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# Spaces of Visibility and Identity

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**Spaces of Visibility and Identity**

**By**

**Shelby R. Purdy**

**An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
University Honors Scholars Program  
Honors College  
and the  
Honors-in Philosophy Program  
College of Arts and Sciences  
East Tennessee State University**

## **Introduction**

We are caught within the web weaved by culture, society, and the institutions that pervade the two. Within the intertwined aspects of the human experience there lies a concept of identity, which is sometimes quoted as being the most familiar aspect of this experience. Who am I and how have I become this “I?” The formation of the self has long been debated: are we born with an identity, or an inherent essence, or does it begin to take shape after we interact with the world? Is interaction with the world necessary for a formation of an identity? There could possibly be a combination of the two. This debate is familiar in different disciplines: philosophy and the debate on essence versus existence, psychology and the debate on nature versus nurture, and within religious contexts with the debate on divine creation and chance.

Throughout this paper I will be arguing that identity is certainly shaped through an interaction with the world, and without the context of the world then a definitive identity would be hard to articulate. For this to be done, I will begin my paper by defining the concept of visibility and how visibility plays a pertinent role in the formation of an identity. Visibility should not be taken as solely the act of being observed; it turns out to be more complex than that. Visibility also constitutes the space where people come together to disclose themselves and information about the world. Within the spaces of visibility there is also a role that repetitive discourse and cultural intelligibility play within the context of identity formation. Repetitive discourse is when norms, identity shaping norms in particular, are repeated within a space of visibility so that they become intelligible to other beings. Cultural intelligibility implies that the repetitive utterance of the norm has created a definitive identity. I will elaborate more on

discursive practices, cultural intelligibility, and visibility later on in my paper. Afterwards I will be dividing my paper into two main sections: “spaces of surveillance” and “spaces of appearance.” The two main thinkers that I will be using to further my discussion are Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt. The former section will be dedicated to Foucault and will focus on those spaces of visibility where the main purpose is correction and conformity. The latter section will encompass Arendt’s theories about how certain spaces of visibility provide a positive power to those within that space. In other words, “spaces of surveillance” subjugate and “spaces of appearance” empower. Both thinkers argue that these spaces of visibility allow for an identity to be disclosed and possibly formed by the visibility that the world provides. To expand the discussion of how visibility and the reinforcement of culturally intelligible iterations have an impact on identity I will be using feminist thought to detail how the concept of gender is constructed through the visibility within “spaces of surveillance” and “spaces of appearance.” Once I have described both spaces thoroughly, I will show that Foucault’s “space of surveillance” is a necessary yet limiting view about identity formation. What the “space of surveillance” lacks the “space of appearance” will supplement. Neither space can be ignored; rather, both are necessary for a dense view towards identity formation.

## **Visibility**

Before delving into “spaces of surveillance” or “spaces of appearance,” it is important to describe the role of visibility within both spaces. Visibility should not be seen as solely the act of being viewed. While the gaze itself is an important aspect of visibility, it is not the only mode of visibility in the context of this paper. Visibility is the state of existing within a world that does not allow for total isolation. To exist within the world is to be visible to others, and this visibility is inescapable. Visibility can be seen as a presentation or a disclosure of oneself to other beings.

Existing within the world inevitably implies that one is presenting oneself to others, whether or not the presentation is deliberate. Foucault uses the concept of visibility to further explain how his theory of power forms subjects, and Arendt uses the concept of visibility to describe how subjects disclose themselves in the presence of others and how subjects can use visibility for empowerment. Visibility is not simply the act of being viewed and viewing another; rather, visibility is the process of observing, contemplating what has been observed, and then using the knowledge gained from the visibility to either shape a subject or gain insight into who the subject is. While visibility itself is necessary for the formation of an identity, the concept of repetitive discursive practice is also a component to identity formation. Without recurring normative identity discourse, then the identity itself would not reach cultural intelligibility and would hold no weight on an identity formation. Neve Gordon describes the importance of visibility in the context of a space of surveillance:

“Visibility is essential to power not only because it is put to use by power in order to control people, but perhaps more importantly because it is power’s condition of possibility. Discursive practices, for instance, are meaningless and powerless if they are not visible . . . discursive practices are actually created, reproduced, and upheld through visible citation and repetition of their normative fiats. Conversely, if a discursive practice ceases to be articulated by constant repetition, it loses its power and may eventually disappear. Thus, the practice maintains its power only insofar as it is visible” (Gordon, 132).

Without visibility, the norms that shape subjects will cease to exist, because for something to become a norm it has to be repetitively visible for it to take hold within a society. Without the

norms discussed by Foucault being seen and heard, they hold no sway on the shaping of subjects in any sense of the phrase.

In Arendt's work, *The Human Condition*, visibility is not used in order to correct, control, and ultimately form the subject, but rather is used in order to empower the subjects within the domain of visibility. Visibility and repetitive discursive practices discussed by Arendt are used in a positive way in that the subjects within the "space of appearance" are able to disclose themselves as subjects (instead of being made into a subject within the "space of surveillance"). The visibility within this space allows for the subjects to incite attention and possibly change based off the feedback of this attention. The visibility within a "space of appearance" is less dogmatic, unlike the "space of surveillance," where the repetitive discursive practices are creating norms that people are meant to abide by. Within the "space of appearance" the repetitive discursive practices create an intelligible identity through free disclosure. Visibility, in this broad sense of existing in the world and presenting oneself to others at all times, is a key feature of both Foucault's and Arendt's work and is key to identity shaping.

Now that I have articulated what visibility is within the context of my paper, I am now able to explore the two different spaces of visibility—"spaces of surveillance" and "spaces of appearance." I will begin in the "space of surveillance" because Foucault's work gives a more determinist view of how a subject is shaped. While Arendt is not directly responding to Foucault in her concept of the "space of appearance," I will be able to use her work to create my own response to his more restrictive view about identity formation. Once I have evaluated Foucault's stance within "space of surveillance" and shown how the visibility within this space shapes an identity, I will delve into Arendt's theories about the "space of appearance." After elaborating on both spaces I will show how Foucault's discussion on identity is necessary because it is

impossible to completely eliminate the institutions that effect an identity, but I will also show how taking the “space of surveillance” alone is a limiting view about identity formation. An identity does not simply have to be a creature intuitional frameworks. Arendt and the “space of appearance” provide a supplement to the limiting discussion concerning the “space of surveillance.” It cannot be denied that there are particular normative institutions that effect the way we see identities, such as, binary gender identities. The “space of appearance” allows an individual to challenge the binaries and the restrictive “space of surveillance” by disclosing an identity that does not abide by the institutional frameworks that pervade the world.

### **Space of Surveillance (Michel Foucault)**

The first space of visibility that I will be discussing is the “space of surveillance” that is emphasized in Foucault. The “space of surveillance” exists in many different aspects of society and to escape it is nearly impossible. Visibility is evident in a “space of surveillance” by the name alone and it is an integral part to identity formation within these spaces. Surveillance implies visibility, but these spaces are not meant to depict solely an overseeing gaze. The power relations that exist within these spaces function because of visibility and use visibility to achieve the goals within a “space of surveillance”: correction, conformity, and control. To explain how identity is shaped within a “space of surveillance” I will be using Foucault’s works *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*.

### **Power**

From a Foucauldian standpoint, power relations are the means to which an identity is formed within a “space of surveillance.” Specifically, Foucault uses disciplinary power to describe the subtle yet extensive practices used to shape an identity, but it is important to describe his general

notion of power before delving into what exactly disciplinary power is. He does not see power as something that can be possessed by one person or even one group of people; rather, power is to be taken as relational.

“Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations. Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play. Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix—no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body” (Foucault, 95).

Power is everywhere all at once—it is omnipresent without being dictatorial. While still being omnipresent, it takes analysis to truly notice the power relations at play within a society. It isn't visible like a sovereign power is visible. The head of the king has been cut off, and the power resides within the relational discourses in any particular institution. The power exists because of the reiteration of normative ways of being, and the reiteration itself is what makes the norms concrete and capable of being applied to individuals. Repetitive discursive practices make the elusive form of spoken word normative. The diffuse nature of this relational power results in the



subtle coercions of character and this is what disciplinary power is born out of. The norms that shape identity are created within these visible “spaces of surveillance” through repetitive discursive practices, and once the norms are created, they can be enforced upon individuals. Once the norms are used to coerce individuals, disciplinary power comes into play, and individuals are meant to internalize the normative discourse.

### **Disciplinary Power**

To make more concrete this somewhat elusive, general notion of power, Foucault examines how discipline is enacted through the power relations discussed previously. Within the chapter “Discipline” in the book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines how the subject is created through the institutions that use discipline as a corrective means. For Foucault, the subject is produced as an effect of power used within disciplinary institutions. The subject does not exist and then enter into the institutions; rather, the institutions create the subject. Foucault begins by explaining that in the 1800s sovereign power ceases to reign supreme, and once disciplinary power took hold, individuals were corrected from the inside out. Disciplinary power is exercised on the body and through the body. This power causes the individual to internalize the disciplines and to act in accordance with the norm that is admirable within the institution in question. The disciplines become internalized through the repetitive nature of the disciplinary practices, and the conforming and corrected identity that is shaped becomes culturally intelligible through the recurring disciplinary discursive practices.

Since Foucault wants to argue that an identity does not exist before an interaction with institutions, he begins with a section entitled “Docile Bodies.” He discusses how malleable the body is and how it can be treated as an object and be shaped by the subtle, detailed, repetitive disciplinary powers at play. Docile bodies are to be seen as formless, and through the

disciplinary power a subject is formed out of this shapeless, impressionable body. Bodies are seen as a means within disciplinary power and they are shaped accordingly. It is not that the body itself is shaped; rather, a malleable body is necessary for the shaping of an identity. The disciplinary practices act on the body to correct the internal and external behaviors of the body, and this in turn shapes the identity of the individual to which the body belongs. He provides a concrete example of this by using the soldier of the seventeenth century. A peasant was taken from his home and turned into a soldier. The methods of physical stance, weaponry, and attitude become automatic, and the peasant has been transformed into a coordinated fighting machine by the calculated, precise disciplines of the military. Through disciplinary power people are seen to be differentiated, because to individualize the masses and correct each allows for greater control within the group as a whole. In other words, to correct and train the individual is to control the mass as well. The docile body is shaped into a subject through these detailed disciplinary methods. The peasant is trained to become a soldier, and once a soldier always a soldier. His identity is tied up with the act of being a soldier and without the repetitive disciplinary practices that are placed upon the peasant then the soldier of the seventeenth century would not be culturally intelligible. It is more efficient and economic if the power can mold the individual into the type of being that is desirable to the particular institution.

“The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation

of its elements, its gestures, and its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it” (Foucault, 138).

The importance of these detailed coercions was how it invested and controlled the body. Once the disciplines were internalized, then the specific institution (hospital, military, factory, school, etc.) will function more smoothly. Without having to take the time to exercise sovereignty and with the capability to make diffuse the understated but impactful disciplinary methods, controlling the multitude of bodies becomes an efficient, productive, and economical process.

To use disciplinary power to shape the docile bodies into subjects there are three steps required that all incorporate visibility in the broad sense that I described earlier: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and an examination. Both the norms and the subjects they are being applied to are visible under this three tiered disciplinary mechanism. The norms are enforced by the disciplinary mechanisms to train “the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements – small, separate cells, organic autonomies, genetic identities and continuities, combinatory segments” (Foucault, 170). The hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination are all applied to each individual within the framework of disciplinary power. These three necessary features to forming an identity within the “space of surveillance” would not be possible without the visibility and the repetitive nature that is inherent in their methods.

Hierarchical observation ensures that each individual, of any rank, is being watched, studied, and coerced into abiding by the norm set in place through their visibility. Through being made visible at all times, an individual will be easier to study and ultimately train. This constant observation is what allows for the study of individual differences and the gained knowledge on what the norm is, what the norm should be, and how to ultimately enforce the ideal norm upon

those who are being observed. Without the broad context of visibility, where individuals are constantly existing within a world of presentation and disclosure, then the observation would be impossible. Visibility does not imply observation only, but observation requires visibility. To explain how disciplinary power uses observation as a technology of power, Foucault discusses the change within the architecture of military camps, hospitals, schools, and factories by explaining how the old theme of enclosure and confinement has been replaced by methods of transparency and constant visibility. This allows for better observation and better control over the actions and conduct of the individuals under surveillance. “This infinitely scrupulous concern with surveillance is expressed in the architecture by innumerable petty mechanisms. These mechanisms can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behavior” (Foucault, 173). This hierarchical organization is a type of disciplinary technology, in that it employs the method of each individual assuming that they are being watched, and in turn, the individual acts according to the norm being observed. It may require individuals to do the surveilling, but the importance lies on the internalization of the observation. The hierarchical relations of observation function to enforce the disciplinary power over individuals.

What is there to be observed? Why is it so important that this surveillance be pervasive, subtle, and discreet while also existing everywhere, all at once? The behavior of individuals is meant to be observed, studied, and once behavior has been accounted for, then there is a normalizing judgement to be passed. To observe behavior acted out by individuals is to measure and record data and then correct these individual’s behavior from the inside out by passing this normalizing judgement. Conformity is encouraged and non-conformity is deemed an offense.

The norm is a set of regulations, but it also relies on the study of individuals and the calculation of averages among them. “In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render the difference useful by fitting the one to another” (Foucault, 184). Within disciplinary power, if the norm is not achieved, then the punishment is to always be corrective. One is not locked up in a dungeon or sentenced to a beheading for not conforming; rather, one is encouraged and instructed on how to eventually reach that norm. Visibility and the act of observation allow for this norm to be studied, enforced, repeated, and be deemed culturally intelligible. Without individuals presenting themselves within the world or within a particular institution, then the knowledge of whether or not the individual has reached the norm would not be possible.

To determine whether or not the norm has been reached there exists an examination. The examination is essentially a combination of the hierarchical observation and the normalizing judgement. It is meant to expose the effectiveness of the training, and it’s a method to judge the inheritance and internalization of the enforced norm. It is the assurance that these disciplinary mechanisms are both enforcing power and creating power. Existing within the constant visibility within this world, disciplinary mechanisms enforce power within these “spaces of surveillance.” The mechanisms are subtle, but effective. The power is not only enforced over individuals so that a desired norm is established, but the power is also a productive power. Through enforcing these disciplinary mechanisms, the individual is corrected from the inside out, and their identity is shaped through abiding by the disciplinary mechanisms. Disciplinary mechanisms produce power because the disciplines are internalized and the individual begins the surveil herself/himself. The disciplinary power becomes a part of the individual and begins to emit itself

through that individual. Through encouraging conformity, power is given, because if disciplinary methods are successfully enforced, then an efficient, productive citizen will endure. If the examination proves that the individual has not accurately internalized the norm in place, then further correction is enforced until the individual eventually reaches the norm. This is why the disciplinary power can be considered a productive power and not ultimately a restrictive power.

### **Panopticon/Panopticism**

A concrete example of these disciplinary methods (including hierarchical organization, normalizing judgments, and the examination) that shape identity is given within the section entitled “Panopticism” within *Discipline and Punish*. While this section does give a concrete example of Foucault’s disciplinary power and its ability to shape an identity, it is important to note that Panopticism can be applied to any institution within society. The importance of visibility is exemplified here, and the malleability of bodies is enforced within the Panopticon. The Panopticon, an ideal space of surveillance, represents the method of internalization and automation of disciplinary power within the individual through the methods of visibility. The inmates within the Panopticon are to always assume that they are being watched, even if they are not, and this influences their behavior at all times. They are constantly visible and escaping that is not an option. A self-surveillance is induced; the disciplinary power becomes a part of the individual through the constant assumption of observation. Through this self-surveillance that is enacted, the individual begins to correct herself/himself by abiding by the norm. It is important to remember that the Panopticon is not a static architecture; Panopticism is generalizable across all fields. It is a mechanism or technology of power that can be applied to any institution to enforce a particular norm through repetitive disciplinary practices that exist within this space of visibility. The Panopticon shows how it is important not to get wrapped up in solely the gaze

coming from the observation tower. Visibility, as I said before, is more than just simply being viewed. This whole concept of power relations is involved within visibility. Simply being gazed upon is not enough to shape an identity, power relations are required for this. Power relations permeate society and to exist is to exist within a visible world where these power relations function. Gilbert Caluya, in his article “*Post-panoptic society? Reassessing Foucault in surveillance studies,*” emphasizes the importance of Foucault’s entire concept of power in the discourse of surveillance. The gaze alone is not effective enough to influence behavior and employ normalizing techniques upon individuals. The spaces where visibility under these operations of power work as “an instrument of control or regulation of those who are visible” (Marquez, 22) can be termed a “space of surveillance.” Within the spaces of visibility there exist different mechanisms of power, and these power relations are what influence identity. Both visibility and the concept of power are important in the formation of identity. Simple observation does not have the capability to manipulate.

### **Productive Power/Constructing Sexuality**

The capability to correct and shape an identity comes from Foucault depicting power that is not ultimately repressive but something that is productive in its function. The production exists within the discourse that is repetitive and reinforces norms, and through this repetitive discursive practice identities are created and designated to or taken up by particular individuals. The power of repetitive discursive practices and the influence they have on identity is depicted within the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault questions why in modern times we see our identity so bound up with sexuality. He produces a genealogy of the development of sexuality, and he argues that it is wrong to assume that it is a static, natural trait. Since the seventeenth century, Foucault explains that there has been an explosion of discourses on sex in order to gain

knowledge concerning it. First, it began with the confessional within the church, and then the psychiatric and medical curiosity began to take hold. Foucault argues that through this discourse we have socially constructed sexuality. There is nothing in particular about our physiology that implies a certain sexuality. Sexuality has come to be known through the rapid expansion of sexual dialogue in the name of knowledge. Through sexuality being observed and studied so readily, there have been definitions and labels placed upon sexuality. These labels that have been placed on particular sexualities are entered into discursive practices, and the reiteration of these labels constitute them as norms. The norms, through the function of discourse, allow sexuality greater visibility, and in turn, identities are bound up and/or measured against the norms. Before the incessant curiosity concerning sexuality, there did not exist a specific identity that was culturally intelligible that could be applied to an individual. This relates to disciplinary power through the repetitive measures that exist within defining a sexuality. Just like the soldier or the prisoner abided by disciplinary norms and internalized them through repetition, a sexual identity can also be constructed through the recurring normative definitions discussed within psychiatric and medical dialogue. Enforcing norms requires a visible dialogue and culturally intelligible identities are created through the repetitive enforcement of norms.

### **Foucauldian Identity Formation (Gender Identity)**

The concept of sexuality being constructed and the importance of Foucault's concept of power have influenced modern feminist philosophers in their discussion of sex/gender norms. Being visible within the world has now been tied up with this concept of having to articulate a particular sex and gender that one identifies with. These feminist thinkers are concerned with the construction of gender and sex, and ultimately argue that visibility, which encompasses a presentation, disclosure, and reiteration of discourse, causes one to identify with a particular



gender or sex related to the norms within the society in question. Playing off of Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and his explanation on the construction of definitive sexualities, one can see how these mechanisms can be applied to heteronormativity and its reinforcement of the gender/sex binary. Foucauldian ideas help Sandra Lee Bartky and Judith Butler back up their claims that gender and sex are indeed constructed. Bartky discusses how gender is constructed, and Butler takes it a step further and argues that sex itself is constructed through discourse. Before I focus on how each thinker uses Foucault to back up these claims it is important to elaborate on how Foucault's work can be applied to the heteronormativity.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is relevant to heteronormativity because just like the institutions of the prison and the school, heteronormativity is continued through normalized, repetitive discourse. Foucault explains how bodies and subjects are created through disciplinary powers, which can be used to help describe how sexed bodies are created. Through observation, normalizing judgement, and an examination the body is studied, defined, and a sexual identity is bound up with this body. Visibility within a "space of surveillance" implies these three aspects of disciplinary power, and as said about the Panopticon, these are diffuse and can even be applied to the body. Does one's gender match up with one's sex and vice-versa? If not, then how can we identify this person so that their gender or sex is culturally intelligible? How can we expand this 'norm' within the institution of sex/gender identity construction? Within the visible world there exists a reiteration of a sex/gender dichotomy that is enforced upon and internalized in individuals. The repetitive, discursive disciplinary power of sexuality, which exists because of visibility, enforces the idea that one has to define their sexuality by or against the set norms produced through discourse. The constant visibility in the world that

expects one to present oneself in one sexual form or another encourages a self-surveillance of sexuality, just as the Panopticon did to inmates.

Bartky emphasizes the reinforcement of gender norms and their placement onto specific biological differences. This reinforcement exists within the visibility that is inescapable living within a social world, and without the repetitive discourse, then there would not be a dichotomous set of gender norms to identify with or against. In the article, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” she uses Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power to describe how the disciplines of the feminine norm are applied to women. Performative actions exist within a visible world of presentation, and she wants to examine the performative actions that produce a body that is considered feminine. Three categories of gender norms are considered in her analysis: “those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and those directed toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface” (Bartky, 65). The individual is always visible and is constantly being subjected to these gender norms. Through these disciplinary practices the feminine body-subject is constructed.

“In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality woman must make herself ‘object and prey’ for the man: It is for him that these eyes are limpid pools and this cheek baby-smooth. In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (Bartky, 72).

With this anonymous Other residing within the conscious of the woman, there begins a type of self-surveillance that resonates with Foucault’s theories. If a woman is expected to comply with

the feminine norms of society, then a sense of shame is acquired if she feels as if she has to measure up to these norms and is not able. The need to conform to these norms and the shame that comes along with not measuring up comes from an internalization of this patriarchal disciplinary power—the anonymous patriarchal Other. Bartky thinks that there needs to be a reconstruction of the categories of masculinity and femininity and that “femininity as a certain ‘style of the flesh’ will have to be surpassed in the direction of something quite different, not masculinity, which is in many ways only its mirror opposite, but a radical and as yet unimagined transformation of the female body” (Bartky, 78). Maybe a solution to this radical transformation of the female body can be found within an exploration in the female body itself and the identity of ‘woman’ as being constructed through repetitive discursive practices within Judith Butler’s work.

Not only can the reinforcement of gender norms create a *feminine* body, but the repetitive discursive practices that exist within a disciplinary power can be argued to create a *female* body as well. This concept of gender norms is applied within Judith Butler’s chapter “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire” within *Gender Trouble*. Within this article Butler wants to show how the performative power of gender norms creates a sexed body. This performative power can only exist within a space of visibility. Without visibility then there would be no resonation of the performance. As I stated earlier in my paper, visibility implies a presentation, or an appearance. She begins by questioning whether or not the concept of ‘woman’ as having a universal significance is founded upon factual grounds and whether or not there is a commonality among women that can define them as ‘woman.’ She concludes that representational discourse and the performative power of reiteration undermine the idea of there being a universal concept of ‘woman’ behind the discourse itself. She thinks that “it is not enough to inquire into how women

might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler, 5). She is concerned that the categorization of ‘women’ that feminism propagates might actually be limiting in its scope. She questions whether forming a category termed ‘woman’ is actually a reification of a normative gender dichotomy. The identity that is bound up with a female anatomy defined as “woman” is deemed culturally intelligible through the performative power of gender within the spaces of visibility.

Butler claims that gender can not only be thought of as a cultural creation, but that gender has to be conceived of as having a performative power. To clarify, gender is performed and is constituted through the performance itself. The performance is the gender identification; therefore, the performance has the power to create a gendered identity. This is why Butler claims gender to have a performative power. Through the performance of gender, that is bound to exist within a space of visibility, a sexed body is identified and assigned to an individual. A body exists and then the sex is read back into the particular physiological differences in the body. Gender must “designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (Butler, 11). The performative power of gender is the means to the end which is sex being thought of as a prediscursive phenomenon. She does not want to state that the body is a medium on which cultural meaning is deterministically placed, but rather that the body itself is constructed—at least the identities bound up with the human physiology. She claims that the body comes into being through the performative power of gender; gender norms are read back into specific physiological differences and then these differences are in turn seen to define what set of gender norms should be abided by. A body is observed, a normalizing judgement is placed

upon it, and there exists a subtle examination to determine whether or not one's identity is correctly correlated to a specific set of sex and gender norms. Within spaces of visibility the disciplinary power of heteronormativity is applied to individual bodies, and they are given a particular sexual identity through this strict dichotomy.

Within the article entitled "*Bodies That Matter*," Butler describes how the discourse involving the sex of individuals is perpetuated by this regulatory ideal, or normative discourse. The binary of heterosexuality saturates the dialogue surrounding sex, and this process of discourse has a productive power. Compulsory heterosexuality, or heteronormativity, has "the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls" (Butler, 235). Through this thought process, bodies are not originally sexed, but rather their sex is materialized through the normative discourse constituted through heteronormativity. The materiality of the binary sexed bodies is an effect of this discursive, productive power. "In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialized 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (Butler, 236). Butler points out that the necessity of the reiteration of the norms implies that the materialization is never complete. This reiteration requires visibility to hold sway over the shaping of identities, and the norms of the performativity of gender that are created and reinforced through the reiteration are read back into a body, and a 'sex' within the binary institution of heterosexuality is created.

How is gender performativity related to this materialization? Butler makes sure to point out that the concept of performativity is a continuing process of reiteration and should not be naively construed as representing a single act. A multitude of acts exist within spaces of visibility, and this is what helps define bodies, enforce identities upon them, and to create

cultural intelligibility. This performativity works to materialize bodies, and without this reiteration and performativity, then there would be no sexed body. This evolution of thought is a culprit in the development of the discourse on sex. There is no sexed body outside the domain of the power of performativity and hegemonic discourse. “Sex is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies the body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Butler, 236). This conception of discursive powers creating the sexed body is obviously using Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power. For Foucault, a subject is formed through the power relations and disciplines; there is no subject before the interaction with the world. Just as a soldier is created through the interactions with the military institution and its disciplines, the “I” of a sexed body is formed through the process of assuming a sex within the performative, discursive practice. The subject is formed through a process of inclusion and exclusion; the subject is certain things and is not certain things. The heterosexual imperative and its binary limitations result in a category of abject beings: “the abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (Butler, 237). These ‘abject beings’ who disrupt the social norms of the heterosexual imperative can be used “as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility” (Butler, 237) within a space of visibility.

The sexed body is not necessarily a replica of the law (the normalizing, heterosexual imperative); the law mobilizes the performative actions of the body being sexed and gendered. One can take up the norms of the law or dissimulate them to form a sexed body. The law is not a guarantee that only the norm will be followed; there can be a divergence from the law. Despite

divergence, spaces of visibility allow discourse surrounding sexed bodies to be historically grounded, and they make the intelligibility of bodies possible. A subject is not formed out of nowhere, but through the context of the world in which the subject lives. The accumulation of all the discourse throughout time is used within the formulation of the subject. This accumulation can never be separated from gender performativity and the sexed body. The norms that guide the discourse of sexed bodies call into question how those beings that are not conforming to the norms and are excluded from the category of a 'sexed body' can create a rearticulation of what qualifies as a body that matters. In "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" Butler states that "the notion that there might be a 'truth' of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (Butler, 23). The power relations within compulsory heterosexuality that produce a law of norms, that is the binary of the masculine/feminine and male/female, do not require that gender and sexuality become an exact replica of the law itself, but that "the productions swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (Butler, 39). Those subjects that do not abide by the norms of the binary heterosexual institution have helped to expand the notion of what can be considered a norm in the first place. Visibility allows for individuals to be identified as a particular sex, but it also allows for individuals to refute this designation and create one all of their own.

The refutation of compulsory heterosexuality happens within a space of appearance, so this will be discussed further in a later section. Despite there being some leniency on how one identifies with a particular norm, it seems as though even if there is an 'abnormal' identification, it is always defined by and against the dichotomous norm. Either way, whether it is a 'normal' or

‘abnormal’ identification, both are created through repetitive discursive practices, and these in turn make identities culturally intelligible and allow for an individual to associate oneself with a particular identity. Michel Foucault argues that student, worker, and soldier identities are created. Sandra Lee Bartky claims gender identities are constructed. Judith Butler concludes that the sexed body itself is a product of repetition. The normative discourse on a soldier, a student, a worker, or a sexuality all work in a repetitive way to form an identity. Within a space of visibility, a presentation or performance of the self is required, and through this performative power that is subject to the normative institutions, an identity is articulated. Without this discourse surrounding particular identities, whether it be a sexual identity or the identity of a soldier, it would be difficult to have culturally intelligible beings. The cultural intelligibility and the materiality of these norms is created through the discursive practices. The repetitive nature of disciplinary power creates definitive identity formations that are placed upon individuals or internalized by individuals. This power that forms identities is subtle yet the effects are visible at all times, and this may be the cause for the confusion of identity being constant and at the same time elusive. In other words, identity, at an intuitive level, seems to be a familiar and constant aspect of one’s life, but since the discursive phenomenon influencing identity is at times so subtly assumed and not questioned, this results in an elusive aspect of identity. Discursive influence on identity is inevitable because we are bound up within this world of visibility that is inescapable and, these definitive identities have become culturally intelligible through this presentation and performance within this visible world.

While the disciplinary power that forms identities is not a sovereign power, it seems as though that the effects of a “space of surveillance” can be a bit domineering. If one concludes that this particular space of visibility is a bit deterministic, then I am not sure this would be far



off. It is deterministic in the sense that identities become a part of a cause and effect scenario. The “space of surveillance” forms identities that do not exist outside of the normative discourse. Those that do not adhere to the institutional framework of identity—whether it be militaristic, pedagogical, or heteronormative—are deemed as culturally unintelligible. The identities formed within a “space of surveillance” are always created through the normative discourse, and even if someone is considered ‘abnormal’ then this identity is still defined by and against the normal. The “space of surveillance,” despite having dogmatic undertones, cannot be ignored. Foucault was onto something when he explored how institutional normative discourse had an effect on identity. The space is lacking, and through Hannah Arendt a space is given that supplements this limiting view of identity formation. The “space of appearance” is not meant to refute the “space of surveillance;” rather, the “space of appearance” provides a place for individuals to disclose an identity that does not necessarily abide by the normative discourse. It is a space for the ‘abject beings’ or the ‘abnormal’ to disclose themselves, challenge the pre-existing norms, and create new discursive practices surrounding their ‘abnormality.’ Despite the “space of appearance” being a supplement to the “space of surveillance,” there is still some common ground between the two that can be worked with. The performative aspect of identity can be found in both spaces. Within a “space of appearance” there is no denial of the existing world that includes the institutional frameworks that constitute normative identity constructs, but the space does allow for new norms to be disclosed and considered culturally intelligible. The “space of appearance” allows for a performance of identity that is not completely wrapped up in historical normative discourse. The normative discourse cannot be forgotten though, so we cannot leave Foucault completely behind.

### **Space of Appearance (Hannah Arendt)**

Hannah Arendt did not focus on the concept of identity specifically, but I will be able to use her work to contribute to my inquiry into identity formation. The aspect of her philosophy that will contribute to this inquiry on identity formation is her concept of action and the role this plays within the “space of appearance.” Action and its association with two other fundamental human activities (labor and work) will be discussed later, but for now I think it is important to describe what the “space of appearance” is and how the concept of natality is necessary for this discussion. The “space of appearance” is a type of visibility that is different from the “space of surveillance.” The concept of visibility being a broad concept of existing within a world where total isolation is near impossible is employed within Arendt as well. Where the “space of surveillance” is used as a means of coercion and control, the “space of appearance” provides an area where people can disclose their identity within the context of the world but with the ability to divert from the normative structures discussed within a “space of surveillance.”

“The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves” (Arendt, 199).

People are necessary for the “space of appearance,” and they are the root of this space. Without being visible to others, then the space ceases to exist. There is no room for disclosure of being in a world of isolation and alienation, according to Arendt.

The “space of appearance” relies on Arendt’s concept of natality. Natality is important for all of Arendt’s philosophy. It is a concept that represents the lack of stagnation within the world. There is always a birth of new, unique beings. Not only is natality represented in the concrete act of birth, but it is also exemplified in word and deed.

“With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance . . . This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginning himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before” (Arendt, 177).

Natality is a part of how Arendt is contrasted with Foucault’s deterministic identity formation standpoint. Since every person is a new beginning from birth, and through word and deed they are able to insert *who* they are into the world and create a completely new beginning, this allows for a fight against a complete social construction of identity. Identity formation, from Arendt’s perspective, does not subject the individual to being a creature of institutional discipline. Natality is confirmed in her entire thesis and is rooted in all three fundamental activities of human existence—labor, work, and action. “Labor assures not only individual survival, but the life of the species. Work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time. Action, in so

far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition of remembrance, that is, for history” (Arendt, 8-9). All are rooted in natality because they are all constant forms of creation. Each fundamental activity of human existence—labor, work, and action—make the world in which we live possible. Labor and work help to ensure the world that future people will enter. Natality is a concept of action because every time a new person is born they contribute to the plurality of the human experience and have the capability to start something completely new. The formation of identity that I am extracting from Arendt will not imply that individuals are simply creatures of the institution like Foucault implied. Rather, identity can be created within the element of action and plurality that Arendt claims. There is not a deterministic view of a person because this concept of natality is inherent in her notion of the human condition. The human condition is one in which human beings are constantly creating and recreating their identity and the world around them. The human condition is based on natality and action and speech are necessary to articulate this dynamic sense of identity and the world. Arendt does not want to imply that human beings are continually creating new identities; she recognizes that the world around us conditions our existence. Everything that someone comes into contact with turns into a condition of their experience of the world.

“The impact of the world’s reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence” (Arendt, 9).

*The Human Condition* provides a less deterministic view of identity formation and allows for an individual to present one’s identity in a public setting rather than the institutions creating the

identity as a whole. The term ‘condition’ itself implies a particular mode of being with respect to circumstances. “Condition” does not ignore the pre-existing world. Instead, it uses the context of the world to shape that particular mode of being. This is different than a deterministic view, because under that view the world is the sole cause of an identity. Identity formation cannot escape the normative discourse existing within the world under a deterministic view. What is important for Arendt is that there is an air of active engagement in identity formation, rather than passive manipulation brought about by institutional normative discourse. The active, rather than passivity, is what Arendt is concerned with, and is ultimately what is important for my thesis.

Throughout history, at least up until modern times, *vita contemplativa* has been deemed of higher importance and a more prized way of life than any in the category of *vita activa*. The life of the philosopher in Plato’s ideal *polis* is regarded as cultivating the most freedom and the adequate lifestyle of a ruler over the people. A monk lives a secluded life delving into the mystery of the cosmos. “The primacy of contemplation over activity rests on the conviction that no work of human hands can equal in beauty and truth the physical *kosmos*, which swings in itself in changeless eternity without any interference or assistance from outside, from man or god” (Arendt, 15). The high esteem given to *vita contemplativa*, while not completely misplaced, has resulted in the *vita activa* being seen as only necessary to serve the needs of the *vita contemplativa*. The *vita activa* is what Hannah Arendt focuses on in her book *The Human Condition*, and she wants to make it clear that she is not refuting the importance of the *vita contemplativa*, only that through its primacy it has sequestered the importance of the *vita activa*.

Arendt points out that the *vita activa* is characterized by three fundamental human activities, as mentioned earlier—labor, work, and action. Action is ultimately what is important

in the context of my thesis, but it is important to explain what she means by labor and work in detail before expounding upon the relevance of action.

## **Labor**

While at first it may seem to be irrelevant and confusing to distinguish between labor and work, Arendt actually does define the two in a coherent way. The term labor is meant to imply the acts that we perform that provide for the basic necessities of life, such as eating and shelter. To labor is to be enslaved by the necessities of the body. Arendt's concept of labor is different than that of Marx. Marx explains labor as being purely production, but Arendt explains labor as being more like re-production. In other words, labor is performed in order to sustain a person within production. This is one justification the Greeks tried to propose for slavery. They wanted to focus their time on a philosophical, contemplative lifestyle or devote their time to the political arena, and they did not find this possible if they had to constantly worry about how they were going to satisfy their bodily needs. To be a slave was the worst possible fate for the Greeks because it implied that you were doomed to carry out the necessities of life, whether it be for oneself or for a master. "The institution of slavery in antiquity, though not in later times was not a device for cheap labor or an instrument of exploitation for profit, but rather the attempt to exclude labor from the conditions of man's life" (Arendt, 84). The effort that is put into labor to satiate one's basic, bodily need is futile because the end product is always consumed. Labor is essentially Sisyphean because there is never an end to the life-sustaining process. More food will always need to be consumed and having shelter is always preferred. The effort of labor may be futile, but it is certainly necessary. Labor is necessary because it sustains the biological functions of life.

The fruits of labor are not durable or permanent; rather, the end products are always consumed and never become a part of the world. The *animal laborans*, or the laboring human,

does not choose to not procure objects that have a permanence; rather, the *animal laborans* is a slave to the body and to necessity. They are banished to the home to make sure the needs of the production class are met. Re-production becomes their only identity and they are incapable of freedom from this. Re-production describes the duties that provide for the well-being of the productive class. “The burden of biological life, weighing down and consuming the specifically human life-span between birth and death, can be eliminated only by the use of the servants, and the chief function of ancient slaves was rather to carry the burden of consumption in the household than to produce for society at large” (Arendt, 119). The identity tied up with *animal laborans* allows for the others to pursue these loftier desires and allowing them to focus their energy not on providing for the basic necessities of life, but opening up their time towards contemplation or political agendas.

## **Work**

While the term ‘work’ may seem to be synonymous with the term ‘labor,’ it connotes something entirely different for Arendt. Work is meant to depict the concrete, material objects that human beings create while they are living. It implies the durability of the world despite the mortality of the human being who created it. “The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies—*homo faber* who makes and literally ‘works upon’ as distinguished from the *animal laborans* which labors and ‘mixes with’—fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice” (Arendt, 136). In other words, work is the man-made, created world that surrounds us.

“Although Arendt does refer to worldliness as ‘the capacity to fabricate and create a world’ (PF:209), worldliness requires more than mere fabrication, since it implies our attachment to, and care for, worldly things Arendt appears to include both material

objects like buildings, tools and works of art, and the less tangible but not necessarily less durable forms of cultural, legal and political institutions, including the ‘web’ of human relationships and narratives that pre-exists every individual, sets the context for their activities. And shapes the way actors are understood, responded to and remembered” (Browning, 18).

While it is supposed to depict concreteness and durability, this is not meant to insinuate that work cannot wear over time or that it cannot be destroyed. For example, if one buys a car, which is a piece of work within the world, and does not take care of it properly and use it consistently, then the car will eventually cease functioning. It is no longer an active piece of work within the world. The same goes for legal institutions. A long-lasting law can be struck down by a contradicting case brought up. Durability does not imply immortality.

“The life process which permeates our whole being invades it, too, and if we do not use the things of the world, they also will eventually decay, return into the over-all natural process from which they were drawn and against which they were erected. If left to itself or discarded from the human world, the chair will again become wood, and the wood will decay and return to the soil from which the tree sprang before it was cut off to become the material upon which to work and with which to build” (Arendt, 136-137).

While work may seem to be more durable and less futile than the means and ends of labor, it is still not to be deified and considered immortal. The creating of these artificial things is constituting ‘worldliness.’ Worldliness does not consist of solely mental thought or the laborious activities that do not procure stability. Worldliness is the character that humans have created—the lasting artifacts made by human beings. While labor is required to survive, work is not, but many do argue it necessary for a fulfilling life. Some claim that to have a meaningful life one



must create something that is longer lasting than life itself. Work is always meant to be seen as a means/ends process, unlike labor. Labor's means is a strong labor force which produces the ends which are the life sustaining substances, but the ends of labor immediately become means again once they are being consumed to sustain life. Work, on the other hand, produces objects that are an end in themselves and are not intended to be biologically consumed—a sculpture, for example. The end product of work is independent of people and it adds to the man-made 'worldliness.'

It is important to note that the tools and instruments that are made by the process of work can help eliminate the burden of labor, at least to some extent. They have not gotten rid of the necessity of life; rather, they have been made by *homo faber* to ease the duties that labor provides. In a slave society it is apparent that there are certain necessities in life that are being fulfilled by the slaves, but the industrial revolution has hidden this burden to a certain extent. "The danger here is obvious. Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity" (Arendt, 121). If everything seems so easy all of the time, then one does not notice the necessity and does not attempt to overcome it. The industrial revolution has created an epidemic of labor. Workmanship is not as prevalent and the labor force is used to create objects that are meant to be consumed and not kept for a long period of time—hence the capitalist, consumer society. "The ideals of *homo faber*, the fabricator of the world, which are permanence, stability, and durability, have been sacrificed to abundance, the ideal of *animal laborans*" (Arendt, 126).

## Action

Now that I have explained the differences between labor and work, one a life-sustaining force and the other a process of creating worldliness, I will begin to explain what Arendt's concept of action is, how it relates to identity formation, and how the "space of appearance" is involved. Natality is central here because it is what allows for a dynamic space of word and deed. The plurality of individuals is a breeding ground for new ideas and fresh, progressive action, and without this then the concept of action would be static and our world would be caught in a stifling, conservative place. Natality is inherent in labor and work, but it is most important in Arendt's concept of action because for her this is where political and social change is possible. "Action is distinguished from labor because it is free rather than determined by necessity; and it is distinguished from work because, as Aristotle defined *praxis* as opposed to *poiēsis*, it is an end in itself rather than simply a movement or process towards an external end" (Browning, 24). While someone's identity may be tied up with their slavish like personality, if they're constantly laboring, or tied up with the craft they perform under the category of work, Arendt wants to ultimately argue that one's identity, *who* one is and not *what* one is, is defined in the context of action. Action consists of speech and acts and "this disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds; yet obviously the affinity between action and beginning is closer than that between speech and beginning, although many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech" (Arendt, 178). This concept of beginning is important for Arendt's analysis of action. Each person born allows for a new beginning—a new set of actions that are possible. To act is to take initiative and this initiative begins when a new person is born.

Arendt claims that the basic human condition of action is plurality, or in other words, all humans are the same in the sense that nobody is. Uniqueness is the defining factor of a human,

even if one is influenced by the worldliness surrounding them, and each time someone is born they have the capability to disclose a ‘who’ that has never existed before. What is this ‘action’ that discloses ‘who’ one is?

“It should be evident already that Arendt’s definition of action is broad and not always precise or consistent, combining the spontaneous initiation of something new with the display of exemplary deeds, the exemplification of noble ideals, and the republican ideal of political exchange in the public sphere. The ambiguity in the meaning of action is perpetuated by her tendency to couple the term with ‘speech’” (Browning, 14).

Through action and speech a ‘who’ is revealed. This ‘who’ that is disclosed may be rooted in natality, but this does not imply that they are born onto a completely white blank page. *Who* one is is disclosed through the dynamic interaction of word and deed, and this dynamic interaction is a part of natality. Despite the new beginnings, there is a world that they are born into—a worldliness created by previous generations and particular necessities one must adhere to—and this world is the backdrop on which a ‘who’ is disclosed.

“When action is coupled with speech it immediately assumes an important relationship to worldliness, for communicative action now appears to be the means by which the world of things becomes tangible and real. On the one hand, the distinctiveness of unique individuals only appears when there is a common objective world—a stable structure of public institutions, spaces and things—which, as the table gathers together those who sit around it, ‘relates and separates men at the same time.’ On the other hand, the objectivity of the world appears only when it is talked about and shared, only when it is a public world ‘distinguished from our privately owned place in it’ (Vita Activa, 15).

She claims that ‘who’ one is does not become apparent until the disclosure among other beings takes place—hence her emphasis on plurality. Without disclosure of a ‘who’ in action and speech, then they both simply lose their specific revelatory character and become a mere achievement among others. Arendt does want to point out that it is hard to truly capture *who* one is through language because once one starts to describe *who* they are or *who* someone else is, then the language starts to sound like an explanation of *what* one is. *Who* one is may be revealed in speech, but it is hard to articulate what is revealed in speech. The disclosure of the ‘who’ is more accurately revelatory to the others listening and watching the disclosure; *who* someone wants to disclose does not always succeed in coming across. For instance, I may want a particular characteristic about myself to be vivid to others, but this does not necessitate that they will actually notice it in either my words or deeds. “This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor’s and speaker’s life; but as such it can be known, that is grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end” (Arendt, 193). Arendt essentially has a narrative identity framework; once someone has completed their life-story in death, then the ‘who’ of that person can be revealed. Also, it seems that from the previous quotation, Arendt would claim that the world and the ‘who’ of an individual is created within this disclosure. There is a world that an individual is born into and there is already a worldliness that has been cultivated over time, but, as stated earlier, worldliness also consists of a cultural durability. This cultural durability is created through action and speech of the species.

The identity that is disclosed through action and speech relies on a space of appearance that is inherently social. Multiple people are required for a disclosure of identity to occur and without someone to watch and listen to this disclosure, then the content of the disclosure is void.

Even if a person writes a memoir, the disclosure is still happening in the occurrence of someone else reading it. The “space of appearance” cannot exist without a multitude of people. Through this concert of action and speech that is inherent in the “space of appearance” a social world is created and through this social aspect a political realm emerges. “The political realm rises directly out of acting together, the ‘sharing of words and deeds.’ Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it” (Arendt, 198). Action in Arendt’s terms is what creates a social world where different perspectives can be interchanged and debated. This space allows for social change and disclosure of identity. Arendt prizes the Greek *polis* as being the perfect example of a “space of appearance;” therefore, in the next section I will discuss how the *polis* relates to the “space of appearance” and then argue that modern social media has the same framework. Through both of these a disclosure of identity and social change have the possibility of occurring.

### **Greek *Polis* and Social Media**

Among Plato and the Greek gods and goddesses, if you took anything from ancient Greek studies then it was probably the concept of the *polis*. *Polis* is a term for the Greek city-state. Each *polis* had its own judicial, legal, religious, cultural, and political differences, but they all had the same structure. *Poleis* were considered a breeding ground for art, philosophy, and political debates. They are essentially large cultural centers that bring the community together to discuss the world surrounding them.

“The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen

to be. ‘Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*’: these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly” (Arendt, 198-199).

Arendt clearly points out that a “space of appearance” cannot exist without an interaction of multiple people. The *polis* is the prime example of this space and once the people disperse the space no longer exists. It does not matter where or with whom this space occurs so long as there are multiple people participating in action and speech. Once again it is clear that the “space of appearance” and action itself are inherently social. The *polis*, when viewed as the city-state structure, is an attempt at rendering this “space of appearance” and action permanent. There was always a place for the Greeks to congregate and disclose their identity and particular social, legal, and philosophical issues.

Social media is a modern day *polis*, and in turn a modern version of the “space of appearance.” What is social media though? The term seems intuitive, but some have actually found it hard to define. In an article discussing how advocacy groups have used social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action there is a tentative definition given:

“Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” *Web 2.0* refers to the software platform that gave birth 'to the technology that we currently understand as social media.

The term “was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and

end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Jonathan, 7-8).

This definition clearly expresses how social media is a collaborative effort; it is inherently a “space of appearance.” It is similar to the *polis* in both the concrete and dynamic sense. From here on out it can be assumed that social media, no matter the kind, will always exist on the internet and will forever provide a space for multiple people to interact. This is how social media is like the concrete city-state concept of a *polis*. In the dynamic sense, there will always be new social media platforms introduced and different conversations with different people occurring. It allows for people from all around the world to come together on a particular technological platform and discuss issues relevant to their lives. Social media allows for connection across borders, race, class, gender, etc. In the same article quoted above it is reported that the advocacy groups surveyed found social media to be a great benefit to getting their message out:

“The majority of advocacy groups surveyed noted in their open-ended responses that social media provide a variety of benefits that help facilitate civic engagement and collective action. These benefits are organized here into four sections: 1) Social media help connect individuals to advocacy groups and thus can *strengthen outreach efforts*; 2) social media help promote engagement as they *enable engaging feedback loops*; 3) social media *strengthen collective action efforts through an increased speed of communication*; and 4) social media are *cost-effective tools* that enable advocacy organizations to do more for less.” (Jonathan, 13-14).

The *polis* was a hub of communication on all fronts and a place for the community to discuss hot topic issues they were facing. The previous sentence could replace *polis* with social media and I think it would still be coherent. Yes, social media is a host for narcissism and mundane pictures, but social media also provides a platform for people to come together to discuss relevant topics, whether they agree or disagree. The *poleis* of Greece and social media are both the epitome of a “space of appearance.” The “space of appearance” allows for a disclosure of being and a disclosure of the world—both social media and a polis have the capability of providing this type of space.

### **Arendtinian Identity Formation (Gender Identity)**

The Greek *polis* was brought into discussion because it is a concrete example that Arendt uses to describe the “space of appearance”—just like Foucault used the Panopticon to exemplify the “space of surveillance”—and the important role that action plays within it—both word and deed. It is known that women held an inferior status to men, despite the sacred Goddesses. Men were overwhelmingly the center of historical, political, and philosophical thought in Ancient Greece and women were subordinated to the domestic sphere. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the limiting lifestyle of women in Ancient Greece though; rather, how the *polis* can be compared to social media is what is of interest in terms of gender identity. Even if women in Ancient Greece were permitted to discuss feminism in the *polis*, it is not well documented. Social media is a different story. People from all around the globe are discussing feminist issues in all of their complexities through the platform of social media. It provides a space where people of all different race, gender, ethnic, class, religious, and social backgrounds can come together to discuss relevant issues. “While the role of community media is to challenge prevailing social norms and to ensure equitable gendered relations, the role of state media is to



amplify the national identity of the nation-state” (Isaacs-Martin, 140). Here community media represents social media—they are essentially the same thing. Community media is controlled by the community, hence the name. Social media is a form of community media because it allows for a wide-range of individuals to come together to debate particular topics without a particular rhetoric being engaged by a national identity. This national identity is associated with state media. State media is mass media controlled by the state; the dialogue here is controlled by social norms that are deemed acceptable by that particular media source, for example, a news broadcast or website. Social media allows for individuals to break past the rhetoric of social norms and discuss how the norms are integrated into society and how people are capable of transcending them. “One objective of community media is to ensure that women within a community can develop and produce forms of communication to articulate their experiences. Community media constitutes an important interface for the negotiation of difference and representation of the other” (Isaacs-Martin, 140). This “space of appearance,” community media (social media), provides of space for people to come together and challenge particular societal, social, and biological norms concerning what it is to be a particular gender. Normative gender identity has the capability to be discussed and ultimately challenged when people of all different backgrounds have the capability to come together and have productive conversations on the gender identity. It is also a space where gender performativity can occur, and through this heteronormativity can be challenged rather than passively adhered to like it is within a “space of surveillance.” Through these platforms identities that do not adhere to the normative framework are disclosed and seen as culturally intelligible. Once this space has been created, gender identity has the capability of expanding away from normative standards that society employs for its benefit.

As stated earlier, Arendt does not think that people are born onto a white blank page. She recognizes that people are born into a complex world and total isolation is nearly impossible. This world that one is born into is obviously going to have an influence on one's identity. Gender identity is even effected because people are born into a world with heteronormativity. What is important for Arendt though is this concept of natality in action. In our words and deeds we are able to incite change and challenge the existing world views. The "abject beings" that Judith Butler discusses are a good example of this. The "abject beings" challenge what is considered to be the norm within the world, and a "space of appearance" gives them the capability to bring about a new way of being.

"Literally speaking, natality is the condition of being born, which Arendt lyrically describes as 'being a new beginning'. The faculty of action depends on the condition of natality because action is 'to begin something new', and only a being which *is* a new beginning is capable of making a new beginning; that is, freedom can only arise from something that is not the determinate product of a causal chain." (Browning, 22-23).

Since natality is such a core concept to Arendt's theory of action, natality is also an important aspect of gender identity formation from Arendt's standpoint. Action exists within a "space of appearance" and within this space people have the freedom to disclose themselves. This disclosure, through word and deed, is always a new identity. To clarify, the new identity is always within the context of a pre-existing world—a world that can be challenged. Another central idea within Arendt's theory of action is plurality, so each person that is born contributes to the plurality of the world. Each person born has the capability have acting and speaking in a way that was not spoken before, and through this pre-existing identity standards can be

challenged. The ‘abject beings’ are free to disclose their identity, even if it is met with resistance, within the “space of appearance”.

Identity is constructed within a range of potential social options. The dominant Western system of gender has made it difficult for those whose gender falls somewhere between or outside of the binary system to understand and accept themselves or to be recognized as socially legitimate. Gender is achieved in social interaction with others, and to achieve accountability as a social actor, one must enact gender in ways that are socially recognizable and decodable (West and Fenstermaker 1995). But gender is also "a feature of social relationships, and its idiom derives from the institutional arena in which those relationships come to life" (West and Fenstermaker 1995, 21; West and Zimmerman 1987). Further, gender and gender belief systems are inherent components of the social infrastructure (Lorber 1994). Consequently, gender- and we would argue, gender identity-is learned and achieved at the interactional level, reified at the cultural level, and institutionally enforced via the family, law, religion, politics, economy, medicine, and the media. (Gagne, 479).

It cannot be denied that heteronormativity has an impact on gender identity, but what is important here is that gender identity is formed at the ‘interactional level.’ Arendt wants to argue that identity is formed within this social space—the “space of appearance.” When Judith Butler describes people who do not conform to the binary as ‘abject beings’ she regards them as such because they are seen this way in light of societies standards. Whether or not one conforms to the heterosexual binary or is a gender anarchist, both are still forming their identity within a social space. The identity is performed, or disclosed, within the “space of appearance.” It is articulated in the presence of others, and without others the identity would not be discernable. Arendt is a

proponent of the narrative self-story, or in other words, she claims that *who* one is is discovered through an interaction with other beings, and their life-story is discovered through a plethora of interactions and disclosures of word and deed. From Arendt's standpoint, an identity is created over time, through a performative disclosure among others, and is not complete until the life is over. Even from this point of view we cannot forget about Foucault and the "space of surveillance." What was learned from his perspective was that the world provides normative discourses that cannot be ignored. They will have an effect on one's identity, but the "space of appearance" provides place for people to challenge the normative discourse and reroute the discourse itself.

### **Conclusion**

States of seclusion and isolation are very appealing in the hectic world in which we live, but one cannot stay secluded for long. Living necessarily implies an interaction with the world, and visibility is inherent in all interactions. To reiterate, this broad concept of visibility does not only encompass an observation. Visibility implies a space where there is a disclosure, observation, and rumination on the knowledge gained. Within these spaces of visibility, both a "space of surveillance" and a "space of appearance," there is a repetitive nature of disclosure in order for an identity to be coherent. A Foucauldian concept of identity formation includes a concept of disciplinary power, discursive practices, and an institutional framework of identity formation. The "space of surveillance" is a means of correction and control. The disciplinary power uses normative discourse to coerce individuals to abide by a particular norm. Internalization of the norm is the ultimate goal, and if the goal is not achieved, then individuals are encouraged to eventually achieve the desired set of normative standards associated with the institution in question. Hannah Arendt provides a supplement to the Foucauldian view of identity

formation, in that she gives a more liberating and empowering view of identity formation. This supplement allows people to not simply be creatures of the institutional disciplinary techniques or cogs in an identity machine. Arendt provides an analysis of action, which ultimately shapes one's identity by disclosure through word and deed, and this provides a more optimistic view of identity formation. An individual, through word and deed within a "space of appearance," is able to freely disclose their identity without a normative framework pressing them to conform. Arendt does not contest a pre-existing world that includes pre-existing ideologies, philosophies, beliefs, and identity frameworks, so we cannot get rid of the "space of surveillance." There are certainly dichotomous identity frameworks, especially when it comes to gender identity. This cannot be ignored and this is why Foucault's theories are so important. Arendt simply provides a more liberating view of the matter; she provides the "space of appearance" for individuals who do not, or do not want to, fit the normative mold. The "space of appearance" allows people to combat the normative discourse and reevaluate and redefine what can be considered normative in the first place. The discursive practices discussed by Foucault that occur within a "space of surveillance" certainly influence the action that is performed within a "space of appearance," but influence not imply determinism.

Normative binaries can be questioned and challenged in this space. The "abject beings" Judith Butler discusses are now given a space to become legitimate subjects and begin articulating a socially acceptable gender identity. Heteronormativity may provide pushback towards these "abject beings," but the "space of appearance" gives them an area to present themselves freely, possibly around others who will not have a hostile reaction, and create a possibility of losing the term 'abject' associated with their identity. The performance of gender, heavily articulated within the "space of surveillance," can also happen within the "space of

appearance.” Within the “space of surveillance,” the performance is measured against the normative discursive practices, whereas within a “space of appearance,” individuals are able to perform a gender that does not adhere to heteronormativity, and by their performance they are redefining what gender has the capability of personifying. As discussed previously, Butler argues that the performance of an identity is what materializes the identity, so in a “space of appearance” the ‘abject beings’ have the opportunity to materialize an identity that does not conform to the normative standards of society or a particular institution. As quoted earlier, these ‘abject beings’ who disrupt the social norms of the heterosexual imperative can be used “as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility” (Butler, 237). The Foucauldian “space of surveillance” may be the source of the normative standards of cultural intelligibility, but Arendt’s “space of appearance” provides a supplement to this view by recognizing the normative standards that hold sway over performance and disclosures, but it gives an opportunity to let them go and redefine what counts as ‘normal’ and culturally intelligible.

The attempts at control and coercion expressed by a “space of surveillance” through disciplinary, discursive practices sometimes prove successful. Many find themselves caught in a dichotomous, restrictive formation of their own identity, and I think it is safe to assume that some never question the dichotomy and its effect on their identity in the first place. Through reading Arendt I have discovered a space, the “space of appearance,” where the normative institutional framework no longer has to hold absolute sway of an individual’s identity. These institutions cannot be thrown out and they are certainly important for analyzation of identity, but the “space of appearance” provides a space where identity can be disclosed freely without the intention of control.

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