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Mylo Apollo Parker-Emerson

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THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

Inviting Others In: How Oppression Affects the Self

By: Mylo Apollo Parker-Emerson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Advisor: Lee A. McBride III, Ph.D.

Department of Philosophy
The College of Wooster
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Abstract

Broadly, the focus of this thesis is to consider how oppression affects the self. More specifically, this project supports the claim that there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black (American) Christian spaces that affects the self. The position is elucidated through a four-chapter structure. In the first chapter, I provide a charitable reading to Mead's theory of the self. I end the chapter by considering how a dissonance may occur. In chapter two, I define identity through a hermeneutical lens and supplement this theory by considering the ways identity can be imposed and taken. I end the chapter by defining oppression and situating oppression with the theory of intelligible identities. In the next chapter, I show the importance of recognizing intersectionality through considering the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. In exploring the model, the concept of a core sense of self is assumed. I then consider this assumption, clarify it, and situate this concept within Mead's theory of the self. The fourth, and final, chapter considers a specific environment in which there is a dialectical dissonance and an identity dissonance because of oppression. The focus, here, is queerness in black, American Christian spaces. I show the relationship between dialectical dissonance and identity dissonance, and end the chapter, and the thesis, by putting forth ways to rectify the experience of identity dissonance for black queer folk.

Dedication

To my late Grandmother, Sherlene Parker. For sticking up for me. For insisting on seeing me for all that I am and continuing to love me all the same. To my mother, grandfather, Aunt Gerri, and brothers for growing with me in life, love, self-love, and faith.

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Introduction

The title, “Inviting Others In: How Oppression Affects the Self,” is largely influenced by Darnell Moore, author of *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America*. In conversation with Moore, he and I, among others, were discussing how to navigate one’s professional career while being queer.¹ I posed this discussion topic as I was hesitant about being openly queer and transgender while being a professional inside and outside of academia. He began to talk about his own experience and how he did not feel like “coming out,” in terms of sexuality, was what he was meant to do, especially because not everyone has to come out. Largely, though, for queer folks, it is often an expectation to come out as being queer is deemed to be outside the norm. He reframed this expectation, though, by stating that he would rather invite others in, into his home, where his home was a metaphor for his life, his existence, to the way that he understood his “self.” By inviting others in rather than coming out, he was the one who got to decide who was welcome to know who he is. He gets to frame his own narrative, he gets to be the author of his own narrative. This struck a chord with me. I knew I needed to write, in some way, about my experiences as a queer person of color, but did not know how to frame my inspiration for doing so – until this conversation.

This Independent Study serves as a way to invite others into my experience as a queer person of color. Given the time and scope of a project such as this Independent Study, I could not possibly cover everything I may have wanted to. In order to narrow my scope,

¹Queerness is in reference to what it is to exist outside of the norms of gender, gender roles, gender expression, and sexuality. To be transgender is for one’s gender identity to be outside of the norm, that is, cisgender. Cisgender describes those whose gender falls in line with their sex assigned at birth.

though, I considered what it meant (for me) to be a philosopher, the discipline of philosophy, and why I decided to spend four years questioning everything.

Being a philosopher, to me, in a way, is like being constantly hungry and never satisfied. It is discovering the intrinsic value of learning. It is wrestling with questions that really matter to you, even if they don't seem like big questions, because most end up having big roots. What originally attracted me to philosophy was a course I took in high school titled, "Honors Western Humanities." In that unique space, I finally had the chance to think about those questions that always bugged me, those particular questions that church folk would scold me for having. What really committed me to philosophy was not the readings necessarily, rather it was the discussion around it.

If I reach back to my 14-year-old self in that classroom, I can remember the conversations about the way the world is, God, and love. Taking this course made me realize that there is so much more than what I was merely told. As I was learning about Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, I literally felt like I was coming out of the cave, and now the new ability to questions what I thought I knew was that blinding feeling of new enlightenment. Philosophy was something that I needed in that moment in order finally be reflective. At that time, it was almost as if I had accessed another part of my brain that was previously closed off.

I needed philosophy because I was struggling and couldn't possibly articulate it in the way I can now. During this time, religion had been a big part of my life. I can remember having to always go to church every Sunday, and sometimes bible study every Wednesday. This was never something I wanted to do, it was something I had to do. After every Sunday service, I always felt conflicted. It never felt right, and I could not put a finger on that feeling. I would always ask why we had to go to church, and the response was always because *we*

believe in God, and *we* are supposed to go. But *I* never felt like I was a part of the *we*. I disagreed whole heartedly with the culture surrounding my black Baptist church, the teachings of each sermon that were riddled with toxic paternalism and the incessant sexism and homophobia. I hated being a part of that culture and religion. I lived in the sea of you *have to*, with no why. I was an incredibly angry and angsty as a result. I realize now that a lot of my feelings at the time had to do with the disconnect between my multitude of identities and how they contradicted with the preached tenets of the religion and the surrounding black cultural norms.

My experience here is something that I continually reflect on, and throughout writing my Independent Study, the writing became a way for me to philosophically understand my own experience that others have, too, undoubtedly experienced. Originally, the question was about the “coming out” experience, that is, the public expression of one’s sexuality or gender given that it is deemed outside of the norm. I was curious about how “coming out” affected the “self.” I realized, though, the problem was not the “coming out” phenomenon, it was the fact that having a particular gender identity or sexuality meant one had to come out. And once out, you were to be oppressed. As someone who is black, transgender, and queer, oppression and discrimination are, well, nothing new. The question, then, became: “how does oppression affect the self?” This question, and thus response, became more specific through questioning and refocusing. The position of this thesis, then, is that: there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black (American) Christian spaces that affects the self.

Given the philosophical claim of this thesis, the project is divided into four chapters. The first chapter, “On the Nature of the Self,” provides a charitable reading of George Herbert Mead’s theory of the self. In defining the self, I explicate the distinction between the

“I” and “me.” As a result of this duality, the self is inherently dialectical. I then expand on a scenario that Mead presents in order to show that there are certain instances in which a dissonance occurs between the “I” and the “me.”

In the second chapter, “On the Nature of Identity and Oppression,” I define identity in order to show the basis of which one is oppressed. By considering Georgia Warnke’s take on identity, identity is understood through a hermeneutical lens to show identity’s dependency on context and how certain identities are intelligible. I then expand on Warnke by considering the ways in which intelligible identities can be and are imposed or taken through Robert Gooding-Williams’ philosophy. Given this theory of identity, I consider what oppression is through Marilyn Frye’s essays and draw the connections between identity, oppression, and being a part of a social group.

The third chapter, “Intersectionality and the Core Sense of Self,” highlights the significance of intersectionality by considering the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. This model, though, presents an interesting concept of the “core sense of self.” I then explain what this core sense of self is, exactly, and how it relates to Mead’s theory of the self.

In the fourth and final chapter, “The Oppression of Queerness in Black Religious Spaces,” I consider a specific environment in which there is a dialectical dissonance and an identity dissonance because of oppression. I do so to utilize a particular experience to better understand the particular claim of this thesis. I first define identity dissonance and how this may occur for those a part of an oppressive group and the oppressed group. I then specify the context of the black church in the United States and how it relates to black culture. I consider the conflicting impositions experienced by black queer folk. To end the chapter, I provide a way to begin to rectify these resulting dissonances of oppression.

Chapter One: On the Nature of the Self

The overarching goal of this project, very broadly, is to consider how oppression affects the self. Specifically, I want to support the claim that there is a conflicting imposition (from being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black Christian spaces that affects the self. In order to understand how oppression affects the self, you first have to understand the components that make up the question. Thus, oppression and self are key concepts that need to be defined. Furthermore, the ways in which the self can be affected must be understood. The very first step, then, must be an analysis of the self. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a charitable reading of the self, provide an argument from the nature of the self to show that oppression *can* affect the self, and lastly to present a possible condition of the nature, or the ontology, of the self while oppressed.

George Herbert Mead presents a theory of the self which falls in line with a “dialectic” personal and interpersonal ideology of the self. This theory of the self is incredibly socially situated. By this I mean that what the self is, is dependent on social interaction. Mead put forth groundbreaking ideas through “his concepts of ‘generalized other’ and his rather strikingly socialized ‘self.’”¹ As a philosopher of evolution, Mead was focused on “emergence evolution.”² In thinking about how we come to be, he took in consideration the effects of the society we live in and the communities we interact with, which led to the cultivation of a theory of the self. Mead’s theory of the self is rooted in the assertion that the self develops as an object to itself, the subject. Accordingly, the self is a subject and an object. Mead further explores this idea through the distinction between the “I” and the “me.”

¹ George Herbert Mead. 1956. *On Social Psychology*, Ed. Anselm Straus. “Introduction” p. xi

² Mead. *Social Psychology*. xvii

Section I: George Herbert Mead on How the Self Develops

Mead describes the nature of the self through considering how it relates to the other aspects of the individual by first considering the nature of an individual. He tries to “connect [an] entire evolutionary process with social organization in its most complex expression, and as that within which arise the very individuals through whose life-process it works, giving birth to just such elements as are involved in the development of selves.”³

Before this point in the text, Mead presents a canonical example of evolutionary process through showing how far man has come since the state of nature to civilization.⁴ The purpose of this, though, is to show how “finally we see the situation as one in which we try to do with self-consciousness what took place by a process of evolution.”⁵ Connecting the evolutionary process to how we have developed requires the faculty of self-consciousness. Thus, the element that Mead is alluding to here is self-consciousness that necessitates control.⁶ As self-consciousness is the ability to recognize and reflect on the environment we are in, we need the faculty of control because it helps us utilize this ability. Control comes into play here because “the human being as a social form actually has relatively complete control over his environment.”⁷ There is an interest in the experience of the individual and the development of control because through this understanding, the “self” arises:

... the human self arises through its ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs – because he can talk to himself in terms of the community to which he belongs and lay upon himself the responsibilities that belong to the community; because he can recognize his own duties as against others – that is what constitutes the self as such. And there you see what we have emphasized, as peculiar to others, that which is both individual and which is habitual. The

³ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 30

⁴ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 27

⁵ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 31

⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 30

⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 30

structure of society lies in these social habits, and only insofar as we can take these social habits into ourselves can we become selves.⁸

This paragraph provides further understanding to the idea of a socialized self which comes from recognizing the evolution of the individual.

The first claim that comes from this excerpt makes clear that the self arises or develops through social interactions. This is based off of the ability to think of oneself in relation to the group that you are a part of, which allows you to see yourself in relation to others around you. This is best understood as self-consciousness. Through our ability to reflect on the attitudes and the environment we are in, an object and subject dialectic of the self arises.⁹ He furthers this self dialectical through the connection with that which is both individual and habitual. He does this in order to show the relationship between the individual and the society they are in, which can be understood through social habits. Social evolution drives Mead's theory and shows how an understanding of the faculties of an individual can lead to the development of the self.

In the section titled "Self," Mead goes in to more depth about how one ought to understand the self. He, again, reiterates that "the self is something which has a development."¹⁰ This development occurs through the process of social experience and activity.¹¹ What further supports his claim that the self arises through social experience is this idea that the self "develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole, and to other individuals within that process."¹² It is the case that "a self can arise *only* where there is a social process within which this self has had its initiation."¹³ This seems

⁸ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 33

⁹ This will be further explained in later paragraphs

¹⁰ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 199

¹¹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 199

¹² Mead. *Social Psychology*. 199

¹³ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 42 [emphasis added]

to follow the assertion that an individual will adopt the attitude of the community in which he belongs, thus the “individual is a part of the process where he influences himself as he does others.”¹⁴ Though Mead provides this understanding of an individual as influencing himself and the community to which he belongs, he clearly differentiates between the body and the self in order to show how the self is capable of influencing himself and others.

The understanding and differentiation of the body and the self provides a deeper understanding of how Mead categorized the nature of the self. The body cannot see itself as a whole. This seems like an obvious claim as we can easily see our hands, for example, but we cannot directly see our backs.¹⁵ He states, “The body does not experience itself as a whole, in the sense in which the self in some way enters into the experience of the self.”¹⁶ This seems to insinuate that the self is able to “sense” each of its own aspects. Mead notes that this ability is related to reflexivity. The self is reflexive as it “can be both subject and object.”¹⁷ Thus, reflexively, the self is able to enter into its own experience through its ability to be aware of both perspectives as the object of experience and the subject of experience; the self is able to sense each of its own aspects. Mead makes this distinction in order to bring out “the characteristic of the self as an object to itself.”¹⁸

All these different claims I am putting forth from Mead are done so to show support for the development of the self as a social structure. Specifically put:

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only insofar as he

¹⁴ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 41

¹⁵ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 200.

¹⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 201

¹⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 201

¹⁸ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 201

first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or are in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved.¹⁹

This paragraph seems to be the bedrock of Mead's theory of how the self arises. The individual experiences himself as a "self" indirectly. Meaning, we become aware of the self through other's experiences. When an individual is a part of a social group, the social group holds some sort of set of norms which categorize the individuals who are a part of that group. The individual, then, is like everyone else in that social group, thus he sees himself the same way others a part of the social group would see him. When you consider how a person *experiences*, they are the subject of their experience and the others, who are a part of the experience, are the objects of the experience. It is similar to the way in which a sentence works. Although the individual is the subject, the one experiencing by interacting with objects who are a part of the experience, we come to know our "self" by experiencing our "self" as the object, that is, the part of the experience that is being *experienced upon*. This occurs because the individual is able to be reflective and put their self in the position as the object of the group's sentence. Meaning, we are able to become an object in our own experience through our ability to take the attitudes of others towards ourselves and internalize them in a way that objectifies us in our own experience.

¹⁹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 202-203

Section II: George Herbert Mead on the Subject / Object and I / Me Distinction

To better understand how one becomes an object to himself, we have to further consider self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is best defined, by Mead, as “an awakening in ourselves of the group of attitudes which we are arousing in others,” and when made aware of those attitudes, self-consciousness becomes “the ability to call out in ourselves a set of definite responses which belong to others of the group.”²⁰ Or, in other words, self-consciousness is the ability to emulate those attitudes of the social group of which one is a part.²¹

Self-consciousness, then, is essential to the development of the self. The ability to be aware of the attitudes of members of our social group and emulate those attitudes is directly linked to the way in which Mead defines the mind. Mead considers the development of the mind as a product of social evolution. He states:

The essential condition for the appearance of what has been conceived of as mind is that the individual in acting with reference to the environment should, as part of the action, be acting with reference to himself, so that his action would include himself as an object ... If this is attained, the self as an object becomes a part of the acting individual, that is, the individual has attained what is called self-consciousness – a self-consciousness that accompanies his conduct or may accompany a portion of his conduct.²²

It is a condition of the mind that allows for one to refer to themselves as an object. When one is able to act in reference to their self and in reference to their environment, then the individual is able to attain self-consciousness; once self-consciousness is attained, the individual is able to call out the set of attitudes that belong to the environment of which they are a part. This is able to occur because “it is this ability to control our environment that gives us what we term

²⁰ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 227

²¹ Self-consciousness is not to be confused with consciousness. Consciousness “simply has reference to the field of experience.” (Mead 227)

²² Mead, *Social Psychology*. 95

‘mind.’”²³ The mind is a fundamental aspect of our experience because it allows us to objectify our “self.”

Mead further explains how the self can be an object through the process of going through an experience of readjustment in response to stimuli, which is possible through self-consciousness. He states:

In conduct within which readjustment must take place before the act is completed, there is at least a place for such an involution as that of making one’s self an object in acting with reference to the environment. Given such a situation, in which because of conflict, readjustment must take place, the function of making one’s self an object seems to lie entirely in so pointing out to one’s self the different characters of things that a readjustment of responses will become possible.²⁴

By readjustment, Mead is referring to the ability to respond in the way in which the environment requires through a “trial-and-error process” until one finds themselves adjusting “to the field of stimulations.”²⁵ Responding to stimuli through a trial-and-error process makes the self an object. As the self becomes an object, two things are implied: “first, that the individual indicates things and their characters to others, and second, that the stimulus of which he makes use is one to which he tends to respond in the same fashion as that in which the others respond.”²⁶ By responding the same way in which others respond, one becomes the object of their own experience rather than the subject.

As previously mentioned, if we consider experience like a sentence, the subject is the person or thing doing something, and the object is having something done to it. In adjusting in the same way others are adjusting, the individual becomes a “self” by becoming like others through objectifying his personhood. This is an essential function of an individual because

²³ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 41

²⁴ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 96

²⁵ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 97

²⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 99

“in the experience of the individual a self has arisen to serve the functions of reflectively attaching to things and their characters [as] the results of past experience and of indicating and isolating the meanings of things.”²⁷ The self, by its very nature, is reflexive, that is, both subject and object. Because it is reflexive, it can be reflective about its experiences in order to isolate the norms of an experience to reflect them as the object. Reflectiveness is directly related to the self-conscious as it is the “essential condition, within the social process, for the development of the mind.”²⁸ The self is innately reflexive, and self-consciousness and the mind are what allow an individual to be reflective. The ability to reflectively attach to experiences allows for the objectification of the self.

Before the self can be understood as a subject, it must develop through social experiences. Mead states that it is “impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience,” and that “after a self has arisen, it in a certain sense, provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self.”²⁹ Thus, the self must develop through social experiences and because it develops through social experiences, it can give itself a social experience: the social experience in which one can converse with one’s self. In giving itself a social experience, the subject arises. This claim can be further explained through Mead’s words:

That process to which I have just referred, of responding to one’s self as another responds to it, taking part in one’s own conversation with others, being aware of what one is saying and using that awareness of what one is saying to determine what one is going to say thereafter – that is a process with which we are all familiar ... We are finding out what we are going to say what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process are continually controlling the process itself.³⁰

²⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 99

²⁸ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 196

²⁹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 204

³⁰ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 205

As the self is reflexive by nature, one is able to be reflective towards themselves and their social environment. In the process of reflecting with one's self, the self becomes an object to itself, i.e., the subject. Through the social experience of the object and the subject, we, as an individual, come to know what we are going to say and do. Mead states: "the person should be responding to himself is necessary to the self, and it is this sort of social conduct which provides behavior within which that self appears."³¹ Accordingly, we can understand this presentation of Mead's ideology as that of the dialectic self, necessarily.

Throughout this summation, it is necessary to explicate Mead's theory of "I" and "me." To do so, one first must consider all the pieces that play a role in the definition of the "I" and "me." This is not to be mistaken with the typical understanding in language when the word "I" or "me" is used. Those are mere referential pronouns to our person, while the "I" and "me" discussed in this project are utilized in such a way to understand the nature of the "self" as a social structure. In this way, claims have been put forth to show how the self arises and the ways in which the self could be understood. Mead puts forth this distinction between the "I" and "me" not "to raise the metaphysical question of how a person can be both 'I' and 'me' but to ask for the significance of this distinction from the point of view of conduct itself."³² The "I" and the "me" ought to be considered to best understand the way in which we conduct ourselves, or the way in which we act in a social context as a social structure.

The "me" is the object, while the "I" is the subject. Mead asserts that the "I" reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through replicating those attitudes, we have introduced the 'me' and we react to it as an 'I.'"³³ Thus, the relationship

³¹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 206

³² Mead. *Social Psychology*. 229

³³ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 229

between the “I” and the “me” is dialectical. The “me” is constituted by the attitudes that the individual takes on, and the “I” is constituted by the collection of responses. This occurs because, “insofar as the individual arouses in himself the attitudes of the others, there arises an organized group of responses,” which is due to the abilities of self-consciousness.³⁴ Therefore, the “me,” as a collection of attitudes from the environment, necessitates an “I,” as a collection of responses to those attitudes.

What further differentiates the “I” from the “me” is the way in which the individual experiences each. The individual is aware of the “me,” as “the self he is aware of.”³⁵ The “I” for the individual, or the response, “he does not know and nobody else knows,” because, “the response to that situation as it appears in his immediate experience is uncertain, and it is that which constitutes the ‘I.’”³⁶ The individual is only aware of their “I” “after he has carried out the act.”³⁷ We are not aware of how we will respond as an “I” until we respond because the “I” is experiential. Together, the “I” and the “me,” they “constitute a personality as it appears in social experience.”³⁸ Ultimately, Mead concludes that the “self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases.”³⁹ These phases come together dialectically: a dialectical self.

³⁴ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 230

³⁵ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 230

³⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 230

³⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 230

³⁸ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 233

³⁹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 233

Section III: Summation of Mead; “Oppression and Self” Argument

The previous section presents a charitable reading of Mead’s theory of the self as created through social process by including all of the factors that are necessary in understanding the self as a social process. To understand the self in a larger context, and to best refer to it throughout the rest of the project, it is best to put forth a summation in an order where each point builds off of the previous:

1. *Self as Socialized*: We as individuals have evolved into social organisms. Social organization gives birth to elements which are involved in the development of the self, meaning the self develops.⁴⁰ The self can only develop through social process, experience, and activity.⁴¹
2. *Self as Reflexive*: The self and the body differ in that the self is reflexive, meaning, the self “in some way enters into the experience of the self.”⁴² In other words, the self can be both subject and object.
3. *Development Necessitates Self-Consciousness*: One such element involved in the development of the self that is necessary within social activity is self-consciousness, which is the ability to recognize and reflect on the environment we are in.⁴³ Self-consciousness is also what allows an individual to take the attitude of the environment to which he belongs.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it allows an individual to understand their self as an object.
4. *Self as Object and “Me”*: One enters their own experience as a self indirectly by understanding himself as an object to others, as others are objects to him.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 30

⁴¹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 199

⁴² Mead. *Social Psychology*. 201

⁴³ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 227

⁴⁴ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 227

⁴⁵ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 202-203

As the self is comprised of two phases (the “I” and “me”), he partially sees his self, and his self is, the way others see it. In responding the same way in which others respond, this is the object phase of his experience rather than the subject. In adjusting in the same way others are adjusting, the individual becomes an object by becoming like others through objectifying his personhood. This phase of the self is understood as “me,” which is constituted by the attitudes that the individual takes on. The “me” is the phase of which the individual is aware.

5. *Self as Subject and “I”*: After the “me” has developed as an object, it provides for itself its social experiences through its reflexivity. It is a social experience in which one can converse with one’s self, which is the subject or “I.” As “me” is the attitudes that the individual takes on and conveys, the “I” or the subject is the set of responses to those attitudes. Though, the individual, nor anyone else, will not be aware of what those responses will be until after the act occurs. The collection of responses that the “I” represents may be known, but the way in which the “I” will actually respond is not known until the “me” responds or acts: “It is in memory that the ‘I’ is consistently present in experience.”⁴⁶

Thus, the self is phases that develop through the process of social experience. We first experience our self the way others experience us on the basis of the social group of which we are a part. As we develop as an object, we do so by taking on the attitudes of the social group that we are a part of and display them back to the social group, and that is the self that they see and interact with, i.e. one’s “me.” This is made possible through self-consciousness. In

⁴⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 229

taking on the attitudes of others, this necessitates an “I” or set of responses. Once we respond, our “I” becomes the “me.” Thus, “the self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases.”⁴⁷

Given this understanding of Mead’s theory of the self, it can be better understood that oppression can affect the self. The argument for this position is as follows:⁴⁸

(P1) If the structure of the self allows the self to be able to be socially affected (A), then social phenomena *can* affect the self (B).

-Social phenomena cannot affect the self if there is nothing about the structure of the self that allows it to be socially affected.

(P2) The structure of the self makes the self able to be socially affected (A).

-Supporting Argument for (P2): (P₁) If the self is a consequence of the social process (R), then there is necessarily something about the structure of the self that makes it able to be socially affected (A). (P₂) Mead's theory of the self situates the self as a consequence of the social process (R). Therefore, (A) there is something about the structure self that makes it able to be socially affected.

(C1) Therefore, social phenomena can affect the self (B).

(P3) If a social phenomenon is an event that is observed to exist within a social context (P), then oppression is a social phenomenon (Q).

(P4) Social phenomenon is an event that is observed to exist within a social context (P).⁴⁹

(C2) Therefore, oppression is a social phenomenon.⁵⁰

(C3) Hence, oppression can affect the self.

As it is proven that oppression can affect the self, given the nature of the self put forth by Mead, the next step is to understand (1) the particular social environment in which the self may be oppressed, and (2) the ontology of the self while oppressed.

⁴⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 233

⁴⁸ The argument takes the form of modus ponens, where in the first argument “A” is the antecedent, “B” is the consequent, and “R” serves as support for “A.” In the second argument, “P” is the antecedent and “Q” is the consequent.

⁴⁹ True by definition.

⁵⁰ This is furthered explored in Chapter 2 when defining oppression.

Section IV: Mead in a New Light

Before expanding upon Mead, I want to revisit the project at hand. If an individual is oppressed, then that sort of social experience of an oppressed identity is one that will affect the self, specifically in terms of the “I” and “me.” To consider and justify this claim further, and to understand just how it will affect the self, it is my intent to analyze Mead’s theory in order to understand what oppression can do to the self. Mead’s theory of the self is important to consider as it is completely based on one’s interactions in society and on the basis of how we conduct ourselves. If we are to consider the effect of oppression on the self, as oppression is a social phenomenon, it follows that the nature of the self is one that is dependent on social interaction. Mead puts forth an effective theory of the self in order to claim that the self is essentially comprised of a social process, that is, the self is a social structure. It is my purpose now to consider one of the implications that this theory puts forth in order to elucidate the ontology of the self while oppressed.

The implication that is necessary to address arises in discussion of how the self is in different social circumstances. Mead states:

We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience.⁵¹

Although it seems to be the case that as the self is influenced by and develops because of the social environment, there is a question that needs to be addressed: is the self actually

⁵¹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 207

different in different social situations or is the self merely appearing to be different? Mitchell Aboulafia, too, addresses this question:

For Mead, the “Me” arises in relationship to systems of behaviors, generalized others, and, therefore, is by definition multiple, although the behaviors of various “Me's” can overlap. Further, Freud's model assumes a determinism that is not inherent in the relationship of the “I” to the “Me.” Not only does the “I” initiate novel responses, its new behaviors can become part of a “Me.” In other words, “Me's” are not static. They are systems that often undergo transformation.⁵²

The “I” creates novel experiences that, through action, become a part of the “me,”⁵³ which arises due to a specific social environment. The “me” is not static as it changes on the basis of the social environment or by the “generalized others” who assert the attitudes that the “me” takes on. The self is constantly growing, developing, influenced, and thus, changed by the different environments of which the individual becomes a part. Mead asserts that the self *is* different in different social environments rather than merely *appearing* to be different.

I mention this aspect of Mead’s theory because there is something at stake with this view of the self. What is at stake here is that if it is the case that the self continually changes on the basis of the environment, then there cannot be a self that persists. Aboulafia also presents similar worries in an article titled, “George Herbert Mead and the Unity of the Self.” In this article, he considers Mead’s “various uses of the term self.”⁵⁴ He states that “it should seem pathological when there is no connection between these personalities or selves.”⁵⁵ Is it the case that an individual has as many selves as environments they are a part of, or is there something that connects the individual throughout each space allowing the self to persist? In

⁵² Mitchel Aboulafia. 2016. "George Herbert Mead," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/mead/>>

⁵³ That is to say, there are other parts that comprise the “me,” like the attitudes of the generalized other.

⁵⁴ Mitchell Aboulafia. 2016. “George Herbert Mead and the Unity of the Self,” European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy [Online], VIII-1, URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejppap/465>

⁵⁵ Aboulafia. “Unity of the Self.” 207

thinking more about this question, one must consider whether or not Mead is right in thinking that the self *is* different rather than *appearing* to be different. Thus, there is a question of whether or not “self” is merely in reference to the “I” / “me” phases. But, in this instance, the self would be something that *is* different depending on the environment the individual is in. Another option would be to consider whether or not one’s self is merely the “I” rather than the “me.” Although, in this instance, the self could never be preliminarily or immediately known, as the “I” is known only through a retrospection of action. Additionally, one may consider that the “me” is the part that is appearing to change while the “I” is persisting. This, though, does not make sense either. It is contradictory for a set of responses to persist as the responses are dependent on the set of attitudes which are constantly changing dependent on the social environment.

Lastly, and more likely, the self is a way in which we experience, or in other words, the self is the structure of experience. What I mean by this is that although the social environment may change and thus the set of attitudes, the way in which we engage in each of these environments as “I’s” and “Me’s” (the structure) persists. It may be the case that the “me” is different in different social spaces, but the structure remains the same. Therefore, it is important to consider the way in which the “me” and “I” are in action, as these phases affect the self as the social environment shifts. Consequently, in action “the real self that appears in the act awaits the completion of the act itself ... It is that ‘I’ which we may be said to be continually trying to realize, and to realize through the actual conduct itself.”⁵⁶ As the “I,” that is, the response to the attitudes’ of the others, is continually trying to be realized, we have to consider how the “I” comes through in social environments.

⁵⁶ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 236

The way an individual is different in different social environments is important to consider because it will play a role in understanding if and how oppression affects the self. Mead briefly discusses a social situation that occurs, and as a result, affects the self. He addresses this when talking about impulsive conduct. He states:

Impulsive conduct is uncontrolled conduct. The structure of the 'me' does not there determine the expression of the 'I.' If we use a Freudian expression, the 'me' is in a certain sense a censor. It determines the sort of expression which can take place, sets the stage, and gives cue. In the case of impulsive conduct this structure of the 'me' involved in the situation does not furnish to any such degree this control.⁵⁷

Although Mead explicitly says that impulsive conduct is uncontrolled conduct, he implies that impulsive conduct is uncensored conduct by the "me," which is determined by the environment. Thus, in acting in opposition of the social environment one is in, one's conduct is categorized as uncensored, or later noted as unconventionalized. In this instance, the "I" and "me" are in dissonance.

As the attitudes may be different in different social environments, in some environments for some individuals, there are attitudes that will create stress leading to a dissonance. Mead makes note of instances where this stress can be too great – which creates a dissonance between the phases of the self. One must consider the nature of this "stress" and whether that is the only condition of the self while being oppressed.⁵⁸ What complicates the explanation of the self further is the complexity of social groups or environments – often affected by identity.⁵⁹ Different readings of Mead take in consideration the complexity of social groups when analyzing the self, one of which notes:

The point is *not* that there is no integration, rather that integration in historical reality is always short of complete and that conflict and "incoherence" (or:

⁵⁷ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 238

⁵⁸ Oppression is more substantial than everyday social group kinds of stressors.

⁵⁹ The complexity of social groups is explored further in Chapter 2, Section 3: Oppression.

imbalance, *dissonance*, disintegration) are normal features of social life... incoherence is not only a *practical* reality but an *inherent* quality of social organization.⁶⁰

What this quote entails is that given the structure of the self and of social groups, incoherence, or dissonance, is a given aspect of social organization. This dissonance, then, is inevitable as the “I” and “me” phases are dialectical. By merely being a part of a social group, one may experience stress. As stress may be an inevitable aspect of being a member of a social group, the dissonance serves as a necessary condition but not necessarily the only condition of the self while oppressed. Meaning, if the self is oppressed there will be a dissonance, but there is something else besides this dissonance that is occurring. Considering the relationship between identity and the self, as one is oppressed on the basis of identity, could further elucidate the ontology of the self while oppressed.

The self develops as an object or “me” through a social process, the object, “me,” or set of attitudes demand a set of responses which constitute the subject or the “I.” It may be the case that the “me” constitutes a different self for each environment, but the “I,” in some cases, can overtake the socialized “me,” in order to express its self against the attitudes of the social environment they are in. In these instances, an individual, I believe, would be able to express themselves through their identities based on social group membership or societal norms. The definition of identity, how identity works, and its relation to the socialized self will be further explored in the next chapter in order to consider how identity works within Mead’s theory of the self.

⁶⁰ Peter Singlmann. 1972. "Exchange as Symbolic Interaction: Convergences between Two Theoretical Perspectives." *American Sociological Review*. v. 37, no. 4. 420 (Emphasis added on dissonance).

Chapter Two: On the Nature of Identity and Oppression

A theory of the self that is understood through an individual's (or a social organism's) social interaction is fundamental to my understanding of how we as social organisms grow, develop, and exist in the way that we do, given the self is a social structure and the lens in which we experience. In putting forth a charitable reading of Mead's theory of the self, the self is better understood as a product of the social process, i.e. the interactions one has with the generalized other. It is my purpose now to consider what role identity plays in social interaction with the generalized other. This is especially important to consider as oppression is done on the basis of identity. This consideration, then, will come to fruition through presenting a theory of identity, considering how identities are intelligible, and lastly through an understanding of how they are imposed or taken. After considering what identity is, oppression can best be defined. This step is crucial as it is perfectly situated within the overall purpose of the project, that is, explaining how oppression affects the self.

The particular social interaction of interest comes from a social situation "where the structure of the 'me' does not determine the expression of the 'I,'" and the perceived limits of the social situation are not observed.¹ Meaning, the set of responses that the "I" has is not dependent on the set of attitudes that an individual has, which is the "me." As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the case of a situation such as this, a dialectical dissonance between the "I" and "me" can cause one to disregard the limits of social convention. It is the purpose of this chapter, because oppression works on the basis of identity, to consider how identity plays a role in social interaction, and how imposed or taken identities can cause a dialectical dissonance resulting in the "I" to be uncensored by the "me," which we see is a result of

¹Mead. *Social Psychology*. 238

stress. Thus, first, identity ought to be defined. After providing a definition, we can then consider the ways in which identity is imposed, taken, and intersects, and then define oppression and understand how it works within social groups.

Section I: Defining Identity and its Implications

In defining identity, there are several routes that those who study identity take. What I would like to first consider, though, is the difference between descriptors that contribute to one's identity, and which sort of descriptors that contribute "only to trivial descriptions of the person."² It is important to make this distinction to best define what it means to be oppressed on the basis of identity, and in order to do so, one must differentiate between the kinds of identities that are often oppressed (intelligible identities)³ and mere descriptions. To better understand this distinction and shift to oppressed identities, I want to first begin with Georgia Warnke, who, in *Rethinking Race, Sex, and Gender*, considers the canonical ideologies surrounding identity, moves away from them, and considers the aforementioned distinction.⁴

In Warnke's introduction, she lays the groundwork for her project at hand. She begins her introduction building off of the claims that David Copp puts forth in order to clarify her question of focus.⁵ While she states Copp "is not interested in the question of what it is to be or to be identified as a homosexual, an African American or a woman. Rather, the question [Copp] asks is what role these identities play in our moral psychology."⁶ She differs from Copp in that she is interested in answering the question of what those aforementioned "identities and identifications are."⁷ This is significant as she claims:

the way we identify ourselves and others is a way of understanding who or what we and they are. That is, it may be that the identities we take seriously today are ones with social and historical causes that constructed people as certain kinds of people.⁸

² Georgia Warnke. 2008. *After Identity: Rethinking Race, Sex, and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ProQuest Ebook Central. 1

³ This will be explained further.

⁴ Warnke. *After Identity*. 1

⁵ Warnke. *After Identity*. 1

⁶ Warnke. *After Identity*. 2

⁷ Warnke. *After Identity*. 2

⁸ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

This “we” she mentions seems to be referring to the collective of those who are situated within this American ideology. Within our society in the United States, identities that are socially and historically caused, then, are tools utilized to understand ourselves and those around us. So much so, people become certain kinds of people based on those identities. Thus, the identities that we ascribe to ourselves and to others mean what they mean and do what they do because they are situated within a social and historical context that comes along with assumptions and connotations. These are referred to as intelligible identities.

Warnke further supports this claim of identity as a means of understanding ourselves and each other within a social context by comparing it to understanding a text through a hermeneutic approach. She says that “when we ask who someone is, we are asking the same sort of question we ask when we want to know what the meaning of a particular text is; we are trying to understand the person’s ‘meaning.’”⁹ When considering a text or reading a text we inevitably have questions about the thing in which we are engaged; often that question is about its meaning in order to get a better grasp or understanding of the text. Thus, when asking who someone is, and as they respond with the various identities that they hold to be true about themselves, we take this response and it aids in our understanding of said individual: “Our self-identities and the ways we identify others are modes of reading individuals.”¹⁰ She goes on further to show the benefits of a hermeneutic approach:

hermeneutic premises project unity on texts and look to a standard of coherence as a criterion for revising interpretive projections of meaning that cannot be integrated with one another. If one’s understanding of a part of the text cannot be integrated with the meaning one has projected for the whole, one has to revise either one’s understanding of the part or one’s understanding of the whole ... The hermeneutic circle supports a radically situational account of identity.¹¹

⁹ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁰ Warnke. *After Identity*. 14

¹¹ Warnke. *After Identity*. 224

Here, she shows that identity should be understood through a hermeneutic circle because identity is not to be understood in a vacuum. When considering texts, hermeneutics allows for a unity between different interpretations and conflicting interpretations of parts of the text, in regard to the meaning of the whole by putting forth “coherence as the main criterion for assessing their viability.”¹²

Warnke presents three “characteristics” of textual (hermeneutic) understanding that can be connected to identity as a means of understanding.¹³ The first characteristic is that “our understanding of texts is situated.”¹⁴ She supports this characteristic: “We do not come at our texts with a fresh eye but instead with one that is pre-oriented towards the text in a certain way because of the culture and traditions in which we have been socialized.”¹⁵ By “situated,” Warnke is noting that just as a text is read from the perspective of an individual with their own concepts and ideals they acquired as participants in society, an identity is read and understood in the same likeness. When an individual claims an identity or we assume an individual identifies in a particular way, that identity is situated within our lived experience. For example, the way that I, as a black individual, interact with someone who identifies as white, and/or who I identify as white, is affected and is situated by the history of the United States. It is not the case that I just interact with this person without this history and context lingering in the background.

The next characteristic is that “our understanding of texts is purposeful.”¹⁶ She differentiates between this characteristic and the last by saying we not only understand a text

¹² Lauren Swayne Barthold. 2016. *A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and other Social Identities*. 1st edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. 43

¹³ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁴ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁵ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁶ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

“from a certain perspective and not only within a certain framework of assumptions and concerns,” but we also “have certain hopes and expectations for the text, certain reasons for reading it, and particular worries we would like it to address.”¹⁷ Similarly, when considering our or another’s identity, with that identity comes certain expectations. It follows, then, that there may be (and are) several expectations of me, as a black, masculine-presenting individual, that are well known through the commonly recognized stereotypes of black men. For example, this could include the ways in which I am expected to emote, walk, talk, or even act.

Lastly, in building off of the previous two characteristics, she states that in considering the understanding of a particular text, “we are prepared for different interpretations of the text’s meaning.”¹⁸ Just as we come to a text with our own assumptions, perspectives, or expectations, “others have and will understand it differently than we do,” and they will also “bring a different framework of attitudes, expectations, and concerns to it at different points” in their lives.¹⁹ Therefore, anyone’s understanding at any given point is incomplete, changing as the framework changes. This is the same for identity. As many people as there are, there are that many frameworks of attitudes, expectations, and concerns. With each individual we meet we approach that individual and their ways of identifying through our own unique frameworks that are affected by the context we live in. In summary, Warnke “[suggests] that our understanding of a person’s identity is likewise situated, purposefully oriented, and partial.”²⁰ Thus, the hermeneutic approach to identity is beneficial because it shows how identity can be utilized as a tool to understand how individuals (here, in a Western, United States, stereotypical context) are situated within this society.

¹⁷ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁸ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

¹⁹ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

²⁰ Warnke. *After Identity*. 6

In putting forth this reading of identity, Warnke asserts that identity is contextual. She goes further, though, to present a caution:

Even within the historical and cultural settings in which we can be understood as black, white, Asian or [Latinx] and in which we can be understood as females or males, men or women, we cannot only or always be understood in any of these ways. Particular historical and cultural contexts may give rise to racial, sexed, and gendered identities. It is a further point to say that only particular contexts within those broader historical and cultural frameworks can include raced, sexed, or gendered individuals as intelligible “parts.”²¹

This is incredibly important to note as some philosophers do not address how identity is different in different contexts outside of our own Western perspective. There are times in a person’s life when race or gender are not considered intelligible parts. By intelligible parts, Warnke is pointing to the identities that an individual possesses that are intelligible or a mode of understanding who or what we or another individual are – the identities that are used as a means of understanding or situating. When she states that there are contexts in a person’s life when their intelligible identities are not considered intelligible, she explains this further by noting that “is not just that these identities are irrelevant in most circumstances. It is, instead, that they are misunderstandings of who and what we are.”²² To be identified as or situated by the identity “African-American” does not apply to those who are not a part of the context of the United States. For example, if a black individual who was born and raised in England traveled to the United States and was identified as an African-American, that would be a misunderstanding of who they are. What it means to be African-American in the United States and what it means to be black in England are different because the contexts are different; “Hence, if race, gender, and sex are to be intelligible identities, the contexts of

²¹ Warnke. *After Identity*. 7

²² Warnke. *After Identity*. 14

which they are a part must be more precisely defined.”²³ This means that if identity is context dependent, which it is, the next thing that ought to be defined is the context.²⁴ Thus, “an identity is never either the whole of who we are or who we always are. Rather, who we are depends upon the context in which the question arises and the purposes for which it is asked.”²⁵

²³ Warnke. *After Identity*. 246

²⁴ This is something that will be further explored in Chapter 3. In the next chapter, I will attempt to define a particular context, that is the context of black religious spaces.

²⁵ Warnke. *After Identity*. 7

Section II: Identity Imposed and Identity Taken: Race, Gender, and Sexuality

Though I agree with this understanding of identity, I think perhaps there is a place where Warnke could be supplemented, for her analysis is incomplete. Her claim in question is as follows: “only particular contexts within those broader historical and cultural frameworks can include raced, sexed, or gendered individuals as intelligible parts.”²⁶ Here, she asserts that race, gender, and sex can only be considered intelligible (as in, a means of understanding) in particular contexts.²⁷ Though I agree, where she can be supplemented is through the fact that there is often a difference between the way we see and understand ourselves and the way others see and understand us. Warnke’s claim holds true in regards to the way others are understood through identities imposed but not necessarily about the way we see ourselves through the identities we take. This difference can be better explained through Robert Gooding-Williams in “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy,”²⁸ which is further supported and complemented by Lee McBride, III in “New Descriptions, New Possibilities.”²⁹

Gooding-Williams considers the difference between identities imposed and identities taken through “drawing a distinction between being black and being a black person.”³⁰ McBride articulates and explains this distinction well. He states, “Being black is understood as a consequence of a practice of racial categorization to which blacks have been subjected. Being black is thus socially constructed and imposed ... As such, ‘being black’ expresses a third-person perspective.”³¹ This falls in line with what Warnke is claiming. Being black is

²⁶ Warnke. *After Identity*. 7

²⁷ I would like to add sexuality to this list.

²⁸ Robert Gooding-Williams. 2006. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy,” *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics*. New York: Routledge.

²⁹ Lee McBride III. 2018. “New Descriptions, New Possibilities.” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 1. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University.

³⁰ Gooding-Williams. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy.” 92

³¹ McBride. “New Descriptions, New Possibilities.” 173

understood in a particular way that is dependent on context. Gooding-Williams furthers this, though, in saying that this is a categorization to which black folk have been *subjected*, thus it is imposed or placed on black folk, because of the way in which it has been socially constructed. ‘Black’ is something the *he, she, or they* are deemed or judged to be. Therefore, being black expresses a third-person perspective because society is imposing this on individuals as a means to situate folk. The accommodation to Warnke comes through when one considers how identity can also be taken.

Being black, an identity imposed, is different than being a black person, an identity that is taken. Being a black person “expresses a first-person perspective” because “one is a black person only if one (1) classifies oneself as black and (2) makes choices and formulates plans in light of one’s identification of oneself as black.”³² The first-person perspective is a significant difference between being black and being a black person, because identifying oneself as a black person requires an individual to make a claim about their person, their “me” so to speak. Being a black person is something that “I,” as a personal, first-person, pronoun, am; being black is an identity imposed by society on “him, her, or them” from the society’s third-person perspective. Being a black person necessitates intentionality about the way in which one sees themselves, and the way in which this identity that they have taken affects the way they want “to make choices, to formulate plans, to express concerns, and so forth, [which is] in light of [their] identification of [themselves] as black.”³³ Thus, the way an individual exists in the social environment that they are in takes into consideration this identity that they have taken. As a side note, this is not to say that anyone can just *decide* that they are a black person, as “being black – that is, being racially categorized as black – is a

³² McBride. “New Descriptions, New Possibilities.” 174

³³ Gooding-Williams. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy.” 93

necessary but not a sufficient condition of being a black person.”³⁴ One must be black before they decide to be a black person.

In Warnke’s claim, “only particular contexts within those broader historical and cultural frameworks can include raced, sexed, or gendered individuals as intelligible parts,” she fails to consider the way in which an individual sees themselves.³⁵ In this way, raced, sexed, or gendered individuals continue to be intelligible in regards to the way in which a person understand themselves. Individuals do not merely exist in order to be understood by those around us; the way that we find ourselves to be intelligible is, I’d argue, more important. Understanding those around us in similar ways to how we understand texts is a useful mechanism that situates the understanding in a context. This addition, though, which asserts that our understanding of ourselves matters too, situates ourselves not only as texts, per se, but as authors. As authors, we present ourselves in particular ways; often, these are ways that align with the identities we have taken. This is not to say that I will only be perceived the way that I intend to be, but it is pertinent to recognize that there is a way in which I intend to be seen, read, understood, or intelligible. Considering a similar example to what I presented earlier, if I, an African-American, am roaming around in England and thus am not identified or seen as an African-American but perhaps an African, that does not mean that my identity as an African-American no longer *means* anything, is intelligible, or is a way of understanding “me.” Being an African-American is an identity that I have taken; I am a black person. Thus, I move around the world affected by the experiences I have had as an African-American *and* as being identified as black. By being black and a black person who was born and raised in the United States, regardless of which social environment that I may currently

³⁴ Gooding-Williams. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy.” 93

³⁵ Warnke. *After Identity*. 7

be in, the experiences I have had as this person may affect the choices I make, plans I form, concerns I may have, and so forth.³⁶

This differentiation between identity imposed and identity taken works not only with race, but also with gender and sexuality. The third-person perspective of identities imposed are imposed through their social construction and are utilized and situated in each society in particular ways. Focusing on Western society, race, sexuality, and gender are intelligible parts of an individual. As Warnke states, “we understand one another in terms of identities that are parts of the histories in which we live and, in turn, understand our histories in terms of the identities that we employ for understanding one another. These identities include sex and gender ones.”³⁷ Sexuality, too, ought to be considered an intelligible identity given it is a part of the history and reality of which we live. Throughout Warnke’s book, it seems to be the case that she conflates sex and gender with one another, which is why I am only focusing on gender rather than sex.

Before I try to complete the lofty task of defining sexuality and gender very briefly, I want to address a few points. First, these concepts’ meanings, like race, are politically charged and historically and socially situated. Thus, their meanings and the way in which they are situated within society will continually change depending on the sociopolitical climate.³⁸ What I will here define and articulate for the purpose of my project is being done in order to understand the possible ways in which an individual and/or their society can interact and understand the identities that they take or are imposed on them.

³⁶ Gooding-Williams. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy.” 93

³⁷ Warnke. *After Identity*. 169

³⁸ There are several books and essays to which I will refer in order to best articulate these differences. Within the scope of this project, though, I couldn’t possibly go in depth about these topics, nor is it pertinent for the project at hand to produce a deep understanding rather than a general understanding that will aid in the overall picture of oppression and the self. That being said, it is crucial that this work be done and continue to be visited or explored; as these concepts are constantly evolving, they must be considered and analyzed in order to consider the ways in which these identities affect those who take them or those who have these identities imposed on them.

In showing how race, sexuality, and gender are imposed and/or taken is not to say that these identities are all the same or that a person who identifies with a certain race, for example, knows how a person who identifies with a certain gender is affected by or interacts with that gender. Furthermore, this, too, is *not* to say the experiences that an individual has with each of these identities will be the same. In order to describe the ways in which sexuality and gender can be imposed or taken, I want to restate the criteria put forth by Gooding-Williams in ubiquitous terms that can be utilized with sexuality and gender. In order for an identity to be imposed, it must be done so as a consequence of a kind of categorization of which individuals are subjected to, and it must take a third person perspective. In order for an identity to be taken, an individual must (1) begin to identify (to classify) *oneself* as that particular identity, and (2) make choices and formulate plans in light of one's identification in that particular way.³⁹ I will go further in saying that impositions may include expectations and stereotypes that have been tied with particular identities, whether implicit or explicit. The first step, then, in understanding how gender and sexuality are imposed and taken, is to define these concepts.

The way that gender is imposed on individuals is typically tied to sex because of the way that sex is situated in our society. Gender identity “refers to one’s subjective sense of being a boy, girl, man, woman, androgynous, agender,” nonbinary, genderqueer, and so on.⁴⁰ It is also important to include the definition of gender expression when defining gender as it “refers to one’s social presentation of gender in everyday life (through dress, bodily comportment, vocal expressions, etc.). Gender expression may also shift across social contexts depending on perceived safety and risks.”⁴¹ Though gender is a psychological and

³⁹ This language is taken from: Gooding-Williams. “Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy.” 93.

⁴⁰ Pfeffer. *Queering Families*. xxxiv

⁴¹ Pfeffer. *Queering Families*. xxxv

subjective phenomenon that is intentional and is often different for every person, from birth, on the basis of sex, our gender is imposed.

Gender roles and stereotypes are engrained deeply within our society. This is because we live in a cisnormative society: “Cisnormativity describes the collection of individual and systemic biases and assumptions that all people are and should be cisgender and binary (either man or woman), and by extension, that there is something wrong with people that do not fit within this standard.”⁴² “Cisgender” refers to individuals who are not transgender and is used over “‘natal male’ or ‘natal female’ since these terms obscure the ways in which both sex and gender involve social construction”; for people who identify as cisgender, the gender they identify with falls in line with their sex assigned at birth.⁴³ This quote on cisnormativity is not to pass judgement on any particular group of people, rather I include the definition to note that in our society, we are all, often unintentionally, participants in this cisnormative ideology because we participate in the society where cisnormativity is a norm. It is an unintended bias.⁴⁴ The imposition of gender, then, is a consequence of categorization on the basis of sex (imposed) as a result of cisnormativity, to which individuals are subjected. Gender imposition takes a third person perspective as it is assumed by others around you on the basis of your gender expression.

For an identity to be taken, one must make choices and formulate plans in light of one’s identification in that particular way. As explained earlier, in regards to race, the difference between being black and being a black person is that of a difference between an

⁴² Stephanie L. Budge, and Bonnie Moradi. 2018. “Attending to Gender in Psychotherapy: Understanding and Incorporating Systems of Power.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 74 (11): 2014-27.

⁴³ Pfeffer. *Queering Families*. xxxiii

⁴⁴ There is a lot of literature on cisnormativity from a queer theory perspective, but I am sure that there is room, in other papers, to discuss the moral implications of such a bias we hold. Cisnormativity, along with racism, colorism, sexism, and ableism (to name a few) aren’t things that are right to practice, but are often things we do unintentionally because of the attitudes of the society that we take in. Often lives are spent unlearning these ideologies.

identity imposed versus an identity taken. Gender can be explained in the same likeness. On one hand, because gender imposition is based on the prescribed norms of sex ingrained in our society, someone may be *identified* as a female (at birth or throughout life). On the other hand, one can identify as a woman or take on the identity of a woman, their gender, by making choices and formulating plans in light of her identification in that way. One example of taking gender can be explicated through the denial of gender imposition; this is a common experience for folks who identify as transgender.

Sexuality is also an identity that can be imposed or taken. Sexuality is: “The bodily, emotional, sociocultural, and intellectual aspects of one’s self which impact on and articulate one’s sexual identity and whom or what one desires as sexual partners.”⁴⁵ Sexuality, here, is not only what gender you are sexually attracted to but also it encompasses your sexual identity. Sexual identity refers to your identity as it relates to your sexual (or asexual) acts. As noted earlier, we live in a cisnormative society where the norm is that all individuals are cisgender and those genders are binary (male or female) – this, of course, is imposed. Cisnormativity is also included within the norm of heteronormativity: a term that is “generally understood within queer theory as a theoretical concept in which patriarchy and heterosexuality are centered as the social norm and all other genders, sexualities, and sexual expressions are cast as deviant.”⁴⁶ As this is a norm within our society, it has become an expectation that every individual is heterosexual, and heterosexuality is thus imposed. Heterosexuality is a default categorization that everyone is assumed to hold because of its position in our society; this is why there is the phenomenon of “coming out,” as not being straight is deemed deviant. Sexuality is taken, then, by classifying one’s own sexuality in a

⁴⁵ Gabriele Griffin. 2017. "Sexuality." In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press

⁴⁶ Juan Battle and Colin Ashley. 2008. “Intersectionality, Heteronormativity, and Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families.” *Black Women, Gender & Families* 2 (1). University of Illinois Press. 1

particular way, and as a result, they are making choices and formulating plans in light of their sexuality. In taking this identity, there is a first-person perspective.

Because sexuality, gender, and race are intelligible identities, these identities are ways that individuals are understood in particular contexts. What is essentially shown through the explication of how these identities can be imposed or taken is that (1) individuals are subjected to impositions that are often based on stereotypes and expectations (as articulated by Warnke), which come from categorizations to which we are subjected. This is not to say, either, that individuals are always active in the process of imposing identities on each other. Often, imposition occurs because of implicit biases that have been left unaddressed and unlearned. And (2), the process of taking an identity is an active one. By active, I mean to say that in taking this particular identity, an individual is *doing* something – identifying themselves in that particular way and making choices or plans in light of their identification in that particular way. This rings especially true in terms of race, gender, and sexuality.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ This is not to say that these are the only identities that are intelligible or are imposed or taken. Class, for example, would be a good addition to the list.

Section III: Oppression

As previously noted, intelligible identities are understood in particular ways depending on the context. The position at hand essentially states that in particular contexts, certain identities are understood in ways that are oppressive. The purpose of this section is to understand what oppression is and how oppression is connected to the creation of social groups. This, too, is connected with Mead's theory of the self. As the self develops socially, social interaction is critical to its existence. Oppression, then, is detrimental to self development as oppression is a social phenomenon. Developing as the object of others' experiences, the self takes on the attitudes of others; oppression, in effect, will affect the self-concept of the oppressed person by an internalization of the norms put forward by the oppressive group.

Oppression ought to be defined and then clarified in terms of how oppression is a social construct and phenomenon that works within social groups. Mead's theory of the self is dependent on the assumption that we are social creatures. Given this assumption, these constructs that we have made and have socially integrated into the very fabric of our social groups, have to be considered in terms of the social group in which it works. To define oppression, I look to Marilyn Frye, an American philosopher and feminist theorist.⁴⁸ To consider how oppression works as a social phenomenon and within social groups, I consider Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression."⁴⁹

In an anthology of Frye's works, she discusses oppression in two separate essays. In one essay appropriately titled, "Oppression," she states that "we need to think clearly about

⁴⁸ Marilyn Frye. 1983. "Oppression." *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

⁴⁹ Iris Marion Young. 2014. "Five Faces of Diversity." *Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusive Excellence: Transdisciplinary and Global Perspective*. edited by Seth N. Asumah, and Mechthild Nagel. Albany: State University of New York Press.

oppression, and there is much that mitigates against this ... I want to make clear what is being said when we say it. We need this word, this concept, and we need it to be sharp and sure.”⁵⁰ It seems to be incredibly important to start the essay in this way as she notes that the word “oppression” is often misused, and it is pertinent to be clear, first, about what is being said before the word is used. She begins by considering the word’s etymology: “The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press.’ ... Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility.”⁵¹ Given this etymology, to oppress there must be forces and barriers that create a space of no movement. Oppression, then, is explicitly defined as:

a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group (individually to individuals of the other group, and as a group, to that group). Such a system could not exist were not the groups, the categories of persons, well defined.⁵²

With this definition, Frye states what oppression is, but there are ideas that are implied that need to be expounded upon.

Within this quote, she notes two things. (1) Oppression is a system of connected barriers and forces; thus, oppression is systemic. It is implied that the ability to create barriers and forces are intertwined within the makeup of the dominant group, and in the same likeness, the category of persons deemed lesser is grouped in order to be oppressed. This group, as a result, is well defined. This is evident because the existence of the oppressive group presupposes another group which it can subordinate.⁵³ By stating that there is a

⁵⁰ Frye. “Oppression.” 1

⁵¹ Frye. “Oppression.” 1

⁵² Marilyn Frye. 1983. “Sexism.” *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley: Crossing Press. 33

⁵³ Frye. “Sexism.” 33

“presupposition,” Frye is conveying that in order for one group to oppress the other, there logically must be another distinct group that can be oppressed.⁵⁴ The group, then, that has the ability to oppress others is the dominant group that is able to utilize those barriers and forces in order to immobilize a category of persons. Thus, to fulfill its purpose, that is, to press or immobilize the group deemed as the other, the dominant group (2) utilizes the ability to create barriers and forces in order to subordinate that other group. Oppression, then, is occurring between two forces, within a double bind, where the oppressed is unable to move.

With this definition and explanation of oppression, the effects of oppression can be better understood as it is appropriately situated. Frye states that:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in.⁵⁵

The experience of oppressed people, then, is being intentionally restricted from being a part of the “us” social group and immobilized by being othered. Oppression is inescapable and unavoidable for those oppressed. To be oppressed is to be restricted and limited as a result of the othering by the dominant group. As the oppressed is grouped as a result of the categorization of “us” vs “them” social groups, social groups have to be defined.

In “Five Faces of Oppression” by Iris Marion Young, she presents different ways that oppression will affect those oppressed. Before she explains the five different ways, she clarifies the concept of a social group and considers oppression as a “structural concept.”⁵⁶ What a social group is and how oppression is a structural concept are necessary to consider

⁵⁴ Frye. “Sexism.” 33

⁵⁵ Frye. “Oppression.” 4

⁵⁶ Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.” 5

as oppression works within these particular contexts and is “a condition of groups.”⁵⁷ As she is considering the evolution of how the word has been used, she notes that “oppression also refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices or policies.”⁵⁸ This is consistent with the way that oppression is framed by Frye, as they both provide structural accounts of oppression. Young furthers Frye’s explication, though, by making explicit what is implied in talking about the way that oppression is constructed; she states “[oppression’s] causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules.”⁵⁹ As I noted earlier while clarifying Frye’s definition, what makes a dominant group become oppressive occurs as they form an opposing group to oppress by establishing forces and barriers. The makeup of that oppressive group, then, is oppressive norms, habits, symbols, or assumptions that are unexamined and accepted components of that dominant group.

Given that the function of oppression is to oppress social groups, she tries to define “social group”:

a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way. Groups are an expression of social relations.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.” 4

⁵⁸ Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.” 5

⁵⁹ Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.”

⁶⁰ Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.” 9

It is important to understand what a social group is as the self develops as a result of being a part of particular social groups. Social groups are made up of individuals who have some shared connection of culture, practice, norms, or a way of life; these can be identifiers as a “social group is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity.”⁶¹ Social groups can contribute to the ways that identities are intelligible: “Group meanings partially constitute people’s identities in terms of cultural forms, social situation, and history that group members know as theirs because these meanings have been either forced on them or forged by them or both.”⁶² The language of forced and forged can be related to Gooding-Williams’ language, respectively, of imposed or taken. Even with the creation of a group, group identity can be imposed and taken.

The purpose of this chapter was to understand oppression. As oppression works on the basis of identity, one must note what identity is as it plays a role in understanding ourselves and others. The explanation of social groups helps further understand their construction in relation to oppression. This is an especially important step as the self develops in relation to the social group of which it is a part. In summation, this understanding provides the next step in understanding how oppression affects the self. The next chapter furthers the understanding in how oppression can affect the self by considering the ways that identity relates to the self. This is also important to include to best understand what may also occur when the self is oppressed, given identity affects the self, or at least an understanding of the self.

⁶¹ Young “Five Faces of Oppression.” 8

⁶² Young. “Five Faces of Oppression.” 9

Chapter Three: Intersectionality and the Core Sense of Self

The previous chapter worked as a means to understand oppression and identity as it relates to the question of how oppression affects the self. Though the question does not explicitly address identity, identity is crucial to understand because one is oppressed on the basis of one's identity. Identity is of focus as it is something that may distinguish oppression from other lesser stresses that could create a dialectical dissonance. As such, in order to understand the specific assertion, that is, that there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black American Christian spaces that affects the self, it must be explored how identities may intersect and relate to the way that we understand who we are.

With an understanding of how identities can be intelligible and how they can be imposed or taken, the next step is to consider how they interrelate. These identities do not exist in a vacuum and the intersection of these identities can greatly affect the lives of the individuals who have these identities. Intersectionality is important to consider and define because, often, where identities are assumed to intersect, they may, in fact, conflict. Further, if those identities do conflict, one must take in consideration the meaning one attributes to said identities. Patricia Collins defines intersectionality as an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization.”¹ Between identities is mutuality. In the literature regarding how multiple identities relate, it is first noted that there is a “‘framework of intersectionality’ that [recognizes] how socially constructed identities are experienced simultaneously, not

¹ Patricia Hill Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Ed. 2nd. New York: Routledge. (From Glossary.)

hierarchically.”² This is important to differentiate because the focus, when considering the multiple identities that an individual may have, should be on how they interconnect rather than just pointing out the ways in which individuals are similar or different.³

²Elisa S. Abes, Susan R. Jones, and Marylu K. McEwen. 2007. “Reconceptualizing the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity: The Role of Meaning-Making Capacity in the Construction of Multiple Identities” *Journal of College Student Development* 48 (1): 1-22

³ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 2

Section I: Intersectionality and the Importance of Meaning Making

There are studies regarding intersectionality within the realm of higher education which focus on the experiences of college students. This seems appropriate as this is a time when identity is often explored and confronted. Though I am considering these theories presented within the realm of higher education, I do not believe that this is the only time where one struggles with their identities. As noted before, identities are context dependent, thus the kind of struggle one may endure because of an identity is context dependent. One theory that is of focus was founded by Susan Jones and Marylu McEwen. Within their study, they constructed a model of “Multiple Dimensions of Identity” that is later reconstructed:

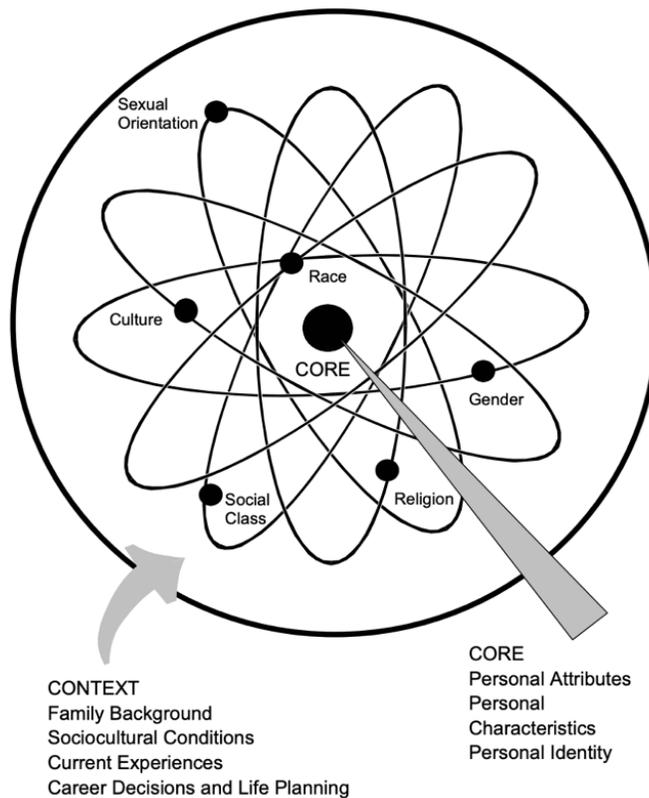


Figure 1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity; Adapted from Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 4

The authors describe each aspect of the model:

The model portrays identity dimensions as intersecting rings around a core, signifying how “no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions.” At the center of the model is a core sense of self, comprising “valued personal attributes and characteristics.”

Surrounding the core and identity dimensions is the context in which a person experiences her life, such as family, sociocultural conditions, and current experiences. The salience of each identity dimension to the core is fluid and depends on contextual influences.⁴

This model falls in line with the telling of identity that is previously presented by Warnke but furthers by serving as a visual metaphor for the way identity interacts with the way we understand ourselves. Warnke utilizes hermeneutics to consider identity in order to emphasize the importance of the context and interrelatedness of all the ways in which we understand ourselves and each other. Similarly, the model asserts through the intersecting rings that all of the different aspects of an individual cannot be understood singularly, rather only in relation to one another because there is a mutuality. Furthermore, these rings circulate around a core which is one's "sense of self."⁵ The core, as noted in the image, could further be categorized as one's personal attributes, personal characteristics, and personal identity. This further connects to Warnke in that both ideologies show that identity is a means to understand ourselves. Identities, as the rings, circulate around our understanding of our self; at different moments in our lives certain identities are closer to our understanding of our self, depending on the saliency of the identity at the time. This original model is important because it "offers a conceptual depiction of relationships among college students' socially constructed identity dimensions, recognizing that each dimension cannot be fully understood in isolation."⁶ Thus, this model aids in putting forth a more wholistic picture of an individual when it comes to their identities, showing that identities should be considered

⁴ Abes. "Reconceptualizing the Model." 3

⁵ This idea of "sense of self" and "Core" is something I will explore further. It is especially important to deconstruct this idea further as it relates to Mead's theory of the self. With the structure of the "I" and "me" what does "sense of self" mean? Furthermore, what is personal identity iff the "me" is dependent on the social environment one is in. These questions will be answered.

⁶ Abes. "Reconceptualizing the Model." 3

simultaneously, rather than hierarchically, and their importance in the understanding of one's self.

The purpose of these authors revisiting this model was to reconceptualize it.⁷ The reconceptualization was done in order to include the concept of “meaning-making,” but also in order to better explain the “saliency” of each identity.⁸ Originally, the idea of a meaning-making structure comes from R. Kegan in 1994:

He defines meaning-making structures as sets of assumptions that determine how an individual perceives and [organizes their] life experiences. These structures constitute the organizing principles of how one makes sense of and interprets the world. He explained that a person actively interprets life through meaning-making structures, and that “there is no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception independent of a meaning-making context.”⁹

Essentially, there are assumptions that we hold that dictate the way we think about our everyday experiences – these are the meaning-making structures. A meaning-making structure serves as a metaphor for the assumptions that allow us to reflectively make meaning about our everyday experiences. Given these “structures,” we accordingly have a set of principles that each experience is filtered through in order for us to make sense of the experience based on our context. As assumptions may change, the way we interpret the environment may as well. These assumptions that we have internalized are serving as a metaphor for what we do psychologically or internally during the process of understanding the relationship between our context and our identities (which is supported through the hermeneutical perspective of identity).

⁷ Though this model is reconstructed, it keeps this atom-esque figure, which is why in the previous paragraph I explain it in detail.

⁸ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 6

⁹ Susan R. Jones and Elisa S. Abes. 2013. *Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks for Multiple Dimensions of Identity*. Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. 98

This metaphor of a “meaning-making structure” comes to fruition within the reconceptualized model through suggesting “that meaning-making capacity [serves] as a filter through which contextual factors are interpreted prior to influencing self-perceptions ... How context influenced these perceptions depended on the complexity of the meaning-making filter.”¹⁰ In other words, when one makes meaning in regard to their particular context, then the way they perceive themselves, their identities, and how their identities interrelate are influenced by the meaning they have arrived at in interpreting their context through their assumptions. For example, if someone were to grow up in a culture riddled with misogyny, then that individual may derive from that context the assumption that women ought to be a certain way or only do certain things. Thus, if a person who identified as a woman lived within this context, then her relationship with her identity as a woman is affected by the meaning she derived from said context. Therefore, one’s meaning-making capacity plays a large role in the way that context affects one’s conception of the way in which they understand their identities based on the assumptions derived from the context.

The model revisited, then, includes a meaning making function because by “incorporating meaning-making capacity into the model” the reconceptualized model can “more thoroughly depict the relationship between context and salience (and self-perceptions) of identity dimensions, as well as the relationship between social identities and the core of identity.”¹¹ An image of the reconceptualized model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity is below:

¹⁰ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 6

¹¹ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 6

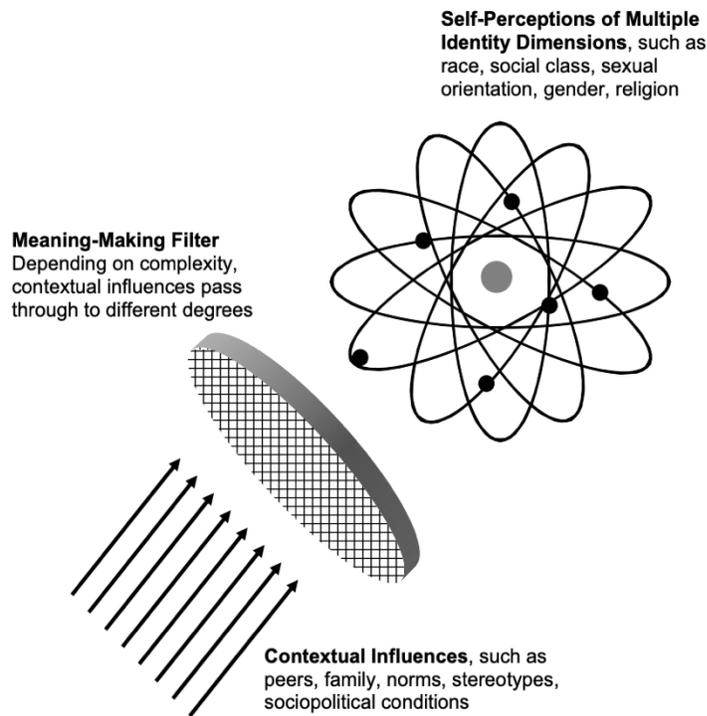


Figure 2: Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity; Adapted from Abes. "Reconceptualizing the Model." 7

The authors describe each aspect of the model. They note that this model differs in that it “portrays in two dimensions the interactive nature of the relationships among components of the identity construction process: context, meaning making, and identity perceptions.”¹² Thus, the model shows that in making meaning of the context, the perception of one’s identity is influenced. The atom component of the model serves as a way to view the identities we take and the way that we understand how they intersect.¹³ The contextual influences can relate to ways that identities are imposed and the implications of those impositions. The meaning making filter depends on our own unique perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, ideas, beliefs, etc., and affects the way we understand and interpret our environment. Every person’s model will look different.

¹² Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 6

¹³ Taken from the previous model

Section II: Core Sense of Self and Mead

The aim of this section is to consider how concepts put forth by Warnke and Gooding-Williams, intersectionality, and meaning-making capacity are situated within Mead's theory of the self. In order to understand how oppression affects the self, one must first understand how identity affects the self, as oppression is on the basis of identity. To explain how identity affects the self, the idea of a core sense of self, as implied through the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, must be elucidated and explicated in relation to Mead's theory.

First, I want to summarize the three main points of identity: hermeneutics, identity imposed and taken, and intersectionality. Hermeneutics is an approach used to analyze texts. Warnke applies this theory to considering identity because hermeneutics allows for a unity between different interpretations and conflicting interpretations of parts of the text in regard to the meaning of the whole. Hermeneutics as a way of considering texts has three components that can be applied to the understanding of identity: (1) our understanding is placed within a context and as a result is dependent on that context, (2) we have certain expectations for those who identify in certain ways, and (3) our understanding and expectations are incomplete. Hermeneutics, for identity, then, allows identity to be a way in which individuals can be understood, making them intelligible, by taking in consideration the context of which the individual is a part. Thus, our understanding of a person's identity is situated, purposefully oriented, partial, and is context dependent.

Gooding-Williams helps supplement Warnke by making a distinction between identities taken and identities imposed. As previously mentioned, for an identity to be imposed, it must be done so in consequence of a kind of categorization to which individuals are subjected, and it must take a third person perspective. In order for an identity to be taken,

an individual must (1) begin to identify (to classify) *oneself* as that particular identity, and (2) make choices and formulate plans in light of one's identification in that particular way.¹⁴

This distinction makes clear that even though identity is context dependent there is a difference between the way that identity can be imposed and taken. The way that an identity is imposed may be context dependent but the identities that we take are still taken regardless of the context. In any case, having certain identities imposed on us or taking certain identities will affect the way we move about in this society.

Lastly, identity is multiple, and because we often have several identities, we have to understand how they may intersect, relate, connect, or conflict. Intersectionality is a key component to include when considering identity because the way identities imposed or taken interrelate, connect, or conflict will affect the way that a person sees themselves or what is understood to be the core sense of self. The models presented help elucidate how, even with multiple identities, some can be more salient than others dependent on the context.

In understanding identity in this way, we can understand how identity affects the self in a social environment. An identity can work as a shared way that a social environment is intelligible. Thus, the way that the individual who is a part of a social environment or outside of a social environment may understand an entire social group is a result of an identity that was imposed on or taken by that social environment (this is a result of collective imposed or taken identities). But, for each member of that social environment they may have a different relationship with that identity because of the way that they may individually take that identity and their own perspective. This connects to a key component that the model presents, that is, the core sense of self, or, the way that an individual understands themselves. This concept, though, needs to be explained further and how it relates to Mead's theory of the self.

¹⁴ This language is taken from: Gooding-Williams. "Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy." 93

When considering the reconceptualized model, the atom part of the model has rings with electrons (so to speak) on each ring, which symbolizes an identity that circulates around a core. This core is described as “an inner-defined personal sense of the self, incorporating ‘valued personal attributes and characteristics.’”¹⁵ Furthermore, this core is “fluid” and “includes personal values and aspects of identity that the individuals perceive as central to their sense of self.”¹⁶ What is most commonly cited along with “core sense of self” are the terms: personal identity, personal characteristics, and personal attributes. What this definition of core seems to insinuate is that there is a particular way in which we see ourselves and there are specific attributes, beliefs, or characteristics that we hold to be essential or valued in our understanding of ourselves. Though these things may change, resulting in fluidity, the core somehow differs from the identities we have that circulate around the core. At different moments in our lives the “electron” of each identity may be closer to the “core sense of self.” What this means is that, for example, there may be moments in life where my gender is closer to my sense of self than my class, dependent on the context and my meaning-making filter. The way that the rings move around the core give insight to what, at any given moment, is more or less salient to the core, or, the attributes that give light to what I consider to be my “core identity.”

The self, as presented in the previous chapter, is an entity that develops through the process of social experience. The structure is comprised of two phases: the “I” (or subject) and the “me” (or object). The “me” is understood as the attitudes that the individual takes on based on the social environment that one is in. The “I” occurs as an effect of taking on the attitudes of the social environment, thus becoming the set of responses to those attitudes. Essentially, the self is a social, dialectical process occurring between these two phases:

¹⁵ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 15

¹⁶ Abes. “Reconceptualizing the Model.” 15

attitudes and responses. Accordingly, can there be a core sense of self, and if so, what is this core sense of self?

This idea of a core sense of self, I believe, can only co-exist with Mead's theory of the self if this core is defined in a way that is synonymous with the idea of perspective, or self-perceptions, which arises through self-consciousness. The "core sense of self" is what allows for individuals to attribute particular characteristics, ideas, beliefs, or identities as personal. It allows for particular identities in certain moments to seem more salient than other identities. In allowing for different characteristics to be categorized as "personal," they create some sort of uniqueness about the individual that differentiates them from others. I would argue, though, that there is nothing about the structure of the self that allows for individuals to feel this way; rather it is one's own perspective through self-consciousness' ability to create meaning through common social environments that gives rise to these feelings.

Consequently, it *seems* like there is a core sense of self, creating an impression of a sense of self, rather than there *actually* being one. First and foremost, the nature and structure of the self does not allow for there to be a core. This is evident through the fact that the self is comprised of two phases that are constantly in dialect. As the conversation or the environment that fuels the self shifts, so does the "self," so to speak. There seems to be a core sense of self because of the way that the self develops. The way that we understand our "self" is through the many social environments that we contribute to, are exposed to, or are involved in. Most of us often stay within a few select social environments resulting in only a limited set of attitudes and responses to which we as individuals partake. Often, too, attitudes of those different environments may overlap. Because we are constantly participating in the same or similar social environments, a person's "I" and "me" are not being continually affected by new content. Thus, through a pattern of behavior or through the repetition of

similar social behaviors, we develop an impression of a core sense of self. That is, a particular way we think that we are, a particular set of beliefs that we partake in, or by having a particular set of characteristics that we attribute to ourselves, all of which we deem to be personal or essential, but in actuality, only occurs as a result of the unvarying environments and attitudes we surround ourselves with.

This impression, though, only arises from our unique perspective. Throughout the different social environments that an individual may engage in, the individual maintains a unique perspective. We know that each individual has a unique perspective, because it is what allows for each individual's "I" to have the possibility of novelty. The "I's" response does not just solely depend on the attitudes to which it responds because if it did, everyone would respond in the same way, as everyone in each particular social environment is experiencing the same set of attitudes. There must, then, be something about each individual that allows for the "I's" response, in some cases, to be novel to them and to the space. Therefore, the way in which each individual responds also depends on their unique perspective. All of this together allows for an impression of a core sense self.

Perspective allows for individuals to consider their typical social environments and derive meaning from them. This idea of the core sense of self must be, for example, the way that I think about who I am, in relation to my particular social environments. In considering this model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, we can understand that different identities circulate around this impression of a sense of self, and at different points, or different social environments, certain identities are more salient. Thus, there is a way that I think about who I am, and there are particular identities that I identify with that mean more, or become more salient, in particular contexts. The saliency is affected by the context and my meaning-making filter. To understand this further, the context must be defined and the experiences and

perspective that fuels a person's meaning-making filter must be considered, too. For example, as a black student a part of a predominantly white liberal arts institution, my identity as a black person (taken identity) is more salient than, say, my religion. It is more salient in this particular context because of the way in which my identity as black is imposed by the environment that I am in and the assumptions that influence the principles that shape the way I understand my context.

To synthesize the previous claims, identity affects the way that I think about who I am in particular social environments. There is an impression of the self because of the typical social environments that I stay in, which shape how I think about who I am. Furthermore, because of the way that identity is imposed and is context dependent, we are often confronted with the expectations and ideas that come along with the imposition. This is why it is important to recognize how identity is understood through a hermeneutical lens. These expectations and the way that we respond to these expectations are one of the aspects that fuel the dialectic between the "I" and "me."

What I have tried to illustrate through explaining identity and how it relates to the self is that in order to best understand the way that identity affects the self is to define the context in which the individual is. In the next chapter, I will define a specific context where the "I" and "me," or the attitudes and responses, are in conflict because of oppression.

Chapter Four: The Oppression of Queerness in Black Christian Spaces

As noted in the introduction, what inspires this independent study is an attempt to understand how oppression affects the self. This chapter's purpose is to explicate the more specific position at hand that states: there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black Christian spaces that affects the self. This chapter is especially important because it serves as a means to concretely understand the way that oppression can affect the self by providing and defining a context in which an intelligible identity is oppressed. This is supported by Frye when she notes that oppression, as a system, "could not exist were not the groups, the categories of persons, well defined."¹ Thus, the previous chapters serve as a theoretical basis for what is to be said here.

The structure of this chapter, then, is to first summarize and draw the theory of the self, identity, and oppression together in order to understand how these three aspects help elucidate the experience of an identity dissonance. This is important to reiterate as we come to understand our selves with respect to the identities that are imposed, taken, or both (i.e. how identity interacts with the impression of a core sense of self). As such, it will be explained that the self, when oppressed, experiences, necessarily, a dialectical dissonance, and may also experience an identity dissonance which differentiates the experience of oppression from other kinds of stressors that may create a dissonance.

To best understand how oppression affects the self, it is important to understand the context in which one is oppressed, as identities are context dependent. One context I think that oppression is clear is in the context of queer folk within black Christian spaces. In chapter two, we covered the complexity of social groups and how because of

¹ Frye. "Sexism." 33

intersectionality, grouping can be further complicated. In this chapter, I will attempt to present the culture and norms that often surround a particular culture group – that of American black Christian spaces (henceforth black Christian spaces). Often, and predominantly, within this space, queerness is synonymous with deviancy. Queer people in black Christian spaces are molded, confined, and immobilized by interrelated systems that make up their grouping that result in subordination. Queer people, in these contexts, are shunned, scorned, barred from seats of power and authority, and, in some cases, subject to violence. Thus, queer folk in black Christian spaces are oppressed. More specifically, here I will assert that, often, within black Christian spaces there are cultural norms imposed based on what it means to be a black Christian. Given these impositions, when you have an intersectionality of identities (black, Christian, and queer), the queer identity, as an umbrella term for those who identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum and often an identity taken, poses a threat to the norm of what is imposed by black Christian social groups. As queerness is synonymous with deviancy in this space, queer folk in black Christian spaces are oppressed. This is evident given what the experience of oppression entails.

Accordingly, I will support this assertion, that is, the position of this independent study, by utilizing supporting literature and theory of black Christian culture and spaces. Though it seems, to some, that stating oppression affects the self is obvious, what makes this a philosophical exploration is the attempt to understand not only *how* oppression affects the self, but to also show a situation where the individual notices and questions the dissonance that occurs as a result of oppression affecting the self. Given this situation, the individual, in response, has the opportunity to question the dissonances that occur. This exploration is in nature metaphysical as it attempts to understand the nature of the self when oppressed.

Section I: Identity Dissonance and How Oppression Affects the Self

The purpose of the first chapter is to not only provide a charitable reading to Mead's theory of the self, but to also provide argumentation that supports the claim and position that oppression affects the self. Though the argument and support for this can be seen in chapter one, it is fundamental to the overall project as it provides the first step in understanding how oppression affects the self by first proving that oppression *can* affect the self, given the nature of the self. It is evident that the phases can be in conflict through Mead noting that there are certain situations where an individual can feel themselves "hedged in" and within those situations they may recognize "the necessity of a situation in which there will be an opportunity for [them] to make [their] addition to the undertaking, and not simply to be the conventionalized 'me.'"² By noting an experience of feeling "hedged in" this expression is consistent with the experience of oppression as noted by Frye. The feeling of being "hedged in," though, is a necessary condition of the self being affected by social phenomena, but not the only effect occurring when one is oppressed by the dominant group. There seems to be something missing that is addressed through understanding identity and the role identity plays in understanding yourself and the social group of which one is a part.

Intelligible identities, like race, gender, and sexuality, as presented by Warnke and Gooding-Williams, are context dependent and can be imposed or taken. Those identities imposed are often a result of expectations based on societal norms and stereotypes and serve as a means to situate that person within that particular context. Given the way social groups and identities interrelate, there are potentially as many social groups as there are identities. As a result, social groups are complex, and individuals can be members of groups that oppose each other. What's more, individuals can be a part of an oppressing group and an

² Mead. *Social Psychology*. 241

oppressed group. Although we as individuals may be a part of multiple and opposing identity groups, identity helps us understand who we are by categorizing the different spaces we occupy. By continuing to circulate between those particular spaces, we develop an impression of a core sense of self – that is, an idea about who where are, beliefs we hold, and character traits we exhibit. Given contrary or contradictory aspects of one's multiplicitious and intersectional identity, there are some spaces where queer black Christians will experience dissonance.

Identity dissonance is possible because identity is a way that we understand ourselves through the impression of a core sense of self. There is a related concept called “identity clarity,” which can be related to the saliency that is noted through the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. Identity clarity is defined “as the extent to which one’s self beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable.”³ It lends to how well, in terms of consistency, clarity, and stability, one has an impression of their core sense of self. Identity clarity is related to self-esteem and psychological functioning. Identity clarity, then, is a key capacity because dependent on the clarity, individuals may “better understand which group memberships, or other cultural identities, relate to [their] personal identity and to [their] well-being.”⁴ Identity clarity and the corresponding “self-conceptualizations are acquired and developed through individuals’ interactions with others and are considerably influenced by individuals’ cultural socialization, family socialization, [and] acculturation.”⁵ What may provide identity clarity comes from the different ways in which we have been socialized through our different cultural or familial involvements. Thus, “the traits,

³Shadee Abdi and Bobbi Van Gilder. 2016. “Cultural (in)Visibility and Identity Dissonance: Queer Iranian-American Women and Their Negotiation of Existence.” *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication*. Vol. 9, no. 1. 71

⁴ Abdi. “Cultural (in)Visibility and Identity Dissonance.” 71

⁵ Abdi. “Cultural (in)Visibility and Identity Dissonance.” 71

ideological positions, shared behaviors, experiences, and shared history that is associated with one's group(s) become internalized by the individual to compose an integral component of an individual's self-concept."⁶

The ways in which we identify, are identified, or take a particular identity may be dependent on or affected by the shared traits from our social groups that we internalize; these characterizations that we have internalized often come from the shared norms that make up that social group. In other words, collective or group identity can be internalized and aid in self-conception: "individuals typically view themselves in terms of their group membership categories, such that one's group membership(s) become a key component of their individual identity."⁷ This is not only consistent with Gooding-Williams and the way that identity can be taken and/or imposed, but also the understanding of social groups. It seems to be more likely, then, for an identity dissonance to occur if an individual has identities from the dominant, oppressive group and the group that was othered, or in other words, a member of both the oppressive and the oppressed groups. This rings true as "identity dissonance suggest that selves are composed of needs and desires that are often in opposition to each other," this opposition coming from being a part of opposing groups.

With the role that identity plays in the way that we understand ourselves and our position within our social groups, it seems evident that intersectionality could complicate these things – especially when one is a part of the oppressed group and the oppressive group. Intersectionality serves as recognition of the particular experiences that folks experience when they maintain a multiplicity of identities. From this multiplicity, there are several factors that fuel our understanding of ourselves that can be contradictory given what the norms are of the social groups that affect our identity clarity. Identity dissonance, then, is:

⁶ Abdi. "Cultural (in)Visibility and Identity Dissonance." 71

⁷ Abdi. "Cultural (in)Visibility and Identity Dissonance." 71

“an unsettling feeling of psychological disquiet, occurring when people make a commitment to two or more conflicting identities. Identity dissonance occurs when an individual regards particular identities as essential components of his or her self-concept yet also considered, consciously or unconsciously, these identities to be antithetical.”⁸

With this definition, then, the idea presented can be unpacked and placed within the context of this project.

Identity dissonance may occur with any identity that is intelligible – a means of understanding ourselves and others. Given the relationship that we have with our identities and how they relate with the social group we are a part of, the norms or expectations of each identity or group identity can be in conflict. When Crymble notes that an identity dissonance can occur as individuals make a commitment to two or more conflicting identities, this seems to connect to the way that individuals can take an identity, committing to it by what they do in light of identifying in that way. But it is also important to note that a commitment does not have to be made to the way that an identity is imposed on an individual. Rather, the way that an identity is imposed and taken may be different because of the way that stereotypes and expectations fuel impositions. Thus, by merely being in a social environment where the impositions, and consequently, expectations, placed on an individual are oppressive, the individual is both a part of the group that is doing the oppressing and a part of the group that is oppressed.

As intelligible identities are ways that we can understand ourselves, committing to two or more identities that may have conflicting norms or expectations can negatively affect our identity clarity or the impression of our core sense of self. The impression of our core

⁸ Sarah B. Crymble. 2012. “Contradiction Sells: Feminine Complexity and Gender Identity Dissonance in Magazine Advertising.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 36, no. 1. 65

sense of self gives light to “essential” components of our self-concept.⁹ Meaning, there are the things we *deem as* personal attributes or characteristics – the impression we have about who we are given the social groups in which we stay. This, then, results in a psychological disquiet or a dialectical dissonance between the “I” and “me,” as the attitudes of the social environment and the responses to those attitudes are in conflict. This is not to say that the “I” and “me” are psychological functions, rather to note that an identity dissonance, as a result of a commitment to conflicting identities, may create turmoil with the way that one experiences and exists.

In having an identity dissonance, not only do *we* deem that the identities in conflict are antithetical, thus in opposition, but we do so given the norms and expectations of what it is to be each specific identity in conflict. This further supports the claim that identity dissonance is especially possible if you are a part of the oppressed group and the dominant, oppressive group. It is not unreasonable or ungrounded to have an identity dissonance, rather the deviation from an imposition results in ostracization and othering. To avoid othering, this leads one to find their identities to be antithetical, only committing to one or the other in each space. Therefore, “what this means is that self, and usually society, presume that identities are an ‘either—or’ proposition.”¹⁰ Hence, the experience of an identity dissonance indicates that the individual has reached the conclusion that these identities, or parts of these identities, should not simultaneously coexist. They are experienced hierarchically rather than simultaneously, or as a newfangled amalgam.

⁹ This idea of essentiality is addressed in chapter 3. We ought not fall fault here to essentializing the self. There is only an impression of a self-concept or a core sense of self given the similar social environments that we stick to, which result in us attributing “essential” (as in significant, fundamental, or important to), personal characteristics to the way that we perceive ourselves.

¹⁰ Crymble. “Contradiction Sells.” 65

It is important to note that not every experience of identity dissonance will be because of oppression – but oppression can cause an identity dissonance when you are a part of the oppressive group and the oppressed group. As a member of the dominant group, one may internalize oppressive norms (imposed) about what it is to be or have a particular identity. But because individuals maintain a multitude of identities, as identities are intersectional, individuals are not just one thing, individuals are multifaceted. Thus, in having identities that may be conflicting because of the norms of the social group, as a result, one is “us” and “them,” but in being a part of the dominant group, they have internalized the subordination. So, within that individual’s self-concept or core sense of self, they deem the two identities that are conflicting to be antithetical. To be oppressed is to be caught between or among forces and barriers that restrict in order to subordinate. Therefore, the individual and their social groups presume their identities to be an “either-or” proposition rather than a “this *and* that” proposition because their self-expression is restricted. Identity is, again, experienced here hierarchically rather than simultaneously.

Accordingly, the nature of the self while oppressed is experiencing a dialectical dissonance, necessarily, as a result of the “stress” of the situation – the “I” will not be conventionalized by the expectation of the “me” or the attitudes of the social environment that the individual is in. For the individual who is experiencing an identity dissonance, there is an expectation of one group identity, that in having another conflicting identity, the understanding of their core sense of self is obscured. Because of this obfuscation, there is an identity dissonance, a conflict with the way one understands themselves, and a dialectical dissonance, a conflict between the phases of the self. These dissonances differ in that the identity dissonance is about the way in which an individual understands who they are, while a dialectical dissonance describes the dissonance occurring between the two phases that make

up the structure of an individuals' very experience. The former is about the way one understands themselves, while the latter is about the ontology of the self.

As previously noted, a dialectical dissonance is a necessary condition, while an identity dissonance is an accompanying condition that furthers understanding the nature of the self while oppressed. What I mean by this is that the self, while oppressed, will necessarily experience a dissonance between the "I" and the "me" because there is a conflict between the attitudes of the social environment and not wanting to take on those oppressive attitudes. An identity dissonance is an additional condition that may occur while the self is oppressed. This is evident given that not only is there a dialectical dissonance occurring between the "I" and "me," but the way in which one understands who they are in their typical social environments is obscured. Ultimately, there is not just something ontologically occurring between the phases of the self, oppression may also affect the way that we understand who we are.

This section served to not only explicate what it is to experience an identity dissonance but to also show how it relates to claims made in previous chapters. By situating this experience within Mead's theory of the self and the understanding of identity, one can better understand the nature of the self while oppressed. As oppression can manifest in different ways, pinpointing the experience of an identity dissonance allows for a clearer understanding of those who may be a part of an oppressed group and an oppressive group.

Section II: My Identity Dissonance as Black and Queer

In this section, I hope to present a particular context of a social group by putting forth the culture and norms, and thus attitudes, of the social group. By putting forth this context, I provide my particular experience in order to understand a particular claim. That claim being: there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black (American) Christian spaces that affects the self. Though I am stating the norms of this particular context, this is not to say every group of the same makeup functions in this way, rather this is the story that is often told through literature and analysis, and the norms I have personally experienced and have been affected by. This is the context of queerness in black Christian spaces in America.

Being black is a result of a categorization. This idea comes from Gooding-Williams: “being black is understood as a consequence of a practice of racial categorization to which blacks have been subjected. Being black is thus socially constructed and imposed.”¹¹ This category of persons, then, was grouped by the dominant group (whites) in order to be othered and oppressed. From grouping this racial category, the social group subsequently was made up of norms that result in a picture, an idea, about what it is to be black. There are resulting norms of the group that influence personal and group identity. As a result of this internalization, if you do not fall in line, then you are not “black enough.” What is ironic about this is that the norms and script did not exist before there was a grouping, thus the picture about what it is to be “black enough” did not even originate from black folks. Thus, there are norms that are imposed on one as a result of being a part of the black social group, and if you do not do it right, then you are taunted or expelled from the group – you are

¹¹ McBride. “New Descriptions, New Possibilities.” 173

deviant. These norms, the “script,” and group identity are perpetuated by the black church, given its positionality and influence in black culture.

There have been continuous efforts made in order to understand the context of black churches in America. This is most likely because “the black church in the USA is widely recognized as the central, oldest and most influential institution in the black community.”¹² Black churches are so influential because they serve as “the spiritual ark that also preserved and empowered black people socially, psychologically and physically during and after slavery.”¹³ Ward also notes: “even if as adults they no longer embrace the church or religious principles, many blacks have been profoundly influenced by the church ideology and imagery with which they were raised, and this continues to influence their later beliefs and practices.”¹⁴ Thus, the culture, norms, and practices that black folk often internalize and display are influenced by the black church.

Given the positionality of black churches for black folk in America, the norms and ideals of the social group have to be explicated. Within this context, that is, black Christian communities, “the church plays a significant role in the production of homophobia.”¹⁵ Ward also notes that “what is also striking is the influence it wields indirectly in the lives of those blacks that are not churchgoers.”¹⁶ So even those who do not go to church or those who are not Christian are influenced by the black church. What lends clarity to this context and where this production comes from, is a consideration of black nationalism, as the “theologically-driven homophobia is reinforced by the anti-homosexual rhetoric of black nationalism.”¹⁷

¹² Elijah G. Ward. 2005. "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. Vol 7, no. 5. 494

¹³ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

¹⁴ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

¹⁵ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

¹⁶ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

¹⁷ Ward. “Homophobia.” 493

The positionality surrounding the black Christian church and black nationalism are interrelated. In her analysis of black nationalism, Professor of black studies Dr. Nikol Alexander-Floyd describes nationalism as black cultural nationalism, where “cultural nationalism is understood as ‘the view that African-Americans possess a distinct aesthetic, sense of values, and communal ethos emerging from either, or both, their contemporary folkways and continental African heritage.’”¹⁸ These norms and values are categorized as the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm, or BCPP.¹⁹ As a cultural pathology paradigm, BCPP seems to be a description of the causes and effects of black cultural nationalism by considering the aesthetic, sense of values, and ethos of the “Black Culture.” I add the quotations around these words as “Black Culture” here is deemed as a specific thing in which those who are grouped in the black social group are expected to partake.

The BCPP, or “this popular set of assumptions about Black family breakdown and cultural deviance ... has had devastating impact on Black communities.”²⁰ As the BCPP maintains a hegemonic and sexist ideology, it has negatively impacted black communities. As a result, Alexander-Floyd utilizes BCPP as a framing device to assess black politics.²¹ In order to do so, she points out several ironies about BCPP. The first irony is:

BCPP is a gendered framework of analysis that assumes that the dissolution of the microstructure of the Black family (i.e., the decline of two parent homes and an accompanying distortion in definitions and operations of manhood and womanhood) produces a culture mired in a “tangle of pathology,” a way of life that promotes drug use, crime, violence, apathy, and even poverty itself.²²

¹⁸ Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd. 2007. *Gender, Race and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 3-4

¹⁹ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 3

²⁰ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 3

²¹ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 18

²² Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 25

The BCPP is a gendered analysis because it puts forth roles that men and woman ought to fulfill but as a consequence of its fulfillment, the black family is expected to fail. These roles of manhood and womanhood promote ‘drug use, crime, violence, apathy, and poverty.’ What is ironic about this aspect of BCPP is that not only is it “propagated by conservatives,” but it also “denies the historical and contemporary effects of racism and explains poverty and black social crises as a function of Black cultural ineptitude.”²³ As Gooding-Williams notes that to be black is a result of a racial categorization, black folks were grouped as a result of being deemed as other. BCPP was imposed on this “social group” which consequentially denies the historical and contemporary effects of racism as the cause of black positionality in our society; rather, the pathology of the positionality of black folks is ineptitude.

The next irony of the BCPP is that it “was made popular not only by White conservatives, but by various constituencies within Black America as well.”²⁴ This goes hand in hand with the previous irony that Alexander-Floyd presents, as the BCPP is a result of the dominant group (whites) grouping black folk. It is ironic because white folk benefit from it. As there are some black constituencies that support the BCPP, “the BCPP is important in the articulation and development of White U.S. nationalism as well as Black cultural nationalism.”²⁵ This point is twofold:

On the one hand, it constituted a political and cultural White nationalism for the United States, reinscribing the boundaries of the nation through its figurative (and increasingly literal) exclusion of Blacks. On the other hand, it enabled and reinforced Black cultural nationalism amongst African-Americans, providing a basis for arguing for the institution of patriarchy in African American communities.²⁶

²³ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 28

²⁴ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 29

²⁵ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 31

²⁶ Alexander-Floyd. *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*. 31-32

Black cultural nationalists have internalized these impositions, resulting in the fundamental aspect of what it is to be black to include hegemonic ideologies, like the placement and roles of men and woman and their relationship and positionality to their white counterparts.

Unfortunately, the culture surrounding the black church and the BCPP are interconnected, and their ideologies are interchanging. So not only are these ideologies and norms being perpetuated in the name of black nationalism, and thus, black power, but also in the church that serves a fundamental influence on the lives of black folk in America today. The church then perpetuates these ideals of heterosexism and homophobia that, as a result, shape what it means to be black.²⁷

Ward states and supports how homophobia and hypermasculinity are perpetuated by the black church. First, he presents three sources of homophobia in the black church, all of which are “intimately related to the history of black slavery, underscoring the complex background influence of racism in the genesis of homophobia.”²⁸ The first is religious beliefs, “related to literalist theological views.”²⁹ Meaning, often homophobia is founded within the scripture read and used in the church. It is noted that “black people’s use of the Bible to condemn homosexuality is understandable in the context of their historical experience, as enslaved blacks sought refuge, and found freedom in the literalness of Scripture.”³⁰ The second source “holds that, among blacks, homophobia may well be at least in part the expression of a more general fear of sexuality ... and homosexuality in particular, [as] a psycho-cultural response to the history of white exploitation of black sexuality during slavery and afterwards.”³¹ As a result of the hypersexualization that was ever present during

²⁷ Heterosexism is the discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.

²⁸ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

²⁹ Ward. “Homophobia.” 494

³⁰ Ward. “Homophobia.” 495

³¹ Ward. “Homophobia.” 495

chattel slavery, sexual acts that deviate from modest sexuality presented in the Bible are reprov'd and othered. Essentially, "in response to debilitating stereotypes, black people in the USA have been profoundly affected by the persistent efforts of whites to demonize them and their sexuality," straight or otherwise.³² The third source of homophobia within the black church has to do with "notions of race survival consciousness," meaning, the "homophobic religious moralisms have dovetailed with the urgency of a racial consciousness of survival and preservation among blacks."³³ Homosexuality, fundamentally, poses a threat to survival and preservation. Thus, Bible interpretation, fear of sexuality, and race survival consciousness serve as three sources of homophobia within the black church.

With these three sources in concurrence, it is noted that "whiteness and homosexuality are both understood to connote weakness and femininity; conversely, black masculinity has been constructed in hypermasculine terms."³⁴ Hypermasculinity is defined as "an exaggeration and distortion of traditionally masculine traits."³⁵ As weakness and femininity is associated with whiteness, in order to be "black enough" one must be hyper masculine (those who identify as male). Thus, this internalization of BCPP and religion-driven homophobia not only negatively affect black folk who identify as homosexual, but those who also blur the lines of their assigned (imposed) gender roles (that is, the prescribed manhood and womanhood). The restriction of gender expression and sexuality are a result of the relationship between the black church and the BCPP, both of which influence each other. Thus, "normative conceptions of masculinity in US society are inherently heterosexist and homophobic ... Because of the conflation of gender and sexuality, to be seen as masculine

³² Ward. "Homophobia." 495

³³ Ward. "Homophobia." 495

³⁴ Ward. "Homophobia." 495

³⁵ Ward. "Homophobia." 496

requires being heterosexual, prompting the hypermasculinization of behavior among males in order to avoid being labelled a ‘fag’ or ‘queer.’”³⁶ In this quote, “queer” is used as a slur in order to subordinate and oppress those who deviate from the norms put forth by the church and the BCPP. Queerness is not just about being gay or one’s sexuality, though. When it is *taken*, it is about existing outside of the norms of gender, gender roles, gender expression, and sexuality. Hence, those who are gendered as male and who are not masculine enough are chastised, those who are gendered as female who are too masculine are also chastised, and those who refuse to abide by the binary are further ostracized for their deviancy.

Based on the norms of this particular context, what it means to be black is in tension with the queer identity. Queerness is categorized as deviant as a result of homophobia and the BCPP. The practice of homophobia and the internalization of the BCPP is a result of impositions from groupings. The impositions of norms on black folk by black folk extends beyond a racial categorization. It is rooted in internalized hegemony (evident through the BCPP). Within the black social group, to “really” be black – one must fall in line with the dominant culture that makes up the fabric of the social group, that is the aesthetic, sense of values, and ethos of the “Black Culture.” In order for it to be convincing, your “me” must convey those attitudes back to the others of that particular social group. Given that the black social group was created in relationship to the white social group in order to be oppressed, what has occurred as a result is an internalization of those hegemonic norms of the oppressive group. Thus, deviancy from those norms is subordinated and othered, resulting in oppression, even to those who are a part of the oppressing group. Those who are both black and queer, members of the oppressive group and the oppressed group, still exist as black and queer despite the imposed contradictions. The dominant members of the black social group,

³⁶ Ward. “Homophobia.” 496

that is those who fall in line with what it means to “black enough,” subsequently oppress those who are queer, and thus deviant.

What I experienced as a black Christian who is also transgender and queer was an identity dissonance. Given the norms of what it is to be black, I felt like when I was in my church, I had to hide my queerness that was evident though my gender expression and sexuality. Queerness was oppressed by first being stigmatized, and by then being restricted and subordinated. For the majority of my life, my identities were antithetical and thus experienced hierarchically: black Christian first, queer second and in secret. As a member of the black Christian church, I was a member of a group that oppressed queerness. So, in order to not be oppressed by my family and my “brothers” and “sisters” of the church, my “me” needed to conventionalize to those attitudes of the social group of which I was a part. Experiencing this dissonance was a “motivating tension,” where this tension arose due to my commitment to identities unchosen, that is, my blackness *and* my queerness. Both of these identities could not be given up; yet, the former meant that in order to be taken seriously as black (to be black enough), and to be accepted by the group I did not have a choice in being a part of, I had to internalize those ideals about what it meant to be the assigned and imposed gender that I denied and to be the assigned and imposed sexuality (heterosexuality) I also denied.

This tension, then, led me to “remove one of the offending identities from [my] self-concept; [to] continue to wrestle with the tension,” to find “alternative psychological and/or behavioral strategies (e.g., distraction) in order to mitigate the resulting anxiety; or ... [to] adjust [my] conception of the identities in order to conceive them as corresponding.”³⁷ For me, my identity dissonance resulted in a distain for Christianity rather than for my blackness

³⁷ Crymble. “Contradiction Sells.” 65

– Christianity was a choice, negotiable and able to be denied, my blackness was not. What I did not know at the time was how much these identities in the dominant narrative were so intertwined. Black churches hold a position within black culture. So even though I rebuked my Christianity in the name of acceptance and love for myself, for my queerness, so many of the norms and ideals of what I thought I needed to uphold in order to be “black enough” originated from the church.

By being a part of one social group that created a collective, group identity – an identity that I deemed to be fundamental to the way that I understand who I am – whose norms supported the oppression and subordination of another identity I held, affected my self. A dialectical dissonance and an identity dissonance are occurring as my self is affected by oppression. The nature of the self is that it is comprised of two phases, the “I” and the “me,” where these phases are in constant dialectic. The dominant black social group upholds attitudes that members are expected to reflect back to that social group through their “me.” Because of the conflicting identities that I uphold, my “I,” or response, is in conflict with the “me,” or attitudes of the social group, resulting in a dialectical dissonance. As a member of a social group, one feels obligated to “have those habits, those responses which everybody has; otherwise the individual could not be a member of the community.”³⁸ But, I could not reflect those responses or habits as a member of the black social group while simultaneously being queer. This resulted in an identity dissonance wherein I experienced my identities hierarchically rather than simultaneously. This affected my self not only ontologically by creating a dissonance, but it also distorted my identity clarity and my impression of my core sense of self.

³⁸ Mead. *Mind, Self, and Society*. 197

Section III: An Opportunity for a Rectification of Dissonances

Being a part of a group that upholds oppressive norms toward those who do not conform is an experience in which many are intentionally or unintentionally involved. What complicates this further is if you are a part of this group and you do not conform, you are a part of the oppressive group and the group that is oppressed. Given these dissonances that are occurring as a result of this experience, your self is continually being negatively affected through phase dissonance, and your self-conception or self-perception is distorted as a result. The question, then, is what happens when this occurs? In other words, what is one supposed to do in this kind of situation?

First and foremost, I do not think that everyone's experience will be the same. My intention in this Independent Study was to provide a theoretical and philosophical explanation of my own experience and discern whether or not this affected my "self." In the process, I tried to understand the components of the question of how oppression affects the self. Secondly, I do not wish, nor ought I, to instantiate some sort of obligation on those oppressed to cure themselves of the dissonances they experience as a result of said oppression, especially when they are not even the cause of their oppression nor is the oppression justified.

Mead, though, broadly puts forth a potential response to a dialectical dissonance. This suggestion, though, assumes that one is open and willing to act in opposition to the norms of the social group of which one is a part. This is why I do not assert that there is an obligation to act in opposition. Often, it is safer to reflect back the attitudes of the social environment of which one is a part. There should not be a normative claim in play that asserts what one should do without first considering what one *can* do.

Mead asserts that in acting in opposition to the attitudes of the social environment, thus, uncensored, one is in a “situation of self-assertion where the self [can] simply [assert] itself *against* others.”³⁹ When the self is not in opposition but working *with* others,

the ‘me’ is determined by the situation. There are certain recognized fields within which an individual can assert himself, certain rights which he has within these limits. But let the stress become too great, these limits are not observed, and an individual asserts himself in *perhaps* a violent fashion. Then the ‘I’ is the dominant element against the ‘me.’⁴⁰

It is clear that in some instances, a social situation could arise that could cause an individual to assert himself in opposition to the “me,” or organized set of attitudes of the environment. The previously explored situation in section II is one of them. I want to note here that an individual does not have to assert himself violently. There are other instances that Mead puts forth where “one can let himself go, in which the very structure of the ‘me’ opens the door for the ‘I,’ [which is] favorable to self-expression.”⁴¹ In the aforementioned instance specifically, it seems to be the case that *stress*, resulting in the dissonance, could cause one to disregard the limits of social convention. Rather than acting in a way that is controlled or censored by the social environment, the individual expresses himself by asserting its self against others, through the “I” overtaking the “me.” We know now that oppression is more complicated than just any kind of stress; there may be other factors in play because of oppression but harmonizing the “I” and “me” could be an important step in rectifying the effects of oppression.

Mead goes on to say that: “When an individual feels himself hedged in, he recognizes the necessity of a situation in which there will be an opportunity for him to make his addition

³⁹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 238 (emphasis added)

⁴⁰ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 238 (emphasis added)

⁴¹ Mead. *Social Psychology*. 241 – In this instance, it is not to say that in always acting uncensored by the attitudes of the environment the “I” is expressed. Rather, this particular position seems to note an instance where the “I” and “me” are in harmony.

to the undertaking, and not simply to be the conventionalized ‘me.’”⁴² This language here of feeling “hedged in” is congruent with Frye’s language of being caged in when oppressed. Therefore, what Mead suggests could be a step in rectifying the experience of oppression. When an individual is in certain situations, there is an opportunity, not an obligation, for the individual to not merely act as “the conventionalized me” or stick to the attitudes of the environment one is in. Although Mead does not explicitly say that oppression causes the dissonance, he does assert that when a dissonance occurs, the “I” has an opportunity to overtake the “me” by not submitting to the attitudes and then responding in a novel way. It is reasonable to assume that oppression may lead to the dissonance between the “I” and “me,” and as a result, one may ignore the conventions of the social environment which holds oppressive ideologies and not conform.

As there is an intersectionality of identities, this process is not easy to perform. People are multifaceted and continually experience an intersection of identities: I am never just black in one space or queer in another, I am always a black queer person whether others know or not. Given this difficulty, the unconventionalizing of the “me” first happens internally in the mind: “a person asserting his rights on a certain occasion has rehearsed the situation in his own mind; he has reacted toward the community and when the situation arises he arouses himself and says something already in his mind.”⁴³ Though it may be easier to rehearse to oneself by reflecting on the experience internally, acting in reality may be more complicated. Hence, one may experience their identities hierarchically and not simultaneously in order to avoid intergroup conflict, wherein each respective social environment they can reflect back to that social group the attitudes the group presents to them. This may be intentional or unintentional, but on some level the individual knows that

⁴² Mead. *Social Psychology*. 241.

⁴³ Mead. *Mind, Self, and Society*. 197

in experiencing an identity dissonance, they are not hiding or suppressing an identity; rather in taking that identity, they know that the way they take it will be context dependent.

Furthermore, with any identity taken, they know that to take an identity is to make choices and formulate plans in light of one's identification in that way. This does not entail that in taking an identity that it will always be known to others, but by taking an identity, the choices that they make or the way that they live will be in light of identifying in that way. For me, among others, this resulted in the activity of inviting others in rather than coming out.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Independent Study was to understand how oppression affects the self. More specifically, this question was to be understood in order to consider the experience and the position that there is a conflicting imposition (by being oppressed) placed on queer folk in black (American) Christian spaces that affects the self. To best answer the question of how oppression affects the self, it first had to be understood what was being asked. Thus, in the first chapter, a theory of the self was presented through a charitable reading of Mead. By putting forth this theory, it was argued that based on this telling of the self, the self is able to be affected by oppression. The latter part of the chapter served to further understand the nature of the self while in dissonance, as a dissonance can be expected given its nature. The next two chapters were utilized in order to better understand oppression and the role identity plays in understanding who one is. Finally, the last chapter not only synthesized this information in order to understand the question, but also explained what is occurring when the self is oppressed. By presenting the particular context of black queer folk in Christian spaces, I was able to provide a particular experience to further elucidate my particular claim.

Throughout reading, considering, analyzing, critiquing, and rereading this Independent Study, I hope that I was able to make a few points clear, perhaps implicitly. First and foremost, the self, as a frame of one's experience, is the kind of thing that has the potential to be constantly growing, evolving, and changing. This all may occur as we continue to wrestle with the attitudes of the different social environments that we are in. Essentially, social occurrences will inevitably affect not only the nature of the self but the way that we think about who we are. But, despite these inevitable changes, each experience and social group that we are a part of lend to our own impression of who we think we are or our "core sense of self." What's more is that we will always be capable of novelty. Though

we may stick to similar social environments, new experiences and environments bring about new content that fuel one's "I" and "me." Novelty, and thus individuality, is possible and not everyone's "self" is conventionalized by the attitudes of their social environment.

Similarly, through my analysis, the question of "who am I?" becomes "how ought I think about who I am?" They differ in that the question of "who am I?" requires one to ascribe and/or pinpoint qualities that seem to describe who you are. The question of "how ought I think about who I am?" takes in consideration not only the constant influx of experiences that may continue to affect us and fuel the conversation between the "I" and "me," but also the way that we think about who we are. Thus, "how ought I think about who I am?" means that who you are is not just a product of the social environments you are a part of, it also includes the way in which we understand ourselves and how we choose to assert ourselves in our different social groups.

Lastly, it is important to note that the self is equipped to deal with and overcome the effects of oppression. Though the oppressed may resist oppression, the responsibility to eradicate oppression does not lie on those oppressed, nor is it the responsibility of the oppressed to heal themselves. But, throughout this process of understanding how oppression affects the self, it is clear that the self has the ability to overcome dissonance. Although social groups hold oppressive norms and oppress those who deviate, subordinating and immobilizing them, oppression does not render the self incapable of response. We each have the capacity to respond to oppression in the way that works best for us. We each, too, can find spaces that support and uplift every aspect of who we are. We do not merely have to be what is imposed.

This thesis worked to understand how oppression affects the self, but some things are left unsaid or not answered completely, perhaps in a way that may leave the reader with

questions. How does the oppressed exist? How do we stop oppression? What can the oppressed do in the face of oppression? For those who may not relate to the experience of the oppressed, those may have follow up questions as well. Perhaps, they may ask, how do I understand the experience of the oppressed? How can I help those oppressed, or in other words, stop oppressing? For all these questions, I would suggest more philosophical readings: Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* where he further explores the black identity and the black experience; Joseph Winters' "Rac(e)ing From Death. Baldwin, Bataille, and the Anguish of the (Racialized) Human," which addresses the temporality and futurity of black queer bodies; *No Tea, No Shade: New Black Queer Studies*, an anthology of essays on black gender and sexuality; Lee McBride's "Insurrectionist Ethics and Racism," which discusses the liberation of racially oppressed people; and forthcoming, Margy Adams' "Insurrecting Purity: Creativity as Resistance in Somatic Ambiguity," which addresses the experience of the Other and provides a way to understand the experience of the Other through creative fiction.

Though many philosophers argue for the intrinsic value of philosophy, it can be instrumentally valuable, too. By this, I mean that philosophy can not only explore the nature of something but can respond to it and engage with it. This kind of philosophy is often seen as the theories that supports all other disciplines. I mention this though to say that the purpose of this Independent Study is not to merely show how the self is affected by oppression, but it ultimately is a response piece. A response to my own oppression. A way to philosophically understand my own experience while oppressed by those who look just like me.

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