

Agency, Authorial Authority,
and the Gendered Narrative of Self

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Introduction to the Project

When the jazz pianist Billy Tipton passed away in 1989, it was discovered that he had been born biologically female. Upon this realization, the question of Tipton's identity immediately entered the public domain. Everyone, except for the man himself, was debating what the true identity of Billy Tipton may have been. Even his most recent wife and children claimed to have no knowledge of his biologically female body.¹ Everyone seemed to need to know why a biologically female individual would choose to live as a man. Biographer Diane W. Middlebrook even suggests that Tipton chose to pass as a man because it was very difficult for female jazz performers to be taken seriously in the jazz scene and that jazz shows were hard to get for female performers, completely undermining any possibility that Tipton believed himself to be a man and desired to live as a man.² The article published by *People Magazine* on February 20th, 1989, discussing Tipton's death, runs the headline "Death Discloses Billy Tipton's Strange Secret: He Was a She" and proceeds to only use feminine pronouns when discussing Tipton.³ Absent from any of these accounts is the notion that Tipton was in fact a man with female physical characteristics, that Tipton did choose to pass socially as a man, but he did not choose to be a man with a female body.

Queer and gender theory is rarely discussed in analytic philosophical conversation. This is partially due to the fact that it is such a young discipline, partially to the fact that many of the answers to the questions being asked by these theorists are already implied by the conclusions analytic philosophical arguments supply, and partially to the fact that the biggest names in

¹ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York University Press, 2005), 48.

² *Ibid* 57.

³ Paula Chin and Nick Gallo, "Death Discloses Billy Tipton's Strange Secret: He Was a She" *People Magazine*, 20 Feb. 1989.

gender theory, for example Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, are considered continental philosophers and thus not taken very seriously in analytic circles. Still, many of the questions being asked by queer and gender theorists could be well-pursued by a more analytic philosophy. In order to better understand what these questions might be, it is first necessary to pursue a discussion of current queer and gender theory. Then, with an understanding of these current debates, an analysis of current analytic philosophical debates centering on the discussion of self, specifically those arguments presented by those analytic philosophers who identify as liberal or communitarian, will enable a closer look at an analytic approach to these questions in gender theory.

In this article I will pursue questions such as: Who has narrative authority in the transgender story? Is the self completely socially determined or is there a sense in which the agent has a power to choose what will come to constitute the self? What are the current communitarian theories of self and how do they relate to gender theory? Likewise, what are the current liberal theories of self and how do they relate to gender theory? Finally, I will present a philosophical theory of self that will allow the self to act as narrator without necessitating that every aspect of the constituents of identity is chosen.

The most important issue at stake in this article is that the contemporary conversation on philosophical theories of identity does not allow for the necessary conditions for a transgender narrative to exist. Liberalism, a theory that argues for the importance of choices as constituting the individual, would not allow for the way in which our gender identities do not seem to be chosen and yet come to constitute us in such an important way. This is especially important in a transgender narrative in which the individual feels his/her gender to be essential and not to be of the same sexual identity as his/her sex. Communitarianism, a theory that stresses the social

relationship and community as constituting the individual, on the other hand could allow for the miss-assigning of gender identity by other individuals and even the posthumous reassignment of gender, as took place in the Tipton case, as being permissible and defining the individual. Put in other terms, the Communitarianism philosophy of identity would argue that Tipton actually was a woman, because his culture interpreted him and labeled him as being a woman. A reevaluation of these philosophical theories is thus necessary in order to ensure that they are allowing for the individual to have authority over his/her narrative of self, including the gender narrative, but also ensure that there is something essentially outside of the agent's control in these instances. This article seeks to reconcile these issues.

An Introduction to Contemporary Discussions of Gender Identity:
Authorial Authority and the Transgender Narrative

Incidents such as that described that took place after Billy Tipton's death seem, prima facie, to be immoral. Even putting aside debates in transgender politics, it seems immoral that the individual's identity, especially an aspect that had been so essential to his self-understanding, was completely manipulated and changed upon his death. It is an instance in which the public is applying a definition to the understanding of the individual that the individual himself never had. Though the posthumous redefinition of the individual is a somewhat frequent occurrence, perhaps all the more troubling are cases in which the individual is told that she does not understand herself as well as those other individuals within her society or community, not only robbing the individual of any kind of control over her life, but also invalidating any kind of self-knowledge she may understand herself as possessing.

With *Herculine Barbin*, Michel Foucault provides the reader with insight into the life of Adélaïde Herculine Barbin, an intersexed individual⁴ who inhabited the world as a woman until, at the age of 22, she⁵ was deemed to be a male pseudohermaphrodite during a physical examination, and was forced to live the rest of her life as a man.⁶ Never feeling completely comfortable in her forced life as a man, Barbin took her own life. In February 1868, "the corpse

⁴ It could be argued that I should not treat the case of Adélaïde Herculine Barbin as a transgender narrative because she was intersex. There is merit in this argument. For the purpose of this article, however, I am focusing on Barbin's self-understanding of her gender identity and her being forced to switch gender identities in her life. Thus, though some may not consider her essentially transgender, she did live a life that was transgender and should be treated as transgender in this article.

⁵ Throughout this article, I do choose to use feminine pronouns to describe Adélaïde Herculine Barbin, because there is evidence within the memoir that she did desire to live and be treated as a woman, even when she was forced to live as a man. Later in the text, on page 8, I discuss the merit of Foucault's choosing the change the pronouns used to signify Barbin throughout the text.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* (Vintage Books, 2010) 122.

of Abel Barbin, who had committed suicide by means of a charcoal stove, was found in a room in the quarter of the Théâtre de l'Odéon.”⁷ Though the narrative is certainly intellectually engaging as a piece of biography, in this article I am more concerned with the interpretation of Barbin's identity by herself, her society, the medical establishment, and Foucault rather than the specific details of her narrative.

It is clear that Barbin herself identifies most closely with the gender role of a woman, though there are instances in which she acknowledges a certain sense of animosity towards her gender identity. For example, when recounting an incident in which a group of her female peers in school are engaged in night swimming in their underwear, Barbin writes, “What stopped me from taking part in it? I would not have been able to say at the time. A feeling of modesty, which I obeyed almost in spite of myself, compelled me to abstain... I would offend the eyes of those who called me their friend, their sister! Of course, they were far from suspecting what tumultuous feelings shook me as I watched their carefree behavior, which is yet so natural among girls of the same age.”⁸ This sense of modesty could be attributed to an understanding that Barbin is somehow different from her female companions she desires to call her peers. It is also very likely that this sense of unease is something that is being attributed by Barbin, the author of the text, to Barbin, the protagonist of the text, after these events have taken place, because she does not begin recording this biography until she had been forced to live as a man. It is important to note that Barbin was also devoutly religious and thus her sense of modesty may be attributed to her religious identity.

⁷ Ibid 115.

⁸ Ibid 39.

In fact, Barbin attributes her desire to seek counsel regarding her gender identity as stemming from her religious identity. After deciding to confess to a monk, Barbin writes “My plan was to unburden myself quickly frankly to this unknown confessor and to await his judgment! You can imagine the astonishment, the stupefaction, that my strange confession caused him!”⁹ Barbin wishes to reveal herself completely. This is a self that is torn between feelings of masculinity and femininity. Unable to accept that Barbin may in fact be an individual with sex characteristics that were both partially male and partially female, the religious authorities forced Barbin to receive an examination and live the rest of her life as a man. When discussing this period of her life, Barbin writes, “I believe that I have said everything concerning this phase of my existence as a *girl*. They were the fine days of a life that was henceforth doomed to abandonment, to cold isolation. O my God! What a fate was mine! But You willed it, no doubt, and I shall say no more.”¹⁰ Here once again Barbin is demonstrating her religious ideologies, submitting her self identity as being a will of God.

With the spreading of the realization that Barbin had male physical sex characteristics, the masses took it upon themselves to try and understand why such a thing had taken place. As Judith Halberstam writes in her piece discussing transgender biography, “transgender lives often seem to attract enormous attention from biographers, filmmakers, talk show hosts, doctors, and journalists, all of whom are dedicated to forcing the transgender subject to make sense.”¹¹ This same attention was certainly paid to Barbin’s being intersexed. “Some people went so far as to accuse my mother of having concealed my true sex in order to save me from conscription. Others

⁹ Ibid 62.

¹⁰ Ibid 87.

¹¹ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York University Press, 2005), 54.

saw me as a real Don Juan, saying that I had brought shame and dishonor everywhere, and had profited brazenly from my situation in order to engage secretly in love affairs with women who had been consecrated to the Lord.”¹² These narratives were applied to Barbin by other individuals and were clearly not narratives with which she herself identified.

Barbin is forced to abandon the life that she had made for herself as a teacher at an all girl’s school and pursue a life as a man in Paris. In her earlier writings in her memoir, such as the night swimming incident, there is a sense of “us and them” when she discusses her relation with her fellow women. I would argue, however, that this was an instance in which Barbin wanted to be identified as fully woman, but did not feel that she ever would be. In her writing after her forced transition, there is once again a sense of “us and them,” this time characterizing her relationship with her supposed peers of young men. In these instances, however, it is clear that Barbin has absolutely no desire to be treated as a man, equal with these individuals. “You [men] have lacked the noble, the great heart, the generous soul, that are needed in order to suffer. But the hour of expiation shall come, if it has not already come. And then you will be terrified by the frightful emptiness of your entire being. Unfortunate men! You shall find nothing to fill it. You are coming to the threshold of eternity to regret – what? Life.”¹³ I thus argue that there is an important distinction to be made between these instances of “us and them.” Barbin has no desire to live as a man and thus feels isolated, but did have a desire to live fully as a woman, but, feeling unable to do so, was isolated. Notice, this inability to feel fully woman does not stem from Barbin self-understanding, but rather from the fears she has of how others may interpret her gender identity.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* (Vintage Books, 2010) 90.

¹³ Ibid 100.

Upon investigation of her suicide, individuals in the medical establishment wrote that Barbin “saw his civil status reversed by a judgment of the court of La Rochelle after the most dramatic and moving circumstances, and could not support the miserable existence that his new and incomplete sex imposed upon him.”¹⁴ With our modern understandings from gender theory, of course, we can now understand that there was nothing new about Barbin’s sex. Her biological sex had not been changed at all. Rather, the gender that Barbin had inhabited was cut off from her when she was forced to live as a man. Also, it should be argued that there was nothing incomplete about Barbin’s sex in the first place. Her status as a psuedohermaphrodite would only be considered an incomplete sexual identity if one were to embrace a kind of natural biological sexual binary of fully man and fully woman that has been proven not to exist. This binary is instead created and perpetuated by the medical establishment upon the birth of an individual when it is decided how the individual should be raised and treated in society.¹⁵ Still, this is a subject for a blatantly politically charged article.

In this article it is only necessary to observe that the language used by the medical establishment to define Barbin is firstly antiquated and secondly not language that Barbin would use to describe herself. This is not to suggest any normative claim that Barbin should have used language that we use at this time. Rather, Barbin would not have described herself as intersexed. Throughout the narrative, she expresses sentiments that she does feel like a woman. She only worries about the acceptance of her womanhood by her peers.

¹⁴ Ibid 123.

¹⁵ Here I reference articles such as Suzzane Kessler’s “The Medical Construction of Gender” (1998) in which she discusses the cases of “intersex management,” instances in which a newly born baby undergoes procedures in order to shape more fully developed sexual organs or hormones are administered routinely in order to bring about a more normalized physical sex upon puberty.

In his introduction to this biography, which he is credited as discovering, Foucault chooses to switch his use of pronouns throughout the discussion of the narrative. It could be argued that he thus understood Barbin's gender identity as changing when she was forced to live as a man. In a very important footnote in the introduction to the text of the memoir, however, Foucault writes that "the use of italics, does not seem to describe a consciousness of being a woman becoming a consciousness of being a man; rather, it is an ironic reminder of grammatical, medical, and juridical categories that language must utilize but that the content of the narrative contradicts."¹⁶ Thus, it is not that Foucault understands Barbin's self-understanding as changing from a consciousness of being a woman to a consciousness of being a man. Rather, Foucault is bringing attention to the fact that within Barbin's native language of French every aspect must be categorized with a word that is gendered and to the gender of Barbin by other individuals. Foucault is not bringing attention to Barbin herself, but rather to the gendered linguistic structure of which Barbin was a part. Thus far I have discussed Barbin's self-understanding regarding her gender identity, the medical establishment's understanding of Barbin's life, and Foucault's understanding of Barbin's biography. I will now turn to a conversation of the consideration of a general audience's interpretation of a transgender narrative.

Most importantly, the narrative of Adélaïde Herculine Barbin is characterized by "the project of stabilization. In this narrative project, the destabilizing effects of the transgender narrative are defused by establishing the transgender narrative as strange, uncharacteristic, or even pathological."¹⁷ The medical community had to search for every aspect of Barbin's life that could be considered different and blame these for her issues with her gender identity. This

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin* (Vintage Books, 2010) xiv.

¹⁷ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York University Press, 2005), 54.

included, above all, her genitalia. By attributing these assumed fundamental differences as being the causes of Barbin's gender identity, the medical establishment stabilized their own gender identities and our broader understanding of gender. It should by now be evident, however, that Barbin's insecurities did not stem from any physical sexual trait, but rather from how she was understood in society. Judith Halberstam, in her piece "Unlosing Brandon: Brandon Teena, Billy Tipton, and Transgender Biography," argues that there are three such motivations for representing transgender individuals in specific transgender meta-narrative projects.

Firstly, as discussed above, there is the project of stabilization. Secondly, there is the project of rationalization, in which a specific reasonable explanation is given as to why an individual would choose to be transgender.¹⁸ For example, the biography *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*, by Diane W. Middlebrook that argues Tipton chose to pass as a man in order to have easier access to jazz shows.¹⁹ There is thus a clear and definite practical reason as to why Tipton chose to be transgender. This allows the interpreter of the transgender narrative, in this case a biographer, to explain the instance of a transgender individual without having to engage with the question as to how an individual's gender comes to be assigned. "Finally, there is the project of trivialization. A third narrative told about transgender subjects in order to contain the threat they represent to gender stability is a trivializing one in which the transgender life is dismissed as non-representative and inconsequential."²⁰ This final project interprets the transgender narrative as being rare and trivial. All of these interpretations of the transgender narrative serve to provide reasoning as to how the transgender individual is unarguably different

¹⁸ Ibid 55.

¹⁹ Ibid 57.

²⁰ Ibid 55.

from the cisgendered ²¹ individual. “Containing gender distress within ‘transsexualism’ functions to naturalize and make ‘healthy’ dichotomized, birth-assigned gender performance. It casts the critical eye on the gender performance of those transgressing gender boundaries, and produces a norm that need not be criticized.” ²² These are all instances in which the transgender narratives are being interpreted by other individuals. There are instances, however, in which the transgender individual is forced to inhabit the transgender meta-narrative that has been constructed.

Dean Spades provides a highly political alternative to the question of narrative authority. In order for a transgender individual to receive sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), s/he must prove that throughout childhood there were instances of gender bending and questioning and must then live life as the desired gender role, without surgery, for three years. The individual must be perceived as the desired gender during this time. In this sense, the medical establishment is requiring that the transgender individual live with the desired “cultural genitals” before s/he can receive the actual physical surgery. “The cultural genital is one which is assumed to exist and which, it is believed, should be there. As evidence of ‘natural sexuality,’ the cultural genital is a legitimate possession. Even if the genital is not present in a physical sense, it exists in a cultural sense if the person feels entitled to it and/or is assumed to have it.” ²³ The medical establishment would certainly be more concerned with the second part of this definition. The individual seeking SRS has already established that s/he feels entitled to the cultural genitalia. The

²¹ For those unfamiliar with the term, it is argued that the binary should not be between those individuals who are transgendered and those individuals who are not. Then the norm is still only being defined in comparison to the understood anomaly of the transgender individual. Thus, in order to make the distinction fair, cisgender has been offered as a way to characterize those individuals who do not identify as transgender.

²² Dean Spade, “Mutilating Gender,” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen White (Routledge, 2006), 315 – 332, 3.

²³ Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, “Toward a Theory of Gender,” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen White (Routledge, 2006), 165 – 182, 173.

requirement is thus that other people will perceive the transgender individual as having the physical sex characteristics of his/her desired gender.

Spade's own transgender narrative hardly fulfills any of these perceived qualifications. S/he²⁴ writes, "It's always been fun to reject the gay childhood story, to tell people I 'chose' lesbianism, or to over articulate a straight childhood narrative to suggest that lesbianism could happen to anyone. But not engaging a trans childhood is terrifying – what if it means I'm not 'real?'"²⁵ Spade is thus considering the possibility that the reality of his/her identity as complete relying on how other individuals perceive his/her enactment of gender roles. Spade is not able to create his/her own gender identity, or even a personal narrative of how s/he believes s/he came to identify as transgender. The inability of Spade to construct or, more accurately, adopt a personal narrative that would be taken seriously enough by the medical community will deny him/her receipt of SRS.

Thus, transgender individuals are rarely allowed authorial authority of the transgender narrative and, in the event that we do allow individuals their transgender narratives, it is only a pre-constructed medical narrative they must adopt in order to receive treatment. Spade writes that, "sexuality has become the locus of the 'true self' – to know the sex is to know one's sex, sexuality, and desire."²⁶ There are two claims that could be made at this point. Firstly, the weaker claim (which is undeniable) is that Spade believes sex, sexuality, and desires are the most important aspects of the individual that come to constitute the self. Spade is being denied access to what he perceives as being his essential physical sex by the medical establishment. The

²⁴ Spade does not express any desire to fulfill a single gender role, but instead wants to reside somewhere in the middle, as a physical example of the fragility of perceived social gender roles.

²⁵ Dean Spade, "Mutilating Gender," *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen White (Routledge, 2006), 315 – 332, 321.

²⁶ Ibid 31.

medical establishment is therefore denying Spade access to his/her true self. Spade even goes further, arguing that not only should the medical establishment not deny the fulfillment of self, but “that sexual and gender self-determination and the expression of variant gender identities without punishment (and with celebration) should be the goals of any medical, legal, or political examination of or intervention into the gender expression of individuals and groups.”²⁷

It could be argued that Spade is not being denied access to this physical exploration of self by the medical establishment, but rather that the medical establishment is refusing to provide this surgery as part of a health care program. In other words, the medical establishment is not denying Spade the surgery, but is refusing to help without cost. These are all interesting arguments that are much more rooted in political philosophy than in the philosophy of identity and, at this point in the article, will be put aside.²⁸ For the purpose of this article, it is only necessary that the reader understand that the transgender individual is put into a dilemma by the medical establishment. Either s/he can adopt the medically established transgender meta-narrative and thus consider his/her transgender identity to be a form of mental illness or s/he can deny the transgender meta-narrative and thus deny him/herself access to physical fulfillment of his/her perceived self. Returning to Spade’s original claim, however, there is a larger and much more controversial claim being made.

Spade is also claiming that the understanding of sex, sexuality, and desire is essential to every individual’s understanding of self-identity.²⁹ Modern feminists have always understood

²⁷ Ibid 31.

²⁸ For more of this debate as to whether or not SRS should be given in a health care package, the article Pauline Kim, “Massachusetts Judge Rules for Inmate’s Sex-Change Surgery,” *CNN*, 6 Sept, 2012.

²⁹ Here it may be argued that I should not be paying such attention to the debate of sex and sexuality because it is separate from the issue of gender identity. To make such a critique is to also admit an ignorance regarding the relation of sexuality and gender. Sexuality is determined by the gender of the other individuals that the person is desiring as well as that person’s gender identity. For example, then, a man with male physical sex characteristics

the individual as being defined by the intersections of identity. This intersectionality would include race, gender, sex, sexuality, and socioeconomic standing. It is important to note that none of these aspects of the individual are within the individual's control (with the possible exception of upward and downward mobility of socioeconomic status, but this has proven not to be the norm). With this conception of self, in which the individual is defined by social intersectionalities, the importance of gender in the formation of self is undeniable. In her recent publication, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, Charlotte Witt argues for gender uniessentialism. Gender essentialism, long since abandoned by feminists, argued that there were some essential characteristics that an individual had to possess in order to be considered as a specific gender. This theory could thus be used to argue that physical sex characteristics, chromosomal structures, the socialization of the individual into a specific gender role, or the individual's self-understanding as having a specific gender identity were essential to whether or not the individual was actually identifiable with a specific gender role.

Witt's uniessentialism, however, is the claim that gender is essential in unifying the individual and the individual's self-understanding.³⁰ Essentialism about an individual holds that "there is a property or properties that make that individual the individual that it is."³¹ The claim that gender identity is an essential component of an individual's self-understanding seems so obvious that it lacks any philosophical bite. The more interesting issue, however, rises when we analyze how these unifying gender identities comes about.

who is attracted to women with female physical sex characteristics would be considered heterosexual. Also, however, a man with female physical sex characteristics attracted to a women with female physical sex characteristics would be considered heterosexual. It should thus be evident how important gender (and thus transgender) identities come to be in the understanding of sexuality.

³⁰ Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, (Oxford University Press, Sept. 2011) 4.

³¹ Ibid.

If it is the case that the individual gender identity is actually defined as the medical establishment suggests, that one can only be considered as truly being a certain gender if others have come to acknowledge the individual as inhabiting that gender identity, it would then be supporting Adélaïde Herculine Barbin and Billy Tipton being denied authorial authority in the creation of their self-identity. Barbin would be a man, because his society had deemed him male, and Tipton would be posthumously deemed a woman. Still, it cannot be the case that the individual simply chooses his/her gender identity. This would then diminish the essential roles that these unchosen intersectionalities of identity play in unifying the individual. Thus, it is necessary to adopt an understanding of the self that does not allow the definition of the understanding of the individual to be created by other parties, but also does not allow the individual to freely choose the intersectionalities that unify his/her self identity.

Thus far in this article I have provided an introduction into contemporary conversations of gender identity. I have argued for the importance of gender as playing an essential role in the individual's self-understanding. I have also provided instances in which the individual has not been able to control his/her own gender identity. I will now continue forward to a discussion of current analytic philosophical theories of self and how they might enter into this discussion of gender and self-identity.

A History of the Conversation of the Conceptions of Self

Before delving into a discussion of specific conceptions of self, however, it would serve well to provide a brief history of the broad conceptions of self in order to situate the Communitarian and Liberal discussion more specifically in time.

With enlightenment thinkers, it was understood that the self was an entity that was completely knowable to the individual. For example, John Locke writes “When a man speaks to another, it is that he may be understood: and the end of speech is, that those sounds, as marks, may make known his ideas to the hearer. That then which words are the marks of are the ideas of the speaker: nor can anyone apply them as marks, immediately, to anything else but the ideas that he himself hath: for this would be to make them signs of his own conceptions, and yet apply them to other ideas.”³² Language functions as a means for the individual to convey his thoughts, concepts, and understandings to another individual, in order so that a mutual understanding can be reached. This theory has very important implicit claims that are relevant in the theory of self. With this theory of self, language is only understood as being a means to communicate self-knowledge to other individuals. This self-knowledge then is removed from the domains of language. It should be obvious then just how knowable and static these theorists believed the self to be.

With the dawn of Freudian psychoanalysis, however, it was understood that there were parts of the self that the individual could not access directly. Rather, it was the job of the psychoanalyst to interpret the dream thoughts of the patient in order so that, through the process

³² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (The Echo Library, originally published 1687) 6.

of association, the patient could come to a better, more full understanding of the self.³³ For example, if I had a dream about riding a bicycle, the psychoanalyst would argue that the bicycle itself is not revealing anything about the nature of the dream. Rather, the latent dream, that dream that would allow a fuller understanding of self, can be found by drawing associations from the bicycle. The reader is no doubt familiar with the Freudian distinction of Id, that natural part of the self that is free from contradiction, Ego, that part of the individual that we most fully refer to as being the “self,” and the Superego, the effects of the internalization of societal regulations, laws, and traditions.³⁴ Postmodern theorists took issue with this interpretation of self, however, because Freud claimed that at a certain point it was necessary that the psychoanalyst fill in gaps that would come to constitute the self.³⁵ The psychoanalyst would tell the client interpretations of psychology in order to inform the individual what the dream meant, and what the individual was actually thinking and desiring.

During the mid-twentieth century, the existentialism of continental philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre began to receive more and more attention. Existentialism acts as one of the most Liberal popular philosophies that could be offered. Sartre writes in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, “Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes himself. This is the

³³ Sigmund Freud, “Revision of the Theory of Dreams,” *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1964, originally published 1933) 8-37, 13.

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Dissection of the Psychical Personality,” *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1964, originally published 1933) 71-100, 75.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Revision of the Theory of Dreams,” *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1964, originally published 1933) 8-37, 15.

first principle of existentialism.”³⁶ Here the self is seen as being completely determined by the individual. Outside forces play absolutely no role in the formation of self identity.

After World War II, with the rise of Postmodern theories, however, the self began to be viewed as essentially fragmented and necessarily socially defined. The self was thought to change drastically depending on whatever social setting the individual may be in. It is this kind of conception that could be most closely related to Communitarianism, though it is not a perfect comparison because Communitarianism does not view the self as changing in every social situation. It merely posits that the self is defined by social relationships.

³⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale University, English Translation Copyright 2007) 22.

An Introduction to the Liberal and Communitarian Debate

The Liberal definition of self argues that the self is constituted by choices that have been made to shape the individual. With the rise of postmodern theory, and Communitarianism, Liberalism was often painted as a caricature of itself, a straw-man to act as the object of absurd arguments. These arguments stated that Liberalism entailed a commitment to the atomic, self-sufficient individual. This is not necessarily the case. Though Liberalism does necessitate the agent's role in choosing, it does not then require that the individual have no ties to other individuals. It merely requires that the individual is constituted by an agent entering a reflective state, engaging with the self in order to make a choice. "The liberal need not posit a self-sufficient subject standing over against an external world who always, or even mostly, impinges his will upon that world. You see, once you've granted the possibility of critical reflection upon one's ends, that's all that's needed." ³⁷

In her article, "Autonomy and the Social Self," Linda Barclay argues that "some feminists have suggested that the concept of individual autonomy presupposes that the self is disconnected from enduring attachments to others, avoids intimacy, and is essentially an egoistic or self-interested maximizer. Such a self is motivated above all by its own narrowly conceived self-interest and eschews the interest and comforts of others." ³⁸ Autonomy is a necessary condition for the Liberal theory of self. Because the Liberal theory argues that the agent chooses those aspects that come to constitute his/her identity, s/he must be freely choosing or else the self would not be determined by the agent. If this is in fact the picture of autonomy that some

³⁷ Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*, (Oxford University Press, 1993) 31.

³⁸ Linda Barclay, "Autonomy and the Social Self" *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (Oxford University Press, 27 Jan, 2000) 52-71, 59.

feminists have presented, in which the agent must be completely removed from all other social relationships or practices, it is no wonder that feminist theorists frequently reject Liberalism as a theory. There seems to be a slight equivocation here, however, between “Liberal” and “selfish.” There is no logical necessity for it to be the case that because the Liberal position requires us to be self-reflective, it also requires for us to be self-serving, just as there is no necessity that, because Communitarians claim that the agent is constituted by his/her community, s/he must always act in the interest of the community and endorse everything the community does. Communitarians would agree that a reaction against one’s community would still mean that the individual’s identity was constituted by the communal identity.

In recent years, as a reaction against these Communitarian critiques of Liberalism, many philosophers have responded to these straw-man arguments. In his article, “Liberalism and Communitarianism,” Daniel Shapiro writes, “some liberals have indirectly responded by noting that the type of individualism that is central to liberalism is not *asocial* individualism – the view that individuals and their nature are largely independent of social causes and social self-conceptions – but *moral* individualism, the view that the source of value or obligation is individuals and their choices and preferences.”³⁹ Shapiro’s claim makes it evident that the agent can be defined by chosen preferences and obligations without necessarily being asocial or atomic. In other words, to say that I am constituted by chosen obligations is not to say that I do not have obligations to other individuals. Agents very well may, and almost always do, have obligations to their peers and communities. These obligations are chosen by the agent, however, are not something that can be applied to the agent without his/her choosing.

³⁹ Daniel Shapiro, “Liberalism and Communitarianism,” *Philosophical Books*, 12 Feb, 2009, 145 – 155, 147.

In her article, “Autonomy and the Social Self,” Linda Barclay also advocates that “although it is undoubtedly the case that certain moral and political theories presuppose an individualistic conception of the self, it is not plausible to suggest that the concept of autonomy itself presupposes such a conception of the self... this position conflates the concept of autonomy with that of substantive independence.”⁴⁰ Again, all that is necessary for the individual to be autonomous is that s/he can freely enter into a reflective state to judge obligations, preferences, and practices without the presence of force, coercion, or manipulation. Thus, there is no reason that Liberalism require the agent to be socially separate from his/her peers or community. In fact, agents can choose to care very much about their relationships or peers. It only matters that these agents have chosen to do so.

⁴⁰ Linda Barclay, “Autonomy and the Social Self,” *Relational Autonomy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 52 – 71, 59.

The Communitarian Theory of Self:

Found Communities, Shared Understandings, and Social Determinism

Communitarians argue that the identity of self is not chosen by the individual, but is instead discovered. The self is constituted by its relations with found communities. For example, an individual is born into certain communities, perhaps being raised in accordance with certain practices from an ethnic identity or being born into a specific religious community. This found community would be argued to constitute the agent in a way that the community to which the agent chooses to belong, perhaps a certain political party, would not. In what is one of the most extreme Communitarian arguments, Genevieve Lloyd argues that the self is not only socially located, but also temporally located.

“By looking more closely at the processes through which we make ourselves responsible for what we have not ourselves done – the process through which human beings enter relations of solidarity that challenge oppositions between self and other – we can gain insight into how our models of selfhood might change to accommodate the realities of interdependence.”⁴¹ In this specific instance, Lloyd is arguing that individuals frequently take responsibility for actions that they themselves did not commit. For example, Jacques Derrida took responsibility for the anti-Semitic publications of his dear friend, Paul de Man.⁴² We see these kinds of scenarios in our day-to-day lives, however, in which one individual chooses to become responsible for actions that s/he did not commit. For example, a mentor may take responsibility for the actions of a student or a chaperone may take responsibilities for the actions of the individual in his/her care.

⁴¹ Genevieve Lloyd, “Individuals, Responsibility, and the Philosophical Imagination,” *Relational Autonomy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 112 – 123, 113.

⁴² Ibid 115.

At this point it could be argued that Lloyd has actually argued against herself. In claiming that the self is socially constituted and temporally located, Lloyd has actually argued that we can accept responsibility for actions that we ourselves did not commit. This accepted responsibility is a chosen obligation. This kind of chosen obligation could only be possible in a Liberal understanding of self. Lloyd takes her argument further, however, and argues that it is not only the case that Derrida can take responsibility for actions that he himself did not commit.

Individuals can be also held responsible for group actions that they themselves did not commit, even if these events took place before the individual came into physical existence. In these instances it is not necessary that the individual willingly accept responsibility. For example, I may be held responsible by another country for the actions of my nation-state, even though these actions took place before I was even a physical member of that community. This kind of assigning of responsibility takes place frequently and seems to be the predominant reason that we have wars and rivalries that continue for generations, even when the original perpetrators are no longer alive. “We do not acquire these responsibilities through any decisions we make as individuals, nor do we acquire them by contracting into a group whose actions or policies we thereby accept. We acquire them by being born into a community.”⁴³

Thus, the kind of independence required by a Liberal conception of self may be viewed as moral independence. Shapiro and Barclay, advocating for the Liberal position, argue that individuals can choose to be morally identified with other individuals. Derrida accepting the actions of de Man, for example, is a chosen moral identification. Derrida had been morally independent before choosing to become otherwise. Lloyd, however, argues that we are in fact not morally independent, but born into a community that provides a set of responsibilities and

⁴³ Ibid 120.

obligations that bound us morally. Though it does seem to function well when analyzed as a moral theory, Lloyd's theory does encounter issues because of its metaphysical implications.

Lloyd writes, "the capacity to have a past and to reflect on it is crucial to selfhood; and having, in the relevant sense, a past is not something that admits of tidy borders between the individual existence that is mine and the collective existence that precedes me, into which I am born."⁴⁴ Put into other words, a self must have a past and be able to reflect on this past. My past as an individual, however, seems deeply intertwined and even defined by the collective experience of the community of which I am a member.

It is unlikely that any philosophers would take issue with the first part of Lloyd's claim. A sense of past does seem essential to the individual's self-understanding. In fact, even the Liberal philosopher David Velleman argues that the unified self over time is achieved by the fact "that a person has past and future selves in virtue of psychological connections that give him first-personal access to past and future points-of-view – connections that can be forged by memory and anticipation but not by the retention of motives or traits of character."⁴⁵ We will return to a more in depth analysis of Velleman's theory of self later in this article. At this point, it is only necessary to understand that no one, not even Lloyd's critics and counterpoints, would argue against the self needing access to a history.

Lloyd's stronger claim, however, is that my past is in fact the collective past of the community into which I am being physically born. This means that the self existed before it physically came into existence and will exist after the physical body dies. Certainly, it should be admitted that Lloyd is correct in suggesting that it is difficult to place temporal boundaries on the

⁴⁴ Ibid 122.

⁴⁵ David J Velleman, "Identification and Identity," *Self to Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 339.

self, but I don't see how this entails that it is more logical to defer the necessity of temporal boundaries from the self to the larger community. This does no philosophical work for Lloyd, but allows her to brush the question aside as if she has answered it. The temporal boundaries of a community or culture are not at all more easily discoverable than those of the individual. In order to make these issues more understandable, it may be beneficial to provide an example.

On a college campus there are undoubtedly a number of politically-driven clubs that choose to identify with a larger political party. If we are engaging in the kind of temporal boundaries that Lloyd desires, we would not try to answer any questions about the specific individual involved in the club, but rather defer to the history of the organization. It may be that the group came into existence when it was recognized as a club by the Student Government Association. This is certainly an appealing temporal boundary. Still, it is entirely possible, and very likely, that the exact same individuals who now meet as this SGA-recognized political club had been meeting for months beforehand, doing the exact same kind of work and engaging in the same kind of conversations that they do now. It is also very possible that over time the group chooses to change the constitution that originally formed the group. The group may even go so far as to change its name in order to find something that is more appealing to a larger audience. Any one of these instances could constitute a change in identity. There is no easy way to set temporal boundaries on this group. Even this example is much more charitable than most community organizations because most organizations are never formally recognized as beginning and don't require constitutions or official names.

What is evident at this point is that trying to define the location of a community not only entails the difficulties of temporal location (unity over time), but also entails difficulty in

defining singular physical location (unity at a time). Thus, there are metaphysical issues in adopting Lloyd's theory. There are also descriptive issues, however.

Lloyd's theory entails that the individual inherits moral responsibilities and commitments in virtue of the fact that s/he is born into this specific community. It seems that moral progress is often made when an individual is choosing not to accept moral responsibility for his/her community's actions. A commitment to defining the self as having moral obligations from found communities seems to imply the denial of moral progress, much like many of the arguments in favor of Moral Relativism. If I am inheriting my conceptions of self from my community's culture, how could I then react against its morals and standards and be justified? Where is this new 'self' coming from that is reacting against the communally constituted self?

It seems that in order for a community to have moral progress, some kind of moral criticism is necessary. Most believe that this kind of cultural moral criticism would require a certain independence from the community on behalf of the moral critic. It seems easy to "believe that detachment from the community's shared meanings bearing on communal practices is a necessary condition of moral freedom."⁴⁶ In other words, in order to morally critique our communities we must, in a certain sense, be separated from those communities. This would prove troublesome for any Communitarian philosopher.

Daniel Bell suggests that individuals can become critics of their communities, which would then allow moral progress. Bell argues that the individual can criticize the community while actually appealing to standards held within the community. "On this view, critical standards are drawn from the shared meanings of a particular group of people rather than from an external, impersonal standpoint. The critic points to a shared meaning which condemns a certain

⁴⁶ Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford University Press, 1993) 64.

social practice...”⁴⁷ This quote makes it evident that the shared understanding is something distinct from the social practice. Rather, we have shared understandings that shape our understanding of social practices. The shared understanding are those values that can be found in the practices, traditions, and texts of a community. Thus, though it was a social practice to have slaves before the Civil War, Bell would argue that individuals could access the true meaning of the shared understanding, perhaps by referencing our Declaration of Independence and the importance of the equality of all individuals, in order to bring about social change and end slavery. Thus the individual, as a member of the community, can access shared understandings of the community in order to bring about social change. The critic can present the true meaning of the shared understanding.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Liberal Critiques of Communitarian Definitions

If Bell is right and there does exist a true meaning of the shared understanding, then this allows for the self to be constituted by his/her community and does not necessitate that the critic become separate from his/her community in order to offer critique. If Bell's argument strikes the reader as familiar, it should, because it is almost the exact argument of Stanley Fish's interpretive communities. Fish's theory is of course related to literary theory, rather than meta-ethics or epistemology.

Still, it is an instance in which Fish is trying to allow that, though there may not be any objective truth in the text (just as Lloyd and Bell would argue that there is no objective comparison to be used to critique a culture) one can interpret the text in a way to reveal a new truth to his/her community (just as the critic can use the shared understanding to present a true meaning to his/her community). Through his use of interpretive communities, Fish is able to provide for the perceived existence of objectivity, without relying solely on a single reading of an author's intentions. "Mine is not an argument for an infinitely plural or an open text, but for a text that is always set; and yet because it is set not for all places or all times but for wherever and however long a particular way of reading is in force, it is a text that can change."⁴⁸ The physical objective text will remain constant, but the objective meaning of the text will change over time because the interpretive communities will change, "which leads the members of the community to pay a certain kind of attention and thereby to *create* literature."⁴⁹

It could be argued, however, that I shouldn't take Fish's claims seriously because they are just bad claims and don't warrant being taken seriously by analytic philosophy. Fish's argument

⁴⁸ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Harvard University Press, 1980) 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 97.

for interpretive communities necessarily entails Cultural Relativism. Each community would be interpreting the truth, including the moral truth, according to its values and ideals. Thus, any argument against Cultural Relativism could be offered against Fish's interpretive communities. It is clear that Fish believes his ideas to have effects outside of literary theory. It's clear that I cannot simply brush aside his claims because he is not an analytic philosopher. Still, maybe his claims are just bad and shouldn't be considered. This is my point exactly. Bell is making the exact same claim that Fish has made repeatedly with his interpretive communities. These interpretive communities are never taken seriously as analytic philosophy. Why then have Bell's true meanings of the shared understandings been taken seriously?

Bell's theory of true meaning of the shared understanding actually proves even more troublesome than Fish's interpretive communities. At least, when treated as literary criticism, the text that is being interpreted is rather easily defined. If I wish to present literary criticism, but I can't specifically say what text I am criticizing, it would not be taken seriously as literary criticism. Bell, however, cannot define the specific text being interpreted. In fact, Bell wishes to take comfort in the undefined texts. Bell clearly argues that the shared understanding is not simply the group consensus. Thus, it is not as if the text being considered would be polling data on the morality of a community. "Interpretation of shared meanings is not merely a matter of uncovering beliefs or attitudes by such means as polling, although polls can lend credibility to a certain interpretation, as I've already said; rather, one should think of this enterprise as a sort of expertise in the understanding of the moral consciousness of the community..."⁵⁰

Thus far I have presented a brief history of the broad conceptions of self that have been presented. It was a history of theories that moved from the self as being created by the individual

⁵⁰ Ibid 65.

to theories of the self as being discovered by the individual. Genevieve Lloyd's theory of the temporally located self acts as a great example of the socially created and individually discovered self. This theory is metaphysically strange, however, because it requires deferring the temporal boundaries of the individual to the temporal boundaries of the community, yet cannot offer any explanation as to the nature of the communal temporal boundaries. and ethically strange because it does not allow for moral progress. I have presented very similar arguments from Daniel Bell and Stanley Fish as to how progress might be made through interpretation using the standards of one's community. I have shown that these arguments are flawed, however, and prove to provide no actual knowledge. I do not wish to pain the Communitarians in an unfair light, however.

Instead of arguing against the concepts employed in arguing against the theories that come to constitute Communitarian definitions, one can adopt a Communitarian definition of self in order to show the undesirable and implausible consequences of the definition. In her book, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Susan Moller Okin argues that "the appeal to 'our traditions' and the 'shared understandings' approach are both incapable of dealing with the problem of the effects of *social domination* on beliefs and understandings."⁵¹ Okin first presents an analysis of specific cultures in which, even if one were to access the true meaning of the shared understanding, it would seem that patriarchy and sexism would exist. This includes, the Homeric tradition, in which "women's virtues were defined in relation to men, whereas men's virtues were not defined in relation to women,"⁵² Ancient Greek society, in which "*all* women were

⁵¹ Susan Moller Okin, "Whose Traditions? Which Understandings?" *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (Princeton University, 1987) 42.

⁵² Ibid 50.

excluded by Aristotle from ‘the good life,’”⁵³ and the theological teachings Thomas Aquinas within Augustinian Christianity, in which men and women are thought to be spiritually equal, though women were not made in God’s image.⁵⁴ Okin argues that, even if individuals had access to a true meaning of the shared understanding that existed, there would be no other true meaning besides one that necessitated patriarchy. Certainly if there were a true meaning of the shared understanding accessible, famous critics such as Aristotle and Aquinas would be thought to be able to access it.

Perhaps most importantly, Okin argues that criticism of the tradition could not be possible. If a tradition were successful in becoming widespread and dominant, it would become increasingly difficult to question its legitimacy. “The more thoroughgoing the dominance, and the more pervasive its ideology across the various spheres, the less chance there is that the whole prevailing system will be questioned or resisted.”⁵⁵ This may seem obvious at first, but it has very serious consequences. The true meaning of the shared understanding is argued to be a meaning that is not necessarily represented directly by a tradition, but the discovery of which instead necessitates interpretation and further understanding. If, however, a tradition becomes widespread, it will not be possible for the individual to criticize the established tradition. Access to the true meaning of the shared understanding would thus be impossible. In other words, the more widespread a specific unjust belief has become throughout a community, the more difficult it will become to access the true meaning of the shared understanding to argue against this unjust belief.

⁵³ Ibid 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid 57.

⁵⁵ Ibid 64.

For example, women have often been treated as objects. Whether it be the often subtly-objectifying language that is often employed when discussing or addressing women, or the actual trading of female-identified persons as property, women's agency has often been called into question. If one were to follow Okin's argument, it would lead to the result that, if Communitarianism were true in this very widespread patriarchy, it would actually be impossible for women to disavow the social construction of women as objects. In his article, "Objectivity and Social Meaning," Communitarian theorist Michael Walzer must address this claim in order to ensure that his theory does not allow for such results.

Walzer argues that "the hard case comes when we begin to think that a long history of social construction has somehow gone awry. Consider, then, those societies where women (all women) seem to have been socially constructed as objects of exchange and where rules of exchange follow from the construction."⁵⁶ This problem case is not an instance in which a woman is forced against her will to objectify herself.⁵⁷ This would be coercion or manipulation and the woman would thus not have agency. The problem case is actually a society in which women are willingly treated as objects. The woman must thus freely choose to sacrifice agency. Her objectification thus morally necessitates her agency. In order for the social construction of her as an object to hold, she must be free from coercion or manipulation. She must be freely choosing to become an object. In other words, she must declare her objectivity by utilizing her agency. "She is constituted by a contradiction—in so far as her subordinate status depends (morally) on her own agreement or acquiescence and is therefore inconsistent with subordination

⁵⁶ Michael Walzer, "Objectivity and Social Meaning," *The Quality of Life* (Oxford University Press, 1993) ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 165-177, 172.

⁵⁷ Ibid 173.

itself—and therein lies her freedom.”⁵⁸ The creation of social construction, in this case the construction of women into objects, thus requires agency.

A social construction can only come into existence when enough individuals acknowledge it as being a social construction. For example, I cannot simply decide that a certain motion of my hand has the social meaning of saying “hello.” Rather, enough people have come to agree upon the movement of the hand from left to right as constituting a greeting. Walzer believes that his argument’s relying on social constructions had freed him from the sexist implications that Okin has observed because, “The theory of social construction implies (some sort of) human agency and requires the recognition of women and men as agents (of some sort).”⁵⁹ He has certainly proven the first claim, human agency is required in the construction of social constructions. He has not proven the second claim, however. The construction of social constructions only requires agency. It does not require widespread agency for all men and women. This large gap makes it the case that any dominating group in a community (in this case, men) may make it the case that justice does not apply to another group (in this case, women). Put into other terms, the dominating group may limit another group’s agency. The dominating group would thus have complete control of the creation of social constructions. These social constructions play a vital role in the true meaning of the shared understanding. The dominating group would thus have complete control of the true meaning of the shared understanding. It may be surprising then that this same sort of argument is used by Will Kymlicka, a self-proclaimed Liberal philosopher.

⁵⁸ Ibid 174.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The Liberal Definition of Self:

Freedom, Autonomy and the Atomic Individual

Thus far I have offered Communitarian theories and Liberal critiques of those theories. A common critique of Liberalism, however, is that, because of all of the emphasis placed on the individual, it does not allow for the influence of one's culture and the important role it plays in the identity of the self. Will Kymlicka argues that there is actually a distinction that must be made between the possible meanings of "culture." Under one of these definitions, Liberalism actually allows the influence of community that Communitarians desire. Under the other definition, however, Liberalism does not allow the effects of community and Communitarians would be absurd to.

"In one common usage, culture refers to the *character* of a historical community. On this view, changes in the norms, values, and their attendant institutions in one's community (e.g. membership in churches, political parties, etc.) would amount to loss of one's culture."⁶⁰ Kymlicka, however, uses culture "in a very different sense, to refer to the cultural community, or cultural structure, itself. On this view, the cultural community continues to exist even when its members are free to modify the character of the culture, should they find its traditional ways of life no longer worth while."⁶¹ Put into more commonly used terms, the cultural character would be the traditions, practices, and values of a community, while the cultural structure would be the aspects of a culture that make it that culture, even if specific traditions were to change.

⁶⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1989) 166.

⁶¹ Ibid 167.

The first definition of culture would lead to all of issues that I have thus far considered in this article. The second definition, however, allows the individual to be very involved in the culture, even to work for the betterment of that culture, without necessitating that s/he is constituted by the cultural character. It would thus be possible to critique and change a culture because the individual would not be accessing any true meanings of the cultural character, but would instead be working within the culture as a system or structure. In fact, Kymlicka argues that the Liberal definition of self not only allows for the effects of the person's cultural structure on the person, but even necessitates it.

With *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls provided the most famous example of a Liberal position of self with the argument that justice is fairness. Rawls argued that to bring about a truly just society, individuals must enter into an original position. In this original position, it is necessary to “nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage.”⁶² Here Rawls is arguing that in order to achieve justice as fairness, it will prove to be necessary that individuals not act out of a self interest acquired by their connections with specific groups (whether it be their racial, sexual, gendered, religious, or socioeconomic identity, for example). Rawls argues that “in order to do this I assume that the parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations.”⁶³ The self could thus be understood as being completely removed from any sort of cultural or communal ties, though it may happen to inadvertently work in the interest of a culture or community.

⁶² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971) 118

⁶³ Ibid.

Rawls is thus arguing that in order to bring about true justice, it cannot be the case that the individuals are acting based on shared understandings. In fact, the individuals should not even act as a member of a group. They should instead act from a veil of ignorance in order to ensure that any consensus reached benefits all individuals and not simply their specific identity group. In the original position, behind this veil of ignorance, I would not advocate for justice on behalf of all liberal arts students, but I would advocate for justice for liberal arts students because it may be possible that I would be a liberal arts student, when not in the original position. I would also be advocating for all other groups, however, because it would be entirely possible that I become a member of those groups.

Kymlicka argues that cultural structure is a primary good in the Rawlsian theory of justice and would thus be protected by all individuals in the original position. “But cultural membership is still a primary good, consideration of which is an important part of showing equal concern for individuals. This importance would have been recognized by the parties in Rawls’ original position.”⁶⁴ It is certainly not clear that Rawls would necessarily agree with Kymlicka’s argument.

Kymlicka argues that the cultural structure to which an individual belongs will provide the individual with self-respect. This self-respect is considered a primary good. Therefore, cultural structures are a primary good.⁶⁵ Certainly Rawls does list self-respect as being a primary good that would be protected in the original position.⁶⁶ “We may define self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. First of all, as noted earlier, it includes a person’s sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth

⁶⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1989) 166.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971) 386.

carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions."⁶⁷ Kymlicka thus wants to argue that we understand ourselves as being deserving of respect only because of our placement in a cultural structure. This cultural structure is thus necessary for self-respect and would be entailed as a primary good in the original position. This same reasoning has been used by Communitarians to argue against Liberalism.

In their article, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," Joel Anderson and Alex Honneth argue that a Liberal conception of justice actually necessitates Communitarianism. Honneth and Anderson argue that the individual must have self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem and that these attributes actually necessitate other people. "Self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem are thus neither purely beliefs about oneself nor emotional states, but are emergent properties of a dynamic process in which individuals come to experience themselves as having a certain status, be it as an object of concern, a responsible agent, a valued contributor to shared projects, or what have you."⁶⁸ In order to have self-trust, self-respect, or self-esteem, one must rely on the perceived opinions of other individuals. The Liberal self is thus understood by its relation to other persons. The Liberal self thus entails Communitarianism.⁶⁹

There are two possible routes to argue against Anderson and Honneth's claims. First, one could argue that self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem are not necessary for a person with the Liberal conception of self. Second, one could instead argue against every claim made to defend that self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem actually require other individuals. Because Rawls has

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Joel Anderson and Alex Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," *Relational Autonomy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 127 – 149, 131.

⁶⁹ I include Anderson and Honneth's counterargument in this section because it first defines a Liberal sense of self and then argues that the necessary implications of the sense of self necessitate a Communitarian identity. Thus, it is best understood when compared to other Liberal theories of self.

commented that self-respect is a primary good,⁷⁰ it would be counterproductive to argue that the Liberal position does not require self-respect. Thus, it will instead prove fruitful to argue that these conceptions in no way necessitate other individuals.

The definition of self-respect given by Anderson and Honneth is something wholly different than what Rawls suggests. Instead of arguing that self-respect is sense of self-value and ability to realize one's goals,⁷¹ they argue that "if one takes respect (including self-respect) to have, as its object, an agent's authority to raise and defend claims as a person with equal standing, then self-respect can be seen as the affectively laden self-conception that underwrites a view of oneself as the legitimate source for acting."⁷² Certainly this conception of self-respect would necessitate an audience, and thus other people, because there would need to be an audience to whom one is defending one's claims. It is unclear, however, that this is the best definition of self-respect or even what is usually meant in our common-sense use of the word.

It is certainly true that, if an individual is able to raise and defend claims, we would argue that the individual has demonstrated self-respect. I would argue, however, that self-respect is more of a disposition that causes the action of standing up for one's claims. It is not necessary that the individual actually defend his/her claims. Self-respect seems to be a value judgment whereupon the self is reflected upon. Thus, when reflecting upon my ideas, I may deem my ideas as being valuable and defend my claims. Also, however, there are instances in which a person may never defend a claim, but will deem him/herself as having value. There are a variety of other instances in which we would argue that an individual either possesses or does not possess

⁷⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971) 386.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Joel Anderson and Alex Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," *Relational Autonomy*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 127 – 149, 132.

self-respect. The defending one's claims example only acts as an instance. This conception of self-respect as a reflective state in which the individual deems him/herself as having certain value in no way necessitates relations with other individuals. Still, Anderson and Honneth could be correct in their claims regarding self-trust and self-esteem as being necessary for the Liberal conception of self and actually necessitating other individuals. I will now turn to a discussion of these two topics to show that this is not the case.

“In speaking of ‘self-trust’ (or basic ‘self-confidence’), we have in mind the characteristic of an agent who has an open and trusting relationship to his or her own feelings, desires, impulses, emotions, and so on.”⁷³ They argue that self-trust is only realized through interpersonal relationships,⁷⁴ that relationships force self-trust because we must necessarily confront all of our imperfections, feelings, and desires. Certainly interpersonal relationships do test an individual's self-trust and provide a basis of evidence for their trust. Still, it hardly seems plausible that self-trust's “acquisition and maintenance are dependent on interpersonal relationships in which one acquires and sustains the capacity to relate to this dynamic inner life.”⁷⁵

Here, I would like to present an example to act as a counter argument to this claim made by Anderson and Honneth. An alcoholic sits in his house. He has emptied it of all known bottles of alcohol. This man has vowed to become sober. He can feel the effects of withdrawal taking place. Upon further investigation, the man discovers a bottle of vodka, perhaps even his favorite brand. The man is, understandably, very tempted to consume this alcohol. Instead, however, he dumps the vodka down the toilet and recycles the bottle.

⁷³ Ibid 133.

⁷⁴ Ibid 135.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

This brief narrative example should act as evidence of an incident in which the individual should feel an enhanced sense of self-trust. Yet, this above example in no way necessitates that the man be engaged in an interpersonal relationship to discover this self-trust. It is certainly true that interpersonal relationships help the individual build self-trust. It is not the case, however, that interpersonal relationships are the only means to building self-trust. Rather, it seems that interpersonal relationships put the individual in situations in which self-trust is tested. Thus, these situations of the forced building of self-trust are not only encountered in interpersonal relationships, though they may be very common in these relationships.

It could still be the case, however, that self-esteem requires other individuals. They argue “individuals cannot decide for themselves what their (speech) acts mean. Rather, determining the worth and meaning of one’s activities is fundamentally framed by the semantic and symbolic field in which that reflection occurs... Thus, for example, the very possibility of being ‘openly lesbian’ or ‘a stay at home dad’ is framed by a whole constellation of evaluatively loaded ways of talking.”⁷⁶ This is Anderson and Honneth’s strongest claim. They are arguing that any self-understanding is necessarily socially-based because it will be based on social understandings of words. Here, I believe that they are overestimating the power of the effects of these concepts. Certainly, an individual may choose to identify as “a stay at home dad.” There would be certain expectations attached to this title. It is not as if these expectations must be normative for the individual, however. I argue that an individual realizes himself or herself to have certain desires, preferences, practices, and obligations and then accepts a socially-constructed title that applies to those qualities of the self. It is true that, after the title has been accepted, the identity may be strengthened, but this is still an identity that was chosen based on the individual characteristics of

⁷⁶ Ibid 136.

self. These characteristics did not come about because of the identity. Rather, the identity came about and was accepted because of the individual characteristics.

There are, of course, instances in which individuals choose to fully accept all normative aspects of a certain title. It is unlikely, for example, that someone who receives the title “police sergeant” would view the aspects of his title as being unnecessary. This is not what Anderson and Honneth are claiming, however. They are claiming that the police sergeant not only fulfills his expected duties as a police sergeant, but that he will understand his whole life and self differently because of his being a police sergeant.

Even if the individual does choose to identify wholeheartedly with a specific social role, it would still be a Liberal conception of self, so long as the individual is choosing and it is not merely happening passively because of his/her being identified as a specific social standing with entailed characteristics. It is possible that the self is choosing based on these assumed social characteristics, these meta-narratives, but the self would still necessarily be choosing. All of the claims made by Anderson and Honneth are thus discovered to be false upon further examination. Other people are not necessary for the individual to have self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem. This could, however negatively impact the earlier Liberal argument made by Kymlicka.

As I discussed earlier, Kymlicka claimed that the cultural structures were necessary for the individual’s self-respect, but that this did not make the influence of cultural character necessary. Once again, Kymlicka is making this argument to act as a counterpoint to the claim that Liberal theories underestimate the influence that communities have on the individual. In order to understand whether or not Kymlicka’s theory would also be proven false by my counterarguments to Anderson and Honneth, it will be necessary to have a better understanding of the distinction between cultural character and cultural structure. Kymlicka would like to claim

that my counterarguments to Anderson and Honneth address the influence of cultural character, not the cultural structure.

It is unfortunate then that Kymlicka never makes the definition of cultural structure clear to the reader. There are a few possibilities that a reader could offer for what is meant by cultural structure. First, Kymlicka could be arguing that, even if we are not internalizing the cultural character (meaning those specific aspects of traditions, values, preferences, and practices) we are working within a structure of institutions that are culturally based. Perhaps the argument is that, though I am never constituted by the character of my culture, the formation of self necessarily entails a political system, an educational system, an economy, or even simply a family. This would not fall ill to my counterarguments to Honneth and Anderson.

Second, Kymlicka could mean that the cultural structure is something more like an abstract value system. Thus, though a Christian may refuse to accept the specific moral rulings of her church, perhaps she has an overall sense of morality that can be attributed to the structure of her upbringing. In this sense, however, the individual would be constituted by an adoption or appropriation of the cultural character of her culture. It is thus unlikely that Kymlicka would wish for cultural structure to be defined in this way.

If, however, we read cultural structure to mean something like the linguistic and conceptual lexicon of a culture, then my arguments are not directed at Kymlicka's claim. This is very closely related to Anderson and Honneth's claim regarding self-esteem. Kymlicka may be interpreted as arguing that any concept that is used to define the self will be a social definition. I constantly use a set of language and concepts that I have come to understand socially. I do not need to accept the character or connotations of this lexicon, however, though other individuals do and we cannot be said to use a word in an entirely private sense. This is how the appropriation of

terms comes into play. We accept the language and concepts, but deny the character or connotations of the specific word, though others may still believe the word has that character or connotation. This would allow the individual to still freely create the self by using the linguistic lexicon of his/her culture, without necessitating s/he is constituted by the specific characteristics or traditions of his/her culture.

At this point the concepts of true meaning of the shared understanding and cultural structure may seem too similar to me to argue against one, but defend one as being a usable claim for my own purposes. The true meaning of the shared understanding requires access to the texts, language, institutions, customs, traditions, and values. What I interpret the cultural structure as meaning, however, is simply the conceptual linguistic lexicon that one uses because of his/her culture. It would serve best to provide an example.

If there existed a group of people that identified as homosexual because they were same-sex desiring and hated sports, they may wish to tell a person that he is not queer because, though he is same-sex desiring, he is not homosexual. If we were to embrace the true meaning of the shared understanding, we would have to analyze this group's traditions, founding documents, procedures, customs, and values. This would lead to the conclusion that the same-sex desiring, sports loving individual is not homosexual because he does not engage in all of these practices or hold the same values. If, however, we implement the understanding of cultural structure, we could instead analyze the use of language. We could separate the essential qualities of the words used from the connotations or associations.

When we think of the word 'homosexual,' there are certain concepts that the word signifies that are understood as being essential. If I were to describe a person who was not same-sex desiring as being 'homosexual,' I would not be using the word correctly, just as if I were to

describe a married man as a 'bachelor.' The word can be appropriated and new words can be used that may share essential signifiers. For example, the word 'lesbian' is acting as a signifier of the essential concept, 'same-sex desiring,' like 'homosexual.' Lesbian is also acting as a signifier for 'female-identified,' however. Thus, the concept of 'female-identified, same-sex desiring individual' is signified by 'lesbian.' I argue that it is this linguistic structure that is part of the cultural structure.

There is nothing to make it the case that simply because the definitions of self are socially defined, the individual cannot create the self. By this I mean that because of the agent's ability to appropriate, accept, and individualize concepts, even if an individual is defining himself or herself in relation to a social construction, this social construction is individually accepted and shaped. Communitarianism would not allow for this same kind of self-determinism in relation to an individual's identity within a cultural or communal context.

On Whether We Choose to Create the Self
or Choose to Accept the Socially-Constituted Self

Thus far I have presented discussions in gender, presented a brief history of the kinds of theories of self that have been presented, and explained Communitarian and Liberal theories of self while offering possible critiques of both. At this point in the article, I would like to discuss one of the fundamental distinctions between the Liberal and Communitarian theories which will become increasingly important when I return to a discussion of these theories' relations to gender identity. This very important distinction is that between the discovered and determined self of Communitarianism and the chosen and created self of Liberalism.

With Communitarianism, the self is not chosen, but is rather discovered as existing through social relationships and in communities. This has very serious implications. The agent will never choose aspects of the self that come to constitute his/her identity. Instead, the self is socially determined and socially defined. There is a sense in which the agent is choosing, but s/he is choosing correctly or incorrectly depending on whether or not s/he is acting to support the socially-constituted self that has either already been determined socially (as most Communitarians would argue) or has even already existed socially (as Lloyd argues). "Fate runs its full course only when willingly (joyfully!) embraced by the fated individual."⁷⁷ As Zygmunt Bauman argues in his piece, "On Communitarianism and Human Freedom or 'How to Square the Circle,'" there is an issue with this Communitarian idea that the agent simply acts in accordance with an already determined socially-constituted self. What would be considered the "right" choice is then placed with all other choices. Because this self has already been determined,

⁷⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, "On Communitarians and Human Freedom: or 'How to Square the Circle'" *Theory, Culture, Society* (1996) 79 – 90, 82

however, it must be the case that the individual will choose this socially-constituted self, or else it would be a Liberal theory. Thus, though there is a choice, it must be the case that the “right” choice is so appealing that it is impossible not to choose it. “One would much prefer to have the favorable outcome of the competition guaranteed in advance. But this means *privileging* one choice over all the others; making the odds against other choices overwhelming, and increasing the stakes entailed in making the ‘right’ choice.”⁷⁸ Bauman has thus provided an argument as to how, because of the socially-constituted self, there are some socially-determined elements about the self, such that I cannot help but choose to continue it. As opposed to a Liberal theory that offers the agent complete control in creating any number of possible identities or selves, the Communitarian theory argues that the agent is simply discovering and reinforcing the single self. For the purposes of this article, I will call this singular self the “true self,” because Communitarians do not want to deny that the agent will be choosing certain aspects of self, but they do want to argue that there are certain aspects of self that cannot be changed. These aspects would come to constitute what I call the “true self.”

This notion of a true self is certainly appealing. It removes much of the angst that can be associated with complete freedom in the creation of self that has troubled so many philosophers, especially those existential philosophers like Sartre and Camus. Still, an individual is a member of many different communities simultaneously. John Christman argues that “as communitarian critics of liberalism have repeatedly stressed, our identities are often constituted by our deepest value commitments. But these foci of selfhood vary from context to context and hence cannot, singly, play the role of the ‘true self’ of which autonomy is meant to be an expression.”⁷⁹ Put

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ John Christman “Autonomy, Self-Knowledge, and Liberal Legitimacy” *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) ed. John Christman & Joel Anderson, 330 – 358, 333.

into other terms, if my “true self” is determined and constituted by my culture, what happens when I am a member of many different cultures? Which of these could be said to constitute my preferences, practices, and obligations that constitute my true self? If my identity is determined by my social contexts, how is it that this identity can remain true, unified, and constant over time and over changing social contexts?

The theory of a true self is especially important when considering the implications that all of these theories will have on transgender theory. It certainly seems that a true self would allow transgender individuals the argument that, though they have been defined as belonging to one gender because of their physical sex, their true self is actually a different gender than their sex characteristics suggest. Still, in this scenario we would not be able to define from which community this true self is being determined or how to realize what the true self would actually be. If a transgender individual is feeling conflicted because of the social implications of attempting to pass as the desired gender, then the Communitarian would have to say that this is their true self. It is a decision in which the individual, when being faced with a fundamental question of who s/he is, cannot help but choose a certain options. In fact, in this instance, it would even be because of social understandings and implications. I will now turn to the Liberal theory in order to see if there is some possible way that Liberals could allow the individual the kind of perceived essentialism of certain aspects of an individual’s identity without necessitating a socially-constituted and determined true self.

Harry Frankfurt presents a Liberal theory in which the self can be identified as being “whole-hearted.” In order to understand this term, however, it is first necessary to have a better understanding of the Liberal definition of self as proposed by Frankfurt. Frankfurt argues that the self is a hierarchical structure of desires. “According to this schema, there are at the lowest level

first-order desires to perform one or another action. Which of these first-order desires actually leads to action is, by virtue of that effectiveness, designated the will of the individual whose desire it is.”⁸⁰ For example, while writing this article, it is entirely possible that I have the desire to swim. I want to swim. This would be considered a first-order desire in Frankfurt’s schema of desires. It is a “want-to-something.” The individual’s will is the first-order desire that leads that agent to action. Though I may want to go swimming, I also want to continue my philosophical pursuits, and so I write the article. My desire to continue to my philosophical pursuits is thus my will. Notice, it is not the potentiality of moving me to action that designates the first-order desire as my will. “It is not the notion of something that merely inclines an agent in some degree to act in a certain way. Rather, it is the notion of an *effective* desire – one that moves (or will or would move) a person all the way to action.”⁸¹

Second-order desires are not simply a “want-to-something,” but a “want-to-want-to-something.” In this respect, they are meta-desires. They are desires about desires. To return to the example of my desires to swim and continue to study philosophy, it could be the case that I want to want to continue to study philosophy. A series of beliefs could cause me to think that there would be more merit in my philosophical pursuits than in simply indulging a desire to swim. Thus, because I have a second-order desire to want to pursue philosophy and I do not have a second-order desire to swim, I am led to pursue philosophy. The first-order desire, to study philosophy, is being endorsed by a second-order desire. It is entirely possible that a first-order desire could win over a second-order desire. Just because a desire is of a higher order does not

⁸⁰ Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 32.

⁸¹ Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Journal of Philosophy* (Jan, 1971), 5-20, 8.

necessarily mean that it is a more effective desire. The second-order desire is just of a different intellectual level.

It is not necessarily the case, however, that I am always led to act by an endorsed first-order desire. It is possible that the agent could be conflicted. “In the first place, there may be a conflict between how someone wants to be motivated and the desire by which he is in fact most powerfully moved.”⁸² For example, an individual may be addicted to a narcotic and want to no longer desire the drug. Still, he succumbs to his addiction and indulges. This is an instance in which the individual is weak willed. His endorsed first-order desire does not lead him to act.

It is possible, however, for the individual to be conflicted in another sense. It could be the case that throughout his competing second-order desires there is not a single desire with enough motivational strength to make it the case that I do whatever first-order desire they’re endorsing. For example, I may want to go to a family gathering but may also want to just run away with a friend and avoid any awkward family encounters. I really do want to want to go to the family gathering and want to want to go away with a friend. ”It is not a matter of volitional strength, but of whether the highest-order preferences concerning some volitional issue are *wholehearted*. It has to do with the possibility that there is no unequivocal answer to the question of what the person really wants...”⁸³ Thus, in these instances of conflict at the second-order, I would simply refer to even higher-ordered desires. It is possible for there to be desires that are of a higher-order desires than simply the second-order desires. These second-order desires are all that is necessary, however, for the individual to be considered an agent.

⁸² Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

It is possible, however, that even if I appeal to higher-ordered desires, I still cannot seem to arrive upon what I could be said to “really want to do.” In this sense of conflict, Frankfurt is arguing that, no matter how many higher-order desires are investigated, there is never a desire that has been clearly endorsed or identified by the agent. In this sense, the agent would not be wholehearted. S/he would be torn, fundamentally unable to endorse a single desire to end this conflict.

When appealing to higher-ordered desires. It is not the case that there is a specific higher-order desire that trumps all other orders. It is not as if I will come across a highest-order and say, “This is it. This is what I really must want to do.” It is not necessary that a single higher-order desire be discovered to endorse a first-order desire. It could also be the case that there is a discovered relation of higher-order desires, that I keep finding higher-ordered desires that endorse the specific first-order desire. “The fact that a commitment resounds endlessly is simply the fact that the commitment is *decisive*. For a commitment without reservation means that the person who makes it does so in the belief that no further accurate inquiry would require him to change his mind.”⁸⁴ It is not that a single higher-order desire makes me realize my desires. Rather, there is a relation of different higher-order desires, such that the individual does not believe further inquiry to be necessary. The individual is thus wholehearted without there necessarily being a singular highest-order desire. At this point, now that I have provided a summary of Frankfurt’s hierarchical structure of desires, it would serve well to provide a more in-depth analysis of wholeheartedness.

Frankfurt argues that the wholehearted self is discovered much like the way in which a math problem is answered. After completing a math problem, the student can double-check the

⁸⁴ Ibid 37.

problem to ensure that she did it correctly. She may even choose to check it multiple times, trying different methods. It is not as if there is some specific number of times that she must check her problem in order for her to feel comfortable in her work. At some point, she simply accepts that she is confident in her work and no further inquiry is necessary. Thus when I am trying to decide what I want to do, it is not as if there is a specific highest-order desire that is unequivocally correct. I don't need to ask, "Well, obviously I want to do this, but do I want to want to want to want to want to do this?" Rather, it could be said that the wholehearted self is shaped through a nexus of actively endorsed and reflected-upon desires.

Frankfurt believes that this very theory-driven conception of the self actually does have support in our everyday lives and language. For example, Frankfurt argues that in the story of Agamemnon, "Agamemnon at Aulis is destroyed by an inescapable conflict between two equally defining elements in his own nature: his love for his daughter and his love for the army he commands... Since the volitional unity of the tragic hero has been irreparably ruptured, there is a sense in which the person he had been no longer exists."⁸⁵ Agamemnon, after he has been forced to make this decision and become a wholehearted agent, no longer has the same desires that he before the decision was made. Obviously Frankfurt does not claim that every single decision we make changes us so fundamentally that we could no longer be said to be the same person. Rather, in this example, Agamemnon defined himself as being a loving father and a great leader of his army. Thus, when a decision has been made between two characteristics that had before been said to define us and one of those characteristics must be sacrificed as a result, it fundamentally changes who we are because our whole set of desires would necessarily change.

⁸⁵ Harry Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). 129-141, 139.

We often say things such as “I was a different person back then.” For example, when I consider my childhood and remember playing basketball, I had never read philosophy, or pursued politics, or played a single musical instrument (all things that I deem important to my current sense of self), the expression “I was a different person then” seem to express the thoughts and sentiments perfectly. There are some issues presented, however, when we consider unity of the self over time because our desires change dramatically over time. If we define ourselves in relation to our order of desires, as Frankfurt argues we do, then how could we be said to be the same person over time? David Velleman raises two points against this conception of the wholehearted self.

The concept of a wholehearted self is certainly appealing, but Velleman argues that we believe in its existence because we want it to exist, not because there is adequate evidence of its existence. He argues that there are instances in which it would actually prove very unhealthy to pursue a wholehearted self. In citing the example of Sigmund Freud’s patient, the “Rat Man,” an individual who was conflicted between his love for his father and his deeply-rooted hatred of the same man, Velleman argues, “the Rat Man’s problem was not so much ambivalence as to his response to it [as Frankfurt would be suggesting]. What caused the Rat Man’s neurosis, according to Freud, was the means by which he sought to cope with the battle between love and hatred within him – namely by repressing his hatred and acknowledging only his love.”⁸⁶ Velleman is thus arguing that it is actually unhealthy to engage in the kind of self-definition that Frankfurt’s wholehearted self would require. Instead, we must acknowledge our conflicted desires. Still, this does not strike me as being an argument that necessarily affects Frankfurt.

⁸⁶ David J Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Self to Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341.

If anything, the necessity of the reflective state of the self as proposed by the Liberal theory of self, including Frankfurt, makes it the case that we would acknowledge all of our conflicting desires. In the Rat Man case, he would necessarily have to acknowledge that he both hates and loves his father. This kind of self-understanding is necessarily entailed in a Liberal theory, in order so that the agent may understand his/her desire and act upon them to create the self s/he wishes to become. The Rat Man example does not conflict with Frankfurt's notion of the wholehearted self, but would be an issue for a true self. It is not necessary that the wholehearted agent not have conflicting emotional states. We acknowledge this frequently in our language.

We acknowledge it as being entirely possible to love and hate the same individual. This could be due to changes over time or to modes of presentation of the individual. Our feelings toward individuals change drastically over time. Even in a single moment, however, it is entirely possible to have positive and negative feelings toward the same individual. I may love certain qualities of an individual, but hate others. I may even love and hate the same qualities for different reasons. For example, an introvert may love his extroverted partner because he is forced to socialize and become more comfortable with people. At the same time, that individual may hate that he is forced to be around people so frequently. These are all senses in which the individual would still be considered wholehearted because the agent would not be fundamentally torn in his/her beliefs. Rather, he would have beliefs about different aspects of an individual. If there were a true self, however, then the individual would need to endorse a specific sentiment and act on it.

The wholehearted self supplies the same kind of unification that makes the true self appealing, without necessitating all of the issues that I had argued against previously that would

be entailed by endorsing a true self. It is possible to have opposing desires with the wholehearted self. The Liberal philosopher John Christmas even acknowledges this internal conflict as being a necessary component of self-knowledge. “We all contain some measure of internal conflict and complexity, and an attitude or ironic acceptance of the tensions of our own psyches is inevitable, and perhaps healthy, in a multi-dimensional and perplexing world.”⁸⁷ Thus, the Liberal conception of self not only allows the individual to be conflicted in some ways, but it also necessarily entails that the individual engage in a reflective state. If one were to adopt a Communitarian theory of self, all of the issues that Velleman raised in the Rat Man example would apply. The individual would not necessarily need to enter into a reflective state and would thus never have to acknowledge any conflicting desires which, Velleman has argued, would be unhealthy for the wellbeing of the agent.

Still, a common critique offered by Communitarians is that these Liberal theories, by requiring that the individual engage in a reflect state, actually expect too much of the agent. Frankfurt’s definition of self, being a Liberal definition, does require the individual to enter into a reflective state. The order of desires can only be discovered upon introspection. It is true that “critics have claimed that autonomy problematically assumes herculean powers of self-knowledge, that the competence assumed in such accounts demands that agents have understandings of their motives and inner selves that few, if any, tend to realize.”⁸⁸ Introspection certainly seems an emotionally and intellectually taxing task that would require very extreme powers of self-knowledge. The reflective state is only actually this taxing when a true self is presupposed, however. If we were all to be engaging to psychoanalysis of our own selves,

⁸⁷ John Christmas “Autonomy, Self-Knowledge, and Liberal Legitimacy” *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) ed. John Christmas & Joel Anderson, 330 – 358, 335.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 336.

attempting to discover what the true and latent self actually wanted, it would be nearly impossible to make any decision. Likewise, if we endorse a Communitarian sense of self with the kind of decision-making that Bauman discussed, then we would constantly be faced with decisions in which we needed to choose the option that continued the true self. Of course, as Bauman suggested, it could be the case that we never have to worry about choosing the right choice because it is so alluring that we cannot help but choose it, but this seems to be overdoing it. If the prospect of choosing is overwhelming, it still doesn't seem to necessitate that we actually don't choose at all. Introspection seems preferable to complete social determinism.

Thus far I have presented Liberal and Communitarian senses of self. I have argued that the Communitarian senses of self encounter issues in ethics (with moral progress), metaphysics (with the spatiotemporal boundaries of self), and functionality (with the constant serving of the true self). I have argued that the wholehearted self as offered by Liberal theory allows for the same kind of unification and essential qualities of the individual that we desire from the true self, without necessarily entailing all of the negative claims that are a part of that Communitarian theory. At this point, however, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that Frankfurt's conception of self in no way discusses the influence of other individuals. It does not discuss the importance of relationships and community. It is likely that this is the exact sort of Liberal conception of self that Communitarians have in mind when they argue that Liberal theories paint the individual as being atomic and removed from relationships. It is true that Kymlicka's cultural structure (which I argued to be the linguistic and conceptual lexicon) would allow for the influence of communities on the individual. Still, even this seems too weak a claim to allow for the kind of necessary role that relationships and communities play in an individual's life. A new theory of self would thus be necessary, one that allows for the importance of relationships and

the influence of communities without arguing that the self is somehow constituted by these things.

I will now turn to a discussion of a new understanding of self that would allow for the individual to have authorial authority of her own self narrative, while also allowing for the importance of social relationships that recent Feminist theories have made evident.

A New Conception of Self:
The Socially-Identified Self

David Velleman argues that we as individuals are constantly engaging in a creation of a narrative of self and then choosing options that bring about this fictitious self. “We invent ourselves, I shall argue, but we really are the characters whom we invent.”⁸⁹ Velleman argues that the self is constantly engaged in a sort of feedback loop of narration. Throughout our days, we commit ourselves to performing certain tasks. We provide support for making a decision by committing ourselves. “These utterances are issued *as* commitments, in the understanding that they will feed back into your behavior. Hence you do understand that your running autobiography not only reflects but is also reflected in what you do.”⁹⁰

An interpretation of Velleman’s self as narrator would allow for the linguistic, semantic/symbolic influences of our cultures without necessitating that we do not have any control in the creation of self. For example, if I were to realize a few of my political views, I would come to the understanding that “I am a democrat.” With this new self-understanding, I may then find myself making decisions in the voting booths that reinforce my identity as a democrat. This allows for the self to be socially defined, because we understand ourselves as being in relation to socially constructed concepts, without necessitating that it is also socially determined.

A nuanced interpretation of Frankfurt’s hierarchal structure of self would allow for even more cultural influence into the self. The self does not choose what exist as first-order desires. Those simply are. The self can only choose whether or not to endorse these first-order desires.

⁸⁹ David Velleman, “The Self as Narrator,” *Self to Self*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 203 – 223, 206.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 214

This allows for the first-order desires to be completely socially defined, as they most likely are. Any first-order desire I may have is characterized by societal input. It is not as if, without society, I would want a car, a computer, to play sports, to read books, etc. At this point, it could be argued that I would still want all of these things. Maybe I wouldn't want to play basketball, but I would want to run around a lot in order to move. This may be true. Desires seem much more related to social influences, however. I don't just want to run around. I want to play basketball. I don't just want a car. I want the most expensive car with the best advertising campaign. I don't just want any book, I want the critically acclaimed book or the book that was banned in the most places. The societal influence is undeniable.

Still, this does not entail that the self is socially determined. I still reflect on my first-order desires in order to pick one with which I find myself identifying and then endorse that corresponding desire. The desires are created and reflected upon in order to engage in the creation of a self-narrative as described by Velleman. I reflect on my first-order desires and realize, that I either wish to endorse those or wish not to have them. It is not a guarantee that I will no longer have the desire, but, because I am not endorsing it, the unwanted desire could not be said to constitute the self.

For example, perhaps a Western-Christian upbringing made it the case that a young girl found herself desiring to engage in the sexual pseudo-confessional that is so characteristic of many newly forming relationships in western cultures. This would mean that the girl feels the desire to tell her new partner of her past romantic and sexual encounters for fear of feeling guilty, as if she is hiding something from her partner. After reflecting upon this desire, however, the girl may realize that it is unhealthy to feel guilty. Perhaps she doesn't want to want to tell her new partner everything because she feels that to recollect her sexual encounters to her new partner

places a greater importance on those experiences, that she feels should not be emphasized because she does not perceive them as constituting her sense of self or even as constituting her identity as a romantic partner. She thus chooses to reject the confessional.

Thus, the self is influenced by society, but is not determined by society and is not necessarily shaped completely by society. The self becomes constituted by the endorsed desires and characteristics of the individual, even when these desires and characteristics are socially-based or socially-defined. Still, I do not only want that the society influence in the individual in this way. This only stresses the importance of cultural influence, but does not yet allow for the importance of the specific community of which the individual is a part.

In his same article, Zygmunt Bauman argues that there are two senses of community. “Either ‘community’ is a *result* of individual choices, an entity made and freely chosen... and thus their very existence, and the choices of loyalty which sustain that existence, are incurably burdened with the same anxieties of risk-taking as all other aspects of life other thoroughly individualized persons acting under conditions of permanent uncertainty; *or* this ‘community’ *precedes* all choice, in the sense of an a priori predisposing the individuals to stay loyal to its values and behavioral precepts (through indoctrination, drill, control) – and thus the community membership comes into direct conflict with individual freedom of self-constitution, self-assertion, and self-definition.”⁹¹ By now it is no doubt obvious that there are issues with the second sense of community, because it acts as the found communities that have been so stressed by the Communitarian theories I have critiqued thus far. Still, I wish to stress the importance of the first sense of community.

⁹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, “On Communitarians and Human Freedom: or ‘How to Square the Circle’” *Theory, Culture, Society* (1996) 79 – 90, 87.

The second sense of community would be considered a “found community.”⁹² This is not a community that the individual chose, but rather something that she was born into and discovered as she came of age. There is a certain sense in which these found communities are very important in the formation of the individual. These found communities would shape the linguistic and conceptual lexicon that we use to define ourselves. It would also no doubt determine the content of some of my first-order desires. Still, these found communities do not constitute the self. Marilyn Friedman provides the example of poet Adrienne Rich, who “writes about her experiences growing up with a Christian mother, a Jewish father who suppressed his ethnicity, and a family community which taught Adrienne Rich contempt for all that was identified with Jewishness.”⁹³ Upon learning more about her Jewish heritage, however, Rich may take it upon herself to go on a kind of quest in order to learn more when she encounters Jewish individuals. “The communitarian view that found communities and social attachments constitute self-identity does not, by itself, explicate the source of such a quest. It seems more illuminating to say that her identity became, in part, ‘chosen,’ that it had to do with social relationships and attachments which she sought out, rather than merely found, created as well as discovered.”⁹⁴ Here, I would also like to present my own example.

A lesbian youth is ostracized by her family. She seeks out new relationships and connections that may act as nurturing connections for her. She discovers a group of individuals of varying ages that all care for each other in the way a family usually would. We can even suppose that this group is led by an older lesbian couple. This young woman has thus chosen a

⁹² Marilyn Friedman, “Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community” *Ethics* (Jan, 1989) 275 – 290, 285.

⁹³ *Ibid* 284.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 285.

new group of relationships. She has chosen a new family. The term “the families we choose”⁹⁵ has a very important meaning the LGBTQ⁹⁶ community. The fact is that many of these individuals come from found communities that were wholly unwelcoming to their senses of self. Instead, they were forced to create new relationships. It should thus be evident that there are ethical issues with viewing the self as being constituted by our found communities and not the communities we choose, especially when considering issues in gender theory and gender identity.

I have thus presented a conception of self that allows for the individual’s first-order desires to be socially constituted. Any desire I may have is determined by social understandings that I have. Furthermore, I have argued that the individual understands him/herself in relation to a linguistic and conceptual lexicon that is also socially determined. Finally, I have argued for the importance of relationships and communities through the formation of created communities. In order to make this theory all the more understandable, I would now like to provide an example.

At this point it could be argued that I have simply presented a repackaging of a Communitarian argument. My proposed conception of self requires the reflective state in which the individual endorses desires and identities. A Communitarian sense of self would argue that the self is created passively. I am arguing that the self is created by the individual when s/he reflects upon desires and chooses to endorse those desires. Thus it is a Liberal conception of self. The available desires and conceptions are dictated by social understandings and concepts. The individual still has autonomy in the creation of self, however, because s/he is choosing whether or not to endorse concepts.

⁹⁵ Originally coined by Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, and Kinship* (Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁹⁶ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

The self does not choose what to want. The philosopher does not choose to enjoy reading philosophy. The musician does not choose to sing or love music. The queer individual does not choose to be same-sex desiring. The transgender individual does not choose his/her gender. Yet, the philosopher chooses to identify with the concept of a philosopher, to endorse the desires and identity that would make him/her a philosopher. The person who plays music endorses the identity of a musician. The individual who realizes she is same-sex desiring endorses the identity of being queer. The individual who feels that she was born into the wrong body by being biologically female chooses to try and change physical sexes and become the identified gender. The desires may be socially determined. The concepts and definitions may be socially constructed. Yet, the individual identity is individually accepted and endorsed.

Conclusion:

Authorial Authority in the Transgender Narrative

When the jazz pianist Billy Tipton passed away in 1989, individuals in the public domain had no grounds to assume that they had any authority in the defining of Tipton's identity, including his gender identity. Billy Tipton, a biological female, had endorsed the identity as being a jazz pianist and a married man. We are all constantly engaging with our identities and desires. Though it may be impossible for us to know how we came to have these desires, it is entirely up to us whether or not these desires come to define us as selves, as persons.

In this article I have provided a brief introduction into the conversations taking place in the studies of gender. I have provided Communitarian theories and a few of the infinitely possible critiques that could be offered against the metaphysical and ethical implications of such a theory that completely removes all control over the constituting parts of self from the agent. I have provided Liberal theories as well as critiques offered that they do not allow for the influence of cultures and the importance of relationships. Finally, I have presented my own Liberal theory of self that allows for the self to be influenced by his/her culture in very important ways without necessitating that we are constituted by forces beyond our control.

We are not defined necessarily by what we want or what we don't want, where we were born or how we were raised. These things come to influence us in a way that is impossibly difficult to understand. They shape our understanding of the world and ourselves, but they do not constitute us. We are individuals engaging with our desires, choosing to endorse whether or not we wish those desires to move us to act, and choosing to accept the social identities that may be associated with that desire.

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