



Recognition and the Harms of “Cheer Up”

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Abstract: *A philosophical frame for violence against women and girls creates unique opportunities to deepen our understanding of the embodied consequences of men’s violence. Using the seemingly innocuous example of being told to “cheer up” or “smile”, we draw on Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Fanon’s work on recognition to suggest that a phenomenological approach to sexual violence may help to voice previously inarticulable harms. The dual frame of Beauvoir and Fanon also highlights the need for philosophical work on sexual violence to take account of the insights of intersectionality.*

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Introduction

Until recently, the public conversation on violence against women has tended to focus on sexual assault and domestic abuse. Though the popularity of the “Me Too” movement has shifted some of this focus,¹ the conversation remains largely centered on sexual harassment in the workplace to the detriment of examining the forms of harassment that many women and girls experience in public from male strangers. Often at their height during women’s adolescence, the ordinary interruptions women experience from men in public space, such as wolf-whistling, cat-calling, staring, and comments, are frequently dismissed as irrelevant or harmless, expressions of free speech or a minor annoyance. This trivialization has led to a gap in the literature, with these forms of “everyday sexism” rarely acknowledged as a legitimate area of study.

Despite widespread use of Liz Kelly’s concept of the continuum of sexual violence, the everyday practices that were so vital to Kelly’s theorization have largely fallen off the academic radar.² Research questions or policy solutions that center forms of sexual violence

¹ In early October 2017, an investigation by the New York Times revealed decades of sexual assault allegations against the well-known Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein. By mid-October, over fifty women had accused him of a range of forms of sexual violence, including flashing, sexual assault, and rape. The revelations sparked the use of the hashtag #metoo, encouraging women to share their experiences of sexual harassment. Though the hashtag went viral in the wake of the allegations against Weinstein, the Me Too movement originated in the work of civil rights activist Tarana Burke over a decade earlier. For more on the Me Too movement and its relation to public sexual harassment see F. Vera-Gray, *The Right Amount of Panic: How women trade freedom for safety* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018).

² See original conception in Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), also

sitting outside of legal or medical frames are often side-lined, and the routine forms of harassment and intrusion that women experience from men in their everyday lives is under-evidenced and under-theorized — particularly in relation to harm.

In response to this, here we begin a philosophical exploration of the harms of one of the most overlooked forms of sexual harassment: women and girls being told to “cheer up” or “smile” by unknown men in public. As an everyday practice, our exploration centers on philosophers of the everyday—namely phenomenologists—looking specifically at the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon on recognition. Through this we aim to identify the possibilities in an intersectional feminist phenomenology to help articulate the harms of sexual violence outside of the medical-judicial vocabularies that currently dominate discussion.

I. Harms and the Continuum of Sexual Violence

The lack of both empirical and theoretical attention paid to the phenomenon of “cheer up” sits within a wider silence around the more commonplace intrusions that women and girls experience across their lives.³ However this was not always the case. The routine forms of violence that women experience in public space formed a frequent element of early radical feminist analyses of violence against women. Particularly in the sociological literature, the role of public sexual harassment in reproducing and naturalizing gender was made explicit, and understood as a connective thread between practices labelled as violent and the everyday practices of the gender order.⁴ This perspective was crystallized in the concept of the “continuum of sexual violence”, coined by the British sociologist Liz Kelly in the late 1980’s.⁵ Unlike the clear differentiations made between rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment in both law and research, Kelly argued that examining women’s experience of men’s violence in detail unearthed the interdependency of individual practices, problematizing their separation into discrete categories.

Kelly’s theorization marked a shift in thinking, from a focus on individual manifestations of men’s violence against women as discrete categories, to recognition of the commonality and connections between different forms. To do this she drew on the dual meanings of the term “continuum” to replicate the complexity of the relationships women have to experiences of sexual violence — those they have experienced themselves and those that have been experienced by other women. Her conceptualization did not seek to order or situate different iterations of sexual violence hierarchically. Such hierarchal positioning — where rape for example is seen as “the worst thing that can happen to a woman” and calls from unknown men to “smile” are framed as a minor annoyance — risks losing how the quieter forms of intrusion rely on the possibilities and realities of the louder, criminal forms to have the particular impact they do.⁶

updated in Liz Kelly, ‘Preface’, in *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, ed. Jennifer Brown & Sandra Walklate, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), xvii-1.

³ Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).

⁴ Jalna Hanmer and Sheila Saunders, *Well-founded fear: A community study of violence to women* (London: Hutchinson, 1984); Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*; Elizabeth A. Stanko, *Intimate intrusions: Woman's Experience of Male Violence* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1985); Elizabeth A. Stanko, *Everyday violence: How women and men experience sexual and physical danger* (London: Pandora, 1990); E. A. Stanko, “The case of fearful women: Gender, personal safety and fear of crime,” *Women & Criminal Justice*, 4(1993): 117-135; Sue Wise and Liz Stanley, *Georgie Porgie: Sexual harassment in everyday life* (London: Pandora Press, 1987).

⁵ Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*.

⁶ Fiona Vera-Gray, *The Right Amount of Panic*.

With the key exception of violence that results in death she held that: “the degree of impact cannot be simplistically inferred from the form a woman experiences or its place within the continuum.”⁷ Instead, the continuum of sexual violence is about the lived experience of sexual violence, and the ways in which it connects contextually to particular meanings for individual women. It speaks to the ways in which the different practices characterizing violence against women are rarely experienced as episodic. Rather, their meanings are made through relation — to the past and the future, reality and possibility; a process in the lives of women and girls rather than a one-off event. Such a conceptualization already has phenomenological connection, reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s development of Husserl’s concept of “horizons” whereby all experience is understood as horizontal,⁸ as well as Beauvoir’s work on the importance of the whole context of a situation in establishing the meanings of singularities.⁹

A. The Dominance of “Trauma Talk”

The limited literature on sexual harassment in the last two decades, as well as the literature on violence against women more broadly, has moved away from this earlier focus on violence and harassment as a process not event. While Kelly’s work on the continuum of sexual violence is still regularly cited, it is often used as something discrete categories of violence are located on rather than providing a way of understanding how they are experienced as overlapping and cumulative. Discussions of harm are dominated by a trauma model — more causal than Kelly’s conceptualization of violence, and its impacts, as a lived process. This dominance is implicated in the silence around the harms of the more everyday practices. In order to have their experience acknowledged, women and girls must tell an understandable story of sexual violence. The language of trauma has become necessary not only to render one’s experience of sexual violence speakable, but to render its harms legitimate, something Jeanne Marecek terms “trauma talk.”¹⁰

The authority of the trauma model in relation to sexual violence remains despite enduring and extensive feminist critique, particularly in relation to rape.¹¹ Key to feminist

⁷ Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*.

⁸ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. (C Smith, Trans.). (Oxon: Routledge, 2003 [1945]; and Edmund Husserl. *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to metaphysics* (D. Cairns, Trans.). (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977 [1931]).

⁹ For more on the phenomenological resonance of the concept of the continuum of sexual violence see F. Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion, women’s embodiment: a critical analysis of street harassment* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁰ Jeanne Marecek, “Trauma talk in feminist clinical practice,” in *New versions of victims: Feminists struggle with the concept*, ed. Sharon Lamb (New York: NYU Books, 1999), 158-182. See also Laura S. Brown, “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” *American Imago*, 48 (1991): 119-133; Mary P. Koss and Mary R. Harvey, *The rape victim: Clinical and community interventions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1991); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

¹¹ Nicola Gavey and Johanna Schmidt, “Trauma of rape” discourse: A double-edged template for everyday understandings of the impact of rape?,” *Violence Against Women* 17 (2011): 433-456; Nicola Gavey, “Rape, trauma, and meaning,” in *Global empowerment of women: Responses to globalization and politicized religions*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott (New York: Routledge, 2008), 233-246; Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton, and Linda Regan, “Researching Women’s Lives or Studying Women’s Oppression? Reflections on What Constitutes Feminist Research,” in *Researching Women’s Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, ed. Mary Maynard & June Purvis (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 27-54; Michelle N. LaFrance and Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr, “The DSM and its lure of legitimacy,” *Feminism & Psychology* 23 (2013): 119-140; Jane M. Ussher, *The madness of women: Myth and experience* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

concerns are the ways in which the medicalization of forms of violence against women render both cause and harm as within individuals, rather than also locating the violence as positioned by and within systemic and intersecting structural inequalities. This acts to obscure the role of the trauma model itself in perpetuating such inequalities, for example the ways in which measures for health can act to pathologize the experiences of women, particularly women from black and minoritized ethnic backgrounds.¹² Such a critique is not made to deny the benefits in a medical approach; indeed trauma talk can be deployed to help legitimate the harms of violence against women.¹³ Instead, the concern lies in the ways in which through a trauma lens harm done *to* an individual becomes an illness *of* the individual, "an individual affliction with recovery as a goal, rather than a process."¹⁴ This shift helps divert our attention away from the role of society in both rape prevention and responding to its aftermath. Treatment or stabilization of "symptoms" is prioritized over advocating for social change,¹⁵ with the underlying message that the person should change to fit with society rather than that society might change to accommodate the person. The critique also does not exclude that some individuals do experience harm in the ways such a model describes. Indeed, previous work by one of us has shown that the harms of public sexual harassment can be described by those who experience it in terms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression,¹⁶ and there is a significant body of research exploring the impacts of all forms of violence against women in terms outlined by a trauma model. Instead, it acts to encourage us to ask questions of the extent to which the dominance of certain ways of understanding violence against women and girls, have shaped how women make sense of and narrate the harms of sexual harassment, rendering inarticulate harms that may be more diffuse or ambiguous — harms such as those of "cheer up."¹⁷

B. "Cheer Up Love"

The limits of the trauma model are amplified in relation to the mundane practice of "cheer up" — a practice few would describe as traumatic. A trauma model is not only unable to accommodate the harms of "cheer up", it can function to actively position the impacts of such intrusions as outside of the boundaries of real or genuine injury. As such, what has been described as "the encompassing hegemony of medical-judicial vocabularies"¹⁸ for

¹² Marya R. Sosulski, Nicole T. Buchanan, and Chandra M. Donnell, "Life history and narrative analysis: Feminist methodologies contextualizing Black women's experiences with severe mental illness," *Journal of Society & Social Welfare* 37 (2010): 29-57; Melba Wilson, "Black women and mental health: working towards inclusive mental health services," *Feminist Review* 68 (2001): 34-51.

¹³ Jane Ussher, *The madness of women*.

¹⁴ Maryra R. Sosulski, Nicole T. Buchanan, & Chandra M. Donnell, "Life history and narrative analysis": 31.

¹⁵ Sheela Raja, "Culturally sensitive therapy for women of color," *Women & Therapy* 21 (1998): 67-84.

¹⁶ Bianca Fileborn, "Doing gender, doing safety? Young adults' production of safety on a night out," *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, (2016): 1107-1120.

¹⁷ Arthur W. Frank, *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr and Michelle N. LaFrance, "Telling stories without the words: 'Tightrope talk' in women's accounts of coming to live well after rape or depression," *Feminism & Psychology* 21 (2011): 49-73.

¹⁸ Stefania Pandolfo, "Clad in mourning: violence, Subjugation and the Struggle of the Soul," in *Review of Women's Studies: An annual review of women's and gender studies*, ed. Penny Johnson & Sawzan Wadl (Palestine: The Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University, 2010), 25-39.

understanding sexual violence may be implicated in the lack of attention paid to its more everyday forms.

Commonly excluded from academic work and difficult to fit into the legal and medical frames that overshadow policy responses to violence against women, estimates on the prevalence of "cheer up" do not exist. It appears, in fact, that this may be the first academic article to focus wholly on the phenomenon. Previous research from one of us, drawn from a sample of fifty women in the United Kingdom, found almost two thirds (62%) of participants had experience of being told by male strangers to cheer up or smile in public.¹⁹ Of those, close to half suggested they experienced this regularly, with several citing it as among "the worst" of all the forms of harassment they received in public.

Though the harm of public sexual harassment has been articulated across studies as the loss of liberty,²⁰ the loss of freedom of movement,²¹ negative body image and/or self-esteem,²² and objectification,²³ such framings struggle to capture the harms of being instructed to "cheer up" or "smile". Where the practice is addressed, and its impact articulated, most commonly the work of American sociologist Arlie Hochschild is used.²⁴ Working in the late seventies, Hochschild developed the concepts of "emotion work" and "emotional labour" during a study of female flight attendants; where emotion work is the work involved in dealing with or managing other people's emotions, and emotional labour refers to this kind of management done during work for a wage.

Hochschild found that emotional labour was not only gendered—disproportionately embedded in the work of women—but that it was also invisible and, importantly, *required*; a silent embedded necessity stitched into the fabric of the role itself.²⁵ Her ideas have been used to try to conceptualise the harm of "cheer up"; a practice that reveals this hidden requirement of women. Cheris Kramarae for example uses Hochschild in her discussion of what she terms "commands for emotion control" on women in the workplace.²⁶ More recently, Sara Ahmed suggests that calls to cheer up are an example of how the expectation of happiness is a form of emotion work attached to the performance of femininity; an expectation that is informed and changed through the positioning of race and class.²⁷ Though limited by the absence of in-depth discussion of the practice in the literature, what

¹⁹ Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men's Intrusion*.

²⁰ Cynthia G. Bowman, "Street harassment and the informal ghettoization of women," *Harvard Law Review* (1993): 517-580.

²¹ Alina Holgate, "Sexual harassment as a determinant of women's fear of rape," *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, 10 (1989): 21-28; Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, *The female fear: The social cost of rape* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Esther Madriz, *Nothing bad happens to good girls: Fear of crime in women's lives* (London: University of California Press, 1997).

²² Janet K. Swim and Lauri L. Hyers, "Excuse me—What did you just say?: Women's public and private responses to sexist remarks," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35 (1999): 68-88; Janet K. Swim, Lauri L. Hyers, Laurie L. Cohen and Melissa J. Ferguson, "Everyday sexism: Evidence for its incidence, nature, and psychological impact from three daily diary studies," *Journal of Social Issues* 57 (2001): 31-53.

²³ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression* (London: Routledge, 1990); Kimberly Fairchild, "Context effects on women's perceptions of stranger harassment," *Sexuality & Culture* 14 (2010): 191-216; Kimberly Fairchild and Laurie A. Rudman, "Everyday stranger harassment and women's objectification," *Social Justice Research*, 21 (2008): 338-357.

²⁴ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁵ Fiona Vera-Gray, *The Right Amount of Panic*.

²⁶ Chris Kramarae, "Harassment and everyday life," in *Women making meaning: New feminist directions in communication*, ed. Lana Rakow (Oxon: Routledge, 1992), 100-120.

²⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2017).

this shared use of Hochschild's work reveals is the need for frames to understand forms of harms and impact that sit outside of the trauma frame. It is here we find possibilities in feminist phenomenology.

II. Towards a Feminist Phenomenology of Violence Against Women

Before sketching the beginnings of a feminist phenomenological account of violence against women, there is a need to acknowledge both what is feminist in phenomenology and what is phenomenological in feminism. Sara Heinämaa neatly captures this in explaining how the twofold relationship between feminist and phenomenological inquiries works to strengthen both perspectives.

On the one hand, phenomenology offers methodological and conceptual tools for the development of a philosophical alternative to contemporary feminist naturalism and constructionism. On the other hand, contemporary feminism challenges the idea of a sexually neutral subject, thus posing the question of whether the transcendental self described by the phenomenologists is of one type or of two (or several).²⁸

Here we see the uniqueness of the feminist phenomenological perspective, distinct from Husserlian phenomenology through the acknowledgment, with Heidegger, of the impossibility of assuming a position on the world of detached observer.²⁹ Instead of a generalizable independence from the material facts (the world "as it is"), such a position claims that phenomenological description can only seek to describe the commonalities that spring from singular situated existence. Situation is used here as developed by Beauvoir to mean our total context, including our embodiment and the meanings and possibilities opened through this given our particular socio-historical location.

As such, our situation is both the point from which we make choices, thus the basis of our freedom, at the same time as being the source of its limitations.³⁰ This perspective—which denies the possibility of experience detached from the world³¹—supports an intersectional approach, responding to the overlapping and interdependent nature of social inequalities and their simultaneous role in structuring lived experience.³² Phenomenology

²⁸ Sara Heinämaa, "Feminism" in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 503.

²⁹ Where Husserl had seen the task of phenomenology to be the description of the lived world from the viewpoint of a detached observer (using the phenomenological *epoché*, where experience is bracketed, and things are examined 'as they are'), Heidegger claimed the observer cannot, in actuality, separate their self from the world, and that Husserl's prioritising of 'lived experience' still supported a false dichotomy between the world as we live it and the world as it is. Consequently, for what came to be known as existential-phenomenology, the modalities of conscious experience are also the ways one is in the world, a shift from the 'lived-world' to the concrete experience of being-in-the-world, or 'being there'. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, [1927] 1996).

³⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage, [1949] 2011).

³¹ Reviewing Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Simone de Beauvoir signalled the importance of relationship for living experience, stating that "(i)t is impossible to define an object apart from the subject by whom and for whom it is the object" translated in Sara Heinämaa, "The body as instrument and as expression" in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 75.

³² Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, gender, and sexual harassment," *Southern Californian Law Review* 65 (1991): 1467-76.

thus provides us with a framework for theorizing “how social differences are effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others,”³³ without reducing bodies to these effects themselves. Sara Ahmed’s discussion of queer phenomenology highlights this, where she heralds the possibilities of a phenomenological frame for theorizing sexual orientation, as embedded in its ability to “attend to the background” and as such to the conditions of emergence, as well as to the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling.³⁴ This potential particularly speaks to theorizations of gender or other social hierarchies that see these as both emergent features of a situation, constituted through interaction with others, at the same time as material realities that structure those interactions.³⁵ Such an approach provides the starting point for an intersectional feminist phenomenology of men’s violence against women.

A. Phenomenology and Sexual Violence

Several key philosophers have developed the possibilities of a phenomenological approach to violence against women over the past twenty years. Phenomenological work has begun, for example, on domestic violence,³⁶ pornography,³⁷ and street harassment — this is the work we extend here.³⁸ Overwhelmingly however, the focus has been on rape; this despite the usefulness of a philosophical approach for making sense of intrusions currently situated on the margins of what is understood as constituting sexual violence. Ann Cahill, for example, has shown how the embodied impacts of rape are understood as both individual and social. She argues that the extent of rape as a presence in women’s lives — what one of us has called an “imminent potentiality”³⁹ — means that “individual experiences of rape are imposed on an embodied subject who has already been influenced by that social phenomenon.”⁴⁰ This demonstrates the importance of locating individual experiences of men’s violence within a broader structure of gender inequality, drawing our philosophical attention to the need for theoretical frames that speak to the role of different social locations in situating meanings, impacts, and responses.

Louise du Toit’s phenomenological frame for understanding rape echoes this, suggesting that for us to appreciate its damage “rape has to stand out as an anomaly against a background which in fact normalizes rape.”⁴¹ Thus while the social structures and lived inequalities that locate women in relation to both men and each other remain in the background, we are unable to grasp the full impact of rape. This is the basis of Du Toit’s argument that the harms of rape cannot be understood in a cultural context that erases or problematizes women’s sexual subjectivity, something she refers to as the “impossibility of rape”. She identifies these harms as constituting a loss of the self, loss of relations with

³³ Sara Ahmed, “Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology”, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12 (2006): 544

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 549.

³⁵ Patricia H. Collins, Lionel A. Maldonado, DanaY. Takagi, Barrie Thorne, Lynn Weber, and Howard Winant. “Review: Doing Difference by Candace West, Sarah Fenstermaker,” *Gender & Society* 9 (1995): 491-506.

³⁶ Norman K. Denzin, “Toward a phenomenology of domestic, family violence,” *American journal of sociology* 90 (1984): 483-513.

³⁷ Clyde E. Willis, “The Phenomenology of Pornography,” *Law and Philosophy* 16, (2005): 177-199; Joan Mason-Grant, *Pornography embodied: From speech to sexual practice* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

³⁸ Sandra Barkty, *Femininity and domination*; Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion*.

³⁹ Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion*.

⁴⁰ Ann Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008): 810.

⁴¹ Louise Du Toit, *A philosophical investigation of rape: The making and unmaking of the feminine self* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 5.

others, and ultimately a loss of the world. Du Toit claims such impacts cannot be made visible within a “symbolic order [that] denies the full subject status of women to start with” because rape is “the symbolic destruction of female subjecthood.”⁴² One cannot be unmade as a subject if we were never one to begin with. This denial of subjectivity makes it difficult to appreciate or recognize the harm of rape in the absence of aggravating circumstances in addition to the rape itself, such as physical harm or injury. These are the same circumstances that are reinforced and reiterated through medical-judicial framing of sexual violence. As such, we can understand the hegemony of such a frame as both stemming from and reproducing the invisibility or impossibility of the harm of “cheer up”, an intrusion which is positioned both symbolically and corporeally even further from the need for sexual violence to procure *additional* or aggravating harm.

Constance Mui mirrors Du Toit’s understanding of the harm of sexual violence in terms of loss, in her discussion of rape and the Sartrean project.⁴³ Mui argues that through a Sartrean lens, rape can be understood as the disruption of our fundamental project, that which “both constitutes the self and provides a basis for us to organize the world, to make sense of ourselves in relationship to the world and others.”⁴⁴ As such, it collapses the scaffolding that supports our basic orientation in the world, and through this, as Susan Brison describes, unravels “whatever meaning we’ve found and woven ourselves into.”⁴⁵ For Brison, it is not just that rape uncovers the embodied nature of the self—and how this embodiment is situated in a world that gives particular meanings to particular bodies—but that it also acts to reveal the fundamentally relational nature of our autonomy. The lived experience of rape “not only shatters fundamental assumptions about the world and one’s safety in it, but it also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity.”⁴⁶

In contrast then to an approach characterized by treating individual symptoms that respond to an event, a phenomenological approach to sexual violence is orientated around the ways it forms a fundamental disruption of one’s being-in-the-world. Such disruption reveals the relational and situated nature of the self, enabling a relocation of the problem, and the solution, from the individual to the social world. In this way we are directed to the importance of an intersectional feminist approach; one able to attend to the simultaneous structuring and structures of oppression and the ways in these interlock, producing experiences which cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts.⁴⁷

B. The Importance of Intersectionality

While public sexual harassment has primarily been located as a form of *gendered* harm, intersectional and Black feminist scholars have illuminated the ways in which this practice is shaped by, and shapes historical and contemporary trajectories and positions in relation to race and class.⁴⁸ Empirical work on public sexual harassment has also shown that the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³ Constance L. Mui, “A feminist-Sartrean approach to understanding rape trauma,” *Sartre Studies International* 11, (2005).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 154

⁴⁵ Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 58

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁷ Patricia H. Collins, “Intersectionality’s definitional dilemmas,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 1-20.

⁴⁸ Deidre Davis “The harm that has no name: Street harassment, embodiment, and African American women,” *UCLA Women’s Law Journal* 4 (1994): 133-78; H. G. Fogg-Davis, “Theorizing black lesbians

experience is not limited to women, with gender and sexuality diverse people targeted for similar forms of harassment with a similar function — though different social contexts result in some differences in meanings, impacts and responses.⁴⁹ As feminist theoretical perspectives have increasingly challenged a “race-only, class-only, or gender-only framework”⁵⁰ for understanding lived oppressions, some of the literature on sexual harassment has foregrounded the need for an intersectional approach, a need perhaps less articulated in research on rape and domestic violence.⁵¹ Despite this, though phenomenological accounts of sexual violence are emerging, none have sought to draw explicitly from intersectional feminist scholarship or decolonial scholarship.

Coined by the African-American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality draws on a wealth of theorizing from Black feminists to speak to the simultaneity of oppression. As a knowledge project, intersectionality is able to attend to power relations and social inequalities phenomenologically, that is as they are lived.⁵² Thus while the benefits and harms of sexual harassment have primarily been articulated in relation to gender and sexuality, intersectional and Black feminist scholars have illuminated the ways in which this practice is shaped by, and shapes, historical and contemporary positions in relation to race and class. Rather than suggesting an additive model where different positions in relation to structures can be simplistically added to or subtracted from one another to produce a particular experience of the world, an intersectional approach recognizes how experiences are located and produced in ways that cannot be reduced to singular categories of identity. It reveals that—contrary to models of additive analyses—the ways in which lived experience means “the different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.”⁵³ That instead, as described by Patricia Hill Collins, they interlock.⁵⁴ Such positioning highlights the importance of bringing together self, body, and world—entangled with and in each other conceptually in the same way in which they are lived—something Lois McNay terms “the incorporation of the social into the corporeal.”⁵⁵

In developing a feminist phenomenological approach to theorizing harm then, we are pointed in the direction of phenomenologists who center everyday experience with an analysis of how this is inflected by the ways that we are situated. It is here we find possibilities through invoking the practice of “feminist recitation” between the works of

within black feminism: A critique of same-race street harassment,” *Politics & Gender* 2 (2006): 57-76; Emanuela Guano, “Respectable ladies and uncouth men: The performative politics of class and gender in the public realm of an Italian City,” *Journal of American folklore* 120 (2007): 48-72.

⁴⁹ Debbie Epstein, “Keeping them in their place: hetero/sexist harassment, gender and the enforcement of heterosexuality,” in *Sexual Harassment: Contemporary feminist perspectives*, ed. Alison Thomas and Celia Kitzinger (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997); Bianca Fileborn, “Doing gender, doing safety?”

⁵⁰ Collins et al., “Review: Doing difference”: 492.

⁵¹ Nicole T. Buchanan, and Alayne J. Ormerod, “Racialized sexual harassment in the lives of African American women,” *Women & Therapy* 25 (2002): 107-124; Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Race, gender, and sexual harassment*; Deidre Davis, “The harm that has no name”; H.G. Fogg-Davis, “Theorizing black lesbians within black feminism”; Fileborn, “Doing gender, doing safety?”; Griff Tester, “An intersectional analysis of sexual harassment in housing,” *Gender & Society* 22 (2008): 349-366; Sandy Welsh, Jacquie Carr, Barbara MacQuarrie, and Audrey Huntley, “‘I’m Not Thinking of It as Sexual Harassment’: Understanding Harassment across Race and Citizenship,” *Gender & Society* 20 (2006): 87-107.

⁵² Collins et al., “Review: Doing difference”.

⁵³ Avtar Brah, and Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 76.

⁵⁴ Collins et al., “Review: Doing difference”.

⁵⁵ Lois McNay, “Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16 (1999): 99.

Beauvoir and Fanon,⁵⁶ to explore the harms of “cheer up” in relation to their developments of the Hegelian concept of recognition.

III. Beauvoir, Fanon, and Recognition

The phenomenological work of Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon called attention to the limitations of the abstract philosophical subject. Closer examination reveals there are actually many similarities in their work, leading to a recent claim that they “belong together.”⁵⁷ Both wrote of the situation in post-war France, openly admired Sartre, and were interested in how the oppressed come to accept and reproduce their positioning as other, developing Hegel’s theory of recognition.⁵⁸

Beauvoir’s interest in how it is that women come to accept their position as determined and differentiated in relation to man—her as the inessential Other, he as the absolute subject—led her to move beyond Hegel’s conceptualization of recognition as an individual relation, towards seeing it as also being a social process. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes the processes through which women are excluded from recognition as a subject, both through their positioning as the inessential Other that enables man to experience his own subjectivity, and through the structures of a society that limit women’s role to the private sphere, whilst ensuring the public sphere is where deliberately chosen projects can be realized. Departing from the struggle inherent in the master-slave dialectic, Beauvoir argued that there has never been any combat between woman and man, and the reciprocity found in Hegel has never been put forward. Rather, men have been asserted as the only essential term, “denying any relativity in regard to its correlative, defining [woman] as pure alterity.”⁵⁹

Here Beauvoir’s analysis can be strengthened through the conceptualizations of gender as interactional and intersectional that came after her. Beauvoir’s account of women’s situation has been critiqued as erasing its basis as an account of white gender difference.⁶⁰ Though some of this critique is unwarranted,⁶¹ evidence for its claims is apparent in the analogies Beauvoir makes between the position of the black slave and the superficially unracialized woman — not allowing for the overlap of black women slaves. It is also found in turning to Fanon’s work on the situation of the black man under colonialism. Fanon troubles one of Beauvoir’s most famous claims in *The Second Sex* that “what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other.”⁶² In Fanon, we find that the alterity Beauvoir finds between women and men, exists between men themselves with his argument (speaking here only of the experience of men)

⁵⁶ Amey V. Adkins, “Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in Black Skin, White Masks.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112 (2013): 719.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 719.

⁵⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, trans Arnold V. Miller, J. N. Findlay, and Johannes Hoffmeister (Oxford: Clarendon Press. [1807] 1979).

⁵⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

⁶⁰ Kathryn T. Gines, “Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35 (2014): 251-273; Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

⁶¹ See Margaret A. Simons, *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, race, and the origins of existentialism* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

⁶² Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 17.

presented in similar terms that "(o)ne day the white master recognized without a struggle the black slave."⁶³

In fact, Fanon's development of Hegel has startling similarities to Beauvoir, though he begins from a different place. Fanon's starting point in exploring recognition and the denial of reciprocity between the white and black man is his argument that any ontology, including Hegel's, is impossible in a colonized and acculturated society. This impossibility is based in how "(o)ntology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."⁶⁴ He argued that to apply Hegel's dialectic "to a black consciousness proves fallacious because the white man is not only "the Other" but also the master, whether real or imaginary."⁶⁵ Like Beauvoir's understanding of gender as a situated, relational becoming, Fanon reveals the relationality of racialization. However also like Beauvoir's lack of attention to the ways in which gender is always raced, Fanon's conceptualization of how the position of "the subject" is racialized as white, neglected to consider how this abstract philosophical subject is also gendered male.

Though Beauvoir and Fanon looked at gender and race in isolation, intersectional and Black feminist scholarship of the last few decades have revealed the ways in which gender is always raced, and race is always gendered.⁶⁶ Putting Beauvoir and Fanon in conversation can thus help to open up new possibilities in both of their works. Responding to the critique that models of sexual harassment have neglected to consider aspects of race and class which interact with gender,⁶⁷ this dual frame is able to speak to a "mix action",⁶⁸ that is to the mechanics of racialized sexual harassment. This is not to be confused with making parallels between the processes of gender and race or suggesting those who exist at the intersections of both processes of othering—in this case women of colour—somehow experience double-oppression. Instead, it is to shift the paradigm of investigation itself, to an understanding of how "(a)dditive models of oppression are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought."⁶⁹ We begin this task below, outlining the ways in which an intersectional phenomenological approach built from Beauvoir and Fanon on recognition can help make the harms of "cheer up" not just visible, but possible.

A. Recognition and Overdetermination

Hegel's master-slave dialectic makes explicit the vulnerability in the ontological fact of the relational constitution of the self. As Fanon describes it, "man is human only to the extent

⁶³ Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 191.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁶ Hazel V. Carby, "White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood," in *Black British cultural studies: a reader*, eds. Houston A Baker Jr, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 61-86; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, gender, and sexual harassment"; Cynthia Levine-Rasky, "Intersectionality theory applied to whiteness and middle-classness," *Social identities* 17, (2011): 239-253.

⁶⁷ Kathleen M. Rospenda, Judith A. Richman, and Stephanie J. Nawyn, "Doing power: The confluence of gender, race, and class in contrapower sexual harassment," *Gender & Society* 12, (1998): 40-60.

⁶⁸ Welsh et al., "I'm Not Thinking of It as Sexual Harassment".

⁶⁹ Patricia H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 225.

to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions.⁷⁰ Beauvoir shares this position, orienting much of her work around the belief that “each consciousness seeks to posit itself alone as essential”,⁷¹ and the according problem of intersubjectivity.

Intersubjective encounters have the potential for a loss of self, through the connected processes of being overdetermined by the other and being made other ourselves. In Fanon, for example, it is the experience of being targeted in public *as* Black that the black man comes to *be* Black. Part of the process of racialization is the ability of looks and comments to attack the corporeal schema, “giving way to an epidermal racial schema.”⁷² Likewise, in Beauvoir, the process of women learning they are “the inessential Other” is grounded in the lived experience of being othered by men. Similar to Fanon’s descriptions of how the racial schema develops through encountering the white other in public, so too Beauvoir draws on the experience of public sexual harassment to explain the development of the gendered body schema for girls. In her descriptions of girlhood she articulates how “(t)he little girl feels that her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing: on the street, eyes follow her, her body is subject to comments”.⁷³ The black man comes to be Black through the gaze of the white man, and one becomes a woman in part through the experience of men’s intrusions.

The existence of the other for whom one is an object in the world thus poses a problem. Such a problem could be easily overcome by simply denying the selfhood of the other if we weren’t dependent on the other to recognize one’s self *as* a self. To do this we need the other to remain a subject as only a subject has the power of recognition. The other thus presents a seemingly irresolvable struggle. Self-consciousness exists only by being acknowledged or recognized by another self-consciousness, yet each self-consciousness attempts to deny recognition of the other they are dependent on, seeking instead to assert themselves as the essential subject. The other must be made into an object—and our own object status must be denied—“in order to allow ourselves to achieve our subjective security.”⁷⁴ However at the same time we need the other to also be a self — for only a subject can give the recognition we need to be a self in the first place.

We are thus caught: needing the other to be a self in order for our own self-consciousness to be realized, yet at the same time we are in danger of losing our self through the self-consciousness of the other. The consequences of this, as developed by both Beauvoir and Fanon, are that if the conflict between consciousness and self-consciousness is a necessary part of the realization of the self, the lack of such a conflict is a denial of the conditions of selfhood. It is in this denial of reciprocity—the loss of self experienced through confrontation without a need for struggle—that we find the previously inarticulable harms of “cheer up.”

B. Intersectional Alterity and the Harms of “Cheer Up”

To be told by a stranger to “smile” or “cheer up” while in public, carries within it the suggestion that there could be nothing internally more significant than one’s being-for-

⁷⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 191.

⁷¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 17.

⁷² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 92.

⁷³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 332.

⁷⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 187.

others. Following Beauvoir and Fanon's line of theorizing, if it is "by the movement of recognition which goes from one to the other that existence is confirmed",⁷⁵ then "(i)f I shut off the circuit, if I make the two-way movement unachievable, I keep the other within himself. In an extreme degree, I deprive him even of this being-for-self."⁷⁶ It is to deny Fanon's two-way movement, containing both an acknowledgment of the self as a subject who can express emotions and respond to instruction, at the same time as a depletion of one's being as a for-itself situated in relation to the world with the ability to act and be acted on.

Cut off from our future and our past in this way, the experience is one that Beauvoir describes as being "reduced to pure facticity", no longer appearing "as anything more than a thing about things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence."⁷⁷ Our complex relationship to our world and others is reduced to the present moment. Our existence as a "being of distances"⁷⁸—infinitely more than what we are—is denied. We are starved of our temporality, the foundation of Fanon's request for recognition: "that I be taken into consideration on the basis of my desire. I am not only here-now, locked in thinghood. I desire somewhere else and something else."⁷⁹

Such harm in relation to "cheer up" is found in an example given by Deirdre Davis in her work street harassment. Recounting an experience of being instructed to smile on the day her grandmother died, Davis describes how this interruption forced her "to rechannel my energies away from issues on my mind to the intrusive interaction".⁸⁰ No longer a meaning-making for-itself situated in relation to her own temporal horizons, what Davis is describing here is how 'cheer up' becomes an experience of being overdetermined by the other. While such harm sits outside of dominant ways of understanding the harms of sexual violence, such as through a lens of trauma, it is revealed through a feminist phenomenological frame. Locked in the present, there is no recognition of Davis as a temporal being and in this we find there is no need to ensure her subjectivity in order to affirm that of the other. There is no desire for reciprocity; we are not only imposed but made to submit to the imposition. Sandra Lee Bartky reflects something similar in her observations in relation to catcalls that "I must be *made* to know that I am a "nice piece of ass": I must be made to see myself as they see me... like being made to apologize, it is humiliating."⁸¹ Rather than a feeling of degradation—the self reduced to the sexual—it is a feeling of not existing as a self at all. Without struggle, we are made other; deprived of our being-for-self.

Davis' work raises the ways in which discourse on street harassment has explicitly disregarded race and explores how this is implicated in making particular harms unspeakable. Discussing the relationship between slavery and street harassment for African American women, Davis develops the concept of "spirit murder" to reflect harms outside of the dominant frames. It is not, Davis claims, that African American "necessarily suffer *more* due to their 'double burden', but they experience oppression in a different way".⁸²

⁷⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1976 [1948]), 126.

⁷⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 192.

⁷⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 100.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 193.

⁸⁰ Deidre Davis "The harm that has no name":143.

⁸¹ Sandra Barkty, *Femininity and domination*, 27.

⁸² Deidre Davis, "The harm that has no name": 157

Drawing together Beauvoir and Fanon's insights on recognition enables us to speak to the ways in which the alterity experienced in calls to "cheer up" is not just a unilateral relation from men to women — lived by all women in the same way. Instead it is multi-faceted, with the particular ways in which women are constructed as other interlocking with their position across other symbolic orders such as their race and class. It is thus lived simultaneously to our experience of racialization before the other — an experience that may contradict or reify the harms that "cheer up" produces.

This can be seen in considering how women's responses to the instruction to smile are read through an intersectional lens: it is not just their position as "woman" that situates the meanings given to their actions. For example, while a middle class white woman may be experienced by others as brave or assertive for insulting a man telling her to smile on the street, a middle class black woman may be experienced as "uppity",⁸³ and similar responses from working class women may be experienced as aggressive or violent. The auto-ethnographic work of Fae Chubin shows how this functions in relation to silence.⁸⁴ Chubin draws from Fatima Mernissi in positioning silence in response to sexual harassment not as a sign of passivity, but instead as a strategic tool of resistance and transformation particularly for marginalized groups.⁸⁵ Like Ahmed's call for a "smile strike",⁸⁶ what can be read as a non-response, can in fact be an act of refusal, a contestation of the attempt to render one as other.

We are thus asked, in articulating the harms of "cheer up" as a denial of the self, to pay attention to the ways in which white women's racialization contradicts their alterity, with their whiteness placing them at the center of a symbolic order based on race. Women of colour do not experience this reprieve through their racialization, though middle and upper class women of colour may be provided access to the conditions for determining the self, depending on the context within which these conditions are realized (that is, in relation to the position of others). Such an intersectional understanding is under-developed or even disregarded in the philosophical literature on violence against women, with Du Toit for example claiming that the role of race in understanding experience of sexual violence is "not an essential one".⁸⁷ In contrast to this we argue that the dual frame provided by Beauvoir and Fanon ensures that the positions of alterity held by those marginalized through gender, race, and other social hierarchies are not themselves ranked in relation to each other, with gender for example being seen as more critical than race. This intersectional understanding of alterity has important implications for the ways in which women live through and make sense of certain formulations of sexual violence, as well as to how others understand and receive women's articulations of the harms of such experiences.

Conclusion

Drawing together Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon's work on alterity offers possibilities for conceptualizing the harm of "cheer up" as a recognition-based harm — a possibility that is largely absent from dominant medical-judicial framings of the harms of

⁸³ Ibid., 165.

⁸⁴ Fae Chubin, "You may smother my voice, but you will hear my silence: An autoethnography on street sexual harassment, the discourse of shame and women's resistance in Iran," *Sexualities* 17, (2014): 176-193.

⁸⁵ Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of trespass: Tales of a barem girlhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1994)

⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Feminist life*, 254.

⁸⁷ Louise Du Toit, *Philosophical Investigation*, 3.

sexual violence.⁸⁸ Though we have focused our discussion on one of the most commonly overlooked forms of public sexual harassment, we see this as a beginning rather than endpoint for a phenomenology of violence against women and girls. Such an approach could help forge new questions and develop new answers for philosophical work on violence. It enables us to balance some of the tension found in attempts to theorize women's agency as lived in the current gender order by reaching beyond the continuum of cause and effect or the binary of subject/object. We are given a way to speak about connections and commonality, without collapsing the ways in which women experience men's violence differently based on embodiments and social and personal histories. It provides us with a theory of embodied selfhood that also accounts for the different meanings given to the individual and generated by the individual through their socio-historical location, opening up a theoretical space to talk about the realities of violence against women and girls as a constraining context for women without denying our "space for action."⁸⁹ Crucially it provides the beginnings of a philosophical account of violence against women that centers an intersectional approach to situating women's experiences of harm.

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⁸⁸ Interesting work from Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland on survivors' experiences of justice has begun to use the concept of recognition to both base harms and point to justice interests, see Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland, "Kaleidoscopic Justice: Sexual Violence and Victim-Survivors' Perceptions of Justice," *Social & Legal Studies* (2018).

⁸⁹ The concept of "space for action" has been developed by researchers at the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University. For more see Shelia Jeffner. "Different space for action: The everyday meaning of young people's perception of rape," Presentation at ESS Faculty Seminar, University of North London, May 2000; Liz Kelly, "The wrong debate: Reflections on why force is not the key issue with respect to trafficking in women for sexual exploitation," *Feminist Review* 73 (2003): 139-144; Fiona Vera-Gray, "Outlook: Girlhood, agency, and embodied space for action" in *Nordic Girlhoods: Past, Present, Outlooks*, eds. Formark, B., Mulari, H. & Voipio, M. Cham (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 127-135.

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