CHAPTER 27

NORMS AND NORMALIZATION

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THE concepts of the "norm," and processes of "normalization" are significant for feminist theory and activism. Feminist theories and activisms seek to dismantle conditions of heteropatriarchy, and to do so they provide an analysis of those conditions and the logics that sustain them. Feminisms approach cultural "common sense" about gender and sexuality critically, exposing how the putative facts about gender, bodies, family structures, and work roles are historically contingent and culturally constructed, as well as both harmful and open to transformation. Much of what feminists challenge are arrangements that have been deemed "natural," such as gender role assignments supposedly rooted in immutable bodily difference. Feminist methodologies and interventions vary with regard to which norms they interrogate. For example, liberal feminisms have taken aim at workplace inequality, examining normalized practices of labor division within families and wage labor systems to propose methods of increasing women's access to participation in wage labor systems. Meanwhile, anticapitalist feminists have argued that such interventions are not enough, and feminists must interrogate and dismantle patriarchal norms that structure the entire framework of racialized-gendered wage labor system rather than just seeking participation in them. Regardless of these differences among feminist interventions, the concept of the norm is crucial to a broad range of feminist inquiries and challenges, including inclusion and equality-seeking models and radical transformative approaches.

Where heteropatriarchal conditions (such as women doing the bulk of unpaid domestic labor) are cast as "natural" preferences or capacities, feminists argue that coercive racialized gender norms about motherhood, rather than anyone's fundamental nature, disproportionately force women into that work. Where rigid standards of body and appearance endanger health, feminists identify "beauty norms" as a serious concern, shifting attention to studying the enforcement of such norms and dismantling them rather than trying to get women to meet them or blaming women for being concerned with them. Understanding the ways that ideas and rules about gender structure

the world as norms allows feminists to study how these norms are invented, enforced, and lived; how processes of normalization work. It facilitates inquiries into how norms are internalized, so that we enforce them on ourselves and each other, despite the fact that such enforcement limits our realm of possibility or causes us suffering. Gender, itself, comes to be understood as a set of norms, rather than as a natural division among people.

Simone de Beauvoir's foundational interventions in *The Second Sex* expose how a range of myths about women's biology and psychology, along with mythological female-ideal roles, such as the virgin and the mother, establish and maintain the norm of maleness and consign women to the role of "other." Beauvoir (2011, 283) famously claims, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." This statement opposes the idea of an essential womanhood or femininity, arguing that gender is constructed and enforced by social indoctrination. Judith Butler (1990, 33) describes gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." Butler argues that "the body is not a mute facticity" (129). For Butler, gender is not itself a truth, but is instead a matrix of norms and repeated practices: "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (136). "Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment" (Butler 1993, 232). Butler shows that gender is a set of congealed, repeated practices that produce a field of regulation in which all people are compelled to perform in order to survive (Butler 1997, 20). She describes the task of feminist theory as such: "A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender" (Butler 1990).

The chapter that follows makes three related moves. First, we review Michel Foucault's conception of disciplinary norms and the normalization of populations to illuminate the centrality of interrogating norms and normalization to feminist inquiry and activism. We then demonstrate this feminist critique through the example of feminist criticism of same-sex marriage advocacy. Finally, we look at how concern with norms and normalization guides feminist criticism and self-reflection within social movement spaces and organizations to produce transformative understandings of collectivity.

Disciplinary Power and the Norm

The work of Michel Foucault is particularly useful for tracing how the concepts of "norm," "normativity," and "normalization" relate to feminist theories and activisms.

Foucault's work intervenes in accepted accounts of how power works. Foucault argued that we often think of power as repressive, as a top-down dynamic in which those who hold power tell the powerless what they are forbidden from doing. However, this view of power hides how power actually operates. Feminist theorists and activists have extensively used Foucault's alternative account to understand both how systems of gender and sexuality operate and what resistance struggles might look like.

Foucault argued that modern power is productive rather than repressive. The regulation of sexuality offered a key example. Foucault observed that people often think that the Victorian period was a time when repression of sexuality increased, what Foucault termed the "repressive hypothesis" (1990). This "common sense" story tells us that during this period new rules and regulations were created to control, for example, women's sexuality and masturbation in children, asserting a new code of silence and secrecy around sexuality. If one accepts the repressive hypothesis, the liberatory response is to "free" sexuality and ourselves by speaking openly about sexuality, including and especially our practices and desires that are considered deviant. Foucault argued that this story misses the real operation of power in the context of the new forms of regulation of sexuality that emerged during the Victorian period. Foucault described how the period that is often associated with increased sexual repression actually witnessed an explosion of discourse about sexuality. Rather than information about sexuality being silenced, such information proliferated as new scientific practices that named, described, and classified sexual acts as well as personas or identities associated with them. He famously described the invention of the homosexual, arguing that sodomy, which had been a criminalized practice among many others, was newly understood to signify a type of person who had a certain type of childhood and bore specific physical and mental characteristics (Foucault 1990). New treatments and practices were invented to manage and prevent sexually deviant behaviors and change, control and intervene on the newly invented deviant types. Sexuality became central to how identity was understood, and enormous amounts of writing and talking about sexuality were required in order to make this happen. Rather than sex being silenced by a repressive kind of power that forbids, Foucault (1990) showed that sexuality was newly regulated through an incitement to speak about sex and sexual deviation; to know oneself and others as defined by sexuality; and to be hypervigilant about sex, sexuality, and the characteristics newly associated with deviant sexuality. Through this example, Foucault demonstrated this kind of productive power, arguing that power operates by generating knowledges about the world that shape the world. Foucault's description of power as productive rather than repressive draws our attention to the mechanisms that produce and enforce norms. Bodies, subjectivities, and their relations in space come to be in relation to norms of embodiment, behavior, and thought. Norms generate a magnetic pull in the productions of biopower.

Gender and sexuality theorists have extensively used these insights to analyze disciplinary power, power that establishes norms of good behavior and ideas about proper and improper categories of subjects. Disciplinary practices congeal in certain institutional locations such as the school, the factory and the clinic, where proper behavior

is codified at the level of detail, and subjects are formed to police ourselves and each other according to these norms (Foucault 1990). Feminist activists and scholars have accounted for the development of this kind of normalizing power, and how this power works both through institutions (including families, schools, and hospitals) and through the internalization of these norms within the subjects of those institutions. The invention of various categories of proper and improper subjects, such as categories of sexual deviants, is a key feature of disciplinary power. Creating these types or categories of people requires establishing and maintaining guidelines and norms that guide the process of diagnosing or labeling.

Feminists have examined invented types like "the hysterical woman," "the welfare queen," "the good mother," "the slut," "the bitch," and many other normalizing figures. The existence of these categories relies on the constant reproduction and enforcement of racialized gender norms that govern sexual behavior, speaking styles, diet, emotional range, punctuality, manners, dress, and much more. Discourses in the social and medical sciences, popular media, criminal and immigration systems, education, and social services industries produce and uphold these norms and the stories that elicit belief in these types of people. The norms produced in these discourses are enforced through institutions that diagnose, evaluate, take formal or informal disciplinary action, or require trainings, as well as through social or internal approval or shaming. Through these processes, we learn to be appropriately afraid of being labeled in particular ways, and we learn what ideals to strive to become. We learn the norms that govern being a proper man or woman, girl or boy, soldier, worker, parent, student, member of our racial group, consumer, patriot, or member of our racial, ethnic, religious, and/or subcultural group. These norms and codes of behavior reach into the minute details of our bodies, thoughts, and behaviors. Feminists have, for example, extensively critiqued how the beauty industry produces voluminous products and media to promote those products to alter every minute aspect of women's bodies, from cuticles to labia shape to body hair and odors. These industries thrive when women internalize these norms, learn to be hypervigilant about their conformity, and relentlessly chase beauty ideals that are for the most part unacheivable. Disciplinary norms keep us in our places by helping us know how to be ourselves properly and establishing internal and external monitoring systems.

Foucault's examination of disciplinary power can be read to suggest that as disciplinary norms become internalized, more directly coercive or violent means of social control are replaced by self-regulation, so that "soft" control replaces direct violence. Anticolonial feminist theorists, including Ann Laura Stoler, Rey Chow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have critiqued this historicization, arguing that direct violence and threats of violence accompany disciplinary norms (Stoler 1995, 2002; Chow 2002; Spivak 1988). Violent enforcement of these norms operates alongside internalization of them. One example is the enforcement of racialized and class-specific gender norms in women's prisons in the United States. US prisons have long forced women to participate in "rehabilitation" programs that aim to train them as domestic workers or to do the type of unpaid domestic labor that is typically considered "women's work." Inside carceral systems women's rehabilitation and readiness to leave prison has often been judged

based on performance of gendered norms such as appearing passive, humble, meek, vulnerable, and prepared for roles as house cleaner and child-care provider. Women who are perceived to be aggressive or unfeminine, especially black women, who are consistently cast as outside standards of femininity that center whiteness, receive increased punishment and increased likelihood of having their parental rights terminated in the related child welfare system (Roberts 2002, vi). The racialized gender norms enforced by the criminal punishment and child-welfare systems overlap with those in the outside world, and are internalized by women in these systems to varying degrees just as by those outside. But these standards are also enforced in an exceptionally violent context using means of coercion that are very direct, such as keeping people in cages in isolation from their homes and communities; denying healthcare and adequate nutrition; subjecting people to conditions that amount to torture, such as solitary confinement and sexual violence; and terminating parental rights (Arkles 2009; Idaho Department of Corrections 2009; Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council 2011, 19, sect. J; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011, ch. 5; Bureau of Justice Statistics 2012, 18–19, 30–31).

Scholars and activists have also documented the ways that systems and institutions that create norms of mental health and categorizations of deviance use both "soft" and "hard" control to enforce racialized gender norms (Scholinsky 1998; Jackson 2002; Bird n.d.; Metzl 2009; Kanani 2011; Haritaworn 2013; LeFrancois, Reaume, and Menzies 2013). Violating gender norms makes people vulnerable to being labeled mentally ill and potentially being imprisoned, experiencing forced medication, or other loss of bodily autonomy and subjection to violence (Metzl 2009). Similarly, rehabilitation is often assessed according to a person's compliance with gender norms. Feminist theorists in trans studies have particularly examined this with regard to mental health diagnoses that are about failing to meet gender norms, such as gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria (Wilson, Griffin and Wren 2002; Spade 2003; Wilchins 1997). These diagnoses produce categories of "healthy" and "unhealthy" ways of being gendered, pathologize people whose gender identities or expressions deviate from the rigid norms of the binary gender system, and create systems of vigilance where people, especially children, must be subject to surveillance for signs of variance and "treated" to correct as needed. The creation, maintenance, and enforcement of these norms is wrapped up in systems of scientific expertise and authorizes particular professionals as gatekeepers, and can include forced or denied medication and other healthcare treatments, including "reparative therapies" and involuntary psychiatric imprisonment. Gender norms, then, operate both through constant internal enforcement in each of us as we daily prepare our appearances, modulate our voices and gaits, and feel shame about our bodies as we move through all the institutions of social control and deviance management that are authorized to intervene directly on the bodies of those categorized as violating these norms.

Much feminist theorizing and activism can be understood to be resistance to disciplinary power and the enforcement of racialized gender norms. Feminist resistance to this kind of control often focuses on opposing norms that center maleness; gender binarism; whiteness; heterosexuality; Christianity; and standards of beauty, health, intelligence, and reason that produce violent hierarchies of value. One key intervention

of these strategies is to expose norms as norms, denaturalizing them. When feminists show that women are not naturally sexually passive and vulnerable, but, rather, are perceived as such and coerced to be so in a culture dominated by severe sexual violence, the romance myth, and the privileging of male sexuality, they are exposing gender norms and challenging them, arguing that things could be another way. When activists form consciousness-raising groups that encourage people to question standards about how they perceive their own bodies and identities and replace those norms with other ideas that they consider better, they are engaging with disciplinary power. White feminist activists and intellectuals in the 1970s are a commonly cited example of this type of work, but it was taken up broadly at that time by Puerto Rican, Black Power, lesbian and gay, and women of color groups, among others. Such groups examined white beauty standards, heterosexism, monogamy, hierarchical governance styles, and other norms and proposed alternatives ranging from natural hairstyles to polyamory to vegetarianism to collective governance structures. In all these movements, discussion of gender roles, beauty myths, and sexual violence played an important part.

Critique of media representations of women is another example of feminist resistance to disciplinary norms. The famous Bechdel test, proposed by artist Alison Bechdel, is a well-known example of this kind of critique. The test asks whether a work of fiction features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man (Associated Press 2013). The test is a commentary on the fact that in most representations of women in fiction, women's relationships with men are prioritized over all other relationships. Women are consistently depicted as solely interested in heterosexual love and romance, and their lives are only important with regard to how they relate to men. The Bechdel test is a popular critical tool and commentary on how media representations enforce harmful gender norms.

Feminist media critique can also be seen in feminist scholarship and activism about welfare policy. Black feminists, in particular, have extensively analyzed how deviant mythological types of black women invented and circulated by white scientists, scholars, media producers, and politicians are mobilized in debates about welfare policy (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Mink 1990; Sparks 2003). Patricia Hill Collins has named these "controlling images." The figure of the "welfare queen" was famously invoked by Ronald Reagan in a 1976 speech but was based in long-standing discourses dating back to the chattel slavery system in the United States about black women as sexually immoral, overly reproductive, irresponsible, greedy, and unfeminine. This image has consistently been portrayed in welfare debates. Black feminist scholars and activists have attacked this portrayal, exposing how it is invented by various institutions of expert knowledge, how its circulation demonizes and harms black women and black populations more broadly, and how it becomes enforced by individual caseworkers in welfare offices on a daily level to deny black families government services (Ernst, Nguyen, and Taylor 2013). Feminists have observed how racialized gender norms circulate in the welfare debate and in the broader context of debates about women's roles in the workforce and in domestic labor. While the myth of the "welfare queen" and the policies it is used to promote portray black mothers as lazy and undeserving if they do not work outside the

home for a wage or in "workfare" while raising small children, white women are often encouraged to give up wage labor and be stay-at-home moms. Gender norms about labor roles portray an ideal of white motherhood that drastically contrasts with the way black motherhood in interpreted, and different forms of coercion apply to enforce these norms. Examination of these roles, the norms that govern them, and the institutions and arrangements that enforce them is a central task for feminism.

Foucault's description of disciplinary power as productive rather than repressive can help develop feminist perspectives on how resistance can be mounted against heteropatriarchy. When we imagine power as primarily repressive, we often imagine that to make change the main thing is to go to those who "have power" and are at the top of the hierarchy, and take over their roles and/or convince them to pass new rules and laws forbidding the prior behavior. So, for example, we might prioritize passing laws to make sex discrimination, rape, domestic violence, sexual orientation discrimination, and gender identity discrimination illegal. These actions, according to a view of power as repressive, should work to make the operations of heteropatriarchy stop. Interestingly, many of these things have happened in the United States. Yet sexual violence and intimate-partner violence remain endemic; the wage gap has not been eliminated; people still work in highly gendered labor roles (such as 90 percent of secretaries are women) that correlate to pay inequity; parenting roles remain highly gendered and parenting labor remains inequitably divided; and, in general, rigid gender norms remain vibrantly alive and violently enforced. Some would even argue that the passage of such laws exacerbates heteropatriarchal conditions because it serves as a mask for these conditions, creating an illusion of equality and of the government as the protector and guarantor of equality, meanwhile apparatuses of racialized-gendered violence, such as the child-welfare, criminal punishment, and immigration enforcement systems, expand. By reconceptualizing how power works and attending to different forms of power, we can account for the seeming contradictions of systems where control occurs in multiple intersecting ways, including through processes of norm creation and enforcement that help us all see, experience and reproduce ourselves and the world according to racialized gender hierarchies.

Biopolitics and the Norm

Discipline was not the only model of power that Foucault described. Foucault also analyzes what he calls "biopolitics," and an understanding of biopolitics and its relationships to discipline is important for understanding the significance of the concepts of norms and normalization to feminist theories and activisms. While Foucault's model of disciplinary power helps elucidate the ways that norms and processes of normalization in terms of gender, sexuality, and race operate in systems of heteropatriarchy, Foucault also offers a statistical sense of norm that operates at the level of population. Foucault uses the term "biopolitics" to describe normalization at the level of populations. Whereas the