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Gendered Embodiment and Power Dynamics in Feminist Phenomenology: An Exploratory Inquiry

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Abstract: *The intersection between gendered embodiment and power dynamics opens a new dimension in feminist phenomenology. It allows us to rethink the perspective of individual experiences in which the body is not only shaped by gender but also by multiple factors or identities such as class, race and culture. These factors influence individuals to experience their bodies within the structures of social regulations and power dynamics. These power relations indicate that bodies are not neutral but shaped by gendered identities and social expectations. This paper explores how gendered embodiment is structured by power dynamics that lie in social, cultural and institutional dimensions and influences our bodily experiences. Based on feminist phenomenology, it shows that the lived experience of the body is shaped by social norms and cultures. Inspecting gender embodiment through the lens of power dynamics uncovers that bodies are subjects of control depending on different societal expectations. Feminist phenomenology explores how power structures are internalized and embodied, which in turn influences how bodies are formed, treated and positioned in the system of social inequalities. In this context, this approach expands the focus on power operating not only as a societal form but also in an individual or personal form that shapes embodied experiences of the lived body. This paper suggests that an intersectional lens is essential for a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding to explore the relation between gender embodiment and power dynamics for analyzing individual lived experiences.*

Keywords: *Gendered Embodiment, Feminist Phenomenology, Lived Experience, Power Dynamics, Intersectionality.*

Introduction

Feminist phenomenology is a branch of thinking that has bridged phenomenology and feminism and investigates how gender shapes one's subjective experiences and perspectives about social phenomena and encourages oppression. It explores gendered lived experiences, embodiment, and intersections. The roots of the phenomenological movement can be marked back to earlier philosophers such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Franz Brentano. However, it truly emerged as a

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distinct movement with Edmund Husserl's work and after him, twentieth century philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida adapted and expanded phenomenology. Along with this, at different points in its history, phenomenology can be traced in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, existentialism and the psychology-related domains (Smith, n.d.).

However, phenomenology is a philosophical approach that is particularly associated with the early 20th century. Edmund Husserl is the founder of the phenomenology of the twentieth century, which has three major stages. The first period is epistemological phenomenology, the next forms the transcendental phenomenology and later, the 'genetic' phenomenology (Macann, 1993, p.1). Husserl (1913) adopts phenomenology as the science of essences that uses the eidetic abstraction method, aiming at capturing the essential structures of objectivity of essence, essences of cognition, universal consciousness and subjective experience (pp. 1-6). After him, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre gave a new version of embodied human experiences. Meanwhile Simone de Beauvoir 's *The Second Sex* (1949) is recognized as the first systematic explanation of feminist phenomenology. Yet her original contributions to the field of phenomenology and existentialism can be found in her earlier philosophical work, *She Came to Stay* (1943) and continues to her later *The Coming of Age* (1970) (Bergoffen & Burke, 2024).

At first, phenomenologists were concerned about human experience in general. Feminists, however, criticized this universalism and claimed that the approach overlooks the experiences of women and marginalized groups and fortifies patriarchal attitudes. Feminist phenomenology challenges male-centered traditional norms with its focus on the subjective experiences of women and amplifies that embodiment is trained, structured, disciplined and gendered. It highlights how these embedded and gendered norms shape marginalized women's lived experiences and fortify an oppressive structure for them (Bartky, 1990, pp. 63-66).

Feminist phenomenology emerged in the early phase of the twentieth century. It examines women's lived experiences by linking subjective embodiment with social and historical contexts. It reinvestigates how our societal and cultural norms influence us to look at our gender and power. The main exponents of this field are Simone de Beauvoir, Iris Marion Young, Gail Weiss and Sara Heinämaa, who re-interpret the area of gender, power dynamics and embodiment. In addition, Merleau-Ponty had a major influence on the development of feminist phenomenology, particularly through his concept of the lived body.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* critiques assumptions about womanhood and lays the foundation for later feminist thinkers to further develop these ideas (2009, p.

10). Beauvoir described the concept of 'becoming a woman' through existential and phenomenological lenses, where she explains women's movements and gender-based attitudes are not fixed biological functions, but rather a process in which societal rules and regulations are injected into women (2009, pp. 19-20). This statement expresses how women have been trapped by the structural concepts of society. Gradually, the whole patriarchal society gives them a secondary role or 'other' position; even women themselves are unaware of their full agency and worth and believe that they must lead their lives according to the socially prescribed gender roles (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 20-21). Over time, women accept these without asking and consider them normal. Beauvoir argues that the position of a woman is not determined by nature, rather she defines and values herself through her experiences (2009, p. 73). Thus, women gradually become accustomed and lose their authority through this process.

Although Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* challenged the prevailing assumptions about the naturalness and biological basis of womanhood and female subjectivity, some feminist thinkers argued that her work gives the impression that women's physiological composition limits their freedom. Young, in particular, critiques Beauvoir for not paying enough attention to women's actual bodily movement, and their socially constructed relationship with the world (Allen-Collinson, 2011, p. 303). She expands Beauvoir's analysis by giving greater emphasis to women's bodily movement and states that gendered embodiment is neither biological nor physiological, rather it is social, cultural and political. She describes how bodily movements and power dynamics are connected to subjective lived experiences (Young, 1980, pp. 137-156). Another feminist philosopher, Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), emphasizes that the formation of gender identity is not something that comes from the internal processes but rather is constructed through our performances and expressions (p. 8). Here, Butler does not directly link gender to any biological trait. She instead views it as something shaped through social and cultural identity. In other words, a person does not automatically develop male or female behaviors at birth. Rather, these behaviors are learned from society, family, and institutions. Later, through our actions and conduct, we actively establish and express our gender identity. These discussions have contributed to the ongoing development of feminist phenomenology by expanding the understanding of women's embodied lives.

This paper asks, how does feminist phenomenology demonstrate the relationship between gendered embodiment and power dynamics in the arena of social, cultural, and institutional contexts? It will explore how the power structure of society determines bodily movements, capabilities, and cultural practices. Based on feminist phenomenology, this paper argues that gendered embodiment and lived experiences are somehow structured by different forms of power dynamics depending

on social and cultural norms. By merging the views of different philosophers and cases in real life, this paper suggests that an intersectional approach is needed to understand the connection between lived experience and broader power dynamics. The purpose of this study is also to challenge how women and marginalized groups are being objectified and commodified in patriarchal systems. It makes connections between embodied subjective experiences and historical context to analyze the power dynamics at several levels. It will advance feminist philosophy by applying the phenomenological approach to propose a dimension for social justice and equality. It will promote societal awareness and foster policies and activism. By achieving these objectives, this study wants to make a fundamental change in mitigating gendered embodiment and power relations. In doing so, I will rely on the writings of the theorists as primary data and relevant secondary sources to explore feminist phenomenology from different dimensions.

What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology includes conscious experiences that are mainly the product of the first-person account of perception and the appropriate conditions belonging to human experiences. Husserl's notion of phenomenology emphasizes intentionality and the lived experience from the first-person account of argument, where phenomenology is described as 'the science of the essence of consciousness (Smith, 2018). The Husserlian approach indicates that the understanding of nature and disposition of lived experiences can be unveiled by direct communication between the investigator or explorer and the purpose of the research. For this, attentive listening, learning, reacting, analyzing and good observing power are needed to find out the exact meaning of fact which is more authentic and effective than preceding understandings of reality (Husserl, 1970; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, pp. 172-180).

Qutoshi defines the concept of phenomenology as an attitude that can educate our perceptions and define our dispositions. It also broadens our outlook about the world around us, gathers subjective understanding and trains the lived experiences (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 216). The lived experience indicates the subjective experiences and choices that a person gathers through a given circumstance and culture (Van Manen, 2016). Sokolowski stated that the phenomenological approach investigates people's personal experiences and how meaning is generated and exchanged. It focuses on lived reality rather than abstract theories that objectify and suppress emotions, ensuring that the essence of experience is preserved (2000, p. 2). Earlier, Merleau-Ponty had described phenomenology as the exercise of the perception of subjective bodily experience (1962, pp. 235-236). Heidegger used phenomenology to develop his theory of the lived experience as the primordial mode of Dasein or being-in-the-world, where Dasein finds priority over all other belonging entities (1962, pp. 36-43). These definitions show that phenomenology is an approach concerned with the structure of experiences and describes how these experiences come from the intentionality of conscious being.

What is Feminism?

Feminism is a revolutionary movement that has been defined in several ways. Scholarly definitions emphasize various dimensions of equality and justice in society. According to Moi, 'feminist' and 'feminism' are used as political labels that assist the new movement of women, which came about in the late 1960s (Raina, 2017, p. 3372). Humm and Walker state that feminism has three waves: the duration of the first one was from late 19th to early 20th centuries, the second part was from the 1960s to 1970s and the third or last wave of feminist movement was from the 1990s to contemporary time (Sen & Das, 2021, p. 21). Historically, the emergence of modern feminism is often traced back to Mary Wollstonecraft, whose writings laid the foundation of feminist thought to demand the inclusion of women in public life ((Ferguson, 1999, p. 427). As a philosophical and political framework, feminism is not only an intellectual commitment but also a political movement that focuses on demolishing all kinds of oppression based on gender (McAfee et al., 2026). Virginia Woolf, in her work *Three Guineas (*1938), defined the term "feminist" as "one who champions the rights of women" (p. 184). Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), described feminism as "the problem that has no name", which focuses on the unhappiness of women in mid-20th century America who had suffered to meet society's expectations (p. 15).

American feminist Walker explains feminism as a political and personal movement that challenges the systems of oppression. In her essay "Becoming the Third Wave", she writes, "feminism means the integration of an idea of equity and the empowerment of women, the right to define what feminism is, the right is not controlled by stereotype structures (1992, p. 86). According to her, feminism stands for women's rights and also empowers women to define feminism, rather than depending on societal perspectives. She also declares, "I am not a post feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave. Each of my choices will have to hold to my feminist standard of justice" (p. 86). Another feminist Bridget Murray Law holds that being a woman is like embodying one's true self, as a woman, free from the fear of judgment or criticism. Success does not depend on material wealth but on the way of determining one's own personal goals and aspirations. It is about taking control of your own life, doing what you want, and fulfilling your needs, rather than depending on others (Law, 2006). This discussion shows that feminism can be defined as a perspective that proclaims all kinds of equality, such as social, political, economic and legal equality, irrespective of class, race and gender. It challenges the patriarchal structure of society and oppression against women and aim to eradicate the gender-based value system.

Intersection between Phenomenology and Feminism

The intersection between feminism and phenomenology adds a new dimension to critical thought by combining philosophy with human experiences. Phenomenology explains the body as a center of experiences and focuses on how experiences and behaviors are structured by societal norms, and how individuals' subjective perspective creates this world. Feminism is a great challenge for patriarchy-based societal functions and gender inequalities and seeks to perceive the very lived experiences and apprehensions of women. Feminism explains gender as a phenomenon constructed by society and adopts phenomenology to explain how structured norms shape an individual's experiences and responses toward the external world. Here, phenomenology aligns with feminist concerns about gender. Both try to address the issues of how women's bodies are being objectified by societal expectations and how societal norms determine women's bodily movements. The intersection between phenomenology and feminism challenges the stereotypical structures that create lived experiences and are being absorbed deeply. Feminists use phenomenology as a tool to understand women's subjective experiences and challenge patriarchal power structures, as well as to examine how the stereotypical norms and beliefs shape experiences and perceptions of women. The combination offers a unique lens to understand gendered experiences that male-centered traditional ethical standards somehow overlook.

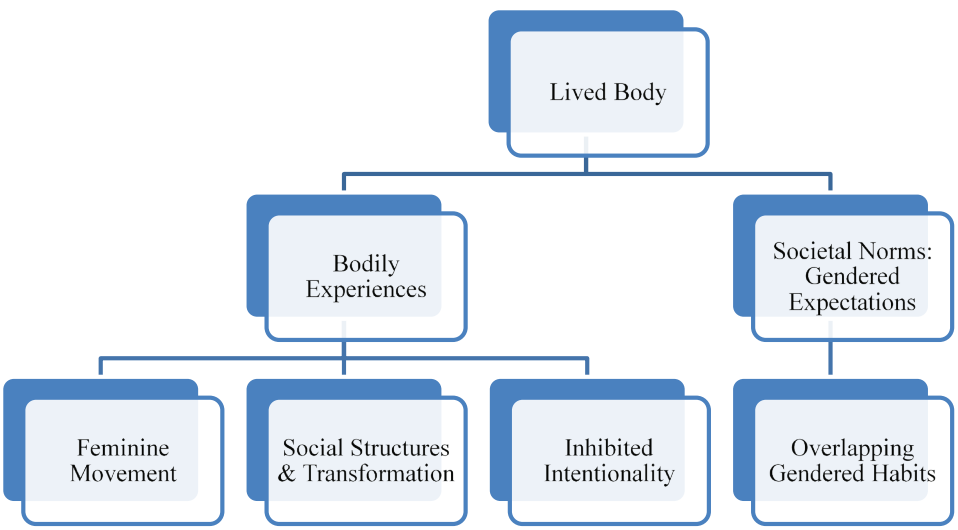


Figure 1: The Lived Body and Gendered Experience

Figure 1 shows the interconnection between the feminist philosophers and phenomenologists and offers an integrated lens to rethink the complicated gender issue. Feminist phenomenology examines existing norms for our lived experiences, focusing on the lived body. It critiques how gendered expectations are shaped

by social structure and influence our thinking, movement and expression, which limits our agency as human beings. This trend wants to rethink these structures and prevailing gender roles and create more self-reflecting and empowered people. Feminism and phenomenology both focus on individuals' lived experiences which come through lived bodies. Phenomenology focuses on how our bodily experiences are shaped by society, while feminism challenges gender norms that restrict women's autonomy. In that sense, feminist phenomenology tries to concentrate on how subjective experiences can be inhibited limits women's agency and lead to change in these oppressive social structures.

Feminist phenomenology is an approach where feminist theory intersects with phenomenological outlook. The main focal point is to examine the lived and subjective experiences of women along with marginalized groups. Feminist phenomenology focuses on how social constraints determine our subjectivity, duty, value, and identity.

Intersectionality of Gendered Embodiment and Power Dynamics

Gendered embodiment refers to how different identities like gender, class, race, sex and ability can greatly influence one's bodily experiences within the social structure. This clearly indicates that lived experiences are not simply determined by gender, but rather, are influenced by social conditions and norms. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), a feminist scholar, states that oppressions or privileges do not come from a single identity, but different factors, such as class, race, and culture, influence the response of individuals. She claims that the body is not only a part of personal identity but also a space where social power is experienced. Gendered embodiment indicates the fact that the bodies of women are being perceived through social and cultural norms and regulations and being experienced with many social categories such as race, class, skin colour and many more, which are not even connected with their gender traits. For instance, a black-skinned woman's experience of her body may differ from that of a fair-skinned woman due to the racist structure of society. Therefore, gendered embodiment cannot be understood separately, as it is not isolated from multiple systems. Thus, intersectionality not only explains how social identities shape experiences, but also provides a framework to analyze gendered embodiment across different contexts. This lens helps us understand how the body is shaped by different aspects of social identity and power structures.

Gendered Embodiment: Insights of Simon De Beauvoir

Beauvoir, influenced by phenomenology and existentialism, examines the lived experiences of women, concerns about their own body and their position in society in *The Second Sex*. Her work analyzes women's experience as the other and gender-related societal and cultural dominations and oppressions. She also criticizes the

societal structures that determine women's relationship with themselves. These are the basements for feminist philosophy. Her book identifies the roots of all oppressions faced by women in the cultural, political and social arena. She shows how the societal and historical basis makes a distinct sense of gender. She offers a phenomenological and existential framework, given in Figure 2, to perceive the root of all misdeeds. From Beauvoir's perspective on gendered embodiment, bodily experiences are socially constructed.

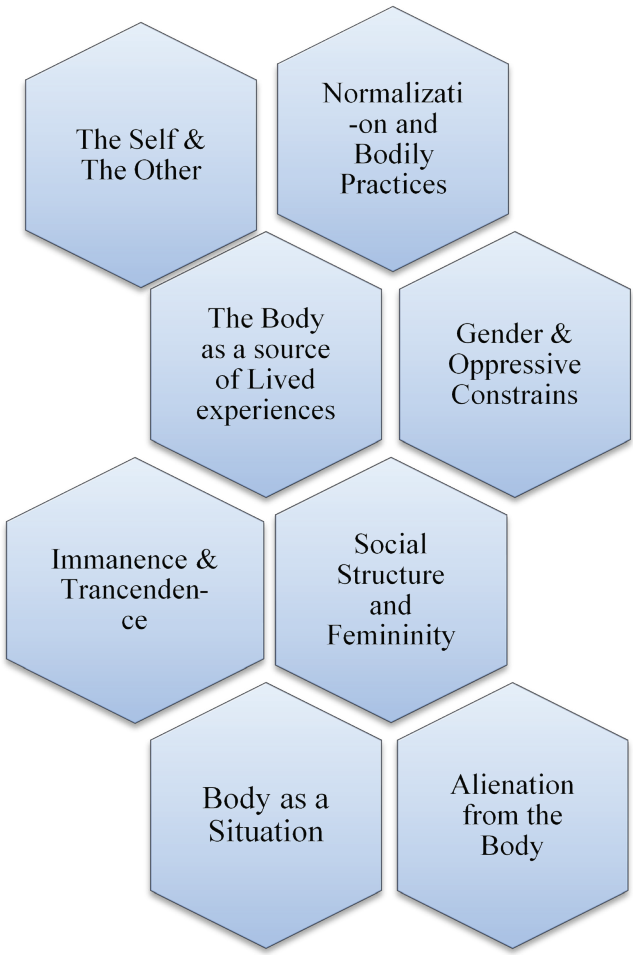


Figure 2: Simone de Beauvoir's Framework of Gendered Embodiment

The Body as a Source of Lived Experiences

Beauvoir opposes the Cartesian view of duality that mind and body are separate things and the mind has consciousness. She claims the body is the central part of human interaction and communications; she believes bodies play a significant role

in societal interactions, and the body is the sufferer and holder of oppression and experiences. Our society determines the role and the importance of the body of a woman, as well as how she should demonstrate her body. Beauvoir stated that "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (2009, p. 73). The statement asserts that being a woman is neither biological nor psychological, rather it is determined by society that creates women and makes them feminine. Society determines the standards for the body and pushes a woman to undergo dieting, artificial implants cosmetic surgery and others to attain these standards. These standards compel women to achieve a perfect female body to fulfill the expectations of society (Bartky, 1990). Beauvoir critiques such societal constraints that limit the right of women to their bodies and claims that the body is the source of agency, expression and freedom. In her focus on the connection of the body and society she is taking a phenomenological approach.

Normalization and Bodily Practices

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir raised the important question: 'What is a woman?' To men, the body has a direct relation with the objective world, and it is considered perfect and normal. But the bodies of women lack some qualities. She stated Aristotle's view that women are considered as women for lacking some qualities and feminine nature is distressed with a natural defectiveness (2009, p. 20), Saint Thomas also said that women are the "imperfect man" (as cited in Beauvoir, 2009, p. 21). Also, it is stated in the *Book of Genesis*, that Eve is created from what Bossuet referred to as Adam's "supernumerary bone" (as cited in Beauvoir, 2009, p. 21). These views reflect that women's body has a long history of neglect, and culturally, it has been grounded in the psychology and habits of human beings.

The Self and the Other

The main concern of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is that the patriarchal society positions males as self-entities, while females are presented as having no self; they are considered as the Other. The position of 'Other' is a primitive concept. In ancient societies as well as ancient mythologies, the duality of 'Self' and 'Other' can be easily found. The concept is not derived from the basis of gender or sexes and not even dependent on empirical standards. In this duality, the Self is regarded as an autonomous being and the Other is considered simply the opposite of the Self. Beauvoir points out that society gives men the position of Self but there is no equivalent position for women. She thus criticizes French historian Jules Michelet's statement that "Woman, the relative being" (2009, p. 21). This demonstrates the idea that women have been considered as contingent and dependent beings whose existence and role are framed by the dint of their relationships to men. Beauvoir also quoted Levinas' idea that, "He is the Subject; he is the Absolute - she is the Other" (2009, p. 21). This view reflects the societal position of women, where they are not considered active agents but are viewed as passive entities.

Another effect of this duality is that men can recognize themselves as valued, but women are obliged to them. Women are not considered as autonomous beings. People like to see women as passive, emotional, and irrational beings who are molded by society and culture rather than biological facts. In her analysis of Beauvoir's theory, Knowles (2019) points out that Beauvoir gave an existential account of human experience and freedom, in her argument that freedom is not something innate, but something we must constantly fight for (pp. 242-265).

Body as a Situation

Beauvoir rejects the idea of the biological determination of a woman's identity and social roles. Biological differences can determine the sexes, but these differences cannot determine the meaning of a woman. To her, sex determination is only a biological fact, while the position and destiny of women are determined through social and cultural forces. She claims, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman gradually" (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 330), which indicates the fact that women have to think all the time she is a woman, not because anything is wrong with their biological function, but simply because she is a woman. She acknowledges that the body is just a condition through which we can interact with the rest of the world and can understand the world and it is the source for the shape of our goal (2009, p. 50).

Transcendence and Immanence

Beauvoir used the term transcendence as a quality of being active, productive, creative, and autonomous and which has a great role in changing and developing society. In society men have duty to society and their active role and responsibilities give them the position of transcendence. On the other hand, immanence stands for passive and non-autonomous beings who do not contribute or help society to progress. It is related to traditional norms, and there is no need for creative self or rationality. Society considers women to be fit for this category because their main duties are handling domestic chores, giving birth and making men happy. Through this scenario, Beauvoir indicates how society has established the belief that the world is completely represented and shaped by men, who present it from their viewpoint and consider it as the absolute truth (2009, p. 141).

Social Structure and Femininity

Beauvoir emphasized that women are structurally alienated from their own experiences as their feelings are led by societal norms, judgments and expectations. The body is the thing that contains our lived experiences. Societal expectations create an imaginary shape of women to acknowledge them as perfect. This creates a separation between a woman and the body that belongs to her. The basis of human existence is all about freedom and being autonomous, but societal constraints force women not to feel the need for this. Beauvoir asserts that humanity is something that fits males and is representative of such qualities, where women are described as female and only by imitating them can be human beings (2009, p. 141).

Gender and Oppressive Constraints

Beauvoir critically engages with historical materialism to identify the root of women's oppression. The development of private property perpetuated women's economic dependence and subordinate position. The conception of private property leads to the concept of acknowledging women as dependent selves. She criticizes essentialist and male-dominated societal frameworks to build a world where women can go beyond societal structures and constraints and enjoy freedom and autonomy. Beauvoir (2009) offers valuable insights into how individuals can resist societal pressures and expectations and challenge oppressive social norms.

Alienation from the Body

The hard experiences faced by a woman cannot unify her body with her true self and she often feels a disconnection between them. Culture gives the meaning and situation of menstruation, pregnancy, and sexuality for a woman, though these are parts of her own body. This alienation of self from body is not innate but socially cultivated (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 65-66). Society determines how women should see and value themselves. Thus, Beauvoir's ideas provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how women are perceived within a patriarchal society and the oppression they experience. Later, Iris Marion Young extends this argument by examining how such oppression shapes women's bodily experience.

Embodiment, Power Dynamics, and Bodily Habits: Insights of Iris Marion Young

Another prominent feminist thinker, Iris Marion Young has provided a powerful stand on how embodiment, power dynamics, and bodily habits can intersect in the subjective and lived experiences of women in *Throwing Like a Girl* (1980). She criticizes societal structures, constraints and cultural norms that determine women's roles and bodily adjustments. It perpetuates the power hierarchies and habits of women. In her later book *Other Works in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (1990), Young explores structural injustice and traditional forms of inequality and injustice.

Embodied Subjectivity

Young analyses how societal norms determine embodied experiences of gender and offers criticism of patriarchal structures (1980, pp. 137-156). Her views align with feminist phenomenology's emphasis on the body as a site of lived and subjective experiences; this according to Fieser and Dowden (1995) is a strong rejection of Cartesian dualism that holds body and mind are two separate things and consciousness is the capacity of mind. In *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays,* Young claims that our bodily habits and dispositions are determined by societal and cultural norms that make societal expectations. Women are considered the most vulnerable entity that is dependent on the true self of our society and

restricts their rational and psychological agency. Like Beauvoir, Young also writes on how society determines the bodily movements of women and 'takes body as a situation' where women are supposed to see the body that belongs to them as an object rather than any active agent. At a certain period, women lose ownership of their bodies lack confidence in their abilities and depend on others.

Social Conditioning in Bodily Movements of Women

Young highlights how society determines which habits women should follow. Their bodily movements must express flexibility, passivity, vulnerability and subordination. It highlights their vulnerable position in society, where they are dependent on men. Some behaviors are selected for women, such as talking in hushed tones or low voice, avoiding eye contact, being soft, and many more. Here, bodily movements come with power dynamics. Young's (1980) phenomenological approach underscores the role of habitual bodily practices in reinforcing societal norms. Habits such as 'throwing like a girl' are not innate but learned behaviors that reflect and perpetuate gendered power relations. These behaviors are somehow ingrained in a woman's mind and seem very natural. Women's physical engagement shows itself with timidity, indeterminacy, and volatility. Often it manifests distrust in their bodies and strength (p. 143).

Body Comportment

Young holds that women feel more incapable and awkward than what their bodies are capable of and can accomplish. Women underestimate themselves more than men do. In sports or physical work, women's bodily movements show that they do not like to present themselves as strong and are not as comfortable with their clothes and bodies as men. Young states that the basic difference between the status of bodies can be seen in the way women do not usually engage their whole bodies in physical tasks as easily or naturally as men do (1980, p. 142). Her view is based on the understanding of bodily movements in physical activities that are characterized by and expected of the agent. Like Beauvoir, Young focuses on women's situation being determined or created by society, which sets social structures and conditions. In such a case women are not considered to be agents of subjectivity, creativity or autonomy which are normally applied to men (pp. 140-141).

Structural Injustice and Oppression

Societal structures perpetuate injustice. Societal norms, regulations, and practices inspire inequality. These oppressions shape the lived experiences of individuals and their perceptions of their bodies. Social objectification of the female body affects their perception of themselves. It limits their ability and engagement in the greater world. Young (1980) explains that we live life in the culture of a patriarchal society, and become physically limited, created, and objectified. Women are

not truly comfortable mastering their lives by intention and aspirations. They feel themselves as objects rather than subjects (Young, 1980, p. 153). Feminine comportment and ability are often inhibited and self-imposed, where women underestimate the strength of men that they have (Young, 1980, p. 144)

Transcendence and Immanence

Transcendence refers to the ability to move beyond societal limitations and create freedom and self-definition. In contrary, immanence describes the confinement to socially imposed roles, often reducing women to their biological functions or domestic duties. Feminist phenomenologists critique how women have been trapped in immanence and emphasize the importance of recognizing their capacity for transcendence.

An analysis of Young's view shows that she reaches the same conclusion as Beauvoir. Young believes feminine bodily experience is perpetuated by a dominant patriarchal society that determines the status of women as objects rather than transcending subjects (1980, p. 148). The movement of a female is not from her "transcendent inclinations", and she disvalues her capacity and feels body as a binding for its fulfillment (Collantes, 2022, pp. 60-61).

Gendered Division of Ability

Young asserts that many women are uncertain of their physical abilities. They often think they are incapable before starting a task, and as a result, they do not put their best effort in it (1980, p.144). This perception of women about themselves makes them less confident and prevents them from realizing their actual potentialities. This division of ability inspires gender inequalities where to some extent women are not appreciated for their roles in family and society.

The Lived Body: Insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Merleau- Ponty, a phenomenologist, is not directly a feminist, but he has influenced feminist phenomenology. Feminist phenomenology explores the concepts of Ponty's lived body to examine how gendered and lived experiences are embodied and inhibited. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) Merleau-Ponty criticized the Cartesian mind-body concept where the mind is separated from the body rather than explaining the body phenomenologically in the way that "I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body" (1962, p. 173). He claimed the body is not something that only has physical or biological dimensions, but it is also a medium to gather experience from the external world (1962, p. 169). He recognized the body as the primary thing of gaining knowledge of the world. Bodily positions in this world make the nature of our understandings and perceptions, and they form the meaning and position of the body. The movements and gestures of our bodies are not merely mechanical, but rather intentional and meaningful. He claims that "the world is not what I think, but what I live through" (1962, preface,

p. xviii), which rejects the idea that our external world depends on our intellectual thinking rather this approach highlights undergoing lived experiences. Like the views of feminists, his ideas of the intentionality of the body explain how social norms determine the bodily movements of women. He states that the body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art (1962, p. 174).

Intercorporeality: Insights of Gail Weiss

Gail Weiss is another feminist philosopher who also took the body as a source of lived experience. She was largely influenced by phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty and existentialist Beauvoir. However, she explores theories through a feminist lens and moves beyond their boundaries. Her view centers on intercorporeality, the social and political context of bodily identity. She critiques Merleau-Ponty for overlooking the gendered and relational dimensions of embodiment. Moreover, Weiss argues that the 'lived body' is not gender-neutral but rather influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts (1999, pp. 5–11She does not reject the idea of Merleau-Ponty, but she explains how he presents the body as a direct and primary perspective in the world. Here, Weiss extends her idea through the notion of intercorporeality that bodily experiences are not simply individual but rather constituted by social, political and cultural contexts, relationality, and interactions with others (Weiss, 1999, pp. 11-14). She revisits the ideas of Beauvoir and criticizes Beauvoir for not highlighting the complexity of embodiment. She expands Beauvoir's thoughts by developing her notion of intercorporeality and the relation of lived experiences with different cultural and social contexts (Weiss, 1999, p. 23).

Relationality and Intercorporeality

Weiss uses the concept of intercorporeality to explain the relational nature of embodiment and the social dimensions of bodily experiences. She emphasizes their idea of embodiment, where our body is the primary part of how we perceive our world. She states that our body interacts with another body which shapes the perception of individuals about their body.

Inter-subjective Dimensions of Contextual Embodiment

Weiss took the body as an active participant and respondent in maintaining social life. Our bodily experiences shape our contact with other bodies. She claimed a holistic approach to understanding the complex nature of reality and its reflections in real life. (Weiss, 1999, pp. 2-3). The body is not merely a physical object; it is an active part of social life. A person's attitudes, gestures, and behaviors shape their relationships with others. Therefore, our bodily experiences are not purely private; they are interconnected with the experiences of those around us. The body helps us engage with and respond to various social and cultural factors.

The Situated Nature of the Body

The situated nature of the body is the central part of Weiss's feminist phenomenology concept. Weiss emphasizes how our bodies are always in flux in a historical, cultural, and social structure, and that is a challenge to fixed or individualistic notions of the nature of the body (1999, p. 10). This suggests that our experience of the body is not just about the physical aspect; it is constantly shaped and influenced by society and culture. Our relationships with others and the social context play a crucial role in shaping these experiences. So, to understand the body, we need to consider not only its physical side but also the social and cultural dimensions that give it meaning.

Embodiment as Gendered and Constitutive: Insights of Sara Heinämaa

Sara Heinämaa, another prominent feminist phenomenologist, wanted to incorporate Husserl's and Ponty's phenomenology into feminist philosophy. Her existential feminist phenomenology explores the lived experiences of people who make sexual differences. In *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* (2003), she integrates the phenomenological approach in gender analysis to indicate that sexual differences are constructed or constituted. She states that sexual differences are socially constructed and depend on our existential perceptions rather than a biological structure (Heinämaa, 2018, pp. 217-229).

Heinamaa argues that Beauvoir's thought in *The Second Sex* is not about gender, but rather it is a phenomenological approach of sexual differences as lived experiences which create woman, female and feminine, not biological structure (2013, pp. 216–242). Heinämaa (2017) critiques dominant theories on gender for making the differences between males and females through their explanatory study and she claims the phenomenological investigation to understand that these differences between these two agents are nothing but experience or perpetuated (Heinämaa, 2017, pp. 180-193).

Integration of the Ideas of Feminist Phenomenologists

While Merleau-Ponty emphasizes lived and embodied experiences, feminist phenomenologists extend the idea of the 'lived body' by exploring how it is connected to power dynamics and gender politics. This intersection is needed for mitigating real-life challenges when bodily autonomy and authority are in crisis. The analysis of the feminist thinkers presented in the discussion indicate a strong connection among them. Their ideas taken together offer some recommendations to rethink existing social norms and to challenge oppressive culture. Beauvoir, for example, examines how social structures shape our lived experience and how women are the worst sufferers of this stereotypical expectation of society. Here, Beauvoir's idea helps us see that the body is a socially constructed entity based on class,

race, community, and culture. Similarly, Young also argues for an intersectional perspective as she highlights the social and religious context of bodily restrictions. She emphasizes how power is transmitted through the lived experience and bodily movements. Weiss, moreover, shows relational embodiments that are influenced by multiple factors and cannot be understood without considering them. Butler and Crenshaw complement this integration, where Butler's notion of gender as enacted through social practices and Crenshaw's intersectional lens of perceiving multiple identities add new dimensions to the understanding of gendered embodiment and power dynamics. These thinkers show that gendered embodiment is socially constructed, context-dependent, and relational. Their views help to develop an intersectional understanding of embodiments, which can be represented as follows:

Power Structures → Social Norms → Embodied Experiences

The effect of power structures on embodied experience

Figure 3: *Intersectional Understanding of Embodiments*

Figure 3 illustrates the way power structures shape our social norms, which influence embodied experiences. The cascading effect of power on lived experiennce shows how social structures and rules are implicated in oppressing and molding individuals. But this process is not uniform; it is shaped differently depending on different influential factors such as class, race, culture, and religion.

After analyzing the foundational theorists of feminist phenomenology, it appears that there is a need to expand this field. For instance, Beauvoir's theory is developed from Western and feminist perspectives. She has not taken into consideration other perspectives such as societal structures of oppression from past centuries that have shaped embodied power dynamics are missing in her study. In contrast, studies from non-Western contexts such as South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa highlight how religious norms, community practices, and local traditions shape women's embodied experience differently. This approach can include intersectional, transgender, Indigenous, black, marginalized and non-binary individuals. Similarly, Young did not include intersectionality or other races in her investigation. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty took his embodied concept as a general or universal subject and did not focus on how power practices shape bodily experiences. Feminist phenomenology focuses on challenging different forms of oppression related to race, gender, class, sex, age, and ability**.** Traditional feminist phenomenology avoids multiple versions of power dynamics, but a new vision should be more open to exploring the field in various ways. It should focus on how multiple power systems like colonialism, racism and capitalism affect embodiments. Based on the integrated perspectives of these philosophers in feminist phenomenology, adopting an intersectional lens is essential to understand the complex relationship between gendered embodiment and power dynamics.

Case Studies

Women in the Media Industry

Gendered embodiment is visible in media trials and health care. Women in many advertisements exhibit a very narrow sense of beauty. They are being used as a tool or object for business purposes and the media sets standards for measuring beauty, attitude, smiling, femininity and more. These create societal expectations on women for their body measurements, skin colour, voice tone and expressions. These standards create burdens for women at an early age and continuously lead to them being judged. Most women feel extra pressure and take on loads to meet societal idealized beauty standards. Thus, because of the importance of physical attractiveness, many young girls become frustrated and alienated from their bodies. The girls who don't meet societal expectations feel less confident in every case and sometimes can't explore their potential.

Beauvoir's idea of the socially constructed body is visible in this kind of stereotypical portrayal of women. Besides, Young also discusses how different cultural norms construct these ideal images. This is the actual picture of how race, class and social status determine the experiences and this subjective experience is psychological and embodied. In this way, society, men and women themselves are heading towards objectifying women's bodies and gradually losing their autonomy over their bodies.

Women in the Corporate Field

Women in Japan had to put on high heels in their workplace to show femininity. Later, Japanese women started the **#KuToo campaign** against this practice, challenging the pressure to wear high heels as a form of gender discrimination and demanding laws to stop that (Weaver & Agence France Presse,2019). The resistance by the Japanese women is an example of how societal expectations pressure females to dress according to professional norms and social expectations. It indicates how social expectations influence the experiences at work. These attitudes vary from context and culture.

In her discussions, Young also highlights this issue that women's bodily comportment and movements are determined and shaped by external expectations. Research on some corporate workplace dress codes demonstrates that women's dress is not chosen in terms of comfort, modesty, or professionalism, but rather to enhance femininity and make women look more attractive or sexualized. It amplifies the male dominance power system in a society where women's bodies are objectified. Beauvoir and Young both mentioned how societal expectations affect women's bodily movements. Dress code laws are constructed for better visions, but still forceful dress code laws, especially for women.

Women in Athletics

In the sport of distance running, athletes are expected to maintain a thin physique. The runners always feel high pressure to stay fit and thin, whereas female runners face more societal expectations (Carey, 2022, p. 35). One of the cases happened to South African Olympic athlete Caster Semenya, who was going through multiple tests for her naturally high testosterone level (Carey, 2022, p. 42). This became a high-profile case at that time and the most discussed issue everywhere. Wells and Darnell (2014) explore the debates of gender verification and fairness and the ethics of testing. Their work stresses how this issue foregrounds gender identity and the reflection of gender norms in society (pp. 44-65). The case demonstrated how the structured rules and subjective standards of feminine norms restricted females. The structured sense of femininity and masculinity decides embodiments and creates power dynamics.

Women in Social Stigma

India had restricted menstruating women from entering Sabarimala Temple, Kerala, as menstruation was considered unholy until the year 2018. It limits women by considering their period as impure and prevents them from completing 41 days of penance, which is connected to a pilgrimage journey. This decision of the authority was perceived as disrespectful to women by many (Suri, 2018).

Another debate that has gained strong visibility is about abortion laws. According to the Getgen, the abortion laws in Chile, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were among the most restrictive in the world. The National Assembly of Nicaragua passed Law 603 in 2006, which prohibited all forms of abortion. Consequently, legal abortion was also eliminated in the case of rape, incest, or serious risks to the life and health of the mother (Getgen, 2008, pp. 151–152). This kind of complete abolition of abortion is diminishing the control of women over their bodies and will. Thus, laws, societal norms and expectations are stronger than her decisions. These cases reflect how laws and societal norms are forcefully embedded in women's bodies.

Conclusion

This exploration underscores how gendered embodiment is far from a neutral condition and has a deep connection with the dynamics of power. Moreover, it shows the deep connection between structured norms and gender behaviors through the frameworks of feminist phenomenology. The body is not a universal site of experience; power is not something external to embodiment, but rather, power is embedded on the body by social, cultural and political forces. Feminist phenomenology gives attention to these dynamics and challenges us to rethink how bodies are being controlled, regulated and marked. This study aims to rethink gender embodiment in a structured form of power norms and experiences. The body is shaped by societal expectations and interactions. The integrated view of

philosophers demonstrates embodiment as constructed, context-sensitive, and relational. The subjective experiences are different in the case of context dynamics. The existing culture, race and religion influence the experiences of a body. For this, moving to an intersectional lens becomes a more powerful strategy to understand the connection among power dynamics, social norms and bodily experiences.

This shift in focus assists us in recognizing how gender affects the way we live, think, and gives a deep understanding of how gender identities are formed and shaped. These perspectives create new possibilities for understanding agency, power and subjectivity. Overall, this paper suggests an inclusive and context-based approach to understanding embodiments.

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