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Rational Economic Man as Bourgeois Ideology: A Critique of the Ways Subjugation is Reproduced

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by

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Onward.

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I want to wake every morning into love,
where love is the question of *how I'm going to help you get free*,
where that means whatever it needs to mean.

— Saretta Morgan, ALT-NATURE

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

I want to situate myself in the development of this body of work as an effort to share about the process and for transparency and clarity of my own positionality. I want to recognize that these experiences of identity are fluid and exist in this way in the current moment, but there is no real way to know if this will translate the same in the future.

My class, race, gender, sexuality, and health played the largest role in this body of work. I grew up in a poor family, supported heavily by welfare programs, including Food Stamps. Care webs have been essential to meeting my needs in all facets of life. I am also white, which comes with a surplus of privilege. Finally, I am often gendered as a woman. There is knowledge that is embedded in some of my marginalized perspectives that often does not reach academia, let alone the canon, while others, like my whiteness, are at the core of economic thought.

For me, becoming an economics major is an experience defined by grief, loss, and understanding. Having never taken an economics class, I sat in Principles of Economics with a deep hurt. My father had just died and I was navigating the realities of grief and anger. Despite not knowing him or having a relationship, I knew he had struggled as a result of systems that had failed him over the course of his life. As I navigated the ebbs and flows of the many emotions of grief, I found myself wondering how his life could have been different if there were systems in place to support him, or at the very least, not harm him.

I struggled to look this grief in the eyes, so I allowed myself to turn the energy of grief toward my Principles of Economics homework and studying. Economics, even while horribly problematic most of the time, gave some sort of language to the difficulties I had to navigate growing up poor. While I wouldn't directly confront my grief in explicit ways for many weeks

after his death, I found comfort in the supply and demand graphs on the chalkboard in Olin Hall at Bard College. As I sat in my grief further, I found the bravery to investigate some of the systems that cause unrelenting harm to us all: strangers, the ones we love, and the ones we are yet to meet.

This is a project of hope.

INTRODUCTION

One of the first things I read for this project was Karl Marx's "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing". It changed how I thought and what I was willing to confront. My guiding quote for this endeavor became

> If the designing of the future and the proclamation of ready-made solutions for all time is not our affair, then we realize all the more clearly that we have to accomplish in the present— **I am speaking of a *ruthless criticism of everything existing*, ruthless in two senses: The criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of the powers that be** (Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism", 1978, 13).

In reading this, I was reminded that when I ask a question, I don't need to have an answer already. The answer will come. The real work is in the critique. We should be asking questions because we are curious and because we want to go through the process of investigation and inquiry, not because we already know the answer and want to reaffirm our own knowledge.

I allowed myself to engage in curiosity in this project. This project does not provide perfect answers and the purpose of this project was not to provide answers. Instead I hoped to dive into intersections I had been curious about and wanted to explore in more formal ways. These intersections include care work, disability justice, economic precarity, anti-capitalist frameworks, and other radical thought. This project is my attempt to engage these ideas in unique and meaningful ways that encourage thought and action, not necessarily answers. Once I gave myself the permission to engage in difficult and strange questions in an academic sphere, this project was born. I found myself criticizing everything from the family, the state, influential activist groups I felt an affinity to, and my own role in these systems. While most of my engagement to create this project was deeply critical, I also found great sources of hope, especially in my research about disability justice and queer liberation.

In the first chapter I explore the realm of economics as an academic discipline. I quickly recognized it as a strange space, but upon research and writing, I found it to also be a deeply flawed space that fails to serve the people it should serve most. It acts as a self-serving mechanism that prohibits entry and engagement from anyone that is not in the insular network of homogenous economists. This chapter explores the ways economics is self-serving to the people in power: wealthy, white, straight, cisgender men. To do this, I investigate the theory of the Rational Economic Man, which is the foundation of most neoclassical models.

In the second chapter, I investigate the ways the Rational Economic Man theory actively also serves the interests of the most powerful class: the bourgeoisie. To do this, I investigate Marx's theory of alienation and private property to understand bourgeois values. I then use this understanding and explore the structures of capitalism in the third chapter. I interrogate the ways that the Rational Economic Man serves bourgeois interests and thus reproduces social structures and ideology that allow for the continuation of subjugation and oppression. In the fourth chapter, I take these understandings to develop a critical lens of capitalism's exploitation of care work through the lenses of feminist economists and disability justice activists. In my final chapter, I build the framework for possible ways to move forward. I found disability justice, harm reduction, mutual aid, and queer and trans liberation principles to be the most convincing.

CHAPTER 1: RATIONAL ECONOMIC MAN

1.1 Introduction

To understand the models economists use to understand the world and human behavior, we need to have a baseline understanding of the aims of economics. We can understand that economics "is the study of how people manage their resources to meet their needs and enhance their wellbeing" (Goodwin et al. 2015, 40). Economics, at its core, is the study of human behavior. Each economic school of thought looks at human behavior and interactions with the economy through different lenses. For example, feminist economists investigate the economy through a gendered lens, while Keynesian economists focus on macroeconomic models in the short-run. Neoclassical economics, which has dominated economic thought for most of history, investigates human behavior in the face of scarcity. Economic activities, which are the acts of engaging with the economy, can be categorized into four categories: resource maintenance, production, distribution, and consumption (Goodwin et al. 2015, 46). These activities tell us how economic agents, which is anyone who is engaging with the economy, spend their time interacting with the economy and how they use their resources, including labor power.

1.2 Assumptions in Neoclassical Economics

Neoclassical economics is the school of thought that is often taught first. The neoclassical model serves as the baseline for other, more complex economic models. This basic neoclassical model (see Figure 1) is a simple supply and demand graph with quantity on the x-axis and price on the y-axis, where supply is upward sloping and demand slopes downward. People want to buy goods and services for the cheapest price possible, so fewer people will demand the same goods

at a higher price, making demand slope downward. The quantity demanded decreases as price rises. This means demand will be higher when price is lower, so when price increases, demand decreases. We can think about supply in a similar way where as price rises, so does the quantity supplied because producers will want to sell more of their goods at higher prices. The equilibrium, where the supply and demand lines intersect, occurs when the market forces are stable. There is only one equilibrium quantity and one equilibrium price (Goodwin et al. 2015).

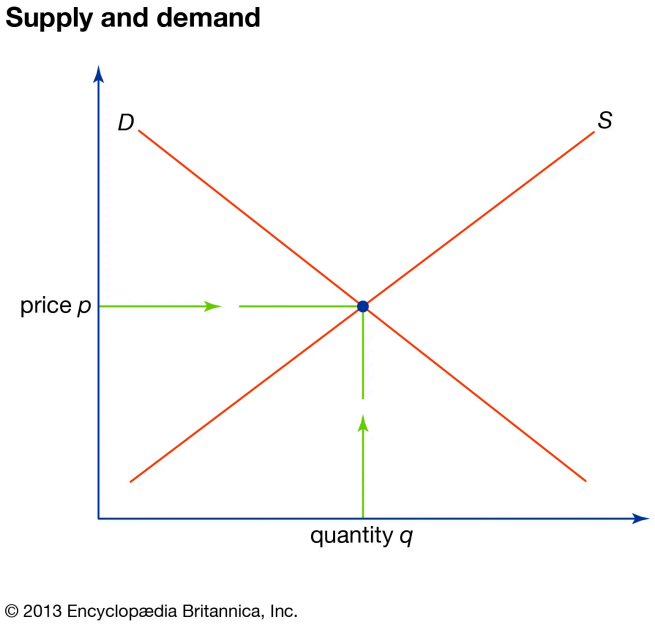

Figure 1: Neoclassical Supply and Demand Graph ("Supply and Demand," n.d.)

Economic models act as controlled environments to predict the behavior of economic agents. Neoclassical economics depends on a baseline set of assumptions, as if human behavior exists in a vacuum, to develop a basic understanding for human behavior and market behavior. In introductory economics classes, we learn that there are three major assumptions of neoclassical economics:

1. **Consumers are rational and self-interested.** Consumers make choices that will give them the most benefit. I will spend this chapter exploring this idea further as it relates to Adam Smith's "Rational Economic Man".
2. **Consumers make decisions in the margin.** This assumption implies consumers do not make all-or-nothing decisions, but rather consume incrementally, or "at the margin". Consumption at the margin means the consumer is asking themselves if the cost of an additional unit is worth the benefit. This cost-benefit analysis requires the consumer to weigh the opportunity cost. The opportunity cost refers to the benefit a consumer forgoes when they choose the next best alternative.
3. **Consumers have perfect information.** Neoclassical economists assume consumers know everything to make the best decision or the most rational choice.

The neoclassical model sets the stage to add other economic factors, known as externalities, into our understanding of markets. The neoclassical theory of supply and demand assumes all economic agents (consumers and producers) will maximize their utility, meaning consumers will buy goods at the lowest possible price and producers will sell their goods and services at the highest possible price. Producers are trying to maximize their profit, and in turn may disregard other important factors, like limiting pollution and ensuring employees earn living wages, so it is important to understand how these externalities change behaviors of both consumers and producers within the models of markets. Other assumptions of consumers and markets that serve as the foundation for neoclassical economic theory and analysis include, but are not limited to, markets being self-regulating, consumers having unlimited wants and limited

resources (scarcity), and economic agents making utility maximizing decisions (Goodwin et al. 2015).

All of these neoclassical assumptions are helpful and allow economists to create a baseline understanding for how decisions might be made in a *controlled environment*. We know that the economy and other aspects of life that economists study do not exist in a controlled environment. These assumptions do not account for power imbalances, acts of violence, hierarchy, and other realities of our world. To get the full picture of human behavior, we must add externalities like pollution and other kinds of markets like monopsonies[1]. Economics should act as a tool to understand broader life activities, philosophies, and understanding how we live in this world. Economics is the study of behavior and how we organize life activities. We have to look at economics with a critical eye because human behavior cannot be perfectly tacked down into a graph, equation, simulation, or even theory. We can use these sometimes helpful principles to understand how behavior often works, but cannot be a one-size-fits-all situation. The neoclassical baseline models cannot be the only mechanism in economic storytelling.

1.3 Rational Economic Man

Neoclassical economists also assume economic agents embody the idea of the "rational economic man" whose needs and wants are relatively consistent over time, will make utility maximizing decisions, optimize the cost and use of resources available to them, have access to perfect information, and will always pursue self-interested behaviors. Usually economists understand this to mean economic agents will pick the option that gives them the most benefit,

[1] A monopsony is a market where there is only one buyer. For example, in small towns where there is only one employer, that employer has a monopsony over the labor market (Goodwin et al. 2015).

which is called “utility-maximizing behavior”. In the labor market we assume people take the jobs with the highest wages and in a commodity market we assume people will buy the cheapest option. Economists apply this same logic to firms, where a firm will make decisions that will result in the highest level of profit. This is not how economic agents actually operate. If economics is the study of human behavior and understanding the ways people interact with the economy, it cannot be done without an investigation into real economic agents and their experiences in real-life economies (Julie A. Nelson and Marianne A. Ferber 1993). The assumptions of the “Rational Economic Man” are unrealistic and unrepresentative of actual human behavior.

The use of “man” in the phrasing “rational economic man” is especially important to understanding the pervasive nature of the biases present in economics. “Rational economic agent” and “rational economic man” have the same set of assumptions of the behavior and actions of that entity with one exception: gender. An economic agent is not gendered, while “rational economic man” explicitly implies maleness and masculinity. Creating a bridge or a relationship between maleness and rationality explicitly in economic theory implies a similar association between female-ness and irrationality (Julie A. Nelson and Marianne A. Ferber 1993).

The “Rational Economic Man” only explicitly calls gender into the conversation, but because of our other conditioned biases, we also assume he is white, able-bodied, and likely middle class. This is a reflection of who we recognize as rational or at least capable of rationality. Is this an assumption rooted in revealed preferences of economists? Economists want to make economic models to understand their own behavior and the behavior of people like

them, so it makes sense that they would be modeling a white, able-bodied, middle class man because that makes up a large percentage of economists.

1.4 Androcentric bias within the discipline

Economists are overwhelmingly men. In 1966, 5% of economics PhD recipients were women, which has risen to only 32.9% in 2021. This statistic has dipped since 2013, where 35.4% of economics PhD recipients were women. Historically, there has been no point in history where women have taken up an equal portion of PhD recipients as men (Julie A. Nelson 1993). As I will explain later, the lack of representation of women in the discipline reflects heavily in who economists study and the theories that are developed.

Despite most economic models being entirely theoretical and not mirroring real-world economies, economists frequently remind their audience and each other that economics is a discipline of rigidity, fact, and models backed by math and logic. Most economics programs require students to have a high baseline proficiency in mathematics, but often simultaneously neglect and disregard disciplines that investigate the nuance of the human experience in abstract ways including anthropology and sociology that math alone does not do. By leaving out these disciplines and fields, economists lose out on understanding ways of life and thinking and engaging with potentially beneficial scholarly works. Economics tends to align itself with being a “hard” science, which comes along with an implicit gendering of male or masculine. For centuries, science has been associated with “masculinity, detachment, and domination, and of femininity with nature, subjectivity, and submission” (Julie A. Nelson 1993, 24). Through this, we see that by aligning itself with “science”and “rigor”, economics is also implicitly aligning

itself with masculinity. Economics as a discipline overall craves association with masculinity and maintains a desire for quantitative data, also known as "hard" data. Hard data can include numerical statistics including real gross domestic product (GDP), where soft data involves qualitative analysis and can include investigations of surveys, like consumer confidence surveys, where people are asked about their perceptions of a situation. The discipline favoring hard data has a clear connection to economists desiring the maintenance of a "masculine" discipline, both in subject matter and in demographics of economists. This desire "relies on an association of hardness with positively valued, masculine-associated strength and softness with negatively valued, feminine-associated weakness" (Julie A. Nelson and Marianne A. Ferber 1993, 23). While I will not make the claim that either hard or soft data should be used exclusively, I recognize that it is of active harm to the discipline and the communities economics aims to support to drastically favor hard data over soft data. By disregarding these qualitative research methods and "soft" approaches to the world, economics is identifying what they see as "feminine" as non-economic. With these approaches to academia broadly and economics specifically, it becomes glaringly obvious how women are often unrecognized economic agents. Their labor continues to go unrecognized in investigations of the formal labor market and economics. None of this is to say we should do away with mathematics or models. Instead, I am suggesting that we should favor a critical lens for how we create and understand a relationship between science and masculinity. I do not think it is the most helpful to be intensely critical of an academic discipline without also being critical of the broader systems it has been created within. It is not surprising that the discipline has adopted outdated and problematic ideals and practices

that are present within the systems that they study. I will discuss this further in both this chapter and later chapters.

Economists create models to understand how hypothetical consumers would make decisions though rationality and the gendered lens of Rational Economic Man. Bias is heavily present in economic theory and models. Bias also heavily influences the ways we understand and view economic agents and this aspect of economics is no different. Through the word “man”, the neoclassical assumption that “men are autonomous, independent individuals while women are dependents who cannot stand on their own” (Pujol, n.d., 28) becomes an explicit assumption that is no longer concealed. When women are brought into economic analysis and research, “women are [almost] always defined as members of family units, as wives, daughters, mothers” (Pujol, n.d., 28). This furthers the assumption that women cannot exist as independent economic agents with their own desires and needs. Economic analysis that does factor in the desires of women often only does so within the unit of the family as though the woman and their desires only exist within a family structure. With a general unfamiliarity with the economic behaviors of women, economics often opts to ignore the behaviors of marginalized people from a mix of disregard and uncertainty. It is harmful to leave entire groups of people out of how we understand economic behavior and theories, like understanding how value is created and defined.

If mentioned at all, women, in economic analysis, are often bound to the family unit either as the caretaker or in describing that they often occupy the domestic sphere instead of regarding them as independent individuals. Many feminist economists conclude that this is an explicit act of disregard for work seen as feminine. While it is true that domestic labor and labor done within the family unit is often regarded as feminine, the disregard of women as legitimate

economic agents, especially when existing in a domestic sphere, is a symptom of a larger problem of subjugation within the discipline and society. Society, broadly speaking, is largely scared to recognize "feminine work" as legitimate work, while economists are similarly working to preserve their reputation and image as a masculine discipline and thus are afraid to think and write about care, kinship, community, and especially love. Deirdre McCloskey wrote about how economists think, or rather do not think, about love in her essay "Love and Money". In this essay she wrote, "the most embarrassing word to economists, especially men economists: love. The word is 'about gender' just because women think about it more than men do" (Deirdre N. McCloskey 1996, 97). We have deemed spaces of care and "love" as spaces for *women* or the *feminine*, which economists seem to be willing to do damn near anything to avoid. Economists "think of 'love' as sentimentality, the inability to face facts" (Deirdre N. McCloskey 1996, 98). Emotions and love are dismissed by economists because they are associated with femininity, and thus irrationality. In the neoclassical understanding of *rational* economic agents, we know "irrationality" does not align with the baseline economic models that create a market with agents in a vacuum that expects rationality. Economists reject irrationality so much that an "irrational economic agent" does not exist, so the potential for irrationality is simply not acknowledged in the canon of economics[2].

The neoclassical model also assumes that preferences of economic agents are exogenous and remain stable over time, meaning they are not influenced or altered by environmental factors like advertisements, media, or personal experiences. Preferences and behaviors that are stable and easily predictable make modeling the behavior much easier. Assuming preferences are

[2] Behavioral economics investigates ideas like "predictable rationality". Behavioral economics is a school of economic thought that investigates human behavior that is irrational (Goodwin et al. 2015). Economic investigations of irrationality exist, but have not yet been embedded into many of the conversations the discipline is engaging in.

exogenous makes for a simple exploration, but economists lose the nuance of the impact of relationality and community influence by not investigating endogenous preferences and factors (Nancy Folbre 2001).

Economists, with their need for facts, logic, and mathematics, deepen their avoidance of any sentimentality or emotion, even happiness. Instead of investigating happiness as a potential outcome of economic and other human activities, economists choose to investigate utility. Utility is measured in "utils" and is often presented as "U". Utility is gained incrementally from purchasing or consuming a good or service, meaning spending one additional dollar will result in an increase in utils (Adler 2010). Utility is essentially a measure of happiness that economists understand in marginal terms, yet economists often do not explicitly measure happiness or well-being. While abstract and generally a strange way to investigate the well-being of a person or population, utility can be helpful in looking at policies and choices as it relates to privilege and identity. Utility functions are helpful for understanding opportunity cost. For example, when deciding between health insurance plans, weighing the incremental benefit between each plan is often helpful (Adler 2010). Consumers will evaluate if a "unit" increase in health insurance coverage will give them a high enough benefit to outweigh the cost. This benefit can be understood as utility. Consumers will weigh an incremental increase in utility to the cost of that increase. Utility is often used to estimate the benefits or harms a given policy would create for a population or person, but in abstract terms. We may never know the true scope of how much benefit an additional unit of health insurance coverage will give a person, so economists use utility to attempt to understand the situation.

The strong desire for economics to be a hard science exacerbates current systems of power and harm. Women and their assumed emotional and flexible conceptions of the world are excluded from the discipline both as economists and as people with experiences worth studying. Few economists are women, so the voices of women are not heard proportionally within the discipline. The biases and experiences of the person influence the model and/or theory being developed. While we usually think of bias in a negative light, as in a perspective being skewed or one-sided, we can also think of bias as a lens. When people are not thinking through a specific lens, it can be much easier to leave those experiences out of the models (Julie A. Nelson 1993). Without a decolonial and anti-racist lens, it is easy to unknowingly access our harmful biases. When attempting to highlight diverse opinions and voices, bias, as a lens, can be essential. If economists are working on a theory that aims to center the experiences of queer people, it will be helpful to have queer people in the creation process to bring in a unique lens of understanding. In the case of women, when women are not the ones making the theories and models, it can be easy for people who are not women, to forget or disregard the experiences and perspectives of women because they are not central to the biases that led to the creation of the theory[3].

Another avenue where the lack of voices of women in economics becomes clear is in policy. Economists have a moral duty with their work. The research, theories, and models they investigate are the basis for policy prescriptions and how we understand the world. Economic theories and models inform many policies, so a lack of diverse voice in economics therefore means a lack of diverse voice in policy. Through this, we see the perpetual exclusion of the perspectives and ideas of marginalized groups. Not representing marginalized people in

[3] While representation is important, it cannot alone do the work of liberation.

economics and economic theory, leaves people out of policy prescriptions. There is an androcentric bias in economics, so there is also an androcentric bias in policy. Bias in economic theory and policy reproduce systems of hierarchy, power and marginality.

1.5 What do we lose with the obsession with masculinity?

In this obsession with masculinity, we lose one of the most essential aspects of economics: storytelling. We miss out on hearing stories about and by women and how they experience the economy. We also miss out on economic storytelling done by women. Economists, more than create a model or derive an equation, are attempting to understand a behavior or process. Economists must first understand the stories of the people or phenomena they are studying. Then they must communicate their findings to other economists and broader audiences. This requires a keen eye to details and the ability to effectively communicate. This communication does not entirely rely on the ability to understand an equation, but rather the way the world works, how people interact with each other, the economy, and even themselves. In fact, Dierdre McCloskey reminds economists of the moral implications of their work by saying, “But stories carry an ethical burden. Concealing the ethical burden under a cloak of science is the master move of expertise, the secret ingredient of the snake oil” (Deirdre N. McCloskey 1990, 135). She is reminding economists that they must pay attention to the ethical implications of their work and to be careful to not hide it with scientific language. As economists continue to chase the image of masculinity, they must not simultaneously avoid the moral implications of their work.

1.6 Identity

In neglecting the most nuanced and complex aspects of life like emotions, we are also missing important aspects of identity. The way economists investigate identities is through a deeply flawed and binary lens. Because of economics' obsession with Cartesian methodology, most analysis is regression analysis with little or no room for understanding the influence of communities and external forces. In quantitative research, "when economists acknowledge gender in analysis, they do so by using simple, binary indicator functions, so-called dummy variables, to alter intercept and/or slope coefficients in regression" (Esther Redmount 1995, 216). If economists acknowledge the potential influence gender has on a given research area, they must do so with nuanced perspectives and methodologies. Economists treat gender as stable and rigid, when in reality gender is a fluid and abstract experience. Candace West and Don Zimmerman explore this further in their essay from 1987 "Doing Gender", while neoclassical economists entirely neglected the relational aspect of identity formation.

Akerlof and Kranton investigated the intersections of identity and economic decision making that align with neoclassical ideas and prioritize utility maximization for self-interested economic agents. Akerlof and Kranton argued that individuals will tend to avoid behaviors and decisions that do not align with their identity. Instead individuals will invest in behaviors that conform and align with their identity. People will avoid conflict with their identity for two reasons: (1) they are committed to maintaining and growing their sense of self, and (2) to avoid the consequences of deviating from the norm (Akerlof and Kranton 2010, 27-36).

Akerlof and Kranton briefly investigate the ways in which immigrants assimilate into dominant culture as a way to understand the role of choice in identity. They conclude that people

"often have some choice over who they are" (Akerlof and Kranton 2010, 19). In this example, they are conflating identity and presentation in all situations of assimilation, not just assimilation experienced by immigrants. Individuals can choose to assimilate, but assuming that assimilation is only for the purpose of presenting one's identity is neglecting the necessary context and nuance needed to understand these identities and experiences. While assimilation might be pursued as an expression of one's identity, people often choose to assimilate for contextual reasons like ensuring safety, finding community in homogenous areas, and potential job opportunities. Assimilation requires communal expectations of identity that ostracize people who do not align with the expected norms. This is not a process that occurs independently, but rather requires a collective or at least majority acceptance of desired norms.

Challenging the ideas of investing in one's identity is an important aspect of neoclassical frameworks worth critiquing. Neoclassical economics assumes people spend their income in ways that will maximize utility. The neoclassical identity framework that Akerlof and Kranton use argued that people will invest in their identities as utility maximizing behavior (Akerlof and Kranton 2010), meaning investing in an identity will increase utility and happiness. They do not differentiate between different identities and the ways that the "investing in identity framework" will not necessarily apply for all identities. Identities often hold different weight for people. Identities that are core to who someone is (race, gender, sex, ability/disability, etc) might require different "investments" than peripheral identities (athlete, reader, etc).

Identity investment for core identities does not align with the utility maximizing framework. Someone who loves playing basketball and thinks of themself as an athlete might invest in a gym membership or new basketball shoes. This is not an investment into aligning

with a norm, but is still technically investing in an identity. Investment into core identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc…) are not investments into an image, but rather investments into oneself, sometimes at the risk of being ostracized. In this case, Akerlof and Kranton's idea that "following a norm is also seen as a way to prove something important about yourself to others" (Akerlof and Kranton 2010, 34) is correct in that we often display our identities as a way to find community or conceal our identities to blend into a norm to avoid harm.

Identities are nuanced and cannot follow a one-size-fits-all framework. While the idea of investing in identity is certainly one some people partake in, the concept puts "identity" in a strange commodity-adjacent position. Economics does not need another framework that presents unique and fluid aspects of the human experience as commodities in restrictive and unrepresentative models. Identities also do not exist in a vacuum, but instead are relational. After all, humans are social creatures that rely on collaboration as an aspect of identity formation. Relational-identity formation is a salient aspect about identity that most economists fail to include. The formation of identities is not an activity done by one economic agent, but rather comes into being in collaboration with other people and structures.

Akerlof and Kranton's ideas of identity are in conversation with Gary Becker's theory about "taste-based discrimination". Becker argued that hiring and job discrimination is inefficient because hiring marginalized workers costs less because lower wages have been normalized, so choosing to hire white, straight, able-bodied, male workers would be more expensive. If we use gender for this example, we know that women are often paid less than men. If an employer has a "taste" or preference for male employees, the employer will spend more money on wages because they are unwilling to hire women, who would accept lower wages.

Through this, Becker argues that employers who discriminate (not hiring marginalized people, despite the socially acceptable lower wages) will be driven out of the market due to higher costs (Gary S. Becker 1971). Other firms will spend less money on wages, thus profit margins will be higher, allowing the non-discriminating firms to stay in business.

The use of a utility function is helpful in generally understanding broad motives for self-interested actors, but we know that not all economic agents are acting entirely in self interest. In fact, thinkers and activists working toward liberation argue that self-interest is in direct opposition to liberation. Liberation and identity do not solely exist within the self.

In contrast to many neoclassical thinkers, most feminist and institutionalist economists recognize that gender is a relational identity. Many feminist thinkers add to this by understanding gender as a complex and expansive experience that is often beautifully unstable. Gender is seen as a fluid experience that can change with an individual or society. When experiences are reduced to dummy variables and binaries, we lose these beautiful complexities of gender.

In Candace West and Don Zimmerman's investigation of the differences between sex and gender and the subcategories they found under each (sex category, gender role, gender display, etc), they argued that gender is not a set of prescribed roles or characteristics, and that "doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman 1987, 126). Gender and its performance are developed relationally through interaction. Not only is gender created in interaction, gender "at the same time structures interaction" (Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman 1987 131); gender is informed by and informs our interactions.

Judith Butler makes a similar argument. In their book Gender Trouble, Butler first investigates gender to better understand identity broadly[4]. Investigating gender identity before thinking broadly about identity is important to Butler because "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Judith Butler 2006, 22). Here, Butler is arguing that gender allows society to make sense of people through one's assimilation (or lack thereof) to gender norms. This recognition of identity and personhood through gender allows further understanding of other identities once someone is deemed intelligible or able to be understood (Judith Butler 2006). For Butler, identity broadly, but especially gender, is relational and a process: one comes into understanding their gender through understanding and being understood by society.

Butler spent time investigating Moinque Wittig's ideas about identities as relational creations. In this exploration they explain that Wittig found that men, in cisheteronormative societies, are seen as the default and are automatically awarded an initial level of humanity and recognition (Judith Butler 2006, 22). Because men are assigned this base-level of humanity, there does not seem to be a need for language to describe the experience until an "other" is presented. Language is used as a tool of differentiation, so without an "other", there is often no need to define the "default". Wittig and Butler both argue that upon the advent of the "feminine", language for gender was required because there was an "other" that was recognized, in this case the woman. These feminist thinkers recognize that language is used to understand what we previously have not been able to understand: the other and the unintelligible (Judith Butler

[4] West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender" was published in 1987. Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble" was published in 1990. Butler is often credited with coining "doing gender", but this timeline suggests West and Zimmerman played that role.

2006,). This understanding relies on a cisheteronormative system that recognizes a binary gender system and strives to use language as a tool to identify the deviant.

In publishing “Doing Gender” in 1987, West and Zimerman incorporated understandings of relational-identity development in ways many disciplines had failed to recognize. This work was essential in the further development of feminist and institutionalist economics. Even with deeply formative work, like that of West and Zimmerman, criticism is important to ensure timely progression of academic understandings. West and Zimmerman fail to adequately explore the intersections of other identities that heavily influence gender like race and class. This intersectional approach requires a wide scope, which is not always necessary or helpful in academia, so it is also the researcher's job to incorporate many voices to ensure adequate representation and understanding.

1.7 Intersectionality

As I have been unpacking the ways economists disregard gender in ways that center maleness and masculinity, I want to recognize the ways the discipline does something similar with identities around experiences of race, ability, class, and other experiences. The best way to do this is through understanding Kimberlé Crenshaw’s framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a way to understand the ways oppression intersects. We can use this to understand the experiences of people who hold multiple marginalized identities. Crenshaw first used this to investigate the double burden Black women face through intersecting oppressions based on race and gender. Intersectionality can be more broadly understood as the ways an individual’s experiences are shaped by the multiple identities they hold and the ways these

identities work together to form a unique experience (Crenshaw 1989). For example, someone's class identity and disability can work together to shape their unique experience.

Intersectionality also critiques the ways the social understanding of identity often suggests people have one salient identity that is defining of their experience. It is logical to say that a singular identity might be at play more than another or might impact someone in more direct ways, but nobody only possesses a singular identity. Intersectionality seeks to understand people in their whole experience of identities, which can be helpful to understand the ways the bourgeoisie and its structures have worked to divide people within similar identities and simultaneously isolate people of a whole identity from the rest of society.

Intersectionality is often inaccurately attributed to the structures that create and reproduce the systems of oppression. Instead, we can understand that phenomenon through Patricia Hill Collins's "Matrix of Domination", which is "how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized" (Patricia Hill Collins 2000, 18). We can understand the Matrix of Domination as the mechanism that creates the interactions of oppressive systems that create intersectionality. I will explore the Matrix of Domination further in later chapters.

In this chapter, I investigated hierarchies at play in terms of who is involved in conversations about gender and feminism and what has (and has not) come of them. We also see this in what conversations are welcomed by the discipline for conferences and publishing. There are few conversations about intersectionality as it relates to different identities and perspectives. Intersectionality in academia is not just about diversifying voices and instead requires scholars to understand the complexities of the lived experiences of people (Crenshaw 1989). This includes the people and groups being studied, but also includes students, staff, faculty, and anyone they

may be engaging with. Identities, when put together within one person, create a unique experience that is worth investigating and understanding.

Economics continues to remain deficient in including ideas of intersectionality in conversations and research. Integrating intersectionality into Cartesian practices can be difficult because experiences of identities is not a simple equation. Simply put, intersectionality shows that there is much more nuance to one's identity and experience of the world than the sum of all parts.

The division within feminist movements is a perfect example of this. Historically women have been divided by race by believing that white women and Black women have different struggles and goals in liberation. Simultaneously, structures of power continue to remind working class women of their distance from wealthy women. Dividing the interests of a group of people is meant to make it more manageable to control and make it very difficult to build solidarity within the group.

The Matrix of Domination, coined by Patricia Hill Collins, is used to understand how systems of harm are created and maintained. Systems of anti-Black racism are reliant on systems of incarceration and poverty. A simple explanation of this is that anti-Black racism relies on the subjugation of Black people across all systems (Patricia Hill Collins 2000). This is to say that anti-Black racism has been embedded into our daily lives and systems of housing, incarceration, employment and labor markets, and our interpersonal relationships. Identities like gender, race, class, citizenship all come together to form a completely new experience that is unique to each person and their background. We can use this understanding to recognize the systems of oppression that target these experiences. Think of forms of oppression (ableism, colorism,

sexism, xenophobia, etc) as all interconnected in a web. This web allows identities to be situated near each other to create new experiences. A web connects each outer point more and more as you move inward. We can understand oppression to act in a similar way. If one “pillar” or outer point on the web is removed (for example if patriarchy was dismantled entirely), it would destabilize the web, but the web would not necessarily fall apart. It would be lopsided and unstable. Oppression, especially within capitalism, works similarly. If patriarchy were to be removed, society would not collapse, but systems in place that rely on patriarchy would be unbalanced and unstable. It would be similar if one of the legs of a table was a few inches shorter than the rest of them. The table would still be able to stand, but it would be slanted and prone to tipping. The web is destabilized by removing one of the outer parts, but there would still be the sections that were moving toward that outer pillar. We can think of the inner parts of the web as the small-scale parts of patriarchy (or whatever form of oppression we are using as our outer pillar). This can be pay-gaps and disproportionate acts of sexual violence. Despite “removing” patriarchy, these small-scale acts still remain because they are held up by the rest of the web. The other forms of oppression allow small-scale oppression to persist. If our goal is ending oppression and subjugation, it is not enough to pass anti-racist laws or remove the gender pay gap. It requires dismantling each and every system that comes in contact with another system of oppression or even small-scale acts of subjugation.

1.8 Conclusion

Economics is a discipline attempting to create as much distance between itself and emotions, vulnerability, and the difficult nuances of the human experience, yet the economy is one that creates intense experiences that cause equally intense emotions. These experiences, if

one is truly investigating the economy, cannot be removed. This distance is created and reinforced with each model that willingly neglects complexities of the human experience. In this negation, there is an unwillingness to confront the realities of the world and the harm economics is perpetuating. It is our duty as participants of this world to work diligently to a better future that includes justice and care for all. Economics ought to embrace and investigate the lives and decisions of the irrational, poor, welfare queen and the sex worker and the New York City public school teacher and the Arabs and the rich brunch gays and the drag kings.

CHAPTER 2: RATIONAL ECONOMIC MAN AS BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY

As discussed in the previous chapter, economists continue to leave out essential voices in the discipline and in research. In this chapter, I will investigate the dangers of economists centering the Rational Economic Man in their studies and in who studies economics. I will argue that by prioritizing the experiences and interests of the Rational Economic Man, economists are centering bourgeois ideals and values. Through this understanding, we can conclude that the Rational Economic Man is both a manifestation and tool of bourgeois ideology.

2.1 Intro to Marx

I will be using many ideas from Karl Marx as the underlying framework to understand alienation as it relates to bourgeois ideology. Karl Marx, born in 1818, was a German philosopher, who wrote some of the most influential texts in history about class conflict, the struggles of the working class, and communism. His most well known work includes the "Manifesto of the Community Party" and "Das Kapital" which was one of the most influential texts of his time and today that investigated the capitalist mode of production and the ways capitalism has produced class struggle (Marx, "The Commodity", 1978). His critiques of capitalism continue to be influential to the field of political economy, which is why I will be using his ideas to build an understanding of capitalism. This is not to say Marx got it all right or even that we should all follow his ideas and prescriptions[5]. Instead, Marx unlocks a unique

[5] In fact, Marx suggests quite the opposite. In *For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing*, he explained that "our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analyzing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality" (Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism", 1978, 15). Our criticism must not be permanently tethered to an ideological framework or system. This includes Marx's ideas. They are not to be followed without criticism. Marx published intensely problematic work, including work that was anti-semitic and others that entirely disregarded women. While this project does not allow for it, both ought to be criticized.

understanding of capitalism and its harms which we are often not confronted with because capitalism conceals the violence it creates.

Marx, in his investigation of class conflict and the harms of capitalism, identified two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie is the ruling class that owns the means of production and purchases the labor power[6] of the working class. The proletariat is the working class that sells their labor power for subsistence wages to the ruling class. The two classes exist as capacious categories that many forms of ideology, behavior, and values can fall under. The classes can also have sub-classes. For the proletariat, this can include the middle class, upper-middle class, and people with very low or no incomes (Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", 1978). The proletariat and bourgeois classes are not necessarily defined by wealth, but rather power. The bourgeois class is often wealthy because power is easier to gain with wealth in capitalism, but the defining characteristic of the bourgeois class is the ownership of the means of production, which is a position of power.

It is also important to note that the ideology that is grouped with one class does not necessarily represent the ideology that everyone in that class has. This ideology is not necessarily held by everyone who falls into the bourgeois class, but instead is an ideology that supports and reinforces the societal position of the bourgeoisie. Ideology can be produced and reproduced by people regardless of identity, as can systems and structures. In fact, bourgeois ideology relies on *everyone* to reproduce the power structures, including needing the working class to reinforce their own subjugation.

[6] Labor power, for Marx, is the ability to do work or potential for someone to do work (Marx, "The Commodity", 1978).

The work of the bourgeoisie has been to both elevate its own power and position and to subjugate and alienate the working class. In doing this, the "bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", 1978, 479). Pre-capitalism, families played many roles in a person's life by providing cultural and social connection that existed within larger spaces of kinship, like a village or extended family. Through capitalism and the emergence of wage labor, family-relationships have gone from being built on foundations of love and connection to being money relations. The household and the family became a unit of consumption and production. Through this process, the relationships are built to center economic activities, which include marrying one's partner for economic benefits or legally ensuring a specific distribution of inheritance.

Another broad idea present in Marx's theories is the relationship workers have to the work they perform. Marx identified labor as something outside of human nature and that in working, "[the worker] does not affirm himself, but denies himself… [and] feels himself outside his work, and in his work he feels outside himself" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 74). The worker is denied their human nature because of the alienation and exploitation they face within their work. Because the work is "merely a means to satisfy needs external to [the worker]" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 74), the worker is coerced into a kind of work that is both undesirable and exploitative. One of the 'appeals' of capitalism is the voluntary nature of exchange in a free market. Consumers and producers are free to choose what they buy or sell and from who, which can be applied to the labor market. In theory, people can choose who to sell their labor power and if they will sell their labor power at all. In reality, "if we are free to sell our labor power in the

positive sense, we are also freed, in the negative sense, from any other alternative" (John D'Emilio 1999, 240). There is an illusion that workers are free to choose the work they do because they can apply for different jobs, but the worker is still tied to wage labor regardless of the kind of work they do. In this idea, Marx is not investigating how people choose their jobs, but the fact that they are bound to a job dependent on their exploitation and dehumanization as a means of survival.

Ultimately, the bourgeoisie is an oppressive entity that works in conjunction with state powers to further subjugate marginalized people and people in positions with little power. The bourgeoisie works to uphold the systems like patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and ableism to ensure the maintenance of their power and the continued oppression of marginalized groups.

2.2 Alienation

For Marx, alienation was a core part of understanding class conflict. He argued that alienation manifests for the proletariat class in four ways: the worker is alienated from (1) the product of their labor, (2) the labor process, (3) themself and human essence, and (4) other people and the broader society (Marx "The Commodity", "Manuscripts", "Manifesto of the Communist Party" 1978). The ownership of the means of production is the first aspect of understanding the alienation from the product of labor. The factors of production, which are the aspects that go into the production of a good or service, are land, capital, and labor. The means of production includes the resources other than labor that are a part of the production process. Employees often do not own the means of production (Marx "The Commodity" 1978). In other words, they have no say over how land is used in the production process or how the production

process is organized. Because the workers do not own the means of production, they do not get a choice in what they produce. As workers produce more goods, the production process will expand, which means the scope of bourgeois power also expands. Those who own the means of production are able to make many decisions including decisions about prices, employment (hiring and firing), and investments. These decisions can have lasting impacts on employees, the company, and the broader society.

Labor power is a commodity that is bought and sold in a market. Similarly, goods that we buy and sell in a market are also commodities. The good that the worker produces is a physical manifestation of their labor that exists outside the worker and is owned by external forces outside the worker: the bourgeois class. The product the worker produces becomes a physical manifestation of the labor required to produce the good (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 71). This disconnect between the worker and the product of their labor is a hostile one, where "whatever the product of his labor is, [the worker] is not" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 72). The worker is forced to witness the extraction of themselves in the object. Marx recognized this experience as a particularly aggressive one, where "the life which [the worker] has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 72). Seeing the tangible manifestation of one's exploitation and dehumanization is a violent experience to be forced upon someone.

In the production process, once the good is produced, the worker must confront the good, "as something alien, as a power independent of the producer" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 71). In its final form, the good is entirely separate from the worker and takes on its own power now that it can be described in terms of exchange value. This confrontation is one of objectification,

where Marx said “labor’s realization is its objectification” (Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 71). The worker’s labor has come to fruition and taken on a material form separate from the worker, where the labor is embodied in the goods they produced. In this way, we can understand that labor is only recognized when it is defined in terms of the market: exchange values. We understand labor’s value in terms of the use-value and exchange value of the goods and services the labor produces. Labor is only truly recognized when it manifests itself in a good or service that can be bought and sold in a market. If the goods being produced are something extremely valuable and will sell well on a market, the worker can be paid low wages so the capitalists can extract surplus value. Some jobs are seen as more valuable and thus the worker receives a higher wage, but the worker is still being paid the lowest wage possible to ensure the highest surplus value. The product being produced removes something from the worker, be it labor or a certain degree of personhood. I will discuss this removal later in this section.

Value, for Marx, was understood through two concepts: Labor Theory of Value and Socially Necessary Labor Time. Socially Necessary Labor Time is the amount of labor it would take the average person to produce a good or service (Marx, “The Commodity”, 1978, 307). Marx’s Labor Theory of Value implements this by saying the value of a good or service can be determined by the socially necessary labor time needed to produce it. If labor is “congealed in an object” (Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 71), then the value of an object must be defined in terms of labor, which Marx understands as commodities being “definite quantities of congealed labor-time” (Marx, “The Commodity”, 1978, 307). In the labor process, workers lose control over their life activity partly because of this objectification. Marx found the difference between animals and humans to be that animals “produce one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally”

(Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 76). Humans adapt to and change their environment to meet their needs *and* produce creatively when there are not any additional needs to be met. Capitalism has taken this human desire to create and exploited it for profit and constant growth.

There is a cycle of necessity where the bourgeoisie requires the labor of the working class to make profits and extract surplus value, while the working class relies on the wages from their labor to sustain their survival. The bourgeoisie cannot exist without subordinating and exploiting the proletariat. To gain wealth, monetary wealth and wealth of capital, the bourgeoisie relies on the cheap labor of the proletariat. Through this cycle, the workers are bound to the goods they produce and the bourgeoisie because they depend on the wages that come from the production of the goods. The bourgeoisie uses the reliance the proletariat has on wages to keep them in the cycle of exploitative work. The disconnect between the worker at work and home is so intense that the worker does not even feel like themselves at work, in fact, “the worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself” (Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 74). The labor they are coerced into through this cycle has no connection to the workers’ hopes, dreams, or desires; the labor is done for survival.

Workers being forced to sell their labor power as a commodity in the market, which then becomes objectified, serves as a loss of the self. The process of alienating the worker from themself occurs in tandem with objectification, where “the worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object” (Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 72). Through the commodification of labor power, the worker is dehumanized and objectified and “he becomes an appendage of the machine” (Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, 1978, 479). Additionally, the worker’s value is directly related to the value of the commodities being

produced. Marx explains that “the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces” (Marx, “Manuscripts”, 1978, 71). The more surplus value the worker makes for the capitalist(s), the worker becomes alienated from the production process, the goods produced, and ultimately themself. Through this process, the worker loses. They lose economically as the increase in productivity is not translated into their wage, but their work is alienating, so they lose themself in the process. Through work, the worker is producing commodities, the goods, but is also producing themself as a commodity.

Capitalism requires and encourages competition between workers for wages. This reinforces isolation of individual workers, which makes solidarity between workers especially difficult. Capitalists benefit from a divided workforce, but alienation does not exist only in the production process. Alienation also haunts family structures. In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx explained that capitalism and the bourgeoisie have “resolved personal worth into exchange value” (Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, 1978, 475). Capitalism has dissolved personal relationships, including the family, to money relations (Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, 1978, 476). By reducing human relationships to money relationships, the alienation faced in the workplace enters the interpersonal dynamics. Workers are removed from their human nature and sensuous being, which makes it much more difficult to connect with other people’s human nature, especially outside of work.

2.3 Bourgeois Ideology: Private Property, Consumerism, Individualism, and Supremacy

With an understanding of how the bourgeois class exhibits their power over the proletariat class, we can investigate the ideology of the bourgeois class that allows for the reproduction of both bourgeois ideology and the bourgeois class itself. Bourgeois ideology is that

which will ensure the maintenance of power and status-quo, which encompasses the scope of thought and action that allows the ruling class to continue to rule. Based on the scholarship from anti-capitalist thinkers, we can understand bourgeois ideals to prioritize ownership of private property, consumerism, individualism, and systems of supremacy.

A common assumption about private property and communism is that private property refers mostly to private ownership of *anything*. While that can be the case, most of Marx's theories investigate private property as the concentrated ownership of the means of production. Competitive market economies, especially in the neoclassical model, uphold the ideas of a free market, where prices are unregulated and are supposed to settle in an equilibrium and each economic agent makes decisions that benefit themself, not necessarily the entire society. Marx explained that wealth and private property are contradictory to the proletariat, in that their purposes exist in opposition to each other. The goals of the bourgeoisie and private property are to "preserve its own existence and thereby the existence of its opposite, the proletariat" (Marx "Alienation and Social Classes", 1978, 133), while the proletariat "is compelled to abolish itself and thereby its conditioning opposite—private property—which makes it a proletariat" (Marx "Alienation and Social Classes", 1978, 133). For the proletariat to exist, in the subjugated class position, private property and the bourgeoisie must also exist. The bourgeoisie relies on the exploitation and alienation of the proletariat to maximize the surplus value they can extract. The power the bourgeoise holds requires a hierarchy and thus, a subjugated class is required. To remove the subjugated class position, we must also eliminate the position of the ruling class.

The bourgeoisie has an unwavering desire for accumulation of power and wealth, so it makes sense that the bourgeoisie is heavily interested in consumption. Utility maximization is

seen as the same as the pursuit of wealth and consumption. As consumers in a capitalist society, we are expected to make decisions that will lead to an increase in wealth or an ability to consume a certain good (i.e. luxury items and certain levels of home ownership). When we do make these decisions, they are considered utility maximizing[7]. Through consumption of labor, to a certain point by taking into account diminishing marginal returns, the bourgeoisie can increase the amount of surplus value they can extract. Consumption of goods and services can be used as a tool to demonstrate their status of wealth and power.

The Rational Economic Man and the bourgeoisie are self-interested. The self-interested economic agent is going to prioritize individualism, just as bourgeois ideology suggests. Both bourgeois ideals and the Rational Economic Man suggest that the individual is only responsible for their own success and survival. The role of the community is completely disregarded and labeled unimportant. Through individualism, the bourgeoisie can keep their power through the creation and maintenance of systems like white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism. These systems further fragment the working class and position them against each other. White supremacy makes it desirable for white members of the working class to entirely disregard their Black and brown peers in the interest of maintaining some semblance of power in an economic structure that actively intends to harm them both. In all of these categories, there is a throughline of "divide and conquer". An essential tactic of the bourgeoisie and people generally in positions of power, is to divide the group(s) with less power into smaller groups to limit their ability to organize and practice solidarity. With this strategy, the ruling class works diligently to isolate

[7] Utility maximizing decisions can look different for each person, but economists tend to see utility maximizing decisions as decisions that will increase one's wealth or power. In reality, utility maximizing behavior might look like pursuing a job just for the healthcare benefits, using drugs, and indulging in "risky" behaviors. These often go unrecognized by economists because they do not align with bourgeois utility maximization.

workers and reduce their ability to organize together. Individualism serves the bourgeoisie and reinforces the idea that wealth and power are achieved through hard work; if a single person works hard enough, they too can become wealthy.

This thinking is prevalent within the petty bourgeoisie, which is the class between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and is particularly important for the Black bourgeoisie and Black petty bourgeoisie. Because class awards so much power, "the Black bourgeoisie, in effect, drive for assimilation-integration in hopes of achieving racial and social parity with white people" (Joseph Scott 1973). The Black Bourgeoisie has been essential to Black Power movements as they tend to have "the best chances for success offered to members of the Black community" (Joseph Scott 1973). Joseph Scott points out that many scholars on the Black Bourgeoisie fail to properly recognize the ideological component of the bourgeoisie that many Black people who fall into the class qualifications of the bourgeoisie do not subscribe to (Joseph Scott 1973). In this, we see that the bourgeoisie have managed to have the broader society accept bourgeois ideology as key aspects of our society that are easy to overlook. It is assumed that the Black bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie will accept and align with the values of the white bourgeoisie that center exploitation and violence (Joseph Scott 1973). However, race, gender, and other marginalized identities complicate one's class experience in ways that might lead them to reject the white bourgeois ideals.

Ultimately, the goal of emphasizing individualism is to fracture collective solidarity and resistance. Individualism erodes organizing efforts, which allows for little push-back on the maintenance and reproduction of capitalism and oppression. This also allows systems of supremacy to prevail. Because of the biases of our society, we assume that only someone with a

certain background has access to make certain choices and thus access to certain privileges. There is a societal belief that “good decisions” are made by people who usually benefit from structures of power like whiteness, certain class privilege, and ability.

2.4 Rational Economic Man as Bourgeois Ideology

As I established in Chapter 1, “Rational Economic Man” is a theory that acts in the interests of those with the most power by idealizing behavior that does not account for general welfare or community needs and labels the most marginalized as “irrational”. Economics and the theory of Rational Economic Man, influences policy. In this policy influence, there is also state and government influence in economics and the development of “Rational Economic Man” theories and models.

Rational Economic Man upholds the values that reproduce the bourgeoisie and the people that hold the most power via privilege (white, cisgender, straight, able-bodied men). Economics operates as a self-centering structure that investigates and empowers the studied behaviors of the groups in power. A fundamental aspect of the Rational Economic Man is self-reliance and individualism. The rational economic agent makes utility maximizing decisions that benefit the individual without consideration for collective consequences, which further centers acceptance of individualism and supremacy.

Rational Economic Man serves the interests of the state and the bourgeoisie through aligning with bourgeois ideals at the expense of accurately understanding the needs and perspectives of all communities and identities. The theories of the Rational Economic Man use the biases from economists into the models, which are then used to create policy. These models resemble the wants and needs of white, middle and upper class men, which is a demographic

heavily vested in bourgeois ideals as a means to maintain their own power. In the ways the bourgeoisie engages in subjugation and oppression, Rational Economic Man participates in erasure of ideas and experiences.

CHAPTER 3: STRUCTURES THAT UPHOLD RATIONAL ECONOMIC MAN & BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY

> *But a revolution is not made with formulas. Prejudice must be attacked at the foundation, overthrown, hurled into dust, its injurious effects explained, its ridiculous and odious nature shown forth.*
>
> —P.J. Proudhon

In chapter 1, I discussed the ways that economics and economists center the voice of the "Rational Economic Man" in academic spaces and in the models they create. Ideas of the "Rational Economic Man" are not created and reproduced solely in economics, but lean on other social structures as tools to facilitate widespread reproduction and maintenance of power, hierarchy, and violence. The same can be said about bourgeois ideology; it does not exist on its own, but instead requires a network of structures to uphold and reproduce it. This network includes the family structure, educational institutions, the State, and more. In this chapter, I will use Social Reproduction Theory and the Matrix of Domination to investigate the ways systems and structures reproduce bourgeois ideology and positions of power.

3.1 Social Reproduction Theory and the Matrix of Domination

Social reproduction can be understood as "the creation and maintenance of social bonds… [and] sustaining horizontal ties among friends, family, neighborhoods, and community" (Nancy Fraser and Sarah Leonard 2016). More specifically, Social Reproduction Theory is a theory that aims to understand how and why systems of oppression and violence are perpetuated

through various forms of reproduction (Hadas Weiss 2021). Historically, the work of social reproduction has been gendered.

Capitalists (the bourgeoisie) are compelled to increase production and profits through competition with other capitalists and businesses, which requires further alienation and exploitation of the worker. The worker is forced into this dynamic because they need wages to purchase the necessities to live, so they are also bound to the bourgeoisie's attempt at continual growth. The working class is forced to sell their labor power and usually at lower-than-desirable prices, also known as wages (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978). Through this dynamic, we see the ways reproduction for a capitalist society is driven by forces outside of the control of the working class. In expanding production capacities, there is an increased need for labor and labor power, which can only be provided by a new generation of the working class as the previous generation of workers ages into retirement and death.

Part of the reproduction of the working class and bourgeois ideals is the literal reproduction of humans through having children. Another aspect is the ideological reproduction of capitalism, bourgeois ideals, the continued subjugation of the working class and other marginalized groups through social norms which are upheld in both the family and greater society. To reproduce the working class, people must engage in human reproduction. When a parent engages in wage labor, they will have less time to care for children (Davis 1998). To solve this 'problem', "the capitalist state, acting as an agent of accumulation, has controlled and regulated female reproduction by reinforcing a male-dominant order made up of breadwinning husbands and (temporarily) unwaged, childrearing wives" (Hadas Weiss 2021, 5). This has created what we recognize as the nuclear family. Instead of preserving the family as a source of

connection and kinship, capitalism has enforced a hierarchy of power into our homes and families. Patriarchy and domination now play an essential role in family dynamics instead of systems to make it easier for both parents to work by providing subsidized child care or reducing the obsession with wage labor and extracting surplus value from the working class. These power dynamics can be better understood through Patricia Hill Collins's Matrix of Domination.

The Matrix of Domination is a way to understand *how* power and oppressive systems are structured and organized in ways that encourage their collective maintenance and reproduction. These structures can exist in any formation and "any matrix of domination can be seen as an[y] historically specific organization of power in which social groups are embedded and which they aim to influence" (Patricia Hill Collins 2000, 228).

Intersectionality plays a role in the Matrix of Domination, where people with different identities will experience the oppressive structures differently based on the amount of power and privilege they hold within the Matrix. In the United States, race, class, and gender are central to these oppressive structures. For example, women of different races will all experience hierarchy and power in the United States in very different ways. In this case, "women are differentially evaluated based on their perceived value to give birth to the right kind of children, pass on appropriate American family values, and become worthy symbols of the nation" (Patricia Hill Collins 2000, 230) . The reproduction of the bourgeoisie through institutions and ideology aims to maintain homogeneity within the nation of the "ideal American".

3.2 The State

An essential part of the Matrix of Domination and structures that work to uphold bourgeois ideals is the State. Vladimir Lenin, in *The State and Revolution* investigated Marx's

understanding of the state, which was that “the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of “order”, which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes” (Vladimir Lenin 1918, 8), but that the petty-bourgeoisie believed that “order means the reconciliation of classes” and is not at the core oppression of classes (Vladimir Lenin 1918, 8). For the context of this project, I will be using Marx’s understanding of the state with some amendments: “the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one [group] by another; it is the creation of “order”, which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between [groups in positions of power and marginalized groups]” (Vladimir Lenin 1918, 8). This amendment is important because it recognizes the state as an entity that facilitates and allows the oppression of marginalized people regardless of class.

The bourgeoisie and its ideology is embedded in the state, where the state acts as an institution of reinforcement. In fact, the state plays a large role, in collaboration with the bourgeoisie, to enforce alienation of the working class, where the working class “not only are slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself” (Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, 1978, 479). Subjugation of the working class by the bourgeoisie occurs in the workplace, but because of the mechanism of the state, the subjugation can be even more far-reaching and be upheld by institutions like the family and healthcare.

3.3 The Family

The nuclear family structure has been essential to the reproduction of Rational Economic Man and bourgeois ideology. I will use “nuclear family” and the “nuclear family structure” to identify a family that is composed of two married adults with the children they created. They live together and exist within a home. The nuclear family is a heterosexual couple (John D’Emilio 1999). This form of the family has been manipulated to be a tool of capitalist ideals that aim to reinforce subjugation and class divisions, while reproducing bourgeois ideals.

With the increased cultural affinity for wage labor in the United States, and thus an increase in mobilization, it has become more difficult for people to maintain intense familial ties. Intergenerational family structures were an integral part of survival in the American colonies because colonists “established villages structured around a household economy” (John D’Emilio 1999, 240) that could sustain the needs of the family. People were not as reliant on a market economy as they are now, so it created a heavily interdependent network of people. Both the economy and the family did not outsource production. There were few possibilities for international or even interregional trade and most needs could be met within a small geographic area. As capitalism expanded, so did trade and exploitation, but the family simultaneously narrowed.

The spread of wage labor and the industrialization of American society led to the Family structure undergoing a process of atomization. At the start of this fragmentation process, the family unit was able to remain interdependent in many ways, but was not entirely reliant on the family unit for survival because there were goods they could buy in the market instead of producing them within the domestic sphere. Eventually, people moved in search of employment

as society became more urbanized and industrialized, which weakened familial ties and led to a decrease in interdependence with family as there was more geographic distance between people (John D'Emilio 1999). With the marketization of goods and services now seen as necessary to raise children, the family became a consuming unit. Donald Lowe argued

> commodified goods and services for natal production, health care, child- and preschool care, urban/suburban socialization, and formal education and training have almost totally replaced the non-exchangist social- reproduction practices formerly provided by household, kin, and local community (Lowe 1995, 91)

Instead of relying on networks of care and support, families turn to markets for childcare and schooling. This is not to say that the turning away from networks of care is the fault of the families. In fact, this is a criticism of the ways in which wage labor and the expansion of capitalism have torn people away from their networks of care for the sake of increased growth and profit.

In my discussion of the family from here on out, I will be discussing the Family as a social and economic unit, not the actual body of the family. I also want to recognize that the Family and the Household are not necessarily the same. A family, people who are related by genetics or marriage, can comprise a household, but a household is not always composed of family members. A household can consist of roommates and other living arrangements that do not include family members. Families have held great significance for most people in positive and negative ways. This writing is not meant to detract or dismiss those experiences, but rather investigate the ways the beneficial nature of the Family has been weaponized and abused by institutions of authority.

The nuclear Family reproduces patriarchal standards and norms that rely on control, power, and hierarchy. The Family upholds bourgeois norms that reproduce expectations of white

supremacy, monogamy, heteronormativity, and private property. In this section, I will explore the ways Family abolition can be understood as a way to address the ways the Family has become a tool of bourgeois ideology.

Every economist recognizes that for production to continue, there must be reproduction of the means of production. This means if a firm is producing linen shirts, the firm must be able to get more linen. Without additional linen, there cannot be additional linen shirts. Similarly, if a linen shirt requires two workers to produce, the firm must retain at least two workers or be able to replace them with an additional two workers. Firms rely on both the reproduction of the means of production *and* the reproduction of labor power.

The reproduction of labor power requires three aspects. First, a generation of workers must be enticed into the labor market, which is usually done through wages. In a capitalist society, people need money to consume goods, so they must engage in paid labor to have the financial capacity to consume other goods and services. Workers are then able to maintain a cycle of work and consumption. The necessities of life like food, water, and shelter are all purchased in a market and cost money. Because the goods necessary for life require money, the person must engage in paid labor to be able to afford these necessary goods. Marx identified this relationship as inherently exploitative because of the reliance the working class has on wage labor. Because of this dependence, Marx claimed that this work was "not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*" (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978, 74). Capitalists are able to exploit the working class by paying subsistence wages and maintaining exploitative structures, while the working class is forced to stay in a damaging work environment to earn wages to survive.

The second aspect of the reproduction of labor power requires the maintenance of the current generation of labor power. Siliva Federici recognized that the maintenance of labor power is often the job of the family, specifically the spouse, but can be done by the worker. This maintenance of labor power requires care for both physical and mental functions (Federici 2020). Care for physical and mental functions means literally maintaining the physical body, which includes eating and sleeping enough to sustain one's body. This requires the spouse to bear the brunt of the emotional toll of work, where "the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense" (Federici 2020, 18). The spouse that is expected to do the care work for the Family is also an essential aspect of the production process that allows the worker to restore their mental and physical capabilities and return to work the next day ready to be exploited again.

The final aspect is the creation of the future generation(s) of workers, and thus labor power. This work happens primarily domestically, within the home. Part of the reproduction of labor power is the literal maintenance and reproduction processes of the human body, but there is an ideological reproduction that is necessary to maintain the status quo that is necessary in the maintenance of the current and future generations of labor power. Louis Althusser suggests that the reproduction of labor power is also "a reproduction of its submission to the rules to the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology" (Althusser 1971, 132) so that the ruling class and bourgeois ideology maintain power. The current generation of labor power must participate in and uphold bourgeois ideology via Family structures.

3.4 Healthcare

Healthcare operates within systems of harm, so inherits the bias and violence already embedded in the systems. W.E.B Du Bois was one of the first people to write about racial health disparities, when he identified higher rates of certain diseases in Black people in Philadelphia (Crossley 2022, 17). While little was done to address the health disparities in the early 20th century, in 1985, the 1985 Heckler Report was created based on the findings of a Task Force on Black and Minority health investigated racial health needs and statuses of marginalized people (Crossley 2022, 17). It has become clear that Black people and other people of color demonstrate worse health in both quantitative and qualitative studies of health. In a 2013 study, Black Americans tended to be more likely to rate their health as worse than their white peers (Crossley 2022, 18). Similarly, a 2017 report found Black Americans were more likely to have "chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke… [and] contract infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, shigellosis, and tuberculosis at higher rates" than their white peers (Crossley 2022, 19). This data might be startling and hopefully leads people to be willing to do the intense work necessary to stop ongoing harm and prevent future harm. While there is likely no single solution to racial health disparities, there is a common denominator. Racism. One could argue that it might also be food choices, exercise habits, other factors like smoking and pre-existing conditions. I would argue that all of these factors are deeply informed by racism. For example, it is widely recognized that food deserts primarily exist within communities that are predominantly Black and brown. Similarly, marginalized communities, especially Black and brown and poor communities, face higher rates of smoking (Crossley 2022, 19). Racial discrimination is embedded in every aspect of our society, not isolated to just healthcare sectors.

Here we can return to the intersectionality frameworks I discussed in Chapter One. The intersectionality of identities can also be applied to understand the experiences of multiple illnesses, diseases, or health experiences. The experiences of a disabled Black person are not simply explained by the sum of all parts, but rather a nuanced web where parts of the experience interact with others to form entirely new experiences and identities (Crenshaw 1989). A similar model can be applied to health. We can look at the ways identities inform or impact health. A disabled Black man will likely face racism in seeking medical care, but will also experience ableism. Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence about the compounded disadvantage of being both disabled and another marginalized group. The evidence we do have demonstrates people of color have a more difficult time receiving diagnoses for disabilities than their white peers (Crossley 2022, 207-208).

As we know from the Matrix of Domination, systems of oppression are embedded in every institution and are reliant on each other for their maintenance and continued reproduction. It is clear that racism is embedded in the United States healthcare systems and through the interconnectedness of systems, we know that sexism, ableism, and classism are also certainly present in the healthcare system.

CHAPTER 4: CARE WORK & MARX

4.1 What is Care Work?

The International Labor Organization defines care work in two categories: “direct, personal and relational care activities, such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner; and indirect care activities, such as cooking and cleaning” (Addati et al. 2018). Most care work done in the world is unpaid. Most paid care work is done by women, often “migrants and [they are] working in the informal economy under poor conditions and for low pay” (Addati et al. 2018). Identity distinctions are important to make because they help us understand how the harmful structures in place further reproduce oppression and alienation of marginalized people. In understanding that most unpaid or underpaid care work is done by women and migrants, we can start to investigate if systems of oppression like sexism, racism, and imperialism are interacting with this work and these systems.

4.2 Care Work and Gender

Before the emergence of feminist economics in the 1970s, women were largely left out of economics as a discipline and economic studies and models. Prominent economics garnered a lot of support on theories that most people today would recognize as problematic, yet remain central to economic thought. An example of this is Gary Becker’s model of the family. Becker championed the idea that rational decision making is how humans make most decisions, not just the decisions in consumption markets. His models of the family represented “the household as a sort of factory, producing goods and services such as meals, shelter, and child care” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024). This theory does not engage with ideas of kinship, love, or the

relationships that the household relies on. Instead Becker's theory prioritizes efficiency and integrates market dynamics and functions in our care relationships.

Economists, most of whom were in favor of the idea of the Rational Economic Man, also believed that women are and should be more altruistic than men, which makes them inherently better caregivers (Nancy Folbre 2001). This led to the prominent "separate spheres" mode of thinking, which says that men and women should exist in separate spheres of work, where men would work in the formal labor market and women would care for the home and children (Nancy Folbre 2001, 14). Alfred Marshall, a famous economist in the late 1800s, commended this "separate spheres" thinking and "explicitly warned that higher wages for women in the labor market might tempt them to neglect their duties as wives and mothers" (Nancy Folbre 2001, 12). Conservative thinkers were able to draw from this thinking to also associate an increase of women entering the formal labor market, which would trigger a decrease in women exclusively caring for the home and family, to a decline in altruism in women. This line of thinking is indicative of the belief that men "are incapable of offering more love and tenderness" (Nancy Folbre 2001, 15), so that work is left to women. Men are maybe not incapable of love and care, but are socialized to avoid these "feminine" practices.

For decades, feminists have been grappling with how feminist success should be defined. This question should also include asking if the success of women and the feminist movement can or should include success in the labor market. Should women aim to achieve success by the standards of what is successful for men or should women lean into what makes them different from men and reduce the penalization of womanhood (Nancy Folbre 2001, 17)? Feminists who agree with the former would suggest that women join the labor market and insist that men should

help with care tasks like raising children and doing housework. Feminists who agree with the latter might suggest a restructuring of how we understand care and femininity in ways that destigmatize femininity and embrace women engaging in various activities based on how they want to spend their time. Allowing only women to partake in activities deemed feminine eliminates the opportunity for men to engage in these activities as well. The demand, for any movement toward liberation, should be for total liberation from oppressive forces, not aiming for equality within the already existing oppressive forces. In the example of care work and domestic labor, demanding wages is asking for recognition within the system that these workers are hoping for liberation from. Patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism are all embedded in each other and work to benefit each other.

4.2.1 Wages for Housework

Most feminist thinkers that are working on ideas around domestic labor and housework can agree that the work is undervalued. The disagreement between these thinkers is about *how* to address the devaluation of care work and domestic labor. Some approaches are on a small scale like encouraging households to more equally share the division of household labor or to push more women to enter the formal labor market to earn wages. Encouraging more women to enter the labor market does not solve the burden of unpaid domestic labor because the labor must be done by someone. It is entirely likely that the woman entering the labor market will continue to do the household labor. This does not absolve them of the burden of domestic labor and the exploitation that comes along with it. Shifting the burden of domestic labor to another person also does not address the concerns of it being unpaid and unrecognized. It just shifts the work and devaluation onto someone else instead of removing it entirely. This is something Black

women and generally women of color have faced for decades. Angela Davis, abolitionist and feminist activist, reminded us of this dynamic in her chapter "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework":

> But like their white sisters called "housewives," they have cooked and cleaned and have nurtured and reared untold numbers of children. But unlike the white housewives, who learned to lean on their husbands for economic security, Black wives and mothers, usually workers as well, have rarely been offered the time and energy to become experts at domesticity (Davis 1998, 199).

With the rise of women entering the labor market, women were expected to do both the domestic labor *and* work in the formal labor market. The domestic work does not go away when parents work in the formal labor market. Instead it gets redistributed through childcare in the market (day care, a nanny, etc) or a parent is unable to engage in work in the formal labor market.

Domestic labor being unpaid and unrecognized is not a "woman's issue". It is an issue for anyone doing unpaid and unrecognized labor. By no longer culturally associating domestic labor with women, the devaluation does not simply disappear. It is ingrained into our norms and expectations in ways that reach far beyond the scope of gender. It is embedded in our systems, practices, and even the economy. We see the devaluation in the economy by the lack of childcare options available for parents who are working in the formal labor market and cannot care for their child while they are at work.

A prominent solution for the alienation and isolation of domestic labor is to pay wages for housework and domestic labor. As an attempt to gain visibility and compensation for their domestic labor, a number of feminist thinkers and activists created the Wages for Housework Movement in the 1970s. Their goal was to resist the sexist ways domestic labor was unrecognized by economic systems and cultural norms by gaining recognition via wages. The

argument they held was that mothers and people raising children were essential to the reproduction and maintenance of the working class, which would create surplus value (Federici 2020). The Wages for Housework Movement relied heavily on Marxist theories of alienation and exploitation to understand the ways domestic labor is undervalued.

Marx defined surplus value as the excess produced beyond what is needed to survive, also known as subsistence (Marx, “The Commodity”, 1978). Surplus value is extracted from the labor workers produce. Workers earn a wage, often a subsistence wage. The goods and services that the worker produces are sold in a market for a value higher than the wage and capital required to produce the goods. The difference between the inputs of production (land, labor, and capital) and the price the goods are sold for is profit. The profit goes to the capitalists as surplus value (Marx, “The Commodity”, 1978). Instead, the surplus value could go to workers wages, but instead goes into maintaining a company or to the wages of the capitalist class. In a capitalist society, money is the way we maintain our basic living and necessities. This keeps workers in a cycle of being tethered to a wage in order to survive and meet their needs. In modern capitalist societies like the United States, workers are also bound to their jobs for health insurance and retirement benefits.

A core argument for needing an increase in recognition and implementation of wages for domestic labor is the role it plays in the reproduction of the working class. People maintaining the household, which at the time of the Wages for Housework Movement was mostly women, were not only taking care of the home so their husband could work, but they were also caring for children, which would become the next generation of workers. Future employers could extract surplus value from the husband and children without acknowledging or compensating the

mother/wife for their role in creating and/or maintaining a good employee (Federici 2020). Without the maintenance and reproduction of the working class working at subsistence wages, the bourgeois class cannot extract surplus value. Without the free labor of the caretaker, the surplus value the ruling class can extract would be much lower. The Wages for Housework Movement demanded that domestic laborers be compensated for their work for their role in the reproduction of the working class (Federici 2020).

Marx claimed that workers can return to their sensuous-being[8] nature when they are not being exploited. If a worker experiences alienation and exploitation, they cannot fully return to their sensuous nature until they are no longer exploited (Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978). In a capitalist system, most of this exploitation occurs at work through low wages, dehumanization, and wage theft. That said, I believe we can look at non-work spaces and spaces that do not perpetuate exploitation as places where workers get as close as they can to returning to their sensuous nature. For example, think about spaces where we say we feel most at home or most like ourselves. This can include physical spaces, like a coffee shop or gym, and non-physical spaces, like spending time with people we love without being subjected to the dehumanization and exploitation of wage labor. These spaces are where people can recharge, rest, and connect with other people. These spaces do the work of undoing or providing contrast to the alienation someone experiences in the workplace.

The Wages for Housework Movement also aimed to connect domestic laborers with the broader working class. Domestic laborers that do not work in the formal labor market are often isolated from the rest of the working class and unable to engage in solidarity building activities

[8] In his writing, Marx talked about how humans are not abstract or rational actors, but are interconnected with and interact intimately with social and historical contexts and systems that alter us. We have bodily and social needs that are usually unique to the human experience.

like joining a union (Federici 2020). As a way to undo the alienation from other members of the working class, the Movement hoped that people in the formal labor market would see housework as legitimate work when it was recognized with wages. Wages would certainly make way for recognition within the existing system, but can liberation exist within the current system? Because these systems were built with the intention of creating harm, we should not also seek our liberation from within the confines of these systems.

In a heterosexual couple, where one partner, traditionally a man, works in the formal labor market and one partner, traditionally a woman, cares for the home and children if they have children, it is not just the woman that is alienated and exploited. Working class men are exploited in the workplace, but can return home, which serves a non-exploitative environment[9] (Federici 2020). Women only doing domestic labor are living and working in a singular exploitative environment. Similarly, working class women working in the formal labor market are exploited at work and then often return home to participate in the unpaid care economy by doing housework and caring for children. In this way, people who bear the brunt of domestic labor in a household are never able to connect with their sensuous-self and get even a glimpse of the non-alienated life (Federici 2020, Marx, "Manuscripts", 1978). We know that under capitalism, the working class will not know a non-alienated life.

The Wages for Housework movement uses a Marxist understanding of exploitation and wages, yet was demanding equality and recognition under capitalism, which Marx claimed was not possible. The Wages for Housework Movement using this logic directly contradicts what the

[9] The home is not an entirely non-exploitative environment, especially when there is a power imbalance. This power imbalance can arise when identities with structural implications are different with the partners. Some examples include race, gender, and income. This power imbalance that we usually see within larger, societal structures also exists within smaller spaces like a household or a relationship.

movement desires: liberation. Economic liberation for the working class will not happen under capitalism. By demanding wages for housework, a sector of work that is not defined by a formal capitalist market, forces the domestic sphere to fully enter the market sphere. We know that there is workplace exploitation and alienation occurring in the market sphere, so domestic workers, by seeking recognition from the market sphere, are also seeking alienation and exploitation by and within the market sphere. This will result in the recognition of labor, but will not solve the other issues of alienation, exploitation, and structural degradation of workers. With wages, domestic labor would enter the formal market sphere and take on a more recognized position. This recognition would be through the lens of the state and alienation, like all other wages and formally recognized work. The state is an oppressive entity that is working to benefit corporations and companies and continue to allow capitalists to generate profits and increase surplus value by exploiting workers to work at subsistence wages. People performing domestic labor already hold a precarious position because of how unrecognized the labor is and because of the gendered and racialized position it holds in our social structures. Demanding wages from the state, which aids in the lack of recognition of care work, will not do the work of unalienating, but rather lead to further exploitation and other problems.

Silvia Federici, one of the founders of the Wages for Housework Movement, argued that demanding wages is “a revolutionary perspective [and] it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint” (Federici 2020, 16). True revolutionary and liberatory action will only occur from dismantling bourgeois power. Demanding wages for domestic labor from the state will only allow the potential for domestic laborers to move toward solidarity with the broader working class, but will not effectively work toward liberation from bourgeois private

property and oppressive labor systems. These steps toward solidarity among the working class are essential, but cannot be the final demand of movements toward liberation. Seeking the approval of oppressive entities is repackaged oppression, not liberation.

4.3 Care Work and Healthcare

Care can initially seem like a beautiful relationship between people and community that fosters vulnerability and interdependence in ways our Western cultures often forbids and neglects. This is true in many ways and should be celebrated. We also need to understand the ways care actually participates in and reproduces systems of hierarchy, violence, harm, and ultimately bourgeois ideology. Critical scholar and researcher, Emily Simmonds, defines care in a way that allows this nuance to be present. She defines care as, "an affective relation whose leading ethic is to create attachments within infrastructures of inequity. These attachments are best described as obligations" (Liboiron 2021, 115). This definition understands that care is not just a practical relationship with an exchange of favors and actions, but relies on pre-existing social structures and responsibility. It recognizes a reciprocity that engages in power imbalances that can sometimes include harm. Care operates within systems of inequality and perpetuates and relies heavily on it. In fact,

> 'practices of care are always shot through with asymmetrical power relations. . . . Care organizes, classifies, and disciplines bodies. Colonial regimes show us precisely how care can become a means of governance.' Care is not inherently good. It is an uneven relation and can contribute to and/or mitigate unevenness (Liboiron 2021, 115).

We cannot isolate certain relationships from the systems that they operate within and interact with. Because care-relationships operate within systems of violence, the care is at risk of also having violent elements.

Similarly, communities, whether sharing commonality or not, also exist within these social structures that are influenced by power. Within healthcare, "communities have varying degrees of power, voice, and stability", which are often created by formal titles like "Doctor", "Nurse", "Educator", and "Patient" (Galarneau 2016, 10). In understanding healthcare as a community good[10], we learn that healthcare relies on community in four ways: meaning making, shaping the health of a community, community as the central location of healthcare, and "communities themselves benefit from (or are harmed by) health care activities and institutions" (Galarneau 2016, 11). When we are born, we immediately enter social networks through family, culture, systems (i.e. the foster care system), and geography. These networks shape our understanding of the world, health, and ourselves. These norms go on to inform the ways we practice health and address our own health needs. For example, many people involved in the Christian Science Church believe "healing itself is achieved through prayer and scripture reading" not biomedicine and advice of a physician (Galarneau 2016, 13). In the United States, many Black communities and allies understand disease and illness to often be rooted in both biology and social causes like racism. In this recognition, treating health concerns requires treating both the biological concern and the systemic concerns. Meaning making as a community

[10] Community goods are defined as being non-excludable and non-rivalrous in economics. A nonexcludable good means that the provider of the good cannot exclude a person or group from purchasing or using the good or service. A non-rivalrous good means there will never be a scarcity of the good or service because one person using the good/service does not prohibit someone else from using it. In other words, supply does not change based on how many people use the good/service. With this understanding, we know that a community good is one where the availability will not decrease based on how many people use it and it will be available to anyone in the community (Galarneau 2016).

can also look like harm reduction efforts led by community members and mutual aid organizations. In this work, communities interrogate their own needs and the needs of those around them and collaboratively come up with and implement solutions (Galarneau 2016, 15).

Communities also serve as breeding grounds for disease and environmental health impacts. Communities should also serve as the central point of prevention and cure. We share diseases with our communities and the regional environment with things like water, toxins, and housing needs. While we can spread potentially harmful diseases like HIV and the flu to our communities, we also play an essential role in keeping our communities safe. This can look like regularly getting STIs tests and staying home when sick, but can also look like bringing a hot dinner to a neighbor who just had a baby or whose parent died. Attending a protest against police violence or a settler colonial occupation is also work of keeping one's community safe. Maintaining the health of a community is much more than not sharing your germs. It spans from building a network of friends to combat loneliness and working with a local organizing group working to reduce police violence in Black and brown communities. This is also community-based healthcare; healthcare done by community members and healthcare done directly in communities (Galarneau 2016, 18). In addition to building networks of care within communities, it also looks like eliminating physician deserts and ensuring there is a hospital that is accessible.

Finally, when an individual has access to healthcare resources, the entire community benefits. Healthcare institutions (including informal social networks) can "strengthen community infrastructure" (Galarneau 2016, 20). In fact, "mutual aid societies sponsored health care services

for their members—and as a result strengthened their communities as a whole" (Galarneau 2016, 20).

4.4 Care Work and Disability Justice

Disabled identities are nuanced in unique ways because each disabled person experiences their symptoms in different ways and can have different symptoms altogether. Models of disability aim to understand how disabilities manifest and affect a person's life. The medical model looks at disability as a defect of the body or failing of the body through medical lenses like diagnosis and symptoms. The social model defines disability as a fault of society that renders spaces inaccessible to a person's needs. In the social model the society or building/space are what creates the disability. If we understand disability to be

> a socially-created category derived from labor relations, a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society: one which creates (and then oppresses) the so-called 'disabled' body as one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 212)

we come to the conclusion that being disabled requires rejecting capitalism's expectations of profitability and one's value being intimately connected with their ability to work and produce profit.

In the United States, while the medical and social models are prevalent, "disability came to be defined explicitly in relation to the labor market" (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 214). To qualify by the federal government as disabled, someone

> must not be able to engage in any substantial gainful activity (SGA)[11] because of a medically determinable physical or mental disability(ies) that is either expected to result in death *or* has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months (Social Security, n.d.)

[11] A Substantial Gainful Activity "describes a level of work activity and earnings" (Social Security, n.d.)

This, entirely separated from the social and medical models of disability, lends itself to create a new disability model: the economic model of disability. The economic model of disability defines a disability based on one's (in)ability to do work, usually work for pay. The economic model of disability disengages the disabled person and their body by creating the relationship of value and ability to one's capabilities to produce surplus value and be exploited. The emergence of wage labor and eventually the rise in industrial capitalism led to new divisions including the creation of "a class of proletarians but also a new class of 'disabled' who did not conform to the standard worker's body and whose labor power was effectively erased, excluded from paid work" (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 213) In evaluating one's body and ability through their ability to engage in paid labor, we see how definitions of identity and experiences by the government and state apparatuses are used to exclude people from accessing the economy fully. By not being able to access the economy, disabled people face various forms of economic discrimination where employers can see disability as a "social creation which defines who is offered a job and who is not" (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 214). By only understanding disability through an economic lens, we lose out on understanding the intricacies of the disabled experience as it relates to one's experience of their physical body and mental activity.

With the United States's affinity for wage labor, and thus the relationship between definitions of disability, have equated morality with one's ability to work. Disability is not a moral issue, but rather a human experience that ought to be valued and understood. It is also important to investigate the ways intersectionality and Matrix of Domination are at play with disability. People of color and poor people are disproportionately more likely to be disabled, so there is an added race and class stigma present in ableist rhetoric (Crossley 2022).

Disabled people face “lower labor-force participation rates, higher unemployment rates and higher part-time employment rates than non-disabled people” (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 213). Disabled people are effectively excluded from the labor-force pool and “are nearly three times as likely to live below the poverty line” (Russell and Malhotra 2002, 212). While disabled people are excluded from the wage labor market, social safety nets like unemployment benefits, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps), and disability social security do not provide a living wage enough to meet basic needs. Additionally, the cost of being disabled can be higher than their non-disabled peers due to the cost of medical supplies and additional healthcare needs.

CHAPTER 5: Next Steps Through Justice and Care

> *If power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity.*
>
> —Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

Systems are interconnected and the harm they produce does not just come from a singular system of oppression, but instead stems from an interconnected collaboration of a network of systems. With this understanding, we should also recognize that there cannot be a singular solution to this network of embedded problems. Instead, we need to engage in a real reckoning of what justice looks like while coming to understand the nuances of the systems at play. Can justice exist within systems of harm? Will a staggered or incremental approach to justice and liberation be the most beneficial? How do we reduce harm? How do we engage with past violences in a meaningful way to prevent future ones?

In this chapter, I will explore the values and methodologies of different liberation-focused movements like disability justice movements, harm reduction philosophies, mutual aid, and queer and trans anarchist principles. These movements have been effective at both meeting the needs of the community and enacting change. In this exploration, it is imperative to understand the way abolition of any structure or institution on its own is a risky move, especially for those in precarious positions. There must be a safety net for the most marginalized. This safety net can and should be community-focused instead of reliant on the state and other institutions. We must work under frameworks of positive abolition, where a structure or institution that is abolished is replaced with something new. This is not to be confused with reform that works within existing systems without structural change.

5.1 Disability Justice Principles

Participating in disability justice in ways that include every marginalized group requires communities to be built on the foundation of interdependence and care for each other and the self. Care must be at the center of each relationship and community. Centering care in communities builds deeper connections, rejects capitalist expectations of prioritizing profit[12], and ensures a space of community for everyone, regardless of their health, productivity, or labor-capacity. Being disabled is a joyful, messy, passionate, confusing, and empowering experience and one that ought to be disconnected from labor and profits.

Sins Invalid's[13] Principles of Disability Justice includes:

> intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, anti-capitalist politic, cross-movement solidarity, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation (Sins Invalid 2015).

With these practices, we must integrate systems of justice and care that center the experiences and needs of disabled people. Beneficial networks of care, in health and every aspect of life, require recognition of the entire being. Disability justice aims to do just that.

The systems that I explored in this project have all failed to recognize the wholeness of each individual, especially marginalized people. Economists have failed to integrate the chaos of the human experience into their investigation. Employers fail to recognize the "non-employable"

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[12] Capitalism demands we are isolated, or at the very least have desires that align with individualism.

[13] Sin's Invalid is a "disability justice based performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and LGBTQ / gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized. Led by disabled people of color, Sins Invalid's performance work explores the themes of sexuality, embodiment and the disabled body, developing provocative work where paradigms of "normal" and "sexy" are challenged, offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all bodies and communities" (Sins Invalid 2015)

as valuable. Women's liberation movements have failed to recognize the ways sexism and racism are deeply connected.

For progress to be made, we must recognize each other's wholeness. In addition to recognizing wholeness, the 10 Principles of Disability Justice encourage us to "understand that people have inherent worth outside of capitalist notions of productivity" (Sins Invalid 2015). In the capitalist system, Marx claims as workers are exploited, they are also dehumanized as the worker "becomes an appendage of the machine" (Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", 1978, 479). In this work, they are objectified and dehumanized, yet it is this same process that assigns workers their value. This is not a process of true valuation. Instead it is one of violence that we must aim to exist outside of. We must value ourselves and each other outside the amount of labor they are capable of and how much surplus value the bourgeoisie can extract from our labor.

Seeing disabled people as people, whole people, seems obvious and simple (or at least I would hope), yet the subjugation of disabled people is pervasive and is integrated into every system of our society. Part of recognizing disabled people as whole people that are worthy of love and care requires a reworking and abolition of many of our systems to ensure they are able to hold a full position in society. Accessibility work aimed to support the needs of disabled people also benefits able-bodied people. Able-bodied people often use elevators and curb cuts, despite them likely not being medically necessary for them. Mia Mingus, activist and writer, describes these necessities as disabled people not "simply want[ing] to join the ranks of the privileged, we want to challenge and dismantle those ranks and question why some people are consistently at the bottom" (Mingus 2017). Mingus's desire for disability justice requires us to

investigate the systems at play and how they perpetuate harm as a way of embracing wholeness and solidarity. Interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation remind us that our endeavors toward liberation are bigger than the self and even bigger than our identity-based communities. These principles remind us that "all living systems and the land [are] integral to the liberation of our own communities" (Sins Invalid 2015). Mingus reminds us of the ways our interactions have the potential to cause excruciating harm to our communities or can be a source of compassion, respect, and revolutionary change.

Integrating the principles of disability justice is essential to liberation and justice work moving forward, not just for the liberation of disabled people, but of all people. If these systems are interconnected, so is our liberation. Ensuring access to spaces and community is essential to any liberation-focused work.

5.2 Harm Reduction

Systems, especially within capitalism, create intense levels of violence and harm. While ultimately we should abolish the systems of harm, we must first mitigate current harm. It is important to protect the people being actively harmed the best we can before we fully engage in long-term work toward abolition or even reform. Importantly, this is not the role of the state and other organized structures, but instead the role of communities and networks of care.

I am suggesting a harm reductionist approach. Harm Reduction is defined as "'an alternative approach to addressing the failures of incarceration and medicalization as solutions to personal and societal problems associated with drug use' (Bok 1998, p.3)" (Wieloch 2002, 47). For the purposes of this project, I will define harm reduction as an approach to mitigating harms

produced and reproduced by and within institutions. This definition encompasses the ways that institutions and systems perpetuate violence in communities and the role community can and should have in dismantling that harm. It also includes the work of making risky behaviors, like using drugs, more safe. For example, abolishing the Family as an economic unit without a replacement or safety net, could leave people without community and lose things like health insurance that might be associated with their partner's job. This is where a safety net of affordable healthcare and/or providers that charge based on a sliding scale can be helpful.

This approach encompasses all areas of potential risk, not just drug use and public health policy. Before the abolition of capitalism, there must be support in place for the most marginalized and at-risk populations. This should not be state-funded or reliant on established institutions. This work requires deep community engagement and trust. At first, it might seem far-fetched to propose community-provided harm reductionist strategies, but many communities managed it quite well during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the queer community was reliant on community-care during the height of the ongoing HIV epidemic (Arani 2020). Wearing a mask and isolating when infected with COVID-19 is a strategy meant to lessen the exposure other people have to the virus. We have been doing it for decades, often we just do not call it harm reduction. Regardless of methodology in next steps of abolition, revolution, or even small changes, a central goal should be to reduce harm, especially for the most marginalized.

In the case of harm reduction for drug-use, The People's Harm Reduction Alliance (PHRA) in Seattle, Washington is a great example. The philosophy of PHRA is one of intersectionality, access to resources and community, and health promotion, where they recognize that "no one knows what drug users need more than drug users" ("The People's Harm

Reduction Alliance," n.d.). PHRA does shame-free and judgment-free distribution of harm reduction resources like

> new syringes, sterile injection equipment (cookers, cottons, tourniquets, alcohol pads, paperclips 'handles' for the cookers), overdose reversal medication naloxone (Narcan), pipes and safer smoking kits, wound care supplies, [and] safer sex supplies" ("The People's Harm Reduction Alliance," n.d.)

to people who use drugs. These supplies allow people who use drugs to engage in drug use with reduced risk of transmitting infectious diseases or infections and decreases the risk of overdose.

The work of harm reduction aims to meet the needs of the community through "compassion and respect [not] criticism and punishment" ("The People's Harm Reduction Alliance," n.d.). We can apply these principles broadly. Harm reduction outside of drug use can include community-run food pantries that aim to mitigate the harms of poverty. Approaching actions and people with compassion and respect, requires dismantling of hierarchies built on the subjugation of people and structures meant to (re)produce harm. It also requires breaking down a moral hierarchy and feelings of superiority. People who use drugs are not inherently worse than people who do not use drugs. Similarly, poor people are not lazy and do not need to 'pull themselves up by the bootstraps'. Our community building and actions must reflect that.

5.3 Mutual Aid

Dean Spade, organizer, lawyer, and activist, wrote a book exploring mutual aid and its role in crises. He defined mutual aid as a "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them" (Spade 2020, 7). Under this definition, he identified three primary elements of mutual aid. First, "mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do

not have what they need" (Spade 2020, 9). An essential historic example of this is the Black Panther Party's survival programs, which included free medical care like health clinics, free dental programs, free ambulance programs, GED classes, and legal aid ("Black Panther Party Community Survival Programs" n.d). The Black Panther Party recognized that needs were not being met and that there was a stigma associated with being poor and Black. By working within a framework of understanding the needs of the community, the programs "broke stigma and isolation, met material needs, and got people fired up to work together for change" (Spade 2020, 10). The second aspect of mutual aid is that the "projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements" (Spade 2020, 12). Mutual aid helps to build solidarity, which can be used in larger movements to enact broader and more intense change. After all, it is harder to control a large number of people than it is a singular person. The final element is that "mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors" (Spade 2020, 16). Mutual aid requires collaborative, often non-hierarchical networks that aim to meet people's needs through actions led by respect and compassion. Mutual aid has been essential to the liberation movements of queer, trans, disabled people, and people of color. The philosophies of mutual aid networks take similar judgment-free and shame-free approaches to harm reduction as a way to meet the needs of the community. Ideally, in meeting the needs of the community, mutual aid should operate outside state provisions,

> which frequently blame social problems on individuals' moral failings, mutual aid recognizes that capitalist, white supremacist institutions are responsible for producing poverty, inequality, and violence (Arani 2020, 654).

During the height of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, people distributed face masks to their community members and testing for the virus was free in most places in the United States.

The United States government was failing to address the emerging crisis in a timely manner, so communities stepped up for the most marginalized, which in this case initially appeared to be disabled people and immuno-compromised people. Using the skills and resources you already have to give to your community is at the core of mutual aid.

5.4 Queer and Trans Activism

Queer and trans principles of justice and liberation can also be helpful in understanding the ways in which revolution is not only possible, but imminent. Some second wave feminist activists advocated for lesbian feminism as the way out of heterosexual subjugation. Lesbian feminism centers around the belief that men are not necessary to the feminist movement and the best way to exclude men from the feminist movement is to disengage with men entirely[14]. I will not argue that we should all become lesbians or that that is even a reasonable request. However, there are some lessons we can learn from lesbian activists throughout history when it comes to attempts for liberation. Lesbians were at the core of activism in the height of the HIV epidemic, but were excluded from the at-risk population. It was believed that the only people that were contracting HIV were people who were using drugs and men who had sex with men. Despite the erasure they faced in HIV activism and healthcare, there was a heightened sense of urgency among the lesbian community to act in solidarity with the rest of their community:

> For many gay women and men of color, the devastation in their communities and the need for their engagement and activism was urgent and obvious to them. For many progressive lesbians, the communities most under siege were exactly the communities they were committed to working within (women in prisons, poor women, women of color, young women) . And many of us were losing friends every week, every month,

[14] "Lesbian feminism" is a particular kind of feminism that emphasizes the liberatory aspects of lesbian identity by decentering men from desire and interaction. While this decentering can destabilize the patriarchy, which should be our goal, it is generally unrealistic to expect a complete detachment of men from feminism. "Lesbian Feminism" is also not representative of the goals of all lesbians or all feminists, but rather a subsect of the intersection.

> more each year. Our reasons as lesbians were numerous, varied, and passionate (Hollibaugh 1995, 220)

This grief drove a sense of urgency to act in solidarity with their community. The Lesbian Avengers, who organized the first Dyke March, have been instrumental to LGBTQ+ activism and specifically the connections between lesbian identity and activism. The Lesbian Avengers created a manifesto that described their goals and values and included:

> Lesbian Avengers believe in creative activism: loud, bold, sexy, silly, fierce, tasty, and dramatic. Arrest optional.. . . Lesbian avengers don't have patience for polite politics… Lesbian avengers scheme and scream. Think actions must be local, regional, global, cosmic… Lesbian avengers believe direct action is a kick in the face (Lesbian Avengers 1993).

The activist work of the Lesbian Avengers was meant to disrupt the status quo, while keeping the community safe. Part of keeping the community safe, especially while facing direct persecution by the United States government both through many forms of violence, including by police, and negligence in addressing the spread of HIV, meant making it clear that direct action is not for everyone. For some it means engaging in low-risk organizing activities, which includes non-violent direct action, donating directly to mutual aid and other community-focused opportunities. The Lesbian Avengers made clear who their actions and movement was for:

> It is for women who want to be involved in activism, work in community, be creative, do shit-work, take responsibility on a regular basis, have their minds blown, change their opinions and share organizing skills (Lesbian Avengers 1993)

The political frustrations many people had about the exploitation of the working class, ongoing violence against people of color and queer people, the War on Drugs, and other political tensions were growing with the number of cases of HIV. This frustration spurred people into unique actions that centered community and protection of the people by the people (Hollibaugh 1995). This kind of organizing aligns directly with harm reduction principles and practices. It

illuminates the ways ongoing harm is inflicted by systems and structures and redirects care and interdependent relationships from the state and into communities. The actions of the Lesbian Avengers included memorials for LGBTQ+ people that were murdered and violently attacked (often called “gay bashing”), prideful celebrations like the Dyke March, and other educational and protest-centered actions (Hollibaugh 1995).

We can and should learn and be reminded of the power of inter-identity solidarity and direct action as means of enacting change toward liberation. In these actions, there needs to be a direct target (a law or policy, a politician or figure, and/or an event). There must also be a focus on intersectionality and interidentity solidarity. In the height of the HIV epidemic, when lesbians were at the forefront of activist movements and community-focused care for their HIV positive peers, there had to be care and respect for the Black and brown people disproportionately being infected with HIV and harmed by police and state forces.

Notably, this intersectional work was not being done by the Lesbian Avengers. CITYAXE, a diverse group of lesbians, ended their membership with the Lesbian Avengers after coming “to the conclusion that a multiracial, multicultural lesbian activist project is not viable in the context of an actively hostile white, racist group” (Lesser 2020), while referring to the Lesbian Avengers. While there are lessons to learn from the militancy of the Lesbian Avengers, there is also a lesson to be learned about the importance of truly intersectional and anti-racist organizing work. CITYAXE used this as an opportunity to embrace the experiences of lesbians of color, while still maintaining the militancy and direct-action work that the Lesbian Avengers did. The fracture of these groups allowed CITYAXE to create a much needed space for lesbians

of color and has allowed activists since the fracture to investigate their own role in perpetuating violence.

Ultimately, activist work requires a network of people willing to collaborate in meaningful ways. In this collaboration, the network must also be willing to confront their biases and their role within the systems of harm they are opposing. We all exist in structures of violence in proximity and participation, so we must also be willing to do the work to untangle our involvement in systems and acts of harm.

CONCLUSION

> *What if abolition isn't a shattering thing, not a crashing thing, not a wrecking ball event? What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes, the broken places in our skin, the waiting places in our palms, the tremble holding in my mouth when I turn to you? What if abolition is something that grows? What if abolishing the prison industrial complex is the fruit of our diligent gardening, building and deepening of a movement to respond to the violence of the state and the violence in our communities with sustainable, transformative love?*
>
> —Pauline Gumbs, *Abolition Now: Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex*

Most of my investigation was understanding the ways that harmful structures interact with each other and rely on certain members and roles in a society to reproduce the structure. In this reproduction, the subjugated positions persist and maintain their position. I explored the ways economics as a discipline and economists as the actors of the system (re)enforce bourgeois ideology and hierarchy as ways to maintain capitalism and the subjugation of already marginalized groups. Through this perspective, I analyzed the structures that allow for this subjugation and the reproduction of capitalist ideals. I narrowed this scope to look at care work through a Marxist lens to better understand the ways care work is devalued through a gendered lens. Finally, I grounded all of this analysis in theories of liberation including disability justice, harm reduction, mutual aid, and queer and trans activism.

As I was wrapping up the process of this project in the last weeks of April 2024, college students across the United States and the world have set up encampments on their campuses in solidarity with Gaza and Palestine. This is what the work looks like. It is led by poor people, Black and brown people, and students, as are most revolutionary movements. These acts of

solidarity serve as intense reminders that we can and should exist outside the confines and scope of capitalist and imperialist systems. Students at universities across the United States have organized for Palestine, liberation, decolonization, and anti-racism. Many of these liberation zones have been non-hierarchically organized with emphasis around harm reduction by wearing face masks and protecting Black and brown folks from arrest. Each encampment has taken their own approach that works best for their campus to meet the needs of students and their liberation goals, while simultaneously navigating police violence, intense surveillance, and attacks from their university.

For me, this project has allowed me to grapple with the ways each of us are persecuted by the very systems we participate in. This offered me the space to grapple with the intersections of my class, gender, (dis)abled, and queer identities in a more formal and thorough space. In future projects I hope to further explore the ideas of racial capitalism, the nuances of the disabled experience, especially the intersections of desirability and class, and further explore anarchist ideas and theories.

Broadly, in our simultaneous positions of subjugation and role in perpetuating hierarchy and systems of violence, we have a unique opportunity to use the systems' reliance on our subjugation for their benefit against them. Capitalists rely on diligent workers that are underpaid to make their profit margins as high as possible. Join a union and talk about your wages/salary/benefits! Talk to your neighbors, maybe even bring them soup. Give to a local mutual aid fund and support local drag artists. Shit on company time. Go to a protest. Center your community in everything you do. Ask for help when you need it, even if it's asking a friend to help you move into your new apartment or to drive you to the dentist. My hope is that you, the

reader, have a desire to engage in these politics in transformative ways for both you and your community. This is just the beginning of many more long conversations. There is work to be done, love to be shared, resources to be (re)distributed, and community to be built!

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