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ARTICLE

Narrative Resistance and Emotional Transformations

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine some of the emotional dimensions of oppression under the heading of "emotional alienation." If the experience of oppression is affectively attuned, then resisting oppression will likely involve dealing with these difficult, often painful, feelings. Resistance may require finding ways of pushing back against their potentially disempowering effects and developing other, more empowering, ways of feeling. Long-lasting forms of social oppression have a strong hold in people's sense of self. Resistance, then, requires self-transformation. If emancipation requires undoing disempowering emotional patterns, then self-transformation will require "undoing" ourselves. How is this undoing tied to developing a new consciousness? How does developing a "radically altered consciousness" (Bartky 1990) involve radically changing our ways of feeling? In this paper, I will argue that emotional disalienation need not be thought of in terms of suppressing or excising disempowering emotional patterns. I will contend that narrative thinking, as a relational process, can play an effective role in the struggle towards emancipation.

To be oppressed is, partly, to be particularly vulnerable to distinctive disempowering emotions such as shame, guilt, fear, and a cluster of related feelings (underconfidence, self-hatred, self-disgust). Through narrative testimonies, members of oppressed groups have often documented the emotional harms of oppression. In this paper, I examine some of the emotional dimensions of oppression under the heading of "emotional alienation." If the experience of oppression is affectively attuned, then resisting oppression will likely involve dealing with these difficult emotions, pushing back against their potentially disempowering effects and developing more empowering ways of feeling. Moreover, because sexism, racism, homophobia, and other long-lasting forms of social oppression have a strong hold on people's sense of self, resistance requires achieving forms of self-transformation. As Sandra Bartky observed: "To be a feminist, one has first to become one. For many feminists, this involves the experience of a

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profound personal transformation, an experience which goes far beyond that sphere of human activity we regard ordinarily as 'political'." (Bartky 1990, 11). In this *becoming*, how should we think of emotional self-transformation? In this paper, I will argue against a simplistic and unambiguous picture of feminist resistance, according to which resisting the emotionally debilitating effects of oppression simply involves suppressing certain "negative" emotions (e.g., shame) and replacing them with more "positive" ones (e.g., pride).[1] To a certain extent, I find some elements of this simplified picture in cognitivist views of emotional transformation. By contrast, I argue that emotional *disalienation* need not be thought of in terms of suppressing or excising disempowering emotional patterns (an unattainable goal), but consists rather in *contending with* shame, guilt, etc., for which some forms of narrative thinking can be helpful. Narrative practices, as an open-ended, relational process, can play an effective role in the struggle toward emancipation.

I will proceed as follows. In section 1, I will offer a sketch for a phenomenology of emotional alienation, drawing on first-person, narrative accounts of oppression. This will be instrumental to the development of my argument, insofar as the ways in which we account for emotional alienation shapes the ways we can think of emotional *disalienation*. In section 2, I will examine a prevalent cognitivist view of emotional alienation, which tends to explain the persistence of disempowering emotions (shame, guilt, fear, among others) on account of the persistence of underlying beliefs, judgments, or "cognitive structures." If, as this view has it, inadequate beliefs are at the roots of these emotions, then emotional transformation requires changing these beliefs. However, I argue in section 3, the cognitivist perspective, while not entirely wrong, is not fully satisfactory, as it presents too reductive a view of what emotional resistance requires. I further develop this argument in section 4, where I show the complexities of emotional resistance by examining how gaining awareness of oppression (an affective-cognitive process) may involve its own forms of emotional alienation. Exploring the difficulties and ambiguities of developing a feminist consciousness will allow me to better show how emotional resistance cannot be reduced to a matter of changes in beliefs. In section 5 I argue that narrative thinking offers a more fruitful path for thinking about what emancipatory emotional transformations require. I draw on a series of excerpts of letters sent to Simone de Beauvoir by her readers (Rouch 2020) and highlight how they are an eloquent testament to the emotionally liberating effects narrative thinking can have. I then put in dialogue my analysis of these letters with Peter Goldie's (2012) argument about the central role narrativity plays in our emotional lives. I contend that narrative thinking offers a fruitful path for feminist philosophy if we want a more fine-grained picture of what emotional resistance to oppression can look like.

1. Emotional alienation under oppression: an illustration

The prominence with which emotions such as shame, guilt, fear, and discomfort figure in narrative accounts of oppression is indicative of a significant, non-accidental connection between such patterns of feeling and being oppressed (Fanon 1952; Bartky 1990; Sáenz Benavides 2021). Of course, people experience these feelings in many different forms, owing to their personal history, the specificity of the object of such emotions (what one is ashamed or fearful of), the context in which they are felt, the degree to which they are consciously acknowledged as part of one's experience. The picture of emotional alienation I draw will therefore inevitably be incomplete. I will present some of the salient features of emotional alienation, understanding "alienation"

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in the Marxian sense of being estranged from oneself and from others, as well as lacking a sense of control in how one feels (Jaeggi 2014). Certainly, we all are emotionally alienated to some degree, but the experience of oppression heightens emotional alienation in a way that makes it particularly disempowering.

Being estranged from oneself can look like being and feeling self-divided in a way that makes it difficult to reconcile different dimensions of the self. It can also look like being unaware of one's emotional states; not being able to identify what one is feeling, or the reasons why one is feeling in a particular way. I will discuss this through examples that exhibit different levels of emotional awareness. Emotional alienation can be spelled out as follows.

1.1 Confusion

The first case can be understood as experiencing confused feelings; not being able to clearly identify what is being felt. We can see an example of this in Didier Eribon's (2013) autobiographical narrative, *Returning to Reims*. After being away for many years, Eribon returns to his childhood hometown, due to his father's death. Having spent most of his life trying to escape his working-class milieu, returning to Reims prompts him to see long-standing confused feelings of discomfort in a different light, thus beginning "a process of reconciliation with myself, with an entire part of myself that I had refused, rejected, denied" (Eribon 2013, 17). He describes these feelings as "the discomfort that results from belonging to two different worlds," "a diffuse and hidden kind of malaise" (18). Describing the distance that separates him from his family, he remembers feeling a "*nebulous and indescribable discomfort* in the face of [his family's] ways of speaking and being, so different from those that characterized the circles in which [he] was now moving" (31, emphasis added). Only now, returning to this rejected dimension of himself, does he understand these feelings as part of a social shame that he has not, until then, been able to see for what it is. In Eribon's narrative, shame has profound disempowering effects in that it intensifies feelings of isolation, which typically lead those who suffer it to feel shame as if indicative of their inherent individual failure or defectiveness.

We can find a second example of emotional alienation as confusion in what Betty Friedan (1963) famously called "the problem that has no name," a cluster of disempowering feelings that particularly affected middle-class suburban housewives during the 1950s: "Sometimes a woman would say 'I feel empty somehow … incomplete.' Or she would say, 'I feel as if I don't exist.' Sometimes she blotted out the feeling with a tranquilizer." (Friedan 1963, 16). These feelings were not fully recognized and not really understood by the women who experienced them. A woman could be "so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it. If she tried to tell her husband, he didn't understand what she was talking about. *She did not really understand it herself.*" (14–15, emphasis added). In the cases discussed by Friedan, not being able to clearly identify and understand what is felt is connected to an unawareness of what causes these feelings.

A third example of emotional confusion can be found in situations where people are systematically made to distrust their feelings. In the context of an abusive relationship, psychological violence involves forms of "gaslighting" whereby the abuser systematically disregards and disqualifies the victim's feelings and perceptions, to a degree that the victim fears "losing their mind" due to the stark dissonance between their own emotions and the abuser's picture of the supposed reality. Reflecting on the alienating dynamics

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particular to (although not exclusive of) the Anglo-American philosophical profession, Elena Flores Ruíz accounts for them as the effect of "somnambulatory policing":

> After hearing the increasingly lengthening scrolling narratives of women of color in the profession of philosophy who dwell, whether briefly or constantly, in this sense of puncturing self-doubt, it finally hit me: *Amigas*, sisters, we're being gaslighted, predominantly by the somnambulatory policing in the form of normative practices and tacit methodological assumptions in mainstream philosophy. This is a kind of *professionalized, ambient abuse*; it has no "mastermind" per se and it is done as a means of constructing the professional landscape of philosophy. Although in this case there is no grand architect, there is, however, the moving of justifications and the changing of standards all the while asking, "how is this project philosophy, again?" (Ruíz 2014, 201)

As Ruíz analyzes it, this "puncturing self-doubt" alienates women of color from themselves, and from one another.

Confusion is also experienced when, despite being able to identify a feeling, one lacks understanding as to *why* one has it. For example, I can have a distinct experience of shame and guilt, in the sense that I can consciously recognize what I feel through these categories. However, I may think that what causes my shame and guilt is my "bad behavior" or my inherently defective self. I will therefore tend to see such feelings as warranted, and these may compound with other painful emotions such as self-hatred. For example, women who underwent an abortion when it was illegal in the US reported acute feelings of shame and guilt. (Dore 2014). Significantly, they tended to personalize these feelings, thinking that they were private and only tied to their personal situation. In these cases, a limited awareness of what causes such emotions factors importantly in the confusion involved in emotional alienation.

1.2 Ambivalence and conflict

Emotional alienation can also consist in experiencing disempowering forms of internal division and conflict due to having contradictory feelings, or feelings that stand in contradiction with our ideals. Affectively, this conflict can take the form of *ambivalence*. According to Deborah Gould (2009),[2] ambivalence was a prevalent emotional pattern in lesbian and gay communities during the 1980s AIDS crisis. People experienced "a constellation of contradictory feeling states, including shame about homosexuality along with gay pride, as well as a desire for social acceptance along with repulsion from a society that oppresses sexual minorities" (Gould 2009, 24). These feelings of shame and desires for social acceptance, as Gould argues, often operated in "nonconscious, noncognitive, nonlinguistic and nonrational" ways, that is, at the level of *affect:* "nonconscious and unnamed but nevertheless registered, experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body" (Gould 2009, 19).

Ambivalence was experienced by some members of gay communities when some of their conscious ideals and political commitments (the vindication of rights) clashed with less consciously recognized feelings (shame and guilt). For example, when unconscious feelings of shame motivated their attempts to distance themselves from other gay men, who were primarily seen as blameworthy for the AIDS epidemic, despite consciously rejecting this view at the same time. In this sense, ambivalence had disempowering effects on people's capacity to resist oppression. As feelings of shame for homosexuality

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were already part of the affective landscape in gay communities—a likely effect of internalized oppression[3] (David and Derthick 2013)—the "shame for bringing AIDS" more easily took hold of people's emotional response to the crisis (Gould 2009). Ambivalence can therefore lead to forms of complicity (Jaggar 1983; Knowles 2021) with an oppressive system when we experience emotions that sustain an oppressive situation. It can weaken feelings of solidarity among the oppressed which are needed in order to resist more effectively, and instead motivate distancing behaviors, whereby people disidentify with those who are deemed more blameworthy. It then further contributes to isolating people from one another. Shame and fear are not only pervasive affects but become part of the horizon of intelligibility of one's experience.

Emotional contradictions can also be experienced with a high degree of awareness, and this can bring its own forms of distress. They can be experienced as a contradiction between how one *ought* to feel, and how one actually feels, that is, as a deviance to "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1985).[4] For Audre Lorde, despite being fully aware of the fact that "Other Black women are not the root cause nor the source" of the anger that the experiences of racism and sexism have filled her with ("a boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point"), she interrogates the dissonance between this knowledge and her feelings: "Then why does that anger unleash itself most tellingly against another Black woman at the least excuse? Why do I judge her in a more critical light than any other, becoming enraged when she does not measure up?" (Lorde 2017, 133). In her essay, she identifies this anger and cruelty as the by-products of growing up "metabolizing hatred like a daily bread" (141):

> This cruelty between us, this harshness, is a piece of the legacy of hate with which we were inoculated from the time we were born by those who intended it to be an injection of death. But we adapted, learned to take it in and use it, unscrutinized. Yet at what cost! In order to withstand the weather, we had to become stone, and now we bruise ourselves upon the other who is closest. (150)

We can also think of the conflicted feelings women may have about their experience of motherhood. In her essay on motherhood, Adrienne Rich (2018) cites the following entry from her journal: "My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and rawedged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness." (Rich 2018, 88). Writing her book was not possible, Rich says, "until I began to feel ... unambivalent enough in my love for my children, so that I could dare to return to a ground which seemed to me the most painful, incomprehensible, and ambiguous I had ever traveled, a ground hedged by taboos, mined with false-namings." (85).

1.3 Double-consciousness

Under the heading of "double-consciousness," W. E. B. Du Bois ([1903] 1994) conceptualized the particular internal division experienced by the oppressed as a result of the oppressor's perspective being imposed upon them.[5] Double-consciousness is described as "this sense of *always* looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. *One ever feels his two-ness*,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength

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alone keeps it from being torn asunder." (1994, 2, emphasis added). An important aspect of double-consciousness is that, once the oppressed acquire it, once they are aware of how the world that excludes them perceives them, they cannot "unsee it." The perspective of the oppressor becomes part of the structure of their self-consciousness and stands in tension with the ways the oppressed feel about themselves, their desires and their capacities.

Double-consciousness, and the depletion of vital energy it entails (what Du Bois calls the "waste of double aims"), is *imposed* upon the oppressed: to be oppressed is to be forced to become acquainted with the negative ways in which one is perceived. In this sense, I cannot *not* see myself as the oppressor sees me. This is, in itself, a feeling of impotence that characterizes oppression, but it can also lead to other feelings of impotence: I may fail or struggle to see myself, unambiguously, in a positive light. For example, I may struggle to feel good about my body because society's expectations and norms regarding acceptable, beautiful, "good" bodies have structured how I perceive my own. We can think here of the difficulties that oppressed people may have in experiencing forms of pleasure and joy without feeling guilt or shame. For example, in homosexual relations, having difficulties in enjoying sexual pleasure due to feeling that homosexuality is a sin. In some cases, the capacity for pleasure might be reduced; in others, the pleasure might not be as enjoyable when succeeded by feelings of shame, self-hatred, or self-disgust. An important feature of this kind of emotional alienation lies in the feeling of powerlessness (Webster 2021) we might have in relation to feelings that "impose themselves" on us: we can't help feeling this way. This impotence might happen despite having a degree of awareness or knowledge about the power relations at play: "*I know* I should not feel this way, but I can't help it." In a *New York Times* article, philosopher Kate Manne (2022) reflects on her "fraught" relationship with her body, an experience familiar to many in a fatphobic culture. The shame of body weight imposes itself despite rational knowledge that such feelings are not warranted.[6] In experiences of emotional alienation due to oppression, shame often bypasses our rational knowledge and beliefs, and this very fact—perhaps due to feeling impotent—is shame-producing. As Manne puts it: "I felt shame—and ashamed of my shame."

These feelings of impotence or *powerlessness* may encompass the emotional dimensions of alienation I have described (confusion, ambivalence, and double-consciousness). While we all, oppressed or not, can feel impotent regarding some of our feelings at some point or another, in the cases I examine, the way some emotions overpower us is non-accidentally connected[7] to being oppressed. Impotence is all the more likely to be an overarching feature of emotional alienation in that some of the emotional phenomena I have taken into account can be better explained as the felt experience of a loss of power in how one appears before others. As Aness Webster convincingly argues, some cases of shame in response to racism are not necessarily due to someone's *belief* in their inferior status, but rather to their "inability to choose when [their] stigmatized racialized identity is made salient" (Webster 2021, 536).

2. An explanatory account: the cognitivist view

So far, I have sketched a picture of what emotional alienation under oppression looks like. It involves forms of confusion, self-division, ambivalence, and impotence which can have isolating and disempowering effects. It can deplete people's vital energies; it can therefore make resistance more difficult. How should we think then of emotional *disalienation*? In this section, I examine a prevalent explanation of emotional alienation

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under oppression which emphasizes the role of ideological beliefs as an underlying cause for its persistence. I will call it the "cognitivist explanation".

2.1 Inadequate beliefs, inadequate emotions

If we follow "judgement-based cognitive theories of emotions" (Goldie 2012), according to which our emotional states stem from and consist in evaluative beliefs (Nussbaum 2001) or judgments (Solomon 2003), emotional alienation can be explained as resulting from a series of either false and/or contradictory beliefs. As some of the examples I provided show, emotional alienation may be linked to ignorance of the causes of our affective patterns. If I do not know that my persistent body shame is tied to oppressive societal norms around how bodies should be (thin, white, able-bodied), I will tend to believe that my body is truly, inherently defective. I will therefore tend to think that shame is what I should feel, while perhaps desiring a more "beautiful" body. The split between how I feel about my body, and my desire for a beautiful body will likely bring additional distress. In this case, the persistent shame and psychic conflict can be explained in terms of a *cognitive deficit*; both stem from the wrong, harmful belief "my body is ugly." In this sense, my shame is "wrong" as well: it is not a warranted emotion because it is based on a wrong assessment of reality. On the cognitive-evaluative view of emotions, emotional disalienation will therefore involve suppressing false beliefs and replacing them with more adequate, true beliefs, such as "my body is beautiful as it is." While cognitivist accounts of emotion differ,[8] those who hold this view tend to agree that changing an emotion requires changing the thought, belief, or judgment underpinning it.

2.2 Cognitive structures and conceptual resources

According to Deborah Gould, many analyses of political emotions in the social sciences tend to draw a highly cognitivized picture of emotions as well (Gould 2009, 23). Emotional alienation is explained in terms of an internalization of a set of beliefs stemming from the ideology that sustains oppression. In the philosophical literature on oppression, Ann Cudd (2006) draws on cognitive psychology to discuss the psychological harms of oppression as the effect of stereotyping, which she describes as "the fundamental cognitive process of oppression" (79).[9] Analyzing the processes through which stereotyping makes oppression a self-reinforcing phenomenon, Cudd explains the oppressed person's acceptance of their oppression in terms of beliefs: "they come to believe in the stereotypes that represent their own inferiority." (80).

On this view, the pervasiveness of disempowering feelings is the result of the stability of harmful stereotypes as "cognitive structures." Emotional disalienation would therefore require changes at the cognitive level. Becoming aware of the fact that some of our beliefs come from stereotypes can be a way of emancipating ourselves from their harmful effects. In this picture, the acquisition of the right beliefs is a precondition to achieving that goal.

2.3 The replacement view

The cognitivist explanation may account for some forms of emotional alienation discussed above, namely, the ones that are caused by forms of ignorance (wrong beliefs or inadequate concepts). If these feelings are sustained by inadequate beliefs, the logical solution lies in ridding ourselves of said beliefs and challenging their reproduction.

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However, the cognitivist perspective faces the following objection: in many cases, emotions persist even though they contradict our beliefs. As some of the examples previously discussed show, despite having an adequate understanding of what we feel and of its causes, we may still feel impotent; having new, adequate beliefs seems insufficient to rid ourselves of these feelings. Against this objection, Nussbaum argues that we may hold contradictory beliefs at the same time. For example, inadequate beliefs that stand in contradiction with adequate ones may still operate at an unconscious level. In this sense, forms of critical self-reflection, which allows us to bring to consciousness some of our thoughts, can play a role in emotional disalienation.[10]

While the cognitivist explanation may account for some aspects of emotional alienation, it still presents, in my view, an insufficient account of what emotional disalienation requires.[11] I do not deny that beliefs and ideological systems have a significant negative impact on the emotional patterns that oppressed people may experience. However, while the persistence of some emotions may be explained by the persistence of unconscious beliefs, thinking of emotional disalienation in terms of suppressing and *replacing* inadequate beliefs with adequate ones has some limitations.

3. Limitations of the cognitive-replacement view

Thinking of emotional disalienation in terms of suppressing inadequate beliefs and replacing them with adequate ones presents too rigid a view of this process. It seems to presuppose too mechanical a view of the mind: alienation happens when we use the wrong tools (beliefs, judgments or concepts); we therefore just need to remove these tools and replace them with the right ones. This presupposes that these beliefs and emotions are discrete and relatively easy to identify and isolate. As we replace a faulty cable in a mechanical instrument, we can also remove and replace faulty beliefs and emotions. However, given that patterns of thought and emotion have a pervasive character under oppression, these disempowering emotions are deeply entangled with the self, so that they can be said to be partly constitutive of it. As Sandra Bartky has argued, in the case of women and other oppressed groups, shame and guilt are not discrete, episodic, and short-lived emotions that simply disappear once the shaming event has passed, or once the shame-inducing belief and behavior has been modified. Rather, these disempowering emotions are long-lasting; they are integral to the way oppressed people engage with the world, the "emotional coloration" or "affective taste" of their lives. (Bartky 1990, 88). This has two implications for my argument: first, modifying emotional patterns involves forms of self-transformation that cannot simply consist in replacing discrete beliefs. Secondly, suppressing these emotions, in the sense of eradicating them, seems an unrealistic goal. As Eve Sedgwick notes, disempowering emotions such as shame "are not distinct 'toxic' parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed" (Sedgwick 2003: 63, as cited in Gould 2009, 78–79). Given their entanglement with the formation of the self, they are likely to remain part of the emotional landscape through which the oppressed experience the world.[12]

3.1 Linearity belief-emotion

The cognitive view tends to draw a rather linear picture of emotional transformation: in order to change our emotional patterns, we first need to change our cognitive patterns

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(beliefs, judgments, or concepts). However, emotions themselves can also prompt us to question, and eventually change, our beliefs. As Arlie Hochshild (1985) argues, "emotion, like seeing and hearing, is a way of knowing about the world" (29); as such, it has a "signal function" (29).[13] So-called noncognitive emotions, or affects, have an epistemic potential: by feeling deep discomfort, I get a sense that something is wrong. (Ahmed 2017; Maur 2021). What Alison Jaggar (1989) has called "outlaw emotions"—when some of our emotions are at odds with the dominant, socially acceptable repertoire of emotional responses—can help us see injustices as such (Silva 2021, 685).

In this sense, we do not only gain awareness of gender oppression by having access to relevant adequate feminist concepts ("sexual harassment") or feminist beliefs ("cat calling is street harassment"). When feeling outlaw emotions, we can also gain awareness of the fact that something is wrong, thereby initiating a process of sense-making that can lead to developing greater understanding of social oppression and the ways it harms us. Furthermore, outlaw emotions do not necessarily stem from beliefs, as the cognitivist view would have it. In many cases, the feelings may operate at nonconscious, nonrepresentational levels. Precisely due to their conceptually or cognitively unclear character, some outlaw affective states may prompt us to seek greater understanding and stimulate our desire for social change. As Gould puts it, "Affect can generate a strong desire to make sense of itself." (Gould 2009, 38). Although the cognitivist picture may explain some cases of emotional alienation, and indicate how to undo it, the belief-centered explanation tends to underplay the role that feelings or affects at nonrepresentational and nonconscious levels can play in this endeavor.

The previous considerations suggest that emotional disalienation need not require the elimination or replacement of beliefs that arguably cause it. Such a goal seems unrealistic given the pervasiveness of these emotions under oppression. Disalienation may therefore involve a more complex process of self-transformation which the cognitive-replacement view does not track. In the following section, I look more closely into phenomenological analyses of this process, drawing on Bartky's and Ahmed's phenomenological accounts of "becoming a feminist."

4. Gaining awareness and disalienation

While it is uncontroversial that gaining knowledge is key for emancipation, the connection between acquiring knowledge (adequate beliefs, concepts, or judgments) and undoing emotional alienation requires further clarification. We have seen that the cognitive account offers a possible explanation of this relationship. However, as I have argued, this account is not satisfactory. Disempowering emotions may persist despite having a sufficient degree of knowledge, or even when our consciously held beliefs are in contradiction with these emotions. Let's have a closer look at first-person accounts of gaining awareness of oppression and the development of a feminist consciousness. In *Living a feminist life* (2017), Sara Ahmed retraces her own intellectual journey by discussing "the process of becoming a feminist, and how consciousness of gender is a world consciousness that allows you to revisit the places you have been, to become estranged from gender and heteronorms as to become estranged from the shape of your life." (Ahmed 2017, 18). While oppression leads to forms of emotional alienation in which we are estranged from ourselves and others, developing a feminist consciousness does not automatically lead to a disalienated consciousness, but entails other kinds of alienation, which I now go on to discuss.

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4.1 Feminist consciousness and emotional alienation

Becoming a feminist gives rise to other experiences of alienation, such as feeling "out of tune with others." (Ahmed 2017, 40). For example, when one notices the wrongs of oppression while others refuse to acknowledge the very existence of these wrongs. Ahmed and Bartky narrate similar situations of being perceived as the annoying "feminist killjoy" during family gatherings: "Eyes seem to roll wherever you go, whatever you say. In fact, you don't even have to say anything before eyes start rolling. It can seem as if eyes roll as an expression of collective exasperation because you are a feminist" (Ahmed 2017, 38). While Christmas shopping, Bartky wonders "What if, just this once, I send a doll to my nephew and an erector set to my niece? Will this confirm the growing suspicion in my family that I am a crank?" (Bartky 1990, 19). A heightened awareness of injustice can therefore make one feel like "the odd one out" when others do not share a similar awareness.

Gaining consciousness of oppression can also lead to being more in touch with the painful feelings produced by its harms; it can therefore mean having a more acute experience of being harmed: "Becoming feminist: how we redescribe the world we are in. . . . It is not an easy or straightforward process because we have to stay with the wrongs. And think about feeling: to direct your attention to the experience of being wronged can mean feeling wronged all over again." (Ahmed 2017, 27). Drawing attention to the experience of being wronged in the context of structural oppression can mean noticing the patterns, connecting the dots between the multiple harms: the cumulative effect of it can lead to feeling overwhelmed by the omnipresence of sexism and misogyny. Once you see it, you cannot unsee it, and you see it everywhere.

In a similar vein, Bartky points out how consciousness raising exposes women to suffering an "ontological shock." Gaining a feminist awareness brings an "anguished consciousness," as it gives rise to new forms of self-division, confusion, and conflict that can be deeply unsettling: "The transformation of day-to-day living into a series of invitations to struggle has the important consequence for the feminist that she finds herself, for a while at least, in an ethical and existential impasse." (Bartky 1990, 20–21).[14]

In this sense, Ahmed and Bartky highlight how the path toward emancipation as disalienation is not a straightforward one,[15] as some simplistic portrayals of liberation would have it. Bartky sees this kind of simplified version of female liberation in Ibsen's *A doll's house*. The heroine, Nora, decides to leave her husband and family to seek a more independent life, "But Nora makes the decision too easily. Ibsen, her creator, betrays a certain lack of sensitivity to feminist experience: A real-life Nora would have suffered more." (20).

4.2 Emancipatory aspects of feminist alienation

Although it can lead to an "anguished consciousness," feminist self-division is not disempowering as compared with the self-division that characterizes emotional alienation in some of the cases previously described. Certainly, as Bartky notes, by recognizing how one has been victimized by oppression, one apprehends oneself as a diminished being. However, this apprehension is simultaneously "a joyous consciousness of one's own power." (16). The divided consciousness that feminism brings is "both consciousness of weakness and consciousness of strength. But this division in the way we apprehend ourselves has a positive effect, for it leads to the search both for ways of

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overcoming those weaknesses in ourselves which support the system and for direct forms of struggle against the system itself." (16).

Due to its unsettling character, gaining awareness of oppression can give rise to feeling disoriented: "[the feminist] no longer knows what sort of person she ought to be and, therefore, she does not know what she ought to do." (Bartky 1990, 20). However, as Ami Harbin (2016) has argued, disorientations can be morally productive and have emancipatory effects. In feminist and anti-racist consciousness-raising groups during the 1970s, Harbin notes, "uncomfortable discussions" took place, which often required "address[ing] interpersonal conflicts and experiences of anger." (Harbin 2016, 79). In these settings, consciousness-raising did not simply involve replacing specific beliefs with new ones, but rather experiencing a disorienting "uprooting of whole systems of belief." (79). People gained awareness not simply by acquiring new information, but by having experiences of disorientation that did not necessarily indicate a path or a way toward reorientation (78). In this sense, feeling disoriented had liberatory effects in that it could be experienced as an opening of possibilities. While potentially distressing, being disoriented can also lead to questioning the orientation that one's life has taken until then. Moreover, consciousness-raising generated awareness of political complexity (Harbin 2016); while some of the roots of thought and behavior were distrubed by uncomfortable discussions, their questioning did not necessarily lead to stability through new beliefs or new behavior. Disorientation freed space for indetermination, which can be an opening for the creation of new meaning.

Because the path toward emancipation is not a straightforward one, and given the particular forms of emotional alienation that feminist consciousness can bring, gaining awareness of oppression calls for more than replacing beliefs. Given the complexity of this process, this "search for overcoming weaknesses in ourselves" (Bartky 1990, 16) calls for a more active and creative form of sense-making, which, as I go on to contend, requires deploying our capacity for narrative thinking. In the following section, I will argue that narrativity, as an open-ended process and relational endeavor (MacIntyre 1981; Ricoeur 1995; Lara 1998; Gallagher 2020), is crucial to satisfying this need for sense-making. Narrative processes can help reduce the disempowering effects of these emotional patterns and free the path toward emotional disalienation.

5. The emancipatory potential of narrativity

In order to better understand how narrativity can play an emancipatory role in emotional transformations, it will be helpful to examine narrative accounts of the process of gaining consciousness of oppression. This will allow me to illustrate how emancipatory emotional transformations require more than access to relevant conceptual tools or beliefs, and something other than correcting some of our false beliefs by replacing them with more adequate ones.

The following accounts are from women who have gained a new consciousness of their subordination by reading Beauvoir's writings. I draw on a series of excerpts of letters sent to Simone de Beauvoir by her readers. In this sense, Beauvoir can be said to allow some of these women to recognize and validate outlaw emotions. These letters, as Marine Rouch (2020) argues, are examples of acts of resistance. Some of Beauvoir's readers testify to how reading her books constituted a "revelation," thereby signaling the acquisition of a form of knowledge that unveils life-changing truths. But through

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this correspondence we may see that the kind of revelation these letters tell us about cannot simply be accounted for in terms of substituting false beliefs with true ones, or in terms of learning a series of new facts. Rather, I suggest Beauvoir's writings have strikingly emancipatory effects because they invite the readership to develop a new narrative perspective on their own lives. In this sense, it's not that after gaining new consciousness about oppression, one goes on to correct specific beliefs, judgments, or concepts, and apply the right ones, as if fixing a faulty mechanism. Rather, one's capacity for understanding and making sense of one's situation, including one's emotions, is heightened by narrative thinking, as a creative way of sense-making that can have potent emancipatory effects.

5.1 Reading Beauvoir: a revelatory experience

Letter 1:

> *The Second Sex* . . . was for me an answer, a confirmation of many things I had started foreseeing, a light, a strengthening of what I felt, of what I thought was fair, but that I was alone in feeling. Also, a source of groundedness and confidence in myself. (Reader G to Simone de Beauvoir, June 18, 1958, as cited in Rouch 2020, 236, my translation)

Letter 2:

> At a time where we lack enthusiasm and the pleasure of life, I thank you. You are in fact only a pretext, the spark that suffices. . . . [I]t is comforting to see what one can do with a life . . . (Reader M to Simone de Beauvoir, 1962, as cited in Rouch 2020, 237–38, my translation)

Letter 3:

> [*The Second Sex*] . . . was a rather violent revelation; first, a slow awakening to dignity . . . [it] gave me back the will to live and, mostly, the determination not to suffer eternally. (Reader T to Simone de Beauvoir, September 12, 1951, as cited in Rouch 2020, 243, my translation)

Letter 4:

> In reading you, there were moments in which I almost "felt like slapping myself". It is always uncomfortable to catch oneself in being passive, in one's complicity . . . Depressing? In my case [your book] made me want to live briskly, to prepare myself . . . to smile to my old age and to prepare for it. . . . I write down sentences that bring me this warmth swollen with life . . . all your books have given me "something else"; . . . what I was desperately looking for in order to be myself. (Letter from Huguette Céline Bastide to Simone de Beauvoir, March 18, 1970, unpublished manuscript, "Lettres reçues," cote NAF 28501, Fonds Simone de Beauvoir, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Richelieu, reproduced in Rouch 2020, 247–51)

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5.2 Knowing differently

What elements can we gather from these excerpts?[16] It seems that the revelatory experience in reading Beauvoir is not reducible to having access to new factual information that was previously ignored, or to changing specific beliefs. Letter 1 tells of the experience of not merely cognizing, but of *recognizing*, in the sense of knowing again something that was once only intuited or confusedly known, or known with the kind of distrust in one's insights that characterizes emotional alienation as we saw in some of the examples discussed in section 1. Reading *The second sex* allowed the reader to understand her experiences in a clearer light. This echoes Bartky's point that feminist consciousness is not necessarily about knowing new facts but involves knowing the same things differently.[17] This recognition is affectively charged: seeing something about her own experiences reflected in Beauvoir's writings enables the reader to grow in confidence. Interestingly, being able to trust her own insights seems to accompany or lead to an increase in her self-confidence more broadly. A key aspect of this recognition, as *knowing-with-confidence,* is its relational element. Coming to understand one's emotions as part of a broader social pattern, as shared by others, contributes to increasing trust and self-confidence.

5.3 Narrative perspective

A second aspect that we can see in these letters has to do with the fact that reading Beauvoir stimulates her readers to take part in narrative thinking, which leads to adopting a narrative perspective on their own lives. Reading Beauvoir's analyses of the lived experiences of ageing allows a reader to look at herself critically (Letter 4). Reading Beauvoir has a revelatory impact by enabling her readers to recognize their own complicity. However, this revelatory aspect does not consist in identifying specific beliefs, suppressing them and replacing them. Rather, it seems that reading Beauvoir allows the development of a critical perspective that questions the self more profoundly.

Reader M in Letter 2 expresses how reading Beauvoir has brought the exhilarating feeling of an opening of possibilities for her own life. Interestingly, it is the publication of Beauvoir's *Memoirs* that motivates more readers to write to her than the publication of *The second sex* (Rouch 2020). In this correspondence, we can see that the way Beauvoir touches her female audience is closely connected to the autobiographical, narrative form[18] and the feeling of closeness that this kind of writing creates in her readership: "the essay allowed her readers to join a community that shared a common experience." (Rouch 2020, 236, my translation).[19]

Beauvoir's readers' letters suggest that narrative experiences can play an important role in undoing emotional alienation. I am calling "narrative experience" both the process of articulating a narrative and the process of listening to/reading other people's narratives. Reading and listening to other people's narrative accounts of their experience can motivate us to adopt a narrative perspective into our own lives and engage in narrative thinking.[20] But what is, more precisely, the relationship between narratives and emotions? I follow Peter Goldie's (2012) analyses of the way narratives play a crucial role in our emotional lives. Goldie's argument is not simply that narratives are useful tools for our emotions, as if we had fully constituted emotions on one side and a separate narrative on the other. Rather, narratives play a constitutive role insofar as much of our experience of emotion is narratively structured.[21] Goldie critiques a prevalent tendency in mainstream philosophical approaches of conceiving emotions as episodic and short-lived mental

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states; such accounts "give priority to the emotion, that is to the favoured mental state or event, *at a time*, rather than to the dynamics of the emotion—to the way it unfolds *over time*." (Goldie 2012, 58). While some of our emotions do correspond to the episodic picture, other emotional phenomena are more adequately conceived as temporally extended *processes*, rather than states or events with distinct temporal limits. Such is grief. As an emotional process, and unlike mental episodes or states, grief unfolds according to characteristic patterns. Grief is not an emotion that we can adequately describe as a single mental event; it is not identifiable as a mere disruptive moment, as "something that—like the feeling of pain, or the perception of a red cube, or the thought that it's time for tea, or the desire to stretch your legs—can be there one moment and not there the next." (56). The different feelings that are part of grieving are not isolated *episodes* but come to be understood as the stages of a complex *process* that unfolds over time in a characteristic way.

Due to their temporally extended features, emotional processes such as grief require more complex explanatory models than single, short-lived events. In order to explain the latter, we look for the *trigger* that caused them. In the case of the former, we also try to find out what *sustains* them over time. This is why emotional processes are better accounted for through narrative. A particular emotional stage of grief (say sadness, anger, or despair) cannot be properly understood by merely finding its cause ("what triggered it?"). A more complex narrative account is needed ("why this emotional reaction in particular? How does this relate to the person's history and bond with the object of grief?"). Through narrative, the causal relations at play can be revealed, as are other elements that allow us to understand our emotions: multiple perspectives can be included, which can help us see how the different feelings we experience are part of a wider pattern (our personal history, our family relations, our social situatedness, for example). A narrative is distinguished from a sequence of events and from causal explanations or matter-of-fact accounts, such as the one provided by annals or chronicles, in that the latter lack narrative structure. A narrative is "a representation of events which is shaped, organised, and coloured, presenting those events, and the people involved in them, from a certain perspective or perspectives, and thereby giving narrative structure—coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import—to what is narrated." (Goldie 2012, 8). Narratives make such processes intelligible for us and, at the same time, they hold together the different elements of our emotional processes (feelings, memories, habits, etc.). In this sense, some of our emotions are narratively structured; the way we understand them through a narrative is integral to the way we feel them.

As I argued above following Bartky, the emotional phenomena that I am presenting as integral to oppression cannot simply be understood by following the episodic model: the oppressed experience disempowering emotions not as short-lived episodes but as temporally extended patterns. Goldie's analysis of narrativity and emotional processes is therefore particularly relevant for thinking of emotional disalienation. An important aspect of Goldie's account is the emphasis he puts on narrative thinking *as a process*, rather than on narratives as a product. We have good reasons to think that narrative thinking[22] as a dynamic process is especially relevant for our problem.

Following Goldie, Anna Bortolan (2020) recently argues that narrativity plays an important role in shaping our affective experience. Studies in psychiatry suggest that when narrativity is disturbed, as in the case of BPD or Borderline Personality Disorder, "emotions [are] … less differentiated and expressed primarily through the body; they may not unfold meaningfully over time and may be severely

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dysregulated." (Bortolan 2020, 15). This makes it more difficult for people with BPD to manage the distress of some emotions. Bortolan argues that, when there's a disturbance of our narrative capacities, becoming able to modify our self-narratives in a therapeutic setting may improve our capacity to control our emotions. Taking a narrative perspective allows us to contextualize our emotions by connecting them to our life more broadly. This enables us to better understand them and ourselves, which facilitates emotional regulation (Bortolan 2020, 7). In this sense, narrating does not involve the suppression of specific beliefs, nor does it aim to replace them; such painful emotions can still be there, but by taking a narrative perspective on them, we can reduce the distress they produce. While Bortolan's argument is more directly concerned with how this may play out in therapeutic settings, we can extend her insights: contextualizing our emotions in relation to other aspects of our life and to socio-political phenomena can have emancipatory effects. Narrating can therefore be a way of resisting. In a similar fashion, we can think of how narrative thinking can help us reduce the disempowering effect of the painful emotions that, as we discussed, are part of oppression. It's not that we stop feeling them altogether, by suppressing and/or replacing them, but we can enhance our understanding of them, which can facilitate our capacity to sit with them.[23]

5.4 Narrating as learning to sit with ambiguity

I have argued that narrative experiences can contribute to emancipatory emotional transformations. In this argument, narrating as a process, rather than simply as a product, is what can more satisfyingly respond to the need for sense-making that emotional alienation calls for. In the remaining section, I will argue that the *relational* element in narrativity is also crucial for emancipation.

In the cases of emotional alienation discussed in section 1, social isolation was an important aspect of it. The disempowering feelings that oppression tends to elicit in the oppressed (shame, self-loathing, etc.) are profoundly isolating; and being socially isolated contributes significantly to emotional alienation. However, the relational nature of narrative experiences can contribute to undoing alienation. In consciousness-raising groups, sense-making, by sharing lived experiences with others, appears as an emancipatory collective endeavor. As we can see in Friedan's account of the *feminine mystique*, only once women's feelings of shame and guilt came to be understood as part of a broader social issue—namely, the way women's sexual and reproductive capacities are controlled as part of their oppression—were they able to recognize how their feelings were not necessarily an indication of individual failure. They came to be understood as an effect of how oppressive societal norms exert control through these disempowering feelings. Sharing these experiences with others similarly burdened by them was central to developing a richer understanding of the social causes behind their feelings. Being unable to understand one's distress was integral to the distress, and this lack of understanding was closely tied to the fact that women did not know to what extent their distress was part of a common condition that affected most women in similar living situations. Only once women started talking to each other, narrating to each other how they felt, were they more capable of making sense of their experience. This form of collective sense-making allowed people to develop "introspective, emotional self-knowledge." (Gould, 2009).

Consciousness-raising groups are not the only situations where the creative potential of narrative perspective taking can emerge. Passing books around, as Ahmed analyzes it,

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can also function as a catalyst for liberatory shifts. In book-passing one does not only become acquainted with a new source for self-knowledge (a book), but also with a particular history that can accompany the act of sharing: one can imagine that, when someone shares a book that has had a transformative impact on their lives, the swirls of this transformation continue their effects in moving us toward change. But passing books around can also mean inheriting an affective archive of difficult emotions that signal the start of a new feminist consciousness. As she puts it: "To inherit feminism can mean to inherit sadness" (Ahmed 2010, 75), when one realizes the meaning of gender as "the restriction of possibility." (75). But this inheritance of unhappiness through the circulation of books "is not necessarily to inherit the same thing." (79). The destabilization of "the promise of happiness" for middle-class white women takes a different form for women of color. For example, while Betty Friedan's white bourgeois housewives see themselves as women whose life has the conditions for happiness (married, with children) but, paradoxically, achieving these goals does not fulfill them, women of color are not imagined as having the inherent qualities of happiness, when the ideal of happiness is constructed as that which white bodies can embody because of their attributes (82). Inheriting sadness as part of inheriting feminism through the circulation of books is just one of many possibilities of the affective exchange that can initiate emancipatory emotional transformations. Lesbian feminism of color can also be a "willfulness archive" (Ahmed 2017, 230) that becomes a source for vitality and creative resistance, as "female trouble-maker fiction" can inspire it: "For me, as a lesbian feminist, reader, characters like Molly Bolt with a spring in their step pick me up; feisty characters whose vitality is not at the expense of their lesbian desire, but how their desire roams across the pages." (229–30).

What book-passing can bring, and what people testify to in consciousness-raising groups, is not simply a change in beliefs and concepts, but a change in one's self-narrative. This change is not merely a change in content—as a change in narrative as a product—but also a change in one's role in relation to narrating as a process, by developing a more active role in one's self-narrative.[24] As Beauvoir's readers show, instead of passively repeating alienated narratives about how they should feel, what they should want, what they can or cannot do, engaging in narrative thinking allowed many of them to "own" their narrative. It enabled them to create it by taking a narrative perspective on their lives. Narrative experiences, then, can allow us to regulate difficult emotions. We no longer passively endorse other people's narratives, but we can become the authors of our own.[25]

Whether reading or listening to other people's accounts of their lived experience, narrative thinking, as a relational process, has empowering effects. But this goes both ways: narrating for others is also an important aspect of emancipation. First, narrating our experience and imagining that others can benefit from it can be empowering in that it expands the realm of the self. In imagining how we transform others through our stories, a part of us transcends our individual self by becoming a part of the lives of others. Second, knowing how our narratives impact others contributes to our ongoing self-transformation. We saw how Beauvoir's writing stimulated narrative thinking in her readers, but this had an impact on Beauvoir's thinking herself. According to Marine Rouch, Beauvoir's readers transmitted a feminist ethics to Beauvoir which influenced her taking a greater role in feminist activism. Her intellectual work was also influenced by their letters[26] (Rouch 2020).

Throughout this paper I have mainly focused on the emancipatory potential of narrative experiences. However, one should bear in mind that, of course, not all

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narratives are liberating.[27] In this sense, it matters to not idealize the role of narrative thinking as *necessarily* enabling resistance. As Jo Woodiwiss (2017) argues, some narratives can be liberating but at the same time limiting; while giving voice to some, they may silence others. It is therefore crucial "to identify the dangers of particular and/or dominant narratives which, as guides to living, can constrain as well as liberate their tellers, whether through silencing or dismissing other stories or 'fixing' particular identities on which the story relies." (2017, 17). In many ways, the narratives that I have chosen to illustrate my arguments are *counter-narratives*; they have allowed people to challenge hegemonic and oppressive narratives (for example, those that led women to blame themselves for their difficulties). In other ways, these same counter-narratives may also be limiting for those who are excluded by some of their perspectives (e.g., the *Feminine mystique* narrative had a different impact for white versus Black women). However, by centering narrative accounts that highlight the ambiguities of feminist consciousness (section 4), I have attempted to show how they help challenge hegemonic and simplistic narratives of oppression, resistance, and liberation.[28]

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that oppression involves forms of emotional alienation that are disempowering insofar as they have disintegrative effects. Oppression breaks people down, making them lose parts of their psychic self. Resisting oppression therefore requires supporting the development of empowering emotional patterns. I have argued that cognitivist explanations do not offer a satisfying picture of emotional disalienation. On the one hand, they tend to think of emotional disalienation in terms of replacing inadequate beliefs with more adequate ones. In so doing, they presuppose too mechanistic a view of the mind, which oversimplifies its operations. On the other hand, the picture of emotions as discrete units, underpinned by discrete beliefs, is not well suited to thinking of emotional transformations in the context of oppression. The disempowering emotions that partly constitute the experience of oppression are entangled with the self in such a way that their transformation cannot be simply thought of in terms of suppression and replacement. Moreover, the process of emancipation is not a straightforward one: developing a greater consciousness of one's oppression (for example, a feminist consciousness) can lead to other forms of emotional alienation that can be difficult and challenging to navigate. In this sense, emancipatory emotional transformations call for more complex and dynamic forms of sense-making. Narrative thinking provides a better picture of what combating emotional alienation requires. It is a mode of thinking that pulls otherwise seemingly disparate experiences and emotional episodes together into an organic whole. Experiences of trauma, which are characterized by the shattering of the self and, simultaneously, by the undoing of our narrative capacities, show the importance of narrative thinking, both for reconstituting a coherent self and for processing the emotional effects of trauma. Similarly, narrative thinking can help combat the disempowering effects of emotional alienation. Rather than accepting oppressive narratives that restrict us and alienate us, it can lead us to a more adequate self-narrative, stimulating us to take a more active role in the struggle towards emancipation.

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Notes

1 This simplified picture can be seen in pop culture products which present an individualistic "believe in yourself" narrative as the key to a life free from the emotions that hold us back. We can think of the many self-help books with alluring subtitles, such as "How to live a shame-free life," "Transcend self-doubt: Conquer imposter syndrome and thrive," "Stop over-thinking." My point is not to discuss whether these books can be helpful, but to offer some examples of a popular way of framing emotional transformations, as (1) depending mainly on individual's beliefs, and (2) as definitive: once one realizes these beliefs are false, then one should be able to rid oneself from these emotions for good.

2 I thank Hayley Kavanagh for pointing me to Gould's analysis of ambivalence.

3 Understood as the "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the . . . oppression of the (dominant) society." (Lipsky 1987, as cited in David and Derthick 2013).

4 "Feeling rules are what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges." (Hochschild 1985, 56).

5 He recounts a shocking and painful event from his childhood, at the source of his double-consciousness: "I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil." (Du Bois 1994, 2).

6 See more recently: Manne (2024).

7 I am not arguing for necessary and sufficient connections between some emotions and being oppressed. I argue that the prevalence of some emotions is indicative of a non-accidental connection between being oppressed and experiencing such emotions.

8 For Solomon (2003), emotions consist in judgments, while for Nussbaum (2001) they can consist in non-propositional beliefs.

9 "Stereotyping is the process of taking data, assimilating it to role schemas by which one codes that kind of data, shaping it by accentuation of group difference, manipulating the differences in ways that make the in-group look as good as possible and as different from the out-group as possible." (Cudd 2006, 79).

10 However, the mind being extremely complex, Nussbaum says, it takes time and effort; indeed, a lifetime, to rid ourselves of the inadequate beliefs underpinning these emotions (Nussbaum 2001).

11 Moreover, it may not account for all cases of emotional alienation under oppression. See section 1.3 of this paper and Webster 2021.

12 The cognitive-replacement view falls into what Sara Ahmed has called the "*inside out* model of emotions" (Ahmed 2004, 8–9), which tends to frame emotions as internal and private states that belong to individuals, thus obfuscating their public and political dimension. Rather than thinking of emotions as underpinned by internal, discrete beliefs, we can argue, following Ahmed, that we should attend to their *relational* dimension to do justice to the way relations of power "shape the very surfaces of bodies" (12), as Butler (1993) also analyzes it. Shame is not a private feeling that *I* have "inside" but the effect of my contact with a shaming world.

13 Hochschild discusses "emotion management" techniques that institutions require from workers which involve modifying feeling by intervening in people's imagination. These attempts to modify emotion have alienating effects, as such modifications instrumentalize emotions for the monetary profit of the institutions (Hochschild 1985, 55). Due to differences in power, however, "women do *more* emotion managing than men." (1985, 164). In consequence, there are gender-specific forms of alienation entailed by emotional labor.

14 We can think of this feminist awareness as what has often been identified as a positive epistemological side of duboisian double-consciousness, consisting in a relative "epistemic privilege" or advantage the oppressed can have in relation to oppressors. This epistemic advantage can concern not only the specificities of the experience of oppression, which the oppressed are evidently more familiar with, but also some

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cognitive deficits and affective features that oppressors may often unwittingly exhibit, and that the "third eye" of the oppressed is more trained to detect and interpret. For more on this, see Narayan 1989; Mills 2007; Medina 2013; Alcoff 2015.

15 That resistance does not follow a straightforward path, and can therefore be ambivalent, is also conveyed by Butler's analysis of the ways in which repetitions of gender norms via performative practices such as drag do not necessarily lead to emancipatory results. See Butler 1993: 124–25.

16 I do not discuss these excerpts as *representative* of Beauvoir's readership. The question of the social constitution of her readership is a difficult one. The archives show a "wide spectrum of readers" (Coffin 2020: 19). Nor am I suggesting that the letters here cited are representative of the way readers reacted to Beauvoir's books. For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Beauvoir and her readers, see Rouch 2020 and Coffin 2020.

17 Many thanks to Em Hernandez for this suggestion.

18 While there may be a relevant distinction to be made between personal narrative and testimony, the discussion of the details of this distinction remains outside of the scope of this paper for reasons of space.

19 While the idea of sharing a common experience has often led to problematic generalizations that erase how class, race, and sexuality differentially shape women's experiences of oppression, I am here thinking of the possibility of recognizing in other people's narratives something in common while at the same time being able to see the differences.

20 Of course, as I point out at the end of this paper, this is not necessarily always emancipatory. For example, it can lead to "illusions of intimacy." See Coffin 2020: 30–31.

21 Although with a lesser emphasis on narrativity, Sue Campbell (1997) has also argued that the way we express our emotions is integral to the way we experience them. See also Hochshild's discussion of organismic (Darwin, Freud, William James) versus interactional (Dewey, H. Gerth, C. Wright Mills, E. Goffman) models of emotion: "for the interactional theorists, emotion is open-ended whereas for the organismic theorists it is fixed. . . . In the interactional model, social factors enter *into the very formulation* of emotions, through codification, management and expression." (1985, 206–07).

22 By narrative thinking Goldie understands a way of "thinking through" whereby we represent events in narrative form: it "involve[s] certain sequences of thought, feeling, and imagination" which have a narrative structure. Narrative thinking gives "coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import to what is narrated." (2012, 4). There are many ways in which one may "think through": "remembering, perhaps episodically or experientially, some events that happened to me or that I observed, hypothesising what might happen in the future; thinking through a narrative propositionally; mentally rehearsing it, as one might mentally rehearse a speech; using perceptual imagination to, for example, visualise what might happen; thinking through an episode of events cooly with little or no emotional engagement; thinking through the episode vividly and highly emotionally; thinking of 'that terrible quarter of an hour when I thought I was lost'" (Goldie 2012, 4).

23 The disturbance of narrative capacities and, consequently, the difficulty in regulating emotions, are also typically experienced in cases of trauma. As Susan Brison (2003) argues, trauma is experienced as a shattering of the self (Brison 2003, 15). This is simultaneously experienced as a shattering of one's narrative capacities (50). In consequence, attempting to overcome the distressing emotional impact of trauma involves a rebuilding of narrative capacities as a way of rebuilding a self.

24 Under the "narrative self-constitution view," Marya Schechtman (2007) has argued that "we constitute ourselves as persons by forming a narrative self-conception according to which we experience and organize our lives. . . . What this means more specifically is that we experience the present in the context of a larger life-narrative. In order to have a narrative self-conception in the relevant sense, the experienced past and anticipated future must condition the character and significance of present experiences and actions. When I have a self-constituting narrative, what happens to me is not interpreted as an isolated incident, but as part of an ongoing story." As such, narrating as resisting can be seen as a way of modifying alienated narrative self-conceptions.

25 While I argue that narration can have potent emancipatory effects, I do not claim that narration is *enough* for inhabiting one's own skin and public spaces in a disalienated way. Apart from the structural changes in the way some bodies are not allowed to circulate and inhabit public spaces, other forms of retraining of the body that go beyond narrative experiences will still be necessary. The examination of the link between narrativity and bodily changes goes beyond the scope of this paper. My argument is, more modestly, that narrative thinking can help dealing with difficult emotional distress brought up by oppression, and not that it is a sufficient condition. I thank anonymous reviewer for asking this clarification.

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26 "si les lettres adressées à Beauvoir permettent de dévoiler une appropriation de l'œuvre par ses lectrices, les réponses de l'écrivaine et l'évolution de son travail littéraire montrent, elles, que le parcours intellectuel et féministe de l'écrivaine s'est dirigé de l'individuel vers le collectif en grande partie sous l'influence des lettres de ses lectrices." (Rouch 2020, 245). Beauvoir also conceived writing as a relational process "a book is a collective object: readers contribute as much as the author to its creation." (Beauvoir 1963: 60, as cited and translated in Coffin 2020, 34).

27 This also joins Butler's point about drag not being necessarily always subversive. See n. 15 of this paper.

28 The important question of the availability of hermeneutical resources that allow for counter-narrative-making is, however, a complex and difficult one. Where can these counter-narratives be found? A first spontaneous answer may lead us point out to anti-oppression social movements. We can also think of Ahmed's point about resistance through passing books (see section 5.4 of this paper); for example, of lesbian feminism of color and "female troublemaker fiction" (Ahmed 2017, 228) as a "willfulness archive" (230): "A book, a survival strategy, comes alive, acquires a life of its own, a will of its own, a willful will; history by the bone, own but not alone." (230). However, we can also speculate that, the more some resources for counter-narrative become *available* (for example, through the articulation of anti-oppression social movements), the more potentially hegemonic they can become. The very processes that allow some phenomena (previously invisible due to the marginalization that oppression entails) to become visible in their counter-hegemonic stance, may involve their own forms of exclusion. And the more visible they become, the more hegemonic and oppressive, as the cultural dominance of any narrative will effectively silence other kinds of counter-narrative (for more on this, see Axel Honneth's critique to Nancy Fraser in their famous 2003 debate: Fraser and Honneth 2003, 114–135). My point in this paper, however, has been to show the potentially emancipatory power of narrative experiences for dealing with emotional alienation. The complex question of what processes can facilitate counter-narratives that challenge hegemonic and oppressive tropes, of where they can be found, and to which extent these narratives also reproduce said oppressive tropes, remains outside the scope of this paper. I thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to reflect on this issue.

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