



## **Liberal Feminism and Intersectional Self-Ownership**

Alexander J. Ariken

*The thesis of this piece is to reconcile feminism with a libertarian set of rights under a Rawlsian framework. The foundational work is taken from Anne Cudd's 'Feminism and Libertarian Self-Ownership' where she criticizes the traditional model for the libertarian set of rights because the atomistic self-owner is guilty of being androcentric. Cudd, offers a relational self-owner of rights that is ontologically connected rather than separate, as to better represent feminist perspectives of the individual. I critique Cudd because her set of rights and representation of the self-owner is built on an assumption that inherently essentializes what woman should want from a libertarian set of rights. I introduce the intersectional and multiplicitous self-owner that integrates the complexity of social groups an individual belongs to. In this way, I offer a feminist libertarian set of rights that allows a woman to be who she is in totality, even if she were androcentric. Finally, I seek to solidify this account through offering and responding to prominent and foreseeable criticisms.*

**Key words: Feminism, Intersectionality, Liberal Feminism, Anne Cudd.**

This paper aims to explore the compatibility of feminism and libertarianism. I begin my expedition from the framework of Ann Cudd's, 'Feminism and Libertarian Self-Ownership'. Cudd wants to say that the atomistic self-owner is a metaphysically false representation of an actual person. Subsequently, she offers an alternative view

of the self that is ontologically connected, insofar to exemplify a feminist perspective of the self-owner. In this first section, I accept that the connected self may have some metaphysical advantages against the atomistic self. However, this is not to say that Cudd's self-owner is an entirely accurate representation of the self. Instead, my thesis argues for a metaphysical identity denoted as the intersectional and multiplicitous self. In the second section, I offer my own set of rights in hopes of reconciling the intersectional self-owner with the liberal feminist. In the final section of this piece, I will respond to anticipated objections of my view for the purpose of solidifying this account.

In this foremost section, I will discuss the atomistic self denoted from the libertarian self-owner. I also, present criticisms against this notion of the self, argued by feminists. There are two aspects rooted at the basis of the atomistic self: causal and definitional<sup>1</sup>. The former means to say that the libertarian self-owner is casually self-sufficient. If she were not then she would have a dependence on the labor of others; she would not have ownership of herself. Granted, all women were free from dominating male powers to pursue their own interests they would still hold relationships with others in the least partly constituting their being<sup>2</sup>. For this reasoning, feminists reject individualistic assumptions of interests and autonomy presented by liberal theory. As well, feminists reject the abstractly universalistic features of liberalism, such as the reduction of individuals to atomistic entities<sup>3</sup>. Cudd argues that the belief where she holds ownership of herself is rendered false by the definition of

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<sup>1</sup> Ann E. Cudd, "Feminism and Libertarian Self-Ownership 1." In *The Routledge Handbook of Libertarianism*, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> V. Held, "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory" In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Held., 1990.

the atomistic self because no one is essentially self-sufficient, particularly at birth. Secondly, the definitional aspect functions to distinguish the self from other selves<sup>4</sup>. It seeks to provide a delineated boundary because if the boundary were not distinct then evidently, an organ donor could claim shared ownership over her recipient's donation. Cudd, denies the self to be only a physical body instead she ascribes a metaphysical essence that is constituted by one's connections. Through its inability to account for this internality, Cudd claims, the atomistic self-owner is a metaphysically false representation of an actual person<sup>5</sup>. She offers an alternative view of the self that is ontologically connected, rather than separate.

In this area of my piece, I will explicate Cudd's feminist account of libertarianism that asserts the thesis of connected self-ownership. Later, I will propose firm criticisms of this account. Much of what constitutes our actions and our thoughts, entities that are essential to the self, are constructed through interactions with our families and communities. Cudd's thesis of connected self-ownership claims, "that the individuals, who are inevitably enmeshed in their social relations, have the maximal set of rights over their bodies that is consistent with maintaining social connection, and with other selves having like rights over their bodies"<sup>6</sup>. The connected self permits minimum infringements on bodily autonomy to uphold the norms necessary for connection<sup>7</sup>. This way, the self-owner may continue to uphold her set of bodily rights, as well as voluntarily act as a means for others without violating her rights to self-ownership.

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<sup>4</sup> Cudd., 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Cudd.,2017.

<sup>6</sup> Cudd., 2017, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Cudd., 2017.

These rights must pertain consistently to others as well<sup>8</sup>. To contrast, whereas the feminist believes that by acting to maintain social connection one becomes freer, the libertarian believes she is freer because she is not bound by such duties. That being said, Cudd's relational self-owner also fails to include other significant aspects that constitute the self. Aspects that arguably hold the same degree of importance to one's constitution as one's relationships do.

In this paragraph, I depict the androcentric nature of the atomistic self to parallel the underlying oppressions provided by the connected self. For the atomistic self, it is rational however, represented as genderless, sexless, raceless, ageless, and classless. Feminists argue that this version of the self masks a heterosexual, white, privileged, male, who is advantageous enough to disregard these influences in his analysis of the self-owner of rights<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, the connected self does well to include one's social identity within its analysis to a better extent than the classical libertarian self. Parallel to the underlying androcentric nature of the atomistic self, many early forms of feminism are only representative of white, privileged women.

Much concern of the relational self is that it supposes that women want to act in accordance to their connections, rather than acting on their own independent volitions. In this way, women are made out to be slaves to their own relationships rather than equally independent as the man. This is particularly evident in cases of physically abusive relationships. Consider Mary, a woman who exemplifies the same values proposed by Cudd, meaning she truly believes her intimate relationships to be a part

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<sup>8</sup> Cudd., 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Willett, C., Anderson, E. and Meyers, D., "Feminist Perspectives on the Self" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018.

of who she is. Mary's father is aggressive by nature therefore growing up Mary has continued to witness the physical abuse inflicted onto her mother, and has also experienced the abuse firsthand since she was a child. Why should she act to maintain a social connection with her abuser that will eventually lead to more harm? I see no compelling reason that suffices the tolerance of child abuse. Furthermore, there is no gripping argument in support of her abuser's deservingness for her pardon. This thought experiment, begins to demonstrate some oppressive implications by the values put forth by Cudd's theory.

Cudd's view of the connected self is also, susceptible to ethnical ignorance. Willet et al. mentions that African-American feminists bring to light the underlying racism within feminism. Some reasons for which these women are hesitant to join the feminist movement: fear of dividing the minority community, the focus on male liberation in the black social movement; and the idea of black matriarchy<sup>10</sup>. Here, the men of African-American descent require separation from the criminalization of their racial profile. Supporting the feminist movement may implicitly empower the stereotype of the black matriarch, which regards the black father as undependable. From here, my two main objections to the connected self follows: a relational constitution of the self causes infringements on female independence, and it supposes that a women of color can just dismiss her cultural values to support a social cause imposed by the privileged. Collectively, these considerations lead us to the conclusion that both the atomistic self and the connected self are not substantial enough to provide a fair account of the various types of minority self-owners. Drawing parallels from the libertarian self and

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<sup>10</sup> M. Simons., "Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood." In *Feminist Studies*, 1979

Cudd's proposed self, the former excludes woman in general, however the latter does so to the minorities of disconnected women, and the women of color.

Cudd does not explicitly respond to my objections to her thesis of the connected-self. However, in charity of her piece, her aim was more directed towards refuting the atomistic self, in support of feminist arguments. I have outlined some of these arguments as I defined the atomistic self. Cudd does not claim for the connected self to be a sublime alternative of the self, rather that it is a superior metaphysical representation of the self than atomism. Cudd admits, "A libertarianism of connected selves needs further consideration to decide whether this could be a form of libertarianism at all or whether it is better viewed as a negation of libertarianism,"<sup>11</sup>. However if she were to refute my claims, I anticipate a response along these lines.

Cudd may respond that some social connections have heavier obligations because they are more crucial to one's life. In this way, the minority self-owner may associate more so with the connections of her race over that of her gender. If she can choose which relations to act in accordance to then, she may continue to garner a sense of independence and her liberty is not infringed upon. This is a strong response to the objections I stated above. It raises the questions of what is being measured in reference to the property of what makes a relation important to one's life. If the agent measures importance then this objection makes her theory sounder because it offers a potential device, such as a hierarchy of relations that better accommodates to one's social identity. In response to this, heed the words of Hilary Clinton. Andra Fakhrian

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<sup>11</sup> Cudd., 2017, 138.

and Dini Nur Islamiyati provide an outline of liberal feminism from Hillary Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2016:

“In liberal feminism perspective, ‘liberalism suggests all human being either men or women is created in the equal position, harmonious, and having the same potency and rationality. Women must be independent to struggle so they are equal with men’. Still, liberal feminism is being portrayed by the responsibility of women by their choice and action toward the individualistic form.”<sup>12</sup>

Clinton argues against the passive, nurturing, and relational connotations, associated with femininity. She wants to acquire the same level of independence that is associated with masculinity. She wants to be considered just as rational, assertive and dominant as her male counterparts, qualities that more closely resemble leaders. In her 2016 speech, at the Democratic National Convention, Clinton aims to break these gender stereotypes<sup>13</sup>. What I am alluding to with the example of Clinton is that the values that the connected self supposes are based on gender profiling. Through the assumption of womanly values at the core of the thesis of the connected self, an underlying oppression towards women is brought to light. For the woman to be seen on equal terms as the man, it is not her values that need to be respected, it is she.

With that in mind, in this section, I propose an intersectional and multiplicitous self that has become a more prominent representation of self-ownership amongst feminist. This view acknowledges that attributions of social identity, gender, race, class and

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<sup>12</sup> Andra Fakhrian, Dini Nur Islamiyati., “Reading the Values of Liberal Feminism In Hillary Clinton’s Speech at the Democratic National Convention 2016.” In Okara : Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra, 2017, 279.

<sup>13</sup> Fakhrian & Islamiyati., 2017.

sexual orientation do not function in isolation; rather they produce a compounded effect<sup>14</sup>. Intersectional theories of selfhood, do not focus on resolving one type of social issue, rather it seeks to achieve harmony amongst them. The multiplicitious self is not a comprehensive abstract theory of the self instead it includes aspects of selfhood pertaining to the memberships of various subordinate and privileged social groups one may identify with<sup>15</sup>. Although it is not universalistic it may persist to accommodate to all the various identities of self-owners of rights. Moreover, the intersectional and multiplicitous self provides for an epistemic advantage to those whom are multiply oppressed. It does so because it allows them to choose what cultural values and practices they identify with, as well as to discern incoherence of their beliefs from that of the groups, which they belong to<sup>16</sup>. Although it may be presumptuous to claim that it achieves harmony in this way, it does well to direct efforts towards this aim. The intersectional and multiplicitous self provides for a fluid identity that is sensitive to changing beliefs, and humanistic growth. This dynamic quality proves to be more advantageous than the former two static alternatives because it is compatible with the notion of human development. It is also compatible with feminism, as it allows equal representation of all sorts of social groups, privileged and subordinate. In light of this knowledge, the intersectional and multiplicitous self proves to be, in the least, an attractive account, if not more so than Cudd's and the libertarian's self-owners of rights.

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<sup>14</sup> Willet et al., 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Willet et al., 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Willet et al., 2018.



In this area of my piece, my aim is to provide a set of libertarian rights that coincides with the intersectional and multiplicitous self. Libertarians, Peter Vallentyne and Bas van der Vossen depict rights falling under the definition of full ownership that I will use as my basis. Also, I will change denotations of rights to better suit feminist values, in accordance to Cudd's set. Lastly, I include rights that secure the distinctiveness of the this notion of the self.

The first (1) is a control right over one's possessions that entails a liberty-right to utilize it at one's discretion and a claim-right so others cannot. This right precludes control rights over one's own body<sup>17</sup>. The next (2), is a right to compensation, if one were to use the property without the owner's authorization. In cases of severe violations, such as rape, the intersectional self-owner is entitled to compensation in a sense of duty, rather than omission<sup>18</sup>. Instead of omitting a violation so long as there is adequate compensation, no amount of compensation is necessarily sufficient, but if violations were to occur, then compensation must follow from it. Thirdly (3), intersectional ownership obtains enforcement rights that can be exercised for protection, prior to a violation of these rights (Vallentyne and van der Vossen 2018)<sup>19</sup>. This includes, protection to enforce the preservation of bodily integrity against forcible breaches as they violate one's control rights<sup>20</sup>. The fourth (4) right is the right to transfer their set of rights to others, perhaps by sale, gift or through other forms of voluntary exchange. The intersectional and multiplicitous self also has the (5) right to

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<sup>17</sup> Cudd., 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Cudd., 2017.

<sup>19</sup> P. Vallentyne, B.van der Vossen, "Libertarianism" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Cudd., 2017

garner her own dynamic beliefs, as well as an obligation to not discriminate against those with contrary beliefs. This self-owner also obtains the (6) rights to belong to whichever social groups she identifies with, indicating a negative duty not to discriminate against members of other social groups. Lastly, (7) full ownership entails immunity from these rights being stolen.

Rights (1), (2), and (3) serve the purpose of protecting one's bodily integrity so that they may live freely without threat of physical harm. This is especially important to preserve for feminist because as history has shown, being a female has proven time and again to be a very common denominator for victims of abuse, inclusive of child victims. Rights (1), (4), and (7) promote autonomy, where the intersectional and multiplicitous self gains property rights, as well as discretion over what to do with them. For instance, since a woman has complete control rights over her body as well as the right to transfer these rights, she is permitted to engage in prostitution. Some feminists argue that this is an infringement on bodily autonomy and that it goes against the perseverance of bodily integrity because her body is being used as a means for another. That being said, a cohesive doctrine that argues for complete bodily control entails the moral agent having total authority over the way in which she chooses to use her body, also in matters of how she defines her bodily integrity. If she voluntarily chooses to participate in this form of exchange, then prostitution is not anymore of a threat to bodily autonomy than normative consented intercourse. With that in mind, the aim of these rights that I proposed is to satisfy the libertarian's expectations for freedom without contradicting feminist values of bodily autonomy.

The most distinctive rights of my set are (5) and (6), they are for the purpose of preserving the intersectional and multiplicitous essences of the rights owner. The former promotes freedom of one's beliefs which neither the classical libertarian or Cudd, addressed. Cudd argues for metaphysical preservation of one's social identity in her concept of the connected self. I do so, within the domain of this set of rights. In this way, the intersectional self-owner has freedom from being attacked for her beliefs. She has the liberty to garner the beliefs she ascribes to her identity and those beliefs may develop into new beliefs as she matures. This allows for an epistemic advantage when representing individuals who are multiply oppressed. Lastly, (6) functions as an anti-discriminatory clause against acts of hate. This clause protects the subordinate social groups from the subjugation of the privileged. This is significant to the intersectional and multiplicitous self because neither the atomistic or connected selves acknowledge the need for liberty from social constraints such as, racism, sexism, and homophobia. In this way, the most marginalized groups for instance, members of the LGBTQ community may be free to express themselves. In contrast, where the other sets mostly focus on bodily autonomy, the intersectional set includes autonomy over the constitution of one's social identity, in other words freedom of self-expression.

This latter area of my piece will purpose possible criticisms to my thesis of the intersectional and multiplicitous self. The first is that the right to one's beliefs is self-defeating because it allows individuals to foster discriminatory beliefs. I take this objection seriously, and approach it pragmatically as this is an issue prevalent in political powers of democracy as well. It is to my understanding, holding discriminatory beliefs do not entail discriminatory actions. The right (5) to one's beliefs entail a

negative duty to not discriminate against beliefs of others. When I refer to 'discriminate' in this context, I am pertaining to the action of hate, rather than the garnering of hateful thoughts. If Sally had discriminatory beliefs against African-American men, she is permissible to hold them internally, so long as she does not act on them, in this instance there is no harm done and no wrongness of action to correct. This does not mean that she is justified in her beliefs but that if she has them then we must permit it for the sake of equality. One could argue that disallowing her to act on her beliefs is an infringement of her liberty. This is an infringement of liberty that I am willing to accept to allow for greater liberty, in the sense that protection against hate crimes preserves one's freedom of expression and self-identification.

The next objection I anticipate is concerned with right (6). If the intersectional and multiplicitous self is justified in belonging to the social group that she identifies with, then she is permitted to culturally appropriate at will. For instance, Jessica is a Caucasian woman who identifies as indigenous culture therefore she is permitted to culturally appropriate the traditional indigenous headband at music festivals. This objection is an issue of semantics and propositions. When I say 'identifies', I do not mean that she has a choice in where she belongs, rather she identifies with the social groups that she was born into. This is the notion that I put forth because I do not believe that race, gender, and sexual orientation are a matter of choice. Let us consider the case of rapper Eminem who is a Caucasian male, which grew up, greatly influenced by African-American culture. With right (5), he may associate with values and certain practices of their culture yet he still refrains from using the racial slur 'nigger' within his lyrics. This is because he understands that his genetic history, has

not earned him the birthright to make such utterances therefore he may celebrate their culture without abusing his ethnic privilege. In other words, to identify with a social group one must be born into it. One could argue that transsexual people are not born into the social group they identify with. This intuition is wrong because for them their identity is born in the correct social group, however their physical bodies do not reciprocate this.

The last objection I anticipate follows; the intersectional and multiplicitous self is not a comprehensive account of the self. It is not succinct at depicting an abstract, universalistic, sense of the self that can help motivate theoretical progression. This is because the it is indexical in nature as it cheaply ascribes knowledge of the self, relative to the individual. In this way, theorizing of the self becomes more of a matter of relativity, rather than conceptualization. This objection holds true. In refutation however, I argue that the pragmatic advantages that come with this sense of the self-owner outweighs its theoretical disadvantages. With the intersectional and multiplicitous self, we have at our disposal an abundance of sets containing properties. These properties are crucial to one's analysis of the self. These various sets of properties accommodate to all sorts of individuals despite the complexity of their personhood. According to Leibniz's law, no two persons are identical therefore it is unreasonable for all analysis of the self to be the same. Perhaps, in metaphysics a universalistic abstract representation of the self may prove to have greater theoretical benefits. That being said, those benefits do not translate into political philosophy where analyses are intended for real persons rather than just possible ones.

In summation, my thesis is that the intersectional and multiplicitous self provides for a more inclusive and less oppressive analysis of the self. Inclusive in the way, it accounts for more diversified types of individuals. Less oppressive in the senses that it does not attribute inaccurate values to agents, and it does not hold only androcentric representations of the self. Finally, this indexical sense of the self in collaboration with a stringent feminist libertarian set of rights achieves harmony between competing values of feminism and libertarianism. It does so more profusely than the atomistic and connected selves. This renders the intersectional and multiplicitous self to be a more attractive analysis of the self than its opposing counterparts.

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