Dupes of Patriarchy: Feminist Strong Substantive Autonomy's Epistemological Weaknesses

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Feminist strong substantive autonomy (FSSA), as presented by Natalie Stoljar and Anita Superson, pronounces judgment on the autonomy status of certain women living under oppression. These women act on deformed desires, Superson explains, and as deformed desires cannot be the agent's own, the women are heteronomous. Stoljar argues that some women's choices violate the Feminist Intuition; by acting on false and oppressive values, these women render themselves heteronomous. I argue against Stoljar and Superson on epistemological grounds. I present six different ways in which agents' choices can be related to deformed desires, with varying results for their autonomy statuses. I show that Stoljar and Superson are not able to distinguish properly among the differing autonomy statuses in these six cases, because doing so requires attention to agents' inner processes of decision-making, as those processes are enacted in the agents' social and temporal contexts. Stoljar and Superson judge others' autonomy statuses based on abstract generalizations rather than via empirical attention to agents' actual decision-making processes. Consequently, their judgments are not adequate to the lived self-direction of real persons. Assessing others' autonomy status requires consideration of agents' inner choice-making in sociotemporal context, which favors a procedural or weak substantive account of autonomy.

I. Feminist Strong Substantive Autonomy and Oppression

Anita Superson and Natalie Stoljar advance our understanding of the problem of oppression, showing how patriarchy can lead women to adopt values undermining their capacity for self-government. Oppression is not only a struggle

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against external impediments; oppressed agents are socialized to internalize oppressive preferences. As Stoljar and Superson show, this insight poses a challenge to feminist autonomy theorists: What can it mean for oppressed people to be self-directed when their selves have been colonized by patriarchy?

Nevertheless, as I argue here, Superson's and Stoljar's account tends to attribute heteronomy to the oppressed without sufficient investigation. Superson's and Stoljar's feminist strong substantive autonomy (hereafter FSSA) has epistemological weaknesses.[1] I argue that FSSA cannot reliably assess real women's autonomy because it attends neither to agents' inner processes nor to their psychological states, nor to the sociotemporal context in which agents' choice-making unfolds. Hence procedural and weak substantive accounts are epistemologically better suited for assessing agents' autonomy under oppressive socialization because these accounts analyze the detailed workings of agents' choice-making.[2]

I begin by presenting Superson's and Stoljar's FSSA.[3] Because my epistemological argument rests on distinctions among agents' actual decision-making processes, I consider both Stoljar's interpretation of a pioneering study on non-contracepting women, and the study itself. Kristin Luker's study of risk-taking women is often referenced in this debate, but the sociotemporal context that undergirds many of the women's choices is ignored.[4] I present six different ways in which oppressed agents may act with regard to deformed desires in context, and argue that a successful account of autonomy must be able to discriminate among these six possibilities.

A review of concepts may be helpful. Procedural theorists, such as Harry Frankfurt (1998), Marilyn Friedman (1986), and John Christman (1987), contend that autonomy is content-neutral. That is, agents achieve autonomy by performing appropriate procedures (such as reflective or counterfactual endorsement) upon their desires and values, and then by acting upon only those that survive the autonomy-conferring process. Any desire may be pursued autonomously as long as the agent has, for instance, rationally assessed and endorsed it. The content of the desire is irrelevant; all that matters is that an appropriate evaluative procedure was used.

Weak substantive accounts address the psychological damage effected by oppressive socialization. For weak substantive theorists, such as Trudy Govier (1993), Robin Dillon (1992), and the later Paul Benson (2005), autonomy requires an agent to have values that reflect her self-worth, self-respect, or self-trust. Agents who exhibit these character strengths will resist autonomy-undermining socialization. This view has indirect content—weak substance—because it assesses agents' values obliquely. The weakly substantive autonomous agent need not endorse any particular moral or epistemic norms, but her choice-making ought nevertheless to demonstrate certain psychological traits. Agents must respond to their socialization from a perspective of psychological health.[5]

But strong substantive theorists argue that certain desires and values are incompatible with autonomy, regardless of the agent's evaluative procedures or psychological health. Instead, autonomous agents enact true moral and epistemic norms. Susan Wolf requires an agent's desires to be "sane," "rational," and morally correct (Wolf 1990). For Wolf, Stoljar, and the early Benson (Benson 1987), autonomy competency requires normative competency: only agents capable of determining the rightness and wrongness of their values will be able to reject those that impair autonomy.

Superson's and Stoljar's feminist variant on strong substantive autonomy—FSSA—focuses on "deformed desires,"[6] desires that undercut the agent's welfare, reinforce oppressive social structures, and rest on objectively false values. Since oppression often shapes agents to identify with these desires, they may survive reflective evaluation and may be enacted by psychologically healthy agents. Stoljar and Superson therefore conclude that only strong substantive autonomy can explain the incompatibility of deformed desires and autonomy.

II. The Debate So Far

Superson's FSSA

Superson's "Deformed Desires and Informed Desire Tests" argues that since desire-satisfaction theories of rational choice cannot exclude deformed desires as irrational, the theories require supplementation (Superson 2005). Agents who hold deformed desires are ignorant about their own value, an ignorance that formal theories of rational choice cannot address. Consequently, we must extend the concept of rationality to disallow desires not in keeping with the agent's equal worth. In her exploration of rationality's desiderata, Superson aligns herself with FSSA: there are false and oppressive values that, if internalized, make their holders heteronomous.

Superson incorporates a response to Uma Narayan. In "Minds of their Own: Choices, Autonomy, Cultural Practices, and Other Women," Narayan argues that Westerners often mistakenly assess the autonomy of women in other cultures, characterizing them either as "prisoners of patriarchy" or "dupes of patriarchy." Narayan says we should instead see the women as "bargaining with patriarchy": they consider the advantages and disadvantages of cultural practices, and then determine their response. Veiling, for instance, is a practice many Muslim women find physically uncomfortable and socially isolating. Yet at the same time, many say "they would feel naked if they went out without their burqua" (Narayan 2002, 420). Veiling comports with their religious and social identity, and has practical advantages such as enabling them to move about the city

without detection by passing male relatives. Thus many veiling women exercise their agency in deciding how to act within the circumstances that are socially available to them.

But Superson contends that Narayan overestimates the agency possible for veiling women. Neither dupes nor bargainers are autonomous. Bargaining with patriarchy "cannot make these desires [their] own", as these desires are "not self-respecting" (Superson 2005, 116). Even desires that feel like one's own are not one's own, Superson says, if those desires support patriarchy (116). A woman whose desires benefit patriarchy *has* patriarchy's desires, and "Allowing others' desires to rule oneself is inconsistent with recognizing oneself as an equal" (122). Thus Muslim veilers, whether dupes of or bargainers with patriarchy, are heteronomous.

Superson does acknowledge that there are benefits for women in enacting deformed desires, such as promotions at work and "catching" a man. "But these benefits are at best short-term and short-sighted: … the conformist usually does not get to the top … and the partnered woman often is expected to conform to autonomy-denying 'feminine' roles or, even worse, suffers abuse," she writes (111). A dupe of patriarchy "does not know deep down what is objectively good for her" (121).

Stoljar's FSSA

Stoljar also argues that bargainers with patriarchy are heteronomous, and that only FSSA can accurately diagnose that heteronomy. In "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," Stoljar argues that neither procedural nor weak substantive autonomy can explain the heteronomy of those enacting deformed desires, but FSSA can. FSSA centers on "the feminist intuition, which claims that preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous" (Stoljar 2000, 95). Stoljar writes that procedural and weak substantive autonomy identify as autonomous some agents whom the Feminist Intuition would assess instead as heteronomous; this tells against procedural and weak substantive autonomy.

Stoljar uses Luker's study of noncontracepting women to show the incompatibility of autonomy and deformed desires. Luker's women are heteronomous, says Stoljar, because "Women who accept the norm that pregnancy and motherhood increase their worthiness accept something *false*" (Stoljar 2000, 109). Stoljar writes that fear of being seen as sexually available or sexually experienced led women interviewed by Kristen Luker to risk pregnancies they did not want, and that "the overall picture derived from [Luker's] interviews is one of women motivated in large part by the following norms: it is inappropriate for women to have sex lives; it is unseemly for women to plan for and initiate sex; … and women

are worthwhile marriage partners only if they are capable of childbearing" (99). Because the women endorse these values as their own, the values will not be dislodged by critical reflection or psychological strength. The heteronomy of Luker's women can be seen only on a strong substantive account of autonomy.

III. Luker's Women

Luker's *Taking Chances* explains noncontracepting women's behavior as a case of tacit bargaining, balancing the costs of contraception and the potential benefits of pregnancy (Luker 1975). Women navigate biological, medical, and financial costs, and social costs such as acknowledging one's sexual availability. The benefits of pregnancy include affirmation of one's fertility and self-worth, and clarification of a partner's commitment. Some of these costs and benefits sound odd, as Stoljar noticed. Surely it is not so damaging for contemporary women to acknowledge their sexual availability.

But would we say the same for women of a previous era? How would we assess the choices of women navigating sex and reproduction forty years ago, before the widespread changes wrought by second-wave feminism? Luker interviewed her subjects in 1971–72.[7] These women lived in a different social, medical, and legal context.

Women in Luker's era averaged 58% of men's pay (Luker 1975, 118) in sex-segregated jobs with little opportunity for advancement or personal development. Accordingly, motherhood and marriage were among the few outlets for women's energies, a situation that has improved significantly for contemporary middle-class women.

Luker's women were born into a world where abortion was illegal and the pill was unavailable; that changed around the time they became sexually active. Abortion was thus a newly available, legal, contraceptive back-up method,[8] which made risk-taking less risky (112–13, 135). Rapid adoption of the pill[9] undercut men's willingness to use condoms. Thus Luker's women inhabited a context different from ours: since the advent of HIV/AIDS, condom use has again become standard; men have reassumed some contraceptive responsibility; and contraceptive risk-taking may cause death.

Clinics now accommodate walk-ins and offer discounts; in Luker's day appointments and full payment were required. Contemporary medicine offers a lower-dose pill than that available to Luker's women; the higher doses of the late 1960s caused greater emotional and physical side effects, leading many women to discontinue use. Gynecologists in Luker's time wanted to verify women's fertility: many took their patients off the pill to see if they ovulated, which Luker calls "risk-taking behavior on the part of a doctor" (Luker 1975, 62). These doctors rarely suggested back-up contraception. Women's magazines were not rife

then, as they are now, with advice on contraception and on introducing the topic with a new partner. Many women did not know that the average noncontracepting couple has an 80% chance of conceiving within a year. Fully two-thirds of the interviewees had been told by their doctors "that they couldn't get pregnant, or would have trouble doing so" (63). Although Luker determined that the doctors had intended to convey that if women had trouble conceiving they should seek treatment, this was not what the women understood. Believing themselves infertile, contraception seemed unnecessary.

Finally, Luker's women considered it socially costly to plan for intercourse because it was costly, more so than it would be today. Since the abortions took place around 1971, Luker's men and women were socialized in sexual mores in the 1950s and 60s. As reported by Luker's subjects, sexually active women did in fact lose status, being called, for instance, "rabbits" (Luker 1975, 42). Men were unlikely to court such women respectfully, treating them instead, as one of Luker's women said, as a "sexual service station" (49).

Surprisingly, neither Stoljar nor her critics consider Luker's women's context. In fact, they never mention it.[10] Stoljar assesses these women as though they were contemporaries. But Luker's women inhabited a different social world.

Doubtless, some of Luker's women acted unreflectively or self-doubtingly on deformed desires, and would be autonomous on neither procedural nor substantive analyses. But the interviews show that many enacted their desires reflectively, and some weighed costs and benefits without being motivated by deformed desires at all.[11] One of Luker's women became pregnant after a romantic episode with her husband outdoors on their secluded property (Luker 1975, 50), which neither wanted to interrupt by returning to the house for contraception. Some of Luker's women describe themselves in terms that reveal only the functioning of risk-oriented personalities (90). Another woman explained that she stopped using contraception because she resented bearing a responsibility that impeded her sexual enjoyment. "Here I'm so wrapped up in being scared and he's getting the good end of it," she said. After stopping contraception, "I did get a lot more out of it, not worrying about it.... I'm not getting pills for his benefit.... Sex was a one-way street. He gets all the feelings, girls have all the hassles" (127–28). While this risk-taking was perhaps imprudent, it represented a protest against, rather than a capitulation to, deformed desires. Stoljar never mentions the presence of such women among Luker's interviewees. Her generalizations about Luker's interviewees appear even to deny these women's existence: "Luker's subjects lack confidence in asserting their sexual agency and as a result, do not have a robust sense of their own authority in asserting their claims" (Stoljar 2000, 98).

Superson also ignores contextual factors, claiming that veiling women ought not to comply with their society's expectations, but ought instead to defy them. This is stirring rhetoric, but it ignores the fact that in some settings,

noncompliant women are severely punished. It is hard to be self-directed when dead. Women coping with life under the Taliban face challenges most of us need not navigate. Additionally, Superson's assessment of bargaining is too pessimistic. Women who fit in at work are not necessarily too conformist to be promoted. Not all heterosexual partnerships require the woman to deny her autonomy or submit to abuse. "Women are deceived, then, about there being no more to the story of desire-satisfaction than receiving the 'false benefits' of conformity," Superson writes (Superson 2005, 111). However, the reality of women's bargaining with patriarchy is more complicated.

IV. Six Agents

There are various ways in which agents respond internally to oppressive socialization, and these differences are not readily identifiable by external assessors: I raise six possibilities.

Contemporary American women are expected to shave their legs and underarms.[12] Ann shaves because models and celebrities have smooth skin, and because Ann's family and friends think hairy women are disgusting. Ann's "deformed desires" are so entrenched that it would not even occur to her to notice that she has them. Ann is an unreflective desirer.

Barb also shaves, although it bothers her that men are not expected to do so. She dislikes the time expenditure and nicking herself. But she feels more attractive when she shaves, particularly since her body hair is dark. Barb reflectively decides the inconvenience is tolerable, since she dislikes being hairy. Barb is not an unthinking dupe, but a reflective desirer.

Cath abjures female beauty ideals, and did not shave until she became a women's rights attorney. Judges treat skirt-wearing female attorneys better, and juries will penalize her clients if she does not shave. So she shaves—purely because she has weighed the costs and benefits. Cath is a nondesiring bargainer. If bargaining with patriarchy enables the pursuit of more important goals, then Cath will bargain. Her compliance is entirely extrinsic, oriented toward the outcomes she'll achieve.

Deb also ignores female beauty ideals. She pays no attention to celebrities or to fashion. Deb is a highly ranked competitive swimmer, and shaves to decrease drag in the water. Any bit of increase in speed justifies the bother. Despite external appearances, Deb neither has deformed desires nor bargains with patriarchy. Deb is a faux bargainer.

Eve considers female beauty ideals corrupt and oppressive. In protest, she does not shave, and wears clothing that reveals her legs and underarms. Eve's body hair demonstrates her feminist courage; she hopes in this and other ways to mitigate women's oppression. Eve rejects internal deformed desires and external bargaining.

Fran, like Eve, does not shave. But this is not Fran's own unimpeded choice. Fran thinks hairy women are unattractive, and thus is repelled by her own appearance. Fran's husband Fred forbids her to wear makeup or to shave. Fran feels ugly, but she obeys Fred; she is not self-directed, but Fred-directed. Fran's heteronomy prevents her from enacting her beauty-related deformed desires. Ironically, acting on her deformed desires would signal an increase in her autonomy. Although Fran's behavior appears to accord externally with the autonomy standards of the feminist intuition,[13] she is arguably even more heteronomous than Ann. Ann is unconflicted, whereas Fran knows that she is acting against her aesthetic desires because of a more powerful desire to submit to Fred. Fran is both conflicted and aware of her conflict, yet she does not resolve the conflict.

Are these women autonomous? On Superson's and Stoljar's account, Ann is clearly heteronomous, and Eve autonomous. FSSA would call Barb heteronomous too, since her desires and behavior are opposed to correct feminist norms. But Barb's reflectiveness differentiates her from Ann's unquestioning acceptance: Barb questions her deformed desires, even though she ultimately retains them. For any agent who eventually rejects deformed desires, Barb's state is a necessary first step. Thus although autonomy theorists of good will can disagree about Barb's autonomy status, we ought to agree that she is *more* autonomous and *less* heteronomous than Ann. Autonomy theory ought to explain, furthermore, *how* it is that Barb is more autonomous than Ann.

Cath, like Eve, should be called autonomous (ceteris paribus). She is self-directed toward feminist values and not motivated by deformed desires, so her autonomy is evident on some construals of FSSA. Yet by shaving, she bargains with patriarchy: she does not demand that judges change their sexist attitudes. Instead she externally enacts female beauty ideals and then gets on with the work of helping women.

Deb should also be understood as autonomous (ceteris paribus). She has no relevant deformed desires and is not even aware that her behavior might appear to enact them, nor does Deb bargain with patriarchy. Nevertheless, Deb looks to any passerby to be a compliant (if unusually muscular) female, just as Fran falsely appears to be a feminist rebel. True, neither Stoljar nor Superson theorizes autonomy in such a way that Deb or Cath should be considered heteronomous. But when it comes to actual cases, both Stoljar and Superson overlook the presence of Debs and Caths in their samples. Fran's case shows that behavior externally according with the feminist intuition can even be enacted heteronomously, which means that FSSA cannot distinguish between heteronomy and autonomy using observation at a distance. In order to see the differences in autonomy status among these six types of agents, and to avoid mistaken assessments, we need to pay empirical attention to their contextualized decision-making processes.

V. FSSA's Epistemological Weaknesses

Careless Application

These cases show that autonomy cannot be accurately assessed without paying careful attention to agents' inner responses to external cultural circumstances. Some agents who initially appear heteronomous by contemporary Western standards are, on further investigation, not. Certainly many of Luker's women are not heteronomous, even by FSSA's standards. Yet Stoljar makes generalized claims such as "Luker's subjects are motivated by oppressive and misguided norms that are internalized as a result of feminine socialization" (Stoljar 2000, 98). Superson's attitude toward veiling women is similar.

But why is it a problem that Stoljar and Superson overgeneralize when applying their analysis? Surely that only tells against misapplication, rather than the analysis itself. Nothing in the theoretical content of FSSA advocates judging agents' autonomy status based on external behavior; Stoljar's and Superson's attributions are simply practical mistakes. Since FSSA's focus is on agents' motivations, FSSA theorists can exercise care not to generalize about noncontracepting women and Muslim veilers, remembering that some may not be acting on deformed desires, despite their suspicious external behavior.

Yet in practice Stoljar and Superson overlook real women's lives, motivations, cultural contexts, and, in some cases, probable autonomy: Stoljar attributes motivation to Luker's women despite interviews that contradict that attribution, and Superson assesses veiling women as heteronomous without investigating their actual motivations. These may be mistakes of careless application. But the mistakes are less likely to occur using procedural and weak substantive analyses, because applying those theories requires consideration of agents' inner states.

Theoretical Insensitivity to Absence of Deformed Desires

FSSA tends to call whole groups of real women heteronomous without noticing significant individual exceptions, due to careless application of the theory. Sometimes, however, the reason for the mistake is a conceptual lacuna in FSSA itself. FSSA overlooks that some agents are nondesiring bargainers and some are faux bargainers; it cannot distinguish these differences in agents' bargaining. FSSA views any bargaining with patriarchy as a case where agents bargain with their own deformed desires, bargaining on the basis of their own oppressive values. But nondesiring bargainers and faux bargainers are not acting on internalized oppressive values.[14]

FSSA acknowledges three possibilities: one can be a dupe enacting one's deformed desires, a bargainer who reflectively enacts her deformed desires, or a rebel rejecting deformed desires. But FSSA overlooks the three remaining possibilities: nondesiring bargainers (such as Cath), nondesiring agents who falsely look like bargainers (such as Deb), and cases (such as Fran's) where acting on one's deformed desires would surprisingly show the agent to be, at least in that act, independent of another's control and relatively autonomous. FSSA should acknowledge the existence of nondesiring bargainers and faux bargainers. Although Luker's interviews reveal women who fit the profile Stoljar emphasizes —they take contraceptive risks because they have internalized norms against women being interested in sex—the interviews also reveal many who do not. Some of Luker's women resemble Cath, bargaining externally, and many resemble Deb, falsely appearing to bargain with patriarchy.

Cath-like women in Luker's sample include those who did not use contraception because then men would treat them disrespectfully, as a "sexual service station" (Luker 1975, 49). These women were bargaining with men's values. Deb-like faux bargainers among Luker's women include the wife who had spontaneous outdoor marital sex; those who took contraceptive risks due to their risk-oriented personalities; those who rejected contraception to repudiate male prerogatives; those who didn't want artificial chemicals, hormones, or devices in their bodies (43, 44); those afraid of side effects caused by the pill's earlier stronger formulation (61); those whose doctors took them off the pill because of side effects (52) or to check for ovulation (62); those unable to get an appointment (52); those who disliked seeing doctors (51); those who couldn't afford contraception or a doctor's fee (45, 51); those who misused their contraceptive method (164); and those whose male partners falsely claimed to be infertile, trickery that Luker says "was infrequently but consistently reported in this study" (58). Furthermore, since two-thirds of Luker's women believed their doctors had told them that they were infertile, and most did not know that the average couple has an 80% chance of conceiving during a year of unprotected intercourse, many of these women did not understand themselves as risk-takers. Stoljar overlooks these cases, claiming that Luker's women are "nonautonomous because they are overly influenced in their decisions about contraception by stereotypical and incorrect norms of femininity and sexual agency" (Stoljar 2000, 98). But contraceptive risk-taking is not always motivated by deformed desires, particularly when the sociotemporal context makes contraception hard to get and use.[15]

Superson also overlooks that some Muslim veilers are nondesiring nonbargainers. During the 1979 Iranian Revolution, some women began veiling to express their opposition to the Shah and his Western affiliation. The veil was a means to assert the value of Iran's own non-Western traditions, and thus a sign of rebellion and political self-assertion.

Superson and Stoljar both use language that conflates internal and external bargaining; but bargaining with one's own (deformed) desires differs from bargaining with social expectations the agent cannot change.[16] For instance, Superson describes bargaining as "bargaining over [one's own] conflicted desires" (Superson 2005, 115) and writes of a woman who "concedes partly for patriarchal reasons" that any concession to patriarchy leaves her "still under its grip" (115). But Superson nowhere distinguishes between "conceding for patriarchal reasons" for 1) the agent's own patriarchal reasons, as opposed to 2) the patriarchal reasons of others surrounding the agent. On Superson's account, "The person who truly exhibits full agency does not sacrifice herself, but *maintains* a sense of self *through* her inherently individual interests" (115, emphasis Superson's). What then of the Muslim woman who does not want to sacrifice herself, who wants to maintain her sense of self and pursue her interests, despite living in a culture where nonveiling women are severely punished? In such a case, engaging in external behaviors that bargain with patriarchy's expectations may be necessary to self-respect and self-preservation. But Superson derides such a woman, who is trapped in a cultural context she cannot change or escape,[17] as "lack[ing] sufficient belief in her self-worth to insist that *men* be the ones to change their attitudes toward women who do not veil.... [H]er principles, not just her desires, are wrong" (115, emphasis Superson's). Superson assumes that oppressed women have the power to insist that men change their attitudes. Sometimes women have or can gain this cultural power, but where they cannot, insisting may cause the agent's marginalization, poverty, or death.

Stoljar's approach is similar. She writes that Luker's women are motivated by norms such as "pregnancy and childbearing promote one's worthiness by proving one is a 'real woman'" (Stoljar 2000, 99). This has two possible interpretations: 1) Luker's interviewees considered themselves "real women" only if they proved they were fertile; and 2) Luker's interviewees knew their potential mates would consider them "real women" only if they proved their fertility. A marriage-seeking woman—and in the 1960s women had powerful economic and social reasons to seek marriage—had to contend with men's values.

FSSA overlooks the fact that oppressive norms as held by privileged others generate social consequences for oppressed agents. When oppressed agents violate such norms, their well-formed desires—for example, safety, security, and developmental opportunities—may be undercut. A cost of oppression, then, is that agents may have to bargain with *other* people's values.[18] Even women who prefer not to veil may do so in order to secure food and shelter; even women who repudiate traditional sexual norms may abide by them to obtain companionship. These are difficult choices. But women can make them without having internalized the norms they represent. Some agents bargain with patriarchy based on well-formed desires for security and safety, desires pursued because of agents' belief in their equal worth.

Ignores Context-Dependent Variability of Deformed Desires and Bargaining

FSSA has a third epistemological problem: despite focusing on oppressive socialization, it ignores the context of social shaping in its evaluation of deformed desirers. Remember that FSSA's central concern is that oppressed agents have been so thoroughly socialized that their values are patriarchy's and not their own. But having one's own values is not just an abstract matter of distancing oneself from deformed desires, because in context, some deformed desires are more pervasive and powerful than others. If the deformed desires are socially widespread and insistently held, to question them at all indicates some mental independence. Thus a 1971 reflective desirer concerning sexual agency shows greater autonomy and independence from patriarchy than does a 2012 reflective desirer concerning sexual agency. If agents question deformed desires where such questioning is socially supported, that questioning shows less autonomy than does questioning desires whose social force is pervasive and insistent.

Superson writes from a cultural perspective in which pressure to veil is nonexistent, but she passes judgment on agents shaped by strong pro-veiling pressure. The agents whose autonomy she judges do not experience the ease of resistance to veiling she enjoys. Similarly, contemporary women find it reasonably easy not to violate the feminist intuition about contraception; but for Luker's women, not violating the feminist intuition was harder. Thus when any of Luker's women, subject to much stronger forces, nevertheless question their desires, they exercise reflective agency that indicates some independence from patriarchy. FSSA, however, ignores the differing force of deformed desires in varying social contexts: it portrays deformed desires as abstractions that extend unchanged across differing cultures and times.

Just as the pull of deformed desires varies by context, so too do the severity, pervasiveness, and unavoidability of bargaining costs. In the hair-removal cases, the costs of refusing to bargain with patriarchy are not especially severe. They are pervasive, but avoidable (one could wear pants, for instance). However, many Muslim women would experience severe, pervasive, and unavoidable costs for refusing to veil. These differential costs must be taken into account when assessing agents' autonomy; bargaining with patriarchy occurs not just in the agent's head but also in *patriarchy*, and patriarchy has varying instantiations. Luker's women bargained with a patriarchy where the costs for women's sexual availability were more severe, pervasive, and unavoidable than those imposed by contemporary patriarchy. We cannot fairly evaluate either veiling women or Luker's women without considering how the pull of deformed desires and the costs of bargaining in their contexts differ from our own.

Unclear Concept of Deformed Desires

Suppose that Superson and Stoljar were to stipulate explicitly that agents are heteronomous in choice-making that is motivated by deformed desires, regardless of whether this motivational fact is known. FSSA could define actual deformed desirers as heteronomous, but avoid assessing whole groups of oppressed women as heteronomous. Would FSSA's epistemological problems be eliminated?

They would be eased, but not eliminated. Because the concept of deformed desires is unclear, it cannot be used to discern agents' autonomy statuses. Stoljar's feminist intuition says that "preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous" (Stoljar 2000, 95) and Superson explains deformed desires in part by saying that "their satisfaction aims to lower their bearer's value" (Superson 2005, 111). But what is meant by "influence"? "Aim"? Who aims to lower desirers' value? The agents themselves? That seems unlikely: even where enacting a deformed desire proves to be self-harming, the agent enacted it believing she would thereby help herself. Might the aimer be patriarchy? Patriarchy is powerful, but it does not have intentions. Part of what makes its eradication difficult is that its insidious effects are often not the conscious intent of individual persons. A remaining possibility is that the satisfaction of a deformed desire itself aims to lower a desirer's value; this is Superson's phrasing. But I do not know how to make sense of satisfactions themselves having aims.

Similar difficulties beset the notion that deformed desires are those preferences "influenced" by oppressive norms. How strong is this influence? If agents' preferences are influenced-as-determined by oppressive norms, then their heteronomy needs no analysis: agents whose actions are directed by others or by society's norms rather than by themselves are, by definition, heteronomous. But surely oppressed agents are not all deterministically controlled by their socialization, incapable of any thought or motivation of their own.[19]

Is "influence" then weaker than deterministic control? Even Eve's preferences are influenced by oppressive norms of femininity. Virtually all agents in a society will be nondeterministically influenced by its oppressive norms, including privileged agents. So if being influenced by oppressive norms makes people heteronomous, then nearly all agents, oppressed or not, are heteronomous. If deformed desires are defined so that almost all agents are categorizable as heteronomous, then FSSA cannot meet its goal of identifying the distinctive cause of oppressed people's heteronomy.

Stoljar does not discuss Luker's men,[20] but their motivations show the influence of oppressive norms concerning female sexuality. For instance, men who seek romantic relationships with stereotypically nonsexual women, or who will marry only women whose fertility is assured, are influenced by oppressive norms. In the first case, the men are arguably influenced to act against their own interests or desires. Of course, Luker's men, as men, are not oppressed. Yet Stoljar's

omission of Luker's men occludes the reality that almost all agents' preferences are influenced by oppressive socialization.

In fact, the choices of Luker's men strongly resembled the choices of Luker's women. Most of the men interviewed were passive about contraception: they knew their women were not on the pill; they knew they themselves were not using condoms; they knew a pregnancy might occur; yet they continued to have sex despite not wanting to become pregnant. Luker's men are contraceptively passive but not oppressed, so contraceptive passivity can result from causes other than oppression. Some preferences that appear "influenced" by oppressive socialization result instead from a biological or psychological orientation toward timidity, for instance. The vagueness of "deformed desires" obscures the presence of oppressed agents acting on nonoppressive motivations; consequently, the "deformed desires" concept muddies the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous agents.

Overdetermines Oppressed Women as Heteronomous

Correlatively, without a clearer concept of deformed desires, oppressed agents appear determined to act by their deformed desires. In fact, the concept of deformed desires looks circular. First, we stipulate that oppressed agents are socialized into having deformed desires. Second, when asked what shows that these agents' suspicious choices result from deformed desires, and not from other human causes, the answer is that these agents are oppressed. Empirical investigation is unnecessary. We can know oppressed agents enact deformed desires because these are the motivations generating oppressed agents' actions.

On this view, oppressed agents enact deformed desires; nonoppressed agents do not. Stoljar shows this tendency by omitting Luker's men and by treating smokers' motivations as nonheteronomous. She says that "we are unlikely to judge that [smokers'] decisions are not autonomous because smokers are not typically opting to smoke on the basis of false and oppressive norms" (Stoljar 2000, 99).[21] Suspicious decisions made by nonoppressed agents are nevertheless called autonomous, whereas suspicious decisions made by oppressed agents are called heteronomous.[22] If deformed desires are understood as the default motivation of oppressed women, we will assess such women as heteronomous regardless of their actual internal responses to oppressive social shaping.

Abstract Intuitions

All five arguments above share a theme: FSSA ignores the epistemological dangers attendant upon assessing others' autonomy. The dangers are intensified by

FSSA's focus on the feminist intuition, because abstract intuitions do not reliably explain particular people. It is easier to construct an abstract dupe than it is to understand an actual person fairly. Interestingly, in its zeal to make autonomy impervious to problematic socialization, FSSA overlooks the role of social context for assessors and agents alike. FSSA's sixth epistemological problem is that it overlooks the cultural locatedness of the feminist intuition itself.

All intuitions are socially located, according to metaphilosophical studies (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich 2003; Buckwalter and Stich 2010). When asked to resolve philosophical puzzles using abstract intuitions, men and women answered differently, as did people from varying cultures and classes. The fact that people in varying social locations experience differing intuitions suggests either that there are no such intuitions or that our understanding of them is socially shaped. In either case, intuitions about oppressed groups are prime candidates for the replication of social prejudice, including the feminist intuition. Unless we recognize our own social shaping, we run the risk of seeing oppressed women as dupes of patriarchy.

Procedural and weak substantive autonomy are unlikely to make the epistemological mistake of seeing all oppressed women as dupes of patriarchy, for two reasons. The first reason is that procedural and weak substantive autonomy are focused not on abstract intuitions, but on the inner work a particular agent performs in choice-making. Weak substantive and procedural autonomy do this differently: procedural theorists consider whether an agent has performed an autonomy-conferring procedure, such as reflecting rationally on her choice-making. Weak substantive theorists assess whether an agent chooses with appropriate self-trust, self-respect, or self-esteem. Determining whether an agent meets these standards requires considering the agent's inner response to her specific circumstances. Rational reflection has no prescribed course, but incorporates the agent's beliefs, values, desires, and sociotemporal context. The enactment of self-respect may differ between contemporary American and Luker's women, given women's changing access to external goods and treatment by men. Hence empirical investigation is necessary to determine an agent's autonomy status. A procedural or weak substantive theorist who wanted to assess Luker's women's autonomy would attend to Luker's interviews. What evaluative processes and psychological capacities were employed, and how are these illuminated by the women's sociotemporal contexts? Procedural autonomy and weak substantive autonomy are positioned to observe oppressed agents' resistance to deformed desires, wherever such resistance occurs, instead of reifying the trope that oppressed people are dupes.

Here the FSSA theorist may object. Weak substantive and procedural views cannot reliably detect cases in which deformed desires generate heteronomy. An oppressively socialized agent can rationally reflect yet still endorse deformed desires, because the desires are so entrenched that they survive critical evaluation. Or she may enact deformed desires self-trustingly and self-respectingly,

again because oppressive socialization has shaped her to pursue deformed desires even while psychologically healthy. Thus the epistemological access of non-FSSA accounts is irrelevant, since any autonomy statuses they identify are metaphysically deficient.

Although this objection might appear conclusive to FSSA theorists, FSSA's metaphysical claims remain controversial in the larger philosophical community. Meanwhile, FSSA has epistemological weaknesses that procedural and weak substantive autonomy do not, or so I argue. FSSA, as currently construed, errs systematically when assessing the autonomy status of oppressed women. Hence even if FSSA is ultimately vindicated metaphysically, it remains epistemologically troubled.

A second reason that weak substantive and procedural accounts are unlikely to make the same epistemological mistake as FSSA is that applying the autonomy criteria of weak substantive and procedural autonomy to real people is unavoidably demanding. It is complicated to determine whether another person's choice-making shows psychological health, or was vetted by rational reflection; care must be taken. This may explain why procedural and weak substantive autonomy are not guilty of pronouncing whole groups of women heteronomous.

VI. Six Remedies

What remedies are available to FSSA? First, FSSA theorists can avoid labeling whole groups as heteronomous. FSSA is theoretically committed to assigning autonomy status based on the motivating presence of deformed desires, so it should abide by its own standards and avoid adjudging heteronomy based on agents' external behavior. Second, FSSA analysts can acknowledge that not all bargainers with patriarchy are deformed desirers; some are nondesiring bargainers, and some are faux bargainers. Third, FSSA can recognize that cultures vary, meaning that the ease of resisting deformed desires varies by context; hence agents who critically reflect on their deformed desires in an oppressive context may show greater self-direction than do agents who reject deformed desires without having been pressured to adopt them. FSSA should also recognize that the costs of refusing to bargain with patriarchy vary by context. Fourth, FSSA needs a clearer concept of deformed desires. Saying that they are those preferences "influenced by" oppressive socialization makes it difficult to distinguish heteronomous from autonomous agents. Fifth, not all choices that accord with deformed desiring result from agents' oppression. Nonoppressed agents sometimes make choices resembling those of the oppressed; and the oppressed sometimes make heteronomous-seeming choices because of personality traits or individual circumstances, rather than because of deformed desires. Sixth, FSSA should

reconceptualize its feminist intuition as a defeasible generalization, sensitive to empirical investigation into the actual choice-making of oppressed persons in their sociotemporal context. Otherwise FSSA risks recapitulating women's oppression by unfairly regarding such women as dupes of patriarchy.

Notes

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1. My scope is limited to FSSA; I set aside strong substantive autonomy. Strong substantive autonomy (for example, Wolf 1990) does not analyze oppressed agents' autonomy, because it is not a specifically feminist view. Nor do I address Marina Oshana's social-relational account. Oshana's view contains a substantive element, but it is primarily concerned to argue that autonomous agents must enjoy external social circumstances in which they can enact their wills without subjection to others' wills; Oshana does not assign autonomy based on the normative merits of agents' desires. Oshana writes, "[A]utonomy is determined by criteria other than what the agent happens to value" (Oshana 2006, 72).

2. I believe my epistemological criticisms of FSSA are new. Paul Benson criticizes Stoljar's FSSA on metaphysical and not epistemological grounds (Benson 2005). Andrew Schwartz also raises metaphysical difficulties for Stoljar (Schwartz 2007). Although Schwartz does not feature epistemological issues, he alludes to them. Schwartz writes, "Failing to notice or draw attention to these varying degrees of content-neutral autonomy risks masking the autonomy such women have" (Schwartz 2007, 447).

3. Susan Babbitt is an FSSA theorist whose work I am not addressing. Babbitt argues that agents are autonomous when they act on their best interests as "defined in terms of moral considerations of human flourishing" and not when they act on their best interests as "defined in terms of [their] actual aims and desires" (Babbitt 1996, 45).

4. Anderson 2001 mentions the sociotemporal context of Luker's women, but does not directly address the relative merits of strong substantive, weak substantive, and procedural autonomy.

5. Weak substantive and procedural autonomy provide different accounts of autonomy, as I explain above. But both are alternatives to strong substantive autonomy, and both turn on inner work in response to agents' circumstances. I further address the differences between these views in section V, subsection on "Abstract Intuitions."

6. Superson acknowledges Sandra Bartky as the term's originator (Bartky 1990).

7. Luker does not specify the timing of her intensive interviews. She had reviewed the abortion clinic's intake data by 1971 (Luker 1975, 194, n.7), and refers elsewhere to 1973 as a year "after the study was completed" (9).

8. In 1967, the California legislature legalized abortion in cases of rape, incest, or a threat to the physical or mental health of the mother. Luker's women had been assessed as likely to be mentally harmed by their pregnancies, although Luker characterizes this assessment as a formality. The United States Supreme Court invalidated all anti-abortion laws in 1973, in *Roe v. Wade*.

9. The FDA first approved the pill in 1960. Birth control remained illegal in Connecticut. The US Supreme Court invalidated the Connecticut law in 1965, in *Griswold v. CT*. Massachusetts outlawed the sale of contraception to unmarried women until 1972 (US Supreme Court, *Eisenstadt v. Baird*).

10. Stoljar cites the time of Luker's interviews—"the early 70s" (Stoljar 2000, 96)—once, but does not discuss the implications of that timing.

11. We cannot rule out the possibility that Luker's women were self-deceived about their motives. But Stoljar takes Luker's interviews at face value, and so, in this discussion, do I.

12. Although female body-hair removal is a low-stakes topic in comparison with veiling and sexual self-assertion, it may thereby be more illustrative. Most contemporary American women have never considered veiling; but they have determined an approach to visible body hair.

13. FSSA theorists might argue for Fran's autonomy because she does not enact her deformed desires concerning shaving. However, they would then be arguing that Fran's autonomy is achieved through blind submission to her husband's will. Ultimately, FSSA seems likely to assess Fran as heteronomous, since Fran "[allows] others' desires to rule" her (Superson 2005, 122), on patriarchal terms.

14. Sonya Charles's FSSA does not have this problem, since Charles requires agents to be motivated by deformed desires in order to count as heteronomous. She writes: "Just because a person chooses to do X does not make it nonautonomous. If we consider that a person chooses to do X for reason Y and reason Y is an internalized norm that perpetuates oppression, then my substantive theory of autonomy would rule it out as autonomous" (Charles 2010, 425).

15. Conceivably, these women were also motivated by deformed desires, in addition to their reported motivations. But without further investigation we cannot know.

16. An ambiguous additional category exists between desiring bargaining and nondesiring bargaining: cases where acting in accord with cultural norms may or may not indicate self-undervaluing. For instance, when women veil because they wish to identify with their community or religion, additional inquiry is needed to determine whether such identification is self-valuing or self-undervaluing.

17. Space restrictions prevent consideration of the nature of autonomy in situations of constrained choice. However, all people, oppressed or privileged, must adapt to some constrained choice. Privilege confers the advantage of fewer, and more advantageous, constrained choices than those facing oppressed persons.

18. Stoljar appears to recognize this point, but in one passage only. She writes that contraceptive risk-taking is usually "the product of a complex array of factors, including a wish, based on pragmatic reasons, not to be *seen to be* violating norms of female sexual agency" (Stoljar 2000, 103, her emphasis).

19. I take no position here on metaphysical determinism. The topic is social determinism, for which FSSA has not provided reasoned support.

20. Luker regularly comments on the motivations and choices of her women's male partners, since many participated in the interviews.

21. Stoljar stipulates that smokers are heteronomous if they are motivated "on the basis of false and oppressive norms" (Stoljar 2000, 99), but she considers oppressive

motivation "not typical" among smokers, certainly less typical than women's oppressive motivation. But I believe that such motivation *is* fairly typical among smokers, who often report that they acquired the habit after internalizing social norms of glamour, norms that are "false and oppressive."

22. Charles also tends to see oppressed agents' suspicious decisions as motivated by deformed desires, and other agents' suspicious decisions as nonproblematic. She writes, "What makes the Surrendered Wife's decision problematic in a way that the monk's decision is not is that her decision reflects internalized social norms that devalue her worth as a moral being. In contrast, barring any extenuating circumstances, there is no reason to believe the monk's decision was motivated by internalized oppressed norms" (Charles 2010, 420). Here again, without consideration of an actual woman's real motivations, we conclude that she has acted on internalized oppressive norms. The monk's motivation is not oppressive, *unless we have some specific reason to think otherwise*.

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