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Individualization of Social Policy and Individualization through Social Policy: The Perpetuation of Neoliberalism through the Cycle of Individualization

Aurora Lynn Randolph
University of Colorado Boulder

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**“Individualization of Social Policy and Individualization through
Social Policy”:
The Perpetuation of Neoliberalism through the Cycle of Individualization**

Aurora Lynn Randolph

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Thesis Advisor

Michaele Ferguson || Political Science

Committee Members

Kenneth Bickers || Political Science

Isaac Reed || Sociology

Abstract

Scholars from various disciplines have documented shifts in different political areas toward an emphasis on individuals and individual actions. This increasing concentration on the individual results in decreased consideration of the social and structural nature of these political issues. This change in conceptualization is a result of neoliberalism. In synthesizing different theories of this ideology, and considering the way in which it operates in various political realms, I argue that neoliberalism needs to be understood as an individualizing ideology. Neoliberalism is shown herein to perpetuate itself through a cycle of individualization that is manifested in different ways. The individualizing component of the ideology changes the way in which subjects conceptualize reality, and makes it particularly difficult to see neoliberalism as an ideology. I develop a detailed understanding of individualization that accounts for the distinct but interconnected ways in which neoliberalism is expressed in different political areas. I conclude by arguing that we should interrupt the cycle of individualization in an effort to interfere with the perpetuation of neoliberal ideology.

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Introduction

Our conceptualization of society, the collective, and even the individual in the United States is undergoing a significant transformation. American individualism is a long-standing concept that is at the heart of even our social structures and institutions. In recent years, there has been a striking evolution of this notion at play, however. As political dialogue is increasingly focused on personal responsibility and the primacy of the individual, a trend can be seen in which issues formerly understood to have systemic and structural components are depoliticized and re-conceptualized as matters of individual character and choice. While this point of view about social issues is just one of many, it is becoming increasingly important insofar as it is understood as the common sense perspective. The growing prominence of this trend is connected to the rise in neoliberalism as the dominant ideological paradigm of our time; and is undermining conceptions of social responsibility, shared obligation, and systemic forces. This phenomenon can be seen across the political and social world.

A changing dynamic of focus on the individual across various political areas has been well documented in recent years. Nina Power, for example, traces the modern feminist movement from its former emphasis on collective responsibility and political action in collaborating to create a culture that values women and respects the diversity, to the consumer culture of modern feminism (2009). This is reflected, she suggests, by the increased focus in having a job, being able to pay your own bills and finding emancipation through the market (Power 2009). Similarly, both Lisa Duggan (2003) and Sarah Schulman (2012) characterize the transition in the gay rights movement from a community-oriented collective action centered fight to a more depoliticized movement with a homogenous, conformist program that utilizes the rhetoric of individual responsibility and privacy. Henry Giroux (2008) presents the evolution of

racial issues as a movement away from an understanding of racial inequality as generating a social obligation and, as a function of structural oppression, towards an exclusive focus on the individual choices of people and the responsibility individuals bear for their own situation. Meanwhile, Robin Roff (2006) and many others highlight the new environmentalism in which the former ethos of collective and shared responsibility has given way to a certain kind of personal responsibility that serves to isolate and individuate activism. The way these and other social issues are being structured is changing - and the way we ultimately understand them as a society is changing, too. While these shifts have generally been documented on a case by case basis irrespective of other issues, a step back illuminates the simultaneous metamorphoses that are taking place across the spectrum of social problems - and a common theme is emerging.

The changes being seen in social politics are the result, I argue, of neoliberal ideology. This ideology morphs our understanding of collectivism and the social to an ideological framework of individualization, and in doing so simultaneously undermines our ability to mobilize social action against the ideology. Understanding the role of this individualization within neoliberalism and the way in which it manifests itself is important both theoretically and practically. Other academics speak to this trend, but have not yet clearly identified the different aspects of individualization; in this project, I aim to provide this framework. Additionally, though there has been research done on the effects of neoliberalism from various disciplines, the work of these scholars has not been synthesized - which I do in this project. The synthesis and analysis of seemingly diverse developments that I provide here is of particular importance because it provides a framework to consider these changes as part of a broad neoliberal ideological shift; one that serves to disable the foundations of the political activism that could threaten its hegemony. If the dominant ideology is to be challenged, a detailed account of

individualization and its different manifestations is vital.

Neoliberalism, as a political ideology, is built upon the premise that market values are the fundamental tenets of political rationality. In this project, the definitions of many theorists are synthesized to develop this as an ideology grounded in economic values that works to extend market values to all spheres of life, in which the role of the state is to serve the market and economy, ultimately manifesting in policies of deregulation, privatization and liberalization – all of which are premised on the idea of the individual rational actor. The individualization that I highlight as a key component of neoliberalism identifies, in the name of market rationality, the individual as the primary unit of measurement, and promotes social concerns as individuated issues. It is a concept that I show to be distinct from the individualism found in classical liberalism. The academics I use in my research have all illustrated this to be a part of the ideology but have not identified it as the primary factor, as I argue it is.

In this thesis, I initially develop an understanding of neoliberalism as an ideology, and I explain the method through which I present my argument. From that foundation, I present the literature on neoliberalism and argue for an expanded conception of its individualizing tendencies. Then, I consider neoliberalism in practice and analyze literature on five different social movements to show how neoliberal ideology manifests itself in various ways. I conclude by showing how these case studies identify individualization as produced by and crucial to neoliberalism; and while exhibited in four particular ways, individualization is present and is pivotal in the neoliberal model. Ultimately, I argue that a common understanding of neoliberal ideology as an individualizing phenomenon, coupled with a renewed conception of collectivism and shared responsibility, is vital in addressing the effects of individualization.

Section I: Neoliberalism as an Ideology

Throughout this project, I argue that neoliberalism is an ideology. This claim is an important one to clarify. Above and beyond arguing that neoliberalism has a distinct set of characteristics, conceptualizing neoliberalism as an ideology helps us to understand that it has tangible political effects. Far from a neutral phenomenon, I argue, neoliberal ideology is a particular type of lens or way of viewing politics and reality. Theorists who make the case for neoliberalism as a political ideology face several challenges in making such arguments, and I address them in the following section.

What is an ideology?

It is imperative to establish a shared understanding of what an ideology is – what its purpose is, how it functions, and what it means – before considering neoliberalism in particular. Theorists like Michael Freeden have laid important intellectual groundwork about the conceptualization of ideology. He explores the multitude of notions about ideology and how they have evolved over time, showing that our understanding of the concept and the way we view it can and does change (Freeden 1996; 2003). Ultimately, however, he highlights that the common thread among theorists is that an ideology is the mechanism through which we experience the world (Freeden 2003). I employ a similar reasoning about ideology in this paper, using the word to describe a world view consisting of theoretical relationships between particular concepts and values that helps us to understand the world. For our purposes, it is helpful to conceptualize an ideology as the lens through which we relate to the world and develop ideas. Ideologies as such are not things that can be cast aside to expose some sort of truth, but are mechanisms used by all people in conceptualizing reality. Consequently, ideology plays a very important, perhaps underestimated, role in our lives.

Though ideologies are generally understood to be abstract, this doesn't inhibit our ability to critically analyze what they are and the effects they have. Freeden describes the evolution of the study of ideology and emphasizes the thinking of Ludwig Wittgenstein in showing that "far from being monolithic, the standard structure of an ideology was a jigsaw of components that furnished it with considerable flexibility" (2003, 44). An ideology, then, is the platform from which we conceptualize the world, a collection of values and tools that we utilize in interpreting and responding to our experiences. This platform is helpful in providing some level of cognitive consistency for us as we continually internalize information.

How do we study ideology?

The study of ideology is a challenging matter because as intellectual frameworks consumed, understood, and internalized by the masses, they intrinsically lack complete conceptual cohesion. As partly unconscious mechanisms through which we experience the world, they can be hard to identify as an "ideology," and not reality. The consideration of neoliberalism, specifically, as an ideology presents scholars with both a theoretical and political problem.

As an ideology, neoliberalism is difficult to conceptualize on a theoretical level because there are no official leaders or founding texts, there is no platform as such, and no one affiliates or labels themselves as a "neoliberal." In political theory, as theorist Isaiah Berlin (1999, 149) notes, most of the work – and certainly the more interesting discussions – are concerned with concepts that may not have a broad consensus definition. Concepts like "freedom" and "justice" do not lend themselves to simple analysis because their understanding varies between people, between context, and between ideologies. The problem that neoliberalism poses to theorists regarding its elusiveness is not insurmountable for scholars; Freeden's conceptualization of

ideological morphology serves to provide a platform to discuss ideologies with an understanding that they are abstract and less easy to identify than political parties, for example (1996). I utilize this understanding of ideology throughout this project.

Freeden describes the dynamism of meaning associated with ideology as morphology. This notion, for Freeden, is based on an ideological structure comprised of political concepts with varying levels of salience: core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts (1996, 77). This refers to the changing meaning of political concepts when deciphered in relation to other concepts in the nexus of ideas found in any one ideology (1996, 66-76). The positioning of these concepts within the framework of an ideology greatly informs the meanings each respective concept evokes. Ideologies, he argues, have an inherent structure as well as fundamental effects that establish this morphological component (1996, 14). To argue this view of ideology, he presents a few premises about the study of ideology. Differentiating himself from other scholars, Karl Marx in particular, he concludes that ideologies are not classist tools (1996, 22). He argues that ideologies are “produced by, directed at, and consumed by groups,” as tools to facilitate the necessary social and cognitive functions of life (1996, 22). The framework provided by an ideology serves to heuristically help us process information efficiently, while not necessarily consistently. In prompting us to think of ideologies as being consumed, Freeden (1996; 2003) highlights that in addition to the inherent morphological characteristics of ideologies there is also variance created at the individual level of utilization. In acknowledging ideologies as “ubiquitous forms of political thinking, reflecting as they do variegated perceptions, misconceptions, and conceptualizations of existing or imagined social worlds,” he notes that the mental frameworks created by ideologies do not necessarily need consistency, logic, or coherence, and do not need to be premised on accurate conceptualizations of reality (1996, 22). His approach then

culminates in the belief that ideologies, as these facilitators, are imperative to study because of their implications for our understanding and internalization of the world (Freeden 1996; 2003).

Ideologies, as a practical matter, are difficult for us to recognize, and this presents a serious political problem. Public policy theorist Barry Bozeman, in his discussion of the theory of economic individualism, speaks to the elusive influence of political ideas:

Theory is socially enacted and includes not only sets of ideas but also interpretations, applications, rhetoric, and symbols. In many instances, people who may have never read about or even heard of a particular theorist or theory may nonetheless be influenced by popularizations and other secondary uses of the theory...if theories produce useful analytical tools, one need not read or fully understand the theory in order to employ, and be strongly influenced by, the tool that has issued from it...theories often have their strongest influence not in helping us decide among choices but in helping identify the set of choices we will ultimately decide among (2007, 19).

The surreptitious way in which ideologies function as lenses in our perception of reality has political implications. While ideologies are unavoidable mechanisms that all people utilize, the ability to recognize that is pivotal to an understanding that our perception is one among many, and predisposed with certain values. Losing this recognition, especially in politics, means a loss of awareness that people are using ideological lenses – not looking at the world uninfluenced. This problem can be circumvented with the solid understanding of ideologies as cognitive lenses that provide different perspectives and understandings of the world. Importantly, however, these cognitive lenses are not neutral; emphasizing one conceptualization over another has a distinct political effect and should be recognized as such.

Understanding the obstacles faced by studying ideology and establishing a common conceptualization of an ideological framework serves to establish an effective method for studying neoliberal ideology. Freedon not only provides an important conceptualization of how ideologies function even as they may seem abstract and disjointed, he provides a structure for

studying ideologies that takes into account their morphological nature (1996, 14). Freedden argues that we can best understand ideologies by approaching them from a few angles. He suggests that by “employing the conceptual analysis that political theorists have been trained to handle; utilizing the type of empirical and contextual inquiry in which historians are versed; and approaching the morphological patterns which contribute to the determination of ideological meaning,” researchers will be best positioned to understand the complexities and implications of ideology (Freedden 1996, 14).

The structure of this paper is set up in a manner that reflects the type of analysis Freedden is advocating. Firstly, I delve into the conceptual groundwork that has been laid thus far on neoliberal ideology. In my consideration of prior research on this ideology, I highlight the major themes found across the research, but also the variations emphasized by different academics. As is consistent with Freedden’s conceptualization of morphology, the literature about neoliberalism has some disparities. While common themes emerge in all the theories, different scholars position different concepts as more or less central to the ideology – which, as we now know about ideology, can result in a differing understanding of the ideology. I address these differences by building upon the work of both Wendy Brown and Michel Foucault, and identify the individualization of component as the central feature of neoliberalism; an element that I ultimately argue serves to undermine not only the ability of theorists to construct a coherent understanding of the ideology, but also the ability of the public to conceptualize the existence and implications of the dominant paradigm.

Why study ideology?

Ideology, as the filter through which we understand the world, helps determine our values and choices in a very subtle way – and this has serious political implications. Freedden

emphasizes the importance of ideologies in creating the framework for the intellectual realm that we all inhabit; they structure our thinking in a very fundamental way by helping us to organize the way we conceptualize the world (2003, 11). The impact of a structured intellectual framework cannot be overstated. This is an important point because, colloquially, if all you have is a hammer, everything you encounter truly does look like a nail. Ideology not only informs the way we perceive the world, but facilitates the production of a specific solution set. Ideologies are powerful forces – and they are socially constructed – which means that we can influence, change, and adapt them.

Neoliberal ideology is particularly important to study because of some of its inherent characteristics. The concepts at its core serve to perpetuate both its premises and its values. With the proliferation of the analytical tools and value set of neoliberalism, the ideology is promoted as a common-sense, neutral perspective. As neoliberal ideas alter political and social choices, neoliberalism reaffirms its position as the dominant paradigm because of its seeming sensible perspective. David Harvey solidifies this point when he attributes some of the ideology's strength to its campaign that promotes the notion that there is no alternative - no alternative to this particular way of thinking, or to the neoliberal lens (2005, 181). It is by no means a stretch to assume that this kind of framing limits the perspective that we have, whether it be about current political issues or other ideologies. Furthermore, without a definite conception of the ideology (as exists for classical liberalism or classical conservatism), critics and society in general exhibit a sort of collective cognitive dissonance around the concept. In showing neoliberalism to be an ideology, we are better equipped to consider the prominent effects it has on our thinking - effects that may have arisen without our having realized. I next examine the existing literature about neoliberalism to highlight the major themes, disagreements, and missing components.

Section II: Theories of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism as a concept has been discussed by people in different disciplines. Other theorists offer significant insights that I use as the foundation of this project and of my understanding of neoliberalism. The general understanding of neoliberalism that they develop consists of several fundamental characteristics including: economic values, expanded market rationality, a specific role of the state, particular public policies, and a focus on the individual. These theories about neoliberalism have been invaluable in helping me to develop a clear conception of the ideology; however, they do not provide a detailed account of individualization and its primary role within the ideology. Using the theoretical foundation that they have built, I seek to add to their understanding of the focus on the individual characteristic, and explore this individualization with greater depth. In this section, I review the existing literature and pull out the common themes from these authors while arguing for a greater primacy of the individualizing component.

What is neoliberalism?

There are several common themes that are consistently identified with neoliberal theory.¹ Each concept is important to understand both on its own and in relation to other concepts. Neoliberalism as an ideology is greater than the sum of its parts, and should be understood to have multiple values that are interconnected. There are six distinct characteristics of neoliberalism other theorists have established that I will present and ultimately work from in this project.

¹There has been much research done about the international relations conceptualization of neoliberalism. In this paper, I will be considering neoliberalism strictly in a domestic, American sense. While commonly associated with a similar ethos as American neoliberalism with concepts like globalization and free-trade, international neoliberalism as a coherent ideological entity is a bit of a misnomer. As such, it is not considered here. See Foucault's discussion of the international variant of neoliberalism (2008, 190-193); and Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy's account of the difference and relation between globalization and neoliberalism (2005, 9-11).

Neoliberalism is grounded in economic values

A consistent theme found by most academics within neoliberal ideology is a strict adherence to economic values. Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy, in their book *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, explain the ideology as a social construction with three different manifestations; one of the components of the ideology they highlight is the economistic ethos of the theory (2010, 12). Thomas Palley, in discussing the differences between neoliberalism and Keynesianism, describes neoliberalism as a “conservative economic philosophy” that draws from the classical liberal emphasis on economic values but that is focused primarily on promoting competition as opposed to strict adherence to laissez-faire economics (2005, 20). By constructing a romanticized picture of consumerism and the free-market, Steger and Roy see this ideological element as a theoretical structure for free-market globalization politics (2010, 12). It is from this that they label neoliberalism an “economistic ideology,” a value system that “puts the production and exchange of material goods at the heart of the human experience” (2010, 12). In this explanation, the two begin to illustrate how an ideology centered on economic values is distinct from the proselytizing of capitalism; this ideology is built upon economic values as opposed to any other considerations.

The focus of the ideology on economic values has subtle ramifications. Neoliberalism aims to be perceived as an objective, common sense approach to governing that leaves most value judgments to be made by individuals via participation in the marketplace. This conception of neoliberalism ignores the fact that market rationality is a specific theoretical approach, centered on a particular value – that truth can be found in the market. So though it presents itself as truthful, it espouses a very specific, narrow idea of what is truth. Duggan implicates the neutrality that the theory tries to invoke as another explanation of the ideology’s expansion

(2003, xiii). Framing government as analogous to business - framing the role of citizens as consumers of government - neoliberals are able to appeal to the values of market rationality as fundamental and use concepts like efficiency for a seemingly nonpolitical analysis (Duggan 2003, xiii). So, the construction of the ideology is such that while promoting market rationality – the application of economic values – it simultaneously characterizes the promotion of other values as subjective and biased.

Simon Clarke (2005) argues that neoliberalism is a greater project than just an ideology. As it is based on a very specific (and “simplistic”) economic model, he suggests that this economistic perspective is the essence of neoliberalism. He goes further to argue that “the point for neoliberalism is not to make a model that is more adequate to the real world, but to make the real world more adequate to its model. This is not merely an intellectual fantasy, it is a very real political project” (2005, 58). So concerned is the theory with economic values that it proactively works not only to conceptualize all spheres in market rationality terms but to shape spheres into ones that lend themselves to this particular ideology (2005, 58).

Neoliberalism extends market values to all spheres of life

The research of most theorists establishes the economistic foundation of the ideology and then positions the theory as continually expanding its market rationality to spheres outside of the economy. Foucault references a type of “standard of truth” that is perceived to exist in economic theory because of the effective process of finding truth - prices - in a market (2008, 31-32). Under the premise that markets are the best way to manage the interests of individuals in society, neoliberalism requires a state that promotes market rationality in all spheres of life (Foucault 2008); this is the governmentality of neoliberalism he speaks of. It is through this characterization of truth that the general mentality of society and government becomes one that

says “the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions” (Giroux 2008, 2). Foucault describes the de facto culture that goes along with this type of rationality as one with a “social ethic of enterprise” (2008, 147). Bozeman, in his analysis of the changing paradigm in the public policy realm, highlights the morphing of the concept of public values into promotion of one public value – economic value (2007, 129). In a significant break from classical liberalism, neoliberalism dissolves the boundaries of the market, government, and private life, and promotes the rationality of the market in more and more non-economic parts of our lives.

It is in the discussion of the consequences of broadening the application of this rationale that the research becomes somewhat irresolute, but both Brown and Foucault present interesting effects. Foucault argues that this change in civil society plays a role in changing the kinds of subjects that operate under these institutions (2008). The people under this paradigm become the kinds of people that are required and conceived of by the theory. Brown adds to Foucault’s analysis with her understanding that under this economistic governmentality the ideology not only changes the structuring of social issues through expansion of market rationality, but also has implications for “the soul of the citizen-subject,” because of the permeation of this rationality to every sphere of life (2005, 39). Foucault makes the further assertion that in order for this rationality to exist the state must, first and foremost, promote competition - a fundamental piece of market rationality - throughout various social spheres (2008, 121). Thus, a neoliberal state is by no means a “small” entity but one which has a very big job of propping up the market and dispersing economic rationality.

The role of the neoliberal state is to serve the market and economy

Neoliberalism's distinct understanding of the market informs its view of the role of the government. While neoliberalism is founded upon a strong confidence in the market's ability to promote good, it is a theory that does not see the market as an institution that exists without proper facilitation by the state (Foucault 2008, 132). So while similar to classical liberalism in the view that the government should not intervene directly in the market, neoliberalism considers it to be the state's job to create the market (Foucault 2008, 132). Liberalism, on the other hand, understands the market as an entity that will naturally come into existence in human society and that will work best without interference (Foucault 2008, 132). Thus, for liberals, as we create the space for the market (primarily by restricting the state) to function freely within a political society we are also promoting individual freedom (Foucault 2008, 131). Duly, neoliberalism is an ideology based around the belief that the best governmentality is one that promotes market rationality and also creates the market – as such, neoliberalism does not shy away from a strong, “big” government, but simply wants it to operate in a very specific way (Foucault 2008).

As indicated, the mandates of the government are to expand the areas under the influence of economic rationality and promote competition in these areas, and to construct and ensure the market; the neoliberal government also operates under the economic rationale. As one of the main manifestations of the theory, Steger and Roy also speak to the neoliberal mode of governance describing it as a particular way of governing based on certain premises (2010, 12). The neoliberal state, as is intuitive of an entity acting under the purview of market rationality and concerned primarily with efficiency and competition, is adverse to “public” solutions to problems whenever it is possible to promote “private” solutions instead (MacGregor 2005, 143). Bozeman notes that the dominant paradigm, what he calls economic individualism, has permeated in part because of its ability to connect the familiar, personal experiences people have

as consumers to services provided by the government (2007, 53). Duggan highlights the presentation of government as comparable to business as a serious consequence of neoliberal ideology that results in people becoming the consumers of an increasingly “private” government (2003, xiii).

A government that functions primarily to create, support and encourage participation in the market has consequences for its citizens and their society. The state, sociologist Ronaldo Munck (2005, 61-63) posits, recreates itself in the image of the market to enable the functioning of a market society and economy. Munck highlights the importance of the state in promotion not only of the ideology itself but of its values *and the conditions necessary for its proliferation* (2005, 63). This point is a powerful testament to the institutionalization of economic rationality that a neoliberal state creates by using its unique position in society to structure society in a way that conforms to its mode of governance.

Neoliberalism manifests in policies of deregulation, privatization, and liberalization

Steger and Roy talk about one of the manifestations of neoliberalism as a particular policy agenda, including globalization (2010, 11). Globalization – with its emphasis on market values, free trade, consumerism, deregulation, and privatization – is a force through which neoliberal values are promoted globally. They see neoliberal governmentality rearing its head in the prominence of the recent paradigm shift in public policy, new public management (Steger and Roy 2010, 13). Bozeman characterizes this evolution as “a philosophy emphasizing in matters economic the values and interests of the individual... values are based on humans, not society” (2007, 4). Within the new public management is an agenda that is adverse to “public” operations and promotes action on the individual level instead, overwhelmingly in favor of deregulation, privatization, and globalization (Steger and Roy 2010, 11). Dumenil and Levy,

while acknowledging the economic tenets of the ideology, see neoliberalism as “a new social order,” shifting power and money back to the ruling classes (2005, 9-11). To that end, they see neoliberalism as effective in its upward redistributive efforts (2005, 18-19). While not all authors identify this explicitly as an element of neoliberalism, the consequential policy decisions of the other characteristics of the ideology often lead to a predictable political agenda widening the wealth gap.

Neoliberalism is premised on the individual rational actor

A fairly consistent characteristic attributed to neoliberalism is its promotion of the individual as the fundamental, cardinal consideration. Using the economic tenets of liberalism, neoliberalism also promotes perhaps one of the most fundamental elements of classical economic theory – the rational economic actor. The state promotes social policy for a society of rational economic actors, the culture promotes this characterization of people, and social policy is enacted under the premise that people are indeed rational actors. Bozeman (2007, 4) is explicit about the change in public policy as a movement that is individual-centered and increasingly ignorant of the broader social context. This speaks to neoliberal ideology because as people increasingly view themselves as rational economic actors it becomes easier and more “common sense” to advocate for individualization. Giroux (2008, 112) describes the culture of neoliberalism as “a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain.”

Other authors mention the individualism found in neoliberalism, but the role that it plays in the theories of many academics varies considerably. Harvey describes the theory as one that focuses on “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (2008, 2). Steger and Roy

make only a brief mention of the role of the individual in their conception of neoliberalism in their discussion of a state that promotes individual-level action (2010, 12). They also reference Adam Smith's idea of *homo economicus* as one of the economic premises that both liberalism and neoliberalism are built upon (2010, 2). This premise, that rational individuals make their decisions largely based on self-interested motives that will provide them the most material gain, is an inherent characteristic of the ideology (Steger and Roy 2010, 2). Duggan (2003, 14) explains neoliberal rhetoric as focused on two concepts: privatization and personal responsibility. The promotion of personal responsibility, for Duggan, is intimately connected with the drive of neoliberalism to privatize (2003, 15). As such, individualism does not serve as an important component of the neoliberalism Duggan (2003) describes, but seems to serve as a convenient rhetorical device to either mask or facilitate the privatization policy program of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism produces people who act like individual rational actors

This is the individualizing component of neoliberalism that is generally underemphasized and undeveloped in current neoliberal literature. Brown, more so than other authors, talks about the types of subjects that are created by neoliberal ideology. Brown provides a unique and damning analysis of the powerful neoliberal state by emphasizing that in its construction of the market and the society, coupled with the expansion of market rationality, it also structures the behaviors of citizens (2005). In the expansion of market rationality, she is concerned with its extension into how citizens behave (2005, 43). Neoliberalism is unique in that it “normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life” (Brown 2005, 42). Like the *homo economicus* portrayed in economic theory, the neoliberal citizen is presented as a rational actor, making choices using calculated logic (Brown 2005, 42). This citizen is one that makes strategic self-interested choices using the options presented (Brown

2005, 43). Brown (2005, 43) sees the state as constructing such a citizenry by enacting policy that not only treats citizens like these rational individuals, but that structures social problems in an individuated manner. Furthermore, Brown emphasizes that in the construction of this economic individual, neoliberal ideology “equates moral responsibility with rational action” (2005, 42). The moral autonomy that becomes attached to being rational and taking care of oneself facilitates the neoliberal political agenda of individuated existence (Brown 2005, 42). The ideas about production of behavior presented by both Foucault and Brown served to initiate my focus on this process of individualization.

What is individualization?

It is this final aspect of neoliberalism that most interests me. While there is significantly less literature on this than on other components of the ideology, I think it plays a prominent role in the theory. I argue that a variety of phenomena get conflated and potentially misunderstood in this aspect, and that a theory is needed to develop these interrelated but distinct phenomena that are a result of this individualizing characteristic. These phenomena include:

- **an increased emphasis on personal responsibility** that serves to undermine considerations of social responsibility and conceptions of social obligation
- **attributing inequity and injustice to individual choices**, as opposed to recognizing the structural nature of some political issues, thereby individuating issues as personal problems
- **activism through consumerism and the market** that reinforces the premises and values of *homo economicus*
- **depoliticization of formerly public matters** that results in a marginalization of the state as a collective action platform

These phenomena are important to understand both singly and in relation to neoliberalism because it is through these pressures that neoliberalism, as an ideology, shapes the way in which people think and act. This importance is underscored by the aforementioned impacts of ideology as a political force that is difficult to recognize.

Many authors note these phenomena in their discussion of neoliberal ideology in one way or another. Most theorists, like Jodi Dean (2009, 5) and Munck (2005, 68), seem to attribute this individualization to liberalism - my primary claim, however, is that this individualization is distinctly neoliberal. The economic values that neoliberalism is based relies heavily on the acceptance of the *homo economicus* model of subjects and the commitment of individuals to the economic values themselves. This acceptance requires subjects to be socialized as such. Extending these values to other spheres is contingent upon the embracing of this economistic way of thinking. Perhaps the most striking case for individualization as a phenomenon of neoliberalism is the way in which the role of the state is connected with the individualization. The neoliberal state, in implementing specific policies in the service of the market premised on *homo economicus* subjects, structures policy that atomizes social issues into issues on the individual level. In framing issues this way and premising government actions on the rational actor model, the state's actions created individuated subjects of a distinctly neoliberal variety with particular economic values and atomized ways of thinking.

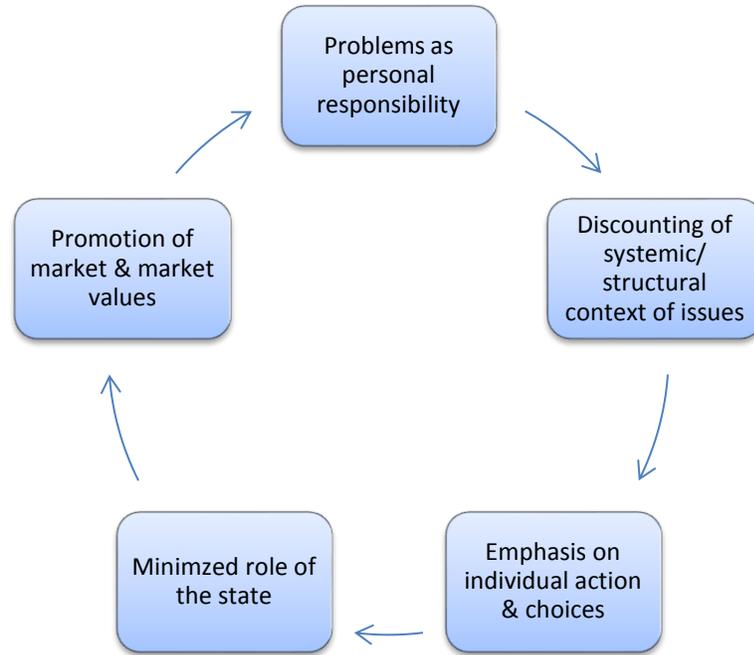
To show how individualization works within the context of neoliberalism it is fruitful to look at how neoliberalism operates in practice because, as Michael Freeden emphasizes, contextual inquiry is an important tool in understanding ideology. In the next section, I consider neoliberalism's effect on multiple political issues and examine the different role that individualization plays in each case.

Section III: Neoliberalism in Practice - The Cycle of Individualization

In this section, I review literature on neoliberalism in five political issue areas: racism, feminism, environmentalism, gay rights, and poverty. I look to the evolution of these issues as case studies because in looking at movements on *social* issues we are positioned to see how individualizing works in the context of the society. These issues and movements provide a grouping that enables a manageable level of analysis that is more measurable than looking at trends among all individuals in society. Furthermore, these cases were chosen because of their variety – the way in which neoliberalism is manifested in these issues is different and provides for a wide range of analysis. The issues chosen also needed to have sufficient scholarship available that traced their progression over the last 40 years.

In analyzing these cases, I show how in each of these political areas there is a similar perpetuating cycle that is taking place. This cycle, I argue, is **the cycle of individualization**. While each issue has undergone it in a unique way, it broadly involves five stages: the re-characterization of problems as matters of personal responsibility; a decreased conception of the potential systemic forces at work; advocacy of individual action and choices; minimized role of the state; and an emphasis on the market or market values as the best avenue for activism and change (see Figure 1). Since it is a cycle that perpetuates itself, there are no clear starting or ending stages within these cycles, just various components that together result in individualization. This general cycle of neoliberalism, however, manifests itself differently in different situations - as we would predict from the account of ideology presented earlier. These different realizations of individualization are perhaps more interesting to consider because they materialize in distinct ways. From this analysis, we can see that there is indeed a common cycle that we can identify in these multiple political areas. Furthermore, this helps us to see how

Figure 1.



individualization manifests in four analytically distinct ways, although not in the same way in each area. As such, this analysis is the basis from which I construct a comprehensive account of how neoliberalism produces individualization.

Race: From structural causes of oppression to the focus on individual characteristics and choices

When we consider race, what we see is a move towards conceiving race as an individual problem. Individualization in this context involves a depoliticizing of race as notions of a post-racial society proliferate. In framing racism as a problem of the past of minor import today, meritocratic discussions of individual choices and responsibility shift the effects of racism onto individuals. Instead of a social obligation to fix the wrongs of racism, the collective is relieved of this duty while the obligation falls on the individual to take full responsibility of herself and her situation. In removing this issue from the political and public realm, the focus becomes on facilitating the exercise of personal responsibility.

The anti-racism movement has changed dramatically since the 1960s and 1970s during

the Civil Rights movement, an evolution in which we can see the role of individualization and neoliberalism in changing the conceptualization of racism. In the 60s, the movement was focused on social institutions and structures, hierarchical power and coercion, and the systemic effects that racism had in the economic, social, and political realms. It had countercultural, radical messages that conceived of racial injustice as a force with common roots with other social issues - like gay rights and feminism - and was built upon group solidarity. Beginning in the 1980s and solidifying today, the emphasis has shifted to an accommodation of the systems and institutions once called into question. There has been a narrowing of focus that has resulted in acceptance of systemic structures, advocacy for increased assimilation into the market society, and priority largely focused on individual freedoms - especially freedom to participate in the economic sphere as consumer and producers. In developing this argument, I draw heavily on work done by Giroux (2008), who has written extensively about the interaction of neoliberalism and culture. He has highlighted how the neoliberalization of racism has led to more subtle forms of racism that ultimately disenfranchise minorities. I also look to Duggan (2003), whose work in cultural studies has focused on identity politics and neoliberalism, for an understanding on how the narrowing purview of the anti-racism movement has taken questions systemic or structural in nature out of the equation. In synthesizing these authors' work, and providing examples of the neoliberal framework of economist Milton Friedman (1962), I show that the utilization of neoliberal values in the anti-racism has led to a situation in which personal responsibility is the primary focus, and the social nature of the issue is left unconsidered.

The cycle of individualization with respect to race and racism starts with a re-conceptualization of the issue as one of individual responsibility in the context of an impersonal market. This understanding helps facilitate a notion that we are post-racist. As such, the role of government is minimized to address the few remaining overt racists; primarily, however, the state makes policies that serve the economy as opposed to addressing the plight of the

disenfranchised. Increasingly, this leads to situation in which people are left internalizing the issues caused by racism as matters of personal failings. While it is difficult to say where a cycle like this starts or ends, I go into more depth about the way in which this cycle operates in the following paragraphs.

Perhaps the first stage of the individualization in the area of race is the increasing focus on personal characteristics coupled with color-blind rhetoric. Racism as an issue has largely disappeared from public discourse, as it is considered an issue of decreasing salience. Mentalities that move away from social conversations about race, and tend to promote the idea that everyone is equal imply that people of all races essentially have with equal opportunities. Neoliberalism has framed the conversation about racism in a way that designates the United States as colorblind (Giroux, 2008). The notion of color-blindness as a neoliberal strategy of approaching racism is perhaps best exemplified by Friedman in *Capitalism and Freedom*. He makes the case that the market proves to be a force for good on the race issue because pressures for increasing efficiency and profit are indifferent to racial differences (1962, 109). Racism, he suggests, is a matter of taste - a taste that will eventually be mitigated as people realize the market consequences of discrimination (1962, 110-11). In taking this perspective, neoliberals are able to overlook structural disenfranchisement of racial minorities, thereby atomizing the experience of discrimination. While perhaps not immediately apparent, the ramification of ignoring racism in this way is a great disservice for the movement looking to equalize opportunity and experiences for minorities. Giroux sees this changing relationship between society and racism resulting in a situations where "racial hierarchies now collapse into power-evasive strategies such as blaming minorities of class and color for not working hard enough, refusing to exercise individual initiative, or practicing reverse-racism" (2008, 63).

Another stage in the race cycle is the notion that discussions of race are no longer needed; with increasing understanding that racism is dead, social obligations to address racism subside.

Friedman articulates the neoliberal position by saying that racism is not important in a free market society because “there is an economic incentive in a free market to separate economic efficiency from other characteristics of the individual” which allows for people of color to compete on their merits (1962, 109). Duggan (2003) and Giroux (2008, 60) both draw attention to this evolution of racism as one that has changed the dynamic such that while overt and explicit racism is less frequent, the injustices to minorities are still prevalent, only largely covert and systemic. This stance implies that if people are struggling, it is a problem of their personal merit and ability, not as a consequence of their position in the racial hierarchy. Giroux describes it as a movement towards “an utterly privatized discourse that erases any trace of racial injustice by denying the very notion of the social and the operations of power through which racial politics are organized and legitimized” (2008, 61). Highlighting why this change in racial discourse is so important, Giroux identifies how this new understanding of race limits our conception of structural inequities that plague minorities in particular, but also the power structures that exist and greatly affect the way that society and the market operate. He describes it as a kind of racism that “works hard to remove issues of power and equity from broader social concerns” (Giroux 2008, 64). This color-blind approach to race, as Giroux notes, is “a convenient ideology for enabling whites to disregard the degree to which race is tangled up with asymmetrical relations of power, functioning as a potent force for patterns of exclusion and discrimination...providing an ideological space free of guilt, self-reflection, and political responsibility” (2008, 69-70). Important to emphasize here is the notion that society can rid itself and its structures of culpability for the status of minorities. As society, broadly, can relinquish accountability for the disenfranchisement of whole groups of people, state programs and social institutions transition from any potential they had to address structural inequities and increasingly look to solve these problems on the individual level - addressing the symptoms of racism, if you will.

This leads to the next stage of individualization on the issue of race and racism where the notion of increased individual freedom via a limited government with increasing focus on entry into the market and development of human capital is promoted. In dismissing racial discrimination as a matter of malleable tastes of a very small group of individuals, Friedman says “there is a strong case for using government to prevent one person from imposing positive harm, which is to say, to prevent coercion. There is no case whatsoever for using government to avoid the negative kind of ‘harm.’ On the contrary, such government intervention reduces freedom and limits voluntary co-operation” (1962, 113). In this conception of coercion, he is dismissing the idea that any positive harm can be caused by institutional structures. Additionally, he is seriously dismissing the severity of harm caused by racism by classifying it as a factor that is only present on the individual basis and not as a social problem. The neoliberal belief that the market can uniquely address the problem of racism by being an indifferent, efficiency-maximizing entity mandates that the government avoid interventions like affirmative action or quotas. People should be convinced that anti-discrimination is the right way, not be forced into it (Friedman 1962, 113). Giroux notes that these types of claims gain traction by making reference to the widespread belief that the civil rights movement was successful in purging the system of racism and racists; and he acknowledges that the next step in that thinking is a dismantling of state programs (2008, 71).

In another stage, the role of the government is reduced to producing a workforce. One consequence of this abandonment of proactive government and societal measures to lessen inequalities based in racial differences is a widespread belief in the “political impotence of public institutions” with respect to addressing these important problems (Giroux 2008, 63). As a good representation of neoliberal logic, we can look at Friedman’s view of the role of the state - that “we should not be so naïve as to suppose that deep-seated values and beliefs can be uprooted in short measure by law” - as an indication that there is no acceptable role to be played in to

mitigate discrimination (1962, 118). Increasingly, measures that seek to address the inequities of opportunity - like affirmative action, anti-discrimination laws, and quotas – are under attack as the social roots of these problems are lost in rhetoric of personal responsibility. The state, then, is left to deal with the symptoms of racism and discrimination, and increasingly unable to do even that.

A final stage is the internalization and privatization of racism through emphasis on personal characteristics allowing social obligations to be minimized. When people like Friedman say “color of skin is an irrelevant characteristic,” (1962, 117) more than affirming their inability to discriminate, they are able to shrug off any responsibility for discrimination that does take place. Since skin color is irrelevant, racial minorities are presumed to be equally able to get good jobs and receive good education - though that is clearly not the case even today – and thus are accountable exclusively for their stations in life. Since we live in a world ruled by market rationality, one’s position at the top of the socioeconomic world can be attributed to one’s hard work, not one’s markedly unequal abundance of opportunity relative to others. Apart from Friedman, this sentiment is popular among both political parties but particularly in Republican circles as shown by Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s comment about the lack of racial diversity on the GOP presidential ticket, “I think we recognize people based upon their values” (2012). In putting on these blinders and ignoring the possibility that there may be a serious discrepancy in access to education or opportunity for different segments of society, people are able to put themselves in a more comfortable position where they are only responsible for judging merit; and definitely not considering the social structures at work in the staggered opportunities between races.

Feminism: From the personal is political to liberation through the market

While the analysis of race showed the atomization of the increasing emphasis on individual choices; when we look at feminism, we see a similar depoliticizing trend coupled with a unique manifestation of consumerism. Individualization in the realm of feminism, like race, emphasizes personal responsibility and agency while framing the feminism and the women's rights movement as largely unnecessary. In the feminist context individualization also promotes the notion of liberation through consumerism and the market. These simultaneous phenomena result in a production of subjects increasingly more like *homo economicus*.

I argue that the feminist movement has undergone a drastic change over the last four or five decades. During the 1960s and 70s, the emphasis of the movement was on the public, political, and social nature of the disenfranchisement of women. Messages regarding the power of the patriarchy were prevalent; social and gender norms were genuinely critiqued, and solidarity was of central importance in fighting for genuine equality. Today, in stark contrast, feminism is re-conceptualized as greater individual and economic freedom for women. Messages of social mobility, economic empowerment, and consumerism result in a marketed lack of critical conversations about the important questions around the role of women in society. To make this argument, I use the analysis of critical theorist and feminist Power (2009) who shows that consumerism is promoted as an expression of freedom and emancipation, and highlights the consequences of women being socialized as individual, competitive economic actors. Angela McRobbie (2009), cultural theorist and feminist, also adds to my analysis with her discussions of how the feminist community and social institutions have weakened as the economic sphere has moved in to serve as a framework for feminism, and how women understand themselves and others differently under a market dynamic. Weaving the work of these scholars and others together shows that neoliberalism has led to an individualization wherein women are conceptualized and socialized as individual economic actors, and discourses about the systemic nature of sexism are muted.

The cycle of individualization for feminism is built upon the changing notion of liberation through consumerism and the market. As this becomes the way in which women exercise agency and freedom, the notion of a women's movement and solidarity becomes obsolete in the face of new personal responsibility. While women are pressured to maximize their engagement in the economic sphere, the issues that were once both public and political become depoliticized. In the context of the market as the tool to achieve agency, the role of the state is minimized to the protection of individual rights. Women increasingly compete with each other as economic actors and women are held to be exclusively responsible for their situations, seen as reflections of personal failings or successes.

The initial stage of the individualization of feminism is the framing of emancipation through consumerism and increased economic freedom, access, and agency. Personal responsibility is employed in the form of utilization of the consumer freedom newly provided to women. Power (2009) authors a feminist manifesto that describes how women, as economic actors, and the feminist movement have been integrated into the market system. Whereas once the feminist conversation may have centered on the issue of equality and genuine self-determination, the focus has shifted on women being fully able to participate in the economic sphere. Women are informed that their feminine freedom is in the form of economic independence. Occupational status and a women's place in the market hierarchy becomes a very important piece of self (McRobbie 2009, 77). The increasing popularity of choice feminism - a flavor of feminism that promotes any decisions made freely by women as feminist - is a good example of the dramatic shift that feminism has undergone in the last 30 years. Working primarily on access to the economic realm means that women implicitly agree to work within the parameters of the market. This means a broad consensus of individualism, the "you go girl" mentality, and acceptance of competition, not just with men but more importantly with each other.

As the market becomes the liberating force, the next stage becomes a stigmatization of solidarity that is premised on the idea that feminism is no longer needed and women can now be responsible for themselves. Individualization coupled with the pressures of the market necessitate increased competition and mitigation of feminist values that run counter to the new found acceptance into the market. Freedom and success in the world of the woman is defined as a lack of attachment to a man, a career, and ultimately becoming an economic actor able to participate individually and autonomously. With this economic freedom, women are expected to be independent. This pressure to conform to the individualizing market and to compete with others seriously stifles any inclination of solidarity and rids women of a “need” for feminism. Power alludes to this when she notes that “so conditioned are we to think that our behaviors are individual (a degree is an ‘investment’, starting a family is a ‘personal choice’) that we miss the collective and historical dimensions of our current situation” (2009, 34). The language of individual empowerment replaces former feminist discourses.

The social conversation about societal values, gender roles, and sexual identity has fallen by the wayside to make room for a focus on the individual (Ferguson 2011; Power 2009). McRobbie (2009, 54) describes this new phenomenon "feminine citizenship." An understanding that feminism is concerned about employment opportunity and participation in the consumer culture, basically exclusively. Antithetical to older notions of feminisms, women are now judged not only on the usual criterion of femininity but on how successful they can be in this economic realm. Women in a social mobility type ethos are told that they can be all that they want to be, and if they are not, it is because of their lack of effort, entrepreneurialism, or marketability. Poor women, in particular, are affected by the lack of consciousness among women as a disenfranchised group. Unable to participate in the “liberation” of the market in the same way as other women they become stigmatized by society and other women as those that may not be capable of handling this expanded freedom.

The next stage is a depoliticization of women's issues as maximum incorporation into the economic sphere is promoted. There is a widespread a movement encouraging women's self-improvement and development of women's human capital in the name of marketability – whether explicitly acknowledged as such or not. The logic of the language of individual empowerment is that if you are not succeeding in your career, relationships, and physically, then something is wrong with you personally. Feminism that is experienced through the market, through economic participation, allows feminism to be an action that can take place in the marketplace - and not in politics or society (Ferguson 2010; Schulman 2012, 162-3). Economic issues are now synonymous with women's issues, as public considerations of things like gender roles and patriarchy are pushed out of the public discourse. We can think of legislation like the Lily Ledbetter Act as an example of a shifted market focus. Feminist and critical theorist Robin Goodman (2010, 16) describes this as a shift towards "privatizing public life" where feminism looks away from the political and social realms both as points of agitation and points of discourse, and instead focuses on women's private individual lives – abortion and access to birth control. Goodman describes it as a process whereby these broader issues are "disabled from public recognition and thus politicization" (2010, 31).

In the next stage, the state is replaced by the market as a tool for feminists to use in the service of equality, and becomes primarily focused on protecting individual rights. In the absence of a strong social sense of feminism, there is a "subtle renewal of gender injustices and re-instated patriarchal norms" (McRobbie 2009, 55). The de-politicization, or personal internalizing of, women's issues leads to what Goodman describes as a "diminishing sense that the public can be a viable means of political agency or social change" (2010, 36). The result of weakening social institutions and feminist communities, McRobbie (2009, 62) suggests, is an increasingly strong, dominant commercial sphere that is opening itself up to women. As women's equality is being created in the market, the role of the state is minimized to that which

provides for women's emancipation in the market through job training and marketability programs.

The next stage is the increasing competition of women as economic actors with the understanding that women's problems are matters of personal responsibility. Without community or social institutions, women are expected to be self-reliant vis-à-vis the new economic freedom. Other women cannot be looked to as competition has been accepted and solidarity was thrown away for marketability and acceptance in the liberating marketplace. A "landscape of self-improvement...promotes female individualization and condemnation of those who remain unable or unwilling to help themselves" (McRobbie 2009, 73), leaving women to internalize potentially socially-rooted problems as their own. It is within this context that empowerment discourse is so poignant. We can also see this when we consider the increase in reliance on and changing approach of women's self-help books (2003, 14-15). Sociologist and writer Arlie Hochschild notes that "modern advice books reaffirm one ideal (equality) but undermine another (emotionally rich social bonds)," a process she refers to as a "cooling" approach to support (Hochschild 2003, 15), something that could arguably be linked to the changing dynamic of feminism.

Environmentalism: Changing the responsibility to act to a responsibility to buy

Individualization in feminism as well as environmentalism involves an element of consumerism, though they have slight variations. Individualization in this context also involves promotion of a neoliberalized version of personal responsibility. The changing understanding from a personal part in the shared responsibility of environmental protection to a notion of personal responsibility to advocate through individual choices has resulted in environmental advocacy via the market. Individualization here has resulted in the elimination of structural critiques and increased emphasis on a marketized personal responsibility. In framing consumer

choices as the most effective advocacy, environmental action has largely been atomized.

Here I will argue that the environmental movement has changed dramatically since the 1970's toward a more individualized model of activism. 45 years ago, the focus of environmental advocacy was systemic critique; the viability of capitalism, in particular, was being questioned openly and seriously by the movement. Environmentalism was conceptualized as a social matter that required direct action, a strong environmental community, and an overhaul of unsustainable paradigms. Today, however, mainstream environmentalism is built around market rationality. Social changes are possible through individual consumer actions and utilization of the market. To support my argument I look to many experts, but primarily utilize the framework laid by geographer and theorist Roff (2007). In critiquing neoliberal activism generally she highlights the consequences of individuating advocacy in global issues and the limitations of solutions that are created by market-centered movements. Environmental education scholars Ian Robottom and Paul Hart (1995), who consider this issue in *The Journal of Environmental Education*, illustrate the way in which focus on individual behavior to address climate change minimizes the socio-political aspects and problems. Additionally, I use the insight provided by scholar and author Jennifer Kent (2009) about the marginalizing effects on the environmental movement of disseminated responsibility. I use the various perspectives of these experts to show how the neoliberalization of the environmental movement has led to market-friendly activism that reduces the social problem to a matter of personal responsibility.

The cycle of individualization in environmentalism starts with an increasing emphasis on a particular type of personal responsibility which is fulfilled by changes in personal consumption decisions. This focus on this type of individual action leads to a movement away from critiquing social structures and looking at the personal level instead. The solutions proposed are firmly planted in notions of market rationality; either the market is the tool for change or the government creates a market as a solution. People are encouraged to be the solution with their

actions and consumer choices, and are left feeling helpful without taking a second look at the structural components of the issue.

The initial stage is a shift toward messages of personal responsibility in a way that frames solutions as changes in personal action and consumer choices. Kent refers to the individual responsibility model of environmentalism as “hegemonic” (146). As notions of personal responsibility for climate change become prevalent, personal action becomes salient. People are empowered to make conscientious decisions as consumers. Changing personal behavior and consuming wisely allows people to combat climate change painlessly. Robottom and Hart, in their critique on individualistic environmentalism, show how recent messages from environmental groups promoting green consumption and personal action “highlight individual responsibilities without considering broader social pressures,” or problems that “involve corporate or structural limitations to improving environmental well-being” (1995, 7). They say that current approaches to environmental education, “by emphasizing individual human agency as the key factor,” misrepresent the socio-political context in which the environmental problem is taking place (1995, 8). They highlight the effect that individuating has on the conceptualizing of the issue by saying that “individualism in formal and nonformal environmental education presents the environment in an apolitical, ahistorical, and social manner that deflects attention away from the broader economic, social, and political constraints on environmental improvement” (1995, 7-8).

The next stage is one in which the focus of the environmental conversation moves away from considerations of the structural and social. As a result of increased focus on the individual, critiques about the system that created the environmental problems and injustice fade from the mainstream. Instead, activists choose to work within the system. Distinguished scientist and social critic Fred Magdoff, and John Foster, a sociologist and cultural theorist, provide vital commentary on the salient discussion about the compatibility between capitalism and

environmentalism in the movement. Most influential environmentalists, they note, stay away from “direct confrontation” with systemic critiques and adopt positions espousing responsible capitalism (2011, 97). Environmental organizations have accepted the capitalist system and advocate within those parameters. As activist and educator Gopal Dayaneni of Movement Generation’s Justice and Ecology Project notes, the new environmental agenda built on “market fundamentalism diverts attention away from the root causes of the problem” (2009, 1).

The subsequent stage is a changing understanding of solutions for environmental problems into two primary categories. The first is the increased reliance on the market to fix things. The market is promoted as a mechanism which concerned citizens can use to their advantage to demand environmental responsibility from companies. With the increase in “green products,” companies can position themselves as able to offer the types of products that consumers want, products that can be the change that people envision. Furthermore, utilization of the market means that these transitions to more ecologically-friendly alternatives will be efficient and innovative. This concept can be seen easily within the free-market environmental movement.

The second category is governmental policy based in market rationality. If the government does consider environmental action, it is action crafted in the tradition of market rationality. The notion of the market as the best avenue for progress is still very present even in government action. Leaders of this sort include the few conservatives who acknowledge a need for environmental action, but also people like former vice-president Al Gore and organizations like Natural Capitalism that encourage adaptations in the market to address climate issues. Policies like cap and trade and carbon offsetting are examples where the government opts to use market mechanisms to dictate policy and action instead of more direct intervention like imposing strict limits on carbon emissions.

In a final stage, people are encouraged to make changes in their own individual actions through positive reinforcement mechanisms and empowerment rhetoric. In working within an

unsustainable system, these environmentalists ensure that their actions are moderated by the parameters of the system (Roff 2007). The deferred responsibility that is the new face of the movement - "we can all work to fix this" - means that accountability is also deferred (Kent 2009). Contortions in responsibility result in situations like we have seen many times in the United States – catastrophic weather resulting from climate change results in tragedy for entire communities, and people are scrutinized for their decisions of where to live, for example, instead of conversations about how to collectively address a problem that is affecting many people.

While personal responsibility is useful in any discussion of climate change, marketizing the individual responsibility results in narrowing of people's role in environmentalism. Messages about how much good we can do by switching light bulbs, for example, has a two-fold consequence. It keeps us busy and distracted being conscientious consumers, thereby drawing much of the very limited attention given to thought on the environment. It also serves to reinforce the notion that conscientious consuming is enough; there is a dimension of positive reinforcement that we get in buying green products – from ourselves, from others, and from the companies. "Sustainable consumption has created would-be green consumers who feel that by purchasing 'sustainable' commodities they can pursue their same consumerist lifestyles and feel virtuous at the same time" (Magdoff and Foster 2011, 105). It is a comfortable way to save the planet that positively reinforces consumerist behavior.

Gay Rights: From community action to individual rights advocacy

Individualization in the area of environmentalism was focused on a market-oriented idea of personal responsibility; when we look at individualization in the context of gay rights there is a process of depoliticization that results in a focus on individual rights and privacy. In advocating primarily for individual and privacy rights, the trend has been to privatize the discrimination and difficulties that this group faces. In moving these issues out of the public and political realms, the

social/structural nature of the issue is removed from focus as the community of activists is atomized by the emphasis on individual rights.

In the gay rights movement, there has been a change in focus and rhetoric since the 1970s. Formerly, the movement was marked by strong community and solidarity, promotion of alternative culture and perspectives, and strong critique of structural and institutional disenfranchisement. As the movement has evolved under neoliberalism, it increasingly has narrowed its purview from the collective good and consciousness to focus on individual rights and privacy. The connectedness of the gay community has deteriorated, physically shown by the dissolving of enclaves, as advocacy focuses on creating space for gay people to have their rights and privacy. In developing my argument, I lean on writer and gay rights activist Schulman (2012) to provide insight from inside of the movement on how it shifted to a more moderate, mainstream force and the disconnection that has occurred because of the transition. I also use Duggan (2003) again in this section to show how the reconceptualization of purpose in gay rights activism has led to an ignorance of power structures and narrowed view of activism. In looking to these authors, and others, I show that the changing approach of the movement towards a more individual rights focus has led to an individualizing and privatizing of social issues.

The cycle of individualization in the gay rights movement is largely an issue of a narrowing purview. There is a movement away from a former emphasis on the gay community and a collective good towards more individual rights. Acceptance of homosexuals is presented as implicitly conditional – society does not want to change, gay people are asked to fit in. Under this ethos, a divide is created between counter-culture structuralist activists and more mainstream advocacy, with the former being marginalized. The importance of the gay community as an entity is weakened by promotion of the individual and privacy. As such, conceptualization of a community with common issues is decreased.

As with the other political areas, the first stage involves a shift away from consideration

of the collective good towards a framing of individual rights. Schulman, in her memoir about the changing of the movement, describes the transition strikingly:

How did the gay liberation movement...a group relationship that envisioned total revolution of gender and sex roles, social accountability, and community-based responsibility...a community that faced the AIDS crisis with unity and endless imagination...how did this radical, living, creative force ...deteriorate into a group of racist, closeted, top-down privatized couples willing to sacrifice their entire legacy to get married? And fail? (2012, 114)

The trend in conversation is to show that gay people are just like everyone else – they want to be able to exercise their individual rights and be productive members of society – not necessarily to embrace the diversity that this group can bring to their communities as unique individuals.

Whereas there was once a large vein in the gay movement regarding the value of questioning norms and the value of diversity for society broadly, recently there has been a noticeable difference in approach that does not ask society to change so much as to accept or make room for gays and lesbians.

A next stage is that of conditional acceptance; encouragement to fit in to acceptable society and its structures. Duggan (2003) is concerned about a sort of gay mainstreaming (or gay tunnel vision) that leads to a lack of consideration of the power structures and inequities at play and promotes individual rights instead. She describes this as a “new homonormativity – it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2003, 50). Schulman quotes infamous activist feminist and gay rights activist Marcia Gallo as saying “when we’re at our best we challenge the way power gets constructed” (2003, 132). Through a variety of ways, the gay rights movement has changed in its demands. It has increasingly looked to a more atomized approach of activism. Focusing on individual rights has resulted in a less

community-oriented movement.

In a distinct stage, counter-culture gay activism with a structural focus is marginalized and separated from more mainstream activism advocating within the system. Duggan highlights how the advocacy of the gay movement has changed:

National lesbian and gay civil rights, lobbying and litigation organizations have nearly all moved away from constituency mobilization and community-based consultation...gay civil rights groups have adopted neoliberal rhetoric and corporate decision-making models...consequently, the push for gay marriage and military service has replaced the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized the national groups as they first emerged from a progressive social movement context several decades earlier (2003, 45).

Schulman describes this as “a place where homosexuality loses its own transformative potential and strives instead to be banal” (2012, 115). Schulman places a big portion of responsibility on popular media’s gay figure heads that did not represent the gay movement but served to be marketable to a mass audience, as opposed to “community-based figures” (2012, 121) with roots in the grassroots activism, as a key point in the changing of the discourse of the gay rights movement (2012, 116). Gay marriage, Schulman argues, is “dramatically more acceptable to the tolerance model than any true concept of distinct culture or community-based structure” (2012, 130). She captures the idea that the gay movement may be playing a game of moderating activism for acceptance and success in a society that increasingly marginalizes different social norms and groups.

In the gay rights movement, we have seen that working within the system has led to an emphasis in moderation and system-sanctioned solutions. Formerly, sexual norms were challenged, traditional family structures were questioned, and the equality of the system was constantly facing scrutiny. Today, through the focus on individual rights and privacy, we see the movement focused on acceptance within the framework of the market society. This emphasis, as opposed to one of acceptance of the community and counter-culture alternatives, serves to

change the dynamic of the gay community. The deteriorating solidarity associated with privacy advocacy – which looks something like allowing people to be who they are in their private lives, instead of demanding acceptance in the public sphere – has only catalyzed the divisiveness of individual rights focused advocacy. Furthermore, the biggest organizations in the gay rights movements have shifted the discussion toward more moderate, acceptable goals – like marriage and adoption. Advocacy went from discourses about the social nature of the AIDS epidemic to promotion of same-sex marriage and access to certain individual rights – like entering into a viable contract as a homosexual couple and promotion of the normal gay couple endorsing adoption rights. These demands from the gay community were compatible with a neoliberal model; older critiques of social norms and power structures, however, were not.

Consequently, the next stage of the cycle is a sense that the gay community as such is no longer needed as individual rights and privacy protections are advocated. There is a sense that the gay community as a strong entity is moot, as seen by more integrated communities and decreasing enclaves. Citing the lack of a national anti-discrimination legislation, lack of widespread integration in society and culture, and the social hierarchy that implicates homo or bisexuals as less than heterosexuals, Schulman pushes back against the common notion that the LGBTQ community is concerned primarily with marriage because everything else is basically alright for the gay community (2012, 114-5). Additionally, there is a serious question about where the movement will go after marriage equality is eventually accepted, highlighting the limitations of this new framework of advocacy.

A final stage of the cycle is the resulting deteriorating solidarity and conception of people as a cohort with common problems caused by an individualized focus. With the changing gay community has come increased focus on individual rights and privacy protection, a movement away from a broader civil rights focus to individual freedom, to privacy and the free market. The right to privacy that is advocated for by many of the large gay rights organizations has the

effect of privatizing the issues facing gay and lesbian citizens (Duggan 2003). Much like the change that we see with color-blind racism, we see that stated indifference to homosexuality has the effect of leaving important social issues – like the disproportionately high suicide rate for gay teens or the inability for many people to be open at work – out of the public discussion. Discourse in the movement has a clear lack of structural critique or alternative ways of being; working within the parameters of the social status quo – which emphasizes individualization – leads to a narrowed scope for advocacy, and ignores the systemic, public nature of many problems that uniquely affect the gay and lesbian community.

Poverty: A Relinquishment of Social Obligations

While the individualization of the gay movement amounted to depoliticization and an increasingly exclusive focus on individual rights, individualization of the area of poverty results in a move toward focus on individual choices and actions. This individualization involves morphing the focus from working to address the problems – even structural problems – keeping people in poverty to a focus on transferring responsibility to individuals through positioning individual choices and actions as the primary considerations. This process is predicated on depoliticization and discounting of structural critiques. Like the other cycles of individualization, this results in disintegration of community and of public awareness of the various political problems and how they affect entire groups of people – not just those of lacking entrepreneurship or motivation.

Our understanding of poverty - and the way that we feel we need to address it as a society - has subtly changed since the 1970s. Before the issue was neoliberalized, the state was tasked with working to move people out of poverty to better economic situations. Assistance for low income citizens was aimed at providing the necessary tools and resources to lift people out of the cycle of poverty. Importantly, the cycle of poverty – the lack of educational opportunities for

poor communities and constant pressures on limited resources - was a part of the conversation. Poverty, today, is considered in a very different way. As notions of personal responsibility reign supreme, the conceptualization of poverty becomes one that focuses on getting people off of poverty assistance instead of out of poverty. Instigation of limits on assistance, stigmatization of poor recipients through fickle requirements and obstacles, and an entire belief system built upon the idea of social mobility have contributed to the new understanding. The difference is rather nuanced, but very important to highlight. There was a time when poverty assistance was based on the principle of the imperative to maintain the wellbeing of citizens above a minimal, acceptable standard of living regardless of any other factors - including their potential addictions, criminal history, or even the inability (or lack of desire) to work.

Today, assistance is not about sustaining people above a minimum, but ultimately creating individuals who can get off of the governments list of obligations. Assistance is offered to those who are deemed responsible, cut off at a certain point whether or not people are at the minimal level of subsistence, and focused on moving people from welfare to jobs regardless of the fact that many of these situations do not provide for the minimal standard. I am continuing to use the framework of Duggan (2003) in the discussion of poverty to show how formerly social obligations have been internalized by individuals and turned into matters of individual responsibility. Steger and Roy (2010) have laid out an analysis of the changing policies under neoliberal presidents that I will also use to inform my discussion of the status quo. By weaving these various accounts of the new paradigm of poverty together, I show how the trend away from society's obligation to maintain all people toward an almost exclusive emphasis on individual responsibility is a result of neoliberalization. This individualization changes the way we look at both the poor and ways to alleviate poverty.

The cycle of individualization in the area of poverty and poverty alleviation is a matter of resigning social obligations to the poor. Initially, focus shifts onto members of the community in

a manner designed to implicate poor people as responsible for making bad choices. Rhetoric is centered on getting people to take care of themselves, implying both a lack of responsibility and reiterating individualistic values. The focus of government changes, consequently, from helping to get poor people out of poverty to relinquishing its obligation and getting people back into the workplace. As a part of this picture, people are prompted to look to the private sphere and market as avenues for help instead of their community or government. The poor community is then divided and competitive among each other, and poverty assistance is stigmatized to an even greater degree.

The initial stage shifts the focus away from the structures that affect the poor towards an emphasis on personal responsibility and focus on individuals; choices and character. Rhetoric, like that described by philosopher and economist David Schmidtz as about “not so much individualism as much as a willingness to take responsibility,” about self-reliance and dependency reshapes the national conversation about poverty (1998, 9). This changing focus is framed by the stigmatizing of those who need help as personally defunct and through messages that reinforce notions of social mobility as consistent and strong. People are encouraged to believe that if one works hard, she can succeed - the shadow logic of that notion is that if one is not "successful," then she is not hard working because for someone to be working hard and unable to make ends meet, is inconsistent with the neoliberalism’s fundamental premises. President Barack Obama (2013) provides an example of this promotion of hard work being the great equalizer in his second inauguration speech when he said that “we know that America thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work; when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else.”

An example of this shift can be seen in Bill Clinton’s transition from more traditional

forms of poverty assistance to his infamous workfare. It is specifically important to note the responsibility his program and subsequent welfare programs transfer to families by limiting both the amount and the types of aid people can access. This leads to people being herded into low wage jobs without benefits or opportunities to train for better work. Duggan describes this as a process wherein “social service functions are privatized through personal responsibility,” the costs of which are thus internalized by working class individuals and families (2003, 15). An important consequence of this personal responsibility transition is a changing understanding of the roots of poverty that leads to a changing understanding of how to address the problem.

The second stage of the shifting emphasis towards poverty as a problem of personal responsibility is how society’s role in poverty prevention and assistance is changed. With the permeation of the belief that those who work hard enough will be successful, is the corresponding idea that society only needs to maintain a very minimal safety net and primarily needs to properly motivate individuals through programs like workfare with specific conditions and limitations. In this way, receiving help is implicitly - and sometimes explicitly – shameful and stigmatized. This type of demonization is prevalent as in this tidbit from Fox News contributor and lawyer Gary Shapiro, “whatever the true number of unemployed able-bodied Americans, it is much larger than it should be. These people are straining our economy and our collective ability to support them” (2012). Discourse about poor people’s dependency on the system further removes society from taking much responsibility for the condition of the poor. The draining of responsibility from society to support the poor does not always show itself in a demonizing nature, however.

In his second inauguration speech, President Obama (2013) shows how this message can be taken on by Democrats as well when he says that, “while the means will change, our purpose endures: a nation that rewards the effort and determination of every single American.” This is a vision of a society where people get just compensation for their work - as opposed to a nation

where we promise a level of wellbeing for our citizens, period. When he conceptualizes a just society in this speech it is not one where society will support every member, it is one in which people are rewarded individually based on their performance.

Foucault addresses this issue in a more abstract way. In a neoliberal society, he said, there are not egalitarian sentiments only pressures for competition (2008). Competition, he believed, is a state that requires inequity (2008). Whereas conversations about class and income inequality are largely missing from popular political and social discourse, the increasing emphasis on personal responsibility, especially in the realm of poverty, promotes this competition. Fox News commentator Roy Beck highlights this when he says:

yet, these two groups with exceptionally high unemployment among young adults are the ones who will have to compete most directly with the millions of illegal aliens that the president intends to add to the labor force. What Mr. Obama – and all the Members of Congress proposing their own versions of a DREAM amnesty -- miss is that young illegal aliens aren't the only ones having a hard time. The country is full of American victims of this economy. The latter should not be re-victimized by efforts to help the former (2012).

So, not only is poverty no longer an issue of society's, but also the role society is asked to play is different. As poverty becomes a personal issue, poor people are pushed to 1) not look to society for help, and 2) compete with each other for scarce opportunities and resources, as exemplified by Beck's rhetoric. This serves to disintegrate solidarity that working class people could have as a block. Additionally, as Foucault (2008) wants to imply, since a neoliberal society requires competition – whether that be because that is a fundamental principle of a market society or because without competition there could be greater solidarity and social consciousness – inequity is not an imperative problem to fix anyway, as it ensures perpetual competitiveness among subjects.

Another stage involves the state shifting its priorities from providing for the poor to insuring businesses the opportunities to have low-wage, under-regulated jobs; government is

working to get people off welfare not out of poverty. As poverty becomes a personal issue, government is prompted to either 1) move out of the way – lower regulations and rules in an effort to allow the market and private sector to ensure that there are job opportunities for the poor, or 2) use policy based in market rationality or market principles. Government programs generally, as they continue to be cut by both Democrats and Republicans, face increased pressure to cut minimum wage, and work standards and regulations to allow for easier connectivity between needy people and employment. In reference to the “residual restrictions” that minorities and the working class face, Friedman says that as opposed to being the perpetrator of these restrictions, “the free market has been the major factor enabling these restrictions to be as small as they are” (1962, 109). As the exemplar neoliberal, Friedman highlights here the belief that the market - and not the state - has brought about progress for minorities.

The policies that the government does implement are designed with a market rationality framework with the ultimate goal of poor people being integrated within the market where they will no longer be on assistance from the state. Neoliberal welfare reform is easily highlighted in Clinton’s 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (Duggan 2003, 17). His effort to rid the nation of “a cycle of dependence, to one that emphasizes work and independence,” (Clinton 1996) through the workfare component is an example of neoliberal reform (Steger, and Roy 2010, 64-66). With limitations, this program meant that recipients faced serious pressure to take low-wage jobs that risked perpetuating their situation while assuring that there could be a cap on the responsibility the government had to take care of people. The tendency of these reforms to limit the responsibility of the government to take care of its most desperate people, coupled with decreasing funding being allocated to these programs means that this vulnerable population is gradually relying on the market for solutions.

Subsequently, the next stage is the increasing encouragement for people to look to the

market and the private sphere as a solution. Poor people are disengaged from the state as they are chastised, judged, and increasingly alienated by the government and society. Vulnerable people, encouraged to work as much as possible at minimum wage, are then removed from the purview of the government: addictions ignored, lack of education overlooked, system reform averted.

Writer and advocate Barabara Ehrenreich wrote about this issue noting that “the impression is left of a public sector that’s gone totally schizoid: on the one hand, offering safety-net programs for the poor; on the other, enabling large-scale private sector theft from the very people it is supposedly trying to help” (2012).

A final stage is the resulting fracturing of the poor community; people in dire circumstances become competitive with each other in the economic sphere and support for assistance is weakened as people are alienated from each other. As the state pushes people off of the welfare rolls into the free market where they can expect minimum wage, or less, without health benefits or childcare or access to career or educational training, people are expected to make things work. Limited by time constraints on assistance from the state and private organizations, people are expected to get along and develop an even better existence for their children. Welfare and welfare recipients are stigmatized by generalizations and stereotypes. Schmidtz exemplifies this when he says that “we do untold damage when we set up programs that make recipients less willing to meet life’s challenges in peaceful and productive ways” (1998, 94). He presumes that assistance to the poor somehow debilitates their dignity and ability to be meaningful members of society. Welfare assistance, he argues, is “not making responsible adulthood necessary,” and thus becomes a program looked upon with very judgmental eyes (1998, 96).

In considering the way in which individualization has affected these different political areas, I have highlighted the different ways in which neoliberalism operates. Utilizing Freeden's understanding of ideology, we can now see how morphology materializes in practice. Furthermore, as the nature of the cycle of individualization has been analyzed, we can begin to establish a conceptualization about the way in which neoliberalism changes people as subjects. Though the manifestations of individualization are different in different political areas, a common theme should now be understood to exist. As this trend has been highlighted, a better understanding of the forces at work needs to be theorized.

Section IV: A New Account of Individualization

In considering what individualization looks like both in theory and in practice, we are positioned to consider individualization in greater detail. Neoliberalism as an ideology makes suppositions about the world and the way in which people operate within it. The individualization that I have described is the process by which people are subtly changed into the *homo economicus* subjects that neoliberalism posits and ultimately requires. Theorists to date have identified this propensity of neoliberalism, but have conflated or even ignored the different parts of individualization. In this section, I argue that there are four distinct ways in which individualization manifests in neoliberalism. These different aspects are interrelated and can occur separately or together; and though they are distinct and have different consequences they are all a part of the same larger phenomenon.

Personal Responsibility vs. Collective Responsibility

The first form of individualization is the shift from collective responsibility to personal responsibility in handling social problems. Neoliberalism relies heavily upon the privatization/internalization of responsibility by individuals for a few reasons. Ultimately, in

framing social problems as issues of personal responsibility, neoliberalism obscures the need for state action. It asserts that if people are choosing to be poor, for example, it is not a problem that government or the larger collective should be responsible for. If it is a matter of individual choices, preferences, and interests – it should be left to the market. So in framing things this way, market rationality is expanded – a fundamental component of neoliberalism. Privatizing responsibility is part of the neoliberal effort to privatize as much as possible to take it out of the public, political realm and into the market. Duggan (2003) seems to think of individualization as partly caused by the drive towards privatization, but I think it is an aspect that stems from the individualization itself, as it seems to dovetail with many other characteristics of individualization. Under the notion of isolated, strictly personal responsibility, we can see how with this focus neoliberalism frames rhetoric and public discourse around rational action and individual economic actors.

This manifestation of individualism is clearest in the environmentalism case. The notion of personal responsibility has been promoted as the primary lens through which activism and advocacy needs to take place. This particular issue, where the problem clearly has an amount of personal responsibility that has to go with it, shows the type of individualism neoliberalism pushes for. Because the movement itself advocates and assumes a high degree of personal responsibility in solving ecological problems, neoliberalism has co-opted this tendency and morphed it to fit with its paradigm. Where once personal responsibility was considered only part of the issue, and it was more about responsibility to activate ourselves and others politically and publically, we see personal responsibility of a different, specific variety. The environmental personal responsibility of today is the exclusive level of responsibility - that is, there are no other dimensions of responsibility that need to be considered. Instead of looking at our personal piece

of a shared social responsibility for a structural problem, people are prompted to consider their personal share and accordingly act atomistically. Exclusively focused on the individual – as opposed to the societal or systemic dimensions of the issue – this version of responsibility promotes personal consumer choices and activity in the market as the platform for advocacy. This has meant that instead of being a potential target of critique of the environmental movement, the market has been accepted as a tool – an extremely successful instance of expanding market rationality and utilization. This is underscored by the fact that government action on this issue is by and large focused on working with or creating markets. Furthermore, individualization in this case has resulted in a changing conceptualization of the shared nature of this problem. In atomizing advocacy, neoliberalism has expanded the market into a new space, continued to spread market rationality, ushered the state into its proper role as market promoter, and isolated advocacy such that structural critiques remain largely out of the picture. While most clear in environmentalism, we see this morphing of personal responsibility to some degree in all of our cases where a reasonable level of personal responsibility is present but being pushed to take a new form that ignores systemic variables.

Individual Choices vs. Structural Oppression

Another form of individualization is the movement away from structural critique toward critiques of individuals' choices. In eliminating unfair systemic problems as appropriate places to bestow some responsibility, culpability for one's position falls almost exclusively on the individual and her personal choices. Personal responsibility is pushed in a way where obligation shifts from society to individual people. The individual responsibility emanating from here is the accountability for one's problems. Moving away from institutional arguments in favor of an individual/rationalist line of thinking allows for the shirking of collective responsibility; and

leads to a smoother application of economic values and the expansion of market rationality. With a weakening ability and impetus to look at things from a structuralist perspective, subjects are less able to perceive structural injustice as such – and an inability to critique inadequate institutions allows for an easier, broader implementation of market rationality and the expansion of the market generally. If people are told it is their responsibility or a matter of individual choice, they start to conceptualize things on this level. With neoliberalism, it is a matter of re-framing the way we think about ourselves. If we continue to operate within a paradigm where we are exclusively responsible for our situation in life, we start to think in that way. So the reconstruction of these issues as a matter of choice facilitates the conceptualization of the framework within which we go about the world. In being prompted to look at the world as such, we begin to operate under the same understanding. Additionally, as the entire neoliberal system is built upon the premise that all subjects operate as rational economic actors, the notion of systemic injustice or systematic market failure would create deep instability in the foundation of the model.

In looking at poverty and racism, this feature of individualization is especially clear. Founded on the ideas that the market is meritocratic, and that rational actors who make good decisions will be successful and prosperous, individualism serves an important role in the neoliberal model. Systemic factors contributing to poverty and racism are ignored in the neoliberal narrative. Instead, these issues are framed as matters of personal problems and failings. Those struggling within this system are isolated from one another, as there is not an understanding of the widespread nature of these issues. This alienation allows for a greater degree of individualization to take hold.

Market rationality has a solid presence in the states decisions regarding poverty policy as

well. The state feels less of an obligation to people who have “made bad decisions.” Instead of working to get people out of poverty, the state allows assistance for a limited time - regardless of how the people are faring - and pushes them to become responsible by getting poorly paying jobs and leaving assistance. Instead of improving the system via structural change or helping people get the resources they need to be permanently better off, the focus is on getting them off of assistance rolls and into the market where they will now (hopefully) make better choices. As consideration of the structural foundations of poverty and racism shifts to an impetus on individual choices almost exclusively, the neoliberal paradigm is solidified.

Consumerism vs. political action

The third aspect of individualization is the promotion of consumerism as a stand-in for political action. Increasing impetus toward commercialization and consumption-oriented advocacy and action is one way in which individualization changes the dynamic of social issues. The advancement of the market as the new avenue for advocacy means that the market, as an institution that may hold some responsibility for structural injustice, is essentially off bounds for critique. In using it as a tool for advocacy, activists are limited by its framework. Trying to initiate change within the market means that the rules and structures of the market are implicitly accepted by the movements, and consideration of the problems created by the market fall largely off of the radar of activists. The transition towards consumer-centered activism ingrains and reiterates neoliberal market rationality. Moving away from the state and a more collectively-oriented platform to the market individuates action and commodifies solutions. Furthermore, this consumerism changes the understanding of political action from a more collective notion to one, again, of individual action and choices. The promotion of consumerism instead of political action has served to largely conflate our understanding of personal responsibility to be one of consumer

responsibility – and this consumer responsibility serves as a stand in for political action.

This characteristic has been prevalent in recent environmentalism as “green washing” takes root; green-washing is particularly alarming to see in this movement as consumption is a serious contributing factor in environmental degradation. This focus on personal consumer choices has empowered individuals to take the issue into their own hands. While this sense of accountability is not completely unusable or bad, this focus has served to individualize environmental advocacy and potentially make the problem worse through increased consumption. This can be seen in a slightly different way in feminism, as well. Consumption as a form of liberation has resulted in feminists setting the market, and even capitalism, aside as problematic. The morphing of the notion of equality from one of equal agency and respect to one of equal ability to operate in the economic sphere is seen in this push towards consumption. This emphasis on the market for feminism has resulted in atomized individuals who consider the former solidarity and critiques of their predecessors unnecessary because of their ability to participate in the market and independent consumption. Individualization in this case has permeated the movement with economic values; these values are the driving values of many mainstream feminist groups.

Depoliticization vs. Collective Political Action

The final aspect of individualization is the increasing depoliticizing of these issues as they are framed as personal issues. This has to do with the changing nature of the citizen-government relationship. As consumers of government, citizens now have a quite a different relationship with the state than they used to have. Taking these issues out the public sphere and the political realm changes the way in which people relate to the state. In removing the influence of the state from social issues, and removing these from the public realm, people are left as

isolated individuals trying to address problems that are often perpetuated by institutional factors. The state, in a strong position to facilitate collective political action, is effectively removed from the conversation once issues are pushed towards depoliticization.

As formerly public issues become private, the purview of the government shrinks. This is vital to neoliberalism's remaining dominant. While advocating for a strong government that creates and promotes markets and competition, welfare type concerns are the antithesis of neoliberalism. Limiting the role of the government by limiting the issues it is concerned about is in the service of a neoliberal paradigm. In shrinking the domain of the government, neoliberalism simultaneously creates space for a greater presence of the market. Increasingly, the state is shredded to fit into its place in a neoliberal model; a state that creates and promotes the market, and one that when it acts is typically acting under market rationality, or acting to relieve itself of responsibility and deferring to the market.

Every issue discussed in this project exhibits this aspect of individualization. In the gay rights movement, even above and beyond the primary political push for marriage equality, we can see how the rhetoric of the movement has become focused on personal rights. Emphasizing advocacy for the right to privacy has the effect of depoliticizing the issues that face the gay and lesbian community. Taking the discrimination that a group faces on a systematic level and removing it from the public sphere of discussion takes it out of the political realm and leaves individuals to deal with it themselves. The role of the state is minimized by such advocacy, and individuals are left to deal with the consequences. It is similar with the issue of racism. The role of the state shrinks when these issues are internalized and removed from the public sphere. The individual is left to work against very real structural difficulties without support from the state or the public generally as these issues recede from the public domain.

Many theorists have highlighted these aspects of neoliberalism separately, and have been invaluable to me in developing an understanding of the ideology. However, they have not recognized these as aspects of the broader phenomenon of individualization. Understanding these distinct tendencies of individualization facilitates important insights about the way in which neoliberalism operates. From this analysis, it is clear that neoliberalism does not manifest in the same way in all cases – and it shows that the fact that it doesn't materialize in the same way is not a reason to discredit the role of neoliberalism. With this understanding, it is clearer that we are becoming individualized actors, and more possible to see how this social framework is impacting that change. Furthermore, what this detailed account of individualization shows is a widespread depoliticization; a depoliticization that leaves subjects less able to recognize, critique, and organize against this dominant theoretical paradigm and thus less able to offer true alternatives.

Section V: Conclusion

In this project thus far, I have worked to construct a methodological framework and have extrapolated from the research of others to provide a better understanding of neoliberalism. Using the theoretical models of Freeden, I have provided a foundation for thinking about neoliberalism as a coherent ideology with morphological characteristics. Under this theory of ideology, it is clear that ideologies are not neutral forces. Looking to other theorists, I have established a general understanding of neoliberalism as a way of viewing the world with market rationality. I emphasized how important a common conception of this ideology is, and identified a place in which theorists to date have neglected. In discussing individualization, I argued for a more primary position for this particular aspect of neoliberalism. My discussion of various political areas served to show how individualization works in practice, and how changing social

dynamics can change the way we both understand a problem and work to solve it. In developing a more detailed account of the way in which individualization is manifested, I showed 1) how we can understand neoliberalism as a coherent phenomenon even if it does not result in the same outcome in all cases, and 2) how individualization changes us as subjects.

While developing this thesis, I have been navigating two particular concerns that are important to come back to now. The theoretical challenge of this project was the matter of conceptualizing ideology in the absence of a cohesive platform, founding texts, or clear leaders. In reflecting back on the discussion of ideology in general, I chose to address it not by positing a certain outcome for all political areas, but by noticing and analyzing common themes and trends. In my analysis of the different manifestations and components of neoliberalism, I have shown how distinct manifestations are attributable to the cycle of individualization. Understanding the ideology as a phenomenon in which there are common themes and a fundamental cycle of individualization - which are expressed differently in differing political areas, but with common tendencies – has served to mitigate this particular issue.

The political issue of the project still looms: it is difficult to see a point of view as ideological and not necessarily objective reality. As my analysis of neoliberalism has shown, this issue is more insidious with neoliberal ideology because through its individualization it undermines our ability to recognize it as a point of view and see it as a problem, and undermines mechanisms through which we might contest its hegemony. It is not a problem of rejecting all ideology, because ideologies are tools all people use to conceive of reality; rather, the problem is that neoliberalism makes it harder to see the ideology as such. In addition to its conception of market rationality as a neutral, common sense theoretical tool, it undermines institutions through which we could mobilize against it. Individualization, through the various manifestations I have

outlined, serves to disempower subjects to be able to see this hegemonic ideology as a common problem and makes it less likely that people will be able to resist it. As established earlier in the project, however, ideologies are a socially constructed force which means that we can influence and change them.

The cycle of individualization is an important mechanism for the reinforcement and production of neoliberal ideology and values; interrupting this cycle in even a minor way would serve to interfere with the perpetuating mechanism of atomization. A potential way of doing this would be a reconceptualization of personal responsibility and social obligation. Theorist Iris Young (2007) has written extensively about this change of perspective. She begins by showing how the common understanding of responsibility, based upon some degree of direct interaction between parties – what she calls the “liability model” – cannot reasonably account for or deal with structural injustice (2007, 175). This is the typical way in which we conceive of responsibility, and the foundation on which the individual responsibility component of neoliberalism is built. She expands the notion of responsibility to account for structural and systematic injustice. Her “social connection model of responsibility” conceptualizes responsibility as shared (2007, 172). Each individual is partially accountable for systemic wrongdoings; however it is a certain conceptualization that is based in individuals. The exact responsibility of every person, she notes, cannot be identified given the nature of structural injustice - so the responsibility is one that is "shared," as opposed to collective (2007, 172). Young's understanding of responsibility could be particularly helpful. She conceptualizes it like we conceptualize ones responsibility as a citizen, stating that it "does not imply finding one at fault or liable for a past wrong, but rather refers to agents' carrying out activities in a morally appropriate way and aiming for certain outcomes" with "a reference to causes of wrongs, here

the form of structural processes that produce injustice...we bear responsibility because we are part of the process" (2007, 175).

To identify how this would differ from a neoliberal conception of responsibility, we can consider how different one of the aforementioned political areas might look with such an understanding. If we look to environmentalism, a straightforward issue in which structural problems can clearly be seen as bearing a large brunt of the blame, the change is clear. If, instead of considering environmentalism a matter of personal consumer responsibility, we understood it as a matter in which each person has a level of responsibility but in the form of a piece of the broader *shared* responsibility model, the cycle of individualization could be interrupted. As subjects that are part of a system that produces environmental injustice, we each must bear a portion of culpability for a system that results in outcomes contrary to what we perceive to be fair and just. Conceiving of responsibility in this way in the context of environmentalism, instead of on the liability model, would mean that personal obligations would be of a different type. Instead of understanding personal responsibility as individual consumer choices that lessen an individual's environmental impact, people would be prompted to think about their responsibility as a part of an unjust situation. In environmentalism, this shift would mean that the consumerism and individualistic advocacy would lose salience, and people would be encouraged to advocate and collaborate on a more collective level. In this context specifically, once people are conceptualizing of responsibility as having a component in structural injustice as well, they are freed up to look critically at social structures and institutions, like the market, that may be producing adverse outcomes. The avenues for activism, critique, and change are much broader than under a neoliberal responsibility model.

The purpose of this project has been to identify the mechanisms through which

neoliberalism works, to highlight the way in which it perpetuates itself, and to identify a different way of looking at the world. Beyond the fact that neoliberalism is a particularly problematic ideology because it works to undermine efforts to see the world in any other way, neoliberalism is especially concerning because of the way in which it undermines the ability of the collective to recognize that the political world is affected, at least in part, by systemic and structural social forces. A reconceptualization of responsibility, and the degree to which we assume accountability for the structural forces that have serious ramifications in the lives of others, would enable us to address problems like racism and poverty much more effectively and compassionately.

Re-establishing awareness of the collective nature of our society is still very possible. In his 2013 Inaugural Address, President Obama made a clear reference to the idea:

...preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action. For the American people can no more meet the demands of today's world by acting alone than American soldiers could have met the forces of fascism or communism with muskets and militias. No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation, and one people (2013).

While President Obama himself operates under neoliberal ideology (made clear by his primary focus on “individual freedoms”), the fact that the majority of the country also resonates with such a message is a sign that individualization has not completely saturated public consciousness. The notion of the social nature of society is appealing, intrinsic, and fully capable of being revived. Foucault was right when he said “the more we move towards an economic state, the more, paradoxically, the constitutive bond of civil society is weakened and the more the individual is isolated by the economic bond he has with everyone and anyone” (2008, 303). It is

of the utmost importance to seriously consider the way in which we see the world, and to consciously decide if the values that neoliberalism perpetuates are the best way to conceptualize the world and effectively work toward a fair society.

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