoir's case. Beauvoir describes her mother's death as a situation in which relationships between people create clearly bodily needs and obligations. The bodily imperatives in Beauvoir's situation are not as concrete as the bodily imperatives in the maternal-fetal or parent-child dynamic. Similarly, the intercorporeality is less literal, as no one is physically attached to anyone else. Weiss reads Beauvoir's account of the death of her mother, Françoise, as containing bodily imperatives originating in Françoise de Beavuoir's "deteriorating physical condition, which necessitates immediately, 'life-and death' decisions'" – bodily imperatives having to do with the body itself, and the kind of care to give it (158). However, Weiss also argues that bodily imperatives arise from the situation that don't simply direct the participants toward the right treatment of Françoise de Beauvoir's body, but toward the many people affected by and caring for

[13] Of course, it's not clear that the general awareness of the close relationship between mothers and fetuses is always for the best.

Françoise. For example, Beauvoir's mother refuses to acknowledge her looming death, even refusing to see a priest, despite her devout Catholicism. In Beauvoir's telling, the imperatives, which require a kind of dishonesty, often make her and her sister uncomfortable – but they feel themselves compelled to meet their mother's highly specific needs. Françoise de Beauvoir's needs are not just for physical, but for her daughters to respond to and accommodate her psychological responses to the physical and emotional experiences prompted by the care. Her refusal to acknowledge that she is dying is one response, and the bodily imperative arising out of it is her daughters' similar refusal, at least while they are in her company. Françoise de Beauvoir's case also substantiates Weiss's observation that we are subject to imperatives from our own body – our bodies do not simply require attention and responses of others, but from ourselves as well (167). These imperatives will not just have to do with our responses to birth, illness, and death, but more mundane occurrences like handshakes, meals, and bodily movements.

Bodily imperatives support a finely-grained ethics, making generalizations tricky. In this, Weiss's proposal aligns with other ethical philosophies that view bodies not as obstacles to morality, but rather as media for moral action. For example, classical Confucianism insists on responsiveness to the particularities of human personalities and relationships and communicates moral regard through bodily behaviors. Confucius held that fulfilling filial obligations required more than meeting parents' basic needs: "'But even dogs and horses are provided with nourishment. If you are not respectful, wherein lies the difference?'" (2.7). "Respectful" is conceived robustly, clarified in the next passage when Confucius says, "'It is the demeanor that is difficult'" (2.8). Anyone can

"go through the motions," but moral regard must be *embodied.*[14] Confucian sources emphasize personal integrity; in this case, integrity refers to the unity of moral requirements, emotional states, and bodily practice (2.4, 2.7-8). Ethics focused on relationships and community foreground "body images" as well as bodily imperatives; manners, comportment, and facial expressions are salient because these are aspects of our embodiment that give evidence of our emotional states to *other people*. Primarily, of course, they are visual evidence. How, then, can we return to a consideration of *felt* experience, and what role might *it* play in our moral lives?

Ami Harbin's work on bodily disorientation, strongly influenced by Weiss, describes some of the possibilities for felt experience. For Harbin, disorientation refers to "experiences of shock or surprise, unease, and discomfort. They are often cued by feelings of being out of place, unfamiliar, or not at home" (2012, 262). Harbin emphasizes the everyday and the banal as aspects of our moral lives: "I take moral agency to be largely about day-to-day practices of interaction: with spaces, objects, living beings, events, projects, ideas, and norms" (263). Harbin argues that disorientation "experienced through complex corporeal, affective, and cognitive processes" is vital to moral agency (263). Experiences of bodily disorientation change our attentional patterns, highlighting aspects of our experiences that otherwise go unobserved:

> disorientations often make more visible the ways my well-being relies crucially on the work of others . . ., and this can support morally better, potentially reciprocal, interaction with them. As disoriented, we are more likely to stand out

[14] See Sarkissian 2010 and Book 10 of *Analects* for an expanded treatment of this theme.

> to others, to depend on them, and to appreciate their power in our lives; this can bring us into closer relationships in some cases and distance us from parts of our communities in others. (272)

Harbin joins other philosophers (such as Weiss and Saito) who emphasize the link between attention and ethics: "we enact moral agency often through habits of attention and action" (273). And it is important to keep the body in view, as "processes of cognition and emotion cannot be theorized apart from embodiment" (276).[15] These philosophical accounts of bodily experiences, bodily attention, and bodily imperatives shine a bright light on the habitual, preventing it going unremarked and unacknowledged. The habitual, after all, makes up the greatest part of our lives. I turn now to a particular kind of habitual experience: objectification.

IV. Feminist Perspectives on Subjectivity and Objectification

> [W]hen might the whole problem – the whole *thing* – start happening to them again? The whole signs-of-mortality thing. The whole *thing* thing. Nobody likes it, thought Toby – being a body, a thing. Nobody wants to be limited in that way. We'd rather have wings. Even the word *flesh* has a mushy sound to it.
>
> We're not selling only beauty, the AnooYoo Corp said in their staff instructionals. We're selling hope.
>
> ■ *The Year of the Flood*, Margaret Atwood

Bodies feature prominently in practices of objectification. Indeed, one way of conceiving of objectification is just *as* a "reduction to body" (Langton 2009, 228-29). Plenty of ink has been spilt on all the other ways of thinking about objectification, and when it is or isn't a bad thing to do to another person. Kathleen Stock (2015) divides the

[15] Even highly cognitive theories of emotion set aside some place for corporeal experience.

debate into two camps: the MacKinnon-Haslanger account (sexual objectification is categorically bad) and the Nussbaum-Langton account (sexual objectification is sometimes a good). The MacKinnon-Haslanger account links eroticism and subordination: "that women are to be sexually subordinated is experienced as what is erotic about women, both by men and by women too (MacKinnon 1987, 54)" (Stock 192). Nussbaum and Langton do not link sexual objectification and gender as firmly as the MacKinnon-Haslanger account. Additionally, Nussbaum argues that objectification can be a positive experience, not damaging to humanity, in certain highly-circumscribed situations. For example, it doesn't damage my lover's status as a human being to use their belly as a pillow for my head as long as the relationship generally promotes respect and autonomy (1995, 265ff).

Some philosophers question the framing of this debate over the nature of sexual objectification. Stock (2015) argues that the debate is illusory: the two camps are talking about different phenomena. On the other hand, Ann Cahill (2011) argues that both camps' explanations of the harms in objectification perpetuate flawed notions about autonomy and moral worth, disvaluing human bodies in a way that erases the fact of embodiment and fails to dismantle harmful patterns of sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the traditional accounts neglect the way subjectivity features in practices identified as objectification. Cahill (like Weiss, though their projects are different) also rejects the idea of disembodied subjectivity, which perpetuates a mind/body hierarchy by abstracting away from bodily particularity. Cahill suggests, instead of continuing to use the concept of "objectification", that we apply a new concept: derivatization, which involves seeing others as a reflection of our own interests (a derivative of us). Cahill

argues that derivatization explains the harms of reducing people to others' interests in them, but bypasses the disvaluing of the body that the accounts of objectification can't.

I'm not here to weigh in on the conceptual gradations in various uses of "objectification" or alternative concepts – it seems to me that all the projects have merits and are promising in their explanatory power. Further, they all seem to agree that a similar set of sexualizing aesthetic evaluations that occur along gender lines are bad. That is, these accounts generally pick out the same kinds of phenomena and experiences but explain their bad-making properties differently. These experiences and events are bad because they reduce other people, particularly people in socially vulnerable positions relative to us, to their ability to fulfill our desires. Generally, the people so reduced are visibly members of a social group that is vulnerable to such reduction and whose membership in a vulnerable class is taken to justify that reduction. I think this is sufficient to get my project off the ground without alienating proponents of one or another definition of objectification or proponents of revisionist accounts. Borrowing Nancy Bauer's argument that defining just what activities "count" as objectification is the kind of project that tempts philosophers without, necessarily, dispelling any confusion, I am going to let other people take up the ontological project (2015, 27). Human bodies aren't by nature bad, and being embodied isn't by nature bad, but as things currently stand, being identified with one's body still counts as a reduction: not metaphysically, but socially and economically. Most of us can stand to get our metaphysics a little bit wrong for a while if it means we can focus on our well-being. My interest lies in the experience of navigating our moral lives under the risk, threat, or presence of objectification – or whatever.

Additionally, I think a perk of my analysis is its agnosticism about the concept of objectification (or derivatization) while nevertheless capturing a prevalent experience. Objectification, or something like it, affects our relationships with our bodies, our moral lives, and our self-understanding – generally for the worse. Because the burden of objectification intensifies when it intersects with oppressive structures, feminists have devoted a great deal of attention to exploring the harms of objectification. I will limit my discussion to the kinds of objectification that *are* harmful, whether obvious negative experiences that harm the objectified person (such as some kinds of street harassment) or more nuanced, less obviously harmful experiences (practices of self-objectification). I rely here on analyses of objectification offered by Iris Marion Young and more work by Nancy Bauer. Young and Bauer are, in turn, deeply influenced by Simone de Beauvoir and Sandra Bartky. I am also influenced by the work of bell hooks. My analysis and use of the existing work on objectification and related phenomena, and the experiences I use to ground the analysis, focus on the ways subjectivity and objectivity intertwine. As I understand it, my argument is relevant whether you think subjectivity and objectivity are mutually exclusive or mutually enmeshed – whether we toggle between them or experience them as woven together.

In her essay "Women Recovering Our Clothes," Young gives a vivid depiction of the experience of objectification, prompted by an advertisement for wool clothing. The ad's first panel shows a stylish woman in wool clothing; its second shows her watched from behind by a man. Young imagines herself in the woman's place, wearing wool:

> And who might I be? An artist, perhaps . . .. Or maybe I will be a lecturer coming off the airplane . . .. Or perhaps I'm off to meet my new lover, who will greet me face to face and stroke my [clothes].
>
> But who's this coming up behind me? Bringing me down to his size. Don't look back, I can't look back, his gaze is unidirectional, he sees me but I can't see him. But no – I am seeing myself in wool seeing him see me. Is it that I cannot see myself without seeing myself being seen? (63)

Even in a consumerist fantasy, remember that men are evaluating you! Indeed, shouldn't that *be* the consumerist fantasy? Young describes a complicated and upsetting experience, a sharp twist from subject-phenomenology to object-phenomenology with a noticeably aesthetic flavor. This disorienting experience differs from the kind Harbin valorizes.

Enacting objectification is not the special province of actual men; women can and do engage in self-objectification and objectification of other women – I will discuss this a bit later in this section. And women certainly objectify men, for example Dietrich's appraisal of Gary Cooper at the start of *Morocco,* or perhaps most vividly in contexts where class or racial privilege is made visible, such as Helena Bonham Carter's brief appearance in *Maurice*. Playing an upper-class woman watching a cricket game, Bonham Carter frankly appraises gamekeeper Alec Scudder (played by Rupert Graves). The appraisal is communal, as Bonham Carter's friend, of the same social class, points Scudder out to her, and both women take noticeable pleasure in his appearance – as the movie intends the audience to do. The pleasure turns into objectification when Bonham Carter's character remarks, "perhaps with a haircut," neatly reducing Scudder to his ability to fulfill *her* tastes and preferences. Not much hinges on Bonham Carter's objectification of this lower-class man – the two characters don't interact and we never see her again in the film – and I don't think we can read the

Bonham Carter character as actually *harming* Scudder through her objectification of him. For one thing, her gender shapes her ability to harm him: even given the differences in their social class, she has fewer ways of enacting objectification than a man in her position would over a lower-class woman. For another, the film does not want us to agree with Bonham Carter's reduction of Scudder; the audience reaction is something like, "yes, you're right, we like to look at him, too – but that was quite a snobbish thing to say."

By contrast, the 1933 film *Baby Face* is 80 minutes of a woman exploiting men for her economic gain. Barbara Stanwyck's Lily twists her vulnerability to objectification into an asset: that is, she bargains sexual allure for economic advantages. Lily's method is self-objectification: understanding herself as an object. She knows that the men in her life objectify her (she wouldn't use this word) and decides that she can exercise some control over what follows from these transactions. The film essentially tracks Lily's progress from a focus of objectification to active self-objectification, though it keeps her subjectivity in view throughout. It accomplishes this in a few ways. First, the film treats Lily as an objectifier, although she does not *sexually* objectify the men in her life. Rather, she treats them as means to her ends. Second, the film positions her as a subject both through its narrative elements (plot, character development), Stanwyck's performance (which is steely, but wry), and its visual strategies. *Baby Face* clearly sets up an environment of sexual exploitation and objectification for Lily, without actually encouraging the audience to view her as an object or suggesting that she really believes the narrative that her gender and social class ultimately define her. Lily consistently resists her marginalization – and the film endorses her resistance.

We observe Lily's resistance and the film's supportive attitude toward it in a few scenes. The first scene, early in the film, involves an altercation between Lily and a man who has just paid her father for a sexual encounter with her. The camera briefly adopts this man's viewpoint for a lingering pan up Lily's body, which receives an ironic puncture when it culminates in a close-up of her irritated, sullen face.[16] She is clearly preoccupied with her own thoughts and resents others' intrusions upon them. Rather than submitting to the sexual encounter, Lily pours coffee on the man's hand as he gropes her knee. She offers a non-apology: "Oh, I'm sorry, it's just my hand shakes so when I'm around you." When he pursues her into her bedroom, she pushes him off, leaves, and pours herself a beer. When he comes up behind her, interrupting her first sip, she smashes him over the head with the empty bottle – and then, while he's reeling from the assault, goes back to her beer. The men in her life may take her sexual availability for granted, but Lily never does. Further, Lily resents the attitude the men around her take, but her resentment does not lead to victimhood.[17] I don't mean that she has unwavering self-confidence or self-possession, as a scene discussed below makes clear, Lily's sense of her options changes with the times. But, by presenting Lily at her own estimation and foregrounding her own view of herself and her projects, the film consistently presents her as a subject, rather than reducing her to an object.

Because she melds self-objectification with transactional sex work that relies on an objectifying view of men, Lily's experience explores a different, more complex kind

[16] Warner Archive has excerpted this scene and put it on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqN8AZCGvnc

[17] A recent Indian film, *The Dirty Picture*, presents a similar narrative of self-objectification for material gain and, to some extent, psychological fulfillment. *The Dirty Picture* is a tragic melodrama, however, and so the story is also one of a woman being punished for sexual transgressions. In *Baby Face*, Lily gets away with it, which I think is the more interesting turn of events.

of tension between subject/object identity than Young's. Young explores objectification originating in an appearance of the body. The cases of Gary Cooper in *Morocco*, or Rupert Graves in *Maurice*, or the woman/self in Young's imagination only require that the objectified be visible to the objectifier, that the body and self be vulnerable through visibility. The other sensuous qualities of "Young's" body are irrelevant to the objectifier, as are Young and her projects. The objectifying gaze makes that irrelevance clear, and the complete, rapid, and (for the objectifier) incredibly *easy*, isolation of the experience of one's self from the appearance of one's body is what makes this kind of objectification so striking. A look is sufficient to sever the connection between the visible evidence of my personhood and my personhood itself. Young describes a forcible switch from subject-experience to object-experience. There is something aspirational in the experience of identifying with the woman in the first picture; the second picture yanks identification away. While feeling herself to be a subject – a *person* – she is reminded that, for others, she is an object, a something-for-others. All through looking.

Baby Face again presents quite a different situation. First, because Lily's self-objectification involves a series of sexual relationships, she cannot self-objectify simply through presenting her appearance. Rather, she puts the full spectrum of her body's sensuous qualities on offer for her sexual partners/patrons. Indeed, the pan up her body at the start of the film, and the way the film subverts that generally lascivious cinematic technique, suggests that Lily is particularly resistant to visual objectification. Because the immediate result of the film's nod to visual objectification is significant bodily injury to the man whose objectifying gaze the camera appears to adopt, the film

suggests that taking the appearance of Lily's body as indicative of the things that may be done to her/body is doomed. Rather than having her subjectivity yanked away, it is both the necessary condition for her self-objectification and something continually intruding on the fantasy on which her sexual relationships rely. Lily's self-objectification requires simultaneously pretending to have very few personal desires but also having enough ambition to willingly engage in transactional sexual relationships. In order to make the relationship last long enough to secure, for example, a luxurious apartment, Lily has to maintain an environment of convincing mutual pleasure. In most cases, she drops the façade after securing a more powerful patron, thereby underlining the degree to which she sublimates her sense of self in the pursuit of her social and economic well-being.

Lily's situation further differs from that of the woman in Young's paper because Lily is not forced between the roles of object and subject. Rather, the plot of the film relies on her choosing to adopt both roles at once. She follows the Nietzsche-inspired advice she receives at the start of the film, from Crabb, an old cobbler who recognizes her sexual appeal but displays no sexual interest in her, treating her as a mentee. After her father's death, Lily briefly considers giving into the limited options Eerie, Pennsylvania offers: "Just as I was leaving the cemetery, Ed Sipple made me a proposition. And last night the manager at the burlesque house offered me a job in the chorus to do a strip act." Crabb criticizes both her lack of ambition and sense of surrender, saying Lily is deciding to "let life defeat you, you don't fight back." Instead, she should recognize her "power over men. But you must use men. Not let them use you. . . . Exploit yourself! Use men! Be strong! Defiant! Use men to get the things you

want."[18] In some sense, Lily's choice still represents a surrender: she agrees to go along with the role in which most men have cast her, rather than continuing to hit them over the head with beer bottles. She "gives in" to her objectification. In another sense, it's impossible for viewers to deny Lily's subjectivity. And, considering that the turning point in the film involves a jealous ex-lover's murder of the man who replaced him, and then his own suicide, which turns into a scandal Lily bargains into a $15,000 payout (in 1933 money!) and a job in Paris (at which she excels), it's quite clear who's come out on top. That is: we have to believe Lily is objectified by both herself and other people, but we would be quite wrong to believe she is taken advantage of.

Lily's juggling of subjectivity and objectification is human ambiguity. On Bauer's reading of Beauvoir, "ambiguity" captures a "phenomenological dilemma" not just a metaphysical one (Bauer 47). Living as a human, a person discovers "she is a both a subject (a self-conscious being capable of moving beyond what nature and the world give to her, including her desires as they stand) and an object (an embodied being with characteristics, a style, appetites, and a history, all of which invite the judgment of others)" (Bauer 47). For women and other oppressed groups who have to consider the objectifying gaze of others if they wish to navigate the world safely, discovering the degree to which they register as objects is a poignant experience.[19] Further, women

[18] In a nice touch, the film reveals that Lily and Crabb stay in contact even after she's "made it."
[19] Ambiguity shares some features in common with double consciousness, in both the Du Boisian and the Emersonian uses, and some scholars suggest that Beauvoir was familiar with Du Bois's work through Richard Wright (Simons 1999, Chanter 2000). See Bruce 1999 for a comparison of Du Bois and Emerson and McWeeny 2016 for an analysis of other kinds of two-ness in oppression. Ambiguity seems ontologically and phenomenologically distinct from double consciousness, with one important distinction being that ambiguity is at least in theory something anyone will experience and double consciousness originates in some specific historical instances. So, ambiguity seems like a precondition for varieties of double consciousness. Narcissism and self-objectification seem closer to double consciousness than ambiguity.

have real motivation to engage in self-objectification because doing so earns praise and pleasure. Bartky argues that narcissism enables women to derive a kind of masculine pleasure in their own bodies. A woman is fully capable of "tak[ing] toward her own person the attitude of the man [objectification]. She will then take erotic satisfaction in her physical self, reveling in her body as a beautiful object to be gazed at and decorated" (Bartky 1990, 36-37). Bartky's "erotic satisfaction" has a significant aesthetic component, too, and one which looks similar to traditional aesthetic expression: artistic expression. The objectified body is the raw material on which subjectivity may be expressed.

Subjectivity also intrudes on self-objectification in more straightforwardly erotic contexts, such as sex. Bauer talks about self-objectification becoming a kind of sexual power in the context of unreciprocated oral sex amongst college students: "Being the object of the helpless desire of a boy you are about to fellate, especially when, at the moment, you're the only one around to fulfill it, can be – excuse the pun – a heady experience for a girl. And the pleasure is only intensified if it's quasi-sadistic" (2015, 46). Again, Stanwyck's performance in *Baby Face* comes to mind. Lily's approach to sex is transactional, self-centered, and quasi-sadistic. Her pleasure at duping the men who seek to exploit her facilitates both her self-objectification and the project of exploiting men for her own needs. Lily's self-objectification brings genuine material and psychological pleasures. For one thing, the project of taking men's money both on and off the clock serves as a kind of revenge on the men in her hometown, including the memory of her father. Dropping one when a more rewarding target comes in view is also a kind of revenge on their venality and self-absorption. For another, she has

financial security, lovely clothes and pleasant surroundings, and peace of mind. She might have to manage the men she sleeps with, but she doesn't have to worry about them. They are fungible, their feelings and desires important only inasmuch as they enable or obstruct her ability to achieve her own goals.

As these cases show, subjectivity and objectification are complexly bound up in each other. In the context of sexual objectification in a patriarchal society, women's subjective experiences seem to undergird a voluntary self-objectification from which they themselves derive no small amount of genuine pleasure. Sometimes that pleasure is somewhat solipsistic, as Bauer describes, but in the *Baby Face* case, the pleasure signals resistance to and manipulation of objectifying structures. Lily's pleasure is mostly in the products of her objectification, or in the results of her subjectivity (her ambition and canniness), rather than the experience of objectification. Bauer's case of self-objectification differs again in that the pleasure is most significantly in the objectification, not its results.

By contrast, other feminized activities might also make the list of pleasurable self-objectification without necessarily involving sexual exploitation. It is nice to have soft hands and moisturized lips. For one thing, when you "take care of yourself" in this way, you are more likely to be more physically comfortable and less likely to, for example, find your lips splitting during an animated conversation or your fingers torn apart by hangnails. Both experiences are painful and distracting. But these kinds of bodily maintenance fulfill traditional feminine aesthetic roles, even more traditional than Lily's gradually acquired silk robes and bleached hair. The objects that enable women to fulfill those roles are sold *as such*, promising the appearance of youth,

beauty, and sexiness. My moisturizer tells me that by using it I "refuse to obey time," because my face will not undergo the changes that a physical body left to the mercies of time and nature will. If you're going to be an object (and you're going to be), you better be a perfect one. Foundation won't fix *the* problem – "the whole *thing* thing," as Atwood put it in the quote at the start of this section – but it will do a pretty good job stopping other people from noticing the problem. A different strategy involves selling products as self-indulgent occasion for pleasure, that, despite their self-indulgence, are the kind of thing a woman *owes* herself. On this approach, failing to acquire or pursue a trim waist and new lipstick are signs that women are letting themselves down.

This kind of self-objectification emphasizes subjectivity. However, emphasizing subjectivity happens by putting the body at a distance and positioning it as a problem to be solved or as a medium for sensuous attention. Neither the narrative of self-perfection nor the narrative of self-indulgence seems to capture the richness of women's actual experiences of our bodies and the things we do with and to them. Although these strategies and patterns of self-understanding rely on ambiguity between object/subject existence as a basic human feature, since they would be impossible without ambiguity, they do not acknowledge or explore ambiguity. The body is once more the thing (object) transformed by our agency (subject). Nor do these manifestations of self-objectification understand embodiment as a neutral fact of human existence. Whether the body is a medium for pleasure or mastery, it remains extraneous and inessential to subjectivity. At best, it throws subjectivity into sharper relief.

Young's essay "Breasted Experience" explores ambiguity, contrasting felt experience and objectification. Young argues women "experience our objectification as

a function of the look of the other, the male [subject] gaze that judges and dominates from afar" (2005, 77). Breasts are readily and easily objectified through their (mis)alignment with certain visual, phallo-centric ideals. Under Western patriarchy, a woman's "fetishized breasts are valued as objects, things" and her value reduced to that of the (most) visible sign of her sexuality (78). Bell hooks describes a version of this objectification/appropriation in "Selling Hot Pussy." Outside a dessert place with a group of white colleagues on a Friday night, other patrons refer to hooks as a "nigger." Her attempts to draw her colleagues' attention to the racist reaction receive no uptake. And then: "as we enter the dessert place they all burst into laughter and point to a row of gigantic chocolate breasts complete with nipples – huge edible tits. They think this is a delicious idea – seeing no connection between this racialized image and the racism expressed in the entryway" (1997, 122). Already facing solo status in her professional group, hooks is now doubly an outsider, reminded that not only that she, her blackness, is unwelcome, but that the "past when the bodies of black women were a commodity" resurfaces at any time (122). Perhaps hooks' epistemic privilege also allows her to understand the dessert as objectification in ways her white colleagues do not; perhaps all it takes is knowing that those chocolate breasts look like *her body*, still, in many ways, the absolute of otherness for white people. Here are breasts for literal consumption, isolated from the body as a whole and from considerations of personhood.

For many women, in a patriarchal context, the existing dialogue around "breasted experience" requires considering yourself and your breasts either as objects for sexual-aesthetic delectation or as problems to be solved. Even in female-dominated spaces, acknowledging breasted experience usually means discussing back pain, the

difficulty of finding clothes that fit properly, or the need to support the breasts during exercise – in short, the inconvenience of having breasts. They are obstacles to personhood or obstacles to day-to-day existence – surely a counterproductive attitude to have toward our bodies if we are seeking human flourishing. We need to push back against the pattern of objectification that dominates our understanding of embodiment. But how?

Young argues for creating a "woman-centered meaning" for the breasts, constructing a value framed "apart from measurement and exchange" (80). Rather than prizing the way breasts *look* as they conform to patriarchal ideals, a woman-centered approach would consider their relative fluidity. Many of the complaints women have about their breasts hinge upon breasts' protean characteristics: the need to keep breasts supported and relatively still while running, and the way they alter according to changes in hormones underline the ways in which actual breasts fail to meet the phallocentric objectified standards applied to them. These standards are inappropriate – of course we fail them. Women's breasted experiences are already more diverse than the look-oriented, objectifying approach to breasts *and bodies* admits, but it is the *tensions* that are easiest to discuss. Rather than foregrounding the frustrations of bodies failing the objectifying standards set upon them, a woman-centered approach acknowledges subjectivity and personhood in embodiment. Young takes breasts as a starting point, but the project could extend to the rest of our bodies.

Exploring just how we might extend the project is the work of the following section. In order to flesh out these possibilities for subjectivity, I return to everyday aesthetics. Work in everyday aesthetics focusing on the body extends the project in

feminist philosophy of addressing issues of bodily objectification, both sexual and otherwise, while also highlighting the way subjectivity functions in these experiences. While the discussions in this just-concluded section of the paper meant to illustrate the ways subjectivity and objectification are intertwined with each other, the move to everyday aesthetics addresses somewhat pragmatic concerns. Focusing on aesthetic experience gives us some guidance as to how we can, in our own lives, "remember" our subjectivity and thereby resist objectifying narratives.

V. Aesthetic Experience and Subjectivity

The idea that paying attention is one way of acknowledging value recurs throughout philosophy of the everyday. I argue that paying attention to women's experiences of objectification is one way of counteracting everyday instances of gendered injustice. My focus here is not on paying attention to women's testimonies about those experiences, but on attention to phenomenology of objectification. Both examples that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, street harassment and self-objectification, feature here as occasions when attention to embodied experience affirms subjectivity. Further, the aesthetic has a special place in the ongoing, many-layered project of counteracting gendered injustices and understanding one's own condition. So, the attention I advocate is, at least in part, aesthetic attention. I will start by explaining why this is a project for aesthetics, not just ethics or political philosophy.

Our human ambiguity means that we are both subjects and objectified others. When you "toggle" from subject to object – or, as in the case of Young's wool advertisement and other cases of objectification, *are* toggled – subjectivity lurks in the

background.[20] Self-objectification also requires a subject-agent -- I suspect that is one of the reasons it bothers us. Despite its pervasiveness, objectification is not something you are supposed to accept when it is done to you, much less opt in to. An objectified person has had a harm done to them by someone else, but self-objectification looks like a harm one does oneself despite "knowing better." Young's phenomenology of objectification is transparent on the intertwining of subjectivity and objectification, because she clearly illustrates the switch from one perspective to the other, and also elucidates the discomfort that results. Because she writes as an observer not a participant, Bauer's examples are more opaque – as, indeed, are many of our experiences of objectification and self-objectification. But the opacity of these other instances lends significance to felt experience, since it becomes one more source of information and meaning. Determining the specifics of bodily imperatives surely requires thoughtful attention to the specifics of relationships, the people in those relationships, and their contexts. Privileging the specific over the "universal" is vital to Weiss's account: "There is no 'place' to begin to examine a relationship except from within that relationship" (1999, 163). Now, that is a very strong construction – perhaps too strong for my liking – but it does usefully center the interested parties, and prioritize the concrete circumstances of embodied interactions.

There are three reasons for thinking we should understand my project as aesthetic, rather than "merely" ethical. First, aesthetic values play a large role in processes of objectification, such that aesthetic norms signal the value of certain kinds

[20] It's not clear to me if the reverse is also the case: if objectification is *also* always in the background. I am uncertain what to say on this point because I am not sure about the role power and privilege play. Objectification doesn't begin and end with sexual objectification, and some people probably never have to consider receiving sexual objectification.

of bodies. Second, deviation from or adherence to these norms makes one particularly vulnerable to objectification. In the spectrum (there is at least one!) of feminine self-presentation, the middle ground allows one to pass unremarked, but "ostentatiously" feminine or notably androgynous or masculine self-presentation "provoke" comments. But certain bodies get classed as "extremely feminine" or "androgynous" without much agential action at all: women have relatively little say about the size of their breasts or the width of their hips. Finally, the link between aesthetic attention and moral agency also means there is a particular need to counter aesthetic oppression with aesthetic liberation. I use the ethico-aesthetic norm of sexiness to illustrate the relevant dynamics.

Aesthetic values inform our judgments about our own bodies and the bodies of others, sometimes enabling objectification. We consider bodies in light of norms like sexiness, and alter bodies/bodily appearances to better align with them, or to flout them more dramatically. Though actual ideas about what "counts" as sexy are as diverse as the people who hold them, the cultural content of, or what A. W. Eaton calls our "collective taste" for/in sexiness is fairly limited.[21] It readily acknowledges white, able bodies. It makes room, sometimes, for racially and ethnically "ambiguous" bodies, provided they meet or better the standards of white sexual desirability. In the aesthetic context of the 1990s, hooks argued that Naomi Campbell "embodies an aesthetic that suggests black women, while appealingly 'different,' must resemble white women to be considered really beautiful," while also being photographed in highly sexualized contexts (1997, 130). Whatever racial progress has occurred since the 1990s, the sense that Lupita Nyong'o's *Vogue* covers push the boundaries of mainstream beauty persists.

[21] For a more thorough philosophical discussion of sexiness, see Lintott and Irvin: "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects."

Vogue covers (in general) track a slightly different kind of desirability than concepts of sexiness do, and Nyong'o and Campbell are not treated as desirable, beautiful, or sexy in the same way Kate Upton is (they are high fashion in a way Upton is not).[22] The ideas nevertheless intersect and overlap, and women find themselves navigating their relationship to each. For women of color, sexual desirability and beauty are fraught experiences – and often dehumanizing, objectifying in a surprisingly narrow sense. For example, Robin Zheng, writing about "yellow fever," or white men's "preference" for Asian and Asian-descended women, argues that "racial depersonalization inherent in yellow fever threatens Asian/American women with doubts as to whether they are or can be loved as individuals rather than as objects in a category" (2017, 408).[23] And Asian/American women who find themselves outside the lines of "collective taste" for Asian/American female bodies might find themselves with doubts as to whether they can be loved as objects in a category, let alone individuals. Desirability seems possible only through the lens of the exotic and the subhuman.

Sexiness is oddly positioned in the context of gender. It sometimes permits male bodies to be desirable *as bodies*, rather than as people.[24] However, the cultural content of sexiness still requires pouting lips, lush cleavage, and a dramatic hip-waist ratio, and none of these attributes traditionally fall within the domain of the male body.[25] Most female bodies *also* fail to realize these attributes, and so women-in-

[22] Though Upton has also been on *Vogue* covers, her career relies on her ability to please a very traditional version of the male gaze in a way neither Campbell's nor Nyong'o's does.
[23] The phenomenon is not limited to heterosexual relationships. Alexander Chee (2017), a Korean-American writer, has discussed dating a "rice queen" (he doesn't recommend it).
[24] See, for example, the camera's treatment of John Abraham at the beginning of "Shut Up and Bounce:" https://youtu.be/0akqVN4ts0w
[25] Sherri Irvin suggests it might be the case that there are simply different norms of sexiness for men. I think that's true – but sexiness full stop still seems to be feminized to me. If you want to talk about male

waiting "must" learn to counterfeit them through purchases (lip gloss, elaborate lingerie) or postures (shoulders back, one foot forward, back arched). The norm here is visual: the goal is to create an appearance of sexiness, contemplated at a distance. This appearance of sexiness happens to be pretty useless for reciprocal sexual activity: it's very difficult to remain sexy while taking off your Spanx. Failure to learn how to mimic the norm sexiness can have terrible consequences.[26] So, too, can success.

The mode of judgment, conformity to, and rejection of such ideals as sexiness is paradigmatically visual. This is particularly true of other-directed aesthetic activity, but it is also true of much self-directed aesthetic activity. Applying red lipstick, for example, does seem like an act of distancing me from my body: it sets up the kind of object/observer dynamic that got us into this problem in the first place. However, felt experience is less easily categorized according to objectifying norms. Indeed, I suggest that felt experience offers a strong counter to objectification. Paying attention to felt experience foregrounds subjectivity by making salient those parts of our being which are specific to us individually: our emotions, reactions, histories, and the nebulous, sometimes mysterious internal sensations that only we have (total) access to. Only I know what the drag of the lipstick feels like. Only I know if it dries my lips. This is much more important to my experience of the lipstick than whether the lipstick looks

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sexiness, you have to specify that you're referencing an alternative mode of sexiness. The situation is the inverse of "woman writer" or "female comedian," which signals, through the gender label, that the person being discussed is an exception our cultural understanding that writers and comedians are male.

[26] This is of special poignancy for trans women, whether or not their self-expression leans toward traditional feminine aesthetics. A woman's safety might rely on her being "convincingly" a "real woman." But if she manages this *too* well, she risks hyper-sexualization and, perhaps, the assumption that she is a sex worker. And if she declines to present in a feminine way, she might increase her risk of encountering transphobic violence.

"perfect." In public, only other people can see if it does, and other people are not very good at noticing.

However, we do need to wear lipstick to create or provide an aesthetic experience for observers. Our bodies have visual and tactile features already, while we can move our bodies in ways that produce aesthetic effects. For us, these experiences have felt qualities, too. I don't know what it is like to be Lily in *Baby Face,* but I suspect the beguiling smile she gives her patron has felt qualities inaccessible to him, a flavor only she perceives. She might be thinking with delight of the feeling of her full stomach and silk underwear, even as she also registers her contempt for the man who paid for those sensations. An aesthetic appreciation of these experiences might entail, as Irvin suggests about itches and scratches, "acknowledging . . . how they call attention to our somatic experience and how they color that experience in certain ways" (2008b, 30). Lily's experiences can only make complete sense if their aesthetic qualities are considered, too. The significance of her – compromised, grim, morally dubious – choices registers through the aesthetics of her felt experience. Or, since Lily is fictional, the full meaning of choices made by people like her manifest in the details of their subjective experiences.[27] The way we experience our own embodiment matters, just as the way we experience other people's embodiment matters. Some of that experience is, or can be, aesthetic.

Recognizing the aesthetic aspect of embodiment is, on some level, just a response to the bare facts of human existence. At its most basic level, aesthetic

[27] The situation has some echoes in the choices impoverished people make, which often look like bad ones to the financially secure. Lily, like many women, is poor at the beginning of the film.

appreciation of embodiment just requires saying, "I am embodied, and therefore there are sensuous experiences specific to my embodiment that I can pay attention to in ways that inform me about the world and myself." But, as the discussion of aesthetic experience above highlighted, making the aesthetic aspects of our experience salient alters our way of valuing them. Calling attention to something's sensuous qualities and fully attending to the specifics of sensuous experience, rather than screening them out, is a way of giving that experience value and weight. Aesthetic experience pervades our lives – but value pervades aesthetic experience.

With this in mind, let me suggest a further arena where aesthetic attention to felt embodied experiences is morally valuable: when on the receiving end of that hiss I mentioned above. Such expressions seek to cut women down to size, reminding women they are first and foremost things for men to consider possessing. In fact, these "interactions" often seem to rely on a masculine assumption that he *already* possesses you. Receiving this kind of response can be humiliating.[28] That humiliation has, I think, its own bodily phenomenologies. In the face of an objectifying hiss, my nausea, hot cheeks, and curled lip "color my somatic experience" and reaffirm my personhood – if I let them. These bodily reactions push back against the gaze of ownership, affirming my sense that a wrong has been done me and my sense that the wrong was moral. In communicating contempt through a curled lip and registering my anger by the heat in my cheeks, I redirect the negative emotional/moral reaction of shame away from my self and toward the person who has actually committed the violation. Simply noting my

[28] Although it is also sometimes merely baffling. I don't take bewilderment to be a morally better reaction to street harassment *in general*, but I suspect it is sometimes a kind of self-preservation. It's not, in my experience, unusual to skip straight to contempt, bypassing humiliation altogether.

bodily responses is insufficient to make this shift, although it is of course important. I must also *appreciate* the bodily responses, must inhabit the experience. Otherwise, I risk distancing myself from the moral wrong. Or, I distance and alienate myself from the body (my body!) that received this moral wrong. I run the risk of habituated alienation from my body – which would again negatively impact my moral functioning and my well-being.

Aesthetic attention is not the only attention that can achieve this effect, but reflecting on earlier arguments about acknowledging and seeking out aesthetic experience in daily life helps explain why the aesthetic can make this kind of resistance more effective. Attending to the aesthetics of something and recognizing aesthetic experience as a possible response to our interaction with a thing is a way of valuing that thing.[29] A key component of those earlier arguments was that both seeking out aesthetic experience and appreciating aesthetic experience in areas where we don't expect it helps change our orientation toward those areas. So, as the example above went, appreciating the aesthetic experiences unique to vegetables can help us appreciate vegetables more, and thereby facilitate adopting a vegetable-centric diet. Note that I am not suggesting we aesthetically appreciate being objectified, but rather that we cultivate an aesthetic appreciation of our bodily responses to objectification. Our bodies are the vegetables: aesthetically appreciating bodily responses, particularly the felt responses that are accessible *only to us*, is a way of valuing the body and our affective reactions to the world around us. In situations of oppression, we end up valuing our bodily counter-

[29] Aesthetic appreciation of something doesn't preclude exploitation of it, but I think the case I'm considering is narrowly circumscribed enough to avoid that worry. The worry creeps up in other papers in this dissertation and is probably worth a more involved treatment at a later date.

testimony, helping us to resist the forces structuring that oppression. While other ways of taking stock of our embodiment provide us with the relevant testimony, attending to the aesthetic facets of the testimony help us cultivate an attitude of value toward that testimony. Aesthetically attending to the body also keeps ambiguity salient, thereby preventing us from perpetuating the subject/object split on which some kinds of oppression (such as objectification) rely.

By inhabiting my experience fully, learning the quirks of embodied emotions, I learn to appreciate my body as something that strengthens my subjectivity. Bodily experiences, in the totality of their *feeling* if not their appearances are accessible only subjectively. They are not other-regarding, but private. In their privacy and subjectivity, felt experiences render objectifying comments and gazes incomplete. They offer immediate counter-testimony to the objectifying judgment and suggest other sources of self-understanding and value. In conditions of oppression, it is important to have ideas about what alternatives we might have or make in opposition to oppressive structures. Subjective experience, which says to itself, "but I *am* a person and it does matter how I am treated," offers one such alternative. Aesthetic appreciation of that subjective experience, because of its close relationship with value and worth, gives persuasive power the counter-testimony of our embodiment.

Finally, attention to felt experience helps render the body fully human rather than merely a precondition for objectification or impediment to moral action. It accomplishes this by adjusting our understanding of what having a body *means*. Embodiment still makes us, for example, physically and existentially vulnerable – and I don't think altering our fundamental vulnerability is within philosophy's purview.

However, focusing on the aesthetic possibilities resulting from our embodiment, in that embodiment makes sensuous experience possible, suggests other ways of conceptualizing and experiencing embodiment. On this approach, the body is central to our humanity in that it features prominently and, at least sometimes, positively in our moral lives. The body is furthermore a rich source of meaningful experience, singularly available to embodied beings. Pointing out the conditions of human existence and suggesting new ways to relate to those conditions certainly *is* within philosophy's purview.

VI. Conclusion

By decentering the outward appearance of bodies and attending instead to the specificities of felt experience, we can foreground subjectivity. This reframes the aesthetic in a few ways. First, it makes the aesthetic an aid to our ethical and moral lives. Second, it accomplishes this union by using the aesthetic to redirect attention to our own embodiment and, thereby, our own subjectivity. Third, it presents a positive link between aesthetic experiences and bodily experiences, rather than simply placing the body at the mercy of (often-corrupt) aesthetic values.

The paper further offers reasons to move beyond images of both our moral lives and our aesthetic experiences that, when they acknowledge embodiment's role at all, denigrate the body's role in moral or aesthetic processes. Instead, it suggests ways in which the body positively contributes to our ethico-aesthetic lives and is a worthwhile object of ethical and aesthetic attention. A key feature of these contributions is embodied aesthetic experience's ability to facilitate resistance to oppression by reminding us,

when we experience certain kinds of oppression, of the counter-evidence we can marshal against oppressive narratives and structures. This resistance, as I understand it, is limited: it mostly has to do with our self-understanding, constructing an understanding that allows us to reject the version of ourselves that oppressive narratives and acts, like sexual objectification, propagate. Though it is clearly no replacement for political action and other forms of outward resistance, it may make outward resistance feasible.

3. Respectability Politics as Aesthetic Practice

This paper serves as a philosophical examination of respectability politics, past and present. Respectability politics, I argue, are a specifically aesthetic set of politically-oriented strategies adopted by members of marginalized groups to preserve their bodily integrity. I'll look at two targets of respectability politics: sexual assault and police violence. Both sexual assault and police violence are, in the United States, particularly poignant risks for members of black communities. Consequently, black communities have a long history of everyday strategies for mitigating those risks. Respectability politics, as a distinct, self-conscious approach to the racialized, gendered violence, has used various methods of self-presentation to address this problem. While self-presentation enables a variety of approaches, my focus will be on its aesthetic strategies, effects, and ideas.

Specifically, I explore the way the aesthetic is implicated in communicating adherence to the racialized standard of respectability. Aesthetic choices in self-presentation -- clothing, makeup, and hair styles -- were integral to respectability politics. Advice on and attention to these everyday aesthetic decisions made up a significant part of the politics of respectability. Additionally, respectability politics attempted to unify beauty and respectability, thereby expanding and challenging white supremacist notions of beauty and its attendant moral privileges. In this way, my work also contributes to the ongoing project in feminist philosophy on the role of aesthetic activity and labor in women's lives, and the effect notions of beauty have on women's possibilities. It also points us toward ways of looking at men's everyday aesthetic activity and labor.

Indeed, I'll start by considering a contemporary male account of resistance-oriented aesthetic labor. This example helps us grasp what's currently at stake in respectability politics. I'll then both give a background for the term and explain its relationship with other ethical and aesthetic norms. The third section of the paper returns to the topic of respectable self-presentation, while the fourth looks at the ways notions of beauty, race, and respectability informed each other. The final argumentative portion of the paper (Sections Five and Six) turns its attention toward everyday aesthetics and the connection between everyday aesthetic activity and respect. Respectability politics helps, I argue, illuminate some issues proponents of everyday aesthetics need to consider in order to understand the way everyday aesthetic activity and everyday morality inform each other. Typically, everyday aestheticians focus on the positive potential for this connection, but respectability politics looks like a more complicated example than the everyday aesthetics literature usually treats. However, I'll suggest that turning our attention to the longstanding relationship between respect and everyday aesthetic activity, and considering the multiple directions toward which each of us "points" our respect, helps to resolve the tension.

I. Defensive Dress

After moving from Kingston to New Orleans, the writer Garnette Cadogan describes self-presentation as survival strategy:

> I got out of the shower with the police in my head, assembling a cop-proof wardrobe. Light-colored oxford shirt. V-neck sweater. Khaki pants. Chukkas. Sweatshirt or T-shirt with my university insignia. When I walked I regularly had my identity challenged, but I also found ways to assert it. (So I'd dress Ivy League style, but would, later on, add my Jamaican pedigree by wearing Clarks Desert Boots, the footwear of choice of Jamaican street culture.) Yet the all-

> American sartorial choice of white T-shirt and jeans, which many police officers see as the uniform of black troublemakers, was off-limits to me—at least, if I wanted to have the freedom of movement I desired. (133 – 34)

Cadogan chooses his clothing in order to avoid police attention (that is: police aggression). His description echoes the strategies endorsed by late 19th-century politics of respectability, as described by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Like black Americans in the 19th century, Cadogan claims his respectability, and therefore his moral worth and his right to move through the world unmolested, through his aesthetic choices. However, Cadogan's choices are constrained, reflecting a cultural context into which he has been thrust, and which he must negotiate. Like other uniforms, Cadogan's clothing uses an aesthetic vocabulary to convey an ethical imperative. His clothing choices signal the proper way to treat him. Later, Cadogan describes an embodied, emotional respectability, having to behave calmly, passively, "non-threateningly," when a group of NYPD officers bear him to the ground and rough him up because he (sort of) matches a description (139 – 41). This strategy is also familiar from accounts of black lives, old and new, particularly from contemporary discussions of black parenting practices: "Use your Sunday School manners" (qtd. in Hughes 2014).

The police did not arrest Cadogan, who is alive to tell us about his strategies and about having to employ them. He also knows, because the police captain tells him, that these strategies were effective in preventing his arrest. Cadogan's careful selection of clothing and cultivation of an "un-threatening" manner attempt, in the first instance, to render him invisible (or at least unremarkable), while in the second, they aim at establishing his humanity. However, the kind of humanity Cadogan has to claim in order to survive unmolested in the United States relies on adherence to an inequitable

and unreasonable moral standard. If survival is resistance, and it often is, Cadogan's strategies, which keep him alive, are resistant to white supremacy. But his strategies do not dismantle white supremacy and racial oppression, they only free up some space to live within them. Finding that space is important work, but it is the work of a reformer, rather than a revolutionary. Reform, by its very nature, can only achieve so much, and relies on institutional and cultural continuity, and common ground. Reform can expand and diversify the center, challenge the idea of what and who is marginal and what and who is central, but it rarely challenge the ideas of marginal and central. Distinguishing reform from revolution as approaches to solving problems of injustice, will be helpful for considering respectability politics' historical evolution. The distinction also helps frame some of the limitations of respectability politics as a social and political means of redressing systemic racial injustices.

Finally, Cadogan's essay describes his everyday aesthetic practice as an individual response to a social dynamic. As we will see, when respectability politics are taken to be the method of resistance, rather than one method that aids other forms, individuals assume disproportionate responsibility for their personal well-being. Cadogan's account of his self-presentation is pragmatic, but critical. He recognizes the decisions he makes regarding his self-presentation as important to securing his safety, but also recognizes the disproportionate level of responsibility attributed to him for the results of his interactions with police officers. His approach accommodates the biases and aesthetic preferences of white society. Rather than adopting the "neutral" uniform of white t-shirt and jeans, Cadogan dresses "up" because he finds that in order to read as "neutral" he has to read as educated and middle-class – as "one of the good ones."

Indeed, his reference to "Ivy League style" suggests that Cadogan understands he's aesthetically claiming membership in an American institutional system of comparable power and significance to the police systems. His decisions about his clothing aren't prompted by internalized racial shame, but by a learned understanding of the way his racial identity gets read and the consequences that can follow from that reading. Cadogan makes his accommodations in order to preserve his bodily well-being, another consistent theme in explanations of or justifications for respectability politics.

As a self-conscious strategic decision, respectability politics originated partly as a strategy of racial uplift, and partly as a strategy to help black women avoid sexual assault. The next section of the paper discusses respectability politics' historical origins, its role in racial uplift, and its uses of the aesthetic. The third section looks at what respectable self-presentation involved during the post-Reconstruction and pre-Civil Rights eras. The goal of this first chunk of the paper is to explain the everyday aesthetic strategies respectability politics employed in order to achieve moral, social, and political goals – and also to explain what those goals were. Aesthetics' role in social, political, and moral experience and progress has been much-discussed, but that discussion has focused primarily on artworks and artistic activity.[30] However, everyday aesthetic activity has an equally long history as a tool in social, political, and moral movements – it has just not tended to receive the same level of scholarly attention, nor has it necessarily been recognized as an application of aesthetic concepts.

[30] For example, *A Room of One's Own*, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" and "Criteria of Negro Art."

2. Framing Respectability Aesthetics

Although as a practice, respectability politics has a long history, the term is fairly recent. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined "politics of respectability" in her work *Righteous Discontent*, a history of women's work in the Black Baptist Church from 1880 to 1920. Higginbotham ties the term to processes of racial uplift, which had a special urgency post-Reconstruction, amidst state plans of disenfranchisement (1993, 4). In this context, "politics of respectability" refers to a strategy of racial uplift "that equated public behavior with individual self-respect . . ." (Higginbotham, 1993, 14). Advocates of respectability politics "felt certain that 'respectable' behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America." Higginbotham makes the complex dynamics of black politics of respectability clear: these strategies "rallied the poor working-class blacks to the cause of racial self-help" and support of the black middle-class, but "the effort to forge a community that would command whites' respect revealed class tensions among blacks themselves" (1993, 14-15). In addition to engaging ideas about class and propriety, respectability politics also focused on notions of gender. In fact, Brittney C. Cooper argues that respectability politics "constituted one of the earliest theorizations of gender within newly emancipated Black communities" (2017, 19). In addition to its use of race, respectability politics' use of class and gender contribute to its vexed reception in popular and academic work.

The intra-racial class tensions respectability politics highlighted have been a focus of contemporary criticism of the practice, in part because "class policing that anchors respectability discourse remains persistent and troubling," but Cooper argues this focus on "elitist class politics" sometimes obscures the important work

respectability politics does to address gender-based violence (2017, 15, 19). It also obscures other theoretical work black communities did on their own behalf. Cooper, whose book *Beyond Respectability* positions respectability politics within a broader context of race women's public intellectual service and antiracist work, argues that "the sexual and gender policing at the center of . . . calls for respectability, conservative as they are, emerge as a reasonable, though not particularly laudable, approach to protecting the sanctity of Black women's bodies" (2017, 15). While much of respectability politics' strategic effect was to safeguard the well-being of black women when they entered the homes of white people, Cooper also points out that respectability had a certain urgency for black women who took up the roles of public intellectuals: "cultivating the public platform as a site for Black women to stand [required] making the space as safe as possible for Black women's physical bodies, which would be publicly on display" (2017, 15).

Respectability politics were and are a complex strategy, positioned with an eye toward promoting black flourishing – but using a narrow understanding of what conditions for flourishing might be. The goals of respectability politics are bourgeois goals, in both material and psychological senses. For example, Frederick C. Harris (2014) describes respectability politics as a way of framing "the virtues of self-care and self-correction . . . as strategies to lift the black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy." On this reading, respectability politics locates the underlying problem in poor and working-class black people, particularly their lack of facility with capitalism. Michelle Smith (2014) characterizes respectability politics as arguing, at bottom, that "marginalized classes will receive their share of political

influence and social standing not because democratic values and law require it but because they demonstrate their compatibility with the 'mainstream' or non-marginalized class." Smith notes that compatibility with the mainstream is affective and embodied: for example, in the post-Reconstruction United States, that meant not only practicing chastity but looking chaste. One goal of this section of the paper is to outline what embodied compatibility with the mainstream looks like, historically, and what kinds of behavior are taken as good evidence for that compatibility.

The values of respectability politics were fundamentally Victorian and bourgeois; their exhortations were for "temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals," all the marks of "white middle-class propriety" (Higginbotham 1993, 14, 15). We must acknowledge that Victorian sexual morals make a lot of sense if one is, in fact, Victorian, or even Victorian-adjacent. We must also remember that a goal of respectability politics was to safeguard black women's bodies. However, the primary strategy for achieving this goal was "to make Black women's bodies as inconspicuous and as sexually innocuous as possible" (Cooper, 2017, 9).[31] Black women bore the responsibility for stopping white male objectification. Again, this approach makes a lot of sense: we have some control over our own actions, but only influence (and not always that) over the actions of others. An atmosphere of propriety discourages actions, such as sexual assault, that might violate that propriety, and respectability politics offered tips for conveying the idea of propriety. Further, as Smith writes, proponents of respectability politics assume "propriety breeds respect" –

[31] Alison D. Ligon's "Striving to Dress the Part: Examining the Absence of Black Women in Different Iterations of *Say Yes to the Dress*" discusses some contemporary, intergenerational contexts in which black women are discouraged from displaying their body.

respect for one's status as a moral agent required (and sometimes still requires) adherence to a standard of propriety originating in the white bourgeoisie. Respectability politics didn't just seek lip service to propriety's ideals, but a thorough instantiation of them.

Notions about *im*propriety were similarly robust. Improper behavior, at least for people of color, included '"gaudy' colors in dress, snuff dipping, baseball games on Sunday," communal activities respectability politics fails to acknowledge as "survival strategies . . .[,] spaces of resistance" (Higginbotham 1993, 15). Many strategies Higginbotham describes are familiar in spirit, if not in their details (who dips snuff anymore?), not only to contemporary black people but also to members of other oppressed or "deviant" groups – including women of any race. "What were you wearing?" is still a question asked of women alleging sexual assault, sometimes in court, the implication being that clothing either signals consent or renders consent irrelevant. As Cadogan's earlier account of police-proof dressing and the discussion of hoodies later in this paper indicate, the focus on the way mainstream society "reads" clothing on the bodies of marginalized people continues to encompass both masculinized and feminized identities. "It is not lost on me," writes Cadogan, "that my women friends are those who best understand my plight" (2016, 142).

As Higginbotham writes, black women's "race-conscious programs of self-help" took place both "in concert and . . . in conflict" with black men's social and community organizing (1993, 8). Black women's "self-help" was likewise ambivalently positioned with and against white views of black life. Respectability politics functioned as a rebuke to whites who claimed an inability to "imagine such a creation as a virtuous black

woman" (Higginbotham 190, Wolcott 15). In challenging whites' claim that black women could not be virtuous, black reformers had to negotiate which aspects of whites' accounts of virtue to retain. Disproving negative ideas about black women's ethical possibilities required a common conceptual ground of ethical standards. As a result, the politics of respectability linked to racial uplift challenge a relatively narrow set of normative claims – mostly claims about what kinds of behavior were/are possible for black people – while accepting others, even (especially) racially biased claims, for example, about the good life, ideas of virtue, or what kinds of behavior earn respect from other people.

Mapping respectability politics' sphere(s) of concern clarifies both its microethical focus and aesthetic orientation. By "microethical" I mean a collection of "frequently occurring situations in everyday life in which the stakes are seemingly low but in which there are nonetheless potential conflicts of interest between the individuals involved. Microethical situations are often strategic in nature – that is, the outcomes for each person involved depends [sic] on the actions of the others. . . . It is precisely in these everyday situations that one must regulate oneself" (Sarkissian 2014: 101). Now, sexual violence, police violence, and one's economic prospects are not "situations in everyday life in which the stakes are seemingly low," since the stakes are quite high. Rather, respectability politics are microethical because of the nature of their response to sexual violence, police violence, and racialized economic disparities. They are microethical because of the solutions they offer, not the problems they try to address. Respectability politics offers a proactive response, strategizing ways to forestall conflict or remove the possibility of conflict from everyday social interactions and adjusting the

mundane facets of one's life in order to effect change. The other way in which respectability politics are microethical is in their focus on self-regulation. In the historical cases, the calls for self-regulation seem to follow upon a recognition that mainstream white society will not reliably self-regulate, and so blacks interested in preserving their lives took on a disproportionately large portion of the expectations of self-regulation. A more just society would distribute expectations of self-regulation appropriately.

"Respectability aesthetics," by which I mean the aspects of respectability politics that use an aesthetic vocabulary to argue for an agent's respectability, are a particular kind of microethical strategy. Neither Higginbotham nor Victoria Wolcott, the two historians on whom I will rely, explicitly positions the politics of respectability as a project of aesthetics. Nor do they use the term "microethics," which is fairly recent in the philosophy literature. However, both Higginbotham and Wolcott emphasize moral or ethical dynamics expressed through certain kinds of everyday behavior and acts of self-presentation. For Higginbotham, as I have already mentioned, the arenas of respectability politics were primarily the social aspects of religious and domestic life. Wolcott's analysis includes those spheres but extends to cover employment opportunities.[32]

The next section of the paper highlights aesthetic significance in respectability politics. The aesthetic comes to prominence in roughly three areas of respectability politics: self-presentation, manners, and domestic labor. My focus here is on self-

[32] Of course, there are going to be subtle differences between the two accounts, since Higginbotham's and Wolcott's analyses focus on different time periods and geographic locations, in addition to the years separating their books.

presentation; however domestic labor and manners overlap, at least in the context of respectability politics, with self-presentation – so I'll say a little bit about the aesthetic relevance of each. Thinking of manners, self-presentation, and domestic labor as aesthetic practices, or as practices evaluated and experienced through aesthetic categories, does not exhaust their philosophical interest, but aesthetic standards and experiences play a prominent role in each field. Self-presentation is probably the most intuitively aesthetic, since it encompasses things like dress and hair style, familiar objects of aesthetic interest. Manners are a kind of aestheticized behavior, particularly when the govern the way we display and orient our bodies.[33] Manners also overlap with etiquette, a set of practices in which aesthetic experience play a significant role. Lastly, domestic labor in the context of respectability politics included not only work outside the home but the care of one's own home. Values like neatness, cleanliness, and tidiness take on aesthetic significance in the home. Furthermore, decisions about the way one's home looks and feels may, like getting dressed, simply account for baseline physical needs – but often involve elaborate sensory pleasures and experiences and allow the exercise of personal taste.

Aestheticized behavior follows norms of respectability into public and private spheres. Higginbotham writes that the politics of respectability endorsed and enacted by 19th-century black Baptist church women "equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group" (1993, 14). On this approach, public and private patterns of behavior mutually inform judgments of individual moral character and the moral standing of one's community. Randall

[33] For more work on manners and aesthetics see Allen (1976), Stanek (2009), Stohr (2016).

Kennedy formulates the respectability politics with which he grew up as "a particular sense of racial kinship: in our dealings with the white world, we were encouraged to think of ourselves as ambassadors of blackness. Our achievements would advance the race, and our failures would hinder it. The fulfillment of our racial obligations required that we speak well, dress suitably, and mind our manners" (2015). Because respectability politics make one's private life (dress, sexual morality and family life might typically be thought of as aspects of private, or personal, life) relevant to public life (the political status of one's community), the aesthetic features of private lives purported to give good evidence for respectability – such as a clean home and children wearing neat clothes – become relevant to one's experience of public life. In addition, much of the ethico-aesthetic respectability signaling is embodied, and therefore follows a person into their many social contexts. Respectability politics, in sum, are pervasive.

My exploration of the relationship between respectability and self-presentation focuses primarily on clothing and hygiene. I also discuss comportment, particularly in the public sphere, which sometimes bleeds into self-presentation and which, like manners and domestic labor, received a great deal of attention from reformers. Section 3 details what respectable self-presentation involved, while Section 4 discusses the relationship between respectability and beauty. Presenting black women as beautiful was a strategy for racial uplift (and remains an anti-racist project today) and was frequently used by reformers advocating respectability politics to highlight moral worth.

III. Respectable Self-Presentation

Self-presentation is difficult to disentangle from questions of manners and civility, especially in the context of respectability politics. Likewise, self-presentation has a lot to do with the way one arranges living space, as well as the body. My divisions are not neat ones. One useful feature of respectability politics is the way it situates individuals against a wider communal context (of course, this is closely related to the harms it does, too). Furthermore, the guiding principles of self-presentation – that is, ethico-aesthetic ideals such as civility and cleanliness – manifest in the context of manners and domesticity as well as in ways of presenting one's body and self to other people. I will start by looking at clothing, personal hygiene, and other material bodily aesthetic practices. Strategies of respectable self-presentation emphasized hygiene, dress, and comportment as methods of "contest[ing] the plethora of negative stereotypes" of black women (Higginbotham 1993, 191). These strategies adapted to respond to new situations and challenges, encompassing not just black women and their justified fears of sexual assault, but migrants to northern cities. Respectability also became important to middle-class black people as a way of preserving their class status and of being, in Kennedy's phrase, "ambassadors of blackness." Kennedy's ambassador metaphor is helpful for giving us a clue as to the aesthetic impression (as opposed to the moral impression) that respectability politics aimed to achieve. The goal of respectability politics seems to be bodily neutrality, achieved through blandness.

One strategy for persuading black people to take up the respectability project was the distribution of pamphlets describing *how* to be respectable. The Women's Convention, leading the post-Reconstruction charge in respectability politics,

distributed “tract literature” guiding members of the black community through various everyday acts of self-presentation, including “How to Dress” and “Take a Bath First” (Higginbotham 1993, 195). For black women, conveying the image of respectability was a way of guarding against sexual assault (Higginbotham 1993, 193-94). In the process, women’s clothing – one of the most obvious and accessible means of aesthetic expression available – came under close scrutiny. It is not surprising to hear that young women were urged to modest dress (where modesty is defined by some “mainstream” source), but navigating the norms of respectable clothing required more than dressing modestly. The colors of women’s clothing mattered, too, with “bright colors and other culturally unique designs . . . characterized as dissipating the high ideals of young women” (Higginbotham 1993, 200). The thinking here seems to have been not only that bright colors would draw attention neutrals wouldn’t, and that brightly colored clothing suggested greed or sexual license, but also that aesthetic aspects of cultural identity were risky – perhaps anti-assimilationist, perhaps “uncivilized.” Guarding young women’s well-being, by supplying them with appropriate clothing and the proper habits of bodily care, became the responsibilities of mothers.

In the midst of the Great Migration, with African Americans pouring into northern cities in search of better work and wages, a division between “old settler” Northern blacks and Southern migrants developed. In part, this division was because migrants appeared disreputable and often lacked the resources to alter their appearance. Additionally, “city” dress and “country” dress might command different modes of self-presentation. The contrast between these two styles of dress led the Detroit Urban League to view black women migrants as contributing to increased segregation because,

in the words of Forrester B. Washington, "loud, noisy, almost nude women in 'Mother Hubbards' standing around in the public thoroughfares" affirmed the image of black women as slatternly and indifferent to norms of propriety (qtd. in Wolcott 56). Washington made this claim in a speech establishing the Dress Well Club, the goals of which the club's name made clear. Club members "distributed cards and pamphlets on the importance of dressing well to migrants arriving at train stations" as well as people already living in Detroit (Wolcott 57). The cards detailed the way women should dress, particularly that they should wear public clothes, not "bungalow aprons and boudoir caps" which marked the wearer as a domestic servant (qtd. in Wolcott 57). Other kinds of "distinctly Southern" dress, for example "wearing of work clothes in public spaces, not wearing shoes in public" attracted negative attention from black reformers, not only in Detroit but in other northern cities like Chicago (Wolcott 2001, 58).

Dressing well also meant wearing your hair in the right way. Respectable hairstyles became another kind of responsibility for mothers. The Dress Well Club advised women on ways to style their children's hair – or rather, on styles to avoid (Wolcott 2001, 57). The cultural and moral significance attached to women's hair is not news (hair has been moralized since, at least, the Bible), and its significance in anti-racist activity extends into the current day. I discuss the ethico-aesthetic contextualizing black hair, and black women's hair particularly, in more detail in "The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life," but the topic is a rich one.[34] Respectability politics, as a strategy for racial uplift treated hair as a source of both pride and shame. Inasmuch as the way one wore one's hair indicated pride in one's racial identity, rather than

[34] See Tate 2009, Gill 2010, Byrd and Tharps 2014, and Taylor 2000 and 2016.

bowing to white beauty standards, it coincided with notions of respectable self-presentation. At the same time, simply leaving hair to grow naturally (whatever that might be), even if it is well-kept, was definitely *disreputable*.

The kinds of self-presentation demanded by respectability politics extend beyond bodily *appearances*. Another problem reformers tackled were "racist representations of black women as unclean, disease-carrying, and promiscuous, conjoined with representations of black households as dirty, pathological, and disorderly" (Higginbotham 1993, 202). Adherents of respectability politics were "helped" to order their bodies by practicing "good" hygiene. Though a pamphlet with advice on how to get rid of bed bugs is useful (depending on the advice, anyway), and perhaps even racially neutral, the white slur that blacks were fundamentally dirty renders advice about bodily care more fraught. Not only was the sight of flesh governed, but the smell of it. Before playing a basketball game against a white team from Grosse Pointe, the black girls from Center Girls Five bathed and donned freshly washed uniforms (Wolcott 2001, 63). It wasn't simply a question of "smelling nice," either – perfumes were risky. Too-generous applications of artificial scent at a 1921 Detroit baseball game, attended by a racially mixed audience, earned comments in the white press (Wolcott 2001, 39). Cosmetics were an instrument of feminine rebellion in the 20s, acceptable if not quite respectable. In the 1920s, middle- and upper-middle-class white women could publicly apply lipstick to signal their disregard for old-fashioned values, including notions of feminine propriety, without necessarily signaling their sexual availability. For black women still wrestling with hypersexualization, a

version of modesty that directed attention away from the body took precedence over flouting traditional sexual mores.

Other pamphlets offered guidance on how to behave while traveling, suggesting a body aesthetic beyond the visible (Higginbotham 1993, 195). The advice to travelers directs the reader through negotiating public space both physically and aurally: "Don't stick your head out of the window at every station . . . don't talk so loud to your friends who may be on the platform that a person a block away may hear you" (qtd. in Higginbotham 195). These pieces of advice do encourage a kind of consideration of other people's comfort, but also suggest that for black Americans the best way to make other people comfortable is to be silent and invisible. Contemporary political scientist Michelle Smith (2014) describes an encounter between a young black man and an older woman of unidentified race in a public meeting about activism and the relationship between black communities and police departments. The older woman tells the young man, "It's important to look respectful and talk in a respectful way!" Smith notes that the young man "lacked recognizable signs of decorum like belted pants, a collared shirt, *disciplined speech and above all, calm*" (emphasis added). That is, the young man did not present himself in the way Garnette Cadogan had learned to present himself.

In eschewing sounds, movements, smells, and colors, respectability politics often seems to offer lessons in total physical and aesthetic neutrality. That is, they are lessons in erasure – of culture, of self, of embodiment. In a society built on racial oppression, respectability politics provided a method of resistance to mainstream characterizations of black people and their communities, but in so doing upheld an unreasonable standard for personhood. White people did not have to meet the standard

of respectability in order to be considered persons. They did not have to strive for physical and aesthetic neutrality because whiteness was, and still is, neutral.

The next section of the paper addresses the role beauty norms played in racial uplift and respectability politics. Pushing out the borders of beauty was also an important antiracist and aesthetic project for advocates of respectability politics. However, arguing for one's own beauty is quite a different aesthetic project than striving to make oneself physically neutral and aesthetically bland. The two aesthetic strategies share a motivating force, the motivating force common to the politics of respectability: claiming humanity for black people. For black women in particular, both blandness and beauty are ways to reject hypersexualization and sexual objectification by white society. The first strategy makes you invisible while the second re-contextualizes your visibility.

IV. Respectable Beauty

The politics of respectability participated in a longstanding tradition of treating beauty as a sign of moral worth. The tactics of self-presentation on which respectability politics rely include, as we have seen, aesthetic activity aiming at something much milder than beauty; however, they also involved arguments that black women *could* be beautiful. Beauty, as well as beautification, played a significant role in the process of claiming respectability and its protections. In this section of the paper, I describe first the unification of beauty with respectability and second the way beautification practices aiming at more quotidian aesthetic norms informed judgments of respectability**.** In so doing, we can see both the place respectability politics can occupy in the existing

philosophical debate about the unity of beauty and virtue, and the way respectability politics helps flesh out aesthetic activity that does not aim *exactly* at beauty.

Roughly two kinds of beauty have been taken as signs or symbols of morality: artistic beauty and personal (or bodily) beauty. Both kinds cause problems, but I am concerned here with bodies not artworks, so I will leave those problems to the attention of others. In the interests of further narrowing this discussion to something like manageability, I will put to the side questions of male bodily beauty, particularly given respectability politics' special focus on women's bodies and self-presentation. Additionally, as Paul C. Taylor has pointed out, antiracist "aestheticist[s'] concern with beauty tends to be a concern with female beauty . . . since current social conditions make physical appearance central to the construction of womanhood and femininity and fairly peripheral to the construction of manhood and masculinity" (2016, 60). Like other conversations about beauty, the conversation at the center of what Taylor terms "antiracist aestheticism" "more or less reduces to talk about womanhood, femininity, and women" (2016, 57, 60). In 19th-century America, the link between aesthetic norms and gender norms meant that women were instructed to pursue virtue and beauty simultaneously. Virtuous women were beautiful women. Sometimes beauty constituted feminine virtue, sometimes the activity of being a beautiful woman (consistently meeting beauty standards takes some care) was the kind of activity in which virtuous women should engage. Beauty norms required self-presentation in accordance with middle-class aesthetic standards, and a woman's record of according with those standards was supposed to be both evidence for her virtue and, in some cases, the proper activity of virtue.

The perceived link between beauty and virtue manifested in complex norms: as a belief that physical features conveyed information about character, as a distrust of beautification practices and artifice, as a debate about the kind of self-cultivation women could justify. Most importantly for tracking the influence conceptions of feminine beauty had upon reformers working for racial equality, the assumed link between beauty and virtue acted as justification for the way one treated individual women. Mainstream feminine beauty meant looking like a white, middle- or upper-class, able-bodied woman, in concert with whatever individual quirks of appearance a woman might have, so a woman might be beautiful simply if she had sufficiently European features, an economic situation that provided her with attractive and well-kept clothing, and good luck with her personal health. She would look beautiful and virtuous. If a woman did not appear virtuous, she could fairly be treated as if she wasn't. I suspect that line of reasoning sounds familiar to most of us, because it persists today. Furthermore, when the beauty standards, and related aesthetic judgments, that signal virtue are fundamentally white, excluding groups of people from beauty effectively perpetuates racial inequality and white supremacy.

In his review of Stephen Frears' 1989 *Dangerous Liaisons*, Hal Hinson draws attention to Michelle Pfeiffer's performance of the virtuous Madame de Tourvel. Virtue is tricky: "nothing is harder to play. . .and Pfeiffer is smart enough not to try. Instead, she embodies it. Her porcelain-skinned beauty, in this regard, is a great asset, and the way it's used makes it seem an aspect of her spirituality. Her purity shines through her pores." Madame de Tourvel appears virtuous, and this appearance of virtue is tied up

with her beauty.[35] Were Madame de Tourvel's beauty less "pure," her moral character would take some discovering from the audience and, presumably, from other characters in the film, including the Vicomte de Valmont, who intends to seduce her. Tourvel would be a less striking target if either her purity or her beauty needed seeking out, but, as it happens, her moral purity coincides with an aesthetic purity, too. Hinson's comment picks up on a pervasive theme in the unity of women's virtue and appearance: "hair, skin, and eye color frequently stood as signs of women's virtue" (Peiss 2012, 24). In addition to modest dress, an unpainted face (more on this later), and correct manners, a good woman had a good complexion. Good skin was white skin.

Certainly, white skin's desirability tracked multiple ways of understanding social and ethical value. White skin indicated class status: not only indicating a woman did not have to engage in bodily labor to support herself, but in the United States making her eligible for certain other kinds of genteel jobs (Peiss 2012, 232). White skin also tracked white women's ethnicity and family history: "to be a lady is to be as white as it gets" (Dyer 57). The value placed on white skin reflected racist beauty standards. Indeed, Anglo-American beauty ideals "were continually asserted in relation to people of color around the world" (Peiss 2012, 31). But black Americans' purported "ugliness" certainly formed the definitive comparison for white beauty, constituting the "antipode of the dominant American beauty ideal" (Peiss 2012, 33). Whites used stereotypes of "kinky hair, dirty or ragged clothing, apish caricatures, shiny black faces" to justify dehumanizing treatment of African Americans, including denial of full participation in social and political life (Peiss 2012, 33). That is, though Madame de Tourvel's purity

[35] This is quite a different way of appearing virtuous than the kind Julia Driver discusses in "Caesar's Wife."

might shine through her pores, and so too would the purity of women with pores like hers, black women were not afforded the same ethico-aesthetic privilege. While "the widespread assumption that bodily beauty and deformity covary with moral beauty and deformity as well as with general cultural and intellectual capacity" prevailed, black women's skin color prevented their making any claim to purity, virtue or, even, humanity (Taylor 2016, 58).

No surprise, then, that physical beauty is a "long-standing preoccupation [of] African-American activists" (Taylor 2016, 57). In fact, claiming physical beauty for black women often coincided with claiming respectability, and with efforts toward economic empowerment and racial uplift. Black bodies, never exactly neutral in the history of the United States, became, in the context of post-Reconstruction civil protests "a subject in the debate over collective identity and action. As lecturer and author E. Azalia Hackley put it, 'The time has come to fight, not only for rights, but for looks as well'" (Peiss 2012, 204). Beauty could not simply be assumed – it had to be, and was, fought for. The project was partly pragmatic, as when reformers sent black women who conformed, to the extent possible, to white beauty standards on job interviews, or prioritized light-skinned women's opportunities over dark-skinned women's. Women who looked less black, so to speak, were thought to have better chances at gaining jobs in factories or department stories that might not otherwise be open to women. By acting as the thin end of the wedge, these women, it was thought, would open up opportunities for other African Americans.

In other ways, the project was liberatory.[36] By "fighting for looks," reformers reclaimed beauty from its alliance with whiteness, even while they retained (though sometimes with a great deal of skepticism) the alliance of beauty with virtue. So long as beauty and virtue were seen, for women, as closely allied and, at least sometimes, as coinciding, pointing out that black women could be beautiful was a way of claiming that black women could also be virtuous. The claim to virtue mattered because it improved their moral standing in a racist society. The claim to beauty mattered directly, too – I'll discuss this in more detail later. First, I want to draw a tighter link between virtue and respectability.

Virtue and respectability aren't precisely the same thing, of course. In the context of 19th-century American women's lives, however, they seemed to stand in for each other – in part because the standards for women's virtue were so narrow. While masculinity offered any number of avenues to virtue, femininity was "bound . . .to ideals of sexual chastity and transcendent purity" (Peiss 2012, 24). Women who guarded their virtue were really guarding their sexuality, not aspiring to wisdom, courage, or hope (at best, wisdom, courage, and hope were variations on preserving sexual purity). Women who were categorically ugly – that is, ugly by virtue of their racialization – were presumed to have no virtue to guard. Like virtue, respectability was closely linked with sexual purity, and presenting as respectable was a way of presenting as ineligible for consequence-free sexual violence. Respectability, like virtue, is also complex, and encompasses various ways of relating to other people, caring for one's

[36] I explore this is more detail in "The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life."

physical-social environment, and fulfilling various social roles (particularly, in this case of respectability, feminized roles).

I want to close this section by recognizing a contrary, but similarly familiar, strand of thinking about the relationship between beauty and goodness. Though the mainstream view placed great faith in beauty, there is also a second narrative of suspicion of beauty: "beauty, or some near kin of it, is unsavory, a temptation that might get the soul off-track" (Higgins 2000, 89). On this view, beauty distracts, seduces, and deceives us as to the actual value of the object or person in which it inheres – it becomes like La Belle Dame sans Merci: beguiling and destructive. Kathleen Higgins suggests that "the impression that beauty is a cheap deception stems from our cultural failure to distinguish beauty from kitsch" and that this failure is clearly manifest in "our ideology regarding female beauty" (Higgins 2000, 92). She suggests we distinguish beauty from the related aesthetic ideals of glamour and flawlessness, both of which are ultimately ethically unsatisfying and, in the case of glamour, deceptive. Beauty, in Higgins' understanding, has much more to do with our well-being, "an ideal of balance and health that is neither self-conscious nor a direct consequence of deliberate effort" (2000, 104). Both our love of beauty and our longing for it are (or ought to be) tied up with our ethical projects, "subordinated into the larger aspiration for wholeness as a human being, a goal that involves a whole ethical agenda" (2000, 105). In judging others to be beautiful, then, we see them as "radiant, and this radiance depends on a wholeness that we take to include the person's inner life" (2000, 105).

I don't have time to unpack all of Higgins' ideas here, so I want to explain the ways her argument speaks to the situation of respectability politics and, more generally,

the situation of disadvantaged groups who are disadvantaged in part because society at large denies them both the "purely" aesthetic judgments of beauty and therefore its ethical clout too. I agree with Higgins that mistrusting beauty relies on a mistake in our thinking about what the beautiful properly is. And, furthermore, Higgins' position recalls the critical moves made by black reformers within the context of respectability politics. Well aware that those exemplifying white beauty standards might indeed be morally bankrupt, African Americans challenged the link between morality and white beauty standards, and thought carefully about constructing alternatives: both the need for alternatives, and how those alternatives might look. Higgins suggests that the proper approach to beauty is something like "tak[ing] our own beauty for granted" (2000, 106). Higgins draws a parallel between health and beauty, arguing "as it is healthy to assume that we are healthy unless we are sick" we should also assume we are beautiful (2000, 106). This attitude prevents beauty or health from becoming a perverse obsession; it likewise removes the need to "prove" one is beautiful/healthy. When you assume beauty (or health) as a default setting, other people's opinions on the matter carry much less weight.

Higgins's suggestion is appealing – but difficult to pull it off if the world around you is constructed to prevent the possibility of your being beautiful. Yet it may be the kind of attitude that enables a more thorough resistance. Some of the reformers "fighting for looks" must have taken their own beauty, if not precisely "for granted," at least as self-evident.

V. The Problem for Everyday Aesthetics

Everyday aesthetics is meant to have in its favor a capacity for enriching our moral lives. The arguments in favor of this capacity are convincing, and I do not want to discount them.[37] Though this part of the paper articulates what I see as a problem for everyday aesthetics as a facet of ethics, my goal is to encourage conversation, not quash it. The problem I see is that everyday aesthetics gives us the toolkit for understanding what makes respectability politics effective and compelling as a response to oppression that makes concessions to the dominant aesthetic and moral viewpoint in the interests of facilitating certain kinds of resistance work, but does not help us see what is unjust in the intersection of aesthetic activity and ethical content. To contextualize the problem I raise, I'll discuss some other worries people sometimes have about everyday aesthetics, before exploring the ways respectability politics both fails and perseveres. I then discuss the moral problem of respectability – specifically, enshrining unequal expectations and responsibility for alleviating oppression – and why it matters to advocates of everyday aesthetics. Section Five, by way of contrast, discusses a much more opposition mode of self-presentation and suggests it a model of resistant, but not reformist, activity.

I am not the first to suggest that everyday aesthetics has to meet certain challenges. Yuriko Saito highlights one problem: the risk of aestheticizing, for example, such that poverty becomes "picturesque," palatable to the privileged, and secure (2007, 191ff). In Saito's cases, the risk is that everyday aesthetics renders injustice beautiful, thereby encouraging the oppressed to accept their oppression. (The criticism gets leveled at certain kinds of artworks, too: for example, the film *Slumdog Millionaire* was accused of glamorizing poverty.) The problem I identify is different since, at least in

[37] For example: Weiss 1998, Saito 2007 and 2016.

their historical contexts, respectability politics were a strategy of resistance, not complacency. That is, they did not encourage black Americans to dwell in their material inequality, but sought to teach them how to change it. However, there may be a second problem, for which respectability politics is a kind of case study, closer to the worry about complacency. Respectability politics called on black communities to value their material environment, particularly the home environment. In one sense, this might place special value on traditionally feminized and degraded work such that the entire community reevaluates both its attitudes toward gender and its attitudes toward its physical environment. However, the work still might remain "women's work," and its newfound value a way of keeping women in their place. A fuller exploration of this problem belongs to another paper. Again, the problem I focus on here has less to do with complacency than with resistance.

In order to see the problem respectability politics pose for everyday aesthetics, we need to acknowledge that respectability politics are problematically constrained in their ability to resist gender- and race-based violence. Perhaps the claim that respectability politics don't work reads oddly when I began this paper with a story about just how effective they still are at saving black men from trouble from the police.[38] Other counter-examples leap to mind: Rosa Parks, for one, made for an effective example in the Civil Rights movement because she was respectable, more respectable than Claudette Colvin, for example. What distinguishes Cadogan and post-Reconstruction respectability politics from Parks is that Parks and her contemporaries used the appearance of respectability to make their resistance more effective. Their

[38] Special thanks to Brian Soucek and Sherri Irvin for pushing this point and helping me clarify my thinking, and to whom I owe some of the counterexamples.

actual targets were institutional methods of perpetuating racial subjugation. However, the modes of dress and comportment urged by post-Reconstruction reformers actually *constituted* their resistance. It was not their only method of resistance, but it was a method in itself. Claiming respectability *was* the resistance, and it was resistance enacted through aesthetic methods. Cadogan's clothing is somewhere between Parks's self-presentation and the respectable self-presentation of post-Reconstruction era. Cadogan dresses the way he does to make his life easier, and to keep himself safe (which is like the original case), but his goal is not respectability. His goal is to avoid arrest, brutalization, and death. All three cases make concessions to mainstream values, but in the modern cases these concessions are pragmatic, not convicted.

The modern cases are kin to the Talk, briefly referenced at the beginning of this paper, black families have with their children about how to behave in (or avoid) encounters with police. These Talks, as Jazmine Hughes' work shows, are often about how to accommodate unreasonable demands from the police in order to avoid brutality of various kinds. The Talks instruct children to negotiate power structures from a disadvantaged position *without* conceding the legitimacy of those power structures. Based on the analysis of historians like Higginbotham and Wolcott, and on the words of reformers themselves, the goal of post-reconstruction reformers advocating respectability politics was to become part of the power structures. Respectability advocates affirmed the legitimacy of the power structures, even while they disagreed about who belonged in the echelons. They questioned the particular intersection of racism and misogyny, but not the belief in sexual purity (the whole point was that black women had a right to sexual purity as much as white women did), bourgeois comfort

(the project was supposed to make bourgeois comfort more widely available), or the (white) signs by which these values were communicated.

Rather than breaking down a dysfunctional social system, respectability politics teaches disadvantaged groups how to navigate that system. While it is good to know how to walk around a city without drawing police attention, or how to discourage an employer's sexual interest, it is much better to not have to worry about those things. Learning to navigate the system leaves the system in place. Effectively, respectability politics place an extra burden on an already over-burdened group. Respectability politics "attributed institutional racism to the 'negative' public behavior," where, as the above discussions indicate, "negative" behavior could be fairly mild (Higginbotham 1993, 15). Randall Kennedy, writing in defense of respectability politics, acerbically and critically describes the version he grew up with as dividing the black population into "Good Negroes" and "Bad Negroes." Not only did it, at least sometimes, cast the oppressed as responsible for alleviating their oppression, but it also denied them the full enjoyment of their community by characterizing the community's social life as dissolute. Respectability politics targets a symptom of injustice, rather than injustice itself. That symptom needed addressing, and respectability politics took important steps toward redress, but it does not step beyond the role of reform. Respectability politics made strategic sense in post-Reconstruction United States, with their vivid need for survival strategies and for counter-messages to the mainstream ideas about what African Americans were like. Respectability politics are an expedient and reformist response to gendered and racialized violence – in this sense, it is difficult to take issue with them. However, respectability politics took on significance beyond the strategic

and expedient. Respectability politics' persistence and evolution give partial evidence for their more-than-strategic significance (and for the fact that racial and gender justice have not improved as much as they ought), but Brittney C. Cooper's work suggests that respectability as an ideal and respectability politics as a method persist in part because of a conceptual confusion (that respectability and dignity are the same) and because respectability played an important role in creating ideas of gender and personhood within black communities.

Cooper, drawing on Anna Julia Cooper's work in *Voice from the South,* differentiates calls for dignity from calls for respectability. These differ in that "demands for dignity are demands for a fundamental recognition of one's inherent humanity. Demands for respectability assume that unassailable social propriety will prove one's dignity. Dignity, unlike respectability, is not socially contingent. It is intrinsic, and, therefore, not up for debate" (2017, 5). When both dignity and respectability are denied to a group, it might make sense to demand the two together, especially if a supposed lack of respectability is taken as permission for denying dignity. With Cooper's distinction in mind, we can better understand the problems that arise when the politics of respectability become more than highly contextualized response to conditions on the ground. Recall that Cooper argues that the politics of respectability "provided a foundation for articulating what a Black woman or a Black man actually was" (2017, 21). By centering black communities' awareness of their own humanity, respectability politics resisted the dominant dehumanizing narratives from the white mainstream. Respectability politics, therefore, did theoretical as well as practical work, both important projects for resistance and uplift. That practical and

strategic work no doubt contributes to their longevity, but Cooper suggests the theory is important, too: "ridding ourselves of respectability would mean completely upending the gender system that Black people, particularly Black women, theorized and created after Reconstruction" (2017, 21).

In respectability politics, we have a set of practices that recognizes the significance of aesthetic behaviors for communicating with other people. The practices assume the intersection of everyday aesthetic activities like self-presentation with everyday morality and take that assumption as a starting point for redressing pervasive racial and sexual injustice. However, rather than correcting structures of injustice, respectability politics "corrects" individual behavior, specifically the individual behavior of the oppressed.[39] The result is a complex series of behaviors: blaming the victim, excoriating the villain, offering strategies to head off further abuses. If a "perk" of everyday aesthetics is that by paying attention to our aesthetic reactions to the material qualities of the world around us, we can alter our patterns of behavior to be more in line with the dictates of morality – and let me reiterate that I *do* think this is something everyday aesthetics enables – then the case of respectability politics should bother us. At least in this case, everyday aesthetic activity may improve some of our lives, but it's not clear that it makes us better moral agents, and it might make us worse. That is, the problem is not with the aesthetic side of everyday aesthetics, but with the moral purpose to which aesthetics are put. Investing in the everyday and its ethico-aesthetic significance looks like it sometimes misleads us about where our attention belongs and about what actions further justice.

[39] I don't mean to deny that oppressed people can err, only that the oppressed bear the most responsibility for injustices committed against them.

In most cases, and definitely in the early iterations of respectability politics, this worry is distinct from worries about aestheticizing injustice and promoting moral complacency about the existence of certain kinds of injustice. The history of respectability politics is not a complacent history, but a highly motivated and tactical one. Pre-Civil Rights iterations of respectability politics had an acute awareness of sexual, social, and economic injustices, and were formulated as a response to those injustices. Cadogan's contemporary account explains his choice of dress as both tactical and personally meaningful (not just in the sense that it preserves his well-being, but in the sense that he incorporates his Jamaican background by wearing Clarks desert boots). Like earlier practitioners of respectability politics, Cadogan uses self-presentation to resist violence. However, it seems clear that despite his resistance's personal efficacy – which, again, I do not want to underrate – its scope is limited. Yet, in both Cadogan's case and the early cases, cultivating respectability is a complex and time-consuming project. So, the worry is about how to prevent the aesthetic from misleading us on points of justice. In that case, we need some guidance to the intersection of justice and aesthetics, the individual and the structural.

Here, I think those of us interested in everyday aesthetics and the promise it holds for resistance are well-served by turning our attention to the longstanding relationship between aesthetic activity and communications of respect, particularly in a more confrontational mode than that of respectability politics. We turn to this topic in the next section.

VI. Aesthetics and Respect

In "Should Black Kids Avoid Wearing Hoodies?", Chike Jeffers considers what it means when black kids (particularly black boys) wear hoodies, but my interest is in his discussion of sagging pants, "a style popular among black kids that is undoubtedly, unmistakably controversial" (2013, 135). While there are official bans against sagging one's pants in some places, Jeffers also notes "vociferous . . . opposition to the practice" within the black community, particularly among adults (2013, 135). Jeffers offers some ways of understanding this opposition without recourse to Eurocentric standards:

> one might see the practice as communicating . . . a basic message of disregard for oneself and others . . . it can be seen as symbolizing a fundamental lack of seriousness about life. Such a message is clearly one to be avoided if black kids are to avoid reproducing the old stereotype of black people as constitutionally *lazy*. (135-36, Jeffers's emphasis)

On these grounds, opposition to sagging pants is compatible with antiracist resistance, particularly if one's resistance focuses on a sense of self-worth or, as Frederick Harris put it earlier, self-care and self-correction. Additionally, countering stereotypes (especially negative stereotypes) of one's community is important resistance work, given the role stereotypes play in certain kinds of oppression. Jeffers also suggests another way of "reading" sagging pants: as communicating "an unruly sense of *freedom* and the refusal of *black cool* to be kept tightly bound. Such a message is not so much self-denigrating as it is pointedly anti-assimilationist" (136, Jeffers's emphasis). Jeffers' readings of both the pro-sagging and anti-sagging sides of the debate highlight the diversity of meanings either held within the practice or read into it by its practitioners or detractors. Both sides seem in agreement that self-presentation matters and helps communicate certain values but disagree on what values this particular practice

communicates. This kind of disagreement occurs in other contexts, too, and has for some time. After I finish discussing Jeffers' analysis of the practice of sagging, I'll discuss this kind of disagreement over aestheticized practices and the values they communicate.

The opposition to sagging, as outlined by Jeffers, looks an awful lot like an updated respectability politics. One could imagine the members of the Dress Well Club handing out a pamphlet called "Wear a Belt." Jeffers' defense of sagging hinges on values firmly opposed to respectability politics as traditionally practiced: unruliness, black cool, and anti-assimilationism. On this reading, sagging does not communicate one's respectability, but rejection of mainstream standards of respectability – and, perhaps, of the presumption, as Cooper put it, that dignity must be proved, that it can be proved by our physical appearance. Jeffers presents a reading of sagging pants that promotes some of the abstract goals of racial uplift, yet rebukes the assumptions of respectability politics, particularly the assimilationist assumptions. Sagging pants, which can become quite elaborate, definitely does not convey an aesthetics of blandness or neutrality. Though young men who sag their pants generally do not display much skin, the act does seem to call attention to, rather than downplay, the body. As a resistant, vibrant, and non-assimilationist aesthetic choice, sagging is similar to the promotion of natural hair styles among black communities after the Civil Rights movement. There are important differences – I've yet to encounter an argument that black youth have a moral/aesthetic obligation to sag their pants, while (perhaps because of its physical intimacy) the morally- and politically-focused discussion about proper treatment and arrangement of black hair in the United States dates, at least, to the 19th

century. The two strains of self-presentation share their anti-assimilationist bent, rejecting white standards of acceptable appearances for black bodies. I want to go beyond Jeffers's discussion and suggest that both kinds of self-presentation tap into a longstanding assumption: respect inflects our everyday aesthetic practices, even in the case of sagging pants.

Part of Jeffers's defense of sagging pants points to the way they can be read as cluing into an "alternative" value system. That is, the wearers of sagging pants do not choose to valorize middle-class values, black or white – at least, not *while* they wear sagging pants: Jeffers points out that the same person may sag their pants on the street and wear a suit to their cousin's baptism. By sagging their pants, black youths communicate a respect for the values of freedom and black cool. We might also read them as communicating respect for the oppressed community of which they are members and rejecting (at least sometimes) the purported benefits that come with assimilation. Perhaps there is something right in reading sagging pants as disrespectful or as confrontational, but this one-sided reading neglects to consider what alternative objects of respect are claimed by the practice. Jeffers suggests that the anti-assimilationist reading of sagging pants should take priority – his reading privileges the way wearers of sagging pants understand their own actions, within the context of their lives. By contrast, dismissive or hostile readings of sagging pants privilege perspectives belonging to groups with more social security, who fall closer to (or even directly within) the mainstream and frame the young people wearing sagging pants in mainstream terms.

Jeffers and the wearers of sagging pants find an admittedly unlikely ally in Confucian philosophy (I am not going to speculate about what Confucius himself might have thought). Confucian philosophers, particularly in *Analects* and *Xunzi*, emphasize the importance of bodily comportment in conveying respect for people and institutions. Given the historical context of these texts, those people and institutions tended to be conservative: patriarchal family structures, rulers, and so on. Ritual, or *li*, is a frequent object of respect and veneration, and also happens to be the means of expressing respect (or other appropriate attitudes and emotions). Communicating one's proper respect for *li* and the things *li* picks out as worthy of respect often requires body work. *Li* cares a great deal about comportment, dress, and ways of speaking, all of which can be done in better and worse ways. Confucius, Mengzi, and Xunzi encounter situations where expressing respect for ritual (for example, by observing ritual propriety) means, effectively, expressing contempt for people in power. A recurring theme throughout early Confucian texts is that the correct moral and ethical point of view may conflict (sometimes intensely) with the mainstream view and the views of the powerful. Confucius's moral disapproval of the Ji family in Book 3 of *Analects* is important, but much less important than his high esteem for ritual. In fact, his contempt originates in his respect for *li*. The Ji family's disregard for ritual represents a moral as well as a procedural failing. They repeatedly perform rituals above their station: "Confucius said of the Ji Family, 'They have eight rows of dancers performing in their courtyard. If they can condone this, what are they *not* capable of?'" (3.1) Similarly, in 3.6, Confucius criticizes the head of the Ji family's pilgrimage to Mt. Tai. By participating in such rituals, the Ji claim privileges and significance they are not properly owed. If the Ji

family behaved properly, or perhaps if they simply had an awareness of ritual's significance, Confucius would still behave with proper concern for ritual propriety, but ritual propriety would no longer require he bemoan the current state of affairs. As things stand, Confucius' display of disdain is a side effect of his respect.

Jeffers's reading of sagging pants seems to paint them as, similarly, a side effect of respect. Freedom, black cool, and racial pride are markedly different objects of respect than Confucian ritual – but they do overlap in their concern for embodiment and proper affective orientation. In highlighting the way perspectives and specific social situations influence evaluations of others' behavior, both the Confucian examples and the sagging pants cases reveal the ambiguity of our behaviors. For one, the origins of sagging pants, as a practice, are contested and ambiguous (Jeffers gives some hypotheses), but for another their current meaning is ambiguous too – hence the need for Jeffers' investigation. Jeffers suggests that the "correct" interpretation of sagging pants may require a lot of knowledge about the person doing the sagging.

> Imagine a young person . . . exemplary in just about every respect: he excels in school; he is active in his community through volunteering and mentoring younger kids; he is respectful of women, of elders, and of people in general; and he strives always to honor the legacy of his people. Now, imagine that, in non-formal settings, he often dresses as many of his peers do, which includes sagging his pants. My intuition is that the message communicated by this young man's style of dress involves the valuing of black youth creativity without any endorsement of the negativity often tied to the style through racist stereotypes or the effects of social disadvantage. (2013, 136-37)

I suspect the volume of information Jeffers presents about this young man is partially defensive. However, this fairly rich descriptive activity, as a way of making sense of the young man's clothing choices, could be done for anyone. In fact, it may be done for all of us, but perhaps for some people the world is structured to extend that description

ahead of time. Jeffers' hypothetical young person shares a lot with Garnette Cadogan, except Cadogan's self-description and explanation of his sartorial choices are first-personal.

Making sense of our actions, not to mention the actions of other people, requires a lot of context, but that context often goes missing. Confucian ritual propriety emphasizes outward expression of our inner character, prizing "consistency between ethical disposition and embodied aesthetic expression . . . informed by social context" (Mullis 2017, 144). Our relationships with other members of our moral communities depend upon the details of our embodiment:

> Upon receiving a gift from a good friend, my expression of gratitude is manifested by my unique facial expression, verbal expression of gratitude, gestures, and general comportment, and the resulting somaesthetic gestalt accrues significance since it focuses a broader field in which members of a community generally feel and express gratitude for generously given gifts and, more specifically, gifts given by one's loved ones. (Mullis 2017, 144)

We have control over some details: we can wear belts with our pants, or not, choose heartfelt words of gratitude, or say something dismissive. Other details are out of our control yet are interpreted as revealing deep truths about our character. Social interpretations of the brute facts of our material existence influence the interpretations of our exercises of aesthetic agency. Hoodies, as Jeffers notes, "mean" something different on white teenagers than on black ones: no one thinks white children in hoodies, *qua* wearers of hoodies, either are in special danger or are especially dangerous.

The social meaning of our aesthetic decisions and our judgments of taste may alter as we move from one context to another. However, that alteration may be in the

sense that our self-presentation takes on additional meanings, rather than that one meaning replaces another. Sagging pants *do* mean low self-respect to certain sections of black communities. The meaning they bear for their wearers, which might be something like a respect for freedom and black cool but might also be something like wanting to fit in with one's friend group, is likewise inescapable. The Ji family's ostentatious display probably means, to them, that they are powerful – while to Confucius it means they are powerful and morally bankrupt. We want to recognize both meanings, but in order to decide which meaning to prioritize and how to respond to the disagreement, we need to consider not just first-personal experience but the context and history that shape that first-personal experience.

Body movements are vital to communicating respect. Our everyday behavior like eye contact, facial expressions, handshakes, and posture communicate respect (or lack of it) for our fellows. However, these body movements are not neutral: they interact with and reflect race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social contexts that inform our judgments about bodies. Emily Lee has argued that "the history of colonialism . . . sedimented into . . . the very way one lives one's body, in one's body movement" (2014, 247). Jeffers and Lee share an interest in the way our histories and social positions impact the way we handle our bodies in social space. This observation is also key to Confucian accounts, though classical Confucian accounts focus more on guiding us into the proper moral attitudes for someone in our position within a hierarchy. Confucians are more optimistic than Lee about the sediment of history and power; they tend, like advocates of respectability politics, to be more reformers than revolutionaries.

In order to more fully describe the connections between positions like Lee's, Jeffers', 19th-century reformers', and classical Confucians', I'd like to turn our attention back to the Caribbean, though a different part of the Caribbean than Cadogan's Jamaica, and consider the way female respectability and everyday aesthetics interact in Jamaica Kincaid's short story "Girl." Kincaid's story doesn't use the term, and the story is of course set in a distinct cultural and historical context from the ones I've been discussing – but I understand it to, nevertheless, offer insights relevant to both the specific context of post-Reconstruction respectability politics in the United States, the more general contexts, such as we find in Cadogan's essay, and the relationship between moral judgments and everyday aesthetic behavior. "Girl," and its treatment of femininity, are too complex for me to fully discuss here – I will take a rather narrow approach – but I want to make it clear that I am not presenting "Girl" as an argument *for* respectability or respectability politics. Rather, I take it to turn a critical eye on some facets of everyday life.

Kincaid's story, at just under 700 words, all of them dialogue, succinctly and powerfully illustrates the expectations for girl children, and the way in which feminine sexual purity links with feminized, and aestheticized, labor.[40] The older woman in the story frequently rebukes the girl to avoid behaving "like the slut you are so bent on becoming." The older woman explicitly links this fate with a few specific failures – not walking like a lady, letting a hem come down, behaving without proper care in the presence of unfamiliar men – but because Kincaid structures the story as a litany of imperative statements about how to be a respectable woman and an accomplished

[40] The story is very brief, and available in its entirety from *The New Yorker*: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1978/06/26/girl

housewife, “the slut you are so bent on becoming” implicitly fails in all the other facets of female experience. Girls who do not become “sluts” not only walk like ladies, but have mastered a host of domestic skills, including taking good care of clothing and keeping their bodies neat and clean: “be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit.”

The older woman’s guidance is markedly relational. The structure of the story first suggests a relationship through using the second person to convey advice from an adult/mother figure to a child. The relationship is confirmed by the time the girl breaks in to defend herself, but even if she never spoke up, the story would suggest a relationship between the older woman and the readers (who would take the “child” position). The content of the advice is also about how to relate to other people through self-presentation and care of the material world. The story explains how to elicit respect from other people by making oneself respectable. In Kincaid’s story, respectable femininity is a robust, highly-skilled way of being a human woman, but it is impossible not to notice the ways in which class, colonialism, and sexual inequality inform the ethical possibilities in the world of “Girl.” The characters in “Girl” navigate a Caribbean racial milieu, not an American one, so they are not conforming to white bourgeois standards with the same motives as women in Detroit trying to avoid sexual assault at work. Nevertheless, the effects of colonialism are evident in the very setting of the story, as well as the older woman’s admonitions about proper Sunday school behavior and how to iron khaki shirts and pants so they don’t crease. Class likewise informs the kind of work the women in the story must know how to perform, as well as the kind of sexual propriety required of them: women with more class and economic

privilege would presumably have to worry a bit less about how to behave with men they don't know and might not have to manufacture their own abortifacients.

Kincaid's story teaches its readers strategies some people in some social positions use and have used to navigate the often-treacherous hierarchies that shape their lives. The story concludes with the following exchange: "always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?" The older woman in "Girl" wants the child in her care to know where the risks are – and where the tricks are, too. The baker's character isn't under the girl's control – he might be an asshole – but there are kinds of influence she can extend. Further, there are ways of paying attention to the world, one's body, and the bodies of one's loved ones that communicate their importance: this is also some of the content of the guidance the older woman in "Girl" offers.

Everyday aesthetic behavior is particularly effective as a means of communicating respect because of the way in which our everyday aesthetic behavior communicates the values we find in ourselves and the world around us. In Jeffers' analysis of sagging pants, aesthetic choices communicate respect for anti-assimilationist values, though perhaps at the cost of respecting intergenerational harmony. Kincaid focuses on the way women's care for their bodies and the bodies of others expresses respect for relationships, both in principle and in practice. She does this, like Confucians, by making clear the way respect and disdain can inform each other. Though these examples do not offer a definitive response to the problem I see for respectability politics, I do think they all point to the ways respect, and potential objects

of respect, reflect attitudes toward institutionalized power structures. The young men wearing sagging pants put themselves in opposition to institutional power structures, while respectability politics take a more ambiguous position. It seems likely that people interested in promoting justice will need to adopt both kinds of strategies, but I'm not sure if everyday aesthetics can help decide between the one or the other.

VII. Conclusion

The projects in this paper were fourfold. The primary project was to explain, using philosophical insights, the practice of respectability politics as resistant ethico-aesthetic strategy. However, giving respectability politics its due calls into question some of the most promising commitments about other convergences of aesthetic and ethical behavior, which make up such a significant portion of the developing field of everyday aesthetics. In particular, respectability politics raises questions about the ways aesthetics influence moral decision-making for people navigating structural or institutional injustice. Respectability politics resists oppression and injustice, but seems to do so in incomplete ways, even though it addresses multiple kinds of injustice (gender, race, and class). The discussion of physical beauty helped to set up the problem, while the discussion of respect will, I hope, eventually contribute to its solution. Focusing on the attitude of respect as one where the aesthetic and ethical converge and looking at both philosophical and literary examples clarified the mutually-informative relationship between respect and respectability. It also explained the abiding connection between social positions and embodied behavior.

4. The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life

Most of us engage in some kind of daily aesthetic labor, but some perform this labor under more pressure than others. Self-presentation can be a means of playful self-expression, joy, and community-building. Self-presentation can be a method of preserving one's safety or getting through the day without harassment, as for some trans and nonbinary people and some people of color.[41] Self-presentation can likewise ensure one is taken seriously, as for many women in professional settings or positions of authority.[42] Self-presentation is, often, expensive, time consuming, and fraught with objectionable social and cultural expectations. Furthermore, the expectations for aesthetic labor remain unequally distributed: members of oppressed groups are more likely to be expected to perform aesthetic labor in order to be afforded minimal consideration within the moral community. I want to explore why it might, nevertheless, be worthwhile for members of oppressed groups to engage in aesthetic labor in the context of everyday self-presentation.

To do so, I first expand on the case against aesthetic labor, and explore three cases in its favor. First, the prudential case: aesthetic labor facilitates living with other people. Second, the political case: there is such a thing as liberatory self-presentation. Third, the flourishing case: like other kinds of aesthetic expression, aesthetic labor in the context of self-presentation does, in general, promote well-being. I conclude by considering what these observations might mean for socially privileged persons.

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[41] See Higginbotham 1993, Wolcott 2001, Hughes 2014, Cadogan 2016, for explorations of black Americans navigating self-presentation. See Alptraum 2017 and Saint Louis 2017 for discussions of trans experiences.

[42] It's not unusual for students entering the work force to receive guidance on professional dress, where "professional" is far from neutral. See Nahman 2017, or attend your university's next workshop on the topic.

I. Aesthetic Labor and Opting Out

This section of the paper characterizes the kind of aesthetic labor with which I'm concerned. It also explains the ways expectations for aesthetic labor fall more heavily on socially disadvantaged people, thereby motivating total disengagement from everyday aesthetic self-presentation. However, opting out is unfeasible.

By aesthetic labor, I mean a group of behaviors in which most people partake as part of self-presentation. Within this group, "upkeep" behaviors like cleaning the body, grooming hair, exercise, and using sunscreen have salutary effects, as well as aesthetic effects. Aesthetic labor also includes more traditionally aesthetic aspects of self-presentation such as clothing, makeup, and skincare. My offered list is obviously not exhaustive, nor particularly limiting. Despite the amount of time and money devoted to aesthetic labor, ideas about what counts as aesthetic labor are not very robust. The critique of aesthetic labor is much better established. Before discussing the critique, I'm going to briefly explain the features of aesthetic labor most relevant to my argument.

Each of the previous examples would count as aesthetic in their phenomenological context: taking a bath, for example, is a multifaceted aesthetic experience when we consider answers to the question, "what is it like to take a bath?" Both the sensuous qualities of the experience and our enjoyment or displeasure in them form the aesthetic experience of taking a bath. But I want to hit the "labor" portion of "aesthetic labor" hard – and it is not the sensuous experience of taking a bath that makes cleaning the body aesthetic labor. Rather, ideas of what clean and dirty bodies look and smell like, and attendant cultural expectations of/standards for cleanliness, make the

process of self-presenting as clean aesthetic labor. The way bodies are understood outside, or before and after, their baths makes cleaning bodies aesthetic labor. Cleanliness, in this context, is other-regarding aesthetic self-presentation.[43] By contrast, taking a relaxing bath after a long day is not other-regarding aesthetic behavior. Though someone's desire for a long, hot bath may originate after a series of interactions with other people, the point of the bath is the experience of being in the bath. A relaxing bath might only involve cleaning the body as a means of achieving another kind of aesthetic experience. For example, bath oils tend to leave a film on the skin if not washed off with soap, so a bather attempting to meet the usual standards of cleanliness doesn't use bath oils. A bather using bath oils is probably pursuing aesthetic pleasures within the spatial and temporal context of the bath, so the behavior is more like aesthetic immersion or aesthetic appreciation than aesthetic labor. A bather pursuing the aesthetic effect of cleanliness (and any related ethico-aesthetic evaluations that attach to clean people) probably doesn't frame the bath in terms of its aesthetic features or experiences. In fact, a bather interested in getting clean probably takes a shower.

Probably the most familiar articulation of the problem with aesthetic labor comes from feminist critiques of beauty. One needn't be much of a feminist to find the expectation to be beautiful, and engage in beautification practices, burdensome for women. But feminists, in particular, "have often encouraged women to throw off the demands of beauty in order to gain social and political equality" (Cahill 2003, 42).[44] The critique's hardest form is that groups of people subjected to unequal expectations of

[43] I hope the rest of this paper complicates the division between other-regarding and self-regarding activities, but I think this is a good place to start.
[44] Feminist responses to problems of beauty and beautification have become increasingly complex. Cahill's article is one instance; see also Higgins 2000, Craig 2006.

beauty labor should give up that labor. The feminist case against women's participation in beauty labor made "unshaved legs and unadorned faces . . . a symbol of 'liberation'" (Rhode, 2016, 82).[45] Talking about *aesthetic* labor widens the scope of this kind of critique, because much aesthetic labor doesn't aim at beauty, exactly, but at a whole scope of other ethico-aesthetic qualities (like cleanliness and professionalism). In the process, aesthetic labor becomes a prerequisite for participating in society. And if you and I need to devote more time, money, and thought to the process of simply being perceived as acceptable by groups of people who, due to social privilege, hardly need to think about these things at all, much less spend money on them – well, why should we do that? Why not just opt out?

Further, the ethico-aesthetic norms to which aesthetic labor caters may be regressive or oppressive, making participation in them harmful to other socially disadvantaged groups. As Janell Hobson (2003) has shown, aesthetic norms about feminine bodies, and the way such bodies may be treated, contribute to black women's oppression. Expectations of thinness, and the idea that certain kinds of thinness are beautiful, harm women across the racial spectrum by contributing to alienation from their bodies, as well as facilitating physical harm.[46] Additionally, anti-fat attitudes track class and racial biases, since "[l]ow-income and minority individuals have disproportionate rates of obesity" (Rhode 2016, 85). Low-income people of all races are multiply stigmatized not only for their class status and racial identities, but also for a perceived failure to meet aesthetic standards or, given the perceived alignment between

[45] I take Rhode's quotations to be usage marks, not sneer quotes.
[46] See Lintott 2003 for a discussion of eating disorders and Bordo 2004 for an account of the relationship between weight and gender.

looking thin and *being* healthy, ethical standards. It is, probably, bad for us to experience our bodies as in need of "fixing," an orientation encouraged by current aesthetic norms and our cultural attitudes toward those norms. As a result of the idea that "almost all areas of the female body are in need of something," women's energies are directed toward "self-improvement, rather than social action" (Rhode 2016, 83).

If you think victims of oppression have a "responsibility to resist, to show signs of power" (Boxill 2010, 11) to each other, if not to their oppressors, then you might also think aesthetic labor isn't worth much. The situation is more complicated than the hard version of the critique allows. The next section explores that complication by looking at the relationship between aesthetic labor and labor practices.

II. Who Does the Work?

Considering aesthetic labor as *labor* also requires considering it as physical work for pay. Though some kinds of aesthetic activity, such as waxing, can be risky, expensive, and time-consuming for customers, in general, the most striking dangers or harms are to the workers. Ethical concerns arise in many contexts in which aesthetic labor takes place. These concerns include the standing of particular aesthetic practices and/or industries in the context of larger social, economic, and political relations of power. Some concerns about the harms of aesthetic labor as an occupation relate to the negative effects of a product or industry on the physical environment. Some kinds of aesthetic labor directly or indirectly endanger or harm the people who perform the labor or produce the products others use in aesthetic labor practices. Power relations, both global and local, are such that risky, low-value work is most available to people in precarious

positions – so, effectively, vulnerable people in local and global communities are made more vulnerable by their mode of employment.

In the context of clothing, "there may be moral, socio-economic, and political concerns" such as environmental costs (fur, chemical contamination) or "the prospects of economic colonialism" (Hanson 1990, 108). At least in principle, these harms may be only contingently connected with aesthetic labor: "political and social issues connected with textile and apparel manufacturing can . . . be directly addressed . . . *as* political and economic problems" (Hanson 1990, 108). We can build factories that don't collapse or catch fire, and provide workers with acceptable conditions. Some harms seem to originate more clearly with capitalism and political aspects of colonialism than with aesthetics. It is quite possible to make, market, and buy a t-shirt without oppressing or physically harming anyone. Other harms are more difficult to extricate from the aesthetic process. A variety of hair treatments can physically harm stylists.[47] Nail salon workers are also exposed to potentially harmful levels of acrylic dust and formaldehyde.[48] Sometimes the kind of labor might be at fault: manicurists and pedicurists work long hours in physically limited positions, and even well-paid, fairly-treated workers making false lashes may still encounter eye strain and back problems.[49] If aesthetic labor, at least in some cases, not only presents a risk of harm to oneself but *also* puts others at risk, usually people in a more precarious social-economic situation than oneself, then we have a compelling reason to avoid at least *that* kind of aesthetic labor.

[47] Brazilian blowouts are a noteworthy instance: see for example Occupational Safety and Health Administration 2011.
[48] Nir 2015b chronicles the harmful chemicals to which nail technicians can be exposed. Acrylic dust may be less risky in a salon with ventilation designed to address the issue.
[49] See Chamberlain 2013 for interviews with Indonesian women making false lashes.

However, the harms of aesthetic labor qua labor exist alongside the benefits of aesthetic labor to oppressed communities. Tiffany M. Gill, in *Beauty Shop Politics*, provides a compelling account of the role work in the beauty industry played in bettering black women's conditions in the United States. In addition to whatever financial benefit beauty work brought to black communities – and for some women, like Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Malone, the individual and communal financial benefits were significant – beauty shops offered women a venue for political action and community alongside aesthetic expression. As Gill points out, the aesthetic and the political aspects of black women's work in and patronage of beauty shops intertwined. Despite the frequent perception that the beauty industry "undermin[ed] women's political possibilities and . . . racial solidarity, the black beauty industry must be understood as providing one of the most important opportunities for black women to assert leadership in their communities and in the larger political arena" (Gill 2010, 2). Black beauty shops created spaces for black women to validate each other as beautiful and attractive, provided economic security and, because segregation rendered the salons invisible to whites, facilitated intra-community political action.

Gill's cases highlight the intersection of aesthetic enjoyment, aesthetic labor, and labor. Many beauty treatments require the direct labor of one person upon the body of another. For the person receiving this labor, the experience might be both delightful and luxurious, and contribute to the ongoing ethico-aesthetic project of self-presentation. For working class women of all races, luxury and leisure are hard won. For black women, who often had to care for white families, "salons themselves served as place of rest" (Gill 2010, 104). As bell hooks explains, black beauty salons provided

"the one hour some folk would spend 'off their feet': a soothing, restful time of meditation and silence" (hooks 1996, 112). Black beauty shops were not simply sites of capitulation to white ideas about acceptable black people, nor locations to conform to strategies of respectability politics. Black beauty shops often rebuked white desires: they were a place for black women working in white homes to refresh themselves – in effect, to make sure black women didn't look like downtrodden servants (Gill 2010, 105). Further, by the time African-American communities identified as "B/black," "these Black people overwhelmingly chose to adopt a new, Black-identified visual aesthetic," particularly in the context of hair styles (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 50). These intimately embodied acts of aesthetic resistance followed on long-standing strategies for asserting lives and identities beyond the stereotypes of maid, cook, or nanny included refusing to wear uniforms in the streets, only changing at work.

Gill documents *black* women's work in the *black* beauty industry. The history she offers stands in contrast to the history of black women's work for/on white women and white families. The history of black women's exploitation by white families is a paradigm case of racial and class inequity compounded by, rather than challenged by, labor arrangements. I'll return to this topic in the final portion of this paper, which addresses the intersection of aesthetic labor and social privilege. For now, I want to note that the costs of aesthetic labor practices qua labor can vary across social contexts.

III. Prudential Arguments for Aesthetic Labor

The prudential considerations regarding aesthetic labor are useful background for more detailed arguments later in the paper. There are a few kinds of prudential arguments for

aesthetic labor: social cohesion, economic or financial security, and expedience. I consider these prudential cases because they all use aesthetic labor as a way of safeguarding individuals' interests, though they are often troubling in other ways.

The pragmatic case for participating in aesthetic labor, even when the standards by which that labor is evaluated are generally oppressive, is that conforming to social norms facilitates existing with other people. Someone who seems physically clean and smells nice is a more pleasant companion than someone who seems physically dirty and smells rank. Since we can't reasonably hope to exist without other people, if some kinds of aesthetic labor grease the wheels, then, especially for people occupying social positions surrounded by a *lot* of squeaky wheels, engaging in aesthetic labor makes good sense. More drastically: accommodating oppressive aesthetic norms may well keep me alive. In such cases, it is unreasonable to ask oppressed people to opt out of aesthetic labor.

In addition to considering aesthetic labor as a method of social cohesion or personal survival, the discussion above about working as an aesthetic laborer make clear that prudence often speaks directly to personal finance. Aesthetic labor on behalf of others may be the best financial decision some groups of people can make. None of us has, in fact, perfect freedom to choose our jobs: I can't choose to become a Supreme Court Justice. For people in communities with few employment options and/or firmly gendered or racialized divisions of labor, their economic survival may require their participation in aesthetic labor.

We cannot reasonably require oppressed people to opt out – not as a matter of general moral policy. Further, if we do think oppressed people have some obligation to resist their oppression, we may think that aesthetic labor, for all its pervasiveness, makes a less important target for resistance than, for example, voting rights. Other kinds of resistance might also be more urgent, and conventional aesthetic labor could very well facilitate some of these projects. An unfriendly or indifferent legislator, for example, might warm up to a neatly dressed group of thoughtful people advocating for voting rights. Advocating effectively in non-ideal situations is a worthy prudential consideration, and prudence and resistance are not wholly incompatible with each other. Indeed, as the next section explores, aesthetic labor in the context of self-presentation and resistance to oppressive structures have historically been bound up with each other.

IV. Liberatory Self-Presentation

While liberatory self-presentation is a fairly widespread instance of aesthetic labor in practice, it is an instance of aesthetic labor where resistance and prudence sometimes conflict. Though the kinds of practices I'm calling liberatory self-presentation are pragmatic, rather than "purely" aesthetic, they are often risky. Clear visible identification with a marginalized group puts one at risk. In the United States, African American political and social movements often clearly illustrated the tensions between resistance and prudence. This section of the paper will consider formal and informal cases of aesthetic labor in the service of liberatory projects. In addition to culturally black aesthetic practices, I'll consider the role of self-presentation in predominantly (white) male academic environments. In both contexts, liberatory self-presentation by

marginalized people sends a social or political message to members of the dominant group and members of one's own group.[50]

Hair care and styling are a common theme in African American political and cultural life. Post-Reconstruction blacks "began . . . shaping their collective identity. And the politics of appearance was to play a pivotal role" (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 26). Successfully achieving the initial project, "access to the American dream," required "mak[ing] White people more comfortable," through, for example, presenting according to Eurocentric aesthetic standards (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 26). These early twentieth-century strategies represent a convergence of resistance and prudence, because the object of resistance was, in part, racist physical caricatures that helped justify (or rationalize) harsh oppression of Blacks and prevented their socio-economic advancement. Alongside politics of respectability, the "New Negro" aesthetic offered "an alternative, oppositional appearance. . . . Both an aspiration and an ideal, . . . the New Negro was a hybrid of retaliation and pride" (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 28).[51] A hallmark of the New Negro aesthetic was straightened hair. Successful methods for straightening black hair, particularly black *women's* hair, made beauty entrepreneurs like Annie Malone and Madame C. J. Walker rich and laid foundations for the beauty culture Tiffany Gill documented in *Beauty Shop Politics*.

As Black political mobilization developed and evolved, "hair shifted from style to statement. . . . Blacks and Whites came to believe that the way Black people wore their hair said something about their politics. Hair came to symbolize either a continued

[50] I don't mean to suggest that either dominant or marginalized groups of people are homogenous as far as their political viewpoints or their relationships with other groups of people.
[51] I discuss respectability politics in the previous paper, "Respectability Politics as Aesthetic Practice."

move toward integration in the American political system or a growing cry for Black power and nationalism" (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 50). Straightened hair (or, sometimes, hair that appeared to be straightened) had been explicitly associated with racial self-hatred early on by both Black radicals and more assimilationist figures like Booker T. Washington, such that entrepreneurs who provided it, like Madame C.J. Walker, were sometimes met with, but pre-Civil Rights the "right" thing to do with Black hair was unkink it (Gill 2010, 23-24, 41-42). With the rise of Black power movements, straightened hair "read as . . . the most obvious marker of one's attempts to emulate Whiteness" (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 51). The total refusal of white beauty standards, and the project of valorizing specifically black modes of appearance, severed liberatory practices from prudential practices. Presenting as undeniably racially Other, and as not only unashamed of that Otherness but proud and pleased by the physical facts of it, centers the lives of racial Others and rejects the perspectives of dominant communities.[52]

Natural hair placed aesthetic labor in a new political context. For some, adopting natural hair was an explicitly collective choice, expressing membership in a politically-oriented group and furthering the aims of Black liberation. I want to suggest that, regardless of someone's involvement in traditional political arenas, the shift toward

[52] I am interested in, but do not have the space to consider here, questions about aesthetic authenticity and Otherness in the context of racialized groups and dynamics. There are some kinds of authentic self-presentation by racial Others that, purposefully or not, cater to white notions of and tastes for the "exotic." I'm thinking here about some kinds of Orientalist gazes and practices, including sexual fetishes. I think one reason Black liberatory self-presentation seems to (mostly) avoid this issue is that it treats the authentic and the modern as compatible. Reviving and reclaiming African braiding styles, for example, coincided with and sometimes communicated a commitment to black and women's liberation movements with a strong interest in participating in and correcting modernity. However, the issues requires further thought.

accepting and embracing natural hair constitutes liberatory self-presentation.[53] The primary reason for thinking so is because of the historical context which normalized natural hair, and because of the profound changes required to normalize natural hair. While the Afro was significant to Black Power movements, its aesthetic and political significance outlasted the political context that took it up. Natural hair outlived Black Power. Allowing Afros and other kinds of natural hair to move beyond political symbol and into everyday life and self-expression enriches everyday intersections of aesthetics, politics, and human bodies.

Natural hair's transition from statement to style also signals a kind of social progress: some goals of midcentury black liberation movements were met, even if only partially. By the time natural hair, and Afros in particular, became one style among many Blacks might choose, it still signaled "an alternative, African-derived aesthetic" had firmly entrenched in aesthetic culture (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 62). Radical politics shouldn't be a precondition for natural hair. Analogously, a middle-class woman who opted not to wear a corset in 1910 made a strong political statement by adopting liberatory self-presentation. But women as a whole are better off when corsets are something we opt into, rather than out of. Liberatory self-presentation and aesthetic labor in the service of political goals aim at shifting targets, particularly if the political goals are even partially met. Liberatory self-presentation, as the move from respectability to Black power illustrates, also employs flexible methods, and often puts those methods in conversation with each other.

[53] I don't want to suggest that the embrace of natural hair styles is total and complete, even in 2018. There's plenty of evidence that natural black hair remains controversial, both within black communities and in integrated contexts, but that controversy clearly differs in character from that of the 1960s.

In “Should Black Kids Avoid Wearing Hoodies?” Chike Jeffers considers the arguments against young black men wearing hoodies in the contemporary United States. Jeffers notes that there may be good reasons not to wear a hoodie, for example “in some context where it is known that wearing a hoodie is *extremely* likely to make one a target of violence” or in contexts where a hoodie would be inappropriate, such as many workplaces (2013, 38). In other contexts, “we should accept the wearing of hoodies as part of black youth culture and even applaud those who express themselves in this way while exploding stereotypes through their pursuit of excellence.” Jeffers suggests that for black youths to present themselves one way while acting in a way allegedly inconsistent with that self-presentation is a liberatory strategy.

Jeffers’ examples and analysis – he talks about sagging pants as well as hoodies – offer one way in which the aesthetic labor involved in self-presentation bolsters efforts toward liberation. Wearing hoodies and low-slung trousers is an aesthetic and ethical refusal to disavow blackness, a strategy similar to forms of bodily aesthetic resistance such as refusing to straighten one’s hair or cosmetically lighten one’s skin. Such methods of self-presentation resist anti-black notions of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” black people. Self-presenting in a way that upsets people who hold such notions might be a good in-itself, but liberatory self-presentation does not boil down to anti-assimilation. Community building matters to liberation, and self-presentation has long been a way of declaring community membership.

Self-presentation and its attendant aesthetic labor does not always aim at making marginalized people attractive to dominant groups. Sometimes it aims at personal pleasure, and sometimes it aims at fellow marginalized people. Sometimes, regardless

of our intentions when getting dressed in the morning, an aspect of our self-presentation can reassure another member of our moral community. A woman who joined my PhD program a year after I did told me she felt more confident in the environment after she saw me wear red lipstick to class. She meant, I think, that she found it reassuring to know being taken seriously did not require conforming to a narrow aesthetic standard (a non-feminine one), that a variety of self-presentations were compatible with the peaceful pursuit of philosophical study.

The link between aesthetic labor and liberatory practices, as I think the examples I've used hint, also links the pragmatic case with the case I'll discuss next: the ways aesthetic labor contributes positively to our human flourishing. Liberatory practices are, in a sense, pragmatic ones too: they respond to the conditions on the ground using the means that will be effective at the time. Liberatory practices are *also* conducive – one hopes – to our well-being, that is, they are also a way of bringing about flourishing (eventually!). The next section outlines the role of aesthetic labor in human flourishing.

V. Flourishing and Aesthetic Labor

There are already traditions linking aesthetic experience and human flourishing: Confucius, Aristotle, and Kant all acknowledge its significance. Writing from marginalized positions, Audre Lorde, W. E. B. DuBois, and Virginia Woolf offer compelling arguments for the importance of artistic work. Lorde, in particular, moves art out of the "luxury" category and makes it a necessity (1984/2007)**.** Indigenous communities around the world have used filmmaking as both a method of cultural preservation and source of income, combining aesthetic, cultural, and economic

empowerment.[54] In (post)colonial contexts, this kind of aesthetic practice takes on liberatory urgency, but underlying that urgency is a more traditional significance. Pointing out the pervasive significance of artistic-aesthetic labor to a good life helps to introduce aesthetic labor in the context of self-presentation. Aesthetic labor can promote flourishing and well-being, both in community and in solitude.

We have already seen that aesthetic self-presentation can be a kind of liberatory practice, resisting both oppressive norms and their social-political context. Aesthetic labor can also contribute to oppressed people's flourishing by affirming the value of their bodies. This happens in a few ways: by framing the body as desirable to others, by positioning it as a source of pleasure (particularly first-personal pleasure) and agency, and by allowing the cultivation of personal taste. I'll take each of these in turn.

Historically, the range of people admitted to the category of "desirable" has been quite narrow. "Desirable" means a few things. We have a version of desirable that means something like "sexy." Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin (2016) have explored both the narrowness of sexiness and argued for our need to expand it. For people who have been shut out of the category of sexy/desirable, claiming that designation for themselves is a kind of claim to full humanity. The writer Kayla Whaley (2016) uses a power chair and presents as femme, thereby "explicitly and visibly claiming the womanhood I've always been denied because of my disabled body – not least through constant infantilization and desexualization." Whaley's highly feminized self-presentation juxtaposes an "undesirable" body with the signs of a desirable one. In the process, she

[54] See Wood 2008, Evans 2010.

claims her value and contradicts narrow views of where aesthetic/erotic pleasure can reside.

A more basic, still carnal, sense of "desirable" more easily accommodates our everyday body aesthetics. A body, including the person in it, has positive value. For people with "undesirable" bodies, taking care of and making the body a site of display contradicts social structures that have urged those with normative bodies to look away. Taking even basic care of certain kinds of disabled bodies resists cultural narratives that suggest disabled bodies are not worth living in. By focusing on pleasure, agency, and moral consideration, this kind of care denies that disabled people's physical experiences can only be defined by suffering, passivity, and futility. Keah Brown, a black woman with cerebral palsy, writes compellingly of the significance aesthetic labor has to her self-worth. Brown describes an intimate link between aesthetic labor, including other-regarding labor affecting the ways others see her, and her well-being. I will look at Brown's discussion of aesthetic labor in three contexts: putting her hair in a ponytail, wearing lipstick, and creating the hashtag #DisabledAndCute. Brown's account is both highly personal and community-oriented, self-regarding and other-regarding – her perspective offers insight into the links between liberation and flourishing, and the role aesthetic labor can play for oppressed persons constrained by simultaneous expectations of aesthetic labor and assumptions of their unsuitability for aesthetic appreciation and pleasure.

In her essay "The Freedom of a Ponytail," Brown describes the accomplishment she feels on learning, at age 24, to put her hair in a ponytail. The inability to put her hair up was one of the many ways she felt dissatisfied with her disabled body, but not the

only one: she describes "resenting everything about" her identical twin sister, Leah, "from the shape of her face to the tips of her toes. . . . I wanted a body with completely functioning hands and feet, . . . without a right leg that was shorter than the left. I wanted to wake up glad that I had woken up." Putting her hair in a ponytail required help from a family member or, in college, from friends. Brown sees this reliance on others as a persistent theme in her life, impeding her independence and barring her from desirability: "I imagined boys thinking, *She can't even put her hair up. Why would I go out with her?*" In college, where she was the only black woman in her friend group, asking non-black women for help putting up her hair also emphasized Brown's racial otherness.

After graduating college, Brown decides "I was going to learn how to do a ponytail, no matter what." She finds plenty of guidance through YouTube videos on forming a one-handed ponytail by disabled women. But the women are all white – their tricks don't transfer. Brown has to figure it out for herself, from the ground up: "I practiced for weeks in the same chair . . . with tear-stained cheeks." It takes her three weeks. The "new sloppy ponytails" represent a breakthrough in Brown's self-sufficiency: "I no longer have to ask my sister for help [getting dressed] unless I want a ponytail that will last a while, or a touch of makeup. My ponytails feel like a revolutionary act, a celebration of disability and of me. . . .I feel less like an outsider and more like the badass, black, disabled feminist I am." I'll return to the "touch of makeup" later, as Brown herself returns to it in a different essay, but first I want to explore Brown's account of this extremely basic form of aesthetic labor and its impact on self-conception and satisfaction.

Brown describes the ponytails with reference to aesthetic and ethical concepts. Putting her hair up is a kind of minimal aesthetic labor: less elaborate and, generally, less fraught than wearing red lipstick or getting a manicure.[55] In the context of her physical disability and, later, her race, the ponytail becomes even more complex: closely related to the way other people respond to her physical presence (the boys who won't think she's cute, but also the friends who will comment on her hairstyle), intertwined with familial and friendship relationships. By performing this aesthetic labor, Brown does not reject her relationships with other people, but she does reframe her relationships with them and with her own body.

In another essay, describing the importance she finds in lipstick, Brown (2017c) more explicitly engages with beauty standards: "There is an urgency to meld myself into what beauty standards . . . ask of me and to change until I fit while knowing the truth, which is that I will never fit." The ableism prevalent in beauty standards precludes Brown's being considered "beautiful," even if it does not exempt her from beauty labor. Actually, she wouldn't want it to: "I never saw myself as worthy of beauty or love . . .. However, there has always been one thing that softened the blow, and that is lipstick." For Brown, while beauty labor intersects with beauty standards, the labor is distinct from its cultural context. Further, the cultural context of this work doesn't stop at aligning with or against standards of beauty, but includes other ideals as well. Brown differentiates the beauty concept from aesthetic labor, recognizing multiple, everyday aesthetic concepts. She describes lipstick as signifying not just physical beauty but,

[55] It seems to me that the cultural politics around hair intervene prior to Brown's wanting to put her hair in a ponytail, so the ponytail itself is less fraught that the decision to straighten or wear hear natural (Brown hasn't, to my knowledge, written on this issue). I am perfectly happy to be dissuaded from this view as I don't think anything rides on it at this point. However, see Paul Taylor's *Black is Beautiful* for a discussion of the possible significance of black women wearing their hair in ponytails.

"maturity, attractiveness, and a sense of self," as well as "confidence and control." Beauty plays a role, but that role is not, for Brown, definitive – she is not simply trying to be beautiful, but also trying to realize a more complex sense of personhood. As with the ponytail, Brown learns to apply lipstick on her own, but she notes that lipstick has "felt like armor even when I felt too scared to wear it, even when I felt I wasn't worthy of it." Brown's body-confidence and self-confidence grow alongside her expertise. Brown finds lipstick opens possibilities to her even when she believes its power to bestow beauty is out of her reach. Whether or not she is "beautiful," she can be a mature and confident woman, in control of her life and with a sense of herself.

In her concise accounts of the specific importance two kinds of aesthetic labor have had on her well-being, Brown pushes back on the idea that aesthetic labor is always and simply another way of oppressing already oppressed people, either through engaging them in self-objectification and self-deception, or through requiring they devote their time and money to behaviors that trap them in a double bind. They are, on the one hand, socially required to perform these tasks, but the tasks themselves are frequently disvalued. As Brown shows, engaging in aesthetic labor helps her to understand her body and self – what she likes and dislikes, what kind of (embodied!) person she is. Additionally, aesthetic labor helps Brown reframe that embodiment as replete with subjectivity. Not only does aesthetic labor allow Brown to understand her body as malleable, versatile, and a source of pleasure, but she comes also to understand it as something other than an obstacle to happiness. By working upon her body, Brown positions embodiment between (self-)objectification and total rejection of the physical. She no longer experiences herself as at the mercy of her gender, race, or disability - at

the mercy of her body.[56] This switch is important because it emphasizes the context-dependent significance of the body, and the way embodiment functions in oppressive structures. Brown's trouble didn't originate with her body, her race, or her gender so much as it originated with the world in which that raced, gendered, disabled body operates.

The world is full of diversely disabled people – but Brown's experience and self-conception intersect with and overlap with the experiences of other disabled people. To magnify these experiences, Brown started a Twitter hashtag, #DisabledAndCute. Her account of this process describes the significance of aesthetic concepts and aesthetic validation in promoting oppressed people's flourishing. Brown (2017b) frames this essay, like her others, as an account of personal development: she starts by establishing the significance "cute" had for her, writing, "there are three things I never thought I'd be: tall, successful, or cute." Cuteness is more complexly related to personal agency than success or height. Like other aesthetic evaluations, being "cute" depends on the shape of the world around you and the way you fit into it, encompassing "bare facts" of the way you look and self-present and the social meaning of those facts, and your own self-estimation. For Brown, "feeling cute" happens after her success is established and she's stopped caring about being tall: "something shifted in me when I looked in the mirror and felt cute." Nothing about her appearance had changed, only her relationship to herself and the world around her. When the feeling persists, she creates the Twitter hashtag #DisabledAndCute, a channel for other disabled people to express aesthetic self-worth. Most of the contributions are selfies.

[56] We're all at the mercy of our bodies, of course! But Brown, and people like her, are negotiating a special, socially constructed vulnerability, one often cast as particularly terrible.

Brown, by her own admission, started engaging in aesthetic labor from a place of self-doubt and low self-esteem: she was not living a flourishing life. The popular assumption, as I understand it, is that aesthetic labor and aesthetic ideals would be meaningful largely for the role they play in putting Brown, and people like her, in that place of low self-esteem. Brown's testimony highlights the impacts of messages that black disabled bodies are aesthetically lacking. But if racist, ableist, misogynist understandings of "cute" impeded Brown's flourishing, other aspects of her life pushed back until she could claim "cute" *and* "disabled" simultaneously and publicly. Brown's self-confidence and belief in her cuteness predate the hashtag, which, though I don't want to overstate the impact of internet activism, contributed to the development of an aesthetically-empowered disabled community online. The hashtag, which remains an ongoing project for the disabled community/ies on Twitter, is a particularly good example of the way aesthetic experience can link human flourishing and liberation. The hashtag creates a loose community of disabled people who both affirm the existence, pleasures, and value of disabled people and push back against stereotypes and narrow aesthetic ideals.

Brown's accounts of her ongoing negotiation of aesthetic labor, gender, race, and disability offer insights into the connection between community/personal relationships and aesthetic ideals and experiences. Brown's exploration of the significance aesthetic labor has had in her life and on her capacities for flourishing routinely acknowledges the importance of relationships with other people. Her relationships facilitate her physical movement through the world by allowing her to present in a way more in line with her self-conception, but they also impact her

psychological states more generally. Relationships help shape the self-conception she uses aesthetic labor to (partially, of course) realize. An answer to the question of my title, grounded in Brown's work, looks like this: for certain kinds of oppressed people, engaging in aesthetic labor helps to improve quality of life by reframing their embodiment and their relationship to embodiment such that "undesirable," "unaesthetic," or "aesthetically negative" bodies can be envisioned as aesthetically pleasurable and meaningful, both as objects of aesthetic experience and as sites of ethico-aesthetic agency. Brown's writing describes a primarily self-directed trajectory. Her understanding of aesthetic labor overlaps with liberatory aesthetic projects, but by recognizing the complex relationships between an individual (*qua* individual) and her social environment, she offers a more generous account of the significance of aesthetic labor than the liberatory account does. Further, Brown foregrounds the judgments, pleasures, and experiences of oppressed people, rather than of the privileged.

Brown's description of her aesthetic labor and aesthetic community building both mirrors and contrasts with Kayla Whaley's account, discussed earlier. Whaley, though not subject to Brown's racialized experiences, also found that, by virtue of her disability, "femininity as an expression of womanhood wasn't meant for me." While Brown's projects around aesthetic labor focus mostly on herself or are (primarily) internal to the disabled community, Whaley makes a point of positioning "femme" as something that contradicts the way the able-bodied world interprets her. Whaley's first-personal account acknowledges the role aesthetic taste and experience play in her flourishing, but she finds the most significance in countering facile ideas about what it means to be disabled. Aesthetic labor for Brown and Whaley comes at a high cost: there

are lots of barriers to their participation in complex, semi-mandatory frivolity. However, they do not frame these barriers as a reason to opt out of aesthetic labor, but rather as deepening the meaning of their participation in aesthetic labor.

Lastly, aesthetic labor allows us to cultivate our personal taste in ways that enrich our lives. Consider perfume. Perfume is a very efficient kind of aesthetic labor: a quick application lasts most of the day and a bottle several years. Wearing perfume is an intimate, rich, and highly varied experience – it unfolds, often idiosyncratically, over time. Very often, the full experience of a perfume is available only to the person wearing it, and sometimes it is only over repeated applications – perhaps even over several years – that someone can "understand" a scent. A perfume like Zoologist Bat, smelling of fruit, dirt, and minerals, challenges and expands our judgments about what it is pleasant for a body to smell of. Perfume does not simply mask "unpleasant" smells – that is, it does not simply disguise corporeality the way deodorant does. Indeed, Richard Shusterman argues that perfume does not function to disguise, since "the desired olfactory style means more than simply eliminating unpleasant bodily odors. A totally odorless body, if indeed possible, would be unattractively bland, antiseptically devoid of a character. A merely pleasant scent will also not suffice" (2012b, 328). Sometimes, as with Papillon Perfumes Salomé, which has distinct notes of sweat and urine, perfume *highlights* the bodily scents deodorant covers up. Additionally, perfume interacts with the body and the environment to create something new and ephemeral. Salomé, for example, may be a sweaty dancer on one wearer and a grand dame on another.

Wearing perfume, then, is not necessarily a means of acceding to a culture with oppressive ideas about acceptable ways for the human body to smell (particularly women's bodies) – perfume does not (necessarily) promote shame. In its intimacy, it frustrates ideas of aesthetic labor as conceding to the pleasures and tastes of other, more privileged groups of people. Instead, wearing perfume and cultivating a taste for it is like cultivating taste in music, literature, or food. As such, perfume and fragrance "is an assertion of one's own taste and an appeal to be appreciated not just sensually but also cognitively for expressing one's own singular taste in style" (Shusterman 2012b, 328). Wearing Chanel No.5 today, with its sharp aldehydic opening, means something different than it meant in 1924, when the perfume was introduced, or in 1954.[57] No. 5 is no longer edgy or surprising for its use of synthetic ingredients – it is, though, an unconventional, un-trendy choice.

Complex, on-going processes like reading novels aesthetically enrich our lives and play important roles in moral agency. Similarly, when it comes to perfume, "the style expressed is more than a mere superficial matter of surface body scent or olfactory connoisseurship, but also an expression of one's deeper character or ethical style" (Shusterman 2012b, 328). Cultivating a taste in perfume might encourage a kind of joy in and acceptance of our bodies' complexity and interdependence. For example, in a community of fellow perfumistas, one becomes aware of the nuances and changes of a single scent. Zoologist Beaver, with a (synthetic) castoreum note, recently made the rounds amongst four of my perfume-interested friends. Natural castoreum is a secretion

[57] We'll put to the side issues of reformulation. It may well be that Chanel No.5 is no longer the same thing as it was in 1924, but that's an empirical or metaphysical question, and outside the scope of this paper.

from beavers' castor glands; it smells something like feces and something like phenol. The castoreum in Beaver, distinct from the other notes, smelled profoundly unpleasant on two of us, smelled *interesting* on a third, and was totally absent on a fourth. Although the fecal note in Beaver was definitely unpleasant on two of us, it occurred simultaneously with a lovely watery linden blossom smell – the composition of the scent made the whiff of shit aesthetically rewarding. On the third wearer, the musk's fecal and phenol notes balanced beautifully with the aquatic floral aspect.

The process of trying, sharing, and comparing the scent with others emphasized the diversity of the perfume's aesthetic effects. Additionally, it called our attention to features of our bodies that are often elided or treated as shameful, namely their fleshliness. Beaver's castoreum note, with its more-than-a-whiff of shit, was of course partly responsible for the fleshly orientation. In addition, the act of passing a sample around, applying it, and noticing differences, played a role. We applied Beaver from a spray sample, but dabber samples, requiring skin contact, would have emphasized fleshliness even more. Even the spray sample, which leaves scent molecules in the air as well as on the skin, requires contact: smelling something means it is in contact with you, however attenuated. Smelling someone else's perfume, while they wear it, is also a reminder of their bodily presence. Unless they are a very inconsiderate perfume-wearer, or they are wearing a "sillage monster," smelling someone else's perfume requires close proximity with them.[58] Additionally, people generally apply perfume at pulse points, where blood is close to the skin, so a purposeful investigation of someone else's scent might mimic gestures that generally only occur in erotic contexts, such as sniffing

[58] Sillage describes the degree to which a perfume "projects" itself above the wearer's skin.

wrists and necks. Finally, in addition to emphasizing a perfume's diverse facets, smelling it on other people can remind us of *human* diversity. Even if a scent smells similar on two bodies, it might not suit them equally.

These experiences of wearing perfume cut against the anti-aesthetic labor view in two cases. In cases of largely self-directed labor, such as wearing perfume to work, perfume can contribute to our flourishing by enriching our day to day aesthetic experience, providing an outlet for the development of personal taste and a pleasurable experience of everyday embodiment. In cases of inter-relational and collaborative aesthetic labor, wearing and appreciating perfume with other people builds personal relationships, puts individual bodily features in context, and adds depth to one's understanding of a perfume's aesthetic effects. Sampling perfume in a group is analogous to other collective aesthetic experiences, where aesthetic appreciation takes place in relation with others. Perfume differs from a seminar or concert, however, because it directs aesthetic attention to the appreciators, who are here participants as well as audience members, as well as to an aesthetic "object."

None of these cases testifying to the link between aesthetic labor and the promotion of well-being is meant to deny that aesthetic labor's opponents have a good point. There are many kinds of aesthetic labor that undermine our well-being, that inhibit our flourishing. Such harms may be historically and culturally contingent – but they are *still* harms. Though benefits may be similarly contingent, recognizing them points us toward an understanding of aesthetic labor that might enable us to reconceptualize what we want from our everyday aesthetic activities. Recognizing aesthetic labor's contributions to a flourishing human life also helps explain the ways in

which groups of people generally not "expected" to perform much aesthetic labor might find such practices a worthy focus of their attention. The final section of the paper makes a case for aesthetic labor among privileged groups, as well as discussing ways of performing and approaching that labor.

VI. Privilege and Responsible Aesthetic Labor

> JACK: I have to look perfect. When it comes to hair, no one is more bitchy than conservative males.
>
> ■ *30 Rock,* "Somebody to Love"

I'd like to begin the discussion of privilege and aesthetic labor, and the final part of this paper, by considering a passage from Elif Batuman's novel *The Idiot*. In this passage, the novel's narrator Selin, a second-generation Turkish immigrant in her first year at Harvard, describes a trip to the men's section of a department store: "The men's department made no sense, the way nothing seemed designed to surprise or delight you, and everything looked the same. How could anyone choose between so many gray jackets?" (2017, 136). Though Selin keenly observes a friend's aggressively chic Paris makeover, she is not herself much interested in fashion. Her reaction to the disappointing selection reflects not so much her own personal taste in clothing (whomever it might be designed for) but her expectations about the kind of pleasure everyday aesthetic experiences allow us. The pleasures the men's department offers are certainly not aesthetic pleasures as Selin understands them. In fact, she seems to think "so many gray jackets" present a difficult puzzle to their prospective wearers and a mystery to others. The jackets' aesthetic effect on Selin mingles baffled disappointment with the judgment that "there was something ridiculous about their sobriety and self-

importance" (136). At the same time, Selin finds herself compulsively "touching the broad shoulders" and in the midst of "a wave of longing" (136).

In the context of the novel, Selin's wave of longing is pretty clearly linked to her crush on an older student, Ivan. She longs for him, and for the things he represents (the novel also makes this cluster of longings pretty clear). Further speculation on what this instance means to the novel will have to take place in another essay; what is interesting for *us* in Selin's responses is the way her expectations of aesthetic pleasure are thwarted, and the masculine aesthetic vocabulary that greets her instead. Expecting surprise and delight, Selin finds sobriety and self-importance, and endless subtle variations on a theme. The aesthetic effects produced by menswear and the environments in which it is sold are markedly different from the aesthetic effects produced by womenswear and its commercial environments. While women's fashion (which is to say, *fashion*) elicits traditional aesthetic responses and interacts with traditional aesthetic values like beauty, men's fashion, at least the kind of men's fashion Selin considers, seeks an entirely different set of ethico-aesthetic responses. I'll explore these responses in more detail below, but for now I want to note that the grey jackets Selin (along with, I suspect, most of us) finds uninspiring and dull both present a barrier to the uninitiated and, through their aesthetic pseudo-neutrality, uphold the power structures that make aesthetic labor a "problem" in the first place. Although we might think that people in positions of privilege aren't expected to perform aesthetic labor, Selin and Ralph's trip to the department store complicates this idea. The aesthetic vocabulary "so many gray jackets" offer is limited, but it is a vocabulary.

Finally, the self-presentation Batuman describes in this part of the novel is communal. The community relationships appear at a few levels, among them personal (friendship, friend groups) and social or institutional (university and pre-professional networking). Selin is in the men's department to assist a male friend, Ralph, with finding suspenders. That is, she is engaged in collaborative, or charitable, aesthetic labor (I don't mean to suggest that Selin and Ralph's personal interaction constitutes a gendered outsourcing of aesthetic labor). Since the novel is a *bildungsroman*, its instances of aesthetic labor also constitute a kind of self-making process: Selin and Ralph are in the store to find the clothes for a kind of person Ralph wants to be. Looking like you belong is an important step in belonging. Their trip to the department store allows Selin and Ralph, already students at Harvard but social and temperamental outsiders, to more fully integrate themselves into the power structures to which their university affiliation gives them special access. Neither Selin nor Ralph is a particularly sophisticated sartorial, or social, analyst, so they operate according to a squishy sense of which colors "belong" together. Their muddling along underlines the ways in which they are, though in a limited sense, outsiders seeking entry into a rarified world.

Menswear has altered since the 1990s, when the novel is set, but not by much. Even in the 90s, there were certainly aesthetic subtleties in menswear that go mostly unnoticed by 18-year-old women like Selin. But those subtleties *also* go unnoticed by many of the men buying menswear. There is little awareness that sober gray jackets produce just as much of an aesthetic effect as Kayla Whaley's makeup, in part because the ethico-aesthetic effect of sober gray jackets is so different in character from the effect of red lipstick or a well-cut silk blouse. The aesthetic labor involved in "choosing

between so many gray jackets" is effectively invisible, though it may also be noticed and found unwelcome. The gray jackets Selin observes with puzzlement align with ideas about white masculinity, and white men are not, according to the cultural consensus, objects of aesthetic appreciation. They are not objects at all.

Indeed, there is little awareness that white men produce an aesthetic effect through their presence – in part because, as John Berger has noted, a cisgender white man's presence communicates "a power which he exercises on others" rather than declaring how other people may treat him (1972, 46). A cisgender white man's decision to wear pants that do not fit reads not as indicating low self-respect or self-esteem, but that he doesn't have to care about what his pants mean.[59] Berger means that a white man (other things being equal) doesn't signal how other people can treat him because his cultural context is such that everyone already knows how to treat him. Any account of the relationship between aesthetic labor and social capital has to consider not just the people at the bottom of a hierarchy, but also the people at the top buying boring gray jackets, and people in the middle, trying to distinguish amongst those boring gray jackets and resenting the boredom and the work. Even quite powerful people cannot effect total revolution on their own, all at once – so in their daily lives must consider how to responsibly manage their social power and privilege.

One strategy might be a uniform, such as Barack Obama adopted while president, and the raw materials of which Selin contemplates with mournful boredom. President Obama adopted uniform dressing to avoid decision fatigue, sticking mostly to

[59] That is, the cultural content of white men in clothes that don't fit is not "low self-respect." Of course, as the discussion of *Queer Eye* later in this section might suggest, plenty of white men *do* wear poorly fitting clothing because of low self-esteem and poor self-image. The social consequences for this group of people are, however, different.

blue or gray suits: "You'll see I wear only gray or blue suits. . . . I have too many other decisions to make" (Lewis 2012).[60] But while Obama's strategy might be the judicious one for someone in his position, that position is so singular that I'm not sure we can usefully generalize from it. For everyday people, the strategy seems to rule out both a wide variety of aesthetic pleasure and personal agency.

While unequal expectations for aesthetic labor and self-presentation persist, as they are likely to, privileged groups opting out of aesthetic labor only confirms the status quo. For example, a tenured white male philosopher who pays no attention to his self-presentation – *if* we can imagine such a person – might effectively help maintain the class-bound, racially-isolated, gender-biased conditions of contemporary professional philosophy. A uniform approach to dressing is at least transparent on the need to perform some kind of aesthetic labor. A uniform even acknowledges that this aesthetic labor (again, we are not simply considering health and hygiene here) is important, and may communicate something about oneself to other people. Given that surely very few white male tenured philosophy professors face daily decisions on the same magnitude as the President of the United States, for members of this group and groups like them to make a point of classifying aesthetic labor concerning self-presentation as frivolous or, worse, a drain on more important daily activities can seem pretentious or obtuse. Though adopting a uniform acknowledges the pragmatic need for aesthetic labor, it does not necessarily admit the role aesthetic labor can play in

[60] Obama did wear a too big tan suit once during his presidency and it briefly made the news: see Izadi 2014, Gonzales 2017, Woolf 2017. He might also, as Sherri Irvin reminded me, have an interest in avoiding racialized characterizations of his clothing as "flashy." Considering that the tan suit was judged "unpresidential," he might indeed be trying to head off racialized criticisms. However, the white men who quote Obama's uniform approach to justify their own are not worried about racialized criticisms.

liberation or flourishing, nor does it necessarily allow for much pleasure in everyday aesthetic experiences oriented toward others.

Karen Hanson has argued that "fashion is inherently associated with change" and this association sparks suspicion: "what real value can there possibly be in something virtually defined by *changing* desire?" (1990, 108-9, emphasis original). That uniforms, including uniform dressing, avoid the changeability of fashion is surely part of their appeal. Much more could be said on the aesthetics of uniforms and uniform wardrobes than I can explore here, so I will draw attention to a few aspects of their use before moving to another problem for aesthetic labor in the context of privilege and, finally, the constructive part of the project. First of all, uniforms signifying all kinds of status – from military uniforms to nurses' to maintenance workers' – anonymize their wearers and unite them to the institution with which they work. Second, as Nancy Sherman has argued, uniforms can convey an "aesthetics of character." The contours of that character differ across uniforms and contexts, but the example of Robert Mueller, as explained by Troy Patterson, is instructive.[61] Mueller, the former FBI director, stays within a narrow, "reticent" range of clothing: "a modest rotation of discreetly striped Brooks Brothers suits," cut "relatively trim," worn with a starched white oxford-cloth shirt, red or blue foulard tie, and a "hideous" black plastic watch (Patterson 2018). Patterson finds "refinement" of Mueller's foulard ties "balance" the watch, which we might expect to be a kind of aesthetic splurge – watches are masculine jewelry. But Mueller's watch neither suggests financial excess (it costs about $50) nor provides

[61] Other writers have observed Mueller's personal style, and Patterson's analysis references their work.

obvious aesthetic pleasure.[62] Mueller's personal style conveys "an incorruptible constancy," continuity with institutional traditions, "rectitude," "heroic values," and "the good, clean, honest look of an extremely civil servant, unaffected, and, therefore, inimitable" (Patterson 2018). The uniform tells us about Mueller's personal character (or, at least, the kind of person he wants to look like) and also allies him with institutions of power in the United States: Ivy League schools, the military, the FBI.

Privileged groups have long used interest in and attention to aesthetic labor to exclusionary effect. Rather than aiming at respect, even minimally, privileged groups use self-presentation and other kinds of aesthetic labor to secure their borders. Ralph and Selin, in their search for suspenders, try to navigate a way through those borders. But even if Ralph and Selin make their way inside, the details of keeping up with aesthetic labor can unsettle an individual while preserving the group's status. The example quoted at the beginning of this section – "When it comes to hair, no one is more bitchy than conservative males" – illustrates this principle. Similar cases include dress codes at country clubs and restaurants. Patterson's account of Robert Mueller's attention to others' dress at the FBI is a related phenomenon. As FBI director, Mueller insisted on white shirts – not officially, but in practice, "mocking subordinates in staff meetings" who wore colored shirts.[63]

The question about what responsible aesthetic labor looks like for the privileged remains a thorny one. Philosophical sources that foreground the relationship of social

[62] This is not to say that, like ugly sneakers, this kind of watch won't ever achieve hipness among extremely fashionable people. "Dad style" is having (another) moment, see Berlinger 2018.
[63] From Garrett Graff's 2008 article on Mueller: "Colored shirts are worn at one's own peril. The head of the bureau's public-affairs division, John Miller – a former ABC investigative reporter who interviewed Osama bin Laden in the 1990s – tries to sneak in a colored shirt on occasion, but Mueller will look down the table at the 9am staff meeting and ask, 'John, what exactly are you wearing?'"

privilege to aesthetic labor (or simply aesthetic experience) and well-being focus either on aesthetic labor in the communal and civic contexts, such as Aristotle's account of magnificence, or on what the social elites owe to their superiors, as in classical Confucianism. These ancient sources are useful to people occupying the upper echelons of explicit hierarchies, but less useful for contemporary contexts of dispersed, overlapping privilege and oppressions. Aristotle and Confucius are simply not interested in adopting dispositions that facilitate the dismantling of social inequality. Responsible exercise of social power in the context of aesthetic labor looks, for the *junzi* and the virtuous person, like graceful paternalism.[64] Graceful paternalism is just not going to cut it in 2018, but the idea of grace does have, I will argue, distinct possibilities.

Grace is still worth considering in the context of the privileged people's obligations. In turning our attention to grace in everyday contexts, I want to focus less on the sense of grace as effortless action – and certainly do not intend to evoke its religious connotations – than on the sense in which graceful action smooths out rough patches.[65] It may well be effortful, and that effort may be seen: tactful corrections often leave a little space for the trespass to register, but even so they promote graceful social behavior. The kind of grace I'm picking out will not be analogous to the grace of the ballet dancer as observed by the audience. Rather, it will be more like the grace that manifests among the many participants of a set dance. In a set dance, most dancers are aware that the other dancers are working hard to remember the moves, be attentive to

[64] Certainly, contemporary scholars have taken efforts to expand the idea of what virtue and the *junzi* mean, for example: Chan 2000, Tessman 2006.
[65] For grace and/or effortlessness see Schiller 1882, Baxley 2010, Montero 2016, and Saito 2016.

their partners, and keep the dance flowing smoothly. They make accommodations for each other.

In the context of oppression, the powerful have an obligation not only to dismantle the system that distributes power so unequally, but also to make existing in that system less painful for the oppressed. The obligations have a far wider scope than aesthetic labor does, and may, in a finite world with limited resources such as the one we occupy, compete with obligations in the context of aesthetic labor – the question of "what to do?" in those cases is beyond the scope of this project.[66] Instead, I want to hang on to grace not only for its aesthetic components, but because it may be the closest we can get to a general recommendation. The recommendation is not to adopt a certain kind of aesthetic labor, but rather that people perform their aesthetic labor with a certain kind of approach, attitude, or style. Additionally, grace, grounded as it is in the physical body, calls attention to the fact of embodiment, a fact privilege often erases.

Grace, poise, and tact contextualize behavior as much as they dictate it. As Fanny Burney observed, "Generosity without delicacy, like wit without judgment, generally gives as much pain as pleasure" – even our best behavior needs mediation. White people wearing dreadlocks are not performing their aesthetic labor with grace, even if they may be dismantling racial prejudice (though of course it is not clear that they are doing this). Likewise, the straight white man making an extended point of his uniform approach to dressing, is not behaving with grace – however interesting or aesthetically pleasant his uniform might be. I do not object to his lack of pleasure in clothing, but to the attitude of resentment that seems to fuel his approach to the minimal

[66] The scope is quite broad enough already.

requirements for aesthetic labor his social position affords him. The writer Chiara Atik, in a piece describing her own foray into uniform dressing, notes "menswear is practically already a uniform (shirt plus pants, repeat)." While Atik's description of her uniform and the context in which she employs it (on a "water bottle tour" of Los Angeles to sell a script) is certainly tinged with resentment toward the way her gender seems to necessitate packaging herself along with her work, while her male colleagues can just sell their work, she also takes some pleasure in the uniform she chooses. Her pleasure is not merely in the fact that she's front-loaded her aesthetic labor, nor does she present the uniform as a way of outwitting a foolish and shallow system, but rather in the peace of mind the uniform gives her and the aesthetic pleasures of the clothes themselves. In a social world filled with and perhaps shaped by small tensions, micro-inequities, misunderstandings, human fallibility – but also, and often simultaneously, by trust, responsibility, hopes, and friendships – grace, poise, and tact are useful tools for accommodating mutual vulnerability as well as responding to unequal distributions of power. I'd like to conclude this paper by looking at two examples, one philosophical and one from reality television. The first, Yuriko Saito's reading of Sei Shonagon's description of the proper way for a man to leave his lover's bed; the second, the Netflix reboot of *Queer Eye*.

Yuriko Saito's article "Body Aesthetics and the Cultivation of Moral Virtues" deals with a case of self-presentation, but aesthetic labor is certainly not exhaustive of the activities she offers. Saito's reading of Shonagon's text focuses on embodiment and treatment of the material world as ways of cultivating relationships with others. To set up the paper, Saito gives a reading of the passage in *The Pillow Book* where Sei

Shonagon contrasts two ways of "leav[ing] a lady's chamber after a night of lovemaking," one "hateful" and the other "elegant" (2016, 228-29). In the first example, the lover

> Is so flurried . . . upon leaving he bangs into something with his hat. Most hateful! It is annoying too when he lifts up the Iyo blind that hands at the entrance of the room, then lets it fall with a great rattle. If it is a head-blind, things are still worse, for being more solid it makes a terrible noise when it is dropped. There is no excuse for such carelessness . . . When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser-sash, rolls up the sleeves of his Court cloak, over-robe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash – one really begins to hate him. (Quoted in Saito 2016, 229)

One might forgive a lover's noise in the morning if it signals he is not trying to sneak out, but Sei Shonagon describes a man who can't even be bothered to sneak out. His noisy clumsiness almost seems to indicate that he has forgotten the woman in bed. In addition, "even if unwittingly, he is forcing a negative aesthetic experience on her through his body movements and the sounds he makes" (Saito 2016, 229). Shonagon's second example offers a correction:

> A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face. . .. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening his sash. Presently he raises the lattice, and the two lovers stand together by the side door while he tells her how he dreads the coming day, which will keep them apart; then he slips away. (Quoted in Saito 2016, 229)

Here, Saito focuses on a common act of aesthetic labor: getting dressed. The good lover uses his morning toilet as a way to underline his emotional commitment. It matters that he "slips away," rather than leaving noisily: "a gentle and elegant bodily movement implies a caring and respectful attitude" (Saito 2016, 229). Graceful conduct, in these examples, combines moral consideration, aesthetic practice, and aesthetic experience.

The bad lover's graceless leave-taking is, as Saito says, inconsiderate: he fails to recognize or accommodate the feelings of his lover. He does what *he* has to do, rather than finding balance between two kinds of necessity in his daily life. The good lover, however, is graceful and tactful because he balances the needs of his life with and without his lover. This balance, which involves considering others' needs and adjusting your behavior in order to meet those needs, is what I think will be characteristic of graceful aesthetic labor. The good lover leaves, but the manner of his leave-taking involves other-regarding effort, not only through his gentle and quiet progress around and out of the apartment, but through the way he gets dressed. His aesthetic labor not only meets the needs of his life in society, but it meets the needs of his lover – and, one imagines, his need and desire to have a close relationship with her.

The Netflix show *Queer Eye* is clearly about aesthetic labor and self-presentation in a way Saito's example is not. Additionally, it engages social disparities in a way that Saito's example, though Heian Japan's gender roles were not precisely egalitarian, does not. Like the original show, the current iteration of *Queer Eye* is a makeover reality show. The premise of the show is that a group of savvy gay men (The Fab Five) informs less savvy people – usually but not exclusively straight men – through aesthetic labor and self-presentation. Each member of the group has an area of expertise: fashion, grooming, interior design, cooking, and culture.[67] Over the course of each episode, the Fab Five share their expertise with the subjects, usually culminating in a party or group celebration where the episode's subject shares their transformation and what they've learned with their friends and family. Two themes recur in *Queer Eye*: the

[67] It's not really clear what the show understands "culture" to mean, but in practice it seems to have something to do with psychological well-being and event-planning.

aesthetic labor involved in the makeover is meant to make the subjects more *themselves* and the subjects are explicitly interested in making the people who matter to them happy. *Queer Eye* views aesthetic labor as important to individual well-being and to maintaining relationships with other people. *Queer Eye* encourages graceful aesthetic labor in two ways: first, by underlining its subjects' reliance on their community, second by having them recognize the work they need (and often want) to do.

The subject of the third episode is Cory, a cop and former Marine, married and with two children. A different reality show might seek to "correct" some of Cory's physical characteristics, like his weight, or his personal quirks. For example, he holds riotous NASCAR parties in his partially finished basement (the episode begins after a party for which black tablecloths were attached to the ceiling to hide the insulation). Instead of "fixing" Cory, or even his basement, the show's experts decide to focus on integrating him into the rest of the house and helping him get a handle on personally meaningful aesthetic labor. Cory describes a typical date night with his wife as a walk around a big box store (so they're inside, in the air conditioning, and away from the mosquitos) for which she dresses up and he wears his usual non-uniform clothes: ill-fitting shorts (often gym shorts), t-shirt, flip-flops. He describes this outfit as his "comfort zone . . . I just care about being comfortable." Their status quo does not involve graceful aesthetic labor. Though Cory's many costumes for his NASCAR parties indicate his awareness of the fun to be had in dressing up, he can't connect that sense of fun to his everyday life or his family. He also has a poor sense of the options available to him, particularly when buying clothes – in part because most of his clothing comes from a grocery store.

Again, the point of the show is not to "fix" Cory, and I don't offer this description of his approach to aesthetic labor (and life in general) at the beginning of the episode to set him up for mockery. The show often invites sympathy for the degree to which its subjects feel out of their depth, at a loss as to how aesthetic labor should feature in their lives, and therefore less capable of meeting their partners' needs. Understanding where Cory begins gives us a sense of the ways Cory's relationship to aesthetic labor could be adjusted for the better. Cory himself is willing to be adjusted; he describes the experience as getting him out of his comfort zone. At the same time, the Fab Five want him to recognize the ways in which his approach does leave important gaps and inequities in his relationship with his family, particularly his wife.

Cory's lessons in self-presentation suggest grace because of the ways the lessons guide him to a better understanding of the needs of the people around him. The show divides its focus among his relationships with his wife, his daughters, and his mother. Because his relationship with his mother does not play out in way that is relevant to the points I want to make, I'll discuss the show's approach to Cory's relationships with his wife and daughters. In both cases, *Queer Eye* takes time to address the disparity between Cory's level of aesthetic labor, even on special occasions, and his family's. I also want to note the shared limitations of both the *Queer Eye* and Saito's example in their ability to make recommendations: both deal with intimate relationships. Although I have identified some ethical principles that guide aesthetic labor in these situations, it is not clear how to adapt those principles to other contexts. The question of how to approach aesthetic labor outside personal relationships or in explicitly political contexts may receive a different answer than the one suggested here.

The disparity between Cory's self-presentation and his wife's gets special mention. In addition to taking him clothes shopping, the show contextualizes Cory's new clothes through his marriage. Tan France, the show's clothing expert, is also married and describes the daily aesthetic labor he performs as, in part, a gesture to his husband. He suggests Cory approach his clothing in a similar way, as a way of signaling to his wife that she is important to him. When the show addresses Cory's personal grooming, it takes the traditional route of freshening his haircut and giving him some pomade – but also introduces him to DIY exfoliation, framing it as something he can do with his daughters. Making and using your own cosmetics is usually a feminine activity, something female relatives share with each other. Whether or not Cory and his daughters develop a facial night routine (I think we all hope they do), the exercise challenges the notion that aesthetic labor, particularly communally, belongs to one gender. Cory becomes a participant in communal aesthetic labor, rather than merely observing aesthetic labor for his benefit. Further, though the show has a light comic tone, it never makes a joke of a straight father mixing up a scented sugar scrub with his daughters. In this case, the show handles aesthetic labor gracefully by teaching its subjects how to perform it sincerely and take the relationships the labor looks after seriously. I don't think Cory has to develop a love for exfoliants or spa days in order to gracefully perform aesthetic labor, but if he understands the full meaning of these practices to the people he cares about, he is less likely to shirk the work or sulk his way through it.

This approach to aesthetic labor emphasizes Cory's community relationships by pointing out the people he values and highlight his own role in sustaining those

relationships by indicating techniques, particularly aesthetic techniques, for maintaining the relationships and communicating the value he places on them. *Queer Eye* gives Cory guidance on kinds of aesthetic labor to perform and on techniques of self-presentation (how to find clothes that fit, for example), but encourages grace by contextualizing that labor and self-presentation so that Cory understands what his aesthetic practices mean to other people. He has learned, in a very different context, the lessons in Saito's reading of *The Pillow Book*: the way we approach our material world and our embodiment affects the well-being of the people we care about. Taking that well-being into consideration allows us to perform aesthetic labor gracefully.

My argument for grace calls back to the most pragmatic formulation of the case for performing aesthetic labor: it makes life easier for everyone. We need to shift expectations about whose life should be easier. Rather than placing the expectations for aesthetic labor primarily on members of oppressed groups, we should focus on members of privileged groups. Additionally, privileged people should consider graceful aesthetic labor as something directed toward, or "for," members of oppressed groups, rather than as something they owe primarily to their confederates.

VII. Conclusion

My project in this paper has been both to highlight some common problems with aesthetic labor in the context of oppressive structures and to offer an account of the way aesthetic labor links with human wellbeing. The link persists even for people at the intersection of multiple oppressions; in fact, people in just this position have offered some of the richest articulations of the relationship. While we have good reason to be

critical of many kinds of aesthetic labor and the way they perpetuate or rely on economic injustice, simply railing against aesthetic labor is both ineffective and unfulfilling. Additionally, rather than focusing only on the ways oppression and aesthetic labor interact, we should turn our attention to the way privilege and aesthetic labor interact. This will give us a fuller picture of the way aesthetic labor features in our lives. I have also argued that grace is a useful "guide" to the attitude one should take towards one's own aesthetic labor when one assumes a relatively high position in a hierarchy. Since many of us will, one time or another, occupy that position, the guide is useful to diverse groups of people.

5. Conclusion

I've argued throughout these papers against a view that our everyday aesthetic experiences are distractions from more important things, that they deceive us about where our attention properly belongs, and that they impede justice projects. Instead, I've pointed to situations of injustice where aesthetic experience, attention, and activity help us resist that injustice. I'll use this conclusion to recapitulate the arguments I made in support of this claim, indicate some ways my projects here might develop in future works, and conclude by explaining some of the goals I had for this project.

1. Aesthetic Resistance

A few points need revisiting. First, I want to emphasize what it is about the aesthetic that I think is so important for these resistance projects. Second, I want to reiterate the connection between diverse varieties of lived experience and aesthetics. Third, I want to revisit the ways in which each of the papers suggests we can understand our bodies as something other than a problem or impediment to meaningful and ethical lives.

As mentioned at various points in the three papers, aesthetic values and judgments often play a prominent role in certain kinds of oppression and injustice. Although objectification is a moral wrong, it incorporates aesthetic judgments, particularly judgments of taste. Both respectability politics and the conditions of injustice to which respectability politics respond enlist aesthetic standards and ideals as a justificatory tactic. Aesthetic labor clearly focuses on aesthetic practices, experiences, and ideals, often to ends that at least seem to perpetuate various kinds of inequality. Given the troubling use to which the aesthetic is put in these kinds of situations, we

might be skeptical about the possibilities of the aesthetic for furthering projects of justice. Yet, the three papers also point out ways aesthetic attention, practice, and experience enables or facilitates resistance – and the ways some kinds of aesthetic practice have constituted resistance. In such cases, the aesthetic promotes justice, rather than impeding it.

The aesthetic can enable resistance because of its value orientation: to observe something's aesthetic qualities is, firstly, a way of paying attention to it, which is a form of valuing it. As philosophers of everyday aesthetics like Yuriko Saito have argued, attending to things like dishes, housework, and human bodies can be a way of countering notions about what kinds of things are "worth our time." Attending to the aesthetic qualities of under-valued portions of our life can positively alter our orientation toward them. Secondly, aesthetically *appreciating* something can be a way of valuing it in the honorific sense. On this model of aesthetic appreciation, the appreciator develops a positive attitude toward the object. I understand this attitude to include a range of positive responses, including quite mild ones like satisfaction and curiosity, that promote an understanding of the richness of the object being appreciated. Such a dynamic differs sharply from objectification, which might look like a mode of attending to and appreciating a person's aesthetic qualities, but the aesthetic response is narrow and meager, circumscribed by social dynamics that make the objectifier into a poor appreciator. For those on the receiving end of an objectifying gaze, aesthetically appreciating their somatic rejection of the gaze reframes the power dynamics and expands notions about which aesthetic properties of human bodies matter.

That expansion is particularly important for improving our attitudes toward human bodies and countering ideas about what certain bodies are worth. The project requires we recognize the both the diversity of human embodiment and the ways community inflects those diverse experiences of embodiment. Rather than replicating the traditional, and art-oriented, notion of aesthetic appreciation and experience as relying on disinterested and atomic judges, acknowledging and exploring the diversity of human bodies facilitates a multidimensional, flexible aesthetic approach to embodiment. It also helps avoid over-generalizations about what bodies and embodiment are like – or should be like. Approaching embodiment as a feature of bodies, rather than a feature of "the body," improves body aesthetics by pushing back against abstractions and universalized assumptions about what is possible for body aesthetics. Calling attention to racialized, gendered, and/or disabled people's aesthetic experiences with their bodies also reminds us of the insights marginalized voices can offer. Importantly, such insights will be *specific*, making them more likely to receive uptake or meaningfully challenge existing power structures.

Finally, understanding body aesthetic practices as means of resistance to oppression helps counter the long history of negative attitudes toward bodies and the kinds of injustice that disdain for embodiment has supported. It also helps avert pessimism about the fact of embodiment, which is useful given that embodiment is (so far) inescapable. In the case of objectification, aesthetic appreciation of bodily responses underlines the way embodiment and ethical action intertwine and offers a vivid counter to objectifying narratives. Although respectability politics has a complex, and sometimes troubling, relationship with the bodies of racialized and gendered

people, it also treated bodies as instruments of resistance, not just sites of oppression. Furthermore, the inciting issue for respectability politics was the bodily dangers black women faced. Respectability politics acknowledged the close link between bodily well-being and community well-being. Similarly, although aesthetic labor can also equivocate on the proper way to understand embodiment (sometimes positioning it as a problem), the examples from writers like Keah Brown and Kayla Whaley show that aesthetic labor can also bring us to a kind of bodily ease and self-acceptance. Writing as disabled women, Brown and Whaley are keenly aware of the ways self-acceptance and bodily ease are denied them, in part through cultural scripts that don't recognize their bodies as capable of eliciting certain kinds of aesthetic responses. By claiming those responses for themselves, Brown and Whaley refute the idea that the problem lies in their bodies and not in the way the world frames their bodies.

2. Next Steps

Given body aesthetics' relative newness, at least as a self-aware philosophical subdiscipline, there are a number of different directions in which these papers point us. In general, and in keeping with the overall project of turning our attention toward under-explored aspects of our lives, these next steps direct attention to areas that have seen, so far, little philosophical analysis. The projects I suggest also draw connections between different disciplines and theoretical approaches. Finally, because the work I've done here has mingled ethical and aesthetic concerns, the future projects I suggest here will be both ethical and aesthetic projects.

a. First-Personal Body Aesthetics

The projects suggested by the paper on first-personal body aesthetics lean more toward ethics than aesthetics. However, they could all speak to issues in body aesthetics and, perhaps, in other areas of aesthetics as well. The first project has to do with explicitly diversifying the kinds of bodies that feature in and inform philosophical understanding of embodiment. The second project looks at ways self-objectification might differ across communities.

Closer attention to first-personal body aesthetic experiences from traditionally marginalized people is in line with my continued interest in recognizing the diversity of human bodies and experiences of embodiment. There are vibrant academic communities for disability and fat studies, for example, and looking toward academic and non-academic work from people with disabilities and fat people might provide useful insight. Certainly, more work needs to be done to connect the discussion in my paper with work in disability studies. Disability is a highly diverse category, so closer attention to work in disability studies would go a long way toward filling in gaps in the aesthetics literature.

Turning our attention back to objectification and self-objectification also underlines the need to explicitly consider the bodies of people in marginalized communities. There are experiences of objectification that I was only able to gesture at. For example, racial fetishes and patterns of objectification look different in gay and straight communities. What might self-objectification look like if you belong to a group that is traditionally desexualized? Heeding the experiences of members of such groups – for example, fat and disabled people, mothers, East Asian men, the elderly – might bring new insight into the way subjectivity pervades self-objectification. Additionally, objectification and

self-objectification, or perhaps Cahill's derivatization, seems to feature in certain kinds of tokenizing. How does attending to embodiment deepen our understanding of the experience of tokenization? Can embodiment facilitate inclusivity? If tokenizers attend to their experiences of discomfort, can they come to a better understanding of tokenizing processes? A more extended consideration of the way first-personal body aesthetics can feature in those different experiences might yield philosophically interesting work. Additionally, explicit, sustained, scholarly attention to members of marginalized groups is an important step toward a more equitable scholarly community.

b. Respectability Politics

The projects suggested by the paper on respectability politics deal with ways respectability politics itself may be interesting to issues in everyday aesthetics and body aesthetics. Additionally, respectability politics has not received much attention in social and political philosophy either, but the projects suggested here might be interesting to philosophers working in those fields.

One issue philosophers might take up is a more thorough taxonomy of different kinds of respectability politics. My paper suggests some ways the politics of respectability were used to further racial uplift, but it would be interesting to more thoroughly explore respectability politics as one strategy among many in the Civil Rights movement. Gay communities have also used respectability politics as a political strategy, and it would be worth seeing to what extent the approaches overlap. Does aesthetic activity feature as prominently when respectability is a strategy for gay rights? Is there a similar striving toward aesthetic neutrality? What does it mean when that

neutrality is coded as straight and middle class in addition to white and bourgeois? How do calls for respectability balance more radical political strategies?

In the topic of everyday aesthetics, respectability politics gives a starting point for expanding the small body of philosophical literature on domesticity. Domestic labor and household management in one's own home were preoccupations of respectability politics, but I did not discuss them with the same detail as I discussed self-presentation. Housework features in everyday aesthetic activity, though admittedly it is hard to get in the habit of thinking of washing the dishes as an aesthetic activity. Even those of us unable to come to that view might recognize social-political and ethical significance in respectability politics' interest in housework and domestic labor as labor issues, and as feminized and racialized industries.

c. Aesthetic Labor

The topic of aesthetic labor is particularly novel to philosophy, perhaps more than any other idea discussed in this dissertation. In the future, I am interested in developing a more robust account of aesthetic labor, particularly its role in community relationships. In addition, "The Case for Aesthetic Labor in Everyday Life" focuses on a few specific aesthetic practices, further consideration of which might make for more fruitful philosophical investigations. Future work might fuse those two interests.

For example, I briefly discussed perfume as an occasion of aesthetic experience and aesthetic labor that positively contributes to our well-being. Part of that enrichment is due to perfume's longevity and intimacy, making it an interesting addition to everyday activity. However, perfume can also be an object of specific aesthetic interest

and appreciation, often in community with other people. Like other non-art aesthetic activities, perfume is under-analyzed in philosophical literature. A thoughtful treatment of perfume aesthetics could explore what is characteristic about perfume as an aesthetic object, what the norms of appreciation are, and how a community's appreciative practices influence aesthetic evaluations of perfume. Perfume's cultural contexts, including the ways perfumers appropriate and adapt ingredients and aesthetic cues from other cultures, would also make for interesting work, both expanding work in aesthetics and offering insights into perfume.

Additionally, there is probably more to be said about the link between self-presentation and liberation. Both liberation movements and varieties of self-presentation are diverse. Given this diversity, a more thorough exploration of the specifics of liberatory self-presentation would be philosophically interesting. For example, liberatory self-presentation might be a strategy consciously adopted in order to advance a political aim, but it might also be self-presentation that happens to contradict prevailing norms about the way one "ought" to perform aesthetic labor. Additionally, liberatory self-presentation is going to be, of necessity, highly contextualized. Are there principles, aesthetic or ethical or otherwise, that underlie various kinds of liberatory self-presentation? To what extent does liberatory self-presentation overlap with (or conflict with) methods of self-presentation that seek safety and survival?

Finally, my discussion of aesthetic labor focused on self-presentation. Other kinds of everyday aesthetic activity also seem to qualify as aesthetic labor: preparing and consuming food, for example. Food has received plenty of philosophical attention, including in aesthetics, and it would be interesting to see what that scholarship has to

say on the issues that arise when we consider food as an instance of aesthetic labor. Food production, preparation, and consumption have complex relationships with ethical and political concerns – perhaps considering these experiences as, at least in part, aesthetic labor could yield further insight. I think that more can be said about outsourcing aesthetic labor, too.

3. Conclusion

I took up this research project because it was interesting, but as I pursued it I found it was also helpful. In particular, I wanted to work out how it was that our aesthetic experiences seemed to function in ways they weren't "supposed" to. By now, the idea that caring about literature and art positively impacts your life and the world around you is common. There is plenty of work in philosophy and other disciplines about the way artworks interact with moral experience and self-cultivation. Additionally, there is a long tradition within literary and artistic communities of thinking about art as something that promotes a just world. In this sense, the aesthetic is generally accepted as aiding ethical projects. Art work and justice are compatible projects.

By contrast, caring about clothes is not "supposed" to help you dismantle injustice. And yet, that example helps point the way to the conclusions at which these papers eventually arrived, since we might think that caring about the way clothes are *made* is a big part of caring about clothes. And caring about the way clothes are made leads you, pretty quickly, not only to a history of craftsmanship and artistry – in the couture context and in the mundane context – but to a system of economic and environmental exploitation and to your position within it. It also leads to rich cultural

histories of clothing, and related craft or art forms, across the globe. Clothing pretty clearly does mean something in our attempts to resist injustice and oppression. In addition to clothing's status as a product, it has significance as a cultural practice. People wear clothing to indicate pride in their cultural identity, alliance with political causes, and their relationship with gender. Self-expression and political or ethical convictions convene in our clothing.

Other everyday aesthetic practices, experiences, and choices share this mix of ethical, social, political, and community significance. Although philosophy as I understand it is well-suited to exploring those intersections, there has been relatively little work that does so. Still less has philosophy acknowledged the role of the aesthetic in these everyday cases. When the role of human bodies is acknowledged, that acknowledgement generally has little to say about bodies' aesthetic facets. Rather than separating out the aesthetic components from the rest (bodily, ethical, cultural, and so on), the three papers I wrote here tried to treat the tangle as philosophically interesting and capable of improving our understanding of the narrow slices of everyday life I picked out. Focusing on the mundane does not mean sacrificing significance: the three papers made it clear that the stakes are high in everyday life.

By taking this approach, I was able to write three papers that helped me. The papers allowed me to explore and investigate philosophical work, as well as work in history, literature, and sociology, that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of objectification, respectability politics, and aesthetic labor. I was lucky to carry out these projects and grateful for the chance.

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