

Beyond adaptive preferences: Rethinking women's complicity in their own subordination

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Abstract

An important question confronting feminist philosophers is why women are sometimes complicit in their own subordination. The dominant view holds that complicity is best understood in terms of adaptive preferences. This view assumes that agents will naturally gravitate away from subordination and towards flourishing as long as they do not have things imposed on them that disrupt this trajectory. However, there is reason to believe that 'impositions' do not explain all of the ways in which complicity can arise. This paper defends a phenomenological account of complicity, which offers an alternative explanation.

1 | INTRODUCTION

As Alison Jaggar described it, 'one of the most important questions confronting all feminist theorists...[is] why women who are, after all, a majority in most populations, so often seem to submit to or even collude with their own subordination' (Jaggar, 1983, p. 149). In the contemporary analytic feminist literature, the primary explanation for why women become complicit in their own subordination is offered in terms of adaptive preferences.¹ This explanation holds that because of the deprived and oppressive social context in which they find themselves, women develop preferences which reflect this deprivation and oppression, and so end up reinforcing rather than resisting their own subordination. In this paper, I argue that adaptive preferences are not the only way in which complicity can arise. I develop a phenomenological explanation of complicity, which offers a new account of some of the ways in which and reasons why agents may be complicit in their own subordination.

I begin by examining the dominant features of the explanation from adaptive preference. I highlight that the approach from adaptive preference assumes that agents have a natural trajectory away from subordination and towards flourishing, and thus, without 'impositions', such as social constraints or other forms of interference that

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disrupt this flourishing, agents will not become complicit in their own subordination.² I argue that these assumptions result in the adaptive preference theorist overlooking other ways in which complicity can arise. To examine these alternative possibilities, I draw on work from the phenomenological tradition. I contend that this tradition offers us an alternative picture of the human agent, which enables us to appreciate how complicity can arise as a result of a particular kind of self-relation, which is not, in essence, externally caused. This is not to deny that impositions, such as oppressive social contexts, often play an important role in cases of complicity. Instead, my aim is to draw attention to a form of complicity that can arise without being 'imposed' on the agent.

2 | WOMEN'S COMPLICITY IN THEIR OWN SUBORDINATION: THE SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

The issue of women's complicity in their own subordination has a long history in feminist philosophy and has been analysed in many forms. The issue is addressed in the work of key feminist philosophers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir. For Wollstonecraft, the problem is best formulated in terms of the issue of women accepting and embracing dependence rather than independence (Wollstonecraft, [1792] 1994). Similarly, for Beauvoir, women's complicity in their own subordination is expressed in the way women cling to limited and limiting self-conceptions that reduce their agency by casting them into the role of the 'Other': man's passive and dependent counterpart (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011). I take subordination in a broad sense to cover not only submitting oneself to another agent but also subordinating oneself within a system: accepting or embracing a restricted, restrictive or otherwise limiting role.

Women's complicity in their own subordination is a problem discussed in the feminist philosophical literature up until the mid-1990s – although again not necessarily under this heading.³ It was examined in terms of the attitudes of 'right-wing' women (Andrea Dworkin's term), in examples of women who reinforced patriarchal ideas and ways of thinking, rather than challenging them. More recently, outside of the academy, we find the issue explored in Ariel Levy's 2005 book *Female Chauvinist Pigs* and in Natasha Walter's 2010 work *Living Dolls*, which both deal with the rise of 'raunch culture' and the issue of women's self-objectification. In the present social and political climate, we can see that women's complicity in their own subordination is very much a live issue, with the rise of groups like 'The Honey Badgers' (the women's wing of the men's rights activist movement), and the involvement of prominent women in the backlash against the #MeToo campaign.

The concepts of patriarchy and male dominance help to explain a key aspect of female subordination, by illuminating the social context that gives rise to sexist attitudes, norms, roles, values and views. But the core question articulated by Jaggar, and one that still remains to be answered, is why women – despite dramatic changes in their rights, their social roles and public attitudes related to sex and gender – continue to uphold and reinforce sexist attitudes, norms, roles, values and views, rather than reject them, and thus, 'why women who are, after all, a majority in most populations, so often seem to submit to or even collude with their own subordination' (Jaggar, 1983, p. 149).

3 | ADAPTIVE PREFERENCES

Since the late 1990s one particular way of answering this question and understanding why women uphold sexist attitudes, reinforce patriarchal norms and thus become complicit in their own subordination, has become dominant: adaptive preferences.⁴ These are preferences formed in response to oppression,⁵ which serve to uphold or reinforce the oppressive social structures that are imposed on the agent as a result of their situation. Adaptive preferences speak to the notion of complicity because they are thought to explain how 'the oppressed come to desire that which is oppressive to them...[and how] one's desires turn away from goods and even needs that, absent those conditions, they would want' (Cudd, 2006, p. 181). Adaptive preferences are commonly presented as unconscious adaptations

(Elster, 1983; Walsh, 2015). They are often thought to be the result of lifelong habituation (Bartky, 1990; Khader, 2011; Meyers, 2002; Nussbaum, 2001). Some argue that adaptive preferences are 'paradigmatically non-autonomous' (Taylor, 2009, p. 71), while others deny that non-autonomy is definitional for adaptive preferences and draw attention to conscious and rational adaptations, which can nevertheless be seen as adaptive because they reflect the situations of oppression in which they were formed (Cudd, 2014; Khader, 2011). What unites this diversity of accounts is the idea that adaptive preferences are in some way imposed on the bearer as a result of their situation of oppression.⁶

Highlighting the explanatory role of impositions in accounts of adaptive preference enables a broad and inclusive understanding of the concept. The notion of impositions need not indicate that certain preferences are problematic because they are unendorsed by the agent (Friedman, 2003, pp. 4–5) or because they are those preferences with which the agent does not truly identify (Frankfurt, 1988). Nor does the explanatory force of impositions necessarily rely on the idea of an underlying authentic self and its related 'real' preferences (Meyers, 2005, p. 49), although it can accommodate all of these accounts. As I shall argue, emphasising the explanatory function of impositions in the adaptive preference literature does not imply that the adaptive preference theorist is necessarily committed to claims about the agent's psychological or subjective states. Rather, the notion of impositions should be taken in a loose and broad sense to signal something that interferes with the agent or oppressively impacts or constrains their options, where options are also understood in a broad sense, as including choices and possibilities for action, but also 'states of being' such as ways of life, self-conceptions, social roles and so on. With this in mind, let us turn to some of the ways in which adaptive preferences are thought to be imposed on agents, and thus how 'impositions' come to form the primary explanatory mechanism of the adaptive preference theorist.

Impositions can describe active interference, such as direct physical constraints or manipulation. This is an explanation we find in J.S. Mill's account of women's subordination. He emphasises how men, 'the masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose'. As Mill puts it, men have 'put everything in practice to enslave their [women's] minds' (Mill, [1869] 2006, p. 148). In more recent accounts, this form of imposition is articulated in terms of 'internalised oppression'. As Diana Tietjens Meyers argues, 'to internalise oppression is to incorporate inferiorizing material into the structure of the self' (Meyers, 2002, p. 8). As Meyers and Bartky (1990) both emphasise, the roles, norms and self-understandings that are prescribed to women under patriarchy are marked by oppression. Having internalised these oppressive norms, roles, values and self-conceptions, women's subordination becomes self-reinforcing.⁷

A similar view focuses on the way agents can have particular preferences imposed upon them indirectly as a result of their oppressive situation. A common view is that problematically adaptive preferences result from a lack of self-respect or self-worth, a lack which is causally related to the oppressive situation of the agent (Okin, 1999; Superson, 2005); for example, the abused woman who remains with her abusive partner because she does not view herself as 'an intrinsically valuable human being' (Superson, 2005, p. 111). As Susan Moller Okin, a proponent of this view, sees it, patriarchy means that women are valued less than men in most cultures; women, therefore, come to value *themselves* less, which reduces their autonomy and explains why they 'acquiesce' in oppressive cultural practices and norms (Okin, 1998, p. 675).

In addition to these modes of interference, self-subordinating preferences can also be imposed as a result of deprivation. Deprivation can constrain our options, or our awareness of our options, and thus impose particular preferences on us. For example, Martha Nussbaum points to the way patriarchal social environments not only direct women into oppressive modes of self-understanding, but how such contexts can deprive women of the knowledge, resources or opportunities for understanding that their gender unjust situations could be other than they are (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 113). Deprivation imposes certain preferences upon agents by depriving them of the resources to lead a good life (Nussbaum, 2001, pp. 83–84). Not knowing any different, Nussbaum argues, such agents come to comply with unequal treatment without 'complain[t] or protest' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 113).

But the explanatory force of impositions need not signal a lack of agency or autonomy in the agent diagnosed with adaptive preferences. Uma Narayan (2002) argues that explaining adaptive preferences, in the way Nussbaum

and Okin do, denies the agency of women in oppressed positions and ignores other reasons they may have for complying with their oppression.⁸ Building on this idea, Serene Khader has offered an alternative characterisation of adaptive preferences, which departs from the 'defective agent' view (Khader, 2011, 2012). For Khader, an agent can be said to have an adaptive preference if they are aware that things could be different but lack the means or the opportunities to pursue a more flourishing way of life. Khader explicates some examples of these forms of adaptive preference in terms of the notion of a 'trade-off' (2011, pp. 195–196). For example, a woman may express a preference for less food in a way that exacerbates her own malnourishment, not because she is unaware that she could have or may deserve more food. Rather, she may 'depriv[e] herself [of food] only because of conditions where keeping her male relatives happy is the best way to ensure access to income, safety and so on' (Khader, 2012, p. 310). In this case, complicity is imposed on the agent because she is deprived of the option of having both food and security, so she must choose between these two goods.

In all of these accounts, the notion of impositions is key to explaining how agents come to adapt their preferences in such a way that they become complicit in their own subordination. But the appeal to imposition(s) only makes sense alongside the assumption that such impositions are problematic because they interfere with the agent's natural trajectory.⁹ Adaptive preference theorists are committed to the idea that in the absence of deprived and oppressive social conditions that impose certain preferences, choices or ways of life upon an agent, the agent would not manifest the oppressive choice, preference or way of life they do (Cudd, 2006, p. 181; Khader, 2011, pp. 49–51; Nussbaum, 2001, p. 85). Underlying this analysis is a commitment to the idea that oppressive impositions interfere with an agent's natural trajectory away from oppression and subordination and towards what is variously presented as liberty (Mill, [1859] 2006), autonomy (Okin, 1998; Superson, 2005), human capability (Nussbaum, 2000) or – a phrase that can accommodate all of these – what Khader calls 'basic human flourishing' (Khader, 2011, p. 49).¹⁰

Analyses of complicity *qua* adaptive preference thus assume two things: (a) the imposition criterion: that complicity in one's own subordination is imposed on the agent (although the means by which it is imposed and what constitutes impositions differ) and (b) the natural trajectory claim: that in the absence of such impositions – however, conceptualised – the agent would gravitate towards basic human flourishing and ultimately cease to be complicit in their own subordination. What we might call 'external flourishing inconsistent impositions',¹¹ or for the sake of brevity what I shall refer to hereafter simply as 'impositions', are the central explanatory mechanism of the adaptive preference theorist, and the ultimate explanation the adaptive preference theorist offers for women's complicity in their own subordination. However, as I shall now demonstrate, there are ways in which complicity can manifest itself that are not primarily explicable in terms of imposition(s). If we remove the imposition criterion and suspend the natural trajectory claim, we may no longer have a case of adaptive preference, as Khader argues (2011, p.47), but we may still have a case of complicity.

3.1 | Questioning the assumptions of the adaptive preference theorist

In *Living Dolls* (Walter, 2010) and *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (Levy, 2005), Natasha Walter and Ariel Levy explore women's participation in 'raunch culture'. They examine phenomena such as glamour modelling; adopting pornographic dress and self-presentation (G-strings, 'boob jobs' and shaved pubic hair); taking pole dancing classes for exercise and going to lap dancing clubs as a form of recreation. They argue that the attitudes that accompany such participation tend to associate masculinity with power (Levy, 2005, p. 107), and in various ways, conform to 'the locker room code of ethics' this prescribes (Levy, 2005, p. 130). Women engaged in raunch culture often structure their identity around norms of sexual objectification (Levy, 2005, pp. 33–45; Walter, 2010, pp. 19–38), and frequently disregard their own sexual needs and pleasure in favour of satisfying men's wants (Levy, 2005, p. 144). These attitudes and ways of being are distilled in the title character of Levy's book, 'the Female Chauvinist Pig' (FCP):

She is post-feminist. She is funny. She *gets it*. She doesn't mind cartoonish stereotypes of female sexuality, and she doesn't mind a cartoonishly macho response to them. The FCP asks: Why throw your boyfriend's *Playboy* in a freedom trash can when you could be partying in the Mansion? Why worry about *disgusting* or *degrading* when you could be giving – or getting – a lap dance yourself? Why try to beat them when you can join them? (Levy, 2005, p. 93)

The FCP embraces her own sexual objectification and endorses and reinforces sexist tropes and norms.¹² Although the FCP may have been born with the 'lad culture' of the early 2000s, we can see her legacy in the idea of 'erotic capital' (Hakim, 2010), and in the mainstreaming of raunch culture as a purported site of female 'empowerment' (Freeman, 2016). The FCP lives on in the complex testimonies of young women who feel 'obliged to turn themselves into toys for boys' at the same time as maintaining that 'the world is a place in which your gender no longer stands in the way of your success' (Bauer, 2015, p. 44), and in the backlash against the #MeToo movement, where women have, for example, defended sexual harassment as a necessary part of courtship (Knowles, 2019, pp. 243, 257). As Levy and Walter present her, the FCP is complicit in her own subordination, but exactly how to explain her complicity is a more complex matter.

As we saw in the previous section, there are three primary ways in which the adaptive preference theorist characterises the impositions that are thought to explain women's complicity in their own subordination: deprivation, interference, and trade-offs. Deprivation may explain the engagement of some women in raunch culture. As Walter observes, attempting to break into glamour modelling may be the result of a lack of alternative options. She discusses the 'desperation' of women who see this as the only way to get out of their dead-end job or their dead-end town (Walter, 2010, p. 34). But this does not account for all the women in glamour modelling Walter talks to (Walter, 2010, pp. 28, 32, 36), nor does it account for women's engagement in more informal forms of raunch culture, which are often explained as constituting women's 'Me-time' (Walter, 2010, p. 25), and something they do for themselves (Walter, 2010, p. 28). Moreover, deprivation is not the situation of the FCP, who is highly educated, economically, educationally, socially and materially privileged (Levy, 2005, pp. 33–34).

Interference also does not straightforwardly or satisfactorily explain women's engagement in raunch culture. As Walter reports in an interview with the then editor of *Nuts* magazine, '[o]nce glamour modelling might have been about some fat sinister guy with a cigar tricking young girls into taking off their clothes, but now women are queuing up to do it' (Walter, 2010, p. 29). This is not to say that there might not be more subtle forms of interference at play, such as internalised oppression or preferences imposed as a result of one's (oppressive) situation, as even women in privileged situations are still subject to the demands and expectations of patriarchy. But the way in which the FCP takes up and takes over these norms constitutes a more active form of complicity, which does not simply repeat or passively reproduce internalised norms. As Filipa Melo Lopes remarks, considering the rise of CAKE parties – a branch of 'raunch feminism' for educated, affluent and privileged women – 'No one was expecting them to go pole dancing on Friday night and there were no foreseen penalties for not doing it' (Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2528).

The FCP is not the woman who lacks self-worth or self-respect; she relishes her participation in raunch culture and admonishes those who object (Levy, 2005, pp. 4, 10, 39; Walter, 2010, p. 33). In many cases, she even presents her choices as feminist acts (Levy, 2005, p.75). She does not *acquiesce* to patriarchal imperatives; rather, her engagement in raunch culture consists in a '*celebratory embrace* of practices historically criticized as oppressive by feminists' (Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2518, my emphasis), even if this celebration is not unadulterated (Levy, 2005, p. 11; Walter, 2010, pp. 21, 25). One might argue that this is because the FCP has internalised sexist norms so entirely that she no longer recognises the tension between these internalised norms and her 'natural trajectory' towards less subordinating forms of life. However, this move risks ignoring and denying the FCP's agency by failing to take her testimony seriously.¹³ As Nancy Bauer argues, we must believe women when they tell us they get genuine pleasure from self-objectification, although such acceptance need not mark a stopping point for our analysis (2015, pp. 45–46).¹⁴

One might argue that the FCP is engaging in raunch culture knowingly as a kind of trade-off in order to become 'one of the lads' and thus to achieve acceptance and reach high ranking office. Such a move would not disregard her

agency, but it still appears to mischaracterise the situation of the FCP. Many of Levy's and Walter's interviewees state that there were other lucrative or prestigious career paths open to them (Walter, 2010, pp. 32–33); or that they have reached a point where their success means they could turn their hand to whatever they wanted (Levy, 2005, p. 90). The issue in these cases of women's engagement with raunch culture, then, is not about what it is rational for agents to do in unjust situations;¹⁵ rather, the issue is why relatively privileged women continue to uphold sexist norms, practices and narratives even when there are other equally viable and more 'flourishing consistent' options open to them. As Walter and Levy are both at pains to stress – and particularly in the case of women in privileged situations – participation in raunch culture 'is not a situation foisted upon women' (Levy, 2005, p. 33). 'Women are deeply complicit in creating and selling this culture' (Walter, 2010, p. 32). If impositions do not (wholly) explain the complicity of the FCP, then, what other explanations might there be?

4 | COMPLICITY BEYOND ADAPTIVE PREFERENCES

In the phenomenological tradition, it is often argued that agents make choices, adopt roles, endorse norms or ways of life that help to perpetuate their subordination and alienate them from their own freedom. Heidegger's extended analysis of inauthenticity in *Being and Time* describes the way in which human agents often tend to 'flee' from their own freedom, alienating themselves from freer and more authentic modes of existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 229). Sartre's account of bad faith is an examination of the way in which people in everyday situations, such as the waiter, immerse themselves in their social roles and conceal from themselves their fundamental freedom and self-responsibility (Sartre, [1943] 2003, pp. 82–83). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir offers numerous examples of women participating in their own objectification and passivity, painting a picture of women who make themselves an object in an attempt to 'resolve' the ambiguity of their own existence (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 654) and avoid 'the anguish and stress of an authentically assumed existence' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 10). Arendt observes the way in which most of us have avoided self-responsibility and freedom by 'not making up our minds' (Arendt, 1971, p. 436), arguing that for the most part, we resist thinking, which would involve an openness to our own freedom and the lack of fixity and certainty regarding our own existence (Arendt, 1971, p. 434). Although, for the most part, these thinkers do not explicitly address themselves to the topic of agents' complicity in their own subordination,¹⁶ their work can be understood to address this issue because, as we see in these examples, these writers describe the ways in which agents commit and subordinate themselves to social norms, narratives and roles in a way that ultimately serves to alienate them from their own freedom, and thus, perpetuate their own subordination by accepting or embracing a restricted, restrictive, or otherwise limiting role.¹⁷ However, in these accounts, an agent's complicity is not primarily understood as the result of an imposition that disrupts their natural trajectory. In what follows, I shall demonstrate how, by taking inspiration from work in the phenomenological tradition, we can develop a new way to approach and explain the issue of women's complicity in their own subordination that enables us to appreciate how complicity can arise independently of imposition(s).

Despite thinking that each of the phenomenological theorists discussed above offers a way to understand complicity that is not reducible to imposition(s), this does not mean that my aim is simply to revive an existing analysis in a modern context. Rather, I aim to think through the phenomenological insights into human existence drawn from these thinkers in order to employ them in the service of my own analysis of complicity. I shall primarily reference Heidegger's *Being and Time* to support my analysis, as it is through a Heideggerian lens that we can most clearly articulate the way in which an agent can be complicit in their own subordination without this being solely attributable to imposition(s). *Being and Time* is foundational in establishing the particular phenomenological understanding and analysis of human existence I wish to elaborate in the context of complicity.¹⁸ Moreover, with regard to the thinkers on whose work I am drawing, Heidegger serves as the uniting factor.¹⁹ *Being and Time* articulates the basic, shared, underlying picture of the human agent found in the work of these other theorists, as well as providing the most nuanced and thoroughgoing analysis of those factors which I argue can and should be mobilised to produce a more

expansive and detailed account of complicity that can help us to better understand those cases the analysis from adaptive preference may tend to overlook, mischaracterise, or fail to account for, such as that of the female chauvinist pig.

4.1 | A phenomenological analysis of complicity

The issue with the FCP, and the difficulty the adaptive preference theorist has in accounting for her complicity, is that the FCP's subordination does not seem to be straightforwardly imposed upon her. She is an economically, socially and educationally privileged woman with other equally viable options open to her, and yet she still participates in her own sexual objectification, the sexual objectification of other women, and in sexist norms that mark women – and thus herself as a woman – as inferior (Levy, 2005, pp. 107–117). What is required in order to explain her complicity, then, is an account that does not rely solely on the notion of impositions. Here is where a phenomenological approach to complicity can make a useful intervention.

Work in the phenomenological tradition begins with a different picture of the human agent to the one we find in accounts of adaptive preference and those in the tradition of liberal political philosophy more generally. Whereas the background assumption of the adaptive preference theorist means that the attitude with which they approach cases of complicity is one of explaining an anomalous data point: why there are agents who deviate from the natural human trajectory away from subordination, and towards basic human flourishing, phenomenologists do not take the natural trajectory claim as given.

Taking a phenomenological approach encourages us to begin with an open and holistic approach to the 'everyday' and to human existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 37–38, 65). That is, to the fullness of life in all its richness, complexity, nuance and contradiction. With regard to the issue of flourishing, a phenomenological approach enables us to observe that 'failures' of flourishing – or what in this context is more appropriately called an instance of complicity in one's own subordination – are an almost universal feature of human life. Moreover, rather than seeing this as a *failure* – a deviation from normal functioning – a phenomenological approach encourages us to ask what this observation tells us about 'normal functioning'.²⁰ Many phenomenologists argue that although human agents are fundamentally free and undetermined at a fundamental or 'ontological' level; in our everyday lives, our freedom is something we attempt to conceal from ourselves.²¹ Rather than gravitating towards situations and opportunities which reflect our fundamental freedom and indeterminacy, human agents often tend to seek out and occupy situations and ways of life in a way that constrains them and limits their options, because of the way in which we are attuned to our freedom and the 'uncertainty' of human existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 229).²² To view the FCP's complicity through this lens is to suggest that it is not something that is entirely explained by her external oppressive situation and the way it imposes certain preferences on her, but additionally to recognise the role that she herself plays in turning away from freer and less subordinating ways of life.

A similar idea can be found in the feminist literature. In her book *Gender in the Mirror*, Diana Tietjens Meyers emphasises that oppression does not totally erase agency, and oppressive socialisation does not guarantee self-subordination (Meyers, 2002). As Meyers points out, it is not only the content of the social roles, scripts and self-understandings that are available to women that play an important role in explaining their complicity, but also the way women *take up and take over* those roles (Meyers, 2002, p. 15). Drawing on work by Sandra Lee Bartky, Meyers highlights the way self-subordination can be entwined with the emergence of subjectivity and one's sense of one's self in such a way that it engenders a kind of active complicity that goes beyond 'acquiescing' to oppressive norms (Meyers, 2002, pp. 8–9).²³ This account helps to explain why agents' complicity in their own subordination may be so difficult to overcome. But it also suggests that perhaps this difficulty is not only rooted in the oppressive social context of the agent or the impositions to which they are subject – those explanatory features which the adaptive preference theorist emphasises. In addition, Meyers suggests, as do phenomenological analyses (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, pp. 642, 653; Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 165, 229, 308), that it may be worth considering the

problematic ways we can relate to the self-understandings, social scripts, roles and narratives that have been made available to us, in a way that further alienates us from our own freedom and contributes to our own subordination.²⁴

If we return to the case of the FCP, we see that Levy argues that there 'are two strategies the FCP uses to deal with her femaleness' (Levy, 2005, p. 107). These 'strategies' are elaborated in terms of certain scripts, that of 'cartoon man' and 'cartoon woman', which the FCP adheres to in order to determine how to behave, how to express herself and her sexuality, and ultimately how to live (Levy, 2005, p. 107). The relation the FCP has to these scripts is an unquestioning one (Levy, 2005, pp. 10, 130) and reflects a stubbornness about the way of life that has been adopted (Levy, 2005, p. 93). As I shall argue, this unquestioning attitude to scripts, norms, narratives and social roles, and the particular stubborn self-relation that accompanies it – or what I shall call 'global self-subordination' – can be key to understanding an agent's complicity in their own subordination; because these attitudes and self-relations play a central role in alienating agents from their own freedom, even in the absence of obvious external influencing factors (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 642; Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 308).²⁵

Global self-subordination is a common occurrence and something of which we are all at risk of falling foul, because destabilising norms, ideas, social dynamics and roles that have become central to our self-understanding and to grasping our position in the world and our relation to others can be a very unnerving thing to do.²⁶ It is thus something that people understandably resist, regardless of the content of the norms, roles and scripts to which they have bound themselves.²⁷ In this respect we can note that global self-subordination can be present in a range of cases beyond those of gender oppression. For example, Lester Burnham at the outset of *American Beauty* and George Bowling in Orwell's *Coming up for Air* lead lives of unreflective conformism,²⁸ they exhibit global self-subordination in the way they limit their possibilities and the options they perceive to be open to them by viewing their social roles as essentially binding. In this respect, they can be considered complicit in their own subordination in the minimal sense that they understand and relate to their social roles in a restrictive way. However, as I shall argue, this does not mean that we must say that the complicity of Bowling or Burnham is equivalent to, or as concerning as, the complicity of the woman who perpetuates her own malnourishment or the woman who defends her abusive partner.²⁹ A phenomenological approach to complicity distinguishes two irreducible explanatory mechanisms of complicity, which enable us to distinguish between different forms and different degrees of complicity, and thus, account for a wider range of cases. In addition to the role of global self-subordination, a phenomenological approach to complicity also highlights the role of what I shall call 'local self-subordination'.

Whereas global self-subordination is primarily a self-relation, characterised by a stubborn attitude to social norms, scripts, narratives and roles, local self-subordination focuses on the specific oppressive context of the agent and highlights the role oppression – as something structural and imposed on social groups – can play in explanations of complicity.³⁰ In drawing attention to particular oppressive impositions on the agent to explain their complicity, we can say that adaptive preference theorists offer an account of complicity in terms of local self-subordination. Khader's notion of a 'trade-off', for example, is an instance of pure local self-subordination, because in Khader's example, the agent would not perpetuate her own malnourishment if her external conditions gave her other options (Khader, 2012, p. 310). By contrast, the cases of Bowling and Burnham exhibit only global self-subordination: they alienate themselves from their own freedom without oppressive conditions imposing such behaviour. In this regard, the case of the woman who acquiesces to her own malnourishment and the examples of Burnham and Bowling are discontinuous. The former can be explained satisfactorily in terms of local self-subordination, while the latter are explicable in terms of global self-subordination. However, although global and local self-subordination can function separately, in most cases of gendered complicity, they function together. Such complicity is thus only fully explicable as a 'double subordination', both local and global.

A phenomenological understanding of the FCP, for example, observes that at the local level, her oppressive social setting devalues femininity and femaleness, whilst men and traditional masculinity are lauded (Levy, 2005, pp. 98–101). Her oppressive social context is one in which female sexual objectification is commonplace, and women who protest are 'frump[s]' (Levy, 2005, p. 92). In this respect, impositions explain one aspect of her complicity and may additionally manifest in terms of the normative pressures to comply (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 164–165) and

the potential benefits of so doing (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 10; Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 165). But in addition to this, a phenomenological approach to her complicity also highlights the role of global self-subordination, observing the active role the FCP plays in binding herself to the (oppressive) social roles, norms and narratives made available to her, and how this can further cement her subordination and alienate her from her own freedom.³¹ As Levy puts it, despite the educationally, socially and economically privileged position of the FCP, 'FCPs don't bother to question the criteria on which women are judged, they are too busy judging other women themselves' (Levy, 2005, p. 103). The FCP thus not only has self-objectification and sexist scripts presented to her as viable and available ways to be in the world, she also plays an active role *qua* global self-subordination in stubbornly taking up and binding herself to these sexist tropes, scripts, narratives and attitudes, which perpetuate her own subordination and the subordination of other women. The imposition-independent character of global self-subordination is where a phenomenological approach to complicity differs from Meyers' analysis. Meyers ultimately points to socialization and culture to explain why agents take up and take over oppressive social roles, scripts and narratives in the problematic ways they do (Meyers, 2002, pp. 22–24). By contrast, what is crucial from a phenomenological point of view is that the tendency towards complicity and subordination in a global sense is not something that is externally caused or imposed.

Taking these phenomenological insights seriously as a starting point for thinking about what it is to be complicit in one's own subordination, transforms the way we think about complicity. Whereas the approach from adaptive preference assumes that what *really* needs to be explained is what and how external factors can impose things on us in such a way that we turn away from our own flourishing and become complicit in our own subordination. A phenomenological approach rejects the natural trajectory claim and takes complicity as a baseline.³² In this respect, complicity is not a response or reaction to external circumstances, as it is for the adaptive preference theorist. It is not primarily imposed, nor is complicity some kind of defect (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 68).

Although global self-subordination may be less relevant in 'extreme' cases like the woman who defends her abusive partner or the woman who acquiesces in her own malnourishment, recognising the role that global self-subordination can play, even in these instances, can help us to approach these situations in a more sensitive way. If complicity is not only a tendency of 'defective' agents but an everyday phenomenon, this enables us to more easily grasp how someone could find themselves in a situation of abuse where they end up excusing or justifying the actions of their abuser. Rather than 'Othering' the complicit agent, a phenomenological approach to complicity enables us to recognise the similarities between our own behaviour and the behaviour of those we might otherwise regard as defective, deficient or pathological. This does not play down the seriousness of these more extreme cases, where the effects of an agent's complicity result in physical harm. Rather, it gives us further resources for understanding, addressing and making sense of these cases, at the same time as offering us a more fruitful way to approach more ambiguous cases, like those of the FCP.

Moreover, putting gendered complicity on a spectrum with more everyday ways of fleeing one's freedom avoids the worry that women have a 'natural tendency' towards complicity, as some readings of Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft suggest (Meyers, 2002, p. 3).³³ It also opens up the possibility of exploring parallels between being complicit in one's own subordination and being complicit in the subordination of others, and analysing how these phenomena may be intertwined. The stubbornness that characterises global self-subordination shares certain features with the 'resistant' nature of white ignorance (Mills, 2017, pp. 50–71) and epistemic vices, such as closed-mindedness, which often play a role in sexual and racial oppression (Medina, 2013, pp. 28–55). Expanding the analysis of complicity to recognise the role of global self-subordination increases our analytic resources, enabling us to highlight the context-independent mechanisms that can play a role in complicity across a range of cases, thereby putting us in a better position to identify and combat complicity in all its forms.

Rather than focussing solely on imposition(s) as the key explanatory factors in cases of complicity, a phenomenological account suggests we should focus on the way the agent is attuned to the fundamental freedom and uncertainty that characterises human existence and how this makes them bind themselves to the limiting norms, roles and self-conceptions of their social setting.³⁴ The adaptive preference theorist, or indeed researchers in the social sciences, may be able to tell a similar story about the way in which people tend to be norm followers. For example,

highlighting the role of empirical and normative expectations in compliance: expecting other people to act in a certain way gives me a reason to act in a certain way.³⁵ Or draw our attention to the role of social sanctions in promoting compliance: agents are aware of potential ‘punishments’ incurred for not following established norms.³⁶ However, both of these are ultimately external factors for compliance, and thus explanatorily analogous to the notion of imposition(s) explicated in Section 3. If other people were not following the norm, or if there were not sanctions for not complying, then we would not expect agents to exhibit the particular behaviour we observe. What a phenomenological account adds into this picture is that in addition to such external factors – and even in their absence – there may also be imposition-independent factors that play a crucial role in explaining complicity.

4.2 | A phenomenological analysis of the imposition-independent factors affecting complicity

To further understand the phenomenological explanation of complicity I have been developing, and demonstrate the advantages of thinking about complicity beyond the realms of imposition(s) and without taking the natural trajectory claim as given, let us consider Andrea Dworkin's account of ‘Right-wing’ women. These are women in relatively privileged situations who fight against women's rights and progressive reproductive legislation, as well as opposing other movements to expand women's possibilities and their freedom (Dworkin, 1983, pp. 31–35). In light of this, Dworkin presents these women as complicit in their own subordination because they limit the options and possibilities that are open to them.

The adaptive preference theorist might argue that these women are constrained by their social setting, or that because of imposition(s) they have come to hold themselves in low regard and that this explains their behaviour. But Dworkin suggests that there is another explanation. She suggests that the behaviour of these women is motivated by a fear of the unknown. They seek to maintain an existing way of life – even if it is one in which they are limited and subordinated – because maintaining what is familiar helps to isolate them from this fear. As Dworkin puts it:

Living in a world she has not made and does not understand, a woman needs rules to know what to do next. If she knows what she is supposed to do, she can find a way to do it. If she learns the rules by rote, she can perform with apparent effortlessness... The Right, very considerably, tells women the rules of the game. (Dworkin, 1983, p. 22)

A phenomenological approach to complicity can help to illuminate Dworkin's analysis by offering a more direct account of the imposition-independent factors that can motivate complicity by drawing our attention to the way in which agents are attuned to their freedom and their existence. Specifically, phenomenologists like Heidegger account for the ‘fear’ Dworkin describes – or what should more properly be called anxiety – by elaborating the existential anxiety we can feel when our self-conceptions and world views are threatened or ‘break down’ (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 231–233).

In their analyses, both Levy and Melo Lopes highlight the ‘anxiety’ that exists around sexuality and modes of expression as motivating factors in women's participation in raunch culture (Levy, 2005, p. 199; Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2531). Melo Lopes develops this analysis by arguing that what raunch feminists were attempting to do was to find a way to express themselves sexually at a time when the meanings of female sexuality had been destabilised by second-wave feminism (Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2530). The forms of sexual expression raunch culture offered women were seen as subversive and countercultural, but at the same time were familiar, clear, available and imaginable (Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2532), thus enabling the re-establishment of a more stable social meaning around sexuality, which could guide and inform gendered scripts and ways of being in the world. While Melo Lopes' argument gives us a compelling account of why women would engage in their own sexual objectification in these specific instances of what she terms ‘meaning vertigo’ (Melo Lopes, 2018, p. 2531), the phenomenological analysis of complicity I am

developing points to the explanatory role of anxiety, not only in those cases where social meaning has been eroded or destabilised by cultural and social critiques or developments, but as a state of being that affects and pursues us constantly, and thus can play a motivating factor in a wide range of cases.

Heidegger argues that what is at the centre of anxiety as a way of being attuned to ourselves, our world and our existence, is not just a concern about the breakdown of a specific system of understanding, but the underlying knowledge – that he argues we all have – that in fact, no system of understanding can ever explain who we are and how we should lead our lives (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 232), since at base we are fundamentally free and undetermined beings (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 67). At first glance, the idea of ‘existential angst’ as an attunement that plays an explanatory role in cases of complicity may seem overblown and unfamiliar, but if we examine what is actually at issue in this account and what its commitments are, it becomes far more compelling.

As research in social science also attests, human agents do not like uncertainty or ambiguity.³⁷ But our lives are plagued by uncertainty and ambiguity, not only with regard to trivial matters, phenomenologists argue, but more fundamentally at an existential level with regard to our existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 67).³⁸ What I shall call the ‘existential question’ or the question of our existence: Who we are, how we should live and why we do what we do; is one that constantly pursues us (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 234), but it is a question to which there is no ultimate answer.³⁹ This is what is at stake in the idea of existential anxiety in the context of complicity. We are anxious about the question of our own existence because it is a question that matters to us, but it is one that we can never answer. We, therefore, tend to turn away from the uncertainty and ambiguity of our existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 174) and instead fix on things that seem more clear-cut and that appear to offer a definite answer to this existential question (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 165). We saw this in the attitudes of Burnham and Bowling discussed in Section 4.1, and in the case of the FCP and women who engage in raunch culture, who Levy describes as turning away from the ‘freedom to figure out what we internally want from sex’ and so ‘instead [end up] mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy’ (2005, p. 200). We are now in a position to offer a further explanation of this ‘turning away’, which constitutes global self-subordination, by examining the motivating factors at work in this account.⁴⁰ Moreover, the central argument we find in this phenomenological account is familiar beyond the realm of phenomenological analysis.

In his book *Freedom Evolves*, Daniel Dennett makes the often observed point that ‘there will always be strong temptations to make yourself really small, to externalize the causes of your actions and deny responsibility’ (Dennett, 2003, p. 293).⁴¹ Like Dennett, phenomenologists argue that in pointing to things outside ourselves, we are not only attempting to avoid the uncertainty and ambiguity that surrounds our existence, we are also trying to avoid taking responsibility (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 165–166, 173). Although Dennett focuses on responsibility for actions (and primarily moral transgressive actions), a phenomenological account suggests that such refusals are best understood within the broader frame of refusals of self-responsibility.⁴² Phenomenologically, self-responsibility can be conceived in terms of answerability⁴³ and self-choosing.⁴⁴ To avoid self-responsibility is to avoid facing up to decisions and judgments as one’s own. It is a way of avoiding taking responsibility for your actions, your way of life and ultimately yourself, by attempting to disburden yourself of your agency.⁴⁵ This refusal of self-responsibility characterises the attitudes of women who explain their participation and sexual self-objectification in *Girls Gone Wild* videos as ‘like a reflex’ (Levy, 2005, p. 11).⁴⁶ But it also characterises the stubbornness of Bowling and Burnham, the rule-following of the right-wing woman, and everyday ways of being where an agent inhabits their social roles, scripts and self-understandings as just what ‘one’ does, such that in your day to day life ‘the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that “it was no one”’ (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 165).

Phenomenologists often argue for a strong link between our unease with the ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounds our existence and the responsibility we have for our own existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 325–330). Viewed through a phenomenological lens, complicity, as it manifests in terms of our absorption in and global-self-subordination to social norms, roles and narratives, serves three functions. First, it is an attempt to fix an answer to the question of our own existence. Second, in so doing, it is an attempt to rid ourselves of the underlying anxiety we have around the question of our own existence. Third, it is an attempt to renege the self-responsibility we must

assume if we face up to the reality that there is nothing external to us that can ever provide a fixed and definite answer to the question of our own existence, why we do what we do, and how we live our lives. On a phenomenological account, then, the imposition-independent dimensions of complicity are explained in terms of our attempt to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty and renege self-responsibility (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 10; Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 229; Sartre, [1943] 2003, p. 78). To the extent that they both observe the ‘temptation’ to avoid taking responsibility (Dennett, 2003, p. 293; Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 223), a phenomenological approach to complicity and Dennett agree. In this respect, invoking the idea of existential anxiety as a motivating factor in complicity should not be regarded as too outlandish. At base, what is at stake in the notion of existential anxiety in the context of complicity is the widely observed phenomenon that agents tend not to want to take responsibility for their actions, although a phenomenological analysis adds that this is at base explained by a refusal of self-responsibility. This analysis captures something about Bowling and Burnham, as well as the right-wing woman and the FCP, who all bind themselves to rules and fixed scripts to tell them how to live. Although the norms, narratives and scripts to which they adhere differ, all of these agents can be understood to renege their self-responsibility in terms of the way they relate to and immerse themselves in social roles, scripts, norms and available self-understandings.

What then can be done about this? Dennett argues that because of people’s tendency to attempt to renege responsibility, we should ‘make people an offer they can’t refuse: If you want to be free, you must *take* responsibility’ (Dennett, 2003, p. 293). Here the phenomenological analysis and Dennett diverge. The phenomenologist asks – as they do of the adaptive preference theorist – on what grounds we should assume that freedom will be an offer people cannot refuse. If freedom and responsibility are linked, why think that although agents tend to want to resist responsibility, they will want to take up their freedom?

Bruce Waller argues that what I have called ‘self-responsibility’, or what he calls ‘take-charge responsibility’, which ‘designates the broader taking of responsibility – including taking charge of one’s own plans and projects and life’, is something that people want to take up (Waller, 2011, p. 107). Accordingly, rather than having to coax people into taking responsibility, Waller argues that where people have all the relevant information, they will be willing to take responsibility for themselves and decisions that may affect the course of their lives, rather than deferring this responsibility on to someone or something else (Waller, 2011, p. 109).⁴⁷ However, Waller also observes that people are often unwilling to take up this take-charge responsibility when they feel they do not have all the relevant information (Waller, 2011, p. 110). This is crucial when considering responsibility and freedom on a global scale, as a phenomenological approach does.

In Waller’s terms, a phenomenological analysis suggests that we never have ‘all the information’, as it were, when it comes to the question of our own existence and the issue of taking responsibility for ourselves, our actions, and our way of life. As Sartre’s famous analysis of the choice of whether to fight for the resistance or care for your sick mother demonstrates, we just have to choose, even when there is not a clear basis on which to make that choice. There is nothing outside ourselves that can answer the existential question. Accordingly, the (external) conditions can never be ‘right’ in the sense that they will ensure people will assume responsibility for themselves on a global scale.⁴⁸ This is precisely what is at issue in the cases of Burnham, Bowling, the FCP and the right-wing woman, whose complicity concerns not only an isolated act or preference, such as having less food, but the existential decision of who they are, how they should live, and what they should do. To borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard, assuming our self-responsibility and thus embracing our freedom will always be a ‘leap of faith’ and, accordingly, it may often be something from which we tend to shy away. What the phenomenological analysis I have developed highlights, therefore, is that even if nothing was imposed upon us, self-responsibility might still be refused, and thus, an agent could still be complicit in their own subordination (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 314–316). In the case of the right-wing woman and the FCP, this analysis enables us to better understand why these agents continue to fall back upon sexist tropes, scripts and self-understandings, despite having other more ‘flourishing consistent’ options open to them.

Accepting this analysis does not mean committing oneself to the strong positive thesis that agents universally tend towards unfreedom and subordination and away from freedom and self-responsibility. To accept the

phenomenological explanation for complicity that I have offered, all that is needed is the weaker negative claim that agents do not necessarily tend towards freedom and self-responsibility. This negative thesis puts into question the assumptions of the adaptive preference theorist that agents have a natural trajectory away from subordination and that this is only knocked off course by impositions, thus making impositions the primary explanatory factor in cases of complicity. Questioning these assumptions opens up a space in which to explore other ways in which complicity can arise, without being committed to a strong empirically contentious thesis regarding freedom, to which it is not even clear phenomenologists themselves are committed.⁴⁹

5 | CONCLUSION

Phenomenological analyses present us with numerous examples of agents who perpetuate their own subordination, even in the absence of impositions such as overt normative pressure, social sanctions, or other external oppressing factors. These detailed and carefully analysed examples encourage us to take seriously not only the idea that agents often do not tend towards freedom and flourishing but also the idea that they may actively turn away from it. To turn towards our freedom is to face up to the ambiguity and uncertainty of existence, and thus to have to assume responsibility for ourselves. Developing this insight in the context of complicity allows us to offer an analysis that goes beyond that of the adaptive preference theorist and the social scientist by providing an account of the imposition-independent factors that can play a role in motivating an agent's complicity in their own subordination.

This is not to say that freedom is not a genuine possibility on a phenomenological account. Indeed, the fundamental freedom of human agents is what underpins many phenomenological analyses.⁵⁰ Just because complicity in one's own subordination may be extremely likely, this does not mean that complicity is inevitable or something from which we cannot pull away.⁵¹ Equally, phenomenologists do not deny that external factors and those things directly or indirectly imposed upon us – oppressive social settings, unjust norms, the sanctions incurred for not conforming – can play a central role in explaining agents' complicity in their own subordination. In the work of both Heidegger and Beauvoir in particular, we find careful analyses of the way external factors and imposition(s) can interact with the avoidance of self-responsibility in a way that makes complicity more inevitable or less inevitable. What a phenomenological approach to complicity emphasises, however, is that impositions are often not the *whole explanation*.

The phenomenological approach I have developed encourages us to theorise complicity as a commonplace phenomenon and something of which we are all at risk of falling foul. This orientation expands the scope of the analysis, drawing our attention to cases such as the right-wing woman and the FCP, which may go unaccounted for or be misdiagnosed if complicity is only viewed through the lens of adaptive preference. A phenomenological approach thus puts us in a better position to identify and ultimately overcome subordination in all its forms by highlighting the different ways in which complicity can manifest itself and the different levels on which it may continue to function.⁵²

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to Alexander Douglas, Alison Stone, Andreas Schmidt, Daphne Brandenburg, Frank Hindriks, Michael Garnett and Pauline Kleingled, as well as to members of the Ethics Social and Political Philosophy work in progress seminar at the University of Groningen, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Analyses of women's complicity are motivated by a desire to show that 'women's compliance with sexist norms does not legitimate those norms' and justify women's subordination (Khader, 2012, p. 302). In approaching the issue, it is

important to distinguish the explanatory question of why women become complicit in their own subordination from the evaluative question of what is wrong or bad about complicity. To a certain extent, these questions are entangled, for example, in the explanatory appeal to oppression in analyses of adaptive preference. However, in this paper, I aim only to address the explanatory question.

- ² I borrow the term ‘flourishing’ from Khader (2011). I elaborate on the notions of impositions and flourishing further in Section 3.
- ³ See, for example, Dworkin (1983); Frye (1985); the debate between Sommers (1990) and Friedman (1990); Wendell (1990); Superson (1993); Cudd (1994).
- ⁴ Jaggar (2005) and Khader (2012) also make this point.
- ⁵ This emphasis on oppression in feminist accounts of adaptive preference contrasts with Jon Elster’s classic account of adaptive preference, which is based on the fable of the fox and the sour grapes: a fox desires some grapes, but finding they are out of his reach, changes his preference, claiming that grapes are too sour for foxes (Elster, 1983). As Martha Nussbaum points out, although this kind of preference change may be problematic in some cases, forming your preferences in response to the (limited) options available need not always be problematic (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 79).
- ⁶ Khader also makes this point (Khader, 2011).
- ⁷ I discuss this notion further in Section 4.1.
- ⁸ Jaggar (2005) makes a similar point. Narayan argues that rather than diagnosing women with adaptive preferences and seeing them as ‘dupes’ or ‘prisoners of patriarchy’ (Narayan, 2002, pp. 418–419), we would better understand the apparently self-subordinating actions of women in oppressed situations if we saw them as ‘bargaining with patriarchy’ (Narayan, 2002, p. 421).
- ⁹ Khader makes a similar point (Khader, 2011, p. 49).
- ¹⁰ For Khader, ‘flourishing’ indicates humans’ tendency towards ‘exercising certain valuable capacities that it is in the nature of human beings to exercise’ (Khader, 2011, p. 49). I deploy the term in a similarly broad sense to signal the commitments of adaptive preference theorists indicated in this paragraph and the idea that agents have some kind of natural trajectory away from subordination and towards exercising their freedom, however, conceived.
- ¹¹ I take the term ‘flourishing inconsistent’ from Khader (2011, p. 51). Formal education, for example, could be understood as something externally imposed on an agent, but it is commonly thought to broaden rather than constrain agents’ horizons, so it is not an imposition in the relevant sense for the analysis of adaptive preference.
- ¹² On feminist analyses of the problems of objectification, see, for example, Mackinnon (1989); Nussbaum (1995); Langton (2009); Cahill (2011).
- ¹³ Meyers has a more subtle account of internalised oppression that seeks to make sense of the way that women can feel ‘competent and empowered by skills that reinforce one’s subordination’ without denying or erasing their agency (Meyers, 2002, p. 8). I discuss this further in Section 4.1.
- ¹⁴ For an extended discussion of the way how false consciousness fails to explain women’s engagement in raunch culture, see Melo Lopes (2018, pp.2526–2528).
- ¹⁵ This marks the case as distinct from Cudd’s Larry and Lisa example, which concerns the rational division of domestic labour under conditions of gender injustice (Cudd, 1994, p. 37).
- ¹⁶ Beauvoir is perhaps the exception here, as she uses the phrase ‘complicity’ to describe the relationship between women and men under patriarchy Beauvoir, ([1949] 2011, p. 757). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Knowles, 2019), it is only when we bring the Heideggerian lens from *Being and Time* to bear on *The Second Sex* that the phenomenological explanation of complicity fully comes into view.
- ¹⁷ This is the definition of subordination offered in Section 2.
- ¹⁸ This is not to deny the importance of figures such as Husserl and Kierkegaard, who had an important influence on the development of Heidegger’s thought.
- ¹⁹ Sartre’s indebtedness to Heidegger is perhaps the most obvious, as indicated by the title of *Being and Nothingness*, but as has been argued, it is also important to recognise Arendt’s intellectual debt to Heidegger (Bernasconi, 2002) and Beauvoir’s (Bauer, 2006; Gothlin, 2003; Knowles, 2019).
- ²⁰ This does not mean that the phenomenologist assumes that agents necessarily tend towards complicity, as I explain in Section 4.2.
- ²¹ This analysis is developed throughout *Being and Time*. See especially (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 167, 221, 229), The idea that human agents are fundamentally free but often turn away from their freedom is also explicitly asserted in

- Beauvoir's account (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011) and in Sartre's understanding of the human agent (Sartre, [1943] 2003). It also informs Arendt's thinking (Arendt, 1971), although in her work, the idea is less explicitly stated.
- ²² I explain this further in Section 4.2.
- ²³ It is relevant that Bartky is particularly influenced by the phenomenological tradition and uses figures such as Heidegger to complicate the process of internalising oppression and oppressive socialisation (Bartky, 1990, pp. 83–99).
- ²⁴ Although Meyers does not see this as needing an explanation beyond internalised oppression, as I discuss below.
- ²⁵ I explain where this self-relation and relation to norms comes from in Section 4.2.
- ²⁶ This also plays an explanatory role in Meyers' account (Meyers, 2002, p. 23) and in Bhandry's analysis of men's complicity in patriarchal oppression. Bhandry cites 'Being at home' as a key motivator of complicity (Bhandry, 2020, p. 180). Heidegger also uses this phrase to describe the comfort of familiar social scripts and our immersion in the everyday world. Although for him, 'Being-at-home' can also conceal the possibility of our own free and more authentic modes of Being (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 233). I develop this account in Section 4.2.
- ²⁷ See Heidegger's claims regarding the 'temptation' of falling back onto familiar social narratives and roles (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 221).
- ²⁸ The Burnham example and the phrase 'unreflective conformism' are taken from Blattner (2013). For more on the way we alienate ourselves from our freedom by relating unquestioningly to social roles, see Knowles (2019, 2021).
- ²⁹ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.
- ³⁰ For examples of this in a phenomenological context, see Heidegger ([1927] 1962, section 27, esp. pp. 164–165) and Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, chapter 10).
- ³¹ It might be argued that the account of internalised oppression active in some accounts of adaptive preference offers a similar analysis, explaining how oppressive external conditions can distort our preferences or desires such that we come to desire what is oppressive to us (Cudd, 2006; Meyers, 2002; Mill, [1869] 2006). What is key from the phenomenological point of view is that the global analysis is not explicable in terms of the impositions of oppression, as I discuss below.
- ³² Textually, this is a description of inauthentic modes of existence. Heidegger characterises freedom and authenticity as an achievement (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 167) and agents' everyday modes of Being in terms of turning away from their freedom and authenticity (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, pp. 222–224).
- ³³ For more on this point, see Knowles (2019, p. 254).
- ³⁴ I develop this account further in Section 4.2.
- ³⁵ See Bicchieri (2006, esp. chapter one).
- ³⁶ See, for example, Axelrod (1986) and Coleman (1990).
- ³⁷ Meyers (2002, p. 23) also makes this point. On uncertainty aversion in decision theory, see Ellsberg (1961); on people's need for closure on a topic, rather than uncertainty see Kruglanski and Webster (1994); Kruglanski (2004). On the related topic of ambiguity intolerance, see Frenkel-Brunswik (1949); Budner (1962); for a comparison of uncertainty and ambiguity intolerance, see Grenier, Barrette, and Ladouceur (2005).
- ³⁸ Beauvoir argues that human existence is characterised by a fundamental ambiguity that cannot be resolved (Beauvoir, [1947] 1948).
- ³⁹ Heidegger argues that we do not have an essence other than the fact we exist there is no fixed or final meaning to our existence (Heidegger, [1927] 1962, p. 67).
- ⁴⁰ 'Turning away' may also feature in the analysis from adaptive preference, for example, as an attempt to overcome cognitive dissonance (Elster, 1983, p. 124). However, on the adaptive preference account, the explanation for such 'turning away' is again the imposition of external factors: a constraint on our options and a lack of opportunity in the form of a mismatch between our preferences and the way the world is.
- ⁴¹ This is a gloss of the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE) observed by psychologists. See Jones and Harris (1967) and Ross (1977).
- ⁴² For the phenomenologists discussed in Section 4, we can say that moral responsibility is grounded in self-responsibility.
- ⁴³ Although in a looser sense than Westlund (2003) employs it.
- ⁴⁴ For more on this point, see Knowles (2021, pp. 231–235).
- ⁴⁵ This account has certain parallels with Hay's analysis of agents' responsibility to resist their own oppression (Hay, 2011, pp. 31–32). For a discussion of this parallel, see Knowles (2021, p. 233).

- ⁴⁶ Girls Gone Wild is an adult entertainment franchise, which seeks out young college-age women at party locations, particularly during the Spring Break holiday in the US, and invites them to expose themselves and simulate sexual acts for the camera. The results are then commercially distributed, although the women in the videos are not paid.
- ⁴⁷ Whereas Dennett suggests that people often refuse this kind of responsibility because it would make them morally responsible for their actions, Waller argues that take-charge responsibility is distinct from moral responsibility (Waller, 2011, pp. 107–109).
- ⁴⁸ The phenomenological account of self-responsibility leaves open how self-responsibility will manifest itself in day to day life. In some cases, it may involve changing one's way of life, while in others, it may only involve reorienting oneself to the norms, narratives and roles one inhabits by recognising that they are not essentially binding on us at an existential level, although they may be compelled and enforced socially. For more on this point see Knowles (2021).
- ⁴⁹ Although the early Sartre may be committed to the stronger thesis (Sartre, [1943] 2003), it is not clear that Beauvoir is (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011). Similarly, Heidegger presents a complex picture of the irresolvable pull between freedom and unfreedom, authenticity and inauthenticity (Heidegger, [1927] 1962).
- ⁵⁰ As Heidegger argues, 'only a free being can be unfree' (Heidegger, [1928] 1984, p. 191).
- ⁵¹ For more on this point, see Carman (2000) and Knowles (2021).
- ⁵² Addressing the question of how complicity will be overcome on the phenomenological account is beyond the scope of this paper. However, one consequence of the phenomenological analysis is that it will not be assumed that external change alone will necessarily ensure complicity is overcome. There will also need to be, as Beauvoir puts it, 'an inner metamorphosis' of the complicit agent (Beauvoir, [1949] 2011, p. 764). For more on this point, see Knowles (2019, 2021).

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How to cite this article: Knowles, C. (2021). Beyond adaptive preferences: Rethinking women's complicity in their own subordination. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12742>