

# Positive Philosophy

A Feminist Practice of Affective Therapy and Political  
Resistance

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# [Front Matter]

## [Title Page]

The Pennsylvania State University  
The Graduate School  
College of the Liberal Arts

### **POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY: A FEMINIST PRACTICE OF AFFECTIVE THERAPY AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE**

A Dissertation in  
Philosophy  
and  
Women's Studies  
by  
Cori L. Wong

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## **ABSTRACT**

What relationships can be drawn between affective states and epistemological states? What do affective experiences, such as anger or pleasure, have to do with political projects of resisting oppression? How can philosophy better inform political practice? Addressing these questions from a feminist perspective, this dissertation develops the concept of “positive philosophy” as a practice of resistance that therapeutically works on and through the affective experiences of socially marginalized individuals. By exploring connections between psyche and soma, experience and embodiment, and theory and practice, I show how systems of domination operate and maintain themselves through the psychosomatic production of negative affects and their harmful physiological effects. Chapter 1 critically analyzes the reclamation of emotion and affect in feminist epistemology as valuable resources for progressive theorizing by showing how even experiences of “outlaw emotions”—such as anger and rage at racism—can evidence the same problematic desire to make righteous knowledge claims that can be found in dominant discourse. Chapter 2 explores how the debilitating and disempowering effects of oppression are not merely psychological but also manifest in one’s physiological body. I stress the need to address the embodied consequences of oppression presented in negative affects as a mechanism of oppression. Chapter 3 critically highlights positive psychology’s therapeutic method of treating negative affects by cultivating positive affects while cautioning against its individualistic emphasis, which lacks sensitivity for larger ethical and political contexts. My argument culminates in Chapter 4, which combines the therapeutic method of positive psychology with feminist political projects to develop a conception of “positive philosophy.” I argue that the unique mode of philosophical reflection in “positive philosophy,” which entails taking pleasure in one’s cultivated ability to think

without certainty, can generate positive affective experiences that undo the negative psychosomatic and affective effects of oppression and discourage the production of righteous knowledge claims.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The arguments contained within this dissertation have been influenced by the ideas and support of many other people, to whom I am deeply grateful. My own approach to and ideas about philosophy have been heavily shaped by many of the scholars whose work I've read for years and to which I refer in these chapters. In addition to acknowledging them for the effort, courage, and dedication that went into producing such fabulous works that have inspired and empowered me in my own life, I also want to acknowledge the Pennsylvania State University, and the Departments of Philosophy and Women's Studies in particular, for providing me with the opportunity and support to continue my own philosophical exploration. I have also had the great fortune of being able to work closely with some of these great scholars over the years in seminars, independent studies, and institutes, including Drs. Shannon Sullivan, Ladelle McWhorter, and Nancy Tuana, and the other members on my committee, Drs. Susan Squier and Sarah Clark Miller. In addition to learning from their different examples of how one can do philosophy, be a philosopher, and engage with feminist theory, I have benefitted from numerous philosophical and personal conversations with them that helped keep me true to my own philosophical goals and values.

My ideas were especially able to gain traction thanks to the hundreds of students with whom I interacted in classrooms, and whose interest, enthusiasm, challenges, curiosity, and honesty helped me further realize the important personal and political work that can be done in a room full of people who are willing to ask hard questions and think and learn together, without ever really coming to know solid answers. I have learned so much from my students, and I appreciate their role in pushing my own thinking in ways that support the idea of doing theory and practice together.

Throughout the writing process and my philosophical journey up to this point, I am very grateful for the support from my family and close friends, many of whom received bits of my writing along the way, read complete drafts of chapters, and extended encouragement and validation on the days when I struggled to stay motivated or felt like it might all just be too much. And I must extend a very special thanks to my dear friend, Bryn Gelaro, for sitting with me in cafes for an untold number of hours over the past year and half of writing, and for helping me do everything from draw out concept maps on napkins to edit transition sentences between paragraphs to laugh and cry and dance and live a full, rich life.

# Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is to develop the concept of positive philosophy, a philosophical practice that can serve as a method of affective therapy and a mode of political resistance. The central characteristic of positive philosophy is cultivating the ability to take pleasure in thinking without certainty—i.e., to cultivate positive affective experiences in the face of not knowing. In other words, positive philosophy hinges on a particular relationship between affective and epistemological states. More generally, my conception of positive philosophy exists at the intersection of philosophy, physiology, psychology, and politics and combines diverse insights from neurobiology, positive psychology, and feminist theory. My argument for positive philosophy grows out of an interdisciplinary investigation of relationships between theory and practice, psyche and soma, emotion and affect, oppression and resistance, and methods for therapeutic healing. Given the array of concepts, themes, and influences contained within this project, I begin by clarifying how I understand a few key concepts and how I will be using my terms. Since my project builds upon a number of themes as they have been developed within feminist scholarship, I will largely note how a feminist perspective provides the background to the central claims of my argument.

The relationship between theory and practice presents a classic tension in feminist scholarship. Although few feminist scholars would suggest that the two are directly opposed to or mutually exclusive of one another, academic theory has often been criticized for being too impractical to be significantly helpful in terms of feminist politics and resistance to oppression. Some have argued that the linguistic density and conceptual sophistication of “high theory” make it inaccessible to wider, more general audiences, thereby compromising its efficacy and political value.<sup>1</sup> And standard criticisms among feminist theorists have forcefully charged that theory has a tendency to be too disconnected, irrelevant, ineffectual, or exclusionary to create real social change, especially if it does not start with or fails to elucidate the lived experiences of those who occupy various social locations based on race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Such critiques are often charged against Judith Butler for her dense prose. For a recent example, see Lauryn Oates, “Judith Butler Shouldn’t Be Honoured By McGill University.” 27 May 2013. 30 June 2013 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lauryl-oates/judith-butler-to-be-award\\_b\\_3333457.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lauryl-oates/judith-butler-to-be-award_b_3333457.html)][[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lauryl-oates/judith-butler-to-be-award\\_b\\_3333457.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/lauryl-oates/judith-butler-to-be-award_b_3333457.html)].

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks is an example of one who intentionally writes with less academic jargon. hooks explains, “I have made specific decisions about the nature of my work in the interest of making it accessible to a broader audience. Those decisions involve doing writing that may not impress my academic peers...To take that risk seems minor given the possible good that can come when the effort is made to share

While such critiques create an important space for “checks and balances” in feminist theorizing, they have not devastated the project of producing theory on the whole.<sup>3</sup> Rather than situating theory and practice against one another, many feminist scholars have suggested that theory and practice should be mutually informed by the other. Practice is valuable for theory production insofar as direct experiences of being from and working within specific communities can help raise important questions and identify powerful insights that might otherwise be overlooked or misinterpreted by “uninvolved outsiders.” In this way sense, practice helps influence the appropriate direction and scope of theory by drawing attention to relevant aspects of our interactions and experiences that deserve greater investigation. Likewise, theory can help shape the practices that one undertakes and how one pursues them by identifying aspects of certain practices that should be altered in order to reach different ends.<sup>4</sup>

The intimate relationship between theory and practice has been pushed even further by thinkers like bell hooks, who argues that theory is itself already a form of practice.<sup>5</sup> According to this position, reading, writing, and teaching feminist theory is a valuable element of feminist praxis in the same way that participating in rallies, volunteering in women’s shelters, organizing consciousness raising programs, or lobbying for legislative reform are crucial feminist political actions. There are also theorists who argue in the other direction and state that certain practices, such as meditation, can be theoretical in nature. I acknowledge this possibility in the final chapter, which differentiates positive philosophy from other approaches to philosophical practice. However, my claim that positive philosophy also can be a practice of political resistance centers on a very standard conception of theorizing and is thus most in line with hooks’ understanding of theory as practice.

The mind-body dualism is another persistent philosophical problem that has become a significant point of interest for feminist philosophy. An attitude that privileges the mind (or psyche) over the body (or soma) might even be complexly related to the tension between theory and practice. For instance, when the mind and the body are conceived of as separate or distinct from one another, it may be assumed that theory more appropriately addresses and engages the mind while practice focuses on more concrete things, such as immediate concerns regarding the safety, health, and protection of our bodies. Since these divisions have also been historically gendered,

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knowledge informed by progressive politics in diverse ways.” *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 235.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for “The Woman’s Voice”.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6.6 (1983): 573-581.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Iris Marion Young delineates a notion of political responsibility with reference to the antisweatshop movement. See “Responsibility and Global Labor Justice.” *Journal of Political Philosophy*. 12.4 (2004): 365-388.

<sup>5</sup> See bell hooks and Tanya McKinnon, “Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private.” *Signs* 21.4 (Summer, 1996): 814-829, and bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.



the mind-body dualism is more than just a philosophical problem—it is a feminist issue. Feminist scholars have highlighted how men have been considered more rational, and thereby more fit to produce theory, while historically women and people of color have been associated with emotion and the body as opposed to reason and the mind.<sup>6</sup> As a result, women and people of color have been assigned social roles in the “private sphere” that involve bodily practices like childcare and tending to the ill while men and white people have occupied social positions with greater access to and influence over public life.

Assumptions about these gendered divisions have no doubt influenced the demographics and content of the western philosophical tradition. Beyond the fact that the vast majority of “canonical” philosophical texts have been written by white men, the very conception of what counts as philosophy has been shaped by a privileging of theory over practice and the mind over the body.<sup>7</sup> While other theorists have challenged such sharp divisions<sup>8</sup> and this counter-approach to philosophy has become increasingly more recognized over recent decades, the dominant picture of philosophy still characterizes it as an intellectual, rational, and mind-oriented discipline that overlooks the role of the body, the soma, emotions, and affects. Thus, despite influential feminist theoretical work that challenges the historical demand for reason and the exclusion of emotion in practices of knowledge production<sup>9</sup> and rejects the idea that one could ever be a “disembodied knower,”<sup>10</sup> there is still a relative lack of feminist attention given to philosophy itself as a somatically-engaging practice. I believe that refiguring standard conceptions of philosophy with respect to embodied affective experiences opens up exciting new possibilities for feminist praxis. In other words, with attention to how assumptions about theory and practice interact with assumptions about the psyche

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<sup>6</sup> See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, especially Chapter 4, “The Ideal of Impartiality” and Chapter 5, “The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity;” and Frantz Fanon’s discussion on how “with the Negro the cycle of the biological begins” in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967, 160170.

<sup>7</sup> This has also resulted in a “masculinization” of philosophy. See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, and Michele Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia’s Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.* Trans. Trista Selous. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> There are many relevant examples found in the tradition of phenomenology. See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. New York: Routledge, 2002, esp. 84102.

<sup>9</sup> See Alison Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotions in Feminist Epistemology.” *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. 129-155.

<sup>10</sup> For examples, see Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991; Sandra Harding, ““Strong Objectivity” and Socially Situated Knowledges.” Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo, *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008. 687-705; and the collection of essays in *Engendering Rationalities*. Ed. Sandra Morgen and Nancy Tuana. New York: SUNY Press, 2001.

and soma, I investigate an overlap between feminist theorizing on political practice and philosophical questions regarding philosophical practice itself.

Feminist challenges to the privileging of reason over emotion and affect represent one way in which feminist theorists have challenged the privileging of the mind over the body. By defending the importance and epistemological value of emotions, which are typically associated with irrational impulses, bodily instincts, and other “unthinking” things, feminist theorists have challenged the assumption that one’s rational mind is the only means by which one can possess knowledge.<sup>11</sup> However, the lines between the mind and the body as they relate to reason and emotion or affect are not always clear. Within the limited scope of the history of western philosophy alone there is a large amount of literature on emotion and affect. Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Sartre, and James are just a few figures who have contributed to the philosophical discourse on the nature of the emotions.<sup>12</sup> One can find even more resources on emotion and affect in disciplines like psychology,<sup>13</sup> cultural geography,<sup>14</sup> neuroscience,<sup>15</sup> and evolutionary biology.<sup>16</sup> With such a long history and a wide breadth of disciplinary perspectives informing the discourse, it should come as no surprise that there are competing, even contradictory, positions regarding the nature of, relationships among, and similarities and differences between emotion and affect.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see Spelman, Elizabeth V. “Anger and Insubordination” in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Winchester: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989. 263-273.

<sup>12</sup> For an introduction to this history, see Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon. *What is an Emotion?* New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, and Robert C Solomon, “The Philosophy of Emotions.” *Handbook of Emotions*. Ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett. 3[r]d Edition. New York: The Guilford Press, 2008. 3-16.

<sup>13</sup> Silvan S. Tomkins and Carroll E. Izard, *Affect, Cognition, and Personality: Empirical Studies*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 1965; David Shave. *PsychoDynamics of the Emotionally Uncomfortable*. St. Louis: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1979; Nico H. Frijda, Antony S.R. Manstead and Sacha Bem. *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Richard S. Lazarus and Bernice N. Lazarus. *Passion and Reason: Making Sense of Our Emotions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres.” *Emotion, Space and Society* 2.2 (2009): 77-81 and “Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24.5 (2006): 733-752; Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect.” *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 83-109; Steve Pile, “Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35.1 (2010): 5-20; Deborah Thien, “After or Beyond Feeling? A Consideration of Affect and Emotion in Geography.” *Area* 37.4 (2005): 450-456.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett, *Handbook of Emotions*. 3[r]d Edition. New York: The Guilford Press, 2008, 159-291; Richard D. Lane and Lynn Nadel, *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Diana Fosha, Daniel J. Siegel and Marion Solomon, *The Healing Power of Emotion: Affective Neuroscience, Development, and Clinical Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Darwin, “The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals.” *From So Simple a Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*. Ed. Edward O. Wilson. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006. 1255-1477.

While there may be valuable reasons for differentiating emotions and affects in certain argumentative frameworks, the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ are often used interchangeably.<sup>17</sup> Because the literature to which I refer does not consistently use ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ to differentiate between relevant phenomena, I also tend to use the terms interchangeably. However, when possible, I maintain a preference for the use of ‘affect’ because this commonly connotes the physiological element of experiences that are often, although not always, associated with certain emotions. For example, Felicity Callard and Constantina Palpoulias explain that in most humanities literature “‘affect’ is precognitive physiological states and changes, and ‘emotion’ is the accompanying cognitive and socially-mediated feeling of, e.g., fear.”<sup>18</sup> A quick overview of other commonly noted differences between emotion and affect further elucidates why I center my arguments on affect rather than emotion.

Despite the fact that emotions are commonly associated with “feelings,” there is a tendency to think of emotions in terms of psychological states rather than— or apart from—physiological sensations. Furthermore, emotions are often understood to be sensations that have been properly labeled and named and that have a specific intentionality—they are directed at another object.<sup>19</sup> As such, when one says, “I am sad,” this is intended to identify a psychological state about something in particular. This is different from a mere physiological response like crying, which could easily be associated with the experience one identifies as ‘sadness,’ or even ‘happiness’ for that matter. Even if it is granted that emotions sometimes have affective dimensions, emotions are typically considered to be immaterial dispositions that are internal to one’s psyche. In other words, emotions are things that one experiences for herself in herself. While we may witness the emotions of others, and this may provoke emotional responses of our own, we do not share or participate in the experience of the others’ emotions.

Affects, on the other hand, are more frequently understood with reference to the embodied, physiological dimension of our felt experiences and are sometimes described as intensities that exceed linguistic representation.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the affective experiences of panic can involve an overwhelming, directionless response that is coupled with a rush of heat across one’s skin, an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Such felt somatic changes in one’s physiology evidence the extent to which one has been affected. Because of this connection to embodiment, affect is often considered to have greater materiality than emotion, and some have argued that affects are more

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<sup>17</sup> For an example of a clear description of affects and emotions, see Agnes Heller. *A Theory of Feelings*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009, 68-103.

<sup>18</sup> Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulias, “Affect and Embodiment.” *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. Ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. 246-262, 247.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

social and interpersonal than emotions.<sup>21</sup> In other words, affects are things that can be transmitted and shared, and in this way, they might even exceed the body by affecting others beyond the boundaries of our skin.

When differentiated in this way—emotions as psychological states and affects as physiological sensations—there is a risk of splitting apart emotions and affects along the bifurcated lines of a mind-body dualism. There is also a risk of echoing the historical privileging of reason over emotion by ascribing an intentional, cognitive quality to emotional responses that affective experiences might presumably lack.<sup>22</sup> Although I prefer the term ‘affect’ for my project, I am cautious about reiterating yet another binary between affect and emotion, which some feminist scholars have noted comes close to mirroring the binary between masculinity and femininity, where affect is more “masculine” and privileged over emotion.<sup>23</sup>

Emotions may not be affects and affects may not be emotions, but emotions are frequently experienced in conjunction with a variety of affective experiences, and vice versa. Thus, at the risk of reinforcing the notion that affects are categorically distinct from emotions, I prefer to use the terms “affect” and “affective” in order to highlight the somatic, physiological character of our experiences, including those that might even be described as “emotional” experiences. As long as the bodily dimension of “emotional” experiences is not overlooked, a strict distinction between emotional responses and affective experiences is not completely necessary for my argument. Indeed, it may be misleading. For instance, in the first chapter I refer to the feminist reclamation of emotion in epistemology because this is the language that has been most commonly adopted by feminist theorists. I note, however, that the particular “emotional” responses that have most frequently been defended as epistemologically valuable are often described in affective terms that refer to somatic experiences. Anger, frustration, and rage at prevailing philosophical concepts and social norms are often felt with a turning of one’s gut or as something that gets “under one’s skin,” and these bodily experiences reveal the extent to which one is affected. They are also part of what can motivate one to think against the grain of the status quo.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the cognitive and affective aspects of one’s experience are coextensive and related, which highlights that ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ may not always need to be considered as fully distinct from one another. Thus, although feminist epistemologists have more prominently argued that emotion can play a valuable role in progressive theorizing, I focus on the signifi-

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<sup>21</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> For a more thorough discussion on the dangers of this distinction with respect to feminist philosophical accounts of emotion, see Shannon Sullivan’s “James and Feminist Philosophy of Emotion.” *Feminist Interpretations of William James*. Ed. Shannon Sullivan and Erin Tarver. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming. (pages not yet available).

<sup>23</sup> Thein, “After of Beyond Feeling?,” 452; and Joanne Sharp, “Geography and Gender: What Belongs to Feminist Geography? Emotion, Power, and Change.” *Progress in Human Geography* 33.1 (2009): 74-80.

<sup>24</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, 125-43.

cance of bodily “affective” experiences for theorizing, to which feminist discussions of ‘emotion’ often simultaneously refer.

I approach connections between affect and epistemology in a way that highlights how their relationship can reinforce certain aspects of social oppression that are often not fully appreciated, even by those who actively work to dismantle them. Oppression is commonly understood in terms of discrimination, prejudicial practices, and violations of basic rights and liberties that result in unjust disparities and inequalities. One’s socioeconomic status and access to education, healthcare, and public services are often markers of social privilege or disadvantage. However, focusing on particular examples of oppression does not adequately capture the full extent to which oppression operates. Marilyn Frye uses the image of a birdcage to illustrate how oppression is made up of “a network of systemically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to [a bird’s] flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, there are specific oppressive experiences that evidence constraints and restrictions on one’s freedom and liberty, such that unequal pay functions as one “wire” of the birdcage, but a myopic focus on the particulars of oppression does not account for the interrelated aspects of one’s experience that inhibit one’s ability to genuinely and freely “move about.” With this imagery in mind, my conception of positive philosophy is based on an acknowledgement of affective and epistemological- discursive dimensions of oppression. This is not to suggest that the affective and epistemological-discursive aspects of oppression capture the full extent of oppression on the whole. Instead, I intend to identify the function of these two aspects of oppression as additional wires of the birdcage.

Rather than simply noting how certain emotions are produced in oppressive situations, or how affects and emotions often motivate further theory and practices of resistance,<sup>26</sup> my conception of positive philosophy works from an affectively-oriented understanding of how oppression operates on and through the oppressed. By highlighting connections between social experiences, systems of oppression, and embodied, affective constitutions, I show how oppression also operates through the detrimental physiological effects of carrying negative affects such as anger, rage, guilt, and shame. In this sense, I tend to differentiate between negative and positive affects based the beneficial or harmful effects they have on one’s psyche and soma. For instance, positive affects like joy, gratitude, and love tend to increase one’s vitality and energy while negative affects such as depression and anxiety tend to drain or deplete it. While experiences of oppression are often linked to higher likelihoods of mental illness such as

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<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> For examples, see *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990, xvii; Gloria Yamato, “Something About the Subject Makes it Hard to Name.” *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990, 20-24, and Sandra Harding, ““Strong Objectivity” and Socially Situated Knowledges.” *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008, 741-756.

post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and addiction,<sup>27</sup> attention to the harmful effects of certain affects reveals that living with oppression is often more than just psychologically damaging. Oppression can also negatively shape one's affective constitution. The burdens that negative affects impose on one's physiological health and well-being—including the biochemical, neurological, and physiological aspects of depression, addiction, and heart disease—are potential markers of one's oppression that are also integral to how one is oppressed.

In addition to the harmful physiological effects of carrying negative affects, I identify how some affective experiences can lead one to inhabit epistemological locations and participate in discursive practices that reiterate oppressive structures. For instance, a strong “gut feeling” about right or wrong can lead one to shut down a dialogue with others who disagree; feeling “moved” by a religious experience can motivate one to suppress or dismiss the beliefs of others. Such affective experiences can reflect specific desires, fears, frustrations, and anxieties that, when coupled with theorizing and practices of knowledge production, might lead one to make claims or engage in practices that inadvertently reinscribe oppressive beliefs and values, thereby undermining efforts for progressive social change. As such, positive philosophy outlines a new way to approach progressive political projects that remains attentive to the risk of embracing specific types of counterproductive affective experiences and epistemological practices that could undermine one's own efforts. Furthermore, rather than continuing the tendency among many feminist theorists to focus on examples of rage, anger, shame, and guilt as productive affective responses to injustice,<sup>28</sup> I identify how a relationship between the affective experience of pleasure and the epistemological position of not knowing can counteract the harmful effects of carrying negative affective burdens, which can exacerbate physiological and psychological dis-ease. Pleasurable affective experiences that emerge from a specific epistemological position of not knowing also counter the assumption that one needs to know in order to be politically efficacious. I identify this assessment of ourselves as potential knowers as another conditioned byproduct of the discursive, epistemological context that also contributes to the maintenance of oppressive systems. Thus, positive philosophy's focus on cultivating the ability to experience pleasurable positive affects while engaging in a practice of thinking without certainty challenges the operation of oppression on affective and discursive levels.

The relationship between affective experiences and the practice of positive philosophy is particularly intriguing in light of considerations about effective practices of resistance. By outlining how oppression operates at affective and discursive levels, new

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald L Braithwaite and Ngina Lythcott, “Community Empowerment as a Strategy for Health Promotion for Black and Other Minority Populations.” *JAMA* 261.2 (1989): 282-283, Nina Wallerstein, “Powerlessness, Empowerment, and Health: Implications for Health Promotion Programs.” *American Journal of Health Promotion* 6.3 (1992): 197-205, and Thomas A. LaVeist, “Segregation, Poverty, and Empowerment: Health Consequences for African Americans.” *The Milbank Quarterly* 71.1 (1993): 41-64.

<sup>28</sup> For examples, see bell hooks' defense of a political rage at racism in *Killing Rage* and Elizabeth Spelman's essay, “Anger and Insubordination.”

opportunities for resistance can be more readily identified. In short, one can resist the accumulation of negative affects and work to transform one's affective constitution in positive, healthful ways. One can also resist participating in discursive contexts that exacerbate negative affective relations among people. Such efforts are appropriately understood as transformative practices that can be realized through the practice of positive philosophy. Disciplining oneself to inhabit a position of not knowing is an act of resistance that challenges our typical assumptions about what one needs to know and how one knows it. Cultivating the affective experience of pleasure with respect to this not knowing can also be understood as a practice of resistance because it seeks to reform affective experiences and affective constitutions that have been negatively shaped by oppression.

Positive philosophy aims to encourage personal, social, and political transformation on multiple levels by enhancing the well-being of particular individuals, especially those who are subject to social oppression and marginalization, while at the same time improving the ethical, social, and political relationships among groups of people. However, the point of this project is not to suggest that positive philosophy is the only way that philosophy can or should be practiced, that it is the best method for affective therapy, or that it is the only appropriate form of political resistance. Instead, I intend to point out certain aspects of philosophical practice that are often not fully appreciated, even by philosophers. Without saying that positive philosophy accounts for all that falls under the umbrella of philosophy, I emphasize that positive philosophy is an approach to philosophical practice that utilizes its therapeutic potential to enhance an individual's capacity to flourish. That one can have affective experiences associated with philosophical reflection reveals that philosophical practice does not merely affect us on epistemological levels by potentially changing the beliefs we hold in our minds. Instead, philosophical practice has the capacity to engage and affect us as affectively embodied subjects. In those moments when the positive reformation and refashioning of ourselves is made palpable, resistance becomes possible. Thus, it is by virtue of the potentially transformative affects that can arise out of philosophical reflection that positive philosophy can be understood as a practice that is politically empowering and personally therapeutic.<sup>29</sup>

Associating practices of political resistance with therapeutic methods can be a dubious task, but considering the two together is necessary for fully appreciating the implications of positive philosophy. Since this combination is potentially troublesome, let me clarify a potential concern surrounding the use of therapy in general. The discourse of therapeutic treatment is often imbued with normalized assumptions about what constitutes an illness or type of pathology that then becomes the specific target for "cure" and "correction." This can be problematic in many ways, not the least of

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<sup>29</sup> Elspeth Probyn's essay, "Teaching Bodies: Affects in the Classroom." *Body & Society* 10.4 (2004): 2143 touches on the main issues for my project, including the possibility for therapy through affective critical pedagogy. Although Probyn focuses on affective pedagogy, especially when teaching feminist material, she does not address therapeutic, affective experiences with philosophical texts in particular.

which consists in identifying characteristics in people as “abnormal” and marginalizing them based on these characteristics. What is “different” about certain individuals can be negatively evaluated as undesirably defective, deviant, or deficient simply because it does not accord with what is dominant—the norm. Rather than accepting and accommodating for the differences among people, normalizing practices seek to eliminate these differences. As a result, the sheer process of identifying and naming certain “pathologies” in people that are assumed to be in need of correction can be understood as already part of a process of normalization. The “therapeutic” treatments that follow can also be understood as providing an oppressive means for manifesting these normalized judgments by “correcting” the differences that set people apart from the norm.

One needs only to consider the dramatic changes in perception and so-called scientific knowledge of types of mental illness for examples of how the normalizing process of identification, marginalization, and “therapeutic” intervention plays out. For instance, consider the ways in which homosexuality has historically been negatively viewed as an illness in need of therapeutic treatment and the drastic, often excessively violent, and oppressive methods by which institutions, medical professionals, religious figures, family members, and even private individuals have sought to “remedy” people of their homosexual desires by “setting them straight.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, shifts in perception and understanding of certain “illnesses” reveal that what is negatively identified by dominant discourse as “pathological” within individuals is shaped by historical contexts and cultural values that change over time and is, therefore, not stagnant. Continuing with the example of homosexuality, there have been dramatic

changes in cultural perceptions of homosexuality in a matter of just a few decades. What was once overwhelmingly considered a form of mental illness in need of correction is now increasingly being defended as an acceptable way of living in the world and loving others that has been granted equal protection under federal law.<sup>31</sup>

To avoid the risk of incorporating normalizing practices under the guise of “therapy” it is helpful to distinguish between naming specific differences among people as “pathologies” and identifying the cultural pathologies that marginalize certain groups of people based on their differences. Disability theory elucidates the significant difference that the location of a presumed pathology makes. For instance, by focusing on physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments as natural dysfunctions or deficits in competence, the medical model of disability favors the use of medical technology to

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<sup>30</sup> This can include various methods of intimidation, shaming, and ostracization through institutionalization or violence through hate crimes. For more, see Ladelle McWhorter’s *Bodies and Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> In some ways, homosexuality is an interesting case because the increased social acceptance does not imply that cultural understandings have stepped outside of normalizing discourses. Instead, there has been a shift in the evaluation of homosexuality *within* normalizing discourses which view it as more acceptable because it is increasingly understood to be “normal,” that is, not so pathological or abnormal.



“fix” people by directly treating their impairments.<sup>32</sup> The presumption is that impairment is what directly hinders one’s ability to flourish in society and therefore must be treated. In contrast, the social model of disability is suspicious of any tendency to identify impairment as the sole source of personal limitation and social dysfunction. It is recognized that impairments only become disabling when the surrounding social conditions fail to accommodate for personal limitations. As Anita Silvers writes, “The social model of disability transforms the notion of ‘handicapping condition’ from a state of a minority of people, which disadvantages them in society, to a state of society, which disadvantages a minority of people.”<sup>33</sup>

Negative affects can be significant hindrances to flourishing and well-being when they exacerbate or engender psychological and physiological illnesses among those who carry them. In other words, negative affects can be identified as personally and socially detrimental—i.e., pathological—and in need of alleviation or elimination. When taken at face value, the notion that negative affects are harmful and that their influence should be mitigated appears to be no more politically or socially problematic than the idea that viruses are damaging to well-being and should also be preventatively or curatively treated. However, affective therapies risk participating in normalizing practices when they seek to “correct” negative affects in individuals without acknowledging how or why there are differences in affective constitutions among people. A more nuanced consideration of negative affects would at least seek to identify how and why they are unequally distributed throughout different populations. For instance, the ways in which negative affective burdens disproportionately harm socially marginalized individuals informs and guides my investigation of which methods would provide the most appropriate forms of affective therapy.

The intention behind my investigation of affective therapies is to mitigate the negative affective burdens of marginalized individuals, which means that the focus is already placed on non-dominant groups that are more susceptible to being coercively subjugated by normalizing practices. However, it is possible to avoid pathologizing negative affects among oppressed groups as especially “deviant” and in need of being eradicated—i.e., normalized—in ways that preserve the status quo. If negative affects can be understood as paralleling disability in disability theory, the relationship between impairments and the disabling social conditions that make having an impairment disadvantageous is useful here. A medical model would problematically identify negative affects as inherent to the individual and presume that they are precisely what hinder an individual’s ability to flourish. As such, the negative affects themselves would be the

“impairment” that requires correction so that the individual can fit better into the existing social framework. For example, a medical model of negative affects would

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<sup>32</sup> Anita Silvers, “Formal Justice.” Anita Silvers, David Wasserman and Mary B. Mahowald. *Disability, Difference, Discrimination: Perspectives on Justice in Bioethics and Public Policy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998. 13-145, 94-95.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

presume that one should nullify her anger at racism because anger is a negative affect that can pose problems to one's physiological and psychological well-being. In this way, one's anger is pathologized, but the social contexts that exacerbate rage to the point of being a "disability" are not called into question. In contrast, a social model would resist pathologizing rage and recognize that differences in affective constitutions should be understood with reference to social conditions that exacerbate or accommodate for particular affects. Taking a social model approach would mean that rage at racism could be validated as a legitimate and important response to racial oppression. At the same time, oppressive social contexts could also be more readily identified as that which require adjustment and change.

While somewhat useful, the analogy between negative affects and impairments eventually breaks down, however. Although it is important to recognize and legitimate certain types of negative affects as appropriate and justifiable, such as rage at racism, it is not enough to simply accommodate for or embrace negative affects. This is because negative affects can pose significant challenges to well-being on both personal and social levels. As such, there has to be a way to acknowledge both that pathology is found in a social context that marginalizes certain populations and that experiences of marginalization can produce serious personal harms that inhibit one's ability to flourish. My goal of affective therapy is not to follow a medical model that "corrects" or "cures" people of deficiencies and illnesses that are presumed to be inherent to them as individuals. That is, while flourishing is related to a reduction in one's experience of negative affects, this fact does not amount to a suggestion, for example, that one simply should stop being angry at racism. Instead, the goal is to ameliorate the negative affective effects of living in unjust and oppressive circumstances that harm, hurt, and hinder the well-being of some individuals more than others by working to dismantle systems of oppression—which, because oppression operates through the harmful effects of negative affects, includes efforts to relieve oneself of negative affects. Thus, affective therapies that promote the well-being of marginalized individuals by targeting negative affects themselves may utilize similar means as normalizing practices, but they can still serve very different ends.

The philosophical arguments contained within this dissertation address issues of experience and embodiment, the mind and the body, and oppression and resistance, but ultimately, this project is also a philosophical reflection on philosophical practice itself. At a time when humanities departments are increasingly under threat from severe budget cuts and marketing campaigns for massive online open courses (MOOCs), an education in the liberal arts is also increasingly viewed as impractical or unnecessary for the livelihoods of students. Those who wish to meaningfully contribute to society—or, at the very least, get a job—are often turned off from studying philosophy under the assumption that philosophy is not pertinent to their lives or won't do anything for them. Presumably, one is much better off studying business, economics, science, engineering, or politics. The presumed uselessness of philosophy is not only bad for philosophy and bad for professional philosophers whose livelihoods depend on others

appreciating the value of their philosophical skills, talents, and contributions. It is also, I think, unfortunate for those whose lives could greatly benefit from engaging in certain types of philosophical practice.

There are a number of possible reasons why the discipline of philosophy, in particular, finds itself in such a tenuous situation. Some argue that contemporary philosophers are at fault for making their own work obsolete.<sup>34</sup> In short, the charge is that philosophy has been and continues to be too disconnected from the problems, conflicts, questions, and concerns that many people have in their everyday lives. In a related way, others argue that a central problem for philosophy is found in its tendency to reinforce and recreate the demographics represented by the Western philosophical canon.<sup>35</sup> By reading, teaching, and writing mostly about the philosophical work from only a small handful of male philosophers, philosophers perpetuate an image of the philosopher that alienates women, people of color, and those whose lived experiences place them on the margins of society.<sup>36</sup> The fact that, on average, philosophy majors outperform all other majors on the relevant exams for graduate school admissions is seldom appreciated outside of philosophy departments.<sup>37</sup> In light of this, especially for those who come from a lower socio-economic background, vocational training might be more appealing than a liberal arts education for the sake of securing a job immediately after graduation.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, philosophy can be quite relevant to real life, women and people of color can properly do philosophy, and training in philosophy can equip one with very valuable skills that could be usefully applied to nearly any profession. Thus, the prevalent assumption that philosophy is impractical, unhelpful, or unnecessary is perhaps a reflection of philosophy's poor public reputation.

However, it is not fair to say that philosophy is completely unhelpful or useless to people, even those in oppressed groups. As many philosophers who have been drawn to queer theory, feminist theory, disability theory, or critical race theory often attest,<sup>39</sup> theorizing, including philosophical theorizing, can be quite empowering. Although one does not need to solely engage in so-called liberatory theories to experience potential

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<sup>34</sup> Lee McIntyre, "Making Philosophy Matter - Or Else." 11 December 2011. 24 June 2013 <<http://chronicle.com/article/Making-Philosophy-Matter-or/130029/> [<http://chronicle.com/article/Making-Philosophy-Matter-or/130029/>].

<sup>35</sup> Tania Lombrozo, "Name Five Women in Philosophy. Bet You Can't." 17 June 2013. 18 June 2013 <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t> [<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t>].

<sup>36</sup> Michele Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Tania Lombrozo, "Name Five Women in Philosophy. Bet You Can't." 17 June 2013. 18 June 2013 <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t> [<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t>].

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ladelle McWhorter describes how genealogy works to undermine dominant discourse through a critical redescription of historical events without resulting in stable, absolute truths. Although such

benefits from philosophical reflection, these theoretical approaches tend to explicitly encourage thinking about one's own experiences, reading about and learning from the insights of others, and utilizing one's own voice to establish new ways of understanding oneself and one's relation to others. As these areas of theory emphasize, philosophy offers an outlet for critical rearticulations of what is and opens up the possibility for creative reimaginings of how things could be.

The idea that philosophy can be especially valuable for those in oppressed groups may seem counterintuitive given that philosophy continues to be the most male-dominated discipline amongst the humanities and the syllabi of most philosophy courses consistently feature texts by white men.<sup>40</sup> However, as George Yancy notes, philosophy has always been appropriately understood as a discipline constituted by a bunch of troublemakers.<sup>41</sup> For instance, although Socrates was chastised by the state of Athens as its 'gadfly,' Socrates persists as an enduring example of the proper role of the philosopher. By encouraging critical commentary on dominant culture, social values, and political norms, especially including cultures, values, and norms that support coercion, injustice, and systems of oppression, the trouble that can be stirred up by philosophers' interrogations is crucial for the health and integrity of society. Thus, to be called a gadfly would be received by many philosophers as a high honor. It should also be noted that a similar thing can be said for the discipline of philosophy. As philosophy finds itself under cultural threat, the value of philosophy requires contributions from those who are troublemakers within it, those who stretch and challenge the borders of what philosophy is, who is allowed to participate in it, and the means by which they are encouraged to do so.

One of my aims has been to cause a little trouble for philosophy by offering a philosophical reflection on social oppression, practices of resistance, and philosophical practice, all with the hope of revitalizing philosophy's meaning and value as a discipline. At the same time that I utilize and expand upon the thoughtful work of many feminist and critical race theorists to support and inform my argument for positive philosophy as an affective therapy and a mode of resistance, I also present cautions against some common approaches to progressive theorizing and progressive political projects. Thus, in addition to writing for people whose lives might benefit from engaging in the practice of positive philosophy, my argument is directed toward those already involved with

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reinterpretations do not empower one "the way that knowledge can," McWhorter offers a thorough account of how genealogical reflections can transform our lives and ourselves in empowering ways. See *Bodies and Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. See also bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Tania Lombrozo, "Name Five Women in Philosophy. Bet You Can't." 17 June 2013. 18 June 2013 <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t>][<http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/06/17/192523112/name-ten-women-in-philosophy-bet-you-can-t>>.

<sup>41</sup> George Yancy, "Introduction: No Philosophical Oracle Voices." *Philosophy in Multiple Voices*. Ed. George Yancy. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. 1-19.

progressive theorizing, especially those who, in their own experience of it, have found the practice of theorizing to be very empowering and transformative.

## Chapter Outlines

In the first chapter entitled, “Contextualizing Outlaw Emotions and Righteous Knowledge Claims,” I argue that the type of affective experiences feminist theorists tend to defend and reclaim as valuable for progressive theorizing and political practice might not be as radically resistant as is commonly assumed when these affective experiences participate in the same epistemological context that grounds oppressive systems. In light of the socially conditioned nature of our affective constitutions, Alison Jaggar identifies outlaw emotions as politically and socially critical responses because they contain judgments that seek to undermine dominant discourse and the normative values that undergird the status quo. Other feminist theorists, including bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa, similarly note how certain affective experiences reflect an embodied sort of knowledge about the rightness or wrongness of a situation that can inform progressive theorizing. While I agree that marginalized individuals are more likely to experience emotional responses that reflect a critical political stance, I argue that responses of anger and rage can be conditioned by the epistemological contexts that produce a desire to be right and a refusal of uncertainty. I note that it is both philosophically and politically significant that, conditioned as such and somewhat separate from their cognitive content, affective experiences can lead to a type of theorizing which plays into the maintenance of socially oppressive systems rather than radically disrupting them. As a way to satisfy the will to know, affective experiences can inform both conservative and progressive judgments that lead to the assertion of righteous knowledge claims, which make dogmatic claims about one’s relation to truth and rightness that foreclose the possibility for genuine dialogue and radically new modes of resistance. Thus, feminist theorists must carefully reflect on how their affects might actually motivate a kind of theorizing that encourages the production of righteous knowledge claims and participates in the perpetuation of socially oppressive systems.

The second chapter, “The Negative Affective Effects of Oppression,” explores how experiences of social oppression are manifest in the affective constitutions of marginalized individuals. Unlike hooks’ emphasis on the psychological harm that racism inflicts on non-white people, I follow Susan Brison, Elizabeth Wilson, and Teresa Brennan to stress that the debilitating and disempowering effects of oppression are manifest in one’s psyche as well as in one’s physiological body. Oppression produces negative affects—such as rage, anger, shame, and depression—that are not merely “all in one’s head;” they are psychosomatic and can pose serious risks to one’s psychological and physiological health. Like Brennan, I argue that the embodied effects of negative affects have a role in maintaining and sustaining one’s subjugated state in the sense

that rage, anger, and depression represent affective burdens that inhibits one's flourishing on physiological and psychological levels. As such, the continued influence of negative affects on marginalized individuals can be understood as a politically and philosophically significant mechanism through which systems of oppressions perpetuate and maintain themselves at the level of the individual. Thus, in the interest of supporting feminist and anti-racist political projects, as well enhancing the well-being of particular marginalized individuals, I note the importance of finding ways to helpfully address the embodied consequences of oppressive social systems that are produced by and presented in negative affects.

Chapter Three, "Affective Therapies," explores various methods for affective therapies. In light of the psychosomatic symptoms that result from oppressive experiences, Brison notes how psychopharmacological treatments may be necessary to initiate physiological change. hooks and Brennan suggest that affective therapy can occur by working directly through and with the affects themselves. For instance, hooks describes how certain expressions of rage can be constructive and healing, and Brennan argues that cultivating a faculty of affective discernment enables one to deflect and resist taking on negative affective burdens from others. A third approach to affective therapy that directly utilizes affective experiences themselves is found in the empirical field of positive psychology. I pay particular attention to the claim in positive psychology that it is not enough to simply reduce or remove negative affects in order to facilitate greater health and well-being; one must rebuild an affective constitution by cultivating positive affects. While empirical evidence supports the notion that positive affective experiences promote greater health, happiness, and well-being, I add a critical perspective to this insight by noting that positive affective experiences must be evaluated and assessed in relation to the social and political contexts that frame them. Precisely because our affective experiences are situated within systems of oppression, it is important to consider whose well-being certain positive affects promote. In other words, some positive affects are direct products of activities and practices that compromise the well-being of others and therefore should not be blindly promoted simply because they are positive affects. I argue that the goal of affective therapies must not be to simply increase positive emotions in the interest of promoting one's "good feelings." Instead, the therapeutic use of positive affects must be placed within a framework that takes social and political justice into account.

The final chapter, "Affective Therapy, Feminist Politics, and Positive Philosophy," combines the methods of positive psychology and feminist philosophy to provide a preliminary account of what I call "positive philosophy." Akin to hooks' views of theory as practice, I articulate how positive philosophy can be undertaken in a way that therapeutically addresses the negative affective burdens individuals carry in light of their experiences within oppressive social contexts. In order to avoid theorizing out of negative affects in ways that participate in problematic epistemological frameworks that encourage the assertion of righteous knowledge claims, the practice of positive philosophy consists in cultivating the ability to openly and critically reflect on social realities

without the need to know solid answers, be right, or prove others wrong. As Ladelle McWhorter has suggested, this type of reflection places one in relation to ambiguity and not knowing in a way that can be affectively experienced as uniquely pleasurable. In other words, positive philosophy echoes the insights from positive psychology on the importance of experiencing positive affects in order to enhance individual well-being, but positive philosophy relates the affectively positive experiences of pleasure to progressive theorizing from a place of not knowing that considers the broad social, political, and epistemological contexts which motivate feminist and anti-racist projects of resistance. Practical effects of producing theory in this way include altering one's affective experiences such that she resists the accumulation and reinscription of negative affects (and their deleterious physiological and psychological effects on well-being).

Furthermore, cultivating positive affective experiences that arise from thinking and reflecting rather than from knowing helps mitigate the tendency to produce righteous knowledge claims, which can uncritically participate in a discursive context that shuts down dialogue and results in a moral and political stalemate. Thus, by improving individual well-being and encouraging an alternative way to relate to the demand for knowledge, the practice of positive philosophy enables, and already is, one form of resistance to the affective mechanisms through which systems of oppression are maintained.

# Chapter 1. Contextualizing Outlaw Emotions and Righteous Knowledge Claims

The embodied experience of knowledge is powerful and can motivate us to do many things. Examples of a felt sense of knowing are especially easy to identify when it comes to matters of right and wrong. As nearly anyone who has had a heated conversation with family members about politics over a holiday dinner can attest, seemingly fundamental issues frequently elicit similarly fundamental responses. The experience of a nauseating turn in the stomach, a flushing heat that spreads across the skin, or a gripping tightness in the chest in response to another person's remarks can feel like irrefutable evidence of the injustice of what was said. Indeed, the embodied sense that affirms to oneself that vegetarianism is morally right might be the same kind of experience that one's relatives cite to condemn abortion or marriage equality. When affective experiences are understood as reflecting a judgment and a claim to knowledge, they are often evoked to justify moral and political positions in a way that precedes thoughtful consideration, prevents genuine listening, and precludes productive dialogue.

Such examples of affective experiences highlight that what we are convinced of in terms of right and wrong might differ, but how the majority of people claim to know these things might look a lot alike. Beyond mere opinions or beliefs, we often have a gut feeling about what is right, just, good, and true. And when our assessment of right, wrong, justice, and truth are upheld or undermined, affective experiences can be respectively associated with emotions like pride, optimism, rage, anger, or shame. Unfortunately, embodied experiences of knowledge can result in an affective stalemate because just as some claim to know things to be true with reference to these embodied experiences, so do those who disagree.

For this reason, it may be tempting to say that affective experiences should have nothing to do with knowledge. However, rather than deny, dismiss, or downplay the powerful influence of affective and emotional experiences on how and what we know, numerous feminist theorists have argued that certain types of affects and emotions among those in oppressed groups can actually shed light on the realities of social injustice. Because of this, affective and emotional experiences might productively provide an embodied basis for developing new theories that can better inform practices of political resistance. At the same time, some affective and emotional experiences can be



understood as examples of resistance in their own right. This strategy for reclaiming certain affective experience serves to legitimate and utilize politically-resistant knowledge claims of those in marginalized groups. It is not, however, free of its own risks and dangers.

Although I agree that marginalized individuals are more likely than persons in privileged positions to experience emotional responses that reflect socially critical perspectives, my aim here is not to agree or disagree with the finer points of the feminist epistemological reclamation of emotion.<sup>1</sup> Instead, my focus on the feminist uptake of emotions and affects with respect to knowledge claims aims to highlight the political and philosophical significance of the epistemological context that frames any type of theory production, including, for instance, those that seek to resist dominant discourse on issues related to gender, sexuality, and race. More specifically, I am concerned with how certain types of emotional and affective experiences are inextricably connected to an assessment of ourselves as knowers of right and wrong and how these can influence practices of theorizing.

In what follows, I reconstruct the main argumentative points that have supported the feminist reclamation of emotion and affect for theory production and provide examples of how feminist theorists have utilized affective experiences of anger, rage, and disturbance to inform critical perspectives on social oppression. After explaining the notion that affective constitutions and emotional responses are influenced by one's identity within a specific social context, I use this insight to provide a cautionary note regarding the use of affective experiences as foundations for politically progressive theorizing. I argue that even "politically progressive" affective responses can be conditioned by the same epistemological context that often supports the injustices they seek to undermine by encouraging one to assert righteous knowledge claims, which take the rightness of one's judgment for granted in a quest for certainty. More specifically, experiences like anger and rage can evidence the desire to make judgments that contrast one's presumed rightness with another's presumed wrongness and promote the tendency to assert knowledge claims with an air of dogmatic certainty and moral purity in a way that is, ultimately, shared among those with opposing perspectives.<sup>2</sup> In other words, markedly different affective experiences can reflect the same problematic desire for truth and rightness even when they produce starkly different claims about what is true and right.

When it comes to progressive theorizing, embracing one's rage at injustice might enable her to produce a theory that legitimates her experiences by asserting a righteous

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, my goal is not to engage the robust debates within feminist epistemology about essentialized notions such as "epistemic advantage" or "standpoint." For examples, see Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist." *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 759-765 and selections from *Engendering Rationalities*. Ed. Sandra Morgen and Nancy Tuana. New York: SUNY Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the implications of my analysis are not limited to negative affects. Certain positive affective experiences could also be problematic for similar reasons.

knowledge claim about truth, but that theory may be motivated out of the same desire for knowledge and a refusal of uncertainty that grounds oppressive attitudes, practices, and institutions. By highlighting these desires as potential underlying motivators for how and why we engage in theory production, I invoke a feminist method of critical reflexivity to encourage a careful consideration of how some affective experiences might inform a problematic type of theorizing. This is not to suggest that all affective experiences are necessarily problematic for theorizing or that all forms of theorizing are necessarily problematic; I grant that some emotional responses and affective experiences can be helpful for theory production insofar as they inspire theorizing in the form of open-ended thinking and reflecting.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I specifically problematize the role that affective experiences have on theory production when they reflect the desire for certainty and moral rightness and lead to a type of theorizing that consists in the assertion of righteous knowledge claims. Theorizing in this way is both politically and philosophically significant insofar as the assertion of righteous knowledge claims plays into the epistemological context that maintains socially oppressive systems rather than radically disrupts them. In light of this, affective experiences that inform progressive theorizing can still run the risk of producing particularly unhelpful modes of discourse and resistance.

## I. The Feminist Reclamation of Emotion and Affect in Epistemology

While arguing that epistemology is necessarily related to politics, Linda Alcoff defines ‘politics’ as “anything having to do with relationships of power and privilege between persons, and the way in which these relationships are maintained and reproduced or contested and transformed.”<sup>4</sup> The latter half of this definition reveals that there is more at stake in epistemology than simply debating the content of specific knowledge claims. Epistemological investigations also explore the very standards by which knowledge claims are evaluated and the conditions under which they are produced.

Accepted standards for knowledge production provide the larger context in which we can even make, justify, accept, or reject specific claims, regardless of whether such claims are explicitly racist, sexist, homophobic, or liberatory in content. As Alcoff goes on to explain, “epistemologies have political effects as discursive interventions in specific spaces, for example, to authorize or disauthorize certain kinds of voices, certain kinds of discourses, and certain hierarchical structures between discourses.”<sup>5</sup> For

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<sup>3</sup> This is, in fact, the main idea that informs my final chapter and a crucial aspect of my argument for this project overall.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Alcoff, “How is Epistemology Political.” *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alston Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008. 705-718, 710.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

these reasons, feminist analyses of and within epistemology provide some of the most productive sites for critiquing assumptions and social values that have perpetuated the denigration of women and other subjugated groups. As a result of these efforts, feminist epistemologists have forged a theoretical space for new knowledges that allows for different voices, different methods, and different kinds of philosophical discourse. Of particular importance is the way in which feminist theorists have redrawn the relationships among social location, reason, emotion, affect, and knowledge production for the sake of political resistance against social oppression.

The historical privileging of reason over emotion in Western philosophy draws one of the exclusionary discursive lines that led to the feminist reclamation of emotion and affect for knowledge production. By looking at key figures in the Western philosophical cannon, Genevieve Lloyd illustrates how the capacity for reason has often been attributed to maleness whereas emotionality, and thereby a presumably less desirable, non-rational character, has typically been associated with femaleness.<sup>6</sup>

However, the division between reason and emotion entails more than a just gendered dichotomy. As Alison Jaggar explains, “Not only has reason been contrasted with emotion, but it has also been associated with the mental, the cultural, the universal, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the psychical, the natural, the particular, the private, and of course, the female.”<sup>7</sup> The division between reason and emotion resonates with various other hierarchized dichotomies.

Furthermore, assumptions about race and class are also wrapped up in these associations such that people of color and members of the uneducated, working class are also denigrated by presumptions about their (lack of) rational capabilities. It should come as no surprise, then, that those who have been associated with reason, cultivation of the mind, and civility typically turn out to be members of politically, socially, and culturally dominant groups—i.e., educated, white men. Nearly everyone else is relegated to the unrefined realm of emotion where they are presumably swayed by their bodily passions and, most importantly, lack the necessary characteristics that enable one to have and produce genuine knowledge.

No matter how degrading or false these associations between reason and emotion with respect to certain social populations may be, they have persisted with grave political consequences. As Elizabeth Spelman writes, “It has been argued again and again, in one form or another, that just by virtue of this association, rational types ought to dominate emotional types.”<sup>8</sup> Political domination is exercised, in part, through the dismissal or silencing of knowledge claims that come from those in subordinated

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<sup>6</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotions in Feminist Epistemology.” *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. 129-155.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Anger and Insubordination.” *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. 156-171.

groups. Similar to Alcoff's argument, Jaggar makes the connection between politics and epistemology explicit when she notes that the "ideological function of the myth of the dispassionate investigator" serves to "bolster the epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups, composed largely of white men, and to discredit the observations and claims of the currently subordinate groups."<sup>9</sup> Thus, while women and people of color are expected to be more emotional than white men, their emotional responses to social injustice are not validated as legitimate enough to threaten the status quo precisely because their emotionality is associated with irrationality. Rather than being seen as legitimate expressions of knowledge, the emotional and affective experiences of marginalized individuals are frequently dismissed as fits of hysteria or rage. Marilyn Frye describes this phenomenon when she writes, "It is a tiresome truth of women's experience that our anger is generally not well-received. Men (and sometimes women) ignore it, see it as our being 'upset' or 'hysterical,' or see it as craziness. Attention is turned not to what we are angry about but to the project of calming us down and to the topic of our 'mental stability.'"<sup>10</sup> The argument that emotion and affect can be valuable epistemological resources attempts to dismantle these historical prejudices that have blocked individuals in marginalized social groups from occupying positions as credible knowers.

While the argument that emotions and affects can play a valuable role in epistemology acknowledges the emotional responses of marginalized individuals, it does not simply privilege emotion over reason. More than simply inverting the privileging of rationality that has been associated with members of dominant social groups and the emotionality of marginalized individuals, the implications of this claim profoundly refigure the role of emotion in theorizing and knowledge production. A more accurate assessment of the feminist reclamation of emotion and affect in epistemology appreciates how it dramatically upsets the historical privileging of reason as the *only* reliable faculty for knowing what is true, real, right, good, and just. Physiological, visceral, embodied experiences of emotion and affect are placed alongside reflections that have historically been assumed to only involve a strictly rational mind.<sup>11</sup> Emphasizing the epistemological value of emotion clearly does not mean that feminist scholars have denied the importance of reason and thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, the goal is to incorporate greater appreciation for how emotion and affect complement and support rational reflection. For example, rather than reiterating the cultural

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*rations in Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Winchester: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989. 263273, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 142.

<sup>10</sup> Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1983, 84.

<sup>11</sup> This comment is not intended to suggest a stark dualism between body and mind, as if one could simply add bodily experiences to reflections of the mind. Neither is it intended to suggest that reason and emotion are distinct from one another, as if emotional responses are irrational. Indeed, the point that many feminist epistemologists make is that there may be reason in our emotions. If nothing else, our emotional responses might enhance our rational reflection rather than detract from it.

separation of reason and emotion, where emotions are viewed as hindrances to knowledge production that should be acknowledged only so they can be cleared out, Jaggar argues that reason and emotion are both necessary for knowledge. They exist as interdependent, equal, and simultaneously operating faculties of human knowing.<sup>12</sup> Jaggar's argument that emotion and reason are on par with one another in their epistemological necessity is radical insofar as it upsets the tendency to privilege reason over emotion without simply placing emotion over reason.

The feminist reclamation of emotion in epistemology is also radical in that it applies to everyone—no knower is capable of completely detaching herself or himself from emotional investments. This is not to suggest that one must or should always be overwhelmed by her emotions. Even Jaggar concedes to some conventionally negative epistemological assessments of emotions by noting that “contempt, disgust, shame, revulsion, or fear may inhibit investigation of certain situations or phenomena. Furiously angry or extremely sad people often seem quite unaware of their surroundings or even their own conditions; they may fail to hear or may systematically misinterpret what other people say.”<sup>13</sup> However, one should not categorically dismiss the epistemological significance of emotion simply because they can sometimes distort one's perceptions. Jaggar notes that, across the board and no matter who one is, “what is selected and how it is interpreted are influenced by emotional attitudes.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, even if, for example, white men delude themselves into thinking that they are able to manage their emotions better than others, they are, nevertheless, emotionally invested in their pursuits. In light of this, to deny some but not others the status of credible knowers based on assumptions about their emotional investment is a dishonest ploy that works to police who can make knowledge claims but does little to preserve the integrity of knowledge itself.

Beyond being an impossible goal, the desire to entirely remove emotions from theorizing fails to appreciate how emotions possess a cognitive dimension that can make them appropriate and valuable resources for understanding. It is easy to dismiss emotions as epistemologically irrelevant or unhelpful if one characterizes emotions strictly in terms of their phenomenal characteristics and denies that they are *about* anything. Spelman refers to this position as the “Dumb View” of emotions, which assumes “that emotions are like feelings of dizziness or spasms of pains since they do not involve any kind of cognitive state. According to this view emotions are, quite literally, dumb events.”<sup>15</sup> While emotions can have an affective element that is felt within one's body, this does not mean that one can simply reduce emotions to physiological sensations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 131.

<sup>13</sup> However, Jaggar claims that this often depends on the situation, particular emotion, and degree of its influence. See “Love and Knowledge,” 139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Spelman, “Anger and Insubordination,” 265.

<sup>16</sup> There are accounts in the history of philosophy that have more sophisticated accounts of emotions and its relation to reason and judgment. For instance, Martha Nussbaum explains how Hellenistic

Emotional and affective experiences are more complex since they possess an intentional quality that expresses a judgment about something in particular. For instance, Jaggar explains, “[I]t is the content of my associated thought or judgment that determines whether my physical agitation and restlessness are defined as ‘anxiety about my daughter’s lateness’ rather than as ‘anticipation of tonight’s performance.’”<sup>17</sup> Thus, emotions are not strictly

physiological phenomena in the body that lack cognitive value. Neither are emotions simply capricious whims, episodic “feelings,” or even biological givens. Instead, emotions can be understood as intentional, dispositional orientations.<sup>18</sup> Because of this, the Dumb View of emotions has been largely rejected and replaced by cognitivist theories of emotion that account for how emotions reflect judgments about particular things.

The cognitive judgment found within an emotional response can reveal important aspects of one’s relationship to systems of oppression and one’s beliefs about right and wrong. Frye explicitly connects the appropriateness of one’s anger to the claim of being right and wrong when she writes, “Anger is always righteous. To be angry you have to have some sense of the rightness or propriety of your position and your interest in whatever has been hindered, interfered with or harmed, and anger implies a claim to such rightness or propriety. When you are not ‘right’ or ‘in the right,’ anger is inappropriate, or impossible.”<sup>19</sup> If one’s values respect greater social justice and equality then it is appropriate to be frustrated, angered, and disturbed by systems of racist, sexist, and homophobic oppression. For example, Frye explains that anger erupts when “you see yourself not simply as obstructed or hindered, but as wronged. You become angry when you see the obstruction or hindrance as unjust or unfair, or when you see it as due to someone’s malice or inexcusable incompetence.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to potentially evidencing a more appropriate judgment of right and wrong, to be angry or upset about oppression can challenge—or reveal—one’s position in relation to those in dominant social groups. The judgment of an oppressor or an oppressive situation amounts to what Spelman calls, “an act of insubordination:”

To be angry at him is to make myself, at least on this occasion, his judge—to have, and to express, a standard against which I assess his conduct. If he is in other ways regarded as my superior, when I get angry at him I at least on that occasion am regarding him as no more and no less than my equal. So my anger is in such a case an act of insubordination: I am acting as if I have as much right to judge him as he

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thinkers argue that “passions such as fear, anger, grief, and love are not blind surges of affect that push and pull us without regard to reasoning and belief. They are, in fact, intelligent and discriminating elements of the personality that are very closely linked to beliefs, and are modified by the modification of belief.” See *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 133.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 85.

assumes he has to judge me. So I not only am taking his actions seriously but by doing so I am taking myself seriously, as a judge of the goodness or badness of his actions.<sup>21</sup>

According to Spelman, then, the experience of anger itself can represent a challenge to inequality by claiming a position from which one can condemn injustice. In contrast, to presume that one could or should approach the realities of social oppression in a cool, detached way might indicate a different set of judgments. It may be too strong to suggest that a cool response means that one judges the social realities of domination, subjugation, and oppression as “right” (although this is not out of the question), but it might reflect an uncritical simplification of the situation in question or a denial of one’s implicit values and assumptions regarding what is at stake. To put it more bluntly, the preference to remain “uninvolved” could correlate with one’s status as a beneficiary of the status quo, thus revealing one’s complicit acceptance of and participation within a system that benefits some (including oneself) but not others. With respect to feminist and anti-racist theorizing, then, it may be that certain gut feelings, affective experiences, and emotional sensibilities are not only necessary but also indicative of more just, appropriate, and right responses to social oppressions. If this is so, it would be more problematic and of greater concern if a theorist claimed to lack emotional involvement with these important political issues and their philosophical implications.

By taking on the historical ascription of women and people of color as “emotional” and showing how some emotional responses can be appropriate or inappropriate, especially with respect to judgments about right and wrong, feminist and anti-racist theorists have redrawn the epistemological lines that were used to exclude them in ways that bolster their own their epistemic credibility. However, it is important to reiterate that emphasizing how gut feelings and affective experiences might reveal some basic understanding of right and wrong does not necessarily depart from, but rather can dovetail with, many conventional views about knowledge, morality, and politics. Acknowledging an association between emotional or affective experiences and knowledge claims can be a double-edged sword since one can also have affective experiences which reflect judgments of wrongness or rightness that *conflict with* progressive political aims. For example, one could cite a felt experience of disgust that is used to frame and justify her view that homosexuality is wrong. Her affective, emotional experience could even be so intense that it motivates her to take political action by lobbying legislators to vote against marriage equality. Thus, affective experiences can motivate and inform actions that work in favor of or against progressive political projects; the judgments contained within affective experiences can support both progressive and conservative aims. Apart from the content of their judgment, the types of affective experiences that feminist theorists have often emphasized, such as anger, tend to possess a similar sense of righteousness and conviction that can also be found in affective experiences that reflect dominant social values.

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<sup>21</sup> Spelman, “Anger and Insubordination,” 266.

Furthermore, although varied and conflicting embodied experiences often ground heated political debates over what is “right” and “wrong,” it is futile to argue for or against the experiences themselves. The truth or falsity of one’s subjective report on her affective experience is not up for debate. Despite the effort that can be put into debating whether an individual’s emotional response reflects an appropriate or accurate judgment about right and wrong, one person’s appeal to this experience stands on equal footing with that of another whose emotional response evidences a different judgment. For this reason it is difficult to defend an embodied kind of knowing over any other based on the affective dimension of the experience alone since both an experience that reflects dominant values and an experience that reflects non-dominant values can facilitate the production of righteousness knowledge claims. Thus, the experience of emotional and affective responses among feminists cannot, in itself, be enough to claim knowledge of what is right and wrong, just and unjust. In light of this, the task for feminist theorists has been to explain why emotional and affective experiences can differ in the content of their judgment among various people and how that difference can support the production of politically progressive theories.

## II. Outlaw Emotions and Politically Progressive Theorizing

In order to defend the claim that emotions play a productive role in politically progressive theorizing, it is important to explore the nature of our emotional and affective constitutions, identify which emotions are present when we seek to know something, highlight the different types of emotional responses among different individuals, and understand what these different experiences reveal about social realities. Feminist scholars have developed sophisticated accounts for understanding our emotional and affective constitutions. It is by virtue of the socially-constituted character of our emotional and affective experiences that feminist theorists have attempted to differentiate between those that work against feminist and anti-racist projects and those that support them.

The fact that individuals can experience very different emotional responses to a single situation reveals that our emotions are not simple, universal, or instinctive biological givens. As Jaggar notes, mature human emotions are “socially constructed on several levels.”<sup>22</sup> Even though it may be the case that the physiological functions of our affective bodies stem from biological, instinctive responses such that we have developed into beings that blush, sweat, pant, cry, or tremor out of embarrassment, fear, rage, sadness, or panic, the specific circumstances that incite these responses are influenced by expectations and cultural values of a particular social environment. This point is supported by the observation that emotions vary across cultures and new affective experiences develop over different times in history. For instance, Kathleen Woodward

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<sup>22</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 134.



argues that the increased prevalence of experiences of statistical panic is unique to current Western social environments which barrage individuals with probabilities and risks of things like plane crashes, cancer, and bankruptcy.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of new affective experiences reveals how our emotional and affective experiences function in part as “sensitive and telling sensors that register emerging shifts in social and cultural formations.”<sup>24</sup>

Given that our emotional constitutions develop within particular social and cultural contexts, they are already intimately connected to the social values that are reflected in dominant culture. According to Jaggar, “we absorb the standards and values of our society in the very process of learning the language of emotion, and those standards and values are built into the foundation of our emotional constitution.”<sup>25</sup> Recognizing this feature of our emotional constitutions complicates the argument that emotions can be reclaimed for politically progressive theorizing since “the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interest of the dominant groups.”<sup>26</sup> Jaggar notes that since we live “[w]ithin a capitalist, white supremacist, and male-dominated society, the predominant values will tend to serve the interests of rich white men.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, Jaggar concedes that we are all likely to develop emotional constitutions that (even if perhaps only implicitly) perpetuate class inequality, racism, homophobia, and sexism, regardless of our economic status, race, sexual preference, or gender.<sup>28</sup> The emotional constitution of a woman or a person of color is—for the most part—still a product of sexist and racist culture.

To say that emotions are socially-constituted does not mean that our emotional constitutions are easily changed. Like the construction of a building, our emotional responses are developed, honed, and polished over time. We gradually learn an array of different emotions and the terms of how and when they are appropriately expressed, but, like a building, that does not make them any less durable, imposing, or tangible to the one who possesses them. The cumulative quality of our affective constitutions presents another challenge for the feminist reclamation of emotion for progressive theorizing. It is not simply that our emotional constitutions will likely reflect the values of dominant discourse, but also that internalized classism, racism, and sexism are difficult to overcome even for those who are committed to dismantling sexist and racist systems. Jaggar writes, “Even when we come to believe consciously that our fear or shame or revulsion is unwarranted, we may still continue to experience emotions inconsistent with our conscious politics.”<sup>29</sup> In the likely case that we possess problematic socially

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<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Woodward, *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of Emotions*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 159.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

dominant emotions, Jaggar advises that they should be consciously acknowledged and subjected to critical scrutiny because “the persistence of such recalcitrant emotions probably demonstrates how fundamentally we have been constituted by the dominant world view, but it may also indicate superficiality or other inadequacy in our emerging theory and politics.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Jaggar acknowledges the probability that our emotions have been socially constituted to such an extent that they can actually maintain the oppressive status quo and detract from our ability to produce politically effective theories. This may lead one to conclude that emotions should not be reclaimed for feminist theorizing. However, with an ironic twist, feminist theorists use the same insights that potentially undermine the value of emotions to justify their place in epistemology.

It is precisely because emotions are socially constituted that they can provide an informative lens through which we see, experience, and understand social realities in a critical light. The interplay of identity, social location, and political structures can constitute our emotions in a way that legitimates their role in knowledge production for the sake of political resistance and transformation. When the socially constituted nature of our affective experiences and emotional constitutions is understood in light of the different experiences people have within socially oppressive systems, it is reasonable that different people will experience different emotional reactions to injustices. As Jaggar explains, “Race, class, and gender shape every aspect of our lives, and our emotional constitution is not excluded.”<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that we are products of our culture and will likely possess emotional responses that reflect racist, classist, and sexist values, Jaggar also suggests that one’s social identity will influence one’s emotional response to a situation because, within the context of a racist and sexist society, one’s race and gender will provide the basis for differing experiences of privilege or disadvantage. This means that no one is unaffected by their social identity—white people and people of color all have emotional constitutions that are shaped by the experiences of their own racial identity. It also means that different kinds of emotional responses among people will largely depend on whether one’s identity situates her within a dominant or subjugated social group, which accounts for how different people can develop different emotional constitutions, and thereby different emotional responses to specific situations, even if they live in the same cultural and historical environment.

The notion that one’s social identity significantly shapes the contours of her emotional constitution resonates with scholarship in feminist standpoint theory, which grants an epistemic advantage to those in marginalized positions regarding what one can know about social realities.<sup>32</sup> The presumed “epistemic advantage” in standpoint theory refers to a different kind of insight that emerges when one begins theorizing

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>32</sup> Standpoint theory originally emerged out of Marxist literature and has been highly influential on feminist theorizing. For a robust description of standpoint theory, see Harding’s chapter “Borderland Epistemologies” in *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, 146-164.

from the experiences of the oppressed, and it is argued that through the lens of this standpoint one is better able to identify and articulate how oppression works. Whereas those who benefit from oppressive systems have an interest in preserving the status quo, and thus for systematically misinterpreting or denying that things like sexism and racism actually exist, it is in the interest of those who are negatively affected by oppression to better understand how it works so that they might be more equipped to survive and overcome it.

Relating the insights from standpoint theory to the emotional and affective experiences of marginalized people, some feminist scholars argue that one's social identity can provide the basis for an emotional constitution that actually reflects such an epistemic advantage. Jaggar refers to the type of emotions that demonstrate this epistemic advantage as "outlaw emotions," which are conventionally unacceptable emotional responses insofar as they do not reflect dominant social values. Within a racist, sexist, or homophobic society, examples of outlaw emotions can be found in anger at racist comments, frustration with sexist practices, and sorrow in light of homophobic violence.<sup>33</sup> Echoing points in standpoint theory, Jaggar explains that women and people of color are more likely than white men to experience outlaw emotions because it is often "subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the status quo."<sup>34</sup> In other words, those who are disadvantaged by the status quo have an increased incentive to understand the structure and operation of oppressive systems more clearly in order to survive within them and more effectively challenge and resist their continuation. Thus, depending on the identity of the knower in question, emotional responses can differ in their ability to inform theories that support political resistance and social transformation.

The value of outlaw emotions is found in their potential to be both epistemologically and politically subversive. Not only do outlaw emotions reflect alternative ways of understanding and knowing, but the claim that emotional and affective experiences can be useful, productive, and helpful for knowledge production flies in the face of the standard conception of objectivity. Objectivity is conventionally viewed as a necessary criterion for knowledge. To be objective requires that one occupy an impartial, unbiased, value-free, universal position and not be swayed by personal experiences, preferences, wants, interests, or desires. Any kind of closeness to the issue, personal involvement with it, or vested interest in seeing things one way over another is assumed

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<sup>33</sup> In "Love and Knowledge," Jaggar provides other examples of outlaw emotions by noting how some people feel "satisfaction rather than embarrassment when their leaders make fools of themselves" or "resentment rather than gratitude for welfare payments," 144. Outlaw emotions could also be identified when people feel uncomfortable with "super-crip" stories that nondisabled people typically find to be, perhaps at the same time, pitiful and inspirational. Non-dominant responses of outrage and frustration to stories about people "overcoming" disabilities show greater sensitivity to how "super-crip" stories reinforce "the superiority the nondisabled body and mind" rather than addressing issues of ableism. See Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1999, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 144.

to threaten one's ability to have knowledge and accurately understand the truth of the matter at hand.<sup>35</sup> As such, one must separate oneself from all subjective influences—race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, culture, and all other things that make one a unique, particular subject—and proceed as if there is only the object of investigation. Donna Haraway refers to this attempt at abstraction as the “god trick,” and highlights the boldness of the assumption that one could remove oneself so fully from her or his own particular subjectivity that she or he is able to occupy a view from nowhere.<sup>36</sup> According to the demand for this conception of objectivity, there is no room for emotional or affective experiences within practices of knowledge production since these experiences evidence and reflect intense subjective involvement, interests, judgments, and personal values that are especially influenced by one's social identity. In short, emotions and affects would presumably cloud one's ability to perceive and think clearly and thus not adhere to the demand for cool objectivity.

Even if one could be purely “objective,” the standard conception of objectivity has a difficult time measuring up to its own standards of impartiality, neutrality, and universality. As Sandra Harding explains, objectivity, conventionally understood, is actually a weak form of objectivity that is more distorted and evidences greater bias precisely because it fails to take the influence of background assumptions, cultural values, and the specificity of the knower's subjectivity into account.<sup>37</sup> In other words, by not giving sufficient attention to the conditions that frame any investigation, those who claim to be objective in the conventional sense are actually much less objective than they assume to be. Thus, Harding cleverly turns the terms of objectivity against itself—all the while preserving the value of objectivity—to argue that a more robust form of “strong” objectivity would explicitly acknowledge and account for these influences.<sup>38</sup> In the interest of being as objective as possible the point is not to get rid of seemingly unrelated influences in the hope of attaining absolute truths. Instead, one should attempt to accommodate for them in ways that make epistemological insights less distorted and less false. Deliberately accounting for the factors that have been assumed to make one less objective would involve efforts to democratically engage many individuals with diverse experiences in a way that actually fosters greater objectivity in the end. Without a doubt, accounting for one's own emotional investments and their influence on knowledge production would support a more robust and, one could even say, “objective” way of knowing.

The epistemological significance of outlaw emotions also carries a degree of political valence. Given that politics weave throughout the entire process of knowledge pro-

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<sup>35</sup> See also Lorraine Code's "Taking Subjectivity Into Account." *Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 718-741.

<sup>36</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 13.3 (1988): 579-599.

<sup>37</sup> Sandra Harding, "'Strong Objectivity' and Socially Situated Knowledges." *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008. 741-756.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the notion of strong objectivity, see Sandra Harding's chapter "Recovering Episte-

duction, producing knowledge from these different perspectives may support acts of resistance by informing and motivating forms of political activism such as lobbying legislators or spawning new political organizations. As Jaggar explains, outlaw emotions can be politically subversive since they can provide a basis for the formation of subcultures that are “defined by perceptions, norms, and values that systematically oppose the prevailing perceptions, norms, and values.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, just as Spelman described the expression of anger as an act of insubordination, theorizing out of outlaw emotions takes this act of insubordination in a different direction by situating oneself as a judge to condemn and correct dominant theories that support the status quo. In this respect, there is no separation between theory and practice; the very act of producing theory from a marginalized social position can be seen as a political act of resistance or, as bell hooks articulates it, the “practice of feminist theory.”<sup>40</sup>

There are numerous examples of how feminist theorists have reclaimed their emotional and affective experiences by relating them to subversive knowledges that can support resistance in both theory and practice. Although Jaggar claims that “dominant values are implicit in responses taken to be precultural or acultural, our so-called gut responses,”<sup>41</sup> the experience of outlaw emotions demonstrates that this is not always the case. Describing the affective experiences that illuminate one’s nascent awareness of injustice, Jaggar writes, “Only when we reflect on our initially puzzling irritability, revulsion, anger, or fear may we bring to consciousness our “gut-level” awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice, or danger.”<sup>42</sup> These visceral experiences reveal a type of implicit, pre-reflective awareness and perhaps even unconscious knowing that something about a situation is not right. The specifics regarding what is at stake, why the situation is as it is, or even what to do about it might come from further reflection, but the initial judgment that something wrong or inappropriate has already made itself known in the affective experience that the situation elicits.

The appeal of a conception of embodied understanding stems, at least in part, from the fact that it is descriptively helpful for explaining why we are sometimes moved to engage in efforts for social and political transformation. Alexis Shotwell develops the concept of ‘sensuousness’ as the “material, embodied understanding that structures our experience and capacity for action.”<sup>43</sup> Much like Frye’s account of anger, the moral and political dimensions of sensuous knowing are made explicit when Shotwell describes it as “the felt, embodied experience of ‘wrongness’ or ‘rightness.’”<sup>44</sup> The connection

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mological Resources: Strong Objectivity,” in *Is Science Multicultural?*, 124-145.

<sup>39</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 144.

<sup>40</sup> bell hooks and Tanya McKinnon, “Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private.” *Signs* 21.4 (Summer, 1996): 814-829, 817.

<sup>41</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 143.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Alexis Shotwell, “A Knowing that Resided in My Bones: Sensuous Embodiment and Trans Social Movement.” *Embodiment and Agency*. Ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell and Susan Sherwin. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 58-75, 58.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

between sensuous knowledge and a motivation to act for personal and political transformation is made prominent when Shotwell writes, “To know in this way, or to know these things, is to be moved. The knower may be affected, as in response to a moving story, and so this understanding relates to our affective and emotional relations with the world. Knowledge that moves us is both affective and transformative, complexly emotional and political.”<sup>45</sup> ‘Sensuousness,’ then, is a bodily way of knowing that serves a purpose. In Shotwell’s description it is couched in terms of right and wrong and is particularly useful for mobilizing political practices and social movements.

bell hooks articulates a similar appreciation for how intense emotional and affective experiences can support acts of resistance by acknowledging the potency of her rage toward racial injustice. hooks writes, “Confronting my rage, witnessing the way it moved me to grow and change, I understood intimately that it had the potential not only to destroy but also to construct. Then and now I understand rage to be a necessary aspect of resistance struggle. Rage can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action.”<sup>46</sup> Rather than shying away from the experience of being consumed by one’s rage—as if feeling overwhelmed is itself somehow undesirable or unproductive—hooks explains that an increase in the diversity of one’s emotional involvement is necessary. “Rage,” she writes, “must be tempered by an engagement with a full range of emotional responses to black struggle for self-determination.”<sup>47</sup>

Among feminist theorists who do not just look to affective experiences to inspire action by way of organized social movements, it is frequently argued that emotional and affective responses are valuable for their ability to inform and motivate the practice of progressive theorizing. This account moves away from claims of embodied knowing and emphasizes the important affective dimension of thinking and reflecting. Visceral, embodied experiences can spawn further reflection by highlighting specific ideas, concepts, and social structures that are problematic for feminist, anti-racist, and other progressive political projects. They may also help identify specific conceptual points where a different kind of knowledge is desired or lacking. For example, Rosalyn Diprose argues that our affective experiences provide the primary motivation for thinking and relates the “affective dimension of ideas” with “the social specificity of one’s embodied experience” to account for why, as feminists, “some ideas might hold us, bother us, and move us.”<sup>48</sup> As Diprose explains, “Something gets under my skin, something disturbs me, something elates me, excites me, bothers me, surprises me. It is this experience that sets off a movement that extends my world beyond the intimate and familiar. A disturbing experience motivates the creation and transformation of concepts.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>46</sup> bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 16.

<sup>47</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, 134.

<sup>49</sup> Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity*, 132.

It is not necessarily the case that intense emotional experiences motivate one to act by joining political organizations whereas a subtle hunch or nagging intuition that something is amiss compels one to reflect further on how and why social realities are the way they are. As Gloria Anzaldua notes, the motivation to think and reflect could also arise from more intensely felt affective experiences:

Total feeling and emotional immersion, the shocking drench of guilt or anger or frustration, wakes us up to some of our realities.. .The intellect needs the guts and adrenaline that horrific suffering and anger...catapult us into. Only when all the charged feelings are unearthed can we get down to “the work,” *la tarea, nuestro trabajo*—changing culture and all its oppressive interlocking machinations.<sup>50</sup>

From subtle disturbance to full-blown anger, feminist theorists have suggested that a range of emotional and affective experiences can be necessary, useful, and productive resources for engaging with social realities in ways that support practices for social and political transformation, including if and how we pursue theorizing as one of those practices.

When experiences of outlaw emotions are reflexively embraced, there can be a mutually-supportive relationship between emotional and affective experiences and the practice of theorizing such that “[t]he feedback loop between emotional constitution and our theorizing is continuous.”<sup>51</sup> Jaggar notes how “new emotions evoked by feminist insights are likely in turn to stimulate further feminist observations and insights, and these may generate new directions in both theory and political practice.”<sup>52</sup> In this way, emotions have the power to influence what we think about and, in turn, what we think about can alter our emotional experiences. Thus, the value of affective and emotional experiences can be found in how they motivate us to continually reflect and theorize about our experiences in new and transformative ways.

There is an important, albeit subtle, difference between the practice of theorizing as a process of thinking and reflecting and theorizing as the production of knowledge claims with certainty. Affective and emotional experiences can motivate both forms of theorizing, but whereas the former initiates an open-ended investigation, the latter participates in the formalization of judgments and beliefs which often entails a presumption of truth and certainty as constitutive elements of knowledge. When the nature of emotional responses is taken for granted as a type of embodied knowing that reflects an appropriate judgment about the wrongness or rightness of a situation, this can quickly result in a type of theorizing that dogmatically assumes certainty in order to assert these judgments as knowledge claims. In other words, what was felt as part of one’s embodied experience is formally developed and articulated as a claim to truth such that the presumed righteousness of one’s anger, and the judgment therein,

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<sup>50</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990, xviii.

<sup>51</sup> Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 147.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

provide the affective foundation for making righteous claims to knowledge that inform one's theory.

Although many feminist theorists have been careful to avoid this slide and suggest that the affective experiences associated with outlaw emotions are valuable resources for motivating further reflection and thinking, I want to draw attention how theorizing in the way of making righteous knowledge claims that presume certainty can be politically and philosophically problematic. In the interest of mitigating this risk for feminist theorizing, due attention should be given to the motivations for how and why we pursue theory. Beyond concerning ourselves with the political valence of specific affective experiences in terms of whether or not they reflect socially dominant or progressive values and judgments, the epistemological context that frames theory production (including that of feminist theorizing) must also come into sharper relief. Such an investigation reveals that many of our affective experiences—those that can be characterized as outlaw emotions or otherwise—are indicative of a particular kind of relation to knowledge that we have as knowing subjects. Namely, affective experiences can reveal a deeper desire to be right in terms of what we know, along with a refusal of error and not knowing. The desire to be right and “in the know” and the refusal of error and not knowing are integral elements of a more fundamental epistemological context that promotes the dogmatic assertion of righteous knowledge claims. In the final section I show how the desire for certainty, for being right and in the right, is not so simple, and how the more this desire informs and motivates one's theorizing the more one risks theorizing in ways that undermine its political effectiveness.

### **III. Rethinking How and Why We Think About the Things We Think About**

It is important to consider potential risks that can emerge if we theorize out of outlaw emotions when they motivate a type of theorizing that asserts righteous knowledge claims. Similar to how emotional responses can reflect dominant social values, even “politically-progressive” outlaw emotions can motivate a type of theorizing that participates in a problematic type of discourse that operates on the dogmatic presumption that one possesses truth and certainty, especially with respect to one's position as a moral agent. As I will show, assumptions about how to do theory emerge out of a politically implicated epistemological context that encourages the righteous assertion of knowledge claims about right and wrong. This presents the risk that the feminist defense of outlaw emotions as epistemologically valuable resources for knowledge production can also invite a type of theorizing that actually perpetuates oppressive social realities by reinforcing problematic structures that are found within the dominant epistemological discourse. To be clear, my suggestion that the political effectiveness of feminist theorizing is potentially threatened when it is motivated by emotional re-



sponses is not a reiteration of the historical privileging of reason over emotion. I am not dismissing the feminist insight that our embodied experiences can greatly support our epistemological pursuits. Instead, I want to highlight how some affective experiences can be intimately related to a particularly problematic *type* of theorizing that strives for knowledge and certainty.<sup>53</sup> In other words, I am less concerned with what counts as a “progressive” emotional or affective experience and more concerned with how certain experiences are presumed to be more deeply connected to our moral and political positions as knowing subjects. More specifically, I argue that the political effectiveness of feminist theorizing is undermined when it results in the righteous assertion of knowledge claims, which can be motivated by affective experiences like anger, rage, and shame that reflect a need for or a presumption of certainty, as well as the desire to be right and the refusal of being wrong.

Desire, in this moral and epistemological context, refers to a craving for knowledge and certainty, especially about matters of right and wrong. More than a mere hope for a practical kind of knowledge, such as knowing how to perform particular tasks, desire can be thought of here as animating a will to know with certainty in a way that presumably establishes one’s status as a moral subject, a knower who appropriately and accurately judges moral rightness and wrongness. To not know in this context, then, amounts to more than ignorance as a lack of practical knowledge; not knowing would appear to mark one as a morally failed or inadequate person who should know what is right and wrong. Satisfying the will to know by engaging in a quest for certainty thus reflects a refusal of not knowing that aims to secure one’s moral status as a good person with knowledge about right and wrong.

Affective experiences that reflect the will to know are often felt in the face of injustice. In addition to evidencing a moral judgment about an unjust situation, we often feel the need to do something. Or, perhaps more appropriately, it can be noted that we desire to know what to do, and to know it with certainty. To illustrate how affective experiences are associated with a desire for knowledge—and, thereby, a refusal of not knowing—Ladelle McWhorter describes a panicked scene where a loved one returns home in an inexplicable fit of tears. Her detailed description of the affective experience is worth quoting at length:

Your heart starts to pound so hard you can barely breathe. You jump up and go to her. What’s wrong?! What happened?! But she doesn’t answer you. You take her

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<sup>53</sup> In this way, my argument differs from Judith Grant’s critique of experientialism. Grant takes issue with how feminist epistemologists have reiterated the essentialist stereotype that women, as a diverse and heterogeneous group, know by experience and intuition whereas men know by reason. Rather than highlighting how problems arise when one assumes that women and men have different epistemologically-valuable experiences simply by virtue of their gendered natures, I am arguing that problems arise when the affective experiences that are used to justify and inform knowledge claims are motivated by desires for rightness and certainty that shut down an ongoing, open-ended practice of thinking and reflecting. These desires can be equally evident in men or women and in conservative or progressive theorizing. See Judith Grant, “I Feel Therefore I Am: A Critique of Female Experience as a Basis for Feminist Epistemology.” *Women and Politics* 7.3 (1987): 99-114.

hands. You pull her down beside you on the couch. You try to hold her, but she is unresponsive. She just sits and sobs. What can have happened? A dozen awful things picture themselves in your head, images crowding in so fast they almost obscure her face in front of you. The adrenaline pours through you. What happened?! Should I get her to a doctor? Should I call the police? What should I do?! Desperate for any clue, your glance covers every inch of her, scanning for traces of blood or bruises or rips in her clothes. But nothing gives you any sense of what brought on these tears, what could have hurt her so badly. Your whole being is poised for action. What happened? Who did this? You feel like you'll explode if you don't get some answers. But all she can do is cry—for two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, thirty minutes. Thirty minutes of tearful silence with no answers, thirty minutes of your heart in your throat, close to panic, enraged at you know not whom, suspended in this mute bodily proximity that gives you no direction, leads you nowhere.

That is the urgency of the will to know. It is bodily.<sup>54</sup>

McWhorter notes that although such an experience might be more intensely felt in a situation like this with a loved one, it is the same affective experience of urgency that she feels in the face of injustice, racism, exploitation, and violence.<sup>55</sup> In each case, the affective experience that correlates with a desire for knowledge with certainty creates, as McWhorter describes, “moments in which every cell in my body screamed for the solidity and assurance of just one absolutely right answer to put an end to the agony of ignorance and uncertainty.”<sup>56</sup> What these descriptions make clear, then, is that the pain, suffering, and agony of injustice is not only felt by those who experience the injustice as a direct victim of wrongful acts; pain, suffering, and agony can also be felt by those who identify the wrongness of an injustice but do not know how to respond to it. Without certain knowledge of the right answer or the right thing to do, we are forced to bear the weight of our uncertainty. As McWhorter notes, “there is no mistaking the fact that the will to know is bodily. Not to know is to suffer bodily.”<sup>57</sup>

The turn to theorizing can function as an attempt to mitigate the uncomfortable affective experiences associated with the will to know. However, the act of theorizing here can quickly take on the character of that which develops righteous knowledge claims; theorizing can be pursued as a quest for certainty, for definitive accounts of and answers to problems. With respect to racial injustice, for instance, McWhorter gestures to this affectively driven impulse toward theorizing when she notes, “I feel a tremendous urgency about coming to terms with race and racism...an urgency that pervades my entire being. Along with that sense of urgency I find myself wanting to (god help us) ‘theorize whiteness.’”<sup>58</sup> McWhorter’s tone of reluctance around theorizing race is informed by her sensitivity to the motivations that drive such theorizing

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<sup>54</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist.” *Hypatia* 16.3 (2001): 115-125, 122.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

toward the assertion of certain types of knowledge claims. Suspicious of the affective experience contained within her response to racial injustice, McWhorter names the sense of urgency that backs her desire to theorize whiteness a refusal and explains, “Desire here—as always?—is coupled with fear, fear of being wrong or in the wrong. I desire to be in the right, untainted. Thus, desire is an act of refusal by a tidy mind impatient with process, experiment, disorder, blind-alleys, mess, and mistakes.”<sup>59</sup> Not wanting to accept that her whiteness might automatically position her on the side of being wrong, on the side of oppression, McWhorter’s desire to theorize whiteness is a desire to know how to be and do what is right.

McWhorter’s concern over even progressive theorizing in the interest of challenging white privilege and racial domination complicates the nature of emotional responses, including outlaw emotions, in helpful ways. It has already been shown that the cognitive content of emotional responses reflects a preliminary presumption about the righteousness, and rightness, of one’s judgment. It has also been noted that emotional and affective experiences help motivate further thinking. However, by highlighting the urgency she feels with respect to dealing with her own whiteness, McWhorter reveals yet another aspect of emotional responses. They can contain a dimension of *desire*. This is not just a matter of already knowing or being right but of *desiring* to know and be right with a sense of certainty that encourages one to make righteous claims that presumably put one on solid moral ground. The impulse to theorize out of experiences of anger and rage, or perhaps even guilt and shame, can now also be understood as potentially reflecting the desire to know what is, what is right, what should be, and what one can and should do in a way that, above all, longs for the comfort and security of certainty and moral authority. Thus, even outlaw emotions can incite the desire to theorize in a way that encourages one to assert righteous knowledge claims. Of course, it is presumed that such “progressive” claims are asserted in the service of social justice at large and are hardly ever evaluated as mechanisms that benefit an individual knower’s personal interest in being right.

As McWhorter describes it, the desire to be right is accompanied by the desire for a clear solution, a clean and easy strategy for effectively addressing oppression. She desires the type of simplicity that breeds confidence in one’s theory. When these two desires are taken together, McWhorter’s comments help illustrate that the desire to know about whiteness, to know about racism, and to be right only make up one side of the coin—the other side bears the mark of a fear of being wrong and a fear of not knowing. Put simply, part of the will to know is a refusal of not knowing. It is a rejection of mess, mistakes, experimentation, and uncertainties. On a more fundamental level, then, it is quite possible that the affective experiences associated with outlaw emotions can evidence the intensity of our desire for a claim to knowledge that can be used to support a clear and certain judgment about right and wrong. The desire to know and be right and the fear of error, uncertainty, and being wrong can both be understood as

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

manifestations of a deeper refusal of not knowing, which, again, is to be understood as something that presumably destabilizes one's status as good person, as a moral judge.

Instead of acting on her affective responses by theorizing in a way that asserts righteous knowledge claims about race and racism, McWhorter suggests that we remain attentive to the bodily experiences of angst and suffering associated with uncertainty that reveal our desire to know and the concomitant refusal of not knowing. By acknowledging her own impulse to "theorize whiteness," McWhorter identifies a serious risk associated with giving into the intensity of one's desire to be "right, untainted" and hold onto hard and fast truths. With a Foucauldian insight about the structured relationships between power, knowledge, and even forms of resistance, McWhorter writes,

But what I know—what I counter-know—*bodily* is that such desires are intimately connected with the very problems they purport to want to solve, that identification and categorization and strict and reasonable organization are the very cornerstones of the dominant *dispositifs*, the power networks that foreclose upon freedom. And, as such, they probably cannot serve as the tools that dismantle those structures.<sup>60</sup>

To put the point more simply, giving in to the urgent desire to theorize whiteness in ways that assert righteous knowledge claims about injustice might settle the discomfort of not knowing, but it may not be the most effective, or ethical, way to proceed if it simply reinforces the conceptualization of racial categories in ways that initially set the groundwork for racial oppression in the first place. For example, if one begins to theorize about whiteness in an attempt to settle the affective experience of white guilt or shame,

one could develop a notion of whiteness, or of race more generally, that asserts knowledge claims about race and racism which seem to "explain away" any discomfort with the complexities of racialized identities.

McWhorter's insight into how the desires contained within our responses to injustice are intimately connected to the problems we aim to resolve can be usefully applied to the feminist reclamation of emotion and affect in epistemology. More specifically, this insight highlights the potential risk that outlaw emotions might pose to the effectiveness of progressive theorizing insofar as even our most intensely felt affective, emotional, and embodied responses to masculinist ideas, heterosexist concepts, racist acts, and oppressive institutions can reflect the same desire for certainty and rightness that structures sexist, heterosexist, racist, and oppressive attitudes and beliefs in others.<sup>61</sup> The seemingly contradictory affective experiences among progressives and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>61</sup> The structure of my argument parallels that of Wendy Brown when she writes, "Working heuristically from Foucault's relatively simple insight that "resistance" is figured by and within rather than externally to the regimes of power it contests, these essays examine ostensibly emancipatory or democratic political projects for the ways they problematically mirror the mechanisms and configurations of power of which they purport to oppose." See *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 3.

conservatives can produce knowledge claims that differ in the specificity of their content but share in their tendency to identify another's claim as wrong (i.e., morally inappropriate and epistemically unacceptable) and righteously assert the superiority of one's own position as morally appropriate and epistemically reliable. Since both approaches evidence a rejection of the unsettling experiences associated with uncertainty and not knowing along with a desire to be unquestionably right, they might both be understood as righteous knowledge claims. Their primary difference is simply that the set of oppressive knowledge claims are offensive to those with progressive sensibilities.

To be clear, this is an epistemological point about motivation that emphasizes how affective experiences can be grounded in the desire to make righteous assertions about right and wrong in order to satisfy the will to know and avoid the uncertainty of not knowing. A closer look reveals that if outlaw emotions emerge directly from the same epistemological context that produced the injustices to which they respond, accepting and adopting these responses might fail to address the deeper source of the problem.

Theorizing in ways that encourage the assertion of righteous knowledge claims, even politically progressive claims, might prune the branches of oppression but leave its roots intact. Of course, there can be a significant difference in content between theories that emerge from outlaw emotions versus conventional emotions that overtly reflect oppressive values. For instance, although anger at racism is different from the hate or fear that fuels it, both sides can exist within a larger epistemological context of making righteous knowledge claims about right and wrong, truth and error. This clarifies why the simple fact that different people experience different emotional responses within a given context may not be enough to determine the political effectiveness of some emotional responses over others. Thus, whereas Jaggar warns that dominant values shape our emotional constitutions such that we must consciously acknowledge when our recalcitrant emotional responses are *inconsistent* with our progressive politics, McWhorter's insight supports a stronger claim: even our anti-sexist and anti-racist emotional responses can be suspect with respect to how they motivate theorizing. This is because, like emotional responses that reflect dominant values, they can be equally rooted in the epistemological context that caters to the will to know, the desire to be right, untainted, the fear of being wrong, and the refusal of uncertainty and not knowing.

McWhorter acknowledges that it might be counterproductive to theorize along the same conceptual lines that have been central to the form and operation of oppression as we know and experience it, but the risk of giving in to the will to know and the refusal of not knowing does not merely apply to the content of our theoretical claims. McWhorter's cautionary note can be extended beyond the use of specific categories and concepts and applied to questions of epistemological motivation, desire, aversion, and discomfort. The epistemological context which frames efforts in theory production is suspect because it constitutes us as potential knowers who are marked by the desire for clean and tidy claims to rightness and a fear of uncertainty's potential for being wrong. A strong desire for knowledge can course through us such that we feel uncomfortable

without a reasonable amount of certainty, especially about matters of right and wrong. Indeed, we typically assume that the ability to make political claims requires and entails that one possess a firm sense of knowledge, truth, and rightness. The desire that backs the will to know and the aversion to not knowing risks leading one to create or defend a theoretical position that one presumes is marked by rightness and finality. One might be tempted to produce a theory that righteously asserts a knowledge claim at the expense of appreciating the presence of theoretical holes, confusions, uncertainties, or even problematic, unintended implications that would follow upon its acceptance. Thus, to settle on a claim that one desires to be right might mitigate the urgency and discomfort associated with one's rage or frustration over injustice, but these desires are byproducts of our being constituted as knowers within an epistemological context that risks foreclosing other potential affective experiences, theoretical possibilities, and subsequent future transformations.<sup>62</sup>

By placing greater emphasis on how we are constituted as potential knowers who are motivated by the will to know and the desire for certainty, McWhorter gestures to another aspect of theory production that relates back to affective experiences— theorizing, whether it is pursued as a practice of thinking and reflecting or as a process of formalizing righteous knowledge claims, can result in its own set of affective effects that counteract the agony and discomfort associated with not knowing. Although the two forms of theorizing both provide options for attending to our affective experiences, they engage the will to know in different ways and, as such, produce affective effects for importantly different reasons. Somewhat separate from a theory's completeness or ability to sufficiently account for lived experiences, the activity of producing theory can have an affective therapeutic effect by providing the opportunity to acknowledge and identify certain realities, process thoughts and feelings, and understand experiences in ways that subsequently elicit new experiences. In this way, the potentially therapeutic affective effects of theorizing are seen to not merely depend on the particular content of the theories that are produced, which of course can be politically progressive or conservative, but rather on how the theory relates to the production of certain types of insights, understandings, or knowledge claims.

Theorizing as an open-ended practice of thinking and reflecting can create a space for therapeutic healing by engaging with, processing, and redirecting the affective experiences that are associated with the will to know without necessitating a presumption of certainty. Progressive theorists often develop theories to help us better understand and account for our experiences of injustice but, at the same time, turning to theory does something to and with the affects and emotions that feminists have frequently cited as part of their responses to injustices. Theorizing can be a means for literally helping one feel better. Recalling her own experience, bell hooks explains,

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<sup>62</sup> Harding makes a similar statement about the presumed role of truth as the ideal standard for scientific claims: "Truth claims are a way of closing down discussion, of ending critical dialogue, of invoking authoritarian standards. They deny the possibility of continuing process of gaining knowledge in the future," *Is Science Multicultural?*, 145.

Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in “theorizing,” in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This “lived” experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became (sic) a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away.

Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place.<sup>63</sup>

As Jaggar previously suggested, our affective experiences might alter or change in light of the theories that we produce such that new concepts can supplant emotional experiences of anger, rage, shame, and guilt into feelings of courage, strength, pride, and a sense of empowerment. Indeed, one of the most valuable contributions of liberatory theories is the production of theories that reconceive race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability in ways that empower rather than enrage those who are marginalized by their social identities. Following hooks’ comments, the notion that theory can be therapeutic acknowledges the possibility for our affective experiences to be altered through the very process of producing new theories.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, theorizing that results in the production of righteous knowledge claims can problematically anesthetize the unpleasant or uncomfortable affective experiences of not knowing by apparently satisfying the will to know and the desire for certainty. In other words, to assert a righteous knowledge claim is to assume to know, with certainty, in a way that secures one’s own moral status as a knower. The affective effects of theorizing by way of righteous knowledge claims result from acting out of a refusal of error and uncertainty and the desire to be right with certainty. Although this may alleviate the discomfort of not knowing, asserting righteous knowledge claims in order to satisfy the will to know is precisely the problematic tendency to which I have been calling attention. Theorizing in this way can be highly counter-productive for progressive political projects when it reiterates epistemological assumptions and discursive techniques that also characterize oppressive beliefs.

It is both politically and philosophically significant that feminist theorists run the risk of being captivated by the notion that certain types of affective experiences can produce the doorway to liberation through a type of theorizing that righteously asserts non-dominant knowledge claims. Without fully considering how the anger, rage, and even pride that characterize outlaw emotions can be conditioned byproducts of the politically implicated epistemological context of dominant discourse that fuels the desire for knowledge and certainty, progressive theorists risk reducing theory production to a less-threatening practice of pseudo-resistance that occurs within oppressive struc-

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<sup>63</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York : Routledge, 1994, 61.

<sup>64</sup> By showing “how our emotional responses to the world change as we conceptualize it differently and how our changing emotional responses then stimulate us to new insights” Jaggar also indicates that “feminist and other critical social theories are indispensable psychotherapeutic tools because they provide some insights necessary to a full understanding of our emotional constitution,” “Love and Knowledge,” 148.

tures, which ultimately remain unchallenged. Theory production becomes a matter of proving oneself right and another wrong, and philosophical discourse becomes about as persuasive as finger-pointing during family feuds over a holiday dinner. This does not mean that the originary presumption of the political potency of feminist theorizing is unfounded or that some affective experiences cannot be useful for motivating theory. Instead, it could be said that the full extent of the political power of progressive theorizing remains unrealized when it is narrowly understood and pursued according to terms that were set by the same discursive context that grounds oppression.

My argument in this chapter resonates with attempts by other feminist and anti-racist theorists to identify when theoretical positions are taken up in ways that are ineffective, or worse, actually detrimental, for progressive political projects because they do not fully appreciate the larger context that surrounds the problem at hand.<sup>65</sup> However, my claim targets a deeper issue regarding the epistemological context that frames theory production: namely, how the righteous character that exemplifies the experience of an outlaw emotion can shape the type of theory that is produced. Whereas scholars may quibble and debate over features of feminist and anti-racist theories in terms of their content—such as the meaning behind and usage of categories like “woman,” “sexual difference,” and “whiteness”—the potential role of the will to know and a refusal of not knowing as motivational mechanisms for theory production have insufficiently been called into question.

My aim has been to show why it should not be taken for granted that theorizing out of outlaw emotions is one of the most effective ways to pursue theory as a political practice. Rather than quickly embracing outlaw emotions simply by virtue of the non-dominant values that they reflect, feminist theorists should consciously acknowledge how the social and epistemological contexts that condition our emotional responses shape their influence on theory and practice. A critical analysis of outlaw emotions highlights how even non-dominant emotional and affective experiences can produce theories that actually play into systems of oppression rather than undermining them, despite the best intentions for the latter, when theorizing is motivated by the hastiness of our will to know, the visceral refusal of uncertainty and not knowing, and the desire to be right. Another goal of my argument has been to emphasize how the desire to know and be right and the refusal of not knowing reveal something important about why we do theory: it has an effect on our emotions and affects. The act of making

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<sup>65</sup> A classic example is Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 49-51. For more examples see Namita Goswami, “On the Limits of Postcolonial Identity Politics.” *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader*. Ed. Mariana Ortega and Linda Alcoff. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. 179-200 and Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. In McWhorter’s introduction she notes, “Intersectional analyses tend to focus analytic attention primarily on identities rather than on institutions, discourse, and disciplinary regimes,” and as a result, “even the most dedicated, persistent, and well-intentioned activists not only fail to bring about the changes they seek but in many instances actually help perpetuate the very oppression and injustice they devote themselves to fighting,” 15.



a righteous claim to truth, rightness, and knowledge about injustice can ameliorate the discomfort of the affective experiences that reflect the will to know. The presumption of rightness that backs one's claim emboldens and empowers. However, a sense of rightness also undergirds the

affective responses of those who exhibit attitudes and values that support oppressive practices and institutions. Thus, in the name of engaging in a more radical mode of resistance, it may be necessary to find a new ground upon which to do theory in a way that attends to our affective experiences, even in therapeutic ways that transform them.

Although a fuller description of an alternative affective foundation for progressive theorizing will have to wait until chapter four, I can briefly sketch its character here. Theory can be pursued in a way that foregoes the need for strict categorizations, clearly delineated concepts, and even simplified pronouncements of right and wrong. On this approach, emotional and affective experiences would still be highly relevant to how one does theory, and experiences of outlaw emotions would be crucially significant. However, rather than engaging in theory production as a way to formulate righteous claims to knowledge and appease the affective experiences associated with the will to know, a cultivated ability to frustrate our desires to know and be right could facilitate another type of affective experience that might eventually be understood as a new kind of pleasure.<sup>66</sup> One would have to remain open to the possibility for error, embrace uncertainty, and invite the alternative affective experience of not knowing. Doing so alters the standard mode of theorizing that hinges on asserting knowledge claims. It could also result in the creation and discovery of new possibilities for resistance, being with others, and fashioning one's own existence which, in turn, could present new and unexpected possibilities for political transformation.

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<sup>66</sup> McWhorter explains that disciplining ourselves to undergo these types of affective experiences might facilitate a different type of political solidarity, as well as a way of doing philosophy that enables us to live with the unknown. See "The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist," 124.

## Chapter 2. The Negative Affective Effects of Oppression

In the previous chapter, I followed the work of other feminist theorists who argue that the particularity of one's social location greatly influences one's affective constitution and that certain types of emotional responses to injustice can reflect an epistemic advantage that might helpfully motivate and inform politically-progressive theorizing. While I supported the notion that some affective experiences can productively encourage further thinking and reflecting, I cautioned against using them to inform a type of theorizing that results in the production of righteous knowledge claims. Backed by a desire for certainty and a refusal of not knowing, righteous knowledge claims can dogmatically assert one's moral and epistemic superiority by judging another's claims to be morally wrong and epistemically false. I noted how making righteous claims to knowledge can anesthetize unpleasant affective experiences by apparently satisfying the will to know, thereby alleviating the discomfort of uncertainty and the possibility for error that can be found within emotional responses like anger and rage. However, when one quells the urgency, anguish, and suffering of these affective experiences by making righteous knowledge claims, one risks engaging in the same politically implicated epistemological context of dominant discourse that supports systems of oppression. I argued that when made out of a desire to be fundamentally right and secure one's own moral superiority over another, politically progressive and conservative claims can both be asserted in ways that create a discourse which shuts down the sort of open-ended dialogue, and affective experiences therein, that could promote genuinely radical social transformations.

This chapter illustrates the extent to which social experiences shape our affective embodiment such that the negative effects of injustice, domination, and violence are manifest on both psychological and physiological levels. Against the tendency to think of the debilitating and disempowering effects of oppression in merely psychological terms, my aim in this chapter is to emphasize the harmful affects of oppression that also hinder one's capacity for physiological well-being and flourishing. I argue that oppression as a social and political system does more than shape certain aspects of our "minds," such as our intellectual concepts and states of mental health or illness. Oppression also works on and through our bodies. In this way, the notion of "internalized oppression," which often refers to the psychological impact of taking on one's own subjugation, does not adequately signal the extent to which oppression is also "incorporated" into one's somatic constitution. The goal, then, is to recognize the phys-

iological effects of oppression, which can largely be found in the affective constitutions of people in marginalized groups, as a vital aspect of how oppression dominates and disempowers the oppressed.

Although I do not explicitly pursue these connections here, my analysis of how experience shapes our physiological embodiment helps clarify why, as discussed in the previous chapter, emotional and affective responses can conflict among people who occupy different social locations.<sup>1</sup> An appreciation for why affective constitutions often differ among people based on their respective experiences within systems of oppression supports the feminist epistemological claim that affective experiences of those in marginalized groups can shed light on social injustice. This chapter does, however, explicitly overlap with the first chapter in terms of its argumentative structure. I argue that if one does not understand the full scope of the psychological and physiological effects of oppression then certain argumentative strategies found within progressive theorizing can actually inadvertently risk reinscribing the terms of one's own oppression. In other words, if the negative effects of oppression are understood in terms of psychological harm but not physiological harm as well, then a significant aspect of the damaging effects of oppression on the oppressed will continued to go unidentified. The failure to appreciate the extent to which the negative effects of oppression are psychosomatic<sup>2</sup>—they affect both the mind and the body—along with the failure to view this psychosomatic effect as a significant mechanism through which oppression operates, are failures to identify the full scope of the problem. Furthermore, working from an incomplete conception of how oppression operates minimizes the likelihood that progressive theorizing and projects of resistance will be able to adequately or effectively address systems of domination. Thus, in the interest of supporting feminist and anti-racist political projects, as well enhancing the well-being of particular marginalized individuals who wish to resist the terms of their oppression, I conclude by noting the importance of finding ways to helpfully address the psychosomatically embodied consequences of oppressive social systems that are produced by and presented in the affects.

In what follows, I outline numerous ways to understand the negative physiological effects of oppression. I begin by describing bell hooks' analysis of racial oppression, which focuses on the psychological wounds it inflicts on people of color, in order to point out the underemphasized physiological harms that are also already implicit in her argu-

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<sup>1</sup> Although 'emotion' and 'affect' can be used as technical terms to differentiate certain types of phenomena, let it be remembered that I am using the terms 'emotion' and 'affect' interchangeably. I prefer to use the term 'affective' because it highlights the physiological, embodied dimensions of felt experiences, which can be present in experiences that others describe as emotional.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the term 'psychosomatic' is not intended to connote that the affective, physiological conditions that can result from living within oppressive contexts are "imaginary," "made-up," or "less-real." Indeed, for my purposes, 'psychosomatic' is meant to highlight the observable, somatic manifestations of traumas that are typically granted psychological significance. This will be discussed at a greater length below.

ment. Without denying that experiences of oppression can hinder one's mental health, I follow the work of Elizabeth Wilson and Teresa Brennan to argue that thinking of the harmful and damaging effects of oppression merely in psychological terms does not adequately capture the extent to which oppression negatively influences our physiological capacity for well-being and flourishing. Wilson looks to the biological conversion of psychologically impactful events to explain how the psyche and soma are intimately connected. Brennan focuses on how social interactions involve the transmission of affect, which produces somatic changes in one's physiology, and argues that oppressive social interactions generate negative affective burdens that are unfairly dumped on the marginalized. As part of her argument, Brennan helps clarify the point that part of what makes negative affects negative—that is undesirable and burdensome—are the somatic, physiological, and affective harms that they produce in those who carry them. The arguments from Wilson and Brennan emphasize how traumatic experiences can result in physiological symptoms such as increased rates of depression, addiction, and stress-related illnesses. All of this helps make sense of how oppression, as a type of political trauma, can also be somatically manifest in the affective, physiological constitutions of marginalized individuals. These unhealthy, unfavorable, and deleterious effects of oppression are incorporated into one's person. For my purposes here, then, the important thing to focus on is the felt experience itself—whether that is characterized as an emotional or affective experience—and its political, philosophical, and now also, physiological significance for those who are affected.

## **I. The Negative Psychological Effects of Oppression**

Living in a situation of oppression can be severely detrimental to the oppressed, those who are subjugated, marginalized, victimized, and dominated by social prejudices and practices of discrimination. People of color, women, and gay or queer people are constantly reminded of their status as second-class citizens within a racist, sexist, and heterosexist culture that reinforces the institutional denial of equal rights, equal pay, or equal protection under the law. Furthermore, everyday encounters with others can reveal the painful reality of persistent prejudice and discrimination. Through direct or indirect comments, overt or covert harassment, body language, and even stereotypical representations of minority populations in the media, the presumed superiority, normality, and privilege of some groups over others is reiterated, affirmed, and reinscribed. Because oppressive attitudes, beliefs, practices, and institutions can create a ubiquitous web of injustices that imbue the majority of one's experiences, marginalized individuals can quickly feel overpowered and overwhelmed to the point of hopelessness, fatigue, or resignation to the injustice of their situation. With respect to anti-black racism, for example, bell hooks writes, “[I]f black people have not learned our place as second-class citizens through educational institutions, we learn it by the

daily assaults perpetuated by white offenders on our bodies and beings that we feel but rarely publicly protest or name.”<sup>3</sup>

The continued and persistent experience of oppression can produce and exacerbate mental health problems in subjugated populations, but hooks notes that this is often overlooked by psychiatrists and mental health practitioners. Emphasizing the negative psychological impact of oppression on marginalized individuals, hooks argues that “by now there should be an incredible body of psychoanalytical and psychological material, written from a progressive standpoint, about black mental health that looks at the connection between concrete victimization and mental disorders, yet this work does not exist.”<sup>4</sup>

The fact that an explicit relationship between victimization and mental health concerns continues to be inadequately identified and addressed exacerbates and perpetuates a cycle of violence and psychological harm among oppressed communities. In addition to the internalization of victimization, marginalized individuals might struggle with related issues, such as addiction. hooks explains:

By not addressing our psychological wounds, by covering them up, we create the breeding ground for pervasive learned helplessness and powerlessness. This lack of agency nurtures compulsive addictive behavior and promotes addiction. Rarely do discussions of drug, alcohol, and food addiction in black life link these problems to any desire to escape from psychological pain that is the direct consequence of racist assault and/or our inability to cope effectively with that assault. Yet if this reality is not considered then the root causes of genocidal addiction may remain unaddressed.<sup>5</sup>

When addiction is only superficially treated without addressing the potential causes of addiction, such as depression, hopelessness, or even low self-esteem, it is less likely that one will recover from his or her addiction. But hooks’ makes this point more strongly by identifying the causes of addiction as potential byproducts of one’s experience in an oppressive culture. When addiction is addressed among members of socially marginalized groups, efforts to curb addiction might fail from the start if no attention is placed on the larger context of oppression that feeds the roots of addiction for these oppressed populations. Thus, in order to effectively address a cycle of addiction among marginalized populations, hooks emphasizes that mental health and well-being must be analyzed in relation to oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 15.

<sup>4</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 141. Since hooks wrote *Killing Rage* there have been some attempts to better understand the connection between racial oppression and mental health but an acknowledgement of this relationship is still far from being a prominent view in mainstream psychology. For examples, see David R. Williams, Yan Yu, James S. Jackson, and Norman B. Anderson, “Racial Differences in Physical and Mental Health.” *Journal of Health Psychology* 2.3 (1997): 325-351 and Brian Smedley, Michael Jeffries, Larry Adelman, and Jean Cheng, “Race, Racial Inequality, and Health Inequalities: Separating Myth from Fact.” *Unnatural Causes* (2008).

<sup>5</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 143.

A lack of scholarship on the relationship between mental health issues and the experiences of oppressed populations should not, however, be seen as a mere oversight within psychological and psychiatric literature. Rather than being viewed as a simple lack of knowledge on the psychological harm of oppression, it is possible that the ignorance of oppression and its relationship to mental health is *produced* for the particular end of perpetuating it. This idea is supported by Charles Mills' notion of an epistemology of ignorance. Referring to the systematic production of White ignorance about racial domination, Mills explains that an epistemology of ignorance is "a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made."<sup>6</sup> In other words, an epistemology of ignorance results in a distorted, inverted way of seeing and understanding the world that actually prevents those who are in dominating positions of power from having a genuine understanding of the social realities that they have created. With respect to race and racism, producing and reinforcing an entire system of knowledge based on ignorance allows White people to avoid confronting their role in the perpetuation of racism because they fail to adequately identify the problem of racism in the first place. As Mills argues, an epistemology of ignorance can be both psychologically and socially functional insofar as it enables the continuation of domination by thwarting the likelihood that accountability will be acknowledged.

Mills' concept of an epistemology of ignorance can be related to hooks' comments about the psychological toll of racism on non-white people that is frequently overlooked. As hooks suggests, ignorance about the devastating effects of oppression can be thought of as a "collective cultural refusal to assume any accountability for the psychological wounding of black people that continues into the present day."<sup>7</sup> It is not simply the case that only a few psychiatrists have been able to recognize a connection between oppression and mental illness among the oppressed. Instead, hooks highlights that there is—at individual, institutional, and cultural levels—a deliberate unwillingness and produced inability to acknowledge, critique, and disavow the system of oppression that psychologically harms people of color. As a result, the damaging psychological consequences of racist oppression continue to affect generations of individuals. hooks notes that "young black children would not be emotionally crippled by psychological problems that emerge from low self-esteem, caused by the internalization of racist thinking, if African Americans had institutionalized progressive mental health care agendas that would address these issues so that they would not be passed from generation to generation. The reenactment of unresolved trauma happens again and again if it is not addressed."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the pervasive ignorance that surrounds the

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<sup>6</sup> Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, 18.

<sup>7</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 141.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

harmful psychological effects of oppression enables them, and the oppressive trauma that produces them, to continue.

According to hooks, a form of resistance can be found in the expression of black rage that identifies and challenges racist domination.<sup>9</sup> However, she notes that perhaps precisely because black rage threatens to shed light on the injustices of domination, black rage is often socially dismissed and denounced. As hooks explains, even some black psychiatrists who acknowledge black rage assure that it lacks its proper place and is “merely a sign of powerlessness.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than urging “the larger culture to see black rage as something other than sickness, to see it as a potentially healthy, potentially healing response to oppression and exploitation,” hooks criticizes these psychologists’ tendency to pathologize it and explain it way.<sup>11</sup>

The tendency among black intellectuals and black psychiatrists to devalue black rage further reveals subtle intricacies of a system of domination. After repeated experiences of abuse, degradation, and violence, subjugated individuals might internalize their victimization thereby surrendering their own power to challenge and resist the terms of their domination. Mills explains that the effectiveness of domination reaches its ultimate height when those who are dominated buy into the system that oppressed them. In this respect, it can be seen that an epistemology of ignorance operates through a type of ideological coercion. Mills notes that it “requires labor at *both* ends, involving the development of a depersonizing conceptual apparatus through which whites must learn to see nonwhites and also, crucially, through which nonwhites must learn to see themselves.”<sup>12</sup> These epistemological terms of oppression become “internalized” by the oppressed themselves such that the distorted, inverted, systematic way of misperceiving the world can inform how one interprets and evaluates one’s own experiences, such as when black psychiatrists dismiss the experience of rage in the face of racial domination. As hooks writes, “Internalization of victimization renders black folks powerless, unable to assert agency on our behalf. When we embrace victimization, we surrender our rage.”<sup>13</sup>

In order to counteract this disempowering mode of victimization, which is a crucial part of how an epistemology of ignorance functions, one must be able to break through the conceptual framework that has been built up in the service of domination. According to Mills, “One has to learn to trust one’s own cognitive powers, to develop one’s own concepts, insights, modes of explanation, overarching theories, and to oppose the epistemic hegemony of conceptual frameworks designed in part to thwart and suppress the exploration of such matters; one has to think *against the grain*.”<sup>14</sup> As hooks sug-

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<sup>9</sup> I will return to the idea of therapeutic rage when I discuss affective therapies in the following chapter.

<sup>10</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 87-88.

<sup>13</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 119.

gests, one way to dismantle an epistemology of ignorance on matters related to race is to think differently about the connection between oppression and the psychological wounding of non-white populations. In so doing, one can develop a critical rearticulation of what really threatens social well-being. hooks exemplifies this strategy when she explains, “Public focus on black rage, the attempt to trivialize and dismiss it, must be subverted by public discourse about the pathology of white supremacy, the madness it creates...White supremacy is frightening. It promotes mental illness and various dysfunctional behaviors on the part of whites and non-whites. It is the real and present danger—not black rage.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, hooks suggests a reconceptualization of the connection between oppression and mental health that first focuses on the pathology of White racism, rather than black rage as a primary cause of black mental illness. Black rage, in turn, is best understood as a byproduct and consequence of white racism.

## II. The Negative Physiological Effects of Oppression

### *A. Psychosomatic: Psychological Intricacies of the Soma*

Just as the persistent exposure to daily forms of oppression can shape one’s psychology, negative social experiences can also have an effect on one’s affects and physiology. In what follows, I expand upon hooks’ arguments about the psychological harm that racism inflicts on people of color. Following the work of Elizabeth Wilson and Teresa Brennan, I argue that a feminist interest in the complexities of our biological and affective bodies can provide new insights on the operation of social oppression. More specifically, I argue that the production and transmission of certain affects is a significant part of how social oppression continues to function. For example, when they emerge as a consequence of one’s experiences within oppressive social structures, rage, shame, addiction, anger, and self-hatred are not merely psychological phenomena. They also have affective dimensions that manifest in one’s physiological embodiment which can prove detrimental to one’s bodily health and well-being and, ultimately, to one’s ability to effectively resist social domination.

My goal here is not to privilege the body over the mind but rather to understand how the two cannot be considered apart from one another. As Wilson suggests, rather than turning away from the biological body, “exploring the entanglement of biochemistry, affectivity, and the physiology of the internal organs will provide us with new avenues into the body.”<sup>16</sup> Viewing the affective possibilities of the body will shed new light on how experiences of oppression affect those in marginalized social groups. In other words, if it is granted that social experiences shape our psychology, and if it can be

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<sup>15</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 14.



shown that that our psychology shapes our physiology (or, rather, that our psychology is already a part of our biology), then we will have a more robust account of how social factors shape our somatic constitution as well. Furthermore, an analysis of oppression that pays close attention to the nuances of how psyche and soma interact can open onto new possibilities for personal therapeutic healing and political resistance that address the affective effects of oppression. In order to promote a holistic state of well-being for those in marginalized social groups, efforts for therapy and resistance must go beyond conventional notions of mental health and include a careful evaluation of the health, strength, and vitality of one's affective, physiological constitution. Considerations of what types of affects are more frequently found among members of different social groups and the effects of these affects on one's ability to resist social domination are of particular importance to this type of investigation.

Although hooks does not explicitly frame her argument about the psychological harm of white racism in terms of the physiological damage that oppression can also produce among non-white populations, the negative physiological impact of racial oppression is already apparent in her description of a “psychology of victimhood.” hooks writes, “Collective failure to address adequately the psychic wounds inflicted by racist aggression is the breeding ground for a psychology of victimhood wherein learned helplessness, uncontrollable rage, and/or feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and despair abound in the psyches of black folks yet are not attended to in ways that empower and promote holistic [sic] states of well-being.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time that one accepts and supports hooks' central claims, it can be noted that “uncontrollable rage” and “feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and despair” do not simply refer to psychological characteristics. They also refer to the felt experience of the affects rage and despair. The affective effects of oppression can also be identified in hook's previous comments about the high rates of addiction among oppressed communities, especially when she writes, “Addictions of all sorts, cutting across class, enable black folks to forget, take the pain and rage away, replacing it with dangerous apathy and hardheartedness.”<sup>18</sup> Addiction is a physiologically significant phenomenon that involves one's neurology and biochemistry as much as it does one's psychology. Thus, with repeated experiences of domination over time one could not only develop a “psychology of victimhood” but also a “physiology of victimhood.” In other words, it is possible to view the major issues that hooks addresses as simultaneously those of psychological and physiological import—that is, as psychosomatic.

In its most common usage, the term ‘psychosomatic’ has taken on an unfortunate connotation which typically refers to an illness that is assumed to be “all in one's head.” While one could refer to a broken bone to account for the pain in one's leg, a “psychosomatic” person would complain about pains and symptoms that appear to lack an identifiable, explanatory source in one's body. This understanding of psychosomatic

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<sup>17</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 137.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

phenomena is often used to explain the effect of placebos. Psychosomatic patients who believe that they are receiving treatment but are in fact only given sugar pills report that their symptoms have improved despite the lack of targeted treatment. In other words, in cases where external circumstances or influences do not obviously affect one's internal states, psychosomatic people might still report a change in their felt experiences. One way to interpret such reports is to assume that, despite an individual's claim about the change in his or her experiences, there is no measurable or observable change in one's physiology. The felt difference is assumed to be an imagined difference.

However, 'psychosomatic' can also be used to describe instances where what one has "in one's head" actually alters one's physiological state. This is sometimes referred to as the power of suggestion, which can also account for the placebo effect when it produces observable somatic changes. In these cases, one's belief or conviction about their state of health is enough to measurably alter one's physical or physiological wellbeing. Hence, the placebo effect can result in measurable improvements in one's condition. Of course, it should be noted that the psychosomatic connection can also work to one's detriment. Emotional stress or anxiety, for instance, can quite literally make one sick such that a psychological state induces physiological responses like hormonal fluctuations, muscle tension, increased heart rate, nausea, sensations of pain, or hyperventilation. According to Teresa Brennan, for example, chronic fatigue syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and depression provide examples of formally identifiable illnesses that are "psychological" or "social" in origin but that produce affective, biological, and physiological effects.<sup>19</sup>

This latter view of psychosomatic phenomena is of particular importance because it evidences the curious connection between psychological states—what is presumed to be "all in one's head"—to physiological states in the body that can be identified, observed, and very much felt by an individual. Unfortunately, these types of psychosomatic phenomena are typically dismissed from serious consideration precisely because their embodied states are understood to emerge from psychological states, which in turn, is assumed to make them less legitimate or real than if they were sourced in purely biological origins. Brennan attributes the dearth of cultural understanding about psychogenic epidemics like chronic fatigue syndrome and depression to this epistemological prejudice that views biology and culture as mutually exclusive of one another. In instances where an intermingling between biology and culture is granted, the effects of psychology and society are often assumed to make something less real. This results in a hierarchical dualism between the degree of reality that is attributed to the biological and the social such that biological things of natural science are viewed as distinct from psychological or socially constituted phenomena.<sup>20</sup> As Brennan notes, "Misapprehensions about hysteria are themselves instances of the tendency to split biological or physical inquiry (real things) from the psychosocial explanation (not real things).

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<sup>19</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Because of this split, the mechanism of hysterical identification has not yet been specified.”<sup>21</sup> Brennan raises this point to stress that hysteria and other psychogenic illnesses, like psychosomatic illnesses in general, are biophysical in their effects. The fact that biology, physiology, and our affective constitutions are changed by social influences does not undermine the legitimacy and materiality of these physiological changes or psychogenic disorders. As Brennan writes, “It really is in the flesh, not to be disposed of by a stiff upper lip or the power of positive thinking.”<sup>22</sup> The task, then, is not to dismiss psychosomatic experiences but rather to understand how psychosocial influences produce somatic effects.

One upshot of seriously taking biological characteristics into account—which could involve investigations in neurology, endocrinology, the respiratory system, cardiac responses, etc.—is that it can lead to a more robust understanding of the body as already psychological. Although many feminist theorists acknowledge that society and culture shape our material embodiment, Wilson suggests that an excessive worry over the threat of biological reductionism continues to deter many feminist scholars from taking a closer, more scientifically-informed look at the biological and physiological materiality of our bodies that enables such materialization. Wilson explains, “For many feminists, [biology and reductionism] amount to the same thing: biology is reductive materiality stripped of the animating effects of culture and sociality.”<sup>23</sup> Wilson denies that thinking of neural systems and biochemistry as intimately related to psychical states like depression necessarily commits one to an undesirable form of biological reductionism. According to Wilson, the worry about biological reduction among feminist scholars evidences limiting assumptions about biology that echo the assumptions of those who question the legitimacy of psychosomatic illnesses. Wilson writes:

It seems to me that the neurology, physiology, or biochemistry of hysterical symptomology can be disregarded only in a theoretical milieu that takes biology to be inert, a milieu that, despite its expressed interest in rethinking the body, still presumes that the microstructure of the body does not contribute to the play of condensation, displacement, and deferred action that is now so routinely attributed to culture, signification, or sociality. Though the body may be the locale of these intricate operations, biology itself is rarely considered to be a source of such accomplishment.<sup>24</sup>

Among those who do not wish to explore the nuances of biology itself, Wilson suspects the presence of an underlying assumption that biology is “uninvolved” matter which does not function in psychologically significant ways.

Wilson suggests that the biology of the “soma” has a more dynamic character such that, one could say, it already possesses an intimate relationship with the “psyche.” As Wilson explains, “hysterical diversion is not forced on the throat, legs, or eyes from the outside, it is already part of the natural repertoire of biological matter. A

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

more sustained focus on the biology of hysteria would allow us to see that the proclivity to conversion (diversion, perversion) is native to biochemical, physiological, and nervous systems.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, although many feminist scholars acknowledge that cultural norms and social experiences influence how girls and women learn to move, primp, diet, cross their legs, and throw baseballs, these experiences are often couched in terms of the social shaping the biological. In contrast, Wilson encourages feminist scholars to look, first and foremost, at biology itself to understand the possibilities, potentialities, and capabilities of our biological bodies to be shaped, formed, and altered in such ways. Wilson also maintains that such an investigation would be pertinent to feminist political projects insofar as “the capacity for transformation—the sine qua non of politics as it is usually understood—is already native to biological substrata. We don’t need to take politics to biology, or wait for biology to adjudicate over our political events...rather, we can explore the peculiar ways in which biological material writes, calculates, fabricates.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Wilson, the psychosomatic connection has been frequently dismissed at the expense of better understanding the biological and physiological functions that are always already present and at work in our bodies. Similar to Brennan’s comments above about the misapprehensions surrounding hysteria, Wilson explains, “The way these contorted ideational structures are then converted into bodily symptoms has attracted less attention than one might expect. Oddly enough, it is the very mechanism of conversion (of psyche into soma) that has been the least explored aspect of conversion hysteria.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than dismissing psychosomatic experiences because their causes appear to be psychological or social instead of purely biological or physiological in nature, carefully exploring the nature of this connection can reveal peculiarities about our biological, physiological bodies that are often taken for granted. In other words, according to Wilson, a better understanding of biology itself might reveal that biological phenomena are already more “psychological” or “social” than we tend to think. As a result, Wilson specifically turns her attention to the connection between psyche and soma to illustrate the capacity of biology to participate in presumably “psychological” events.

By looking at specific cases in Sigmund Freud’s examination of hysteria and how nerves, blood vessels, and muscles can change in light of experience and respond to therapy, Wilson emphasizes that our biological bodies possess a “compliant and complicitous character” such that “biology is more naturally eccentric, more intrinsically preternatural than we usually allow.”<sup>28</sup> Wilson pays special attention to Freud’s analy-

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<sup>25</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, “Organic Empathy: Feminism, Psychopharmaceuticals, and the Embodiment of Depression.” *Material Feminisms*. Ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 373-399, 378.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

sis of Fraulein Elisabeth to illustrate the capacity of our biological bodies to participate in what are conventionally understood as strictly psychological matters of the mind.

Fraulein Elisabeth was a young woman who experienced debilitating pains in her legs, which Freud connected to the psychologically significant experiences of her father's death and the conflicted love she felt for her late sister's husband. Although Freud ultimately failed to develop a full explanation for how Fraulein Elisabeth's physiology facilitated the bodily conversion of her attachments to her father and brother-in-law, Wilson notes that Freud's early writings evidence a strong curiosity about "the nature of the muscles that makes them so psychologically attuned."<sup>29</sup> Rather than looking to the central nervous system and the brain to explain Fraulein Elisabeth's pains, Wilson highlights Freud's appreciation for the potential role of biology to participate in so-called "psychological pains." Wilson writes:

It is as though [Freud] suspects that the psychic conflicts have been devolved to the lower body parts: here, psychic defense is more muscular than it is cerebral. The muscle fibers, nerves, blood vessels of the left leg, and the muscle fibers, nerves, blood vessels of the right leg have become functionally differentiated under the influence of a psychic defense that isn't necessarily centralized in the brain and that certainly isn't contained within Fraulein Elisabeth herself.<sup>30</sup>

With reference to Freud's analysis of Fraulein Elisabeth, Wilson stresses that the relation between psyche and soma is not one-directional, nor does one precede the other. Instead, as Wilson articulates, "there is a mutuality of influence, a mutuality that is interminable and constitutive."<sup>31</sup> Once again, seeing psyche and soma as connected in this mutually influential and constitutive way avoids the threat of biological determinism since "it becomes meaningless to charge that psychic forces are governed by the soma if the soma itself is already psychic, cognitive, and affective."<sup>32</sup> That is to say, the soma does not dictate the psyche precisely because the psyche is itself already embodied, found in our nerves, muscles, and evidenced throughout our bodies' physiological systems. Granting that psychological experiences can be evidenced by and experienced in one's body, Wilson playfully states, "If the pains are indeed all in [Fraulein Elisabeth's] head, then this entails a number of reciprocal ontological contortions: that her thigh is her head, that her mind is muscular..."<sup>33</sup> In other words, rather than undermining the legitimacy of somatic symptoms that manifest as a consequence of psychological events, attention to the physiological mechanisms of biological conversion challenges the very notion of experiencing pain "all in one's head" by suggesting that one's "head" is already experienced as one's entire body.

Wilson explains that, for a short time, Freud flirted with a notion of somatic compliance to account for why some people have a greater biological proclivity for hysterical

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

conversion than others. According to Freud, hysterical conversion is “a process which occurs...in someone whose [biological] organization...has a proclivity in that direction.”<sup>34</sup> Although Freud eventually came to place more emphasis on explaining hysteria in psychological rather than biological terms, in 1894 he wrote, “The characteristic factor in hysteria is not splitting of consciousness but *the capacity for conversion*, and we may adduce as an important part of the disposition to hysteria—a disposition which in other respects is still unknown—a psycho-physical aptitude for transposing very large sums of excitation into the somatic innervation.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than enacting a “popular feminist preference for cultural or social explications” to account for hysterical conversions, Wilson emphasizes that the body and the *biology of hysteria* can remain front and center of any investigation.<sup>36</sup> In particular, Wilson highlights the peculiar way in which our nerves, blood vessels, and muscles evidence a type of “somatic compliance” to psychological states. As Wilson explains, “the strange convolutions of hysteria are held within the confines of biological detail. Rather than reducing the nature of hysteria, this confinement allows the reader to perceive in biology a complexity usually attributed only to nonbiological domains.”<sup>37</sup>

Similar to how hooks stresses that one’s daily experiences of oppression significantly impact one’s psychological health, Wilson’s work points to how daily experiences of oppression can affect our affective, physiological bodies, as well. Following the work of Peter Kramer, Wilson describes a model of depression in terms of a form of “kindling,” which emphasizes the somatic location of psychopathology. Kramer explains, “What distinguishes this view of depression from, say, traditional psychoanalytic models is the recognition that scars are not, or not only, in cognitive memory. It is not merely a question of inner conflict...The scar consists of changed anatomy and chemistry in the brain.”<sup>38</sup> As Wilson writes, “By placing psychical effects in an intimate alliance with the anatomical configurations of the nervous system, Kramer’s kindling model elucidates one particular mode of neurology’s articulate nature. Not only is depression neurological, but neurology can also be depressive. Rather than simply leading to depression, neurological matter itself may become weakened, neurasthenic, depressive; neurology doesn’t stand to one side of the effects it facilitates.”<sup>39</sup> In the same way that a primer sets the tone for and enables what follows, Wilson emphasizes that Kramer’s kindling model of depression highlights how the neural anatomy of the brain can be altered through certain types of stressful or traumatic experiences that predispose the brain to be more depressive. In light of these connections between experiences and the brain, Wilson notes the possibility that “the brains of traumatized people have been

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<sup>34</sup> Freud, cited in Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Peter D. Kramer, *Listening to Prozac*. New York: Viking, 1993, 123-124; cited in Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 29.

stressed in such a way that it leaves them vulnerable...to attacks of depression. A substantial trauma early in life...may be sufficient to weaken the neurological system so that this person becomes susceptible to depression at a later date following a relatively minor trauma. Or, more worryingly, perhaps the brain may be kindled for depression through the stresses of everyday life.”<sup>40</sup> An even more worrying possibility emerges when one approaches these ideas from a feminist perspective that appreciates how, as hooks explains, experiences of “being the constant targets of racist assault and abuse are fundamentally psychologically traumatic.”<sup>41</sup> The stresses of everyday life in oppressive contexts could disproportionately predispose the brains of those in marginalized groups towards depression, addiction, and other forms of dis-ease. In this capacity, the kindling model of depression adds neuro-physiological support to hooks’ suggestion that racial oppression is a catalyst for addiction among African-Americans by noting how experiences of oppression can shape one’s health and well-being in psychologically and physiologically (which here can be thought to include neurology) significant ways.

At this point it may be helpful to draw out the different implications between Wilson’s work on soma and psyche and hooks’ analysis of mental illness in light of the psychological effects of oppression, which I suggested could be understood as already connected to affective, physiological states as well. In contrast to hooks’ primary use of conventional psychological notions of mental illness without explicitly acknowledging the physiological weight of these conditions, Wilson’s attention to the biological aspects of psychosomatic experiences, hysterical conversions, and instances of somatic compliance begins with a notion of the peculiar psychology that is already at work in our biology. Rather than suggesting that psychological states are somehow converted or translated into the body to become biological states, Wilson intends to make an even stronger connection between biology and psychology. The biological changes that can occur in our physiological, affective, and neurological systems can themselves be understood as psychological changes, which could, in turn, alter how we view our affective conditions. Wilson explains:

Many psychological events are unconscious or innate or temperamental or affective; in fact, most psychological events are of this kind. Cognitions are simply the most accessible of our psychological capacities, and psychiatric illnesses are the disruptions most legible to a cognitively oriented epistemology. The vicissitudes of everyday disequilibria—insecurity, loss, embarrassment, fury, procrastination—demand a theory of the psyche that is more extensive...If the psychological landscape could be more broadly surveyed, if, for example, it could be seen to be composed of an innately affective nervous system, then psychological events could be more readily integrated into biomedical accounts...”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>41</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 134.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 41.

Following Wilson's suggestions, our psychological experiences cannot be said to occur solely in the mind, the central nervous system, or "all in one's head" in ways that may produce subsequent somatic effects. Instead, some biological systems can be thought of as having their own "psychology;" they can be depressed, enervated, and perhaps even happy. We have, in other words, "psychological organs."<sup>43</sup> As Wilson writes, the goal is to think "about the nervous system beyond the head; it turns our attention to how the nervous system innervates the entire body, and how distal parts of the body (such as the stomach) have the capacity for psychological action."<sup>44</sup>

For my purposes here, it is not crucial to definitively show that our biology possesses its own psychology.<sup>45</sup> The most important insight I glean from Wilson's exploration of psyche and soma is simply that biology and psychology do not exist in completely separated realms but are intimately connected in ways that are often dismissed or under appreciated. Rather than undermining the legitimacy of psychosomatic illnesses, Wilson's argument reinforces the idea that life experiences which are assumed to carry a degree of psychological significance can also be biologically significant in how they affect us. Events, encounters, and experiences that affect our psychology can also alter our biology and physiology in ways that should not be simply disregarded as "less real." The effects of oppression, then, must be appreciated on both levels—that of the psyche and soma. They are psychosomatic.

## ***B. The Transmission of Affect: Social Origins of Biological Effects***

Another way to understand the significance of psychosomatic experiences and how they occur is to appreciate that affects can be among the physiological effects of our experiences. Like Wilson, Teresa Brennan argues that the connection between the "social" and "biological" is intimate and complex. Brennan accepts that "the traffic between the biological and the social is two-way; the social or psychosocial actually gets into the flesh and is apparent in our affective and hormonal disposition."<sup>46</sup> However, instead of focusing on the psycho-somatic connection in terms of the biological significance of psychological events as Wilson does, Brennan explains that everyday social interactions with others produce physiological effects by operating on and through our affects. According to Brennan "it is not genes that determine social life; it is the socially induced affect that changes our biology."<sup>47</sup> Thus, a closer look at our biological bodies reveals more than that psychological tendencies can make their way into our bodies through a type of hysterical conversion. The nature of our social interactions involves

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>45</sup> See Michael Gershon, *The Second Brain: The Scientific Basis of Gut Instinct and a Ground-breaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1-2.



our affective embodiment, too. Whereas Wilson argues that a psychological response is already contained within the potential capabilities of our biological systems, Brennan refers to the notion of the transmission of affect to explain *how* social experiences “may feature in or distort a person’s affective makeup.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, it is not simply that our biology is already psychological but that our sociality is already psychosomatically affective.

Brennan emphasizes the notion of the transmission of affect to “capture a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect” and refers to how “the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another.”<sup>49</sup> In a sense, then, the way we experience one another does not simply occur through words and actions that, at most, graze the surface of our skin; we engage with others and our environments through affective exchanges that permeate our embodied being. In light of this, Brennan explains that “all affects...are material, physiological things” that should not be superficially understood as merely embodied emotional states.<sup>50</sup> By using the term ‘transmission’ Brennan accentuates the notion that affects—which are typically presumed to be first and foremost of a personal nature—do not solely arise or remain within an individual. They also come from without insofar as affects can be shared, exchanged, and picked up among individuals. This means that the affects that we tend to think of as our own have their origin in social exchanges. Thus, ‘anger’ is not just the name that we attach to a certain emotional state but is an affect that, according to Brennan, can quite literally be in individuals as well as “in the air.” To summarize, Brennan explains, “The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes...In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The “atmosphere” or environment literally gets into the individual.”<sup>51</sup>

Brennan shares Wilson’s view that paying attention to biology in terms of our affective, physiological constitutions does not commit one to a form of biological reductionism. Although Brennan does not deny that our affective constitutions play a role in how we engage with one another, it does not necessarily follow that our biology dictates what we do or how we behave in a way that is removed from social or cultural influences. Instead, Brennan explores the phenomenon of the transmission of affect to emphasize how our social behaviors have a significant effect on who we are and who we become in terms of our physiological makeup. As Brennan articulates, “What is at stake with the notion of the transmission of affect is precisely the opposite of the sociobiological claim that the biological *determines* the social. What is at stake is rather

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1.

the means by which social interaction shapes biology. My affect, if it comes across to you, alters your anatomical makeup for good or ill.”<sup>52</sup>

According to Brennan, transmitted affects have “an energetic dimension,” which, for better or worse, accounts for their capacity to “enhance or deplete” us of energy and vitality.<sup>53</sup> With respect to the negative affects, Brennan explains that they “enhance when they are projected outward, when one is relieved of them; in popular parlance, this is called ‘dumping.’ Frequently, affects deplete when they are introjected, when one carries the affective burden of another, either by a straightforward transfer or because the other’s anger becomes your depression.”<sup>54</sup> Through the act of transmission the one who projects a negative affect is “freed from its depressing effects on him or herself.”<sup>55</sup> As Brennan explains, “if I take your aggression onboard and turn it back against myself as depression I have less energy and you have more, because you are not inhibited by a drive that limits you when it is turned inward.”<sup>56</sup> In addition to being shared, transmitted, and exchanged, then, the energetic dimension of particular affects influences how they can be beneficial or detrimental to overall well-being. Thus, one negative thing about affects that are typically characterized as negative affects, such as anger, rage, and shame, is that they engender negative effects. They are energy-depleting, devitalizing, and alter one’s anatomical makeup for ill rather than good.

Although Brennan’s analysis of the transmission of affect is inclusive of everyday experiences and interactions, the significance of affective effects is especially salient in light of traumatic experiences. Survivors of sexual, physical, and emotional trauma often report that the subsequent consequences of their experiences affect much more than their psychological health. As Brennan notes, “[t]rauma, very directly, is linked to the transmission of affect. Some of its victims testify with extraordinary acuity concerning their experience of something infiltrating their psyches as well as their bodies.”<sup>57</sup> For instance, Susan Brison has written extensively on surviving her experience of being violently sexual assaulted and almost murdered. The aftermath that she describes is characteristic of most symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Acknowledging both the physiological and psychological aspects of her experience, Brison writes, “Longterm effects include the physiological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders and the more psychological, yet still involuntary, responses of depression, inability to concentrate, lack of interest in activities that used to give life meaning, and a sense of foreshortened future.”<sup>58</sup> Although this provides an example where Brison characterizes her depression as a psychological re-

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>58</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 39-40.

sponse, she goes on to note the fine line between the psychological and the physiological when she states, “My mental state (typically, depression) felt physiological, like lead in my veins, while my physical state (frequently, incapacitation by fear and anxiety) was the incarnation of a cognitive and emotional paralysis...”<sup>59</sup>

One could follow Wilson and view the physiological symptoms that manifest after traumatic experiences as evidence of the biological capacity for hysterical conversion of psychologically significant events, but this phenomenon could also be accounted for by Brennan’s conception of the transmission of affect. Given that traumatic experiences are intersubjective encounters between people and environments, the experience of trauma is itself an instance where the transmission of affect occurs. Furthermore, an added consequence of a traumatic experience is that it can facilitate the development of affective proclivities which leave one open for taking on more of the same negative affects. As Brennan explains, it is “as if the affects of the perpetrator are in some way negatively affixed to the victim in such cases. As long as trauma is unhealed it keeps the victim open to the same affects (and attracts them from a variety of sources); there is something in trauma that permits such affects a permanent entry.”<sup>60</sup>

In this sense, Brennan echoes Wilson’s use of Kramer’s “kindling” model of depression where the neurological changes that emerge from stressful or traumatic experiences leave one even more vulnerable to depression in the future. According to Brennan, the significance of trauma is not limited to the transmission of affect in one particular instance but rather carries over into future experiences that make one increasingly susceptible to the continued introjection of similar negative affects, thereby, building an affective constitution for the victim of trauma that largely consists in the accumulation of negative affects.

The physiological consequences of accumulating negative affects are evidenced by higher rates of certain types of illness among those who survive traumatic experiences. For instance, emotional trauma is “correlated to a high number of physician visits, functional disability, and fatigue.”<sup>61</sup> Another way to think of this is that, as Brennan states, “anxiety, envy, and aggression work against bodily being through stress-related illness[es]” such as fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, depression, attention- deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and chronic fatigue syndrome.<sup>62</sup> Among those diagnosed with fibromyalgia, Brennan cites the prevalence of “psychological or emotional precursors to what is another disease in which the musculature and nervous system are trapped in debilitation.”<sup>63</sup> The circuitry of trauma and the transmission of negative affects—where the introjection of negative affects makes one more likely to take on negative affects in the future, which can lead to increasingly debilitating physiological symptoms—is also apparent among patients with fibromyalgia who report “significantly higher lifetime

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>60</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47.

prevalence rates of all forms of victimization, both in adult and childhood, as well as combination of adult and childhood trauma.”<sup>64</sup>

Examples of how the negative affects associated with emotionally and physically traumatic experiences in general can be reflected in the onset of physiological illnesses provide insight that can be applied to the physiological effects of oppression as a particular form of political trauma and victimization. As Catharine Malabou explains, “The work of contemporary neurologists helped me to discover *the impossibility of separating the effects of political trauma from the effects of organic trauma*. All trauma of any kind impacts the cerebral sites that conduct emotion...Even in the absence of any patent wound, we know today that any shock, any especially strong psychological stress, or any acute anxiety, always impacts the *affective brain*.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, if the physiological effects of trauma are granted an equal status of legitimacy on par with the psychological effects of trauma—that is, as real, significant, and meaningful in terms of how they influence one’s well-being—then it should also be possible to appreciate the physiological effects of political trauma. More specifically, and as Brennan illustrates, the transmission of negative affects can take on a new degree of importance when it is understood in a distinctly social and political context of power, domination, and subjugation.

When the physiological significance of the transmission of negative affects is explored through the lens of feminist political projects for social justice, certain affects (and the physiological symptoms they tend to facilitate) can be recognized as possible effects of oppressive experiences. Especially when one considers the debilitating effects of negative affects, the damaging effects of living within oppressive systems can be identified in the physiological, affective constitutions among the oppressed. Thus, by thinking about political domination and social oppression in terms of the transmission of affect, attention can be redirected to marginalized individuals as “those who carry the negative affects for the other.”<sup>66</sup> As Brennan writes, “The question should be: To whom is the affect directed? Because whoever that object is will be prone to anxiety and then depression (both the effects of aggression turned inward).”<sup>67</sup> In other words, one can explore the transmission of negative affects to understand who carries the affective burdens for others and at what cost to their own well-being.

Overt bodily or emotional harm can be (and often is) part of the political trauma that characterizes experiences of oppression. For example, police brutality, hate crimes, and various forms of intimidation can easily be evaluated and experienced as physically, psychologically, and emotionally traumatic. What should not be overlooked, though, is that social and political victimization and oppression can be exacerbated in more subtle ways. In fact, understanding social interactions in terms of the transmission of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*. Trans. Steven Miller. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, xviii.

<sup>66</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

affect helps account for why persistent and prolonged experiences of institutionalized, systematic social oppression can be so devastating to marginalized individuals even if they are rarely subjected to more direct, overtly traumatic forms of violence. In social interactions that are animated by prejudice and discrimination, which can entail any or all of the forms of interaction through words, intonations, body gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, “the negative affects come into play as measurements of one’s standing in relation to others.”<sup>68</sup> The nuances of such encounters can often be so subtle that they are hardly consciously perceived. Nevertheless, as Brennan explains, “[y]ou dump when your voice tones are violently angry and another’s sense of well being is shaken by those invisible violent vibrations. They have taken on your disturbance and have to adjust to the disequilibrium (by retaining it for you or perhaps by finding ways to “give it back”). But the envious glance and the ill wishes that that accompany it take place in silence, unheard and even unseen by the object of that envy.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, the transmission of negative affects can be said to occur on a spectrum of interactions that includes overt forms of violence, discrimination, and prejudice, as well as more subtle forms of these same actions.

The dumping of negative affects becomes significant in new ways when those interactions take place in a cultural climate where racial discrimination, class bias, sexist behavior, or homophobic attitudes influence how individuals and groups interact with one another. Rather than just occurring between two abstract individuals, the “specific waves of affects generated by different cultural constellations” can be seen to differently affect individuals and groups along gendered, raced, sexed, and classed lines.<sup>70</sup> As Brennan notes, “It follows from the idea that affects can be compounded by interactive dynamics that some groups will carry more affective loads than others will.”<sup>71</sup> Using an example of class politics, Brennan explains that “many of the working-class participants are carrying the affective refuse of a social order that positions them on the receiving end of an endless stream of minor and major humiliations, from economic and physical degradations in the workplace to the weight of the negative affects discarded by those in power.”<sup>72</sup> The same insight about the transmission of negative affects can apply to other institutional practices and interpersonal interactions that perpetuate social injustice with respect to race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation such that those in marginalized social groups are more likely to be subject to the negative affects of those in dominant social groups. In this way, the inherent inequality of oppression and domination can also be found in the “affective burdens” that are disproportionately carried by those who are victimized by an unjust culture, which, as even hooks noted, can manifest in higher rates of addiction, depression, and other stress-related illnesses among these populations.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Although the correlation between disparities in health and illness along lines of race have not been extensively studied, there have been a few attempts to understand the racial disparities in health as racist disparities, that is, as direct products of living in a context of racial discrimination and racial prejudice.<sup>73</sup> In a way that parallels hooks' argument that mental illness among African-Americans must be viewed in relation to racial oppression, Shannon Sullivan argues that the "effects of white racism include physiological changes for the people who [are] confronted by it, changes that typically are very damaging to their physical (as well as psychological) health."<sup>74</sup> It has been well- documented that persistent exposure to stress can have significant implications for overall physical health. In addition to elevating heart rate and blood pressure, stress can activate the secretion of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine, which have been associated with the suppression of the immune system and other risk factors related to cardiovascular disease and diabetes.<sup>75</sup> By understanding the levels of chronic stress that can characterize the experience of living in a situation of racial oppression, these health risks can be more clearly related to higher rates of "coronary artery disease, diabetes, stroke, HIV/AIDs, and infant mortality rate" among non-white Americans than white Americans.<sup>76</sup> As Sullivan notes, "we know that African Americans under 50 years of age are twenty times more likely to experience heart failure than white Americans in the same age group, and they have higher rates of the accompanying conditions of high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, and low levels of LDL or "good" cholesterol."<sup>77</sup> In the most simple of terms, then, the chronic stress of racial oppression can be viewed as one type of "affective burden" that is unjustly dumped on non-white racial groups with profoundly harmful physiological effects.

### III. The Political and Philosophical Significance of Negative Affective Burdens

A radically resistant thread in hooks' view of oppression is found in her identification of mental illness as a phenomenon that is shaped by social experiences of racism and domination. Rather than narrowly looking at psychological conditions in isolation and suggesting that they be symptomatically addressed, hooks draws attention

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<sup>73</sup> Shannon Sullivan, "Inheriting Racist Disparities in Health: Epigenetics and the Transgenerational Effects of White Racism." Forthcoming in *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1.2 (2013): (page numbers not yet available).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Sally S Dickerson and Peggy M. Zoccola. "Toward a Biology of Social Support." *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. Shane J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 519-526, 520.

<sup>76</sup> Sullivan, "Inheriting Racist Disparities in Health."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

to the political context that frames experiences of certain populations and facilitates the prevalence of mental illnesses among them. In order to adequately address mental health concerns among marginalized groups, hooks suggests that “the wounded African- American psyche must be attended to within the framework of programs for mental health care that link psychological recovery with progressive political awareness of the way in which institutionalized systems of domination assault, damage, and maim.”<sup>78</sup> Racist oppression must be taken into account as the cause of these psychological wounds in order to effectively alleviate its deleterious effects and continuation. Thus, according to hooks, we must possess a more robust understanding of the problem, which involves experiences within social structures of domination that shape the individual psyche, in order to work toward greater mental health and well-being for marginalized individuals.

I appreciate hooks’ willingness to look at the troubling effects of oppressive social experiences and her emphasis on the psychological toll of domination among the oppressed. My aim, in slight contrast, has been to illustrate how viewing the negative effects of oppression in terms of psychological harm and mental illness accounts for only one aspect of how social experiences of oppression negatively influence the well-being of marginalized individuals. As Wilson and Brennan have shown, oppressive social experiences do not only affect our psyches. They also shape our physiological, affective bodies such that the effects of oppression can be found in the negative affects that are dumped on marginalized individuals in ways that can (and often do) manifest in formally diagnosable illnesses. In addition to mental illness, then, oppression must also be understood in terms of how it can produce physiological illness among the oppressed.

Thus, a more robust understanding of the problem entails greater recognition of how oppression also works on and through our affective bodies.

The failure to recognize the negative affective effects of oppression leads to problematic consequences on at least two levels, namely, with respect to progressive theorizing and in terms of potential methods for therapy and resistance. If critical attention is directed to the psychological consequences of oppression but not its harmful affective, physiological effects, then efforts for therapy and resistance will target mental health concerns but leave questions of physiological health unaddressed. For instance, although hooks’ argument helps highlight an important gap in knowledge (albeit, perhaps, a *produced* gap) about the psychological effects of oppressive experiences, to place emphasis on the subset of negative psychological effects without explicitly accounting for other ways in which oppression significantly harms marginalized individuals might unintentionally participate, once more, in the production of a type of ignorance about the operative effects of social domination that enable its continuation. Participating in the tendency to “overlook” or dismiss the embodied, physiological, and affective effects of oppression can therefore be viewed as yet another example of how systems of domination operate in ways that can go unrecognized and, thus, continue without being

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<sup>78</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 138.

sufficiently challenged or effectively addressed. For, as hooks herself states, if we do not address the fullness of racial oppression head on then we can pretend that “we do not know what it is or how to change it—it never has to go away.”<sup>79</sup> By directing attention to the psychological harm of oppression but not the physiological harm of oppression, even progressive theorists like hooks can unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of domination by failing to take direct attention to the operation of

oppression on multiple levels, especially including the somatic and affective dimensions of our experiences.

As we expand hooks’ view of the psychological effects of oppression, it is not enough to simply acknowledge that negative affects and physiological illness can also be products of oppression. If it is the case that the political trauma inherent to situations of oppression produces negative affects, and if negative affects have the debilitating effect of hindering one’s flourishing and physiological (as well as psychological) well-being, then it is important to think hard about the political effects of negative affects in ways that critique their possible role in a larger system of oppression. An appreciation of the physiological, affective effects of oppressive experiences helps develop a more comprehensive philosophical understanding of the nature of social domination. It may reveal that the negative physiological and affective effects of oppression are politically and philosophically significant precisely because they function as a form of oppression. In other words, constituting a “physiology of victimization” among the oppressed may be one of the key mechanisms by which the systematic operation of social oppression is perpetuated and maintained. As Heather Love notes, “feeling bad *can* result in acting out, being fucked up can also make even the apparently simple act of ‘fucking shit up’ seem out of reach.”<sup>80</sup> The Chicago-based academic and activist organization, Public Feelings Project, also hones in on the affective operation of oppression. This “feltank” organizes an annual depression march where marchers wear bathrobes and slippers, hand out prescriptions for Prozac, and carry signs that say, “Depressed? It might be political.” Love explains that the aim is not simply to highlight that “the political landscape is bad but also that it makes you feel bad, and that it may make you less capable of taking action, or of taking action in a way that accords with traditional understandings of activism.”<sup>81</sup> Love’s analysis accords with my sense that if those in marginalized social groups are not only psychologically maimed but also physiologically disempowered then they may be less likely, perhaps even less able (due to weakened, devitalized, or sickened physiological constitutions), to resist the terms of their domination.<sup>82</sup> I will address this issue further in the final chapter when I develop

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>80</sup> Love, Heather, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, 161.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>82</sup> Anne Cheng makes a similar argument about the politically disempowering effects of negative affects in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.



the notion of a psychosomatically engaging practice that promotes the affective healing of oppressed people as a form of political resistance.

In conclusion, the intention behind this chapter has not been to undermine the importance of noting the harmful psychological effects of oppressive experiences. Instead, my aim has been to show how social oppression produces other detrimental effects on individuals that are seldom recognized but that must also be understood in order to effectively address domination and mitigate its negative effects on the oppressed. To dismiss how social experiences of oppression shape our physiological health and wellbeing, in addition to our psychological health, is to turn away from an aspect of our experiences that could be explored in ways that produce new conceptual frameworks and opportunities for “thinking against the grain.” When it comes to matters of therapeutic healing and practices of resistance for the oppressed, the negative affective burdens that result from living with oppressive social experiences show that it may not be enough to simply “think” differently in purely cognitive or psychological terms. It is also important to find ways to affectively “feel” differently in ways that support greater health, empowerment, and well-being. The next chapter will explore various methods for “feeling against the grain.”

## Chapter 3. Affective Therapies

The last chapter established that our experiences not only shape our psychological makeup. They also have the capacity to alter our physiological, affective embodiment. I noted how a lack of serious investigation into the negative affective consequences of harmful and traumatic experiences, including those that occur as the result of living in oppressive social contexts, can contribute to the perpetual accumulation of negative affects. I also suggested that the negative effects of affective burdens be viewed as a way in which oppression operates on and through the oppressed. The disinclination to view affective, physiological harms as central to oppression can inadvertently protect systems of oppression from critical scrutiny while simultaneously occlude insights about possible forms of resistance. A number of implications about methods for therapeutic healing follow from these claims. First, therapeutic methods that aim to help individuals heal from negative experiences will be inadequate so long as they only target mental health concerns—wellness must be encouraged on a holistic level that addresses both the psychological and physiological dimensions of well-being. In other words, affective therapies are in order. Second, because experience can shape our embodiment such that negative experiences produce and promote the accumulation of negative affects that are physiologically harmful, therapeutic promise may lay in experiences that produce embodied effects in the opposite direction—positive experiences may have the potential to produce positive affects that are physiologically beneficial. Affective therapy, then, might include the cultivation and production of positive affective experiences.

In what follows I discuss several methods for affective therapy. As I will argue, therapeutic methods that primarily focus on mental health and psychic states are often incapable of adequately addressing the affective, physiological consequences of traumatic experiences. One type of affectively-oriented therapy is found in the prescription of psychopharmacological treatments, such as anti-depressants, which are often used in conjunction with psychotherapy and can facilitate biochemical changes that serve a more holistic scope of psycho-somatic therapy. Other notable methods identify how to bring about these physiological changes by engaging the affects themselves rather than by altering affective states through prescription drugs. In the field of feminist theory, bell hooks argues that rage itself can be a particularly therapeutic and healing affect, especially when it motivates political action. Teresa Brennan's work on the transmission of affect suggests that a form of affective discernment entails the ability to resist taking on negative affective burdens from others. As hooks and Brennan help demonstrate, developing the skill of identifying and deflecting negative affects can be

exercised as a form of affective therapy insofar as it can help one resist introjecting negative affects and assuming them as one's own.

Another significant method of affective therapy that focuses on directly engaging the affects themselves, to which I pay particular attention, emerges out of the field of positive psychology. In general, positive psychology aims to build upon pre-existing strengths—what is best in life—rather than focus on “fixing” what is broken. When this orientation toward therapy is applied to affective experiences, positive psychology emphasizes the importance of building up one's affective constitution with positive affects such as gratitude and optimism rather than solely ridding one of negative affects.

As we will see, empirical studies support one of positive psychology's major claims; namely, that positive affective experiences have the capacity to significantly enhance one's physiological (as well as emotional and psychological) health and well-being.

I focus on the physiologically-significant, therapeutic potential of positive affective experiences because it is especially relevant for the account of philosophical reflection as a method of affective therapy that I develop in the final chapter. However, despite the helpful contributions that positive psychology brings to my own project, I end this chapter with some critical comments on the central claims of positive psychology. Even if positive affective experiences can promote greater flourishing and well-being in those who regularly possess them, understanding this phenomenon solely through the lens of positive psychology uncritically places too much emphasis on the positive affects of individuals and lacks sensitivity to the social and political contexts that inherently influence and frame such experiences. Without paying close attention to socially-relevant factors that influence whether, how, when, or why one is inclined to experience positive affects like joy, gratitude, and optimism (or not), the promotion of these affects to benefit some could unjustly occur at the expense of others' well-being. For example, consider the satisfaction, pride, and sense of achievement that one could enjoy from owning and operating a successful corporation. If such successes are gained by engaging in exploitative business practices that undermine the integrity, health, and welfare of employees, surrounding communities, or even the environment, it would be socially problematic to encourage the business owner to embrace and build upon these positive affects (even if they are healthful and beneficial to the owner) precisely because they arise from activities that hinder the well-being of others. In other words, the value of positive affects cannot be established simply from the fact that they are positive affects as opposed to negative affects. Furthermore, encouraging those in marginalized social positions to cultivate positive affective experiences without working, at the same time, to undermine the systems of domination that oppress them fails to account for the deeper, social realities that are largely responsible for the negative affective burdens among marginalized populations in the first place. In addition to creating a situation of treating the “symptom” rather than the root problem, advising the oppressed to be more grateful or joyful can minimize the social perception of the harms of oppression in a way that makes dismantling systems of oppression seem less urgent, perhaps even unnecessary. One might think, “Oppression can't be *that bad* since those who are

supposedly oppressed seem pretty grateful and joyful.” Before adopting the methods put forth by positive psychology, then, one must pay careful attention to the social realities that frame affective experiences and wonder about whose happiness and whose well-being certain positive affects support. Therefore, although I argue that positive psychology offers valuable insights about affective therapy, I reject positive psychology as an appropriate method due to its uncritical promotion of positive affects which could actually participate in and reinforce systems of oppression.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Psychopharmacology and Addressing Negative Affects

If our experiences also produce embodied effects that become manifest in our affective constitutions—such as the negative affective effects of violence, trauma, and oppression that can become detrimental to one’s physiological well-being—then psychotherapeutic methods that seek to alter psychological states to improve mental health are insufficient in their scope of therapeutic treatment. When it comes to relieving individuals of the negative effects of life experiences, therapeutic practices must be able to psychosomatically address the physiological, affective dimensions of our personal constitutions as well.

Elizabeth Wilson’s exploration of the psychosomatic connection between experience and embodiment references numerous anecdotes that highlight traditional psychotherapy’s limited ability to address the physiological consequences of our experiences. Peter Kramer’s description of one woman’s experience of becoming depressed after her mother was murdered provides an example of how traditional psychotherapy is, at times, not enough when it comes to therapy. Kramer writes, “[Lucy] had harbored a kernel of vulnerability that the psychotherapy did not touch. It was as if psychological trauma—the mother’s death, and then the years of struggle for Lucy and her father—had produced physiological consequences for which the most direct remedy was a physiological intervention.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the physiological, affective effects of our experiences must also be addressed, and this requires more affectively targeted methods than a psyche-oriented approach that is frequently found in conventional psychotherapy.

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<sup>1</sup> My critiques of positive psychology reflect the deep concern I have about how “therapeutic” practices can, even if unintentionally, reanimate and bolster systems of normalization and domination, which was discussed in the introduction. In this case, the “therapy” in positive psychology is problematic for multiple reasons. On one hand, promoting positive affects could evidence an attempt to “normalize” those who are marginalized by pathologizing and eliminating their negative affects, such as political rage, which deviate from and challenge the “norm.” On the other hand, promoting positive affects as “therapeutic” could also validate the positive affects one experiences as a byproduct of domination.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kramer, *Listening to Prozac*. New York: Viking, 1993, cited in Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 15.

In the past few years there has been a sudden increase in interest for moving beyond the cognitive-emotional landscape of traditional psychotherapy toward more affectively engaging routes of physiological intervention. For instance, research in neuroscience is proving to be valuable for developing “new affective and body oriented therapies” that can address such “affective issues.”<sup>3</sup> However, the interest in affectively-oriented psychotherapies is not completely new. Sigmund Freud was extremely interested in physiological experiences that emerge from psychological traumas, especially including the conversion of hysteria. Freud even sought to engage the affects through the cathartic method of therapy, where the analysand is encouraged to explore every thought, desire, dream, and fantasy with the aim of identifying the precipitating cause that led to each symptom of trauma.<sup>4</sup> Although Freudian psychoanalysis could be viewed as a foundational model of affective therapy, engaging with Freud’s work requires that one inhabit a particularly self-contained, discursive paradigm of psychoanalysis, which references things like the unconscious, specific mechanisms of repression, and a psychosexual meta-narrative. Without suggesting that these are inappropriate concepts to study in general, arguing for their therapeutic necessity and utility would require that one first work within the psychoanalytic tradition. I do not base my project in Freudian psychoanalytic theory because I disagree with its metaphysics of the unconscious and its account of psychosexual development, especially regarding the Oedipal complex.

Nevertheless, as new possibilities for “experiential, affective, bodily-oriented psychotherapies” emerge, it should be noted that there has already been a mainstream recognition and acceptance of at least one affective treatment in psychotherapy: psychopharmacology.

The psychopharmacological prescription of pharmaceutical drugs aims to alter physiological states and enhance psychological well-being. As such, psychopharmacology can be an especially useful method of affective therapy given that some experiences can eventually build up a particular type of affective constitution. For instance, Elizabeth Wurtzel notes, “It’s not just that an a priori imbalance can make you depressed. It’s that years and years of exogenous depression (a malaise caused by external events) can actually fuck up your internal chemistry so much that you need a drug to get it working properly again.”<sup>5</sup> Susan Brison echoes Wurtzel’s sentiments about the usefulness of psychopharmaceutical drugs when she argues that, in some cases, purely linguistic narratives cannot fully enable recovery from trauma and that “a kind of physical re-

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<sup>3</sup> Jaak Panksepp, “Brain Emotional Systems and Qualities of Mental Life: From Animal Modes of Affect to Implications for Psychotherapies.” *The Healing Power of Emotion: Affective Neuroscience, Development, and Clinical Practice*. Ed. Diana Fosha, Daniel J. Siegel and Marion Solomon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009. 1-26, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1957.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994, 346; cited in Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 25.

mastering of the trauma is necessary.”<sup>6</sup> Although Brison offers political activism and self-defense training as examples of what could enable the “kind of physical remastering” that she has in mind, Brison also specifically notes how “psychopharmacological intervention may be necessary in order to make psychic change physiologically possible.”<sup>7</sup> In Brison’s own recovery from the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that followed her experience of surviving sexual assault and attempted murder, therapy had to begin with direct biochemical treatment. Self-defense training and political activism were not enough to allow Brison to “even marginally” function because, as she describes, “My physiological state—oscillating between hyper-vigilance and lethargy, between panic and despair—made political activism (or even getting out of bed some days) impossible. It’s hard to see how I would have made it without pharmaceutical help.”<sup>8</sup> The experiences of Wurtzel and Brison are not unfamiliar to our culture (in fact, some may even worry that we are over-prescribed pharmaceutical drugs). They reveal that the need to therapeutically treat some individuals on an affective, physiological level has already been long-recognized through the extensive prescription and use of psychopharmacological drugs.

There are benefits to appreciating how psychotherapy can be effectively enhanced through the prescription of pharmaceutical treatments that target the physiological dimension of affective experiences. Although some might find the medicalization of post-traumatic stress symptoms disempowering or dismissive, as if biology dictates and produces the whole of one’s experiences, Brison suggests that recognizing the psychosomatic symptoms of trauma in one’s embodiment can also be validating. “In my experience,” Brison writes, “a diagnosis of PTSD (and subsequent treatment) can be empowering to a victim whose efforts to recover have been hindered by her (and society’s) belief that her injuries are “all in her head.” It can be more enabling to learn to work around—or to overcome—the symptoms of PTSD than it is to pretend that they are simply not there.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Brison’s diagnosis of PTSD was met with relief in part because it meant that her symptoms were indicative of “a neurological condition, treatable by drugs.”<sup>10</sup> This does not mean, however, that psychopharmacological treatments are the best or the only means for a type of psycho-somatic therapy that targets the affects.

Even while acknowledging that prescription medication was a necessary element of her recovery, Brison also explains that, on its own, pharmaceutical treatment was not sufficient.<sup>11</sup> A more nuanced understanding of Brison’s experience reveals that her sense of relief did not simply arise from the belief that pharmaceutical drugs would

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<sup>6</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 76.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. Brison goes on to explain, “The chemically enhanced communication among my neuro-

cure her PTSD. Instead, part of what contributed to the sense of empowerment and relief she experienced upon her diagnosis was the fact that the psychosomatic symptoms of her trauma—including her affective, physiological states—were recognized and validated as legitimate and worthy of explicitly addressing as part of a therapeutic regimen. The recognition and validation of affective experiences as worthy of treatment opens up other possibilities for affective therapy that extend beyond the scope of psychopharmacology.

bell hooks and Teresa Brennan suggest additional ways for addressing the negative affective effects of traumatic experiences by working directly through and with the affects themselves. Turning attention to the therapeutic potential of certain affective experiences maintains the goal in psychopharmacology of altering affective states to promote psychological and physiological healing and relief. However, rather than altering one's affects and physiological states by prescribing pharmaceutical drugs, hooks and Brennan respectively note how a certain kind of experience of and attention to affects can provide a vehicle for therapy. Although their approaches differ in significant ways, both hooks and Brennan pay close attention to how a deeper understanding and conscious awareness of the affects we carry can enable individuals to transform their negative affects into different types of beneficial affective experiences. They also point to how a greater appreciation for affective experiences can help one resist the further accumulation of negative affective burdens. Because of their similarities, then, it is helpful to analyze hooks' and Brennan's arguments for affective therapy through the affects side by side.

hooks' analysis of black rage in the face of racial oppression contrasts with more conventional evaluations of rage as a dangerous, irrational, or pathological affect by illustrating how some affective experiences of rage can be therapeutic. According to hooks, when black rage evidences a kind of "political rage against racism"<sup>12</sup> or "a just response to an unjust situation"<sup>13</sup> it can serve as an affective means of empowerment. As was noted in the previous chapter, hooks criticizes the tendency among psychologists to pathologize and explain away black rage rather than urging "the larger culture to see black rage as something other than sickness, to see it as a potentially healthy, potentially healing response to oppression and exploitation."<sup>14</sup> Chapter 2 also noted that the tendency to devalue, dismiss, or undermine experiences of black rage is not without (potentially indirect or unidentified) political purpose. As hooks explains, "It is useful for white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to make all black rage appear

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transmitters may have facilitated my getting out of bed in the morning, but it didn't tell me what to do next. It made things seem more do-able, but it didn't provide me with any reason for doing them." Brison also needed a "reconceptualization of the world and [her] place in it," which is a notion that will be further explored in the final chapter.

<sup>12</sup> bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

pathological rather than identify the structure wherein that rage surfaces.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, more than a simple misinterpretation of the potential value of black rage, the tendency to discredit one’s experience of rage—and thereby the claims of those who have such experiences— reinforces an epistemology of ignorance about racial oppression. It dismisses the symptom—rage—as hysterical, meaningless, and unrelated to the underlying cause— oppression—which evades critical scrutiny and investigation.

At the same time that hooks notes how rage is “at times a useful and constructive response to exploitation, oppression, and continued injustice,” she acknowledges that some instances of rage can be problematic, unhelpful, and unhealthy.<sup>16</sup> However, even “those particularly extreme expressions of rage which indicate serious mental disorder” should not be merely dismissed for they, too, can be understood as affective outgrowths of racism and oppression. hooks argues that “the complexity and multidimensional nature of black rage” must be understood in more sophisticated ways so that the psychological harm of oppression can be addressed without having to deny the more therapeutic forms of black rage.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, greater appreciation for the oppressive cultural causes of black rage and various types of experiences of it helps reiterate that rage is not itself problematic and thus does not need to be categorically denied, ignored, or pathologized. As hooks explains, “Many African Americans feel uncontrollable rage when we encounter white supremacist aggression. That rage is not pathological. It is an appropriate response to injustice. However, if not processed constructively, it can lead to pathological behavior—but so can any rage, irrespective of the cause that serves as a catalyst.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, if there is a “problem” with black rage, it seems to emerge only when the affect—rage— is not properly acknowledged, constructively processed, and expressed in politically empowering ways.

The importance of acknowledging, processing, and expressing affects for greater overall health and well-being might apply to all affective experiences, but it is especially relevant when it comes to therapeutically addressing negative affects in particular. Without being able to properly acknowledge and outwardly express negative affects, they can be turned back in on oneself in ways that result in more negative affects. For example, hooks mentions “the psychological displacement of grief and pain into rage” that can occur when faced with racial oppression.<sup>19</sup> In other words, although all affects grow out of social contexts, rage can also be the product of internalizing other affects, such as grief and pain. In this way, the tendency to internalize negative affects can be seen to build upon itself and create a complexly burdensome affective constitution for marginalized individuals. When the expression of black rage is not encouraged by social and cultural norms, even if (or precisely because) it is a justified response to racial injustice, the internalization of rage can also compound other negative affects that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27.



contribute to psychological and physiological illness. To illustrate this, hooks describes the intensification and frustration of a “killing rage” within her after experiencing a series of racialized events that led to more grief and pain within her. hooks fixates on a white man who, at one particular moment, came to personify the perpetuation of racism and explains, “I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly ‘racism hurts.’”<sup>20</sup> hooks, however, did not follow through with such actions, literally or metaphorically, and thereby endured the pain of her negative affects once more. She writes, “With no outlet, my rage turned to overwhelming grief and I began to weep, covering my face with my hands.”<sup>21</sup>

Finding constructive ways to express negative affects can be therapeutic because it provides one way to avoid the repeated introjection that can lead to their displacement, internalization, and compounding with respect to other negative affects. When anger and rage are understood in light of Brennan’s notion of the transmission of affect, their expression can be viewed as an attempt to relieve oneself of the complex of negative affects that have been unjustly dumped on her. Brennan explains that “while aggression may be fuelled by the attempt to relieve oneself of the weight of the other’s exploitation, the experience of that exploitation involves more than a nebulous “hostility”—the weight of the other is more likely to be experienced as depression, which can also be released through aggression.”<sup>22</sup> Brennan echoes hooks’ notion that not all expressions of rage can or should be dismissed as pathological, inappropriate, or misdirected. Instead, the expression of aggression, rage, and anger can be recognized as one aspect of a sophisticated and multivalent experience of many different affects that have to be dealt with in some capacity in order to restore one’s own affective balance.

When considered with attention to the social and political context that engenders and informs one’s experience of negative affects, the benefits of expressing rage appear to go beyond the simple fact that it mitigates the weight of one’s affective burden. In a context of exploitation, oppression, and subjugation, the sheer expression of rage can also create a moment where one claims and asserts the subjectivity and personhood that another denies her. As hooks notes, “My rage intensifies because I am not a victim. It burns in my psyche with an intensity that creates clarity. It is a constructive healing rage.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, rage can be experienced as a form of resistance. The political and personal significance of this expression has even gained attention as a viable form of affective psychotherapy from some psychologists insofar as “the experience and occasional expression of anger, in a regulated fashion, may be highly adaptive, leading to feelings of empowerment, assertion, and an overall sense of dominance. Affective

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 67.

<sup>23</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 18.

therapies that permit the honest expression of angry impulses could help set the stage for learning better regulatory strategies.”<sup>24</sup>

There are, however, potential concerns involved with embracing the expression of negative affects even in the name of a type of therapeutic resistance. First, attempts to shift the affective burden onto another can quickly engender a continuous process of transmission that hinders positive interpersonal relationships and interactions. By giving in to the desire to discharge and project negative affects, Brennan explains, “the arousal of anxiety...may make me party to an unjust idea, whose injustice is evident in the wave of aggression my ill wishes direct toward my enemy. These ill wishes, this judging wave of affect, also reinforce the fear and anxiety in my foe, for he too feels the threat from my animus, just as his animosity produced a corresponding fear in me.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, there is a risk that the negative affect one (perhaps justifiably) transmits can trigger and produce negative affects in another, thereby producing a cycle of negative affective transmissions that actually inhibit the formation of productive, supportive, and healthy relationships. Another worrisome implication associated with expressing one’s negative affects as an attempt at therapeutic resistance is that it can also lead to deleterious affective consequences for the particular individuals involved, which may actually reinscribe the affective terms of oppression that one aims to address. Research in neuroscience reveals that the more negative affects associated with anxiety, frustration, anger, and blame are “repeatedly rehashed, these patterns reinforce their familiarity in the neural architecture, thus becoming stereotyped and increasingly automatic and mechanical.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, expressing one’s negative affects might appear to temporarily alleviate the feeling one has of them, but engaging the negative affects in this way may also end up strengthening their hold and influence on *one’s own* affective constitution by reinscribing their presence in one’s physiology.<sup>27</sup> Without fully acknowledging the extent to which the transmission of negative affects strains interpersonal and individual well-being, in their introjection and perhaps even in the alleged “usefulness” of projecting them onto others, the notion of “resistance” through expressing negative

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<sup>24</sup> Panksepp, “Brain Emotional Systems and Qualities of Mental Life,” 12. This idea that the deliberate expression of affects is a mode of therapeutic intervention harks back to Freud’s work and the first formulations of psychoanalysis.

<sup>25</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 133.

<sup>26</sup> Rollin McCraty and Doc Childre, “The Grateful Heart: The Psychophysiology of Appreciation.” *The Psychology of Gratitude*. Ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 230-256, 242. This point would also support a critique against Freud’s cathartic method in psychoanalysis.

<sup>27</sup> The previous points by hooks and Brennan about how *not* expressing or processing negative affects like rage can lead to experiences of depression and leave one vulnerable to even more negative affects is also relevant here. For instance, the internalization of aggression can turn into depression, and extended durations of depression have similarly been shown to produce pathological anatomical changes in the brain, such as shrinkage of the hippocampus and weakened neural architecture. As Kramer describes in *Against Depression*, the neural, anatomical changes in a depressive’s brain mirror the experience of the depressed person and leave her more vulnerable to future episodes of depression: “It is fragility, brittleness, lack of resilience, a failure to heal” (61).

affects like rage will remain a potentially selfdefeating, albeit tempting, possibility for affective therapy.

Brennan's argument about the transmission of affect offers a more robust account of how engaging negative affects can detrimentally maintain their hold on one's constitution by pointing out the reciprocal relationship of projection and introjection required for transmission to take place. Although the cycle of negative affective transmission can proceed in a continuous fashion, this does not mean that we are all necessarily subject to the affects of others because, according to Brennan, the one who projects a negative affect "is dependent on the other carrying that projected affect."<sup>28</sup> Brennan notes that "[p]rojective identification requires unconscious complicity."<sup>29</sup> Dumping may be retained, or it may not...Tendencies to allocate affective responsibilities themselves encapsulate the direction in which the negative affect is pointing, and both parties more or less agree as to who carries it."<sup>30</sup> As such, the introjection of negative affects among marginalized individuals implies that one accepts one's subjugated

position in relation to others which, in turn, makes oneself vulnerable to taking on more negative affects in the future. Brennan explains that "self-pity means enjoying the phenomenon of being hurt, and this means setting up a relation between hook and fish; to dwell in the hurt is to accept the hook, to become the fish on the line. I would like to say that negative affects only ever find their mark if there is something within that accepts the hook."<sup>31</sup> Thus, although hooks argues that the expression of black rage can be viewed as an act of resistance, for Brennan the expression of negative affects like rage can reveal that one has already accepted one's subjugated position within an oppressive context. In other words, the eventual projection of one's own rage represents a culminating moment which evidences that one has already introjected negative affects from another.

In light of the reciprocal relationship between projecting and introjection of affects in order for transmission to occur, Brennan notes that "if freedom means anything, it is freedom from possession by negative affects,"<sup>32</sup> which would apply to both ends of the cycle of transmission—one would be free from having negative affects dumped on her by others and thereby also free of the need to express negative affects for her own affective relief. Brennan's point could be misconstrued as suggesting that oppression ends when there is no longer a felt need for resistance (as if oppression would go away if people just stopped paying attention to it or simply stopped caring to address it). However, it would be more appropriate to understand Brennan as identifying how resistance is

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<sup>28</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> This notion of "unconscious complicity" with respect to the negative affects that one takes on from others can be considered in a way that parallels Charles Mills' notion of how the oppressed "buy into" the system that dominates them by unknowingly participating in its operation. See *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

no longer necessary when oppression is no longer present. More specifically, since I am addressing oppression as it operates through the dumping of negative affects onto marginalized individuals, thereby unjustly burdening them with negative affects that they complicitly take on for themselves as well, the need to express negative affects as a mode of resistance would no longer be pertinent if one did not accumulate negative affects. One would be free of the affective terms of oppression—i.e., taking on negative affects from others—and would have less of a need to alleviate oneself of them.

Given that a disproportionate weight of negative affective burdens has been associated with marginalized individuals, Brennan's notion of a type of affective accountability may raise alarm as a form of "blaming the victim." Rather than primarily addressing those who unfairly project negative affects onto others—the oppressors—and working to prevent such detrimental transmissions from occurring in the first place, one could assume that critical attention is problematically directed to those who "accept" the negative affects of others—the oppressed. The implication, of course, is that the "victims" would now be further burdened by the task of preventing their own introjection of negative affects from harmfully affecting themselves. To acknowledge that unconscious complicity may be at work in the introjection of negative affects does not mean, however, that individuals are solely responsible for the weight of their own affective burden. In addition to understanding the physiological harms of negative affective burdens as constituting a mechanism of oppression, it should also be acknowledged that people in oppressed groups are often socialized to accept, or feel responsible for, the negative affects of others. This process of socialization, too, can be understood as a mechanism of the complex operation of oppression insofar as it contributes to the subsequent affective burdens that marginalized individuals carry. The gendered expectations of girls and women, for instance, can condition them to feel responsible for another's feelings such that they are encouraged to take on another's judgment or discomfort, thereby increasing their own shame, guilt, anxiety, or fear.

Nevertheless, even with a more nuanced view of the "unconscious complicity" of those who take on negative affects from others, those who project negative affects can still be held accountable for the harmful effects that their affects produce in others. Without denying that recognition of this latter point is very important, Brennan's presentation of affective transmission highlights an encouraging possibility for empowerment and affective uplift. While political energy can still be directed to changing oppressive systems and the actions of those who perpetuate them, one can learn to deflect and deny the entry of negative affects into one's own affective constitution. In other words, a form of affective therapy and resistance against the affective terms of one's oppression can be exercised by resisting the introjection of negative affects from the start.

Although the entire process of affective transmission often occurs without our conscious awareness, it is possible to cultivate a faculty of affective discernment that helps avoid the unintentional introjection of projected negative affects. Discernment, for Brennan, requires the ability to recognize when the transmission of negative affects is occurring, "to be alert to the moment of fear or anxiety or grief or other sense of

loss that permits the negative affect to gain hold.”<sup>33</sup> As Brennan explains, if I have the ability to “counter this anxiety and force back this invading affect, I am myself, and moreover, in a position to discern the workings of the affect within me. But I cannot discern it when I am driven by anger to act against my provocateur. Instead, I experience this drive as an inner propulsion. My ego has been engaged in a manner that permits the affect entry.”<sup>34</sup> In terms of utilizing affective discernment as a form of resistance, Brennan writes, “It takes an act of sustained consciousness, sustained because this resistance is precarious until or unless it becomes a habit.”<sup>35</sup> Like any other skill, then, Brennan notes that

cultivating a faculty of affective discernment is a preliminary step toward freedom from the negative affective burdens that others unjustly project that requires consistent effort, energy, and attention. Developing “an ability to consciously discern that the transmission of affect is occurring” is the first step toward gaining a sense of control over negative affective experiences and their effects on one’s overall health and well-being. Rather than being possessed by negative affects, one learns how “to detach from them, to know where one stands, to be self-possessed.”<sup>36</sup>

It is important to note that the benefit of affective discernment is not simply found in the ability to block projected negative affects. As Brennan acknowledges, “the personal discernment of the affects does not only require their resistance, it requires their transformation. More accurately, their resistance is their transformation...and the key to it lies in the change in direction effected by a concentrated change in thought.”<sup>37</sup> The transformation of negative affects can take many forms, and an insistence on their transformation is a shared component between Brennan’s and hook’s accounts of affective therapy. According to Brennan, “The negative affects are brought to a stop when a dyadic or binary loop is broken because the response to aggression is to resist it without violence. They are transformed when love or its variants (wit, reason, affection) reorder aggression.”<sup>38</sup> Although it is acknowledged that some forms of rage can erupt in aggression and violence, hook’s notion of black rage can also be seen to go through a certain kind of transformation that makes it a more constructive and resistant form of affective expression. For instance, hooks writes, “Progressive black activists must show how we take that rage and move it beyond fruitless scapegoating of any group, linking it instead to a passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible.”<sup>39</sup> Love, wit, reason, and passion for political freedom, then, can interrupt the cycle of negative affective transmission by not only blocking negative affects but also by transforming them into more helpful and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>39</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 20.

healthful affects.<sup>40</sup> Thus, affective discernment enables affective transformations and presents an alternative method for alleviating oneself of a negative affective burden.

The transformation of negative affects is more effective at mitigating affective burdens than simply projecting them back onto others precisely because it stops a cycle of negative affective transmission that detrimentally affects all who are involved. Affective discernment is the key, then, that supports one's own "mental health (do not allow yourself to be dumped on) and spiritual health (do not dump back)."<sup>41</sup> For this reason, the process of discerning and transforming negative affects may even be considered a virtuous process. Brennan describes "the refusal to pass on or transmit negative affects and the attempt to prevent the pain they cause others" as a form of kindness.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Brennan explains that such a "refusal carries an admixture of love that, when it predominates in the psyche, is also more than kindness; it is seeing the other in a good light, giving them the good image, streaming one's full attentive energy toward another and another's concerns, rather than one's own."<sup>43</sup>

Since my analysis of the transmission and transformation of affects is framed by attention to contexts of social oppression, it may seem inappropriate, or at the very least, misguided, to speak of a type of kindness and love that views the other in a good light and seeks to protect them from carrying a negative affective burden. In other words, just as it is problematic to "blame the victim" for taking on the negative affects of others, it may be inappropriate to suggest that those who are typically and disproportionately subjected to the projection of negative affects—marginalized individuals—are now further encouraged to discern and transform negative affects in a way that considers the well-being of another—one's oppressor—over one's own. In terms of fairness and justice, projecting negative affects back onto one's oppressor may not be *morally* unjustifiable. However, when oppression is understood as operating in and through our affective experiences, the projection of negative affects by marginalized individuals may be less effective for dismantling systems of oppression precisely because it reanimates one's position in a cycle of transmission that characterizes the affective terms of one's oppression. To take on and engage negative affects is to provide them with a hook, to grant them entry, and to invite the accumulation of even more negative affects, which can be harmful to individuals on physiological and psychological levels and harmful to interpersonal relations by feeding into a cultural atmosphere of hate, distrust, resentment, and fear. Thus, participating in the transmission of negative affects by "dumping" them back onto one's oppressor as a form of resistance may

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<sup>40</sup> Six years after writing *Killing Rage*, hooks also elaborates the necessity of love, especially self-love, for political resistance in *Salvation: Black People and Love*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001. hooks writes, "Love is profoundly political. Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth. Only love can give us the strength to go forward in the midst of heart-break and misery...The transformative power of love is the foundation of all meaningful social change," 16-17.

<sup>41</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

be morally justifiable, but it may not be the most politically or personally beneficial recourse for resistance.

Although a greater sensitivity to one's own affective experiences is crucially important for an individual's sense of (affective and political) freedom, control, and wellbeing, the significance of affective discernment stretches beyond the well-being of particular individuals. The ability to interrupt the cycle of negative affective transmission can contribute to an overall change in a cultural affective atmosphere. For instance, Brennan writes, "Optimism—or hope—repels rather than attracts anger and depression,"<sup>44</sup> and this effect might be found at the level of individuals and communities. As Brennan explains, it is not enough to simply avoid transmitting negative affects to others since such virtues "protect the one from the affects of the other, but they do not in themselves change the climate in which the negative affects flourish. That transformation requires the presence of love (and other progenitors of living attention, such as hope, reason, and faith)."<sup>45</sup> Thus, cultivating the ability to discern affective experiences in oppressive contexts provides a way to resist taking on negative affective burdens that can hinder one's own affective constitution, but affective discernment can also be socially beneficial by facilitating affective transformations that promote positive affects on a much larger scale. In other words, it is not enough to simply block or "dump" negative affects in order to get rid of them; consciously engaging with positive affects is necessary for personal and social transformation.

## I. Physiology and Positive Psychology

Positive psychology presents another method for direct affective therapy that emphasizes increasing positive affective experiences to support greater well-being. In addition to noting that psychopharmacology is an insufficient method of treatment on its own, positive psychologists support hooks' and Brennan's point that it is not enough to simply block or eliminate negative affects. In order to promote the most robust forms of healing, flourishing, and well-being, individuals' affective constitutions need to be reformed in ways that encourage and support the sustained experience of positive affects. For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the strengths and weaknesses of positive psychology as a method of affective therapy. The main claim of positive psychology—that building upon positive affects has a more profound effect on increasing well-being than simply eliminating negativity—is widely supported by empirical research which evidences that positive affects are beneficial on both psychological and physiological levels. As a mode of affective therapy, then, positive psychology could offer a highly effective method of counteracting the negative physiological effects among marginalized individuals that result from carrying negative affective burdens. However, a significant problem with positive psychology is that the literature typically lacks a

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

critical awareness of the social and political contexts that dramatically influence a particular individual's likelihood of experiencing positive or negative affects, which can be caused or informed by very different reasons depending on one's social location. Thus, although positive psychology's promotion of positive affects is compelling, the field will remain ill-suited to address social and political projects of empowerment and social justice if the experience of positive affects is not more carefully politicized. In other words, positive affective experiences themselves cannot be assumed as fundamentally desirable goods until they have been evaluated through a critical lens that explicitly takes their social, political, and ethical value and implications into account.

Positive psychology continues a psychotherapeutic tradition that seeks to help people live better in a way that evidences a keen appreciation for the physiological dimension of well-being in relation to building up positive affects. Martin Seligman captures this appreciation for how positive affects might influence the connection between psyche and soma when he describes his initial interest in the possibilities of positive psychology. As Seligman writes, "I was aware of a legion of anecdotes about people taking sick and even dying when helpless, so I began to wonder if learned helplessness somehow could reach inside the body and undermine health and vitality themselves. I also wondered about the inverse...Could the psychological state of

mastery—the opposite of helplessness—somehow reach inside and strengthen the body?"<sup>46</sup> By posing the question of how certain psychological states might have the power to differently affect the physiological body, Seligman introduces a key point of positive psychology: flourishing does not arise from simply negating or eliminating negative experiences like helplessness but rather emerges from building up their opposite—positive experiences.<sup>47</sup>

Seligman presents the emphasis on removing and eliminating negative affects as a point of critique against conventional views of psychotherapy and psychopharmacology, which typically assume that "the therapist's job [is] to minimize negative emotion: to dispense drugs or psychological interventions that make people less anxious, angry, or depressed."<sup>48</sup> As argued above, psychotherapy and pharmaceutical medicines can help curb the influence of negative emotions, even at the level of physiology by changing biochemistry, but these methods often cannot promote well-being on their own. As Seligman describes, "they remove the internal disabling conditions of life. Removing the disabling conditions, however, is not remotely the same as building the enabling conditions of life. If we want to flourish and if we want to have well-being, we must indeed minimize our misery; but in addition, we must have positive emotion, meaning,

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<sup>46</sup> Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York: Free Press, 2011, 185.

<sup>47</sup> The literature in positive psychology often does not clearly delineate psychological states from emotions or emotions from affects. In light of this, there will be some sliding on my part with respect to how I use the terms. For the sake of consistency, I will use "affect" whenever possible even if this differs from when the literature refers to emotion.

<sup>48</sup> Seligman, *Flourish*, 51.



accomplishment, and positive relationships.”<sup>49</sup> Seligman concludes that the most effective therapeutic method uses “the entire arsenal for minimizing misery—drugs and psychotherapy—and adds positive psychology.”<sup>50</sup>

According to Seligman’s model of positive psychology, the five major pillars of well-being include experiences of positive emotion, increased moments of engagement (or “flow”),<sup>51</sup> the cultivation of positive relationships, a greater sense of meaning, and feelings of accomplishment. As this model makes clear, affective (or emotional) experiences are only part of what makes up one’s sense of well-being. However, all of the pillars are interrelated in the sense that moments of “flow” are more likely to be experienced when one successfully engages in a project she believes in, which could thereby give her a sense of meaning and accomplishment. Furthermore, one may be filled with a positive emotion if she works with others who support her, thereby increasing feelings of belonging or of being appreciated, which in turn could reinforce her position within a network of positive relationships. Thus, even though positive emotion might appear to be only one component of well-being, it cannot be fully removed or isolated from the other factors that contribute to it.

In reverse fashion, the other pillars of well-being could also be viewed as fundamentally supporting the development of a positive affective constitution. Seligman’s description of his presuppositions as a therapist helps illustrate this point when he writes, “[A]s a therapist, once in a while I would help a patient get rid of all of his anger and anxiety and sadness. I thought I would then get a happy patient. But I never did. I got an *empty* patient. And that is because the skills of flourishing—of having positive emotion, meaning, good work, and positive relationships—are something over and above the skills of minimizing suffering.”<sup>52</sup> Seligman continues by explaining that “[u]nlike the skills of minimizing misery, these skills are self-sustaining. They likely treat depression and anxiety and they likely help them as well. More important than relieving pathology, these skills are what flourishing is...”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the pillars of wellbeing ultimately support a holistic experience of flourishing that largely results in rebuilding the affective constitution of an individual from various directions.

Each of the major constitutive dimensions of well-being are important and mutually supportive of the others, but there is good reason to start with a focus on the significant benefits of positive affective experiences in particular. Most importantly, positive emotions appear to provide the foundation for more robust manifestations of well-being. In her “broaden-and-build” theory of positive emotions, Barbara Fredrickson offers support for the idea that positive affective and emotional experiences have an effect on other aspects of well-being and flourishing. According to Fredrickson, joy,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>51</sup> The notion of “flow” was popularized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. See *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Rider, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

interest, pride, and contentment are examples of positive emotions that “*broaden* people’s momentary thought-action repertoires, widening the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind.”<sup>54</sup> Subsequently, “these broadened mindsets carry indirect and long-term adaptive benefits because broadening *builds* enduring personal resources”<sup>55</sup> that include physical, intellectual, psychological, and social strengths, which can be drawn upon later on to help cope with challenges and other difficulties. For instance, gratitude “builds and strengthens civil communities, and it builds and strengthens spirituality...[It] also builds people’s skills for loving and showing appreciation.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Fredrickson argues that whereas cognitive literature on depression documents “a downward spiral in which depressed mood and the narrowed, pessimistic thinking it engenders influence one another reciprocally, leading to ever-worsening functioning and moods, and even clinical levels of depression...the broaden-and-build theory predicts a comparable upward spiral in which positive emotions and the broadened thinking they engender also influence one another reciprocally, leading to appreciable increases in functioning and well-being.”<sup>57</sup> In short, some of the benefits of positive emotions are that they help build up other

resources for well-being that are found in cultivating stronger relationships and developing personal strengths.

Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory emphasizes that positive emotions help expand people’s thought patterns and enable them to think, act, and problem solve in more creative, open-ended ways that improve diverse areas of one’s experience, but the emphasis on broadening one’s thinking should not be misconstrued as merely a form of “positive thinking.” The somatic dimension of positive emotions—and positive affects—remain at the heart of the issue for positive psychology. For this reason, theories that promote positive emotions and affects cannot be conflated with attempts at therapy that simply follow a cognitively-oriented model of positive thinking. Models of “positive thinking” assume that emotions follow thoughts, thereby suggesting that one can control her emotions by controlling her thoughts. However, thanks to continued research in neuroscience, it is becoming clear that “emotional processes operate at a much higher speed than thoughts and frequently bypass the mind’s linear reasoning process entirely.”<sup>58</sup> This means that most emotions do not follow thoughts but rather “occur independently of the cognitive system and can significantly bias or color the cognitive process and its output or decisions.”<sup>59</sup> Our thoughts are affected by our emo-

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds.” *The Psychology of Gratitude*. Ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 145-166, 147. See also Michael A. Cohn and Barbara L. Fredrickson, “Positive Emotions.” *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 13-24.

<sup>55</sup> Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” 148.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>58</sup> McCraty and Childre, “The Grateful Heart,” 242.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

tions to at least the same extent, if not more so, that our emotions are affected by our thoughts. Thus, as Rollin McCraty and Doc Childre conclude, “This is why strategies that encourage ‘positive thinking’ *without also engaging positive feelings* may frequently provide only temporary, if any, relief from emotional distress.”<sup>60</sup> McCraty and Childre highlight the therapeutic possibilities of the affects themselves and suggest that “intervening at the level of the emotional system may in many cases be a more direct and efficient way to override and transform historical patterns underlying maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and to instill more positive emotions and prosocial behaviors.”<sup>61</sup> Said another way, the suggestion to intervene “at the level of the emotional system” is similar to Brennan’s argument for developing a faculty of affective discernment that enables one to disengage and transform the cyclical transmission of negative affects.

In addition to supporting the other areas of well-being such as stronger relationships with others, increasing one’s experiences of positive affects is a promising method for affective therapy because positive affects have been shown to produce direct physiological benefits. The psychosomatic significance of positive affects is consistently presented as a valuable feature of positive emotions and positive affects, such as when Brennan notes that the “attention that discerns and transforms the affects grows in climates of love and hope. That optimism also effects a biochemical shift (where different hormonal directions take over from others) is now a matter of record.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Fredrickson writes, “Two distinct types of positive emotions—mild joy and contentment—share the ability to undo the lingering cardiovascular aftereffects of negative emotions, a finding consistent with the idea that positive emotions broaden people’s thought-action repertoires.”<sup>63</sup> For the sake of space, I will follow Frederickson’s emphasis on the heart and highlight other pieces of literature that focus on the physiological benefits of positive emotions with respect to cardiovascular health.

The physiological significance of positive affects has been evidenced by reduced risks of heart disease. For instance, in study of nearly 1,800 healthy adults, those who rated highest in terms of experiences of positive emotions like joy, happiness, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment “experienced less heart disease, with 22 percent less heart disease for each point on a five-point scale of positive emotion.”<sup>64</sup> The significance of optimism is so great that it even appears to off-set risks to cardiovascular health from negative affects and lifestyle habits. As Seligman suggests, “All studies of optimism...converge on the conclusion that optimism is strongly related to protection from cardiovascular disease. This holds even correcting for all the traditional risk factors such as obesity, smoking, excessive alcohol use, high cholesterol, and hypertension. It even holds correcting for depression, correcting for perceived stress, and correcting

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> McCraty and Childre, “The Grateful Heart,” 242-243.

<sup>62</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 129.

<sup>63</sup> Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” 154.

<sup>64</sup> Seligman, *Flourish*, 192.

for momentary positive emotions.”<sup>65</sup> These empirical studies on cardiovascular disease support the idea that positive affects are not only psychologically healthful but also good for our physiological bodies, and it is the psychosomatic impact of positive affects that makes them such a promising vehicle for affective therapy.

The healthful effects of positive emotions should not be viewed as merely a type of “placebo effect” in the sense that people simply *think* that they feel better without evidencing any observable physiological changes.<sup>66</sup> To the contrary, positive emotions like gratitude, appreciation, and compassion are psychosomatically healthful in large part because they elicit physiological changes. For instance, it has been found that “appreciation increased parasympathetic activity, a change thought to be beneficial in controlling stress and hypertension” while compassion has been found to increase immune functioning.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the physiological effects of positive affects can be directly related to psychological health, which highlights once more the important psychosomatic connection between mind and body. As McCraty and Doc Childre write, “The importance of changes in the pattern of cardiac afferent signals is further illustrated by the finding that psychological aspects of panic disorder are frequently created by unrecognized paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia (a sudden-onset cardiac arrhythmia).”<sup>68</sup> In contrast, coherent and steady rhythms of one’s heart often are associated with positive emotions and feelings of security and well-being. The implication of these observations is that “interventions capable of shifting the pattern of the heart’s rhythmic activity should modify one’s emotional state.”<sup>69</sup> Wisdom from our everyday experiences already reflects an appreciation for the correlation between one’s physiological heart and one’s psychological emotional state.<sup>70</sup> For instance, deep, slow breathing is commonly advised to help cool one’s anger or settle one’s nerves. Research backs up this wisdom by noting that deep breathing works to alter one’s emotional state precisely because “changing one’s breathing rhythm modulates the heart’s rhythmic activity.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, since positive affects produce similar changes in the body’s rhythms, which also have an effect on psychological states, experiences of positive affects are psychosomatically significant—they affect both mind and body.

The possibility for physiological syncopation is commonly observed among heart and respiratory rhythms, but multiple rhythmic neurophysiological systems can also become entrained with other systems in ways that promote healthful benefits. For instance, it is possible to align other physiological oscillatory systems such as “very low

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>66</sup> See Peter Salovey, Jerusha B. Detweiler and Wayne T. Steward. “Emotional States and Physical Health.” *American Psychologist* 55.1 (2000): 110-121.

<sup>67</sup> Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” 156.

<sup>68</sup> McCraty and Childre, “The Grateful Heart,” 235.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>70</sup> For more, see Rollin McCraty and Robert A. Rees, “The Central Role of the Heart in Generating and Sustaining Positive Emotions.” *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 527-536.

<sup>71</sup> McCraty and Childre, “The Grateful Heart,” 236.

frequency brain rhythms, craniosacral rhythms, electrical potentials measured across the skin, and most likely, rhythms in the digestive system.”<sup>72</sup> When these physiological systems cohere with one another it can result in a phenomenon of physiological resonance, which functions in a similar fashion to resonance in physics. In physics, resonance is understood to occur when “an abnormally large vibration is produced in a system in response to a stimulus whose frequency is the same as, or nearly the same as, the natural vibratory frequency of the system.”<sup>73</sup> Physiological resonance occurs when the rhythms of different physiological systems cohere with one another in such a way that the functioning of the entire system is magnified and enhanced. Most importantly, resonance can occur during sleep and deep relaxation, as well as during experiences of positive emotions. Resonant coherence among different physiological systems leads to greater efficiency and effectiveness in metabolic functioning, thus suggesting that a link exists “between positive emotions and increased physiological efficiency, which may partly explain the growing number of correlations documented between positive emotions, improved health, and increased longevity.”<sup>74</sup> In short, empirical evidence supports the idea that positive emotions can produce physiological benefits and a more holistic sense of health and wellness by showing how positive emotions promote the coherence and overall functioning of diverse physiological systems.

Thanks to empirical research across various disciplines like psychophysiology and neurobiology, the psychosomatic significance of positive emotions and affects suggests that projects which increase positive affective experiences are one of the most promising avenues for affective therapy. Given its insistence on promoting positive affects as “the constituent phenomena of physical health, mental health, resilience, and well-being,”<sup>75</sup> positive psychology is a leading option for affective therapy. While positive emotions can help improve an individual’s physiological health, positive psychology emphasizes that they are capable of affecting many aspects of our lives. The use of positive emotions in positive psychology *holistically* promotes health and wellbeing in ways which simultaneously and continually build up personal, psychological, and social resources that enhance one’s ability to flourish. For example, Fredrickson writes, “Through experiences of positive emotions, individuals can transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated, and healthy. Individuals who regularly experience positive emotions, then, are not stagnant. Instead, they continually grow toward optimal functioning.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, in addition to improving our physiology constitutions—which is the most intriguing insight for my project—it seems that posi-

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Diana Fosha, “Emotion and Recognition at Work: Energy, Vitality, Pleasure, Truth, Desire & the Emergent Phenomenology of Transformational Experience.” *The Healing Power of Emotion: Affective Neuroscience, Development, and Clinical Practice*. Ed. Diana Fosha, Daniel J. Siegel and Marion Solomon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009. 172-203, 172.

<sup>76</sup> Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” 153.

tive affects are the key for overall growth, transformation, healing, and wellbeing. That is, at least, according to the picture that positive psychology could easily lead one to believe.

### III. The Politics of Positive Affects

While empirical evidence supports the central idea of positive psychology—that increasing positive affects does more to improve well-being than simply eliminating negative affects—there are highly problematic gaps in the literature that make positive psychology less appropriate for addressing the negative affective burdens of marginalized people in social contexts of oppression and domination. More specifically, positive psychology focuses on cultivating positive affective experiences and rebuilding affective constitutions without paying sufficient attention to the political contexts, ethical implications, or social realities that condition the experiences of particular individuals. By placing emphasis on changing people, or encouraging to them to alter their affective experiences, positive psychology fails to critically assess the social value and impact of certain affective experiences, who has them, and why they are experienced. This means that the value of positive affects such as gratitude or joy cannot be established simply because they are positive affects as opposed to negative ones.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, an appreciation for social relationships and political realities of domination, exploitation, and oppression makes clear that not all experiences of emotion—positive or negative—are equivalent to others. Depending on the social location of the person who has them and the circumstances in which they occur, the same affective experience can be characterized as an outlaw emotion that resists the status quo while at other times it cannot. In short, the fact that positive emotions can produce empirically-supported physiological benefits does not necessarily mean that they are good for politics and efforts of social justice. Thus, positive affects should not be promoted or encouraged on the sheer basis of their being positive affects. Before adopting positive psychology as a method of affective therapy, the value of positive affects must be critically understood through a social and political lens that is also concerned with questions of justice.

My interest in affective therapies stems from an appreciation for how negative affective experiences can create affective burdens that are disproportionately carried by individuals in marginalized social groups. The weight of oppression and domination is not just a psychological heaviness but also an affective burden that can be associated with physiologically harmful consequences. In the interest of alleviating unjustly distributed affective burdens, then, strength, health, and flourishing evidenced (or not) among the affective constitutions of particular individuals cannot be understood in theoretical abstraction. Just as hooks highlighted the importance of understanding that mental health concerns among African-Americans are products of a system of racial oppression that cannot be adequately addressed until the system that produces

them is identified and dismantled as such, affective constitutions cannot and should not be understood apart from the conditions that influence and shape them.

The concern that positive psychology “focuses too exclusively on the individual person, rather than considering the impact of neighborhoods, social groups, organizations, and governments in shaping positive behavior”<sup>77</sup> is not entirely unfamiliar to those in the field. Ed Diener acknowledges that the criticism is not only familiar but also well-founded when he writes, “Although there is research work in institutions, such as business organizations, it is true that most of the work in positive psychology has focused on the individual and factors within people.”<sup>78</sup> Without sensitivity to the social and political context that encompasses the affective experiences of particular individuals, proponents of positive psychology can unintentionally or inadvertently overlook causes of the affective distress and dis-ease that they set out to help people challenge and overcome. As a result, an unhelpful emphasis can fall on the affective proclivities of the individuals themselves as the cause of their continued suffering or struggle. For instance, resilience is often identified as a crucial dimension of flourishing, but the simple suggestion that one should be more resilient reflects an incomplete picture that can make it seem like those who flourish are resilient whereas those who do not flourish are not. As Fredrickson writes, “Resilient individuals experience more positive emotions than do their less-resilient peers, both at ambient levels and in response to stressful circumstances. These positive emotions, in turn, allow them to bounce back quickly from negative emotional arousal.”<sup>79</sup> Fredrickson therefore suggests that, as a result, “resilient individuals report fewer symptoms of depression and trauma.”<sup>80</sup> While I do not intend to discount the positive effects of resilience on the whole, Fredrickson’s comment does not adequately consider social conditions that increase one’s likelihood of experiencing depression and trauma, i.e., situations of domination, exploitation, and oppression.

Neither does Fredrickson acknowledge conditions under which one would experience fewer symptoms of depression and trauma, i.e., more just social conditions. Thus, as efforts are made to positively build up the affective constitutions of individuals, the removal of the “disabling conditions” of life to which Seligman referred above should include projects to dismantle unjust social conditions.

Given that the health and well-being of marginalized individuals is a central concern here and that radical social changes do not typically occur overnight, there are potential advantages to providing individuals with coping skills that help them maintain in unjust environments. Fredrickson suggests that one exercise “redirections of conscious thought” to find new ways to positively engage from within one’s circumstances that encourage the positive affects linked to physiological well-being and stronger social re-

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<sup>77</sup> Ed Diener, “Positive Psychology: Past, Present, and Future.” *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 7-11, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Fredrickson, “Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds,” 155.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

sources.<sup>81</sup> Unlike Brennan's argument for developing a faculty of affective discernment as a way to be consciously aware of affective transmissions as they occur in order to avoid introjecting negative affects, Fredrickson's presentation of redirecting conscious thought does not focus on the affects themselves, although the objective is still closely related to affective experiences. Instead, Fredrickson suggests that attention be shifted to objects and activities that produce different, more positive affective experiences, which, again, should be understood as psychosomatically significant. It is not simply a matter of thinking more positively but rather of focusing on and meaningfully engaging with aspects of one's situation that produce positive affective experiences. As Fredrickson writes, "For the most part, positive emotions take root when people find and enact positive meaning within their current circumstances. Although other routes to enhanced positive affective experiences exist (e.g., through diet, exercise, facial feedback), our habits of mind and action provide perhaps the most powerful leverage points for increasing positive affectivity."<sup>82</sup> However, despite the apparent physiological and social benefits of positive affectivity, it is not clear that finding ways to positively engage in one's circumstance does much for initiating deep social change where, when, and how it is needed (unless, perhaps, one chooses to focus and direct attention to meaningfully engage in efforts of community service and empowerment). Without explicitly promoting positive affectivity through politically-oriented habits of mind and action, "redirections of conscious thought" could implicitly enact an unhelpful turning away from difficult and problematic realities that are precisely what warrant closer attention. As Fredrickson evidences once more, value in positive psychology is often placed on an individual's ability to accommodate to a circumstance rather than the need to change or alter a situation that may be unjust.

It is important to maintain a keen political consciousness when reorienting focus toward positive experiences in order to avoid underemphasizing the negative effects of oppression in ways that can actually enable their perpetuation. Regarding efforts to overcome racial oppression, hooks writes, "Unwilling to embrace a psychology of victimhood for fear that black life in the United States would be forever seen as pathological, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century black critical thinkers and/or activists chose to embrace a psychology of triumph. They emphasized the myriad ways black folks managed to survive with grace, elegance, and beauty despite the harsh brutality of living in a white supremacist nation."<sup>83</sup> However, hooks underscores that despite the achievements of many black individuals, the perspective of a psychology of triumph "did not talk about the psychological casualties."<sup>84</sup> Living within a systematically white supremacist society is "fundamentally traumatic," and as hook urges, acknowledging the effects of racial trauma requires that one problematize and separate from a tradition

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Fredrickson, "Promoting Positive Affect." *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*. Ed. Michael Eid and Randy J. Larsen . New York: The Guilford Press, 2008. 449-468.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>83</sup> hooks, *Killing Rage*, 133.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*



of racial uplift that attempts to minimize the deleterious effects of a racialist system. Separation from a psychology of triumph is necessary because, as hooks observes, the “desperate need to ‘prove’ to white folks that racism had not really managed to wreak ongoing psychological havoc in our lives was and is a manifestation of trauma, an over-reactive response.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, it is still important to illustrate and highlight the specific ways oppression damages people so that its problematic nature cannot be so readily ignored or denied.

Emphasizing instances where oppressed people have “overcome” despite the disadvantages and social prejudices that they have faced has the added potential effect of making those who have not “triumphed” on their own accord appear inadequate, weak, or helpless.<sup>86</sup> In such cases, the fact that one does not possess certain types of positive affects could be used against her by others as a point of negative judgment in ways that seek to quell her efforts for social change and political resistance. An example of this phenomenon can be seen when those with feminist political commitments are criticized as being “too serious” by those who benefit from and enjoy the status quo. As Sara Ahmed describes, “Feminists, by declaring themselves feminists, are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness.”<sup>87</sup> In cases where those who are justifiably discontent with the social realities that condition their experiences are judged for their negative affects, praise and blame is inappropriately directed to those who are forced to respond to their experiences of oppression rather than the systematic structures that oppress them and those who participate in their perpetuation. Or, as Ahmed states, “feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists rather than about what feminists are unhappy about.”<sup>88</sup> As a result, promoting positive affects in too-simplistic ways presents a risk within positive psychology of actually maintaining an unjust status quo.

Another major problem with promoting positive affects of individuals without taking into account the social, political, and ethical contexts that frame them is that some people, depending on who they are and their social location, can experience positive affects that are conditioned by unjust situations or that result from directly hindering and harming others. To make the point as clear as possible, imagine an especially talented chemist who uses her personal skills, talents, strengths, and interests to develop a chemical agent that will be used for biological warfare against civilians;

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>86</sup> This relates to how the image of the “supercrip” functions with respect to disability, that is, the one who “overcomes” her disability in the eyes of dominant society. As Eli Clare describes, “On the other side of supercripdom lies pity, tragedy, and the nursing home.” See *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1999, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness.” *Signs* (2009): 571-594, 581.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 583.

a charismatic leader who motivates others to join demonstrations and lobby against equal rights for others; or a business executive who generates huge profits by exploiting laborers and short-cutting on regulations for waste disposal. Such possibilities reveal that people can experience positive emotions at the expense of another's well-being and flourishing. There is no safeguard against experiencing the other pillars of well-being, such as intense moments of engagement, strong relationships with others, and a sense of achievement, while engaging in socially problematic practices. Thus, although it may be a gross simplification to suggest that some people are happy racists, skillful eugenicists, and proud bigots, it is not an exaggeration to say that some people "flourish" precisely because their values, actions, and projects hinder the well-being of others. Furthermore, such practices are those that contribute to the negative affective burdens of those whom they disadvantage. Directly or indirectly supporting such lifestyles and practices in the interest of promoting positive emotions is therefore a highly problematic issue with which proponents of positive psychology must explicitly grapple.

In the interest of addressing the psychological and physiological harms of traumatic and oppressive experiences on individual well-being, the insights of positive psychology should not be wholly dismissed. Empirical research supports the personal experiences and theoretical perspectives that identify potential for therapeutic transformations by working directly through and with the affects themselves, but the direct use of affective experiences must be approached with sensitivity to the social, political, and ethical contexts that frame our affective experiences. The task that remains, then, is that of formulating an effective and socially responsible method of affective therapy that can mitigate the negative affective burdens of individuals, especially including those of marginalized individuals, without reinscribing the oppressive social conditions, political relationships, or affective transmissions that produce negative affective burdens in the first place. Increasing certain types of positive affective experiences can be a particularly useful strategy for affective therapy if and when sufficient attention is given to how social conditions inform or inhibit one's experience of positive affects. In other words, the most promising form of affective therapy will likely emerge at the intersection where positive psychology meets feminist and anti-racist political projects of resistance. The following chapter will unpack how such political projects can be integrated with the promotion of positive affective experiences to provide a form of affective therapy and a form of political resistance that encourages the health, well-being, flourishing, and empowerment of marginalized individuals.

# Chapter 4. Affective Therapy, Feminist Politics, and Positive Philosophy

I argued in the preceding chapters that the negative effects of affective burdens can be viewed as a means by which oppression operates on and through the oppressed. By constituting a “physiology of victimization” among the oppressed, systems of oppression not only psychologically maim but also physiologically disempower those in marginalized social groups making them less likely, perhaps even less able (due to weakened, devitalized, or sickened physiological constitutions), to resist the terms of their domination. I stressed the importance of recognizing the affective, physiological harms of oppression so that progressive efforts for resistance will not overlook the psychosomatic dimensions of oppression or inadvertently reinforce them by embracing negative affects as adequately resistant in their own right. Moreover, I noted that the psychosomatic forms and effects of oppression found in negative affective burdens call for a psychosomatically engaging practice that promotes affective healing and that such a mode of affective therapy could be considered a mode of political resistance.

Due to the psychosomatic dimension of harmful, traumatic experiences and the need for therapeutic methods that heal by engaging both psyche and soma, Elizabeth Wilson notes that “the combination of pharmaceutical and psychotherapeutic intervention seems to work better (on average) than treatment with either pharmaceutical or psychotherapy on their own.”<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the empirical evidence that supports positive psychology’s claim that positive affective experiences can facilitate this type of psychosomatic healing, Martin Seligman writes, “Cure, to my way of thinking, uses the entire arsenal for minimizing misery—drugs and psychotherapy—and adds positive psychology.”<sup>2</sup> As I noted in the last chapter, however, positive emotions should not be promoted simply because of the physiological benefits they might produce. It is highly problematic to encourage positive affects in cases where a sense of accomplishment, belonging, meaning, optimism, or happiness arises due to one’s involvement in unjust practices or because of oppressive beliefs that one might hold. The task, then, is to

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, “Organic Empathy: Feminism, Psychopharmaceuticals, and the Embodiment of Depression.” *Material Feminisms*. Ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 373-399, 387.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York: Free Press, 2011, 54.

identify ways to bring about the therapeutic effects of positive affects in a more appropriate and responsible manner. As an attempt to accommodate for the social, political, and ethical oversights in much of positive psychology while still acknowledging the empirically-significant benefits of positive affects, I claim that a specific approach to philosophical practice can provide an important and valuable affective means for psychosomatic therapy and political resistance, which could also be used in conjunction with other therapeutic methods.<sup>3</sup>

This final chapter combines the methods of positive psychology and feminist philosophy to provide a preliminary account of what I call “positive philosophy,” a method of philosophical reflection that cultivates positive affective experiences as part of a practice of radical questioning. I argue that developing the capacity to experience uncertainty and not knowing as affectively pleasurable engenders a powerful philosophical experience that can be personally and politically transformative, especially when one’s reflections focus on lived experiences of social oppression, domination, and empowering modes of resistance. To my knowledge, empirical research has not yet been specifically conducted on the potential physiological benefits of pleasurable affective experiences when they are directly related to epistemological states of not knowing, such as a type of enthusiastic wonder, excited curiosity, or joyful inquiry. However, building upon studies that show physiological benefits of positive emotion, I suggest that psychosomatic healing may occur when the affective experiences associated with not knowing are positively experienced as uniquely pleasurable. In this way, positive philosophy echoes insights from positive psychology about the importance of experiencing positive affects in order to enhance individual well-being in both the psyche and the soma. In contrast with positive psychology, positive philosophy explicitly acknowledges the broader social, political, and discursive contexts that frame such experiences. In addition to noting the unjust distribution of negative affective burdens carried by those in oppressed groups and recognizing that this pattern of introjection of negative affects is itself a mechanism of oppression, positive philosophy remains sensitive to the potentially oppressive influences of discourse when it takes the form of righteous knowledge claims. As noted in previous chapters, affective experiences are often used to justify or inform the assertion of righteous knowledge claims, but asserting righteous knowledge claims can inhibit productive dialogue and result in an affective stalemate that can

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<sup>3</sup> My emphasis on the potentially therapeutic value of philosophy counters Seligman’s personal experience. As an undergraduate student at Cambridge, Seligman studied Wittgenstein. While criticizing the “dogma” of “rigorous linguistic analyses” that focus on, what he calls, puzzles rather than problems, Seligman describes Wittgenstein “as an academic poseur” and reassures the reader (and perhaps even himself) by noting, “I did eventually realize that I had been turned in the wrong direction, and I started to correct my course by entering Penn to pursue psychology as a graduate student in 1964, turning down a fellowship to Oxford to study analytic philosophy.” He goes on to further explain the practical differences that he identifies between philosophy and psychology by writing, “Philosophy was a mind-bending game, but psychology was not a game, and it could, I fervently hoped, actually help humanity,” *Flourish*, 57-58. The aim of my project is to show that philosophy, especially when practiced in particular ways, can be especially practical and helpful to our experiences.

evidence a fundamental disagreement on matters of right and wrong. With respect to the interests of feminist theorizing, the reanimation of negative affective experiences might also strengthen their hold on one's affective constitution thereby exacerbating their detrimental effects on health and well-being. Furthermore, the production of righteous knowledge claims risks participating in the same discursive context that supports oppressive views and practices. Given that such risks are posed to feminist theorizing when it participates in a problematic form of discourse by asserting righteous knowledge claims, positive philosophy seeks to cultivate the affectively positive experience of pleasure associated with not knowing among individuals in order to resist and challenge the affective and discursive systems of oppression within which they live.

In what follows, I highlight historical and contemporary philosophical traditions that support the notion that philosophical practice can be therapeutic and use this discussion to differentiate my conception of positive philosophy from other approaches to philosophical therapy. By contrasting positive philosophy with the bodily-oriented practices of somaesthetics and the medical model found among the Hellenists, I clarify how positive philosophy is therapeutic not because it casts conventionally non-philosophical bodily practices as particularly philosophical or because it quells emotional distress by correcting false judgments. Instead, I argue that the therapeutic dimension of positive philosophy is presented by cultivating a specific type of psychosomatically significant affective experience that can arise from openly thinking, reflecting, and questioning without certainty, and that this type of affective experience which can accompany a state of not knowing is positive when it is cultivated as a form of pleasure.

As noted in previous chapters, some of the practical effects of cultivating positive affective experiences include increasing one's ability to discern and alter one's affective constitution such that one might resist the oppressive accumulation of negative affects and undo their harmful affective, physiological effects. Thus, while the type of pleasure at stake here is positive in terms of its valence (in the way that joy and gratitude are positive emotions and can be contrasted with negative emotions like anger and shame), for my purposes the most important characteristic of pleasure as a positive affect is its positive effect of promoting a greater sense of flourishing and well-being in one's psyche and soma. Moreover, the focus on finding pleasure associated with uncertainty and not

knowing serves to curb the discursive tendency to generate problematic theories in light of the positive and negative affects associated with satisfying the will to know. One must remain open to the possibility for error and embrace uncertainty. Doing so can result in the creation and discovery of new possibilities for resistance, for being with others, and for fashioning one's own existence which, in turn, can present new and unexpected possibilities for political transformation. As such, the practice of positive philosophy enables and already becomes one form of resistance to the psychosomatic mechanisms through which systems of oppression are maintained.

# I. Philosophy as Therapy

Before I develop my own account of positive philosophy as an affective therapy, it is useful to note that an appreciation for the therapeutic potential of philosophical practice can be found in a number of other historical and contemporary philosophical traditions. There are many intriguing similarities among these other approaches to philosophy and positive philosophy, such as an emphasis on the intimate relationship between the psyche and soma and theory and practice. Overlaps can also be found in how other approaches view embodied emotional and affective experiences as the ends which are to be altered through philosophical therapy and the means through which therapy occurs. However, the connections I draw between positive affective experiences of pleasure, not knowing, and psychosomatic, affective therapy as a mode of political resistance are unique. Briefly outlining other approaches to philosophy will help differentiate positive philosophy's engagement with the emotions and affects from other articulations of philosophy as a therapeutic practice.

Richard Shusterman's account of somaesthetics provides one of the most recent iterations of philosophy as an embodied practice—a way of life, in fact—that is understood to involve the “dimension of bodily experience, a quality of somatic feeling that lies beneath linguistic formulation and often resists it.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than being a strictly academic endeavor of the mind, the practice of somaesthetics and the embodied experiences it entails engage the soma for the practical aim of improving one's life. Highly influenced by thinkers in the American pragmatist tradition, Shusterman explains that “pragmatism incorporates the practical and the cognitive, along with the somatic and the social, as contributing elements in aesthetic experience”<sup>5</sup> that can engender beneficial transformations on personal and social levels. The importance of the soma for philosophical living is also evidenced in Ludwig Wittgenstein's work, which Shusterman captures by writing, “‘The human body is the best picture of the human soul;’ moreover its passions help constitute the human soul that philosophy has the task of reforming. Hence, ‘it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that needs to be saved, not my abstract mind.’”<sup>6</sup> In line with these philosophical influences, somaesthetics shifts the focus of philosophical practice away from linguistic exercises, concept creation, and theory production and opens it up to the somatic dimensions of aesthetic experience.

Acknowledging the role of the body in philosophical practice in this way invites a series of questions that challenge narrow conceptions about what it means to do

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*. New York: Routledge, 1997, 31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Shusterman also acknowledges that the work of other philosophers, such as the Hellenists, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Foucault, evidence the importance of “growth, integrity, courage, as well as truth and beauty” through the “cognitive and aesthetic, the ethical, social, and political, and also the somatic” dimensions of philosophical life, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

philosophy, questions such as, “Philosophy has often been described as the life of the mind, but to what extent can bodily practices (e.g. diet and exercises of somatic fitness and awareness) form part of the philosophical life?”<sup>7</sup> Although theorizing can still be considered a major aspect of philosophical practice, Shusterman notes that “[p]hilosophy can aim more directly at the practical end of improving experience by advocating and embodying practices which achieve this. And if the practice of linguistic invention provides one such tool, why can’t the practice of somatic disciplines focusing on nondiscursive experience provide a complementary other?”<sup>8</sup> As such, Shusterman’s account of somaesthetics advocates for the integration of “bodily disciplines [like yoga, mindfulness meditation, and t’ai chi ch’uan] into the very practice of philosophy. This means practicing philosophy not simply as a discursive genre, a form of writing, but as a discipline of embodied life. One’s philosophical work, one’s search for truth and wisdom, would not be pursued only through texts but also through somatic exploration and experiment.”<sup>9</sup>

Painting, dancing, and gardening could also be examples of practices that have not been conventionally conceived as philosophical in their own right but that might perhaps be understood as integral elements to one’s philosophical practice.<sup>10</sup> In general, I am sympathetic to these projects of philosophical expansion and do not wish to deny that important philosophical insights can be gained from pursuing other practices as philosophical, especially those that involve, engage, or produce effects (and/or affects) on and in the body of the one who undertakes them. When philosophy is understood as a type of ascesis, a movement beyond oneself that transforms the subject through a process of straying afield of what one already is and already knows, it is quite feasible to think of other ascetic practices that incur similar transformative effects.<sup>11</sup> Something like dance might then be understood as itself philosophical, which is a stronger claim than simply saying that philosophy can inform or interpret forms of dance, or even that experiences of dance might lead one to ask different philosophical questions. However, showing that other forms of embodied practices are philosophical and engaging in these practices as practices of transformation are not central to positive philosophy as I conceive it. Instead, the significance of bodily experiences in positive philosophy is located within the realm of theorizing in a more traditional sense. In other words, positive philosophy directs attention to the type of somatic experiences that emerge when one explores concepts and arguments in relation to truth and knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>10</sup> For an example of this, see Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 136-192. See also Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: a Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 1-14 and *Practicing Philosophy*, 1-15.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1985, 8.

One can find autobiographical accounts from contemporary theorists who describe, often as a part of their theorizing, how philosophical thinking has been integral to their own healing and therapeutic transformation. For instance, while describing her experience of recovery from sexual assault and attempted murder, Susan Brison writes, “The chemically enhanced communication among my neurotransmitters [from Prozac] may have facilitated my getting out of bed in the morning, but it didn’t tell me what to do next. It made things seem more do-able, but it didn’t provide me with any reason for doing them.”<sup>12</sup> Although Brison acknowledges that medication was a necessary element of her recovery, she also explains that, on its own, pharmaceutical treatment was not sufficient; Brison also needed a philosophically-informed “reconceptualization of the world and [her] place in it.”<sup>13</sup> She needed a type of healing that can arise from philosophically rethinking what one thought she was and knew.

bell hooks is another prominent contemporary theorist who frequently defends the notion that engaging in theory can offer a type of therapeutic healing. Regarding her personal experience, hooks explains, “I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.”<sup>14</sup> There are also moments when hooks explicitly suggests that she prefers a therapeutic approach to theorizing over pharmaceutical treatments, such as when she writes, “I’m really interested, more and more, in how we can link theorizing to a concern with healing. I would much rather people be able to grow emotionally, be more able to cope with pain by reading feminist theory than by taking Prozac.”<sup>15</sup>

The idea that transformation through standard approaches to theorizing—i.e., reading, writing, reflecting, and engaging in thoughtful dialogue with others—can be understood and experienced as therapeutic is not new, however. It harks back to the historical foundations of Western philosophy in Hellenistic traditions of the Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans, and Skeptics that viewed philosophy as a way of life, “a mode-of-existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life.”<sup>16</sup> As the work of scholars like Pierre Hadot and Martha Nussbaum persuasively illustrate, the Hellenists valued philosophy for its role in promoting happiness, improving one’s life, and enabling one to face future challenges.<sup>17</sup> According to this ideal of a “practical and compassionate philosophy,”

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 78.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994, 59.

<sup>15</sup> bell hooks and Tanya McKinnon, “Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private.” *Signs* 21.4 (Summer, 1996): 814-829, 827.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*. Trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995, 265.

<sup>17</sup> See also Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*.



“philosophy exists for the sake of human beings, in order to address their deepest needs, confront their most urgent perplexities, and bring them from misery to some greater measure of flourishing.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the Hellenistic thinkers viewed philosophical practice as a necessary and superior route to the good life.<sup>19</sup>

Nussbaum explains that the good things people want, such as flourishing and calm, were presumed by the Hellenists to be acquired “only through a lifelong commitment to the pursuit of argument. Other figures in culture—soothsayers, magicians, astrologers, politicians—all claim to provide what people want, without asking them to think critically and argue.”<sup>20</sup> Therapeutic philosophical arguments, then, provided the crucial mechanism for healing and well-being as arguments. This was their purpose. Rather than being valued for their own sake, the point of logic, reason, argumentation, and definitional precision, and the point of philosophy “insofar as it is wedded to them, is understood to be, above all, the achievement of flourishing in human lives. And the evaluation of any particular argument must concern itself not only with the logical form and truth of premises, but also with the argument’s suitability for the specific maladies of its addressees.”<sup>21</sup> More specifically, the Hellenists claimed that the therapeutic aspect of philosophy is realized through correcting the personal and social maladies that arise from false beliefs. Of particular importance for the Hellenists is how judgments and beliefs are viewed as intimately connected to the passions and emotions such that false beliefs produce distressing emotional experiences.

Similar to threads within contemporary feminist epistemology, the Hellenists acknowledged that emotions possess cognitive content and that “specific social conditions shape emotion, desire, and thought.”<sup>22</sup> According to the Hellenistic philosophers, false beliefs about things like money and status evidence that “society is not in order as it is; and, as the source of most of their pupils’ beliefs and even their emotional repertory, it has infected them with its sickness.”<sup>23</sup> The project of philosophical therapy among the Hellenists, then, is to use philosophical arguments to remedy personal and social ills. To accomplish this, a “good philosophical argument must be searchingly personal, bringing to light and then treating the beliefs that the interlocutor has acquired from acculturation and teaching, including many that are so deeply internalized that they are hidden from view.”<sup>24</sup> One should also note here that these beliefs are so deeply inter-

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Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 3-47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup> A contemporary example of this type of philosophical therapy is most clearly found in philosophical counseling. Philosophical practitioners meet with clients and use traditional philosophical texts to address issues like marriage, divorce, death, and even questions of ethics. Lou Marinoff is one of most influential scholar’s on philosophical counseling in the United States. For more, see his book, *Plato, Not Prozac!* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, xi.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

nalized that they become part of one's emotional constitution. Thus, the relationship between social conditions and one's emotional experiences means that the "diagnosis of the diseases of the passion becomes the basis of a diagnosis of political disorder."<sup>25</sup> For this reason, working to understand and address the emotional constitutions of individuals is a central aspect of therapeutic philosophical arguments that aim for personal and social transformation.<sup>26</sup>

Because the passions and their subtending beliefs and judgments are the target of therapeutic arguments, the Hellenistic approach to philosophical therapy involves special attention on one's emotional experiences. On one hand, given the Hellenistic position that implicit judgments inform emotional responses, the cognitive content of emotions cannot be taken for granted. Instead, emotions are themselves worthy objects of investigation. As Nussbaum explains, "If passions are formed (at least in part) out of beliefs or judgments, and if socially taught beliefs are frequently unreliable, then passions need to be scrutinized in just the way in which other socially taught beliefs are scrutinized."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, since emotions are presumed to be fundamentally built upon certain judgments and beliefs, even if those beliefs are not explicitly recognized by the one who possesses them, one does not need to turn away from philosophy to alter emotional experiences. Instead, philosophical argumentation is viewed as an especially apt means for therapy. Or, as Nussbaum writes, "To use philosophical argument to modify the passions, the philosopher does not have to turn away from her commitment to reasoning and careful arguments: for the passions are made up out of beliefs and respond to arguments."<sup>28</sup>

Therapy and healing are so fundamental to the Hellenistic conception of philosophical arguments that the philosopher is described as "a compassionate physician."<sup>29</sup> By adopting a medical model of philosophy, the Hellenists draw an analogy between the practices of philosophy and medicine—as medicine heals the body, philosophy heals the soul. According to the Hellenists, "Philosophy heals human diseases, diseases produced by false beliefs. Its arguments are to the soul as the doctor's remedies are to the body. They can heal, and they are to be evaluated in terms of their power to heal. As the medical art makes progress on behalf of the suffering body, so philosophy for the soul in distress."<sup>30</sup> Although the therapeutic approach of the Hellenists pays close attention to emotions and passions in a way that might suggest that their method provides a type of psychosomatic therapy, it must be remembered that emotions and passions are intimately related to judgments and errors of cognition. Emotional distress is a psychologically-related, cognition-centered disease of the soul. Thus, the medical

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

analogy highlights the soul as the proper object of philosophical therapy, and this is consistently and explicitly contrasted with how medicine heals the body.<sup>31</sup>

To do philosophical therapy is to pursue a kind of theorizing, thinking, and argumentative project that simultaneously blends the philosophical with psychologically and affectively related experiences. Because the emotional distress arises from false beliefs, Nussbaum explains that “medical philosophy, while committed to logical reasoning, and to marks of good reasoning such as clarity, consistency, rigor, and breadth of scope, will often need to search for techniques that are more complicated and indirect, more psychologically engaging, than those of conventional deductive or dialectical argument.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, in order to be therapeutic and fit a medical model, arguments do not need to abandon the essential characteristics that make them philosophical. They do, however, have to be cognitively and psychologically engaging insofar as eliciting emotions and affective experiences helps bring their underlying judgments to the surface and make them available for rational investigation. The task of philosophical therapy in this sense “requires delving deep into the patient’s psychology and, ultimately, challenging and changing it. Calm dialectic does not probe deep enough to elicit hidden fears, frustrations, angers, attachments. If confusions are rooted deeply enough, it will not find them.”<sup>33</sup>

Insofar as therapeutic arguments work to change a person by engaging her reason, emotion, and affect, the practice of medical philosophy among the Hellenists is a precedent to positive philosophy. However, despite an insistence on therapeutically engaging and altering the emotions through philosophical arguments for personal and political change, there are some very important differences between the Hellenistic approach to philosophy and my account of positive philosophy as a method for affective therapy. First, as found especially among the Stoics, Hellenistic schools “do not simply analyze the emotions, they also urge, for the most part, their removal from human life.”<sup>34</sup> The Hellenists generally use philosophy to extinguish the pull of one’s

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<sup>31</sup> One can find instances where therapeutic arguments are described as producing healthful somatic effects in one’s body. For example, Seneca explains, “I am writing down some healthful practical arguments, prescriptions for useful drugs; I have found them effective in healing my own ulcerous sores, which, even if not thoroughly cured, have at least ceased to spread,” *Moral Epistles*, quoted in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 316. Nikidion, historically identified as a pupil of Epicurus but imaginatively used by Nussbaum to highlight differences among the Hellenistic schools, turns to the Stoics because she recognizes that doing philosophy can improve her life in ways that are good for her health. As Nussbaum writes, Nikidion “wants philosophy to be part of her health, not just an agent of cure...For the way she hopes to improve her life is by the control provided by understanding and reasoning. The very exercise she values in philosophy also makes her healthier,” *The Therapy of Desire*, 321. The Stoics employ the medical analogy more than the other Hellenists but do not push the analogy into more literal territory. The focus is still on “the diseased soul” and philosophy’s medical function is, “above all, that of *toning up* the soul,” Nussbaum, 316-317.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

emotions in the interest of maintaining one's equanimity.<sup>35</sup> According to this view, greater contentment, flourishing, and well-being are attained through the extirpation of the passions. Second, the Hellenists seek to use philosophical arguments to stir the hearer on multiple levels. Such methods are also apparent in how Socrates thinks it impossible to directly teach others how to be virtuous so instead attempts "to affect their emotions and promote a sort of disequilibrium in the souls of his audience that might lead them to further examine themselves."<sup>36</sup> As Marina McCoy notes, Socrates does not attempt to gratify and please his audience; instead, "Socrates' aim is to anger and upset them."<sup>37</sup> Philosophical arguments, then, have been employed to intentionally elicit a range of emotional states and affective experiences such as anger, shame, self-doubt, and confusion in order to initiate further philosophical reflection.<sup>38</sup> Informing all of this emotional excitation and extirpation, however, is the notion that therapeutic arguments work by identifying and correcting false beliefs. In fact, it is precisely because emotions are understood to reflect underlying judgments and beliefs that correcting false beliefs would work to eliminate emotional distress. In other words, the medical model of Hellenistic schools uses philosophical arguments to sift through true and false beliefs.

As will become clearer in the next section, these three factors—extinguishing the passions, eliciting a wide range of emotional and affective experiences, and correcting false beliefs—as well as the relation of philosophical therapy to somatic well-being, represent key, albeit subtle, differences between the Hellenistic approach to philosophy as a mode of therapy and my account of positive philosophy as a psychosomatically engaging practice of affective therapy. Nevertheless, a quick explanation of these differences will be helpful here. First, positive philosophy holds as its end the alleviation of detrimental effects of negative affective burdens, especially among oppressed groups since these affective burdens are viewed as a way in which oppression psychosomatically operates on and through the oppressed. This does not, however, amount to the extirpation of emotional responses and affective experiences. A more specific articulation of the goals of positive philosophy would be the elimination and transformation of negative affects and the deliberate cultivation of more psychosomatically beneficial positive affective experiences. Second, as was discussed in the first chapter, I do not deny that a wide range of emotions and affective experiences can helpfully motivate further thinking and reflection. Outlaw emotions, for instance, can be especially useful for identifying problematic concepts, theories, and practices that warrant further investigation. However, in the interest of facilitating a type of psychosomatic healing through philosophical reflection, I pay attention to one type of affective experience in particular: a pleasurable affective experience that can be associated with the capacity

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 359-401.

<sup>36</sup> Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 84.

to not know with certainty. The emphasis that I place on the therapeutic potential of affective experiences associated with uncertainty provides a third difference between the Hellenistic schools and positive philosophy. Rather than healing by correcting false beliefs in a way that suggests a relationship to knowledge of truth, positive philosophy seeks to cultivate a different affective orientation to not knowing. As the therapeutic potential of philosophical practice shifts away from practices of knowing, strict attention to the truth or falsity of beliefs as the basis for healing becomes less central. Thus, the practice of positive philosophy consists in cultivating the ability to take pleasure in openly and critically reflecting on social realities without the need to know solid answers, assert firm truths, or even possess “more correct beliefs.” Since righteous knowledge claims participate in an oppositional discourse of asserting right and wrong and have the tendency to foreclose possibilities for thinking, acting, and connecting with others, being open to one’s own uncertainty and not knowing, and positively experiencing this as a type of pleasure, involves refining one’s practice of thinking rather than correcting the status of one’s knowing.

Finally, a significant difference between the Hellenistic view of philosophical therapy and positive philosophy is that I want to explicitly challenge the assumption that medicine tends to the body’s illnesses while philosophy merely tends to problematic beliefs in one’s soul. A central part of my argument is that philosophy has therapeutic capacities precisely because it can address physiologically significant symptoms and consequences of oppression that are found in and exacerbated by negative affects. Thus, even though my project follows the Hellenistic preference for a medical conception of philosophy, my argument pushes the limits of the medical analogy. Philosophy does not simply heal the diseased soul or sickly mind by correcting false beliefs. Instead, my suggestion is that philosophical reflection might also heal the body by generating positive affective experiences that could be physiologically beneficial and healthful. It could be said, then, that positive philosophy is a psychosomatically engaging, therapeutic practice that centers on the cultivating positive experiences associating with the practice of thinking.

## **II. Positive Affective Experiences, Pleasure, and Not Knowing**

Positive philosophy provides a psychosomatically therapeutic conception of the connection between thinking and affective experiences in a way that supports an increase in positive affectivity for greater well-being. However, the paramount relationship between positive affective experiences and thinking for positive philosophy is different from connections that have been drawn among positive psychologists about positive affects and thinking. Positive psychology contrasts positive and negative affects with respect to how they influence thinking and suggests that positive affects improve one’s

thinking in ways that negative affects do not. In other words, according to positive psychology, feeling better helps one think better. The tendency in positive psychology to privilege positive affects over negative affects solely by virtue of the positive effects that they can produce has already been shown to be problematic when those positive affects arise from oppressive practices and beliefs. The emphasis that positive psychology places on positive affects for their presumably positive effects on thinking is also troubling because it does not fully account for how positive affects can problematically influence thinking or how negative affects can productively influence thinking. As such, the distinction within positive psychology between positive and negative affects with respect to thinking is insufficiently developed. More importantly, I argue that such focus on the effects of positive affects on thinking is misplaced. Rather than noting how positive affects might improve one's thinking, positive philosophy directs attention to how improving one's thinking can result in positive affects. In other words, the inverse relationship between positive affects and thinking is shown to be significantly therapeutic insofar as thinking better in ways that engender positive affective experiences can help one feel better overall.

A major point of emphasis in positive psychology is the claim that positive emotions are important because they improve one's thinking and ability to problem solve. As Alice Isen notes, "All else being equal, positive affect tends to promote exploration and enjoyment of new ideas and possibilities, as well as new ways of looking at things. Therefore, people who are feeling good may be alert to possibilities and may solve problems both more efficiently and more thoroughly than [nonhappy] controls."<sup>39</sup> The benefits of "pleasant feelings" are frequently contrasted with the effects of negative affects on one's ability to think. In addition to increasing one's cognitive flexibility by enabling one to "switch perspectives or focus, see connections among relatable concepts, or hold multiple considerations in mind at once,"<sup>40</sup> positive affect "brings to mind (i.e., primes) a wider and more diverse range of ideas and recollections than does negative affect or a neutral mood."<sup>41</sup> Thus, positive emotions associated with being in a good mood help broaden one's thinking in ways that are presumed to support greater problem solving.

The tendency to contrast positive affects with negative affects with respect to how they differently shape one's thinking is also evident in Martin Seligman's work. Seligman writes, "Positive mood produces broader attention, more creative thinking, and more holistic thinking. This is in contrast to negative mood, which produces narrowed attention, more critical thinking, and more analytic thinking. When you're in a bad mood, you're better at 'what's wrong here?' When you're in a good mood, you're bet-

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<sup>39</sup> Cited by Leonard Berkowitz, in *Causes and Consequences of Feelings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Alice Isen, "A Role for Neuropsychology in Understanding the Facilitating Influence of Positive Affect on Social Behavior and Cognitive Process." *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 503-518, 505.

<sup>41</sup> Berkowitz, *Causes and Consequences of Feelings*, 137.

ter at ‘what’s right here?’”<sup>42</sup> Given that Seligman’s research as a positive psychologist encourages a shift toward increasing positive experiences rather than focusing on ridding oneself of negative experiences, using positive emotions to creatively think about what is right is implicitly presented as a more desirable pattern of thinking than using negative emotions to critically analyze what is wrong. This valuation becomes evident in the next sentence where Seligman writes, “Even worse: when you are in a bad mood, you fall back defensively on what you already know...”<sup>43</sup>

Such an overly simplistic presentation of the influence that positive and negative affects can have on thinking is problematic insofar as it can quickly undermine the epistemological value of negative outlaw emotions. While one could grant that positive and negative moods, affects, emotions, and feelings differently influence how one thinks and to what one pays attention, distinguishing them simply in light of their positive and negative valence does not necessarily establish which ones are better for thinking.<sup>44</sup> In different situations and among different people with different experiences and social locations, positive and negative affects can broaden or narrow one’s thinking, cloud or clarify one’s ability to identify and understand new problems. As Chapter 1 illustrated, how anger, pride, fear, love, shame, or gratitude influence one’s thinking depends on multiple factors that go beyond whether one is influenced by positive or negative emotions. As seen in cases where outlaw emotions help identify instances of oppression in ways that support projects for greater justice, negative affects like anger and rage might highlight problems that should be fixed. In such cases, noting what is wrong with the status quo rather than shifting attention to what is right is a valuable aspect of outlaw emotions that can productively influence further thinking. Thus, even if one granted the position of positive psychologists that positive feelings help encourage new ways of thinking, this does not necessarily mean that negative affects cannot promote further thinking and reflecting in valuable ways.<sup>45</sup>

The distinction that positive psychology draws between positive and negative affects with respect to thinking is also problematic because it fails to appreciate how positive

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<sup>42</sup> Seligman, *Flourish*, 80.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> With respect to positive and negative affects, it is possible to challenge the idea that positive affects are better than negative affects with respect to thinking while still affirming the empirical evidence that comes out of positive psychology, which suggests that positive affects are better than negative affects when it comes to physiological health and individual well-being.

<sup>45</sup> Although I noted hooks’ emphasis on the political value of black rage in previous chapters, she has also written about loving blackness in ways that echo positive psychology’s take on how positive emotions can support new ways of thinking. For instance, hooks writes, “Collectively, black people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination. Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life,” *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 162. In this case, black self-love would be considered a positive outlaw emotion that supports empowered ways of being.

and negative affects can both limit patterns of thinking by leading to the problematic assertion of righteous knowledge claims. While it may be easy to identify instances where negative affects contribute to a close-minded defensiveness, such as when one becomes personally or morally offended by an idea and is subsequently unwilling to even consider alternative viewpoints on a particular issue, positive affects can also narrow one's thinking. For instance, insofar as one's beliefs and judgments suit their values in a way with which they are content and satisfied, positive feelings could also lead one to defend what they claim to already know. If one is happy with their view of the world, they may be less inclined to think about and understand it in new ways, even if their current way of understanding ultimately supports dominant social values that contribute to the oppression of others. Whereas positive affects might be more often related to experiences that satisfy the will to know or accord with what one claims to already know, negative affects might arise when one cannot satisfy the will to know or when what one claims to know is challenged by others or new experiences. In either case, positive and negative affects can both lead one to make knowledge claims in ways that shut down further thinking and critical dialogue. Thus, arguing in favor of the relationship between positive affects and thinking simply because they are positive rather than negative affects does not make sense. The deeper problem arises with respect to how affective experiences influence the process of thinking and one's presumed relation to knowledge, which means that the focus given by positive psychology to defending the positive effects of positive affects on thinking is slightly misplaced. Instead of highlighting a relationship between affective experiences and thinking to suggest that feeling better (i.e., more positively) helps one think better, the suggestion of positive philosophy is that thinking better (i.e., without certainty or knowing) can actually produce positive affective experiences that help one feel better. In other words, thinking can be approached as an affectively therapeutic practice that specifically utilizes positive affective experiences. As such, a reorientation of the psychosomatic relationship between thinking, affective experiences, and knowledge is in order.

The notion that thinking can be affectively therapeutic, in similar ways to how positive affects can be healing, is found in Brennan's work. In fact, Brennan directly compares the therapeutic potential of thinking to that of positive affects when she writes, "Thinking and loving are closely related in themselves. They are also—both of them— forms of resistance in the nonperpetuation of the negative affects, as it seems is any process of making or sustaining connections consistent with the known facts or needs of others and psychical and physical health."<sup>46</sup> According to this description, thinking is like the positive affective experience of loving insofar as the process of thoughtfully attending to certain aspects of one's experience can interrupt and undo the detrimental effects of negative affective burdens. The transformative feature of thinking, for Brennan, is found in its ability to find ways to describe the affects, to put

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<sup>46</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 132.



words to feelings. “Insofar as people attend actively, listen to what they are feeling,” Brennan writes, “they can identify sensations, sounds, and images they can name or, after struggle, can find words for. We do this all the time. It is called thinking.”<sup>47</sup>

The ability to pay attention to the affects, to struggle with feelings in order to find their linguistic expression, is a crucial part of Brennan’s notion of affective discernment, which, it should be remembered, is Brennan’s suggested method of affective therapy for dealing with the accumulation of negative affective burdens. In this capacity, thinking is a way to “work through” or process negative feelings. Although Brennan describes the acknowledgment and identification of affective experiences as thinking, she ultimately relates the skill of affective discernment to possessing and uncovering a type of knowledge. For example, Brennan writes, “In political as well as personal cases, changing the disposition of the affects (from passivity-inducing and raging judgments of the other to love or affection) requires practice and knowledge.”<sup>48</sup> Knowledge, here, refers to an understanding of yet another kind of knowledge—the “withheld knowledge” that is already embedded in the affects.<sup>49</sup> The task, according to Brennan, is to develop a conscious awareness and linguistic expression of a repressed “fleshly intelligence,” the “bodily knowledge” of “the self who knew but did not know it knew.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, Brennan’s emphasis on thinking by discerning affects is actually a process of signifying one’s feelings to develop and unmask two kinds of affective knowledge—a conscious awareness of the affects and “all that bodily information, coded in languages we have yet to understand.”<sup>51</sup>

Affective discernment is a useful way to think about the project of positive philosophy in the sense that positive philosophy directs attention to particular affective experiences one has in relation to uncertainty and not knowing. Whereas Brennan encourages affective discernment so that we can become more conscious of the affects that are present around and within us every day, and thereby more consciously deny negative affects entry, positive philosophy focuses on cultivating a different type of affective orientation with respect to uncertainty in theorizing. Brennan’s use of thinking and affective discernment also diverges from my own with her suggestion that attention to affective experiences be used to uncover the withheld knowledge of the body. In contrast, positive philosophy is more critical of the cognitive judgments contained within affective experiences and does not use such judgments or their interpretation as the primary source of affective therapy. Giving names to affective experiences as a form of affective therapy and calling this ‘thinking’ is not the same as cultivating specific types of therapeutic affective experiences through thinking. On my account, one does not simply transform negative affects into positive affects by thinking in the sense of giving them linguistic expression. Instead, one thinks in a way that leaves

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-160.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

them open to uncertainty, and the potentially therapeutic effects occur by virtue of the positive affective experiences that can accompany the ability to remain with this not knowing. As such, thinking, or rather cultivating the ability to think in new ways, becomes the central practice that engenders positive affective experiences, which can be psychosomatically therapeutic in their effects.

As Ladelle McWhorter has suggested, a mode of reflection that is grounded in a process of radically open questioning places one in relation to ambiguity, uncertainty, and not-knowing in a way that can produce a type of pleasure. Pleasure, here, can be broadly construed to entail or relate to a number of other positive affective experiences, such as “delight, satisfaction, gratification, gladness, contentment, pleasantness, amusement, merriment, elation, bliss, rapture, exultation, exhilaration, enjoyment, diversion, entertainment, titillation, fun, and so forth.”<sup>52</sup> The goal is to develop the capacity to undergo the affective experiences associated with thinking as a type of pleasure, a positive affective experience. Thus, the central aspect of positive philosophy focuses on a particular kind of affective experience that can occur while one engages in philosophical thinking but differs from other types of pleasure or affective experiences that might be associated with knowing.

In order to experience the pleasure to which McWhorter refers while occupying a position of not knowing, a concerted effort is required for cultivating the ability to consider the problems that most trouble us with a “non-knowledgeable proximate openness.”<sup>53</sup> Developing the ability to remain with the experiences associated with not knowing and taking pleasure in that ability is the work of positive philosophy, and it is here that something like affective discernment might be helpful. Describing her own experience McWhorter writes, “I worked hard to discipline myself to that feeling, to not knowing—not to remaining ignorant, which is just the other side of the same coin—but, to a kind of deeply attentive openness that affirms both the possibility of knowing and even the possibility of never coming to know.”<sup>54</sup> One must first be able to identify the impulse to theorize out of affective and emotional responses that are animated by the will to know before one can discipline oneself to the experience of not knowing. From there, the potential for something new can finally emerge, including a new type of affective experience, namely, pleasure in one’s developed capacity to remain with uncertainty. Such an approach, McWhorter explains, “involves not knowing; involves cultivating an ability not to know, which I suspect also involves seeking pleasures in questionableness and difference rather than in answers satisfactorily identified.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the pleasure associated with this method of reflection hinges on and emerges out of one’s ability to resist satisfying the will to know.

The pleasurable affective experience that is central to positive philosophy is a byproduct of one’s capacity to think without knowing, which does not mean that

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<sup>52</sup> Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist.” *Hypatia* 16.3 (2001): 115-125, 124.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

negative affects—such as anxiety, fear, and discomfort—will no longer be present in our practices of thinking. The point of positive philosophy is not to deny that negative affects can arise while thinking but rather to reorient ourselves to how we experience them and what they motivate us to do. Whereas many feminist theorists utilize the implicit judgments of rightness and wrongness in their experiences of outlaw emotions to motivate and inform theorizing, positive philosophy offers a way to pursue a politically-oriented mode of reflection without giving in to the desires and fears of the will to know that can evidence themselves in a range of affective and emotional experiences. I suggest that we frustrate the desire to know and be right so that we might undergo another type of affective experience: a positive affective experience associated with our ability to not know.<sup>56</sup> As McWhorter notes, “there were pleasures in the situation I described, even in the anguish...there was the pleasure—might it even be called the joy?—of undergoing that proximate, bodily connectedness in the absence of understanding...”<sup>57</sup> In other words, pleasure does not displace the negative affects that one might experience by not satisfying the will to know; it supersedes them in a way that can be new and transformative. Not only might it open onto new ways of feeling, but it might also create the space to develop new ways of engaging with and being in the world McWhorter explains, “Much of the time I am simply confused, and sometimes I am frustrated and fretful. But, I am learning that there is always much confusion *in media res*, and if I cultivate the pleasures of the movement, of thinking instead of the pleasures of knowingness, I find myself open to new disciplinary—ethical—possibilities even in my confusion and ignorance.”<sup>58</sup> In short, the goal is to think better so that one might feel better, but I am not suggesting that we take pleasure in the anguish of uncertainty, as if the relevant type of pleasure here grows directly out of the pain of not knowing. The point is to develop a sense of pleasure in our ability to stay present with our not knowing, which itself might initially be very unpleasant. In spite of the negative affects one might experience from not knowing, finding pleasure in one’s ability to think without knowing helps one stay open to new possibilities that otherwise might not be recognized or experienced.

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<sup>56</sup> Since positive affects are typically associated more with asserting righteous knowledge claims that appear to satisfy the will to know, taking pleasure in not knowing and resisting the desire to assert such claims could itself be understood as a type of outlaw emotion. This pleasure is an unconventional response that does not reflect dominant values associated with the production of righteous knowledge claims.

<sup>57</sup> McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist,” 124.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

### III. Positive Philosophy as Affective Therapy and Political Resistance

Positive philosophy centers on cultivating the ability to find pleasure in thinking without knowing as a means for affective therapy and a mode of political resistance. Although methods of affective therapy and practices of political resistance are often developed separately from one another, positive philosophy explicitly joins the therapeutic effects of positive affects with political projects of resisting oppression.<sup>59</sup> Since oppression has been identified as operating on and through our affects, and since the affective operation of oppression is especially apparent in the negative affective burdens that are unequally distributed among the oppressed, working to undo the detrimental effects of negative affects through the cultivation of positive affects could already be considered an act of resistance. However, in light of the problems associated with promoting positive affects simply for their therapeutic benefits—such as the potential to dismiss the pain, struggle, and harm of oppressive realities, to inadvertently or uncritically participate in oppressive practices, or to assert righteous knowledge claims that “heal” through positive affects by satisfying the will to know—approaches to affective therapy must proceed with political caution. Thus, the emphasis on not knowing is a crucial aspect of the political value of positive philosophy as a mode of affective therapy that can heal the soma and as a practice of resistance that challenges participation in dominant discourse.

As an affective therapy, the healing potential of positive philosophy is quite simple. Following the insights and empirical evidence from positive psychology about the physiological benefits of positive emotions, the goal of positive philosophy is to cultivate positive affective experiences. The relevant positive affective experiences to positive philosophy are associated with a specific type of pleasure, the pleasure that stems from engaging in a disciplined practice of thinking without certainty or knowing. Thinking, then, provides the primary foundation for a type of affective experience might be psychosomatically therapeutic in its effects in the sense that thinking better can help one feel better. It is not that one “thinks up” good feelings or “thinks away” bad feelings, but that cultivating one’s ability to think without knowing can be a pleasurable endeavor, and therapeutic potential resides in the positive affective dimension of this pleasure.

The pleasure of being able to think without knowing provides a new type of affective experience that can be understood as a politically valuable affect. Affects, of course, are already political in the sense that our positive and negative affective experiences

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<sup>59</sup> It should be clear that I am not suggesting that positive philosophy provides the only acceptable or available means for affective therapy. Other methods might be quite useful for countering the detrimental effects of negative affects, especially insofar as they produce other positive affects. Furthermore, other modes of political resistance can also be quite effective. Rather than suggesting that positive philosophy is the only appropriate way to pursue affective therapy and practices of resistance, my goal is to shine a new light on a particular way to approach philosophy that can be both affectively therapeutic and politically valuable.

are not separate from the discursive, cultural, social, and ethical contexts that shape them. In light of this, Heather Love explains that the pressing question for analyzing the affects as they relate to progressive political projects “is not whether feelings such as grief, regret, and despair have a place in transformative politics: it would in fact be impossible to imagine transformative politics without these feelings. Nor is the question how to cultivate hope in the face of despair, since such calls tend to demand the replacement of despair with hope.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, a political project that properly utilizes and accounts for affective embodiment and our affective experiences requires “engaging with affects that have not traditionally been thought of as political.”<sup>61</sup> By focusing on the unique pleasure of disciplining oneself to a practice of thinking rather than the pleasures associated with satisfying the will to know, positive philosophy presents positive affective experiences associated with philosophical thinking as politically potent affective experiences that have been previously underappreciated as such.

In order to experience one’s not knowing, feminist theorists will have to sit with potentially uncomfortable affective experiences like guilt, anger, and rage that emerge when they reflect on their experiences and the reality of social oppressions, even though “sitting with it” might seem like the least reasonable thing to do. Although we would typically dismiss “sitting with” these affective experiences as a completely ineffective, unproductive, and useless strategy, this may be precisely why it is necessary. As the example of outlaw emotions shows, affective and emotional experiences have already been considered political by feminist theorists because of the implicit judgments they reflect about justice and injustice, right and wrong. It may behoove us to hesitate, pause, and frustrate such desires precisely because, as I argued in Chapter 1, the tendency to react in these ways is born out of the same conditions that support currently oppressive structures which dominate by also making knowledge claims about what is right, good, and true. As McWhorter suggests, “Let such desires stand, but encourage them to remember themselves, remember that they too are bodily, that the desire for straight lines and neat classifications and right answers emerges, not from some a priori finite yet rational substance, but from the sharp rap of the ruler across tender hands.”<sup>62</sup> According to the practice of positive philosophy, we are to appreciate that the strength of our desire to know and be right, even in the face of injustice, is a product of a discourse that seems to require a type of righteous knowledge claim in order to be seen as legitimate, valid, or influential, especially in ways that promote oppression and domination through the assertion of knowledge claims.

Given that knowledge claims are already politically imbued, positive philosophy recognizes that the ability to experience one’s not knowing as pleasurable is politically valuable insofar as it creates the possibility for newness. By frustrating the urgency of our desire to respond with a sense of knowing, we reduce the risk of reiterating

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<sup>60</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, 162.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>62</sup> McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist,” 122.

the same problematic structures that condition us to think and act through attempts at proving ourselves right and others wrong. Acknowledging the refusal of error and uncertainty without giving into this desire to be right and in the know might leave us available to the possibility for something new to emerge, something “in excess of cause and effect, knowing and undertaking to act, being on the side of right and wrong.”<sup>63</sup> This does not mean that we *repress* the desire for stable truths and rightness or that we remain ignorant. Neither does it mean that we must give up on the political import of theorizing. Once the context behind experiences like those of outlaw emotions is recognized as potentially working in concert with a context that operates through pronouncements of righteous claims to knowledge, a new relationship between theorizing and politics must be forged.

McWhorter helps shed light on how the connection between theorizing with a sense of not knowing and politics might be alternatively conceived by referring to the experience of writing her first book, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*.<sup>64</sup> This book provides an example of a type of philosophical practice that takes theory, progressive politics, and the deconstruction of normative concepts to heart. However, despite the common belief (or desire of the will to know?) that one must have a plan about what one will do and how one will do it, McWhorter draws attention to the important ways that her book, and the politics therein, often does its work without a clear direction or intention.

One of the main objectives of *Bodies and Pleasures* was to show how the influence of Foucault’s work was not in what it claimed but what it tended to do to those who encountered it. McWhorter intended to argue that Foucault’s writings engendered transformations in his readers. However, throughout the process of writing her book, McWhorter felt a shift in the tenability of her claim “not because it is logically untenable but because it places tenability per se in question.”<sup>65</sup> She also experienced a related shift within herself regarding the philosophical work that she was doing. McWhorter writes, “As I became more disciplined to my own project I ceased to hold hard and fast positions and found instead that my work moved with Foucault’s work and, I think, began to operate on me, the would-be position holder, and on those would-be holders of positions who read it.”<sup>66</sup>

As a result of this shift, McWhorter’s book does things that she did not anticipate, expect, or deliberately try to make happen. When McWhorter started writing the book she did not know that the personal stories that are woven throughout its pages would disempower confessional practices, which Foucault highlights as extremely politically salient practices of normalization. She admits, “Much of what it does and how it does it—undermining confessional practices included—just happened; just came into

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>64</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

<sup>65</sup> McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist,” 119.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

existence as the book came together, and the truth is that I am not always fully aware of what the book does and how it manages to do it.”<sup>67</sup> And just as Foucault’s work did something to her, McWhorter’s book does something to her readers. It should not be assumed, however, that this effect simply arises as the product of persuasively water-tight arguments. Regarding her experience of being contacted by those who are in the midst of reading her book McWhorter explains, “[Readers] respond to what it does to them and what they begin to do with it, and in a very important sense it does not matter how the book concludes or even what it claims. The book’s work is in the reading, not in the knowledgeable concluding.”<sup>68</sup>

The practice of positive philosophy conceives of a related connection between politics and not knowing that occurs on two levels. First, by emphasizing the value of a disciplined practice of thinking rather than theorizing by asserting knowledge claims, positive philosophy manages to step beyond the epistemological expectations for knowledge with certainty set by dominant discourse. Rather than playing into the expectation that one must make righteous knowledge claims in order to be politically efficacious, which often relate back to affective experiences that are exacerbated by the will to know, philosophical practice can be pursued in a way that foregoes the need for strict categorizations, clearly delineated concepts, and even simplified pronouncements of right and wrong. The political value of philosophy is found, then, in a rearticulation of the aims of philosophical practice that attempts to, as McWhorter describes, “de-center result, conclusion, commentary, knowledge; and center acting, making, moving, doing— exercise, *askesis*.”<sup>69</sup>

In addition to resisting the effects of dominant discourse on our will to know, the practice of positive philosophy highlights the important political value of not knowing with respect to how one takes up political acts of resistance. Similar to how our desire to know with certainty about right and wrong can be shaped by the same structures that inform oppressive righteous knowledge claims, the actions that we initially presume to be politically resistant might also reiterate a problematic relationship between knowledge and action insofar as they are motivated by righteous knowledge claims. In contrast, not knowing provides an opportunity to identify, experience, and undertake possibilities for practices of resistance and ways of being that may be radically new. This is not to say that that one should sit and do nothing in the face of injustice, but that what one does— such as think to understand oppression in new ways—might lead one to take up forms of resistance in different ways. Or, as McWhorter describes, “if

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Arnold Davidson describes how the Hellenists viewed philosophy in this way, as a set of exercises that “were not conceived of as purely intellectual, as merely theoretical and formal exercises of discourse totally separated from life... these exercises aimed at realizing a transformation of one’s vision of the world and a metamorphosis of one’s personality.” See his Introduction in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*. Trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995, 21.

we discipline ourselves to the pleasures and powers of connections that occur alongside of but differ from the pleasures of knowledgeable...if we stray far enough afield of our carefully classified selves, something unforeseeable, something new—something that might be called free— may very well occur.”<sup>70</sup> In this respect, the political value of something radically new might only emerge from a position of not knowing.

By cultivating the positive affective experience of pleasure in individuals, positive philosophy offers a physiological, affective method for greater health and well-being. When this occurs in those who carry negative affective burdens as the mark of their oppression, this healing can already be understood as a form of affective resistance. By cultivating the positive affective experience of pleasure through a practice of thinking that does not demand certainty or support the production of righteous knowledge claims, positive philosophy also challenges the epistemological, discursive context that can actually undermine resistant practices when they are based on their own righteous knowledge claims. Positive philosophy, then, seeks to mitigate the harms of oppression at the level of individuals and their somatic well-being. It also specifically aims to disrupt and dismantle the larger social and political structures of oppression by virtue of what philosophical reflection does—thinking in new ways about our experiences—but also by virtue of how philosophical reflection proceeds in its doing—without needing to know.

## IV. Concluding Remarks

My argument that the practice of positive philosophy can be pursued as a form of affective therapy and a mode of political resistance presents a number of implications for the discipline of philosophy in general. To conclude, I wish to note the parameters of my argument with respect to the therapeutic use of philosophy and mention how this type of return to the medical model of philosophical practice might relate to, inform, or potentially transform, professional academic philosophy.

Highlighting the therapeutic potential of philosophical practice is a major goal of this project, but this is not to suggest that other practices—such as psychotherapy, yoga, dance, play therapy, and numerous others—cannot also be therapeutic. If anything, the practice of positive philosophy can be considered as one method of therapy among many that can be utilized on its own or in conjunction with other therapeutic practices. Although positive philosophy is characterized by the cultivation of positive affective experiences with respect to a practice of open-ended philosophical reflection, it is interesting to note that many of these other practices also seek to cultivate and engage specific affective experiences as part of their therapeutic method. This insight about the therapeutic dimension of certain affective experiences could even shed light on why more explicitly politically-oriented practices like community organizing, con-

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<sup>70</sup> McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist,” 125.



sciousness raising programs, and solidarity movements can also provide a sense of therapy to those who engage in such efforts. Such projects might be empowering, or even therapeutic, at least in part, by virtue of the positive affective experiences that they can help foster within oneself and in relation to others. For example, these practices can promote positive affects that arise from establishing friendships, helping others who are in need, or working together in ways that build trust, confidence, respect, and pride.

Another major goal of my project has been to offer a cautionary note on how therapeutic practices are pursued and why they produce therapeutic effects. In order to avoid the inadvertent promotion of politically problematic practices, values, or beliefs, any therapeutic method should be subject to constant critical examination—such as in situations where a therapeutic effect occurs as a byproduct of asserting righteous knowledge claims. Positive philosophy is certainly not exempt from such reflexive investigation. Indeed, remaining critically attentive to how one thinks and reflects is fundamental to the practice of positive philosophy. The point is that every approach to therapy must be under constant scrutiny, and positive philosophy is also subject to its own constant reflexivity. However, by virtue of its essential connection to reflection with an openness to uncertainty, positive philosophy might be better equipped to avoid potential political risks that are not often readily identified as part of numerous other therapeutic practices. In light of this, positive philosophy can be appreciated as an affective therapy that uses a specific orientation toward thinking about social realities, including one's own experiences of oppression and one's own thinking about oppression, in a way that aims to counter subtle mechanisms of oppression that operate on psychological, somatic, and epistemological levels, even within other therapeutic practices.

It should also be clear that my claim is not that just any kind of philosophical reflection is therapeutic. My aim is to highlight a specific way in which philosophical practice can be uniquely therapeutic that is not often fully appreciated, even by philosophers; namely, by engendering positive affective experiences in the face of not knowing with respect to the particularly weighty ethical issues and political realities that inhibit one's capacity for flourishing and well-being. Although linguistic analysis and working through logical problems might help cultivate the ability to critically think in new ways, and one could experience a type of pleasure in light of this developed capacity, thereby inviting physiological benefits of these positive affects, reflecting on our lived experiences is especially relevant to the therapeutic potential of philosophy. In other words, although some people may take pleasure in their ability to logically work through truth tables, the meaningfulness and affective significance of our reflection is often intimately connected to the bearing it has on our lived experiences. Engaging with issues that we deeply care about is more likely to encourage us to think, and thereby increase the opportunity for us to take pleasure in that thinking. Thus, because it is important to develop new ways to think about the problems that deeply affect us and our everyday experiences, it may not be enough to simply “bring philosophy

to the people,” as if the study of philosophy, generally speaking, is itself a palliative practice. Instead, the task should be to provide opportunities for people to develop the skills to philosophically think about their experiences in ways that are empowering, which often means thinking specifically about experiences of oppression as a means of empowerment. With respect to positive philosophy, experiencing positive affects associated with one’s cultivated ability to think without knowing provides an affective means for empowerment that affects one’s psyche and soma.

The recognition that philosophy can be practiced in different ways, and in ways that serve different ends, does not necessarily undermine the value of professional academic philosophy. In order to determine the extent to which professional philosophy resonates with positive philosophy, one must ask, “Is professional philosophy good for the philosopher? Does it support her psychosomatic well-being? If so, how?” To the extent that philosophical scholarship and research are pursued as open-ended practices that encourage and promote positive affective experiences among professional philosophers who engage in them, they are vital demonstrations of a disciplined way of thinking that can readily align with the goals of positive philosophy. In fact, positive philosophy can inform how one pursues professional philosophy. Or, said another way, one can be a professional philosopher who practices positive philosophy. Thus, positive philosophy and academic philosophy can exist without conflict.

Furthermore, professional philosophy can be significantly related to the practice of positive philosophy by presenting an opportunity for others to take pleasure in philosophical thinking and initiating, influencing, and encouraging how others think, especially through teaching and writing. When professional philosophical scholarship and research are approached in such a way that embodies a pleasure from thinking rather than from knowing, they are valuable for being examples of *how* to critically think, which is to be contrasted with a value that might be attributed to them for being resources that persuade others of *what* to think. hooks notes that many people “are not able to engage a process of intellectualization and theorizing that could be empowering to them and should be part of what makes them healthy in the world, more able to live in the world, able to confront reality in ways that don’t diminish but inspire.”<sup>71</sup> When positive philosophy informs professional philosophy, it exemplifies a type of holistic intellectual practice that, as hooks describes, “people often make fun of but that I have found to be

incredibly liberatory in my life...My own speaking more about these subjects was a concrete response to a particular kind of anguish I saw in my students, in my colleagues, and in myself. Once again, what generated a shift in my intellectual thought was not desire for a new topic or something that would get me attention but really concretely searching for new ways to think.”<sup>72</sup> By promoting positive affective experiences in light of one’s cultivated ability to think without knowing, and encouraging this ability in

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<sup>71</sup> hooks and McKinnon, “Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private,” 827.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

others through teaching, positive philosophy can strengthen the appeal of professional philosophy to those whose lives might benefit from undertaking the practice of philosophical thinking, especially including marginalized individuals who have historically been alienated by and excluded from participating in professional philosophy.

When the desired end is one of promoting a greater sense of flourishing for people who practice philosophy, positive philosophy's emphasis on finding pleasure in one's ability to not know and avoid asserting righteous knowledge claims highlights why it is still appropriate to reconsider how professional philosophy is pursued. McWhorter highlights the importance of this consideration when she writes,

I want to take the notion of practice, of philosophical practice, seriously. I want to enact philosophy, not talk about it—or talk about it only as one practice within the enacting. I guess I want somehow to embrace *askesis per se* without a definitive endpoint... I now find myself living in and working in the unfolding of that possibility, and one of the things I find there is the questionableness of much of what we philosophers hold dear. In this context, I think it might make sense to say that a great deal of what I have been trained to call philosophy is unethical.<sup>73</sup>

What this amounts to, then, is a potential need to refigure the practices of professional philosophy itself. One of the most promising ways to go about a transformation of professional philosophy would be for philosophers to simply do what they do best: use their philosophical training to think about philosophy. Philosophical reflection upon the practice of professional philosophy will reveal that the discipline of professional philosophy and we, as professional philosophers, are not necessarily set in the current ways of doing philosophy or impervious to change. As Edward McGushin explains, “This arrangement, these forms and relations, seem so inevitable and natural that we tend not to investigate how they got to be the way they are or challenge how they shape the texts we read, the work we produce, the language we use, the thoughts we think, and the lives we lead. In other words, we [professional philosophers] are formed as readers, writers, speakers, and subjects of the discipline of philosophy, a discipline that is a historical artifact, far from inevitable and far from natural.”<sup>74</sup> Although there are currently established ways of doing professional philosophy, the very practices of professional philosophy can still be subject to their own transformation, especially in directions that promote positive affective experiences for those who engage in and with it. An openness on behalf of professional philosophers to the possibility of such a transformation would provide a solid first step toward a more meaningful, practical, and indeed therapeutic, practice of philosophy. My conception of positive philosophy offers an elaboration of how a transformation of professional philosophy might look. Depending on the extent to which professional philosophy fails to contribute to a holistic sense of flourishing for those who practice it, or is unavailable to those who could,

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<sup>73</sup> McWhorter, “The Revenge of the Gay Nihilist,” 119.

<sup>74</sup> Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007, 283-284.

a steadfast commitment to what we have been trained to value as professional philosophy should be resisted. In a similar vein, Nussbaum notes that “[t]he professional’s love of cleverness for its own sake is to be strongly resisted—and resisted not because professional philosophy doesn’t matter, but because it matters so much.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, in addition to being a method of affective therapy and a mode of political resistance, my conception of the practice of positive philosophy can also be understood as an attempt to initiate a philosophical transformation of professional philosophy itself because it matters so much.

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<sup>75</sup> Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 351.

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—. *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

# VITA

Cori Wong

## EDUCATION

Dual-Ph.D., Philosophy & Women's Studies, The Pennsylvania State University  
December 2013

B.A. (*summa cum laude*), Philosophy & Religious Studies, Colorado State University  
May 2008

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS and PRESENTATIONS

- “Where Are the Gay Girls? Re-cognizing Homophobia” (*invited*) Central American Philosophical Association, Chicago, IL, February 2012
- “Irigaray, (Trans)Sexual Difference, and the Future of Feminism” (*reviewed*) Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Philadelphia, PA, October 2011 and Eastern American Philosophical Association, Washington, DC, December 2011
- “Where Are the Gay Girls? Re-cognizing Homophobia” *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and LGBT Issues* (Fall 2011)
- “The Philosophical Pursuit of Pleasure” (*invited*) Sexuality and Spirituality Lecture Series for the Religious and Philosophical Forum at PSU-Schuylkill, Schuylkill, PA, October 2011
- “Affective Feminist Politics and Not-Knowing” Inviting Intersection: Interdisciplinary Dialogues of Feminism and Feminist Concerns, University Park, PA, February 2011



## **SELECTED AWARDS, DISTINCTIONS, and HONORS**

- Graduate Student Prize, Eastern American Philosophical Association, 2011
- Ethics and Social Media Fellow, Rock Ethics Institute, Penn State University, 2011-2012
- Ethics and Public Philosophy Fellow, Rock Ethics Institute, Penn State University, 2010-2011
- Graduate Assistant, Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute (PIKSI), Penn State University and Rock Ethics Institute, 2009
- Iris Marion Young Diversity Scholar, (PIKSI), Penn State University and Rock Ethics Institute, 2007

## **SELECTED TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Medical and Healthcare Ethics (PHIL 432/STS 432)  
Persons, Moral Values, Good Life (PHIL 003)  
Philosophy of Feminism (PHIL 008/WMNST008)  
Asian Philosophies (PHIL 007)  
Philosophy, Race, Diversity (PHIL 009)  
Philosophy, Love, Sex (PHIL 014)  
Basic Problems in Philosophy (PHIL 001)

The Ted K Archive

Cori Wong  
Positive Philosophy  
A Feminist Practice of Affective Therapy and Political Resistance  
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