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MAKING INEQUALITY VISIBLE WITHOUT MAKING IT WORSE

By Clare Chambers*

Abstract: *Egalitarian commitments have often been thought compatible with practices that are later identified as inegalitarian. Thus, a fundamental task of egalitarianism is to make inequality visible. Making inequality visible requires including marginalized people, questioning what equality requires, and naming inequality. At the same time, egalitarianism is a movement for change: egalitarians want to make things more equal. When egalitarians seek change at the institutional level, the two egalitarian tasks are complementary: making inequality visible is part of campaigning to make things better. However, at the level of social norms there is a dilemma because making inequality visible can make things worse. Making inequality visible can reinforce unequal norms and fail to address intersectionality. The case of gendered pronouns illustrates this dilemma.*

KEY WORDS: social norms, gender, race, pronouns, egalitarianism, feminism, intersectionality, subordination

> "As a legal guarantee, sex equality has been in effect for a considerable period all over the world. None of this has observably produced sex equality in social reality."
>
> — Catharine MacKinnon[1]

> "To be sure, for there to be any real hope of change, it means that men must examine scrupulously and honestly how we actually behave, the real facts about our acts and our responsibilities, what happens to whom as a result, and men must own the consequences of what we have done."
>
> — John Stoltenberg[2]

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[1] Catharine MacKinnon, *Butterfly Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 305.

[2] John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (New York: Meridian, 1990), 24.

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"Your silence will not protect you."
— Audre Lorde[3]

I. Introduction

Egalitarianism has always been countercultural. Since there have been no developed societies without inequality, there has never been egalitarianism without inequality. Societies have sometimes proclaimed themselves to be equal; certainly, they have frequently claimed a commitment to equality. But inequality is ever present.

"All men are created equal," stated the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776. Thomas Jefferson, its author, owned over six hundred enslaved people throughout his life, people who suffered violence, rape, and immense cruelty under his authority.[4] The Declaration of Independence also coexisted with the denial of such basic rights for women as the right to vote and the right to refuse sex with their husbands. "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" became the official motto of France during the nineteenth century, when it was creating a colonial empire across North Africa and French Indochina. French colonialism, like other colonialisms, perpetrated the idea of natural inferiority of colonized people and it was upheld through brutal practices of suppression and punishment, described by French President Emmanuel Macron as "a crime against humanity."[5]

As Catharine MacKinnon points out, sex equality does not exist anywhere, despite being the explicit commitment of many states, international human rights instruments, and egalitarians. Women remain unequal to men, most obviously in their experience of and vulnerability to sexual and domestic violence and in the shockingly low rates at which these crimes are convicted. Inequality between women and men is manifest and maintained in an overwhelming number of ways, including through the division of labor and the fact that women still take on the majority of the caring and household work; inequality in the workplace and the feminization of poverty; gendered norms of behavior, dress, and appearance that hit young women and girls especially hard; incessant sexualization and objectification; and the stigma of female ageing and the denigration of older women.

Egalitarianism has thus always developed in the context of pervasive inequality and, while egalitarianism is typically a reforming or even revolutionary stance, declarations of equality have often been thought compatible with the most egregious institutions of inequality. Inequality, then, is frequently invisible—at least to those who do not themselves suffer from it.

[3] Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017), 2.
[4] "Slavery FAQs—Property," The Jefferson Monticello, https://www.monticello.org/slavery/slavery-faqs/property/.
[5] "French Presidential Hopeful Macron Calls Colonisation a 'Crime against Humanity,'" *France 24*, https://www.france24.com/en/20170216-france-presidential-hopeful-macron-describes-colonisation-algeria-crime-against-humanity.

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The first task of egalitarianism is to make inequality visible. Egalitarians must point out when a society's normal practices are practices of inequality, where groups have been excluded, and where the requirements of equality have been misunderstood. Egalitarianism also requires change, for it is a normative position, a demand for justice. Thus states, institutions, and individuals need to adjust their existing behavior to bring about equality. In this essay I argue that there is a tension between these two vitally important aspects of egalitarianism. Where inequality is sustained by social norms, it is difficult to make inequality visible without making it worse.

My argument in this essay is similar to, yet distinct from, one that Nancy Fraser makes when discussing what she calls "the redistribution-recognition dilemma."[6] Egalitarians, she argues, are concerned with two sorts of injustice. Socioeconomic injustice, which most essays in this volume address, is paradigmatically addressed with some form of redistribution. Fraser notes that the aim of redistributive egalitarianism is to *minimize* differences between groups by "abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity."[7] My essay focuses on a second type of injustice, which Fraser calls cultural or symbolic injustice. Cultural injustice "is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication."[8] It is typically remedied with recognitional egalitarianism, which moves to reconfigure the symbolic social status of subordinated groups. Recognitional justice, Fraser argues, "often take[s] the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group and then of affirming its value."[9]

Recognition and redistribution are not entirely separate egalitarian aims. Many instances of injustice require both sorts of remedy. For example, both sex and race are forms of injustice that combine socioeconomic inequality and symbolic subordination. Fraser's insight is that redistribution and recognition, although both part of egalitarian justice, are in tension because one emphasizes and one downplays the differences between groups. This tension creates an egalitarian dilemma.

Like Fraser, I argue that two essential parts of the egalitarian project are in tension, resulting in an egalitarian dilemma. Also, as in Fraser's account, the dilemma I highlight is between a project that emphasizes group differentiation and one that de-emphasizes it. My argument is that making inequality visible is a necessary first step toward egalitarian change that may need to be repeated as inequality persists. Often, the act of making their inequality visible is part of a subordinated group's strategy of working toward its own liberation; it is an act of defiance, consciousness-raising, or reclamation. Making inequality visible emphasizes group differentiation because it

[6] Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age," in her *Justice Interruptus* (London: Routledge, 1997).
[7] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 16.
[8] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 14.
[9] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 16.

emphasizes the way in which members of groups differ in the treatment they receive and the experiences they have.

At the same time, making inequality visible cannot be an end in itself. Ultimately, the aim for egalitarians is to remove inequality by taking away the subordination that formed the basis of group identification. Removing subordination reduces the (socially significant) differences between groups, which may result in the end of the group as group. For example, Sally Haslanger's account of womanhood focuses on womanhood as a subordinate status; what it is to be a woman, on her account, is to be subject to certain forms of gendered inequality. For Haslanger, the goal of egalitarianism should be to remove this subordination by bringing about the end of women thus defined.[10]

Like Fraser, then, I highlight a dilemma between emphasizing and de-emphasizing group difference; like her, I argue that egalitarianism requires both sorts of action. However, the dilemma I highlight is not between two sorts of injustice: it is not a dilemma between redistributive and recognitional equality. Indeed, the dilemma I highlight exists even if we confine our attention to matters of recognition. In Section V below I use the case of gendered pronouns to further illuminate the dilemma and demonstrate that it occurs even *within* the sphere of recognitional egalitarian action.

II. Institutions, Structures, Norms, and Behavior

I begin by setting out the dilemma in more detail. Inequality exists at different levels, including institutions, structures, social norms, and individual behavior. Egalitarian theories of justice tend to focus on the institutional or structural levels. Here, the two egalitarian tasks are complementary: making inequality visible is an essential part of campaigning for change. Thus, an activist movement for institutional change can focus on making inequality visible via campaigning, protesting, and lobbying. The more an inequality is exposed, the more pressure is placed on institutions and policymakers; the more public awareness, the more incentive for politicians and companies to respond. Campaigning is addressed to individuals and institutions with the presumed power to bring about egalitarian change via wide-ranging, highly influential, or coercive acts. Governments can pass laws and enact policies, employers can change their practices and culture, businesses can change their products and the way they advertise and market them, and social media and tech companies can adjust their algorithms and editorial controls. At the institutional or structural levels, then, there is a relatively clear methodology for egalitarian change. Voters, consumers, and activists make inequality visible and powerful actors fix it.

[10] Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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This complementarity does not mean that institutional change is easy. Significant factors maintain the status quo, including the fact that those with the most power are therefore beneficiaries of existing inequality. There is still a vast amount of work to be done in exposing and combating inequality of the starkest sort: male violence, sexual exploitation, institutional racism, the exclusion of disabled people, poverty, and global injustice. Those in power are not always responsive to egalitarian concerns, to put it mildly.

Sometimes, egalitarian campaigning triggers a reactionary backlash. If a backlash motivates people with sufficient power and influence to prevent or even reverse egalitarian change, there is a sense in which making inequality visible also makes it worse, but this is not the sort of tension I address here.

We can see how the problem of making inequality visible without making it worse arises when we turn our attention to social norms. By "social norm," I mean an informal rule that tells us how to act or not act in a given situation.[11] A social norm can be rigid and insistent, such as the norm against being naked in public, or it can be more lenient and open to interpretation, such as norms of polite greeting that allow a handshake, wave, bow, hug, or a simple "Hello."

Action in compliance with social norms is difficult to analyze from an egalitarian perspective. On the one hand, many social norms are intricately related to inequality more broadly and are part of what drives it. On the other hand, in and of themselves they can often seem relatively innocuous. Moreover, even if we can agree that some norm violates egalitarian principles, what follows? Conformity to a norm may seem to be within the realm of legitimate freedom, while nonconformity may be too much to ask for.

When we follow a social norm, we do so because compliance seems better than noncompliance. "Better" here may refer to a self-interested cost-benefit analysis, to endorsement of the norm, or to what is effectively a default position. Often, we follow social norms without conscious decision or effort, out of habit or simple conformity. (We ask, "How are you?" even if we're not interested in the answer.) We may follow a social norm even though we do not, personally, endorse it either because we fear the costs of noncompliance or seek the benefits of compliance. (Most nudists wear clothes in public.) We often follow social norms willingly, though, because we endorse them. (I approve of exchanging gifts on birthdays, table manners, and reading to my children at bedtime.)

Social norms are part of the sustenance of social hierarchies, such that countering them is a crucial part of egalitarian struggle. While social norms can be amenable to change by institutions and organized action, they must also be addressed by individuals. Norms exist only when people comply

[11] The account of social norms in this section is intentionally brief and schematic. For more detailed analysis, see Clare Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), Part One.

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with them. Every act of compliance reinforces a norm, both by being part of a habituation process for the complier and by setting an example for others.

Full compliance is not necessary for a social norm to survive; there need only be a pattern of compliance. This is not an exact science. The point at which noncompliance with a norm means that the norm no longer exists is not the same at every time or place nor for every norm. Sometimes, norms are extremely robust, requiring unusual circumstances to create enough noncompliance to destroy them. The case of foot binding is like this: the practice endured for a millennium but was ended in one generation by a process of collective, simultaneous abandonment.[12] Sometimes, a norm is relatively weak. Fashion is like this: a small number of designers and influencers can tip clothing norms from one style to another in a matter of weeks or months.

While the *causes* of norm-destruction vary, what it means for a social norm to die is that people stop complying with it. Institutional action can be a helpful or necessary part of this process.[13] Compliance can be discouraged, disincentivized, or even, in extreme cases, punished. Noncompliance can be encouraged, rewarded, or even required. These measures disrupt the costs and benefits of norm-following. At some point, individuals face a choice: Will they comply with an inegalitarian norm, gaining the benefits of compliance but maintaining the norm and the inequality it supports, or will they play their part in dismantling the norm by refusing to comply?

III. Making Inequality Visible

> "We should always be wary of talking of 'the last remaining form of discrimination.' If we have learned anything from the liberation movements we should have learned how difficult it is to be aware of latent prejudices in our attitudes to particular groups until these prejudices are forcefully pointed out to us."
>
> — Peter Singer[14]

Since we have very often missed instances of injustice, especially when they are pervasive, it is essential for egalitarians to be open to recognizing new forms of inequality. In this section I discuss three ways in which inequality needs to be made visible. First, we need to ask, "Equality between whom?" and we need to take time to listen to the voices of those who have been excluded. Second, we need to debate and analyze what equality requires. Third, we need to ensure that inequality is not obscured by faux-egalitarian or falsely neutral language.

[12] Gerry Mackie, "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 6 (1996): 999–1017.
[13] Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice.*
[14] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 1995), xii.

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A. Equality between whom?

As set out in Section I above, egalitarian sentiment has always coexisted with deep social inequality. History shows us that defenders of equality often miss the inequality of their own social standards, accepting or even participating in practices that later seem self-evidently unequal. Sometimes, this is because they have a limited answer to the question "Equality between whom?" and think that equality applies only between men; between white people; or between people of a certain class, nationality, or culture. Egalitarianism requires making inequality visible in the sense of expanding the range of people—or even, as Singer argues, animals—who are considered part of its purview.

This sort of making inequality visible may seem simple, but it is not. Subordinated people must constantly show how they are subordinated, what they experience, and why existing egalitarian movements and principles fail. Movements toward equality have had to expose inequality on the basis of class, sex, race, sexuality, religion, culture, nationality, migrant status, gender identity, age, disability, and more.

Some of the most powerful philosophy of visibility comes from Black feminism.[15] Black feminists have had to fight to make their inequality visible in the face of a women's movement based on white experience and a civil rights movement based on male experience. This is the insight of intersectionality: that structures of domination can intersect in a way that does not merely add one kind of inequality to another but serves to make both invisible. For example, Black women who have suffered sex- and race-based discrimination in the workplace have found it difficult to secure legal remedy since the success of white women in the same workplace suggests the absence of sex discrimination and the success of Black men suggests the absence of racial discrimination. The inequality suffered by Black women as such is thus "theoretically erased."[16] As Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, when feminist and antiracist practices "expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling."[17] Black feminists have had to work, repeatedly, to tell the story of their unequal location.

Inequality must be made visible, which involves not assuming that we know where it lies without listening to those with different experiences from us. As Audre Lorde puts it, "It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with

[15] For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Angela Y. Davies, *Women, Race & Class* (London: The Women's Press, 1982); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981).

[16] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139.

[17] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1242.

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the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences."[18] We must ask "Equality between whom?" and we must ensure that we do not continue to exclude certain voices.

B. What is equality?

Inequality needs to be made visible so that we can refine our understanding of what equality requires and vice versa; by developing our understanding of what equality requires, we make new forms of inequality visible. I take the need for this form of making inequality visible to be uncontroversial among philosophers. Egalitarian theory engages in debates about equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome, equality of welfare versus equality of resources, formal equality versus substantive equality, and so on. Egalitarian analysis must be debated and updated to take account of missed forms of inequality.

For example, much of MacKinnon's most important work has been to make inequality explicit. She argues that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, that rape law based on consent is premised on subordination, that low rates of conviction for rape and sexual assault mean that women are not equal before the law, that abuses of women's rights are abuses of human rights, that rape in war is a form of genocide, that pornography is incompatible with women's equality, that sex trafficking and sex work are intimately interlinked, and that women are not equal in any of this. MacKinnon shows how inequality is often mischaracterized as difference, especially from the dominant point of view.

Social norms can be inegalitarian in various different ways. Some norms explicitly subordinate. For example, a norm that one should bow or curtsey before royalty is an expression of hierarchy between monarch and subject. The genuflection literally lowers the inferior before the superior. A norm that the father of the bride "gives his daughter away" at her wedding is an expression of marriage as the transfer of property. The woman is represented as an object to be transferred and subordinated to both father and husband.

Janet Radcliffe Richards argues that feminist critique should be targeted only at norms that explicitly subordinate. She maintains that feminists need not reject *all* gender-differentiated norms. For Richards, "while feminists must be committed to attacking all cultural distinctions which actually degrade women, the indiscriminate pursuit of an androgynous culture must involve the elimination of innocuous cultural differences as well, and with them the source of a great deal of pleasure to many people."[19] Richards considers appearance norms to be examples of innocuous gender differentiation. Some women enjoy wearing makeup and feminine clothes,

[18] Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, 104.

[19] Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 150–51.

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some men enjoy seeing women thus adorned, and many will agree with Richards that there is nothing wrong with either.

But egalitarians cannot confine their attention to unequal norms that *explicitly* subordinate. Often, social norms subordinate in more subtle ways, requiring analysis to identify and activism to disrupt. For example, the norm that women take on greater responsibility for childcare and men for paid work need not explicitly subordinate women. There is nothing degrading about childcare and nothing inherently elevating about paid work. Indeed, childcare is valuable and can be rewarding and fun and paid work can be tedious, dangerous, or demeaning. However, careful feminist analysis has shown that the gendered division of labor sustains gender inequality.[20] This inequality had to be made visible.

Norms can also be inegalitarian when different groups face very different patterns of costs and benefits.[21] Consider the norm that makeup enhances women's but not men's appearance. Men, who are advantaged by gender inequality, face a fortuitous situation in which they can enjoy both compliance benefits (the absence of sanction) and enhanced social status by not wearing makeup. Women, on the other hand, face a difficult choice. Wearing makeup brings compliance benefits, such as being praised for looking good or having elevated self-esteem, but the status benefits are ambiguous. If a social norm is attached to a subordinated position, then complying with it can solidify disadvantage. A woman who conforms to the makeup norm may be dismissed as an "airhead" or a "dumb blonde," criticized for taking too long to get ready, or not taken seriously professionally. Women's status is not enhanced relative to men by complying with the social norm to focus on their appearance. Instead, their compliance with gendered appearance norms contributes to them being seen as less rational, less serious, and less competent than men who do not (according to gendered scripts) wear makeup or spend equivalent time on their appearance. An individual woman may elevate her status *relative to other women* by compliance with gendered beauty norms, but compliance does not make her men's equal nor does it raise women's status as a group.

Some inequalities occur between social groups that are widely recognized as having deep socioeconomic significance, such as those of gender, race, or class. Group-based inequalities are not always structured along such lines, though, and then the need to make inequality visible can be particularly salient. As James Partridge makes clear, people with "visible difference" or

[20] Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (London: Piatkus, 1990); Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do about It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Gina Schouten, *Liberalism, Neutrality, and the Gendered Division of Labor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[21] I present a detailed analysis of the injustice of unequal norms in Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice.*

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facial disfigurement are subjected to what he terms "faceism"[22] and what Fraser might call recognitional injustice. There is a strong social norm that everyone should have a "normal" face, which is to say a face without visible differences such as scarring, burns, birthmarks, or swelling. Their natural faces without surgery or makeup are treated with stigma in a society that is fixated on normalized appearance. Partridge aims to make this inequality visible in his activism and writing.

Partridge and other people with visible difference face a burdensome choice: comply with faceist norms or suffer inequality. In order to comply with faceist norms, people with visible difference must take steps to change or disguise their faces with surgery or camouflage makeup. If they do so successfully, they will receive benefits of compliance, such as respite from staring and stigma. The status of people with visible difference is not elevated by such action, though, because the unequal faceist norms remain intact. Indeed, the stigma is maintained because norm-compliance reinforces the idea that the visibly different face—and the person it belongs to—is inferior in its natural state.

Norms can also be inegalitarian simply by existing in the context of hierarchy. As MacKinnon puts it, inequality must be "understood through its specific hierarchical substance."[23] MacKinnon thus differentiates what she calls "formal equality" and "substantive equality." Formal equality makes equality equivalent to and dependent on sameness, as captured in the Aristotelian dictum to treat likes alike and unalikes unalike. Under principles of formal equality two people warrant equal treatment if they are the same in some relevant respect; being treated equally thus means being treated the same. The problem is that people are not the same, and so a demand for sameness is a demand that some person or group of people must become like another if they are to be treated equally.[24] In unequal societies, what that means is that the disadvantaged must become like the advantaged; only then will their claim to equal treatment be effective as an equality claim. Similarly, formally equal treatment—that is, doing the same thing to everyone—simply leaves the existing structures of inequality intact. It is not egalitarian to charge the same amount of tax to rich and poor, to deny maternity leave to both women and men, or to require everyone to use stairs to access a building.

In place of formal equality, MacKinnon advocates substantive equality:

> [I]nequality, substantively speaking, is always a material or social value hierarchy—higher and lower, more and less, top and bottom,

[22] James Partridge, *Face It: Facial Disfigurement and My Fight for Face Equality* (Pebble Press, 2020).

[23] MacKinnon, *Butterfly Politics*, 314.

[24] Another example of equality as sameness is analyzed by Nancy Fraser in her account of the "Universal Breadwinner" model of gender justice; see Nancy Fraser, "After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment," in Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

> better and worse, clean and dirty, served and serving, appropriately rich and appropriately poor, superior and inferior, dominant and subordinate, justly forceful and rightly violated, commanding and obeying… . The injury involves material treatment and social standing simultaneously. And the inequality exists whether the person subjected to it experiences a loss of dignity or not.[25]

Egalitarianism opposes not mere difference, but *subordination.* In the context of hierarchy, being treated differently can be a source of subordination for some and neutral or beneficial for others. MacKinnon gives the example of the racially segregated schools that were challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education.*[26] The claim before the Court was that segregated schools could be "separate but equal." The Court rejected that claim and ruled that segregation amounted to subordination for Black children. However, as MacKinnon points out, the mere fact of segregation cannot account for the subordination because, if it did, then school segregation would also have subordinated white children. Separate is not equal, but separateness can mean either subordination or superiority.[27] School segregation subordinated Black children but not white children because it occurred in a context of racial hierarchy. School segregation was the *effect* of pre-existing hierarchy, it was the *expression* of pre-existing hierarchy, and it was *sustenance* for that hierarchy.

Inegalitarianism does not reside in the mere fact of being treated differently from others. Different treatment need not make a person or group inferior. What matters is the fact of being treated differently *in a context in which hierarchy already exists.* The pre-existing hierarchy gives meaning to different treatment, turning it into subordination for some. A gentlemen's club, open to men only, serves to elevate men and denigrate women when it exists in the context of gender hierarchy, that is, a context in which women have historically been excluded from spheres of power. A women-only college, however, does not denigrate men when it exists in that same context; instead, it is a small corrective to a society geared toward male inclusion and female exclusion. It elevates women compared to the situation of there being no women-only colleges because it creates a privileged space reserved for them. It does not go so far as to elevate women above men, though, existing as it does in a general context of female subordination. "The first question," as MacKinnon puts it, is whether "inequality is part of a socially pre-existing disadvantage. For evidence of this, look out the window."[28]

[25] MacKinnon, *Butterfly Politics,* 315.
[26] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
[27] These are not the only options. Sometimes, separateness is needed as a form of compensation or protection.
[28] MacKinnon, *Butterfly Politics,* 312.

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C. Naming inequality

A final aspect of making inequality visible is naming it. Sometimes, naming is done by creating new words or phrases to describe phenomena that have not previously been widely recognized. Examples include Partridge's "faceism" and words or phrases like "lookism," "intersectionality," and "cis privilege." Each of these words or phrases names a form of inequality that was not generally understood, providing visibility through naming.

Sometimes, phenomena that are acknowledged as existing but not adequately responded to can be brought into stark relief with new descriptions. A key example is the phrase "Black Lives Matter." It was not reasonably open to doubt that racial inequality existed in the United States as the continuing legacy of slavery, but that particular phrase has a power because it shows the demand for racial equality to be both urgent and unanswerable. The phrase "Black Lives Matter" is provocative and it is personal. It is a request for basic human empathy and simple equal consideration. It is a claim that cannot reasonably be denied. The backlash claim "All Lives Matter," which arguably *tries* to deny it, thereby demonstrates its urgency.

Another example of making inequality visible via resonant naming is the #MeToo movement, which encouraged women to share stories on social media of being sexually harassed or assaulted. The existence of sexual harassment and assault has long been widely known at the level of social science and it is part of the everyday experience of most women.[29] Nevertheless, it persists and at the policy level is insufficiently visible. The #MeToo movement let women see that they were not alone and enabled men to see what it is like to be a woman in a misogynist society.

Other times, naming inequality requires not the creation of new words and phrases but the retention or redeployment of old ones. Susan Moller Okin criticizes the practice of using gender-neutral language to describe gendered phenomena. Her work shows how philosophers and others tend to ignore sex and gender, even when those things make a profound difference. As Okin puts it, "gender-neutral terms frequently obscure the fact that so much of the real experience of 'persons', so long as they live in gender-structured societies, *does* in fact depend on what sex they are."[30]

Men's role is often minimized by the way we describe aspects of gender inequality. For example, we talk about the issues of women's safety, violence against women and girls, and domestic violence rather than *male violence against women*. We talk about prostitution, sex work, or

[29] A 2020 report by the British government found that 51 percent of women of all ages had experienced sexual harassment in the last twelve months. The experience of sexual harassment is particularly common for younger women: 80 percent of women between ages 16 and 24, and 69 percent of those between ages 25 and 34, reported being sexually harassed at least once in the previous year. See Lorna Adams et al., *2020 Sexual Harassment Survey* (United Kingdom: Government Equalities Office, 2019), 97, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002873/2021-07-12_Sexual_Harassment_Report_FINAL.pdf.

[30] Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 11.

pornography rather than *men's sexual use of women and children.* We worry about threats to women's rights rather than *male dominance.* Feminists debate women-only spaces rather than *spaces without men.* Often, simply reframing the terms we use can make inequality visible. This analysis suggests that making inequality visible requires paying attention to language.

In this section I have shown that making inequality visible is a vital part of egalitarian action. It is necessary because those in positions of power and advantage often ignore the structures of inequality that benefit them. Making inequality visible thus has both an epistemic and a political purpose. It increases understanding of patterns of inequality that might otherwise be obscure to those who do not suffer from them—or even to those who do, as in the feminist process of consciousness-raising. It can also provide a focus and an impetus for change. However, there are costs to making inequality visible. In the next section, I show how making inequality visible can sometimes make it worse.

IV. Making Inequality Worse

In this section I discuss two ways that making inequality visible can make it worse. First, naming and describing inequality reinforces the social norms that sustain it because describing unequal social norms contributes to their reality and salience. Second, the intersectionality that requires making inequality visible also means that strategies for egalitarian change can be complex or contradictory.

A. Norm reinforcement

Many social norms concern appearance and such norms are often inegalitarian.[31] In order to fit in, our bodies must conform to an array of standards. Some of these standards are fleeting and superficial, such as norms of fashionable dress, hair, and makeup. These norms are relatively easy to comply with and to change; with sufficient material resources, clothes, hairstyles, and makeup routines can be adjusted to fit contemporary standards. Other appearance norms are more demanding since they relate to the shape and form of the body itself, which is less amenable to alteration.

Imagine someone considering whether to have cosmetic surgery to "correct" a body that does not conform to social norms. Perhaps they are considering undergoing liposuction to remove fat, enlarging their breasts with implants, having protruding ears pinned back via otoplasty, or cosmetic surgery to minimize facial scarring. A number of claims might be made in defense of these surgeries: that having a more attractive or "normal" body will make them happier, more successful, more confident,

[31] For sustained argument on this point, see Clare Chambers, *Intact: A Defence of the Unmodified Body* (London: Allen Lane, 2022).

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or—to put the negative case—will prevent staring, insults, and bullying. The issue at stake here is not whether any of these claims are true; let us suppose for the sake of argument that they are. The issue is what might make them true. In every case, what might make them true is the fact that as a society we impose sanctions for deviating from social norms and issue rewards for compliance.

Speaking collectively, we make the bully's argument[32]:

> *The bully's argument*: You should comply with social norms because we will punish you if you don't.

Most of us are not bullies, or so we might claim. We do not make fun of people with prominent ears, stare at people with visible differences, criticize people who are fat, or objectify women. When we conform to appearance norms or encourage others to do so, we need not endorse the relevant social standards. We might make a purely rational, hard-headed assessment of the realities of a social situation. Conformity to a social norm may be in someone's interests, even if it is an unequal norm that should not exist. Egalitarians should not demand that already disadvantaged individuals martyr themselves to the cause.

Thus, parents who decide to have their children's ears pinned back, for example, might fully endorse the egalitarian thought that unequal appearance norms should not exist and that everyone should be respected and accepted regardless of how they look. Even so, it may seem to them that they must make the best choice for their child based on rational assessment of the realities of social life. They might put forward the bystander's argument:

> *The bystander's argument*: You should comply with social norms because others will punish you if you don't.

This may seem reasonable when one is thinking only of individual welfare, but the way social norms work means that the bystander's argument is also the bully's argument. We are all implicated in social norms as members of society.

Social norms require compliance, understanding, and agreement. First, norms exist only if enough people comply with them. A social norm that is generally not followed is not really a social norm. Imagine that you are starting a new job and one of your coworkers says to you, "It's the norm that men wear ties and women wear heels, but no one does." You would be puzzled because the statement makes no sense. Perhaps such a norm *used* to exist or perhaps there is a formal rule that no one follows, but without general compliance there is no norm.

Second, norms also depend on there being general understanding of their content. Someone who is entering an unfamiliar country or community may

[32] The argument in this section draws on G. A. Cohen's analysis of the kidnapper's argument in his *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

not know what the relevant social norms are; this is an unsettling and uncomfortable experience for all concerned. But if *no one* knows what the norms are, then they don't exist in any meaningful way. For a norm to persist, it has to be generally understood.

Third, the content and application of social norms must be a matter of social agreement, not individual choice. Individuals may choose whether to comply (or not) with social norms, but individuals are not in charge of defining social norms or of deciding to whom they apply.

The person putting forward the bystander's argument claims that she herself does not uphold unequal appearance norms because she does not make fun of people with prominent ears, stare at people with visible differences, criticize people who are fat, or objectify women's breasts. Perhaps she is right about that. However, most of us do uphold appearance norms, even if we also critique them. Social norms such as these can be deeply internalized. As Sofie Hagen writes, "The negative attitude towards weight is so all-encompassing that the chances are that whoever you meet has been taught to hate fatness, long before they even had a chance to make up their own minds about what it is they like and don't like."[33] We have a similarly internalized reaction to other forms of visible difference and standards of beauty.[34]

No matter our egalitarian principles, few if any of us are truly bystanders where social norms are concerned. Enforcing and upholding social norms is not something "they" do; it is something "we" do. It is possible to set ourselves apart from particular norms, but it is not possible to set ourselves apart from all social norms, even those we do not endorse. As social creatures, the pressures to conform are strong and the social shaping of our behavior goes deep.

Moreover, even if some people manage to separate themselves from a particular social norm, that cannot be said of those who make the bystander's argument. *The bystander's argument is necessarily a bully's argument in the case of social norms because the very act of making the bystander's argument upholds and enforces those norms.*

Social norms are not upheld only by coercive or punitive acts of sanction or by overt and obvious systems of reward. Social norms are upheld by a multitude of repeated, everyday acts of compliance and reinforcement. We reinforce a social norm whenever we comply with it, even if we do so silently and unremarkably, because our behavior becomes part of the context by which we all measure ourselves. For example, I do not remember anyone ever telling me explicitly that I must wear clothes in public. I have absorbed and internalized this norm by observing that every person around me follows it. Each time I see a clothed person the norm is reinforced.

[33] Sofie Hagen, *Happy Fat: Taking Up Space in a World That Wants to Shrink You* (London: 4th Estate, 2019), 36.

[34] Partridge, *Face It*; Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice*; Heather Widdows, *Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

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Robert Cialdini and his coauthors distinguish two types of norms: descriptive norms, which describe what others usually do, and injunctive norms, which say what people ought to do. Making inequality visible is about identifying descriptive norms. The attempt to bring about egalitarian change is an attempt to install an injunctive norm that contrasts with descriptive norms. It is an attempt to create a new normal. Various psychological studies find that it is counterproductive to attempt to bring about change by highlighting current practice. As Cialdini and his coauthors put it, "Within the statement 'Look at all the people who are doing this undesirable thing' lurks the powerful and undercutting message 'Look at all the people who *are* doing it.'"[35] They conclude that attempts to bring about change should focus only on the normative message—what people should or shouldn't do—and stay silent about the fact that people are currently doing things wrong. For example, visitors to the endangered Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona were significantly more likely to take petrified wood from the park, if they saw a notice stating, "Many past visitors have removed the petrified wood from the park, changing the state of the Petrified Forest," as compared to one reading, "Please don't remove the petrified wood from the park."[36]

Making inequality (or other wrongdoing) visible via the bystander's argument is an act that makes the norm salient. The bystander does not just report other people's views. The bystander's argument conveys *by its very utterance* the norm's status and significance. The bystander concurs with the bully on three points: that a social norm exists, that the target's body does not conform to the social norm, and that changes to the target's body will bring it closer to conformity. The bystander need not endorse the social norm in the sense that she need not agree with the value judgments it contains, but then, neither need the bully. That she is willing to engage in sanctioning for noncompliance, need not indicate any principled agreement with the norm; most likely, it indicates her desire to protect her own status.

This process of norm reinforcement is a risk whenever a norm is made visible. Even if the intent is to disrupt or critique the norm, drawing attention to it emphasizes its existence and brings to mind the reality of potential sanctions. Thus, feminist campaigns drawing attention to male violence against women can have the distinctly counterproductive effect of causing women to fear men in ways and to an extent not warranted by the evidence.[37] Many women raised the concern that the #MeToo movement was at least in part an exercise in demonstrating publicly how widespread, effective, and unpunished men's sexual harassment is, requiring women to expose their trauma and humiliation and contributing to the pornification

[35] Robert B. Cialdini, Linda J. Demaine, Brad J. Sagarin, Daniel W. Barrett, Kelton Rhoads, and Patricia L. Winter, "Managing Social Norms for Persuasive Impact," *Social Influence* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5.
[36] Cialdini et al., "Managing Social Norms for Persuasive Impact," 8.
[37] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999), 273–74.

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of women's subordination. If making inequality visible shores up the norms that sustain it, then making inequality visible can make things worse.

MacKinnon's account of substantive equality and her analysis of the subordination of school segregation shows that whether a norm is inegalitarian is not just a matter of its content. It is also a matter of its context. School segregation subordinates Black children and not white ones because it occurs in the context of racial inequality. It contributes to Black children and not white children feeling inferior because that is the material reality of their social situation.

In the context of gender hierarchy, Marilyn Frye argues that all gendered norms are necessarily inegalitarian:

> [W]hen a male's sex-category is the thing about him that gets first and most repeated notice, the thing about him that is being framed and emphasized and given primacy is a feature which in general is an asset to him. When a female's sex-category is the thing about her that gets first and most repeated notice, the thing about her that is being framed and emphasized and given primacy is a feature which in general is a liability to her. Manifestations of this divergence in the meaning and consequences of sex-announcement can be very concrete.[38]

What Frye's and MacKinnon's analyses suggest is that in gendered societies (which is to say, all societies) norms of gender differentiation are highly likely to be inegalitarian even when they look neutral. In most everyday circumstances, being identifiable as a woman is subordinating. As Frye puts it:

> The female, announcing her sex, is both announcing and acting on her membership in the subordinated caste. She is obliged to inform others constantly and in every sort of situation that she is to be treated as inferior, without authority, assaultable. She cannot move or speak within the usual cultural norms without engaging in self-deprecation. The male cannot move or speak without engaging in self-aggrandizement. Constant sex-identification both defines and maintains the caste boundary without which there could not be a dominance-subordination structure.[39]

B. Intersectionality

Inequalities intersect. Our societies are so inegalitarian that they contain multiple hierarchies and multiple dimensions of inequality. Examples include, but are not limited to, sex, gender, race, culture, religion, class, wealth, age, disability, neurotype, nationality, and citizenship. Many

[38] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), 31.
[39] Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 33.

people are subordinated along various dimensions. Many are disadvantaged along some axes and advantaged along others. The more types of inequality we take into account—and thus, the more we make inequality visible—the more likely we are to highlight ways in which each of us is both subordinated and superior.

Making inequality visible can make it worse because making one sort of inequality visible can dilute or distract from another. Egalitarian movements are frequently troubled by dilemmas of priority and focus, inclusion and exclusion. Sometimes, what is at stake is a competition for attention: Will egalitarian activism and policymakers' attention be focused on this struggle or that one? Sometimes, though, drawing attention to one sort of inequality seems actively to undermine or obscure another.

For example, Betty Friedan's landmark work *The Feminine Mystique* was a founding text of second-wave feminism. It was an exemplar of making inequality visible. Friedan's aim was to draw attention to what she called "The Problem That Has No Name": the plight of the suburban housewife, whom she characterized as dehumanized and oppressed. Friedan's critique struck a chord with thousands of women and galvanized the feminist critique of the gendered division of labor. As she wrote, "'I've got tears in my eyes with sheer relief that my own inner turmoil is shared with other women,' a young Connecticut mother wrote me when I first began to put this problem into words."[40]

However, Friedan's work of making inequality visible was also roundly criticized for marginalizing or even undermining equality for Black women. Feminists such as bell hooks argued that Friedan's analysis made sense only for white, middle-class women. Working-class and poor women had no choice but to work outside the home. A housewife was a luxury only some families could afford, and Black women were particularly likely to be poor. Moreover, the legacies of slavery gave Black women a different perspective on subordination. For them, work was more likely to be a place of oppression than liberation and the family more likely to be a place of sanctuary and solidarity. As hooks puts it, "When white women's liberationists emphasized work as a path to liberation, they did not concentrate their attention on those women who are most exploited in the American labor force."[41] Thus, making inequality visible has different effects on people depending on their position in that inequality. For those who are subordinated, making inequality visible can make things worse by giving only a partial account of that subordination and distracting from the most salient aspects. Sometimes, measures that aim to reduce inequality along one axis of oppression actually worsen it along others. For example, exemptions from equality law aimed at countering

[40] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 30.
[41] See hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 146.

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cultural or religious inequality do so at the expense of internal minorities such as women.[42]

My argument is not that we should abandon the aim of making inequality visible. On the contrary, it remains an egalitarian imperative. My argument is that the need to make inequality visible can be in tension with a project of egalitarian improvement. A case study that illustrates this problem is gendered pronouns.

V. Gendered Pronouns

Traditionally, we use the pronouns "he" and "she" to refer to people we presume to be male/men or female/women, respectively, based on their name and appearance. This standard, norm-led practice has been called into question by trans theory.[43] Trans theorists and activists point out that not everyone has a gender identity that matches their appearance as read through gendered stereotypes and they argue that being misgendered by being referred to with a pronoun that does not match one's gender identity is a serious wrong. Misgendering is more likely to happen to people who are transgender or gender nonconforming.[44] This critique of the traditional social norms about pronoun use is an example of making the inequality of accepted social norms visible.

According to Frye's analysis, the various practices with which we signal our gender to others are always inegalitarian in the context of a gender-unequal society.[45] Like Frye, Robin Dembroff and Daniel Wodak view gender differentiation as unequal.[46] They argue that there is a duty *not to deny* a person's gender identity. This duty is not the same as a duty to *affirm* others' gender identity. It is perfectly acceptable to refer to people in ways that do not reference their gender identity at all, perhaps by using their job title (for example, "I agree with the Chair" or "The President was wrong"). However, they view avoiding misgendering as an egalitarian imperative. It

[42] For extended discussion of this example, see Clare Chambers, *Against Marriage: An Egalitarian Defence of the Marriage-Free State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), and Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice.*

[43] Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998); Linda D. Wayne, "Neutral Pronouns: A Modest Proposal Whose Time Has Come," *Canadian Women's Studies* 24, nos. 2–3 (2005): 85–91; Sonny Nordmarken, "Microaggressions," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 129–34.

[44] Lori Watson, "The Woman Question," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 1–2 (2016): 246–53.

[45] My argument does not depend on any particular theory of sex and gender. According to traditional feminist analysis, gender is the process by which biological sex differences are transformed into socially significant hierarchies. We develop a gender, which may or may not include a gender identity, by enacting the behaviors that are socially normative for people of our sex. According to contemporary gender identity and transgender theory, in contrast, gender identity can be generative of (not just consequent on) gendered behavior. Both analyses agree that there is no necessary connection between sex and gender.

[46] Robin Dembroff and Daniel Wodak, "He/She/They/Ze," *Ergo* 5, no. 4 (2018): 395.

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follows, according to Dembroff and Wodak, that there is a duty to use gender-neutral pronouns to refer to everyone:

> If we communicate gender information whenever we use singular third person pronouns, we pragmatically implicate that this information is *relevant* in all of those contexts. In presupposing gender information by saying "She won the Booker Prize twice" we pragmatically implicate that Hillary Mantel's gender identity is somehow relevant to why she won the Booker Prize twice. And we communicate that this is the case regardless of the predicate we apply. So when we use gender-specific pronouns we communicate that *her* gender identity helps explain all and sundry features of *her* life. By contrast, when we use the singular *they* in sentences like "My friend is picking me up but they're running late", we thereby communicate that the referent's gender is not relevant to discussion.[47]

Dembroff and Wodak are concerned to make visible the inequality that exists between people who are liable to being misgendered and those who are not, between those who are transgender or genderqueer and those who are not. They propose the egalitarian policy of using gender-neutral pronouns to refer to everyone. This policy avoids misgendering and avoids stigmatizing those whose gender identity is not obvious to others.[48] Therefore, it looks like an argument that meets egalitarian criteria. It makes inequality visible and it aims to make things better by undermining unequal norms. If we do not use gender terms, then we do not uphold gendered norms.

However, Dembroff and Wodak's proposal makes some forms of inequality invisible. To see this, note that they do not think that gendered terms can *never* be used. They allow gendered terms when they are "relevant," but what counts as a relevant situation? Dembroff and Wodak give only one example: it is acceptable to use the pronoun "she" to correct the misgendering of a trans woman. However, in a gendered society someone's gender is frequently relevant; an insistence on non-gendered terms as a default makes such inequality invisible. Consider the following sentences:

(1) Two of my colleagues had a disagreement in the departmental meeting. He told her to calm down.
(2) Two of my colleagues had a disagreement in the departmental meeting. She told him to calm down.

[47] Dembroff and Wodak, "He/She/They/Ze," 397.

[48] Their argument that misgendering is avoided relies on an asymmetry between gendered terms like "she" and "he" and gender-neutral terms like "they." Dembroff and Wodak argue that "she" and "he" are terms that always imply a gender identity, whereas "they" is a term that can be used both to denote a gender identity, as when it is deliberately chosen by a nonbinary person, or as a generic term that has no relation to a gender identity. In my view there are problems with this argument, but they do not affect the issue at stake here.

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(3) Two of my colleagues had a disagreement in the departmental meeting. One of them told the other one to calm down.

These sentences give quite different impressions. The gendered sentences (1) and (2) each give a sense of an altercation infused with gender dynamics. Sentence (1) brings to mind a classic misogynist trope, whereby women expressing dissent are dismissed as hysterical, shrill, or irrational. The gendered pronouns give us the means to envisage the situation and identify the dynamics. Sentence (2) implies that the man was aggressive and had to be calmed by his female colleague, which is another instance of stereotypical gendered behavior. Sentence (3), which Dembroff and Wodak's proposal would require, makes these gender dynamics invisible.

Dembroff and Wodak could make one of two replies. They could concede that this is a case where gender is relevant to the situation and accept that this case would count as a legitimate use of gendered pronouns. Alternatively, they could argue that I have proved their point: by adding the gendered pronouns, I have encouraged readers to draw on gender stereotypes to draw unwarranted conclusions about the situation. Perhaps the woman in sentence (1) was being unreasonable rather than the man being misogynist. Perhaps the woman in sentence (2) was being domineering rather than the man being aggressive. If I had used the gender-neutral sentence, my critics might say, I would not have bolstered unequal gender norms and would have prevented readers from jumping to gendered conclusions.

The problem with either response is that we cannot determine whether a situation is gendered in advance. For Dembroff and Wodak, gendered pronouns should be used only when gender is relevant to the situation. But how do we know whether gender is relevant, if we cannot name and discuss it? The egalitarian task of making inequality visible requires the ability to name and spot patterns of inequality; this process requires openness and debate. We cannot rely on speakers to know whether a situation is one in which gender is relevant because that is not always obvious. Nor can we engage in discussion, consciousness-raising, and egalitarian analysis without having the necessary information available.

Dembroff and Wodak's example of Hillary Mantel illustrates this problem. They assume, without argument, that her gender is irrelevant to her winning the Booker Prize. However, there is every reason to think that it is relevant, given that she exists in a gendered society. It is relevant because it affects how she would have operated within the world of publishing, that is, how her work would have been received by editors, agents, and readers. It is relevant because it would have affected her education, socialization, and treatment by others. It is relevant because it helps us to assess whether there is gender bias in who wins the Booker Prize.[49] It is also relevant because it

[49] The prize has been won by thirty-two men and eighteen women, a ratio of nearly two to one that inspired the creation of the Women's Prize for Fiction. "The Booker Prizes Facts & Figures," The Booker Prizes; https://thebookerprizes.com/facts-figures; "Our Story," Women's Prize for Fiction, https://www.womensprizeforfiction.co.uk/our-story.

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can be inspiring to other women to see that women not only can be excellent novelists, but also can be recognized at the highest levels for that excellence. All these facts are necessary for the egalitarian task of making inequality visible. We cannot make inequality visible if we cannot describe it.

Therefore, the universal adoption of gender-neutral pronouns in a society that remains gender-unequal undermines the crucial egalitarian task of making inequality visible. Dembroff and Wodak are right to point out, though, that the status quo in which we unthinkingly apply gendered pronouns to people based on their appearance and gendered stereotypes is inegalitarian. What, then, should egalitarians do?

One emerging norm is to ask everyone to indicate their preferred pronouns at the start of meetings, in email signatures, or on identity badges.[50] This alternative norm is motivated by egalitarian commitments. Specifically, it is an attempt to create an environment of recognition and equality for transgender and gender nonconforming people. Since transgender and gender nonconforming people are subordinated, pronoun announcement looks like an egalitarian norm, part of making inequality visible and combating it at the same time.

However, there are multiple social hierarchies in play. Norms of gender conformity are hostile to sex equality as well as to transgender equality; that is to say, gender conformity subordinates both gender-conforming women and gender nonconforming people of both sexes. Creating a norm of pronoun announcement might seem to undermine the norm of gender-conformity since it explicitly acknowledges the possibility of gender nonconformity and cases where a person's gender identity may not correspond to a casual observer's application of gendered norms. However, in the context of sex hierarchy, the costs of announcing pronouns are not equally distributed. In the context of sex hierarchy, pronoun announcement reinforces women's subordination.

For men who are not transgender, announcing their pronouns is costless or beneficial since it draws attention to their superior social status. When a "cis" man (that is, a man whose gender identity corresponds to the sex he was assigned at birth) declares that his pronouns are "he/him," he reminds the rest of us that we should treat him with the respect and status his position in the sex hierarchy demands. The same thing happens when someone asks to be called "Professor," "Lord," or "Your Honor." For women, announcing the pronouns "she/her" is costly since it draws attention to their inferior social status. The announcement risks reminding others that they may treat her with the condescension, indifference, or derision her place in the sex hierarchy permits. In the context of gender hierarchy, the norm of pronoun announcement is gender unequal. It subordinates women but it does not subordinate men. It is another example of an apparently

[50] Tre Wentling, "Trans* Disruptions: Pedagogical Practices and Pronoun Recognition," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (2015): 469–76.

neutral or symmetrical practice that has an unequal effect, much as segregated schools subordinated Black children but not white children.

The gender inequality between men and women intersects in complex ways with the inequality between gender-conforming and nonconforming people. A norm of pronoun announcement is intended to assist transgender and gender nonconforming people, but it can also be burdensome for them. Holding other social hierarchies constant, transgender and gender nonconforming people are subordinated relative to others; thus, it is more costly for gender nonconforming people to announce their pronouns. When gender-conforming people announce their pronouns, they draw attention to and benefit from their relative position of privilege. In this respect, the norm of pronoun announcement is similar to the #MeToo movement. Both have laudable egalitarian intentions and have the potential to prompt egalitarian change: both risk entrenching existing patterns of inequality.

Egalitarian pronoun practices face the problem of intersectionality, which is that one system of oppression can affect different groups in different ways. The gender system subordinates both women and gender nonconforming people. While women are subordinated because their position *within* the gender system is one of subordination, gender nonconforming people are subordinated because they are *excluded* from that system. People who are both women and gender non-conforming face a particularly complex, intersecting form of subordination. In all cases, it is the gender system that subordinates, but the mechanism is different. Inegalitarian systems of meaning can subordinate by both inclusion and exclusion. Thus, the remedy for one group does not fit all and it may even make things worse.[51]

The point of this discussion is not to solve the issue of pronouns, but to illustrate the complex interrelationship between a variety of egalitarian considerations. Since inequality often goes unrecognized, we need to make it visible. However, since inequality is sustained by unequal social norms, drawing attention to it can make it worse.

VI. What Does Egalitarianism Require?

I have argued that, in the context of social norms, there is a tension between two egalitarian imperatives: making inequality visible and not making it worse. When inequality resides in institutions, egalitarians can focus on making inequality visible and demanding change. When inequality resides in individual behavior and social conformity, it is difficult to counter, even if everyone wants to do so.

Making inequality visible is a prerequisite for egalitarian progress. It is a necessary part of formulating programs of change; we cannot work to solve a problem that we, collectively, do not know exists. It is part of the process of

[51] I am grateful to Lori Watson for pressing me on this point. A similar phenomenon occurs in the case of traditional heterosexist marriage, which I discuss in Chambers, *Against Marriage*, 38.

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liberation of those who are oppressed by structures of inequality: naming and drawing attention to one's subordinated status is one way of rejecting it. There can be no duty for subordinated people to keep quiet about their experiences or the inequality they suffer, even if silence serves equality in some respects. People who are subordinated cannot be expected to bear the burden for others' subordination by keeping silent about their own.

However, egalitarian action cannot consist solely in making inequality visible. Egalitarians must recognize two things. First, making inequality visible is not an end-point but merely the first step. Second, making inequality visible is a stage of the journey that contains risks, particularly for those who are disadvantaged. While making inequality visible can itself be an act of rebellion against oppression, we mustn't allow ourselves to think that it is the *same thing* as ending that oppression.

For example, the University of Cambridge is currently running a (well-intentioned) campaign against harassment and sexual misconduct. The name of the campaign is "Breaking the Silence,"[52] a name that implies that the real problem with sexual harassment is that we don't know enough about it rather than that it exists in the first place. This framing of the issue implies that "we," the University, are neither the victims nor the perpetrators of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is something done to (and by) currently silent others. "They" need to talk about it so that "we" can learn about it. The implication is that only then will we be able (or inclined) to act to stop it. After all, if we already knew about the existence of sexual harassment, why wouldn't we be moving directly to action?

Paradoxically, of course, the existence of the campaign suggests that "we," the University, *do* already know that sexual harassment exists because otherwise there would be no campaign. Why, then, not move directly to action? "Breaking the Silence" implies that the remedy for sexual harassment is women talking about it rather than men not doing it. What will happen if women talk about it? Will sexual harassment end? Will perpetrators be harshly punished? Or will sexual harassment become (even) more normalized? If "we" know more about its prevalence, will women become more scared and men more emboldened? A project of making inequality visible must always be accompanied with a strategy for eradicating it. It also must come with measures to mitigate the burden of visibility, a burden which tends to fall on the already disadvantaged.

Egalitarians cannot stop at making inequality visible, but neither can they skip that step or create conditions that make it impossible. Fraser argues that the correct solution to the redistribution-recognition dilemma is what she calls a project of transformation. What this means, in the context of gender inequality, is "a culture in which hierarchical gender dichotomies are replaced by multiple intersecting differences that are demassified and

[52] "Breaking the Silence," University of Cambridge, https://www.breakingthesilence.cam.ac.uk.

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shifting."[53] This is the future envisioned by Dembroff and Wodak in their case for gender-neutral pronouns. Such a future appears as an egalitarian utopia for some but an alarming anomie for others, but that is a matter I cannot settle here. Regardless of the end goal, we do *not* currently live in a society that is characterized by "demassified and shifting" identities. Rather, we live in one in which structures of inequality, such as those of gender and race, are markedly stable and solid. That being so, we need to retain the discursive resources to identify and describe structures, patterns, and masses of inequality, including those that are not at the front and center of public consciousness or political programs.

The tension between making inequality visible and not making it worse is likely to lead to reasonable disagreements about behaviors and policies. These disagreements can be heated and divisive because they are high stakes and because there is right on both sides. The balance may tip from one consideration to another and there is no reason to think that the answer should always be the same.

In the context of academia, the balance usually ought to tip toward visibility. Philosophers, political theorists, and other scholars are engaged in an endeavor to increase knowledge and make intellectual progress, which must be done via debate and openness. In our scholarship we have a responsibility to make inequality visible and to recognize that this process is never complete.

Making inequality visible has not been a simple upward trajectory of progress because most inequalities have been made visible without at the same time being eradicated. The attention paid to structures of inequality and the political will to change them fall in and out of fashion. The subordinated have *known* for centuries that inequalities of class, race, sex, and citizenship exist. Probably, the dominators knew it too. Yet inequalities persist. The need to make inequality visible is not a one-time project. It is something that requires ongoing maintenance.

Still, we must be aware of the pitfalls of merely describing existing inequality. Those who benefit from inequality must be aware of their own status and practice. Most readers of this essay will benefit from some structures of inequality, whether of class, race, gender, or other forms of privilege. We must be willing to make visible our own role in perpetuating or benefiting from inequality. We must take care not to conceal our own advantage by using misleading neutral language that conceals the hierarchical nature of a situation. We must realize that we likely face different patterns of cost and benefit than do the disadvantaged when it comes to norm compliance or resistance. All of us, working together, must realize that mere visibility is not enough.

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[53] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 30.

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