edited by
Dominika Ferens
and
Tomasz Sikora

UGLY BODIES

queer perspectives on illness, disability, and aging

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UGLY BODIES

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NON-THEMATIC SUBMISSIONS

Introduction: Let's Talk About (Crip) Sex

Tomasz Sikora

Dominika Ferens

The intention of this special thematic issue of *InterAlia* is to problematize the notion of a healthy, (re)productive, desirable body through the lenses of queer and crip theory. The perspective we adopted when calling this issue into existence was largely a continuation of the one proposed in a provocative article by Paulina Szkudlarek and Sławomira Raczyńska entitled "Zboczone kaleki. Poza sanonormatywnością i somatoestetyką" (Perverted Cripples. Beyond Sanonormativity and Soma-aesthetics). The thrust of the argument was that illness and disability in conjunction with non-normative sexualities has the potential to (doubly) undermine the liberal-humanist model of modern subjectivity, although more often than not the dominant, neoliberal, politically correct discourses effectively separate the two "parameters of identity" without ever acknowledging how fluid and intersecting they are in a single body – a body whose ever changing processes, needs and desires can never reduce it to a stable, self-contained unit. Such regulation of non-normative sexual bodies is mostly achieved through, on the one hand, relegating disabilities to the sphere of medical management and personal "success" through determination and hard work, and, on the other, tabooing the sexual (let alone queer sexual) in the disabled person's experience, while often reinforcing normative gender roles and rules of attractiveness. Disabled people's sexuality is regarded as also somehow disabled, and if recognized at all, it becomes – in countries with highly developed social welfare systems – a "problem" to be remedied by, for example, providing the cripples with sex-workers. To counter this imposed neoliberal framework, complete with the "individual rights" emancipatory narrative, Szkudlarek and Raczyńska argue for much more "rebellious" queer/crip interventions: they embrace kinky cripples rather than the socially and medically corrected approximations of the healthy-bodied – and hence fully (hetero)sexual – Vitruvian Man.

All too often research on the intersection between disability and sexuality is more or less overtly indebted to the long "ethnographic" tradition in that it could be collected under the general rubric:

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"The Sexual Life of Cripples in Western (Neo)Liberal Societies." Even the turn towards unique personal accounts of the so-called marginalized groups – as in standpoint theory – does not necessarily break away from that tradition. It seems progressive and open-minded to "give a voice" to the subalterns as if it were tantamount to giving them (more) subjectivity and agency, but multiple questions arise at once: Who has the privilege of giving or not giving a voice? How are the received accounts fitted into dominant (academic and non-academic) discourses? Which of the accounts are preferred and why? How are techniques of normalization and self-normalization operating in such personal accounts, and to what extent are they always-already implied in the interaction between an "academic" and a "subject"? How is the crip subject always-already interpellated in a way that leaves little room for self-fashioning and becoming? The questions could go on and on. Arguably, the starting point in such approaches is the idea of lack or deficiency, no doubt related to the medical practice of measuring the degree of disability by determining what percent of an average "healthy" ability the disabled person can achieve or what is the calculable percentage of health loss. We fundamentally disagree with such methodologies and instead postulate an ontology that looks at bodies, including bodies categorized as crippled, with no use for inherent normative measurements and hierarchizations. In other words, the so-called "disabled" body is ontologically equal to any other body in how it finds ways to live and act and develop. It is a body complete in its own embodiment – as much, of course, as any body can be considered complete in its continuous processes of (un)becoming and its complex exchanges with the environment. If anything, "disabled" bodies may be much more revealing about the ontological status of the human and non-human bodies in general in that they register more clearly both the vulnerabilities innate to any living body and the variable capacities and adaptations it develops in response to its environment. It is a commonplace, after all, to say that the history of every single body includes at least some periods of disability, starting with infancy, through temporal or life-long illnesses and injuries, all the way up to old-age impairments, which demonstrates the absurdity of constructing the "disabled" as a separate, identity-based group of people. Instead, we believe it is through the adaptational richness and the acquisition of certain "over-abilities" that crippled bodies should be looked at. Not: what this or that body *cannot* do compared to other bodies, but precisely what this or that body *can* do in its singular *conatus*. And sexuality, to be sure, is one of the spheres where the body's ability to explore its own capacity for pleasure and pain (where the two can sometimes uncannily overlap), discover new sensations and invent new erotic practices is most intensely tested out.

A similar logic applies to the question of the supposed "unnaturalness" of certain bodies. Able and healthy bodies are commonly connoted as "natural" (which further connotes "natural," i.e. straight sexuality), whereas disabled bodies, which often can only function due to some medical intervention, are consequently considered less "natural." The crip ontology we envisage starts precisely from the technologies and techniques on which *any* body vitally depends – a perspective that is now being developed under the name of *somatechnics*.[1] Life and life activities always depend on a complex network of life-supporting systems, both within and without a single organism. The mediation of technology (as when certain animals use a stick to extend their "natural" abilities, or when life-saving equipment is connected to a patient) as well as the acquisition of techniques (as when an animal/human learns to swim or to move around without legs) are inscribed in any embodied existence – no less for "healthy" bodies as for the bodies with what are perceived as handicaps. In other words, it is important to see cripples' abilities not as fundamentally limited and conditionally extended *despite* their handicaps, but to see the handicaps as occasions for the actualization of virtual abilities that able bodies will never have access to. Bodies can be bodies only insofar as they *learn* their ways in a given environment. Let us be clear, however: fully acknowledging crippled bodies' ability to expand their abilities is no excuse for the failing to reshape physical infrastructures in order to make them more liveable for those bodies which were, by default, excluded from the shared public spaces at the stage of designing and construction. Here again the "problematic" bodies help literally *de-construct* the ablist assumptions behind traditional architecture, just as they help deconstruct the presumptions about what "ability" means in the first place and what is "natural" about (always-already somatechnically mediated) bodies.

The phrase "ugly bodies" in the of title this issue refers to all kinds of unsightly, non-normative bodies: disabled, queer, gender-bent, trans*, fat, self-modified, racialized, aged, decrepit, deformed, and in many cases marked with various "defects" combined. Such deviant bodies are perceived as embarrassing at best, obnoxious at worst. More: they are "bodies out of place," so to speak, essentially improper, if not outright dangerous, always posing a threat to the established order of things through the sheer fact of their very existence. If not properly contained through

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[1] For the origin of the term, see the Somatechnics blog: https://somatechnics.wordpress.com/about-somatechnics. So far the initiative has yielded a series of somatechnics conferences and a number of books, the most "foundational" of which is *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologisation of Bodies* (ed. Samantha Murray and Nikki Sullivan, Routledge, 2009).

institutionalization and the mechanisms of social stigma, the (il)logic goes, such bodily deviancy could become contagious to the healthy and productive (social) body that must be protected. The etymology of the word "ugly" confirms its relation to the concepts of *dreadful*, *fearful* and even *hateful*, which clearly situates its connotations far beyond the concept of simply "unpleasant to look at" and closer to the more visceral idea of the repulsive and dangerous. Posited as dysfunctional in one way or another, ugly bodies become even more scarily grotesque when they claim sexual agency: in order to "stay where their place is" rather than spread uncontrollably like an epidemic, they must remain *undesiring* and *undesirable* bodies. This is, again, where the connection between sexuality and disability proves to be a powerful site of critique and a possible springboard for social action. From a queer perspective it is not about integration, rights and personal success, it is about being complete in one's own embodiment, which is as intimately bound up with desires and sexual pleasures, as it is with pains and physical limitations.

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The disability/sexuality nexus is best understood as a vital onto-political and ethical question. Queer critiques of the dominant disability discourse, and especially its complete failure to account for the richness and queerness of the flows of desire and the actual sexual practices occurring in the complex networks that involve disabled bodies, must work towards destabilizing and, ultimately, dismantling the (neo)liberal, individualistic, politically correct language that frames much of the research and public discourse. Robert McRuer describes his project of Crip Theory as an effort "to counter neoliberalism and access alternative ways of being" (42), now severely restricted and regulated. A world that allows alternative ways of being – whether non-identitarian or quasi-identitarian or intersectionally identitarian or any other – requires a different, postconventional (to borrow Margrit Shildrick's term) ethics. One possible form of such ethics commensurate with crip studies and crip practices could be called an "ethics of life-supporting systems." In terms of natural/social ecosystesms (the two never separable) no life exists on its own: it always depends on the infrastructures of the physical world, protection, and care. As Paul K. Longmore noticed long ago, the self-developed disability culture (just like, arguably, non-neoliberalized queer culture) emphasizes "not independence but interdependence, not functional separateness but personal connection, not physical autonomy but human community" (9). One must also be aware of how life-supporting infrastructures are always a (bio)political question as well, referring us ultimately to the question of the structural distribution of the "good life" in present-day societies; yet this is a line of investigation that merits a separate issue of *InterAlia*.

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As often happens when journals announce thematic issues, some of the submitted articles do not respond directly to the questions raised in the Call for Papers; nor do they necessarily use the suggested theoretical tools and methodologies. But the response to our call for papers was more than gratifying because each author contributed to queer and disability studies stimulating work driven by research questions that arose out of his or her own experience and knowledge - questions that we from our local perspective would not have thought to pose.

For practical reasons, the editors have decided to divide the issue into two parts, one that collects submissions in English, and the other one (to be published shortly after) – texts in Polish.

The Polish part opens with a translation of an article by **Robert McRuer**, the initiator of Crip Studies as a field of investigation that combines radical thinking on disability with queer approaches to sexuality. The article is a continuation of and elaboration on McRuer's earlier reflections in his ground-breaking book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006). A similarly broad theoretical perspective in the English part of the issue is provided by the philosopher Thomas Abrams' contribution "Disability, Queer Phenomenology and the Political Economy of Personhood," where Abrams engages in a dialogue with Sara Ahmed's influential book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). While Ahmed brings together the categories of race and desire, Abrams advocates employing her approach for considering the material experience of disability and the formation of "disabled" subjectivities.

Both parts of the *Ugly Bodies* issue contain sociological perspectives. Drawing on six years of fieldwork carried out in Polish escort agencies, **Izabela Ślęzak** implicitly asks: How can the sexual needs of men with disabilities be met if the sex-workers they seek out overwhelmingly reject them? And to what extent does the sex-workers' attitude reflect the dehumanization and desexualization of disabled men by the society at large? Although the article refers to the therapeutic practices propagated by the International Professional Surrogates' Association, it stops short of proposing such solutions in Poland, perhaps because of the abrupt conservative turn towards the end of 2015. Nonetheless, Ślęzak draws attention to the urgent need to address disability and sexuality together, not just within academia but more importantly - outside it. Ślęzak's concerns dovetail with those

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voiced in "Against the Ugliness of Age: Towards an Erotics of the Aging Sexual Body" by Alison Moore and Paul Reynolds in the present issue.

The sociological method in research on non-normative sexualities is represented in the English part of the present issue by the article entitled "Intersectionalities, Dis/abilities and Subjectification in Deaf LGBT People." On the basis of interviews concerning the experiences of deaf LGBT youth in Sicily, the psychologist **Claudio Cappotto** and sociologist **Cirus Rinaldi** set out to prove how necessary it is to rigorously apply the intersectional approach in qualitative research. Of special interest are the voices of young people who belong to a very non-standard minority group. As the interviews demonstrate, they had so far been perceived by teachers, medical staff and researches solely in terms of the hearing impairment and never asked how they coped in a heterosexist society.

The intersectional approach is also applied in **Marta Usiekniewicz**'s article on obesity, race and class in the US. Starting from the cases of fat black men getting killed by policemen or by self-appointed law-enforces, Usiekniewicz analyzes the ideological underpinning of the criminalization of black male obesity in the US and points out the limitations of much of Fat Studies that concentrates mostly on the experiences of white women.

Ugliness is attributed to those bodies that deviate from a given society's norms due to motor disability, hearing impairment, skin color, obesity, among many others. As **Oindri Roy** and **Amith Kumar** demonstrate in their contribution, persons deviating from the norms of proper male and female looks are also commonly perceived as ugly. The daily lives of transgender people in India, as described in autobiographical writing, are the point of departure for theoretical considerations. The authors investigate two autobiographies: *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life-Story* (2010) by the Indian transgender activist A. Revathi, and *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* (2012) by American gender rebellion icon, Kate Bornstein.

Two articles by Polish authors **Hubert Zięba** and **Rafał Syska**, look closely at the ways in which Hollywood and art-house film directors deploy "ugly" – diseased, zombified, and transgendered – bodies. Drawing on Susan Sontag's work on illness as metaphor, Zięba critiques large postapocalyptic film productions like *World War Z*, that map plagues reminiscent of AIDS onto a

global geography, and link them with immorality, homosexuality, and non-whiteness. Consequently, as Zięba points out, within the logic of these films, the transnational zombie/AIDS plague can only be eradicated by the virtuous white heterosexual American male. Thus, to use Judith Butler's formulation from *Frames of War*, films like *World War Z* perpetuate the "social norms that allow certain populations to emerge as living beings and others to be considered as non-living, or as only partially living, or as threats to the living." In his contribution, Rafał Syska fills a gap in film criticism by placing *Container* within a line of Western films about transsexuality and goes on to demonstrate *Containter*'s uniqueness as an experimental film that uses a wide range of visual, aural, and narrative techniques to explore the interiority of psycho-sexual difference. Unlike the diseased bodies on a rampage in *World War Z*, the "ugly" male body that conceals a "beautiful" female subjectivity is not a "threat to the living," because it is locked within a claustrophobic "container" and focused inwards, on memories/ hallucinations. Whether Moodysson's vision of the "ugly body" as forever doomed can lead to a "recognition of my life being like another's life" is debatable. Nonetheless, its rendition of psychological depth may make it difficult for the viewer to see transsexuals as "non-living, or as only partially living" (to quote Butler once more).

Subjectivity likewise organizes **Anna Filipowicz**'s discussion of the tenuous and troublesome connection between human flesh and the prosthesis, "From Campy Burlesque to (Post)constructivist Performance: On Wearing Dentures in the Poetry of Miron Białoszewski." Had we published the Polish- and English-language texts in one volume, we would have paired up Filipowicz's nuanced poetry analysis with **Allison Moore**'s and **Paul Reynolds**'s "Against the Ugliness of Age: Towards an Erotics of the Aging Sexual Body." Although Moore and Reynolds write from a sociological perspective to rescue ageing and disabled bodies from being perceived as grotesque, while in Filipowicz's account of the ageing poet Białoszewski wallows in the grotesque, coming to terms with his dentures as an impediment to eating and lovemaking, they all insist: old people just want to have fun!

Last but not least, we decided to include in the Polish-language section of the *Ugly Bodies* issue a Polish translation of the article "Uncanny Erotics – On Hans Bellmer's Souvenirs of the Doll" by **Jeremy Bell**. The text offers an interpretation of the work of Hans Bellmer, modernist artist and writer. Bellmer worked mostly in France, where he gained recognition thanks to his surrealistic installations and photographs of dolls. Their bodies, made of different materials, dismembered and

recombined into articulated assemblages, evoke both suffering and desire, which leads Bell to reflections on eroticism, corporeality, power and gender identity. Adhering to the psychoanalytical method, the author refutes the claims that Bellmer's work is characterized by misogyny and an essentialized gender binary. Although Bell's text does not address disability directly, it is an example of how the question of the relationship between functional/dysfunctional/prosthetic /unnatural bodies and sexual pleasure/pain/desire can be innovatively rethought through art.

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The English-language part of the current *InterAlia* issue also includes a small non-thematic section, consisting of two contributions. By looking closely at the poetry of Marilyn Hacker and Carl Phillips, **Jason Bryant** examines the performativity and self-reflexivity of "queer coupling." The important methodological distinction that Bryant makes is the one between (homo)normative love and marriage narratives and alternative, queer ways of doing intimacy, domesticity and partnered relationships. Due to their particular and never unproblematic positioning in relation to power, norm and desire, queer subjects develop, or should develop, a "queer sensitivity" that is alert to the complexities of queer relations.

Stanimir Panayotov's statement, which reads almost like a manifesto, targets what he calls "straight separatism" defined as "the culture of self-assimilation in the forms of institutionality and memorialization." At a time when creating and working with "queer archives" is increasingly regarded by many queer scholars and activists as imperative, Panayotov boldly claims that any institutional memorization is always already implicated in the identitarian, heterosexual paradigm of love and recognition that inevitably leads to universalization, assimilation and the debilitation of difference through the apparent act of embracing it. As a result, queers must "abandon all forms of remembrance," at least those forms that depend on institutionalization and formalization.

The two non-thematic pieces can, in fact, be read dialogically vis-à-vis the articles collected for the thematic part. The queer forms of relationship-making explored by Jason Bryant can easily include questions of illness, disability or ageing and how they feature the "queer sensitivity" he describes. On the other hand, the way Panayotov's contribution methodologically challenges many of the prevalent discourses on queer sexuality might be productively applied to discourses on disability as

well. The question might be: Is crip archiving the direction to go now, or should we know better, taught by decades of queer critique?

The editors would like to thank Paulina Szkudlarek for her invaluable contribution in the initial stages of to putting the Ugly Bodies *issue together. She authored the very idea of this thematic issue and composed much of the Call for Papers. She also helped in the selection of the submitted articles and was consulted on several occasions during the editorial process.*

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Disability, *Queer Phenomenology*, and the Politics of Personhood

Thomas Abrams
University of Toronto

This paper explores Sara Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology *from a disability studies perspective. In addition to her emphasis on race and desire, I ask how we might use Ahmed's queer, cultural phenomenology to ask about the sociomaterial basis of disablement, reflecting on the interactive emergence of these subjectivities more generally. In the first section of this paper, I examine the three main chapters in Ahmed's important book. I then ask what Ahmed might have asked, if she had explored disability therein. Next, I turn to some phenomenological disability studies, interrogating how subjectivity is put to work in the shared world, rather than universally accorded to all persons at all times. In the final section of this paper, I return to the basis of the phenomenological project itself, and ask what this revised version of subjectivity means for the phenomenology of Heidegger and Husserl, with an eye to future work.*

Key words: *Phenomenology; Disability; Queer Theory; Racialization; Sara Ahmed*

Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* has little to say about disabled personhood. To point this out is hardly a biting critique: most phenomenological work in disability studies has had little to say - about race or sexual orientation. On these topics Ahmed says quite a bit. This paper, then, dwells on a single, very simple question: how might we do these projects at once, using her work as inspiration? To do so, I first outline the major arguments found in Ahmed's important book. In section two, I introduce the reader to some recent work in the phenomenology of disability. Though the terminology differs, we are on shared ground. Both projects locate the politics of personhood—racialized, disabled, queer or otherwise—in the interaction order. Following Ahmed, I explore "interaction" at two different yet interrelated registers, the individual and the institutional. In the third section of this paper, I return to phenomenological philosophy as a method for interrogating meaningful human existence in all its forms. There I argue that "subjectivity" is an emergent product of a material and symbolic order, not an inherent property of conscious existence. I substantiate this claim with disabled and queer phenomenology interrogated above, tempered with the classic phenomenological work of Heidegger and Husserl. I end by thinking about some other places where we might put this synthesis to work, both philosophically and, more importantly, in our everyday lives.

Queer Phenomenology

Queer Phenomenology has three substantive chapters. My outline and annotation shall follow suit, at a paragraph apiece. Ahmed turns to *objects* in chapter one, where she makes use of existing phenomenological work on our existence with things (Heidegger, *Being and Time*; Leder), coupled with Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, to examine how oriented action is materially equipped. She looks especially to Husserl's desk, as explored in his *Ideas*. Not only does she ask what phenomenology tells us about objects and our orientations to them, but also the material requirements that are necessary for us to perform phenomenology in the first place. What work, what *gendered* work, must take place for us to perform the phenomenological epoché? "To what extent does philosophy depend on the concealment of domestic labor and of the labor time that it takes to reproduce the very materials of home?" (31) The philosophical outlook, then, is a mode of orientation that can only exist on a gendered base. Indeed, all forms of orientation intertwine in, through, and around materiality—"objects and bodies work together as spaces for action" (51). Queering phenomenology demands that we take "the material" seriously, as the basis of any philosophical exploration of personhood.

In chapter two, "Sexual Orientation" (pp. 65-108), Ahmed touches on matters of embodied difference, and pursues a phenomenology of sexual desire. She rereads Freud's psychoanalysis of homosexual behaviour as a "straightening device," an object, space, or mentality that reproduces compulsory heterosexuality as preferable. Freud's psychoanalysis is but one instance of many such devices, where deviant bodies are made problematic. She extends the critique of a compulsory orientation to that of sexual orientation as a natural status possessed by subjects.

> The fantasy of a natural orientation is an orientation device that organizes worlds around the form of the heterosexual couple, as if it were from this "point" that the world unfolds. . . . The very idea that bodies "have" a natural orientation is exposed as fantasy in the necessity of the enforcement of that orientation, or its maintenance as a social requirement for intelligible subjectivity (85).

Two points are especially important here. On the one hand, compulsory heterosexuality, as a cultural form maintained through spaces, objects and their relations (in this case, the early psychoanalytic assemblage) is another trajectory through which we can interrogate ableism and

normalcy, key concerns in disability studies. We are examining "compulsory ability" through the same phenomenological lens as compulsory heterosexuality (McRuer). Secondly, I want to press Ahmed on matters of subjectivity (and will continue below). It is not only the *intelligibility* of subjectivity that is at issue: it is subjectivity itself. If we must pursue a particular line in order to be subjects, then pre-existing and pre-shaped subjectivity *itself* must be called into question.

Chapter three, "The Orient and Other Others" (pp. 110-156) applies Ahmed's hermeneutic approach to race and racialization, space and spatialization. Building on the materially equipped phenomenology of orientations, pursued above, she asks how the phenomenological "I-can" is institutionalized in orientalism, whiteness, and her personal biography. "Phenomenology helps us to show how race is an effect of racialization, and to investigate how the invention of race as if it were 'in' bodies shapes what bodies 'can do'" (112). She does so by re-framing space from mere measurement to phenomenal space, what Heidegger (*Being and Time*) calls "availability". Reading the orientalism literature through her queered phenomenological lens, the Orient becomes "a matter of how bodies inhabit spaces through shared orientations" (p. 118). This she extends to whiteness. Whiteness is not a property found in bodies. It is found in availability, how they cohere in material cultures, institutional lines that admit some bodies and not others. They are defined in terms of the institutionalized "ability-to-". In family histories, race is a straight line accorded to some "pure" bodies, Others "mixed". Whiteness also manifests in habit spaces, where some bodies are permitted to exist, pass, and dwell as normal, Others marked, inhibited, made out of place. In each case, the ability-to (or its opposite) is not simply an attribute bodies have; it is aligned, accorded and denied in the life-world.

As I wrote in the introduction to this paper, Ahmed's book does not address disability. This should not obscure her accomplishments. What her book *does do* is give phenomenological theory and method a series of tools through which to address orientations, of all sorts, in ways anew. She draws novel insights from classic texts, breathing new life into the (frequently dry an often repetitive) phenomenological canon. This already makes the book valuable. *Queer Phenomenology* also has some important lessons for phenomenological disability studies, and, as I will argue below, vice versa. In pursuing this dialogue, we return to the basis of the phenomenological project itself. Her book is not simply a phenomenology *of* queer identity; it queers the phenomenological project writ large, asking about the selective account that phenomenology takes as emblematic of "the

human", a much needed attempt to break the philosophy free of its historical rigidity. It is a phenomenology curious about its own founding orientations. People doing phenomenological disability studies—and phenomenology of every other sort—would do well to pay attention. We should pay attention not only to race, sexual orientation, and desire as ways of being human (though they surely must do this), but also to those interpersonal processes that allow bodies to emerge as such, and the role philosophy plays in exploring particular types of human lives—those that follow the line, so to speak—over others that do not.

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Reading Ahmed, Thinking Disability

At this point, we should ask: what might *Queer Phenomenology* have said if it *did* talk about disability? Let me provide three potential avenues. First, and here I am taking cues from "The Orient and Other Others", Ahmed might emphasize how disability is an outcome of a material, interpersonal and symbolic order, much like how race is the outcome of racialization. We might say, following de Beauvoir's famous trope, that bodies become what they are, be they raced, abled or gendered in the midst of one another. Disability emerges in and through disablement. There are many ingredients in this recipe. Some of them are somatic, but many are not. There is a cultural milieu in which bodies gain the disability label, and materials and material environments that bring forth or exclude bodies in public life. The bodily "I-can" does not fall from the sky. Ability is made, put to work in the life-world, granted to some and not others. It is made up in the same phenomenal space she explores throughout the book, in our orientation towards things, others, and in orienting ourselves to a shared past and future.

Secondly, if attuned to the politics of disablement, Ahmed's book could certainly highlight the role that professional practices play in the production of disability as a mode of personhood. Whereas she develops an historical critique of Freudian psychoanalysis' troubled relationship with the lesbian woman in "Sexual Orientation", we might look to rehabilitation as the dominant *scientia inhabiles*, the technical apparatus that manages and defines disability.[1] Here we are quite close to the work of Ahmed's poststructuralist teachers, Foucault especially. But there is more going on than the historical angle to subject formation—Ahmed might attend to the problem of the lived body, outside of historical ontology to the human experience of the here-and-now medical encounter.

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[1] Nicholls employs Foucault's archeological method to demonstrate the active discursive and practical elimination of 'the erotic' in the historical transition from massage to physical therapy.

We return again to the institutional spaces where the I-can or ability-to is experienced and made possible. In clinical space, disability is not simply a particular way of "bodying-forth" into the world.[2] When disability emerges as a way of human being, it does so carrying a great deal of medical baggage. It does so both through lay explanations of the body-gone-wrong propped up with reference to the medical *dispositif*, coupling a truth regime and associated set of practices, and the problem-solution trajectory demanded by that coupling in the clinical space.[3] This form of life is not without its own modes of orientation, available to personally-informed phenomenological scrutiny.[4]

Finally, for this threefold list at least, Ahmed could very easily explore the kinds of bodily orientations to which desire is made available in, to invoke Foucault, "societies such as ours" (Foucault, *History)*. In her discussion of lesbian affect, she questions what sorts of orientations-towards-bodies are seen as legitimate modes of desire, and what kinds of orientations deviate from that line. There is a burgeoning literature within disability studies exploring this very same topic, asking who is a candidate for desiring subjectivity in the first place, or bluntly, who gets to be sexual at all (McRuer; Shakespeare, "Sexual Politics"; Shakespeare, "Disabled Sexuality"). Following Robert McRuer's lead, the point is not solely that heterosexuality is *the* dominant modality of desire (this is, of course, the case), rather, it is a smaller instance of a greater cultural politics where certain (white, able, straight, male) bodies count and others are accounted for against this rubric. The site of critique expands from heterosexual subjectivity as the benchmark of human existence to the legitimate participation in these sorts of relations at all—acceptable forms of human desire and human being more generally.

While each of these possible lines of thought draws from different components of Ahmed's argument, they, like the three main chapters of *Queer Phenomenology*, intersect in the politics of subject formation. In the successive chapters of that book, there is a clear movement from an

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[2] I take the quoted phrase from Heidegger's *Zollikon Seminars*. For an extended discussion of the importance of these seminars, and Heidegger's prior philosophical neglect of the body, see Aho (*Heidegger's Neglect*) and Askay.

[3] Here I am referring to the summary of that philosophers' thought, as presented in his *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures: "The point of all these investigations concerning madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, and what I am talking about now, is to show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus *(dispositif)* of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false." (19)

[4] I describe my own experience in Abrams ("Flawed by Dasein").

individualistic understanding of human existence—as in the first chapter's discussion of Husserl's transcendental subjectivity and Heidegger's *Being and Time*—to a cultural hermeneutic, where orientations of various sorts are organized in our shared world.[5] In the case of Husserl's phenomenology, this would be called a move from "subjectivity" to the "intersubjective".[6] I have tried to mimic both endpoints in my extension of her argument to disability and disablement. In each case, from the disablement-disability causality to our exclusionary culture of desire, we are attending not only to individual experiences of disabled personhood, but also taking as our focus the sociomaterial conditions whereby disability becomes manifest, meaningful, and a matter-at-hand.

In the next section of this paper, I suggest that a similar expanse, extending from the individual to the cultural-institutional, exists within the phenomenological disability studies literature. In highlighting these spaces, I am not arguing that one end is superior to the other. To expand the phenomenological imagination, we need both types of research. We need individual stories of human existence, and we need abstract theoretical work, drawing connections between them. In this spirit, I will present both kinds of phenomenological disability research. This, when compared with the fruits of the earlier sections of this paper, will allow us to chart a phenomenological project that takes embodied differences, racialization and a democratization of desire seriously.

Phenomenological Disability Studies, Individual and Institutional

Here I will select two bibliographic entries for each of the "individual" and "institutional" phenomenologies of disability, with the caveat that such a typology is merely a heuristic scale, rather than a hard and fast distinction. In the "individual" camp I look to Toombs' "The Lived Experience of Disability" and the pioneering "Disability Studies and Phenomenology" (Paterson and Hughes). Like Ahmed's book, both pieces are autobiographical explorations of disabled personhood using phenomenology as a guide. The two institutional pieces I examine are Titchkosky and Michalko's "The Body as a Problem of Individuality" and Aho's "Medicalizing Mental Health: A Phenomenological Alternative". While the former is located squarely within the disability

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[5] I think this shift in emphasis is still the case, even as Ahmed introduces her personal experiences of orientation toward the end of her book. Even autobiographically, she is self-reflective, I think, in light of collective understandings of race, specialization and temporality. She uses a self, herself, as an entry point into the greater whole.

[6] Heidegger would not, as I shall explain below.

studies literature, Aho's paper is more of an outlier, while still attending to embodied differences. I include it to show how phenomenological methods allow disability studies to extend their purview past merely physical conditions (Shakespeare, *Disability Rights*) and addresses the governance of disability as a technical problem in need of a solution by biologically-oriented psychiatry, as considered in the previous section. Together, reading these papers will let us extend Ahmed's argument to new territory, while maintaining *Queer Phenomenology's* critical outlook.

S. K. Toombs' "Lived Experience of Disability" explores her life with chronic, progressive multiple sclerosis. While Ahmed draws from a plurality of thinkers in *Queer Phenomenology*, Toombs restricts herself to Merleau-Ponty and a small supporting cast (Sartre, and, to a lesser extent, Schütz, and Husserl). The exploration of the lived body in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is Toombs' principal tool. She begins by contrasting the disabled object body-as-object with her lived experience of disability. "I do not experience the lesion(s) in my brain. . . . Rather, my illness is the impossibility of taking a walk around the block or of carrying a cup of coffee from the kitchen to the den" (10). Disability, as it is lived, is first and foremost a way of being, rather than an objectively present lack in an observed body. Using the example of travel to a conference, Toombs demonstrates how the lived and object bodies coalesce in the everydayness of life with multiple sclerosis. This involves not only exploring the world *from* a disabled body, but also encountering that body as a circumspect object (as in moments of breakdown) and in frequently "casing" new environments to see their adaptability.

Of particular interest to me, as a sociologist living with another progressive condition ("Becker muscular dystrophy", says the MDs), is Toombs' reformulation of the phenomenological "I can". An "I-can"/"I-cannot" binary cannot, she argues, encapsulate the fluidity found in the lived experience of progressive illness. The "I-can-and-will-continue-to" is a learned, partial, and temporary achievement, based in both embodiments and surroundings, against which all bodily tasks must be judged. Living with progressive illness requires a constantly changing tool-set: with changes to bodies and environments come new skills that must be learned to make routines possible. Activities are permitted only so long that legs hold out and muscles maintain strength, until new tactics and environmental aids can be discovered and learned. The bookcase in Toombs' hallway, for example, was once simply a place for papers, it became a ledge to grasp en route to the washroom, and, then, a barrier for her wheelchair. These modes of tacit expertise are far more fickle than some of

the philosophical literature on the subject presumes (Polanyi): upstream structures of ability must be taken into consideration for a fuller account of that concept. Here little to no work is required to bridge Ahmed and Toombs' arguments. Both point to the social and material structures through which the "I can" is put to work, or, and far too often, just out of reach.

Paterson and Hughes' "Disability Studies and Phenomenology" is a theoretical meditation on disability politics, using one of the authors' personal experience of speech impairment as a means to ground their abstract thinking. The paper builds on their highly cited phenomenological critique of materialist models of disablement (Hughes and Paterson), arguing that a strict materialism fails to sufficiently account for lived, disabled body. Their carnal politics of everyday life are based in the same embodied phenomenology found in Toombs, with the notable addition of Leder's *The Absent Body*. Paterson and Hughes take Leder's phenomenology of bodily dys-appearance—the way the body is brought forth as object in moments of dysfunction—and apply it to instances of social dys-appearance, when individuals are forced to see their own impairments and otherness in moments of collective breakdown. Here the story of speech impairment has more to do with an affront to real-time communication, as an interpersonal convention, than embodied capacity.

> When one is confronted by social and physical inaccessibility one is simultaneously confronted by oneself; the external and the internal collide in a moment of simultaneous recognition. When one encounters prejudice in behaviour or attitude, one's impaired body 'dys-appears'. The body of a person with a speech impairment 'dysappears' when faced with (socially produced) embodied norms of communication. Exclusion from and disruption to communication is not therefore a matter of the ability of an impaired person to communicate, but about conventions and norms of communication, which are (a priori) hostile to non-conforming forms of physicality. [...] The impaired body 'dys-appears' as a consequence of the profound oppressions of everyday life (603).

This argument shares a great deal with the work explored above. Like Toombs, Hughes and Paterson show how bodies emerge *as disabled* in the everyday lifeworld. Disability is not simply a pre-shaped, asocial entity built into impaired bodies. It emerges in and through sociomaterial

passages when embodiments and environments (widely defined) come into conflict.[7] Like Ahmed, they emphasize orientation, in that disability emerges in moments of *dis*orientation when bodies are made to appear as different because they do not 'follow the line'. Further, Paterson and Hughes, like each of those cited before them, give support for the argument I have tried to establish throughout this paper, namely that disabled (or desiring, or racialized) subjectivity is not, in itself, primordial. It is established, recognized and accorded in the to-and-fro of daily life, in our materially situated and institutionally organized coexistence within the lifeworld, the stuff of the interaction order (Goffman, "Interaction Order").

In comparison to the individually-oriented work of Toombs, Paterson and Hughes, Aho, Titchkosky and Michalko present a relatively more abstract discussion of disabled personhood, as it is put to work in larger scale institutional structures, in the pharmacological-psychiatric and university accessibility apparatuses, respectively. To repeat: in moving to the institutional scale I do not mean to suggest that this higher level of abstraction is more important. Rather, I want to emphasize that phenomenological work in disability studies, like *Queer Phenomenology*, takes place at numerous registers, each involving the production of personhood. Any phenomenological account of the politics of personhood must take both ends of this spectrum seriously.

Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko's "The Body as a Problem of Individuality" applies Edmund Husserl's and Alfred Schütz's twin phenomenologies of the lifeworld to accessibility discourse in the university setting. They begin by outlining Husserl's account of the lifeworld in his *Crisis* (121), the "pregiven world in which science and every other life-praxis is engaged", tempered with Schütz's common stock of knowledge, the "natural attitude", attained to navigate the life-world as a shared cultural space (Schütz and Luckmann 3).

> It is, then, this taken-for-granted life-world and the natural attitude that represents, for us, the genesis of disability frameworks. . . . Disability is a frame that can, upon analysis, teach us much about the life-world that generates it. But herein lies an irony—disability is framed as a phenomenon located and locatable only outside of the taken-for-granted life-world as well as outside the natural

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[7] I borrow this language of 'passages' from Moser and Law.

attitude. Disability is thus understood as marginal to the common-sense world and, as such, outside intuitively given reality (Titchkosky and Michalko 132).

While the lifeworld provides us a window into the sensuous and institutional apprehension of disability, it presents an account of why disability is engaged as a problem, because it challenges the natural order of things in our aggressively individualistic, market-oriented culture—and especially so in the case of the higher education sector (Titchkosky). When Accessibility Services, the name used at the University of Toronto, provides a solution to the problem of disability, it reinforces its problematic status, and recreates those institutional circumstances where business as usual education might continue. The chapter is, in sum, a cultural phenomenology of the life-world tempered by critical disability politics.

Aho's "Medicalizing Mental Health" is a cultural phenomenology of mental illness, and its overwhelming medication. Here I would apply the addendum "discourse" to "mental illness", but I feel that may discount the frequent emphasis on material practices, maintained throughout Aho's paper. Again, Foucault's *dispositif* is apt. Aho begins by exploring the political economy of psychiatry in the United States, using the relationships between that industry and the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (hereafter DSM; then in volume four, now five) as exemplary of "medicalized mental helath". Aho argues that the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a viable alternative to the mode of personhood, or patienthood, presumed by the biomedical diagnostic categories presented in the later versions of the DSM.[8] Aho draws from a line of argument begun by Thomas Szasz regarding the scientific validity of psychiatric categories.[9] Unlike other modes of medical inspection (pathology, for Szasz), psychiatry cannot rely on strictly organic understandings

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[8] Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul* is a fascinating examination of the transition from the DSM-III to the DSM-IV, and the emergence of dissociative identity disorder (née multiple personality disorder). Of interest to us here is the elimination of many of the Freudian undertones of the DSM-III in the formulation of the biomedical model of mental pathology.

[9] Though Szasz stated this critique first, Aho cannot be said to object to the biomedical formulation of mental illness in the same way. Szasz argues that mental illness is not a disease because psychiatry cannot derive its diagnoses from organic states, as in the emblematic case of lesions. Mental illness is a myth because behavior problems are categorically different than organic ones: they cannot be diseases at all. The implied methodological dualism, between mental behaviour and physical organ-states, would not convince Aho because of his Heideggerian heritage, which opposes not the distinction between mental and physical substance, but the ontology of substance more generally. For an exploration of substance dualism, substance ontology, and the phenomenology of disability, see my "Cartesian Dualism".

of illness. Rather, it appeals to behavior (Goffman, "Mental Symptoms"). Phenomenology allows us to pursue a human science of mental illness, instead of one that elects for medication before all else.[10]

> Hermeneutic phenomenology is uniquely suited to challenge core assumptions in psychiatry by expanding the narrow conception of the self as an enclosed, biological individual and recognizing the ways in which our experience of things—including mental illness—is shaped by the socio-historical situation into which we grow. Psychiatry's first priority, in this regard, is not to identify an observable pathology that fits neatly into the ready-made diagnostic categories of the DSM but rather to suspend the prejudices that come with being a scientist or medical doctor in order to hear the patient describing her/his own experience (Aho, "Mental Health" 243-245).

Phenomenology, as an ontological exploration of what we are as human beings-in-the-world, allows us to escape the empiricist prejudices of biomedically-informed psychiatry. However, Aho argues, Husserlian phenomenology is not up to this task because it takes the structures of consciousness, embodied or not, as the basis in which we primarily engage the world (both at face value, and as abstracted to the level of "transcendental subjectivity"). This passes over our basic mode of being-in-the-world, what Heidegger calls *Dasein*. In the tacit meaning-structures disclosed in everyday life, explored in *Being and Time* under the name "*care*", lies the opportunity to explore the modes of personhood found in depression, schizophrenia, and the like, as ways of being-in-the-world, rather than a pseudo-organic problem solely in need of a pharmacological fix.[11] Here, we are looking for genuine dialogue between practitioner and patient, to Heidegger the mutual disclosiveness of Being to the shared world through language, rather than a quick, one-sided diagnosis and prescription.

These two institutional approaches have their differences. Foremost is a philosophical contrast. Titchkosky and Michalko use Husserlian phenomenology to make sense of disability, whereas Aho

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[10] I write "before all else" because, as with Aho, I do not want to discount many of the benefits that have come with new drugs. With this stated, I also agree with his argument that medication should be seen as one of many viable treatments for mental illnesses.

[11] For an extensive account of schizophrenia as a distinct, but no less human, mode of being-in-the-world, see Louis Sass' excellent paper, "Heidegger, Schizophrenia, and the Ontological Difference" (Sass).

employs a Heideggerian, existential perspective. Husserl, as is well known, uses the phenomenology of the life-world as a launching point through which to engage transcendental subjectivity, to examine the structures of conscious experience in themselves. The emphasis is epistemological. Heidegger (the early, *Being and Time* Heidegger), by contrast, examines thoughtless practical action to uncover our fundamental way of being-in-the-world, exploring the grounding disclosure of Being. This work is ontological. Instead of drawing a sharp distinction between these two phenomenological projects, I want to emphasize their similarities. While both move away from everydayness (knowing and dwelling alike) to do different kinds of philosophical work, they begin in the same space: practical human life. It is this space where we need to take account of the wide variety of human existence in order to do more democratic phenomenology, of all sorts.

These similarities extend to the individual camp as well. While Toombs and Paterson and Hughes draw on personal experiences to make sense of abstract phenomenology, Aho, Titchkosky and Michalko engage impairment at the cultural register, exploring how institutions make sense of embodied differences at the larger scale. As I have repeated throughout this paper, we must pursue both types of projects if we are to democratize the phenomenological project in any meaningful way. We need large-scale sketches of the institutionally organized spaces where we find ourselves, and first-hand accounts of what it means to organize our lives therein.[12]

We should review the progress made to this point, before moving on. I began this paper with a reading of Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, outlining how she queers our orientation to things, to those we desire, to cultures and peoples made Other. Ahmed's work did not address disability directly. It was not difficult, however, to extend these existing arguments to disability as manifest in everyday life. Next, I examined some phenomenological work exploring disability at both the institutional and individual levels. In each case, *Queer Phenomenology* and those phenomenological disability studies did a lot of the same things. At risk of oversimplification, each author suggested that modes of personhood—race, disability, whatever—are emergent products of worldly interaction, made and unmade in our institutionally organized, materially equipped coexistence. Not all of these orientations are optimal for persons who must negotiate them, but nonetheless

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[12] This argument is hardly novel; here I take a great deal of inspiration from Ian Hacking's ("Foucault and Goffman") reading of Goffman and Foucault together. He explores existentialist philosophy in that paper as well, further precedent for the argument here.

they are all made in the shared lifeworld. In the final section of this paper, I want to mimic another move made in *Queer Phenomenology*, a return to the basis of phenomenology as a method of inquiry. Ahmed does not simply apply phenomenology to the lives of queer people. She queers the project itself. In this same line of thought: if we have added other modes of humanity to the mix, what does this say about the phenomenological project writ large? What can the classic texts learn from our journey?

Returning to the Basis of the Phenomenological Project Itself

In bits and pieces scattered throughout this paper, I have argued that subjectivity, as a description of personhood, is made and unmade in the common world, in the interaction order. At first glance, this seems antithetical to the phenomenological project, which explores the conditions of human being (conscious, practical or otherwise). Are we at an impasse? To end the paper without resolving this question would hardly be fair. In this final section, then, I aim to tie up these loose ends. In doing so, I want to show how a phenomenology that takes disability, race, and desire seriously contrasts with the classic work of Husserl and Heidegger, which has been employed throughout this paper. I cannot, of course, explore the entirety of either philosopher's work. I will restrict myself to a single book each, Husserl's *Crisis* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and to the role that subjectivity plays in those texts.

Husserl's *Crisis* takes as its object the hubris endemic to the modern, positivist worldview. We are in crisis because we have forgotten that nature only gained its factual self-evidence through human measurement (What Husserl historically traces from Galileo as the "mathematization of nature"; 23). It is only in the life-world, and our natural attitude therein, where these measurements occur and are put to work. We can recover what is particularly human about our experience of this world by "bracketing" that natural attitude—this is the famous phenomenological *epoché*—and turning thought unto itself. In doing so, we are able to explore the structures of consciousness that have been ignored by rationalist (Descartes) and empiricist philosophers (Hume) alike. Here we move to the realm of "transcendental subjectivity", where we engage ourselves purely as ego and others as alter egos, to transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity respectively. A truly scientific, philosophically based psychology—and this is Husserl's goal—must recognize these structures, and eschew the naïve psychologism pervading the positivist mindset.

In *Being and Time*, written before Husserl's *Crisis*, yet very much a reaction to its philosophical heritage, Heidegger locates the concept of subjectivity in the history of western philosophy, one that has forgotten the basic question of Being. Subjectivity, as a conceptual approach to human existence, is part and parcel to the "ontology of objective presence", reducing the things of the outside world as extended substance, and treats the human mind as a place that represents these impressions via mental substance.[13] Heidegger's fundamental objection is not that mental and extended substance should be unified, but that the concept of substance passes over our basic way of dwelling in the world. It emphasizes a theoretical way of looking at the world, rather than our tacit and meaningful navigation of it in practical life, what Heidegger calls *care* (the famous example, used in *Queer Phenomenology*, is the carpenter's use of equipment). Subjectivity is an *ontic* description of the world, exploring objects and their properties theoretically, and passes over fundamental *ontological* questions pertaining to our own finitude and existential status (the distinction is what Heidegger calls the "ontological difference"; *Being and* Time 211n). Because subjectivity ignores these questions, it is a bad description of human existence.

The arguments found in these two classical texts appear, at first glance, positively alien to the phenomenological work explored earlier in this paper. I disagree; though they may talk past one another, the territory that they chart is the same: the contours of meaningful human life. As one who uses phenomenology to make sense of my own personal existence (existence as a disabled person, at that) I believe it is necessary—I know it is necessary—to expand the kinds of human lives that we take as representative of human life, within philosophical frameworks and without. As in *Queer Phenomenology*, this means much more than simply applying phenomenological philosophy to new spaces and leaving it at that. It means amending that core project to better reflect the plurality of human lives from the outset. The question, then, is this: how might Husserl's and Heidegger's work be modified to do so?

In Husserl's movement to transcendental subjectivity, and thus to intersubjectivity, he either assumes that all of the conditions necessary to bring us in contact with our fellow humans are also transcendent, or he ignores them. As almost all of the work covered to this point has made clear, this is not and cannot be the case. There are very important material and social conditions—

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[13] This is what Ryle (*Concept*) would call the "doctrine of the ghost in the machine." His extremely cautious but thorough review of *Being and Time* (Ryle, "Review") demonstrates his deep familiarity with Heidegger's most famous book.

immanent conditions—that must be met in order for human lives to flourish, and for human lives to flourish together. In order for the transcendental orientation to take place at all, a great deal of infrastructure must be in place. This is so in the first chapter of *Queer Phenomenology*, in Toombs' daily life with multiple sclerosis, and in the institutionalized university setting explored by Titchkosky and Michalko. Even if it is granted that we all possess, as human beings, the existential equipment to *be* transcendental subjects as described in Husserl's *Crisis* (and I regard this presumption with cautious suspicion), to have that potential *realized* and *recognized* is a different sort of achievement entirely. While charting the boundaries of human conscious existence, we cannot forget the immanent social and material infrastructure that makes such inquiry possible.

Just as Heidegger rejects subjectivity as an adequate description of human existence in *Being and Time*, he would undoubtedly reject disability studies and queer theory as needless humanisms that also pass over the basic questions of human existence. "Humanism," as he writes in his famous and characteristically androcentric "Letter" on the subject, "is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough." This continues:

> Of course the existential worth of man does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the "Subject" among them, so that as the tyrant of Being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly bruited "objectivity" ("Letter" 233-234).

Not only would Heidegger suggest that the type of work we are doing here is ontic, enframing human being as a subject and failing to account for the ontological difference, he would surely regard the political expediency I have emphasized as a foray into what is now called "identity politics," with similar dismissal. Perhaps. To this charge I have two responses. One is philosophical. The second is personal. The philosophical objection is this: we need only reject subjectivity as a register of human existence when we try to use it in place of our meaningful existence, our *Dasein*. No, subjectivity (so defined by Heidegger) cannot encapsulate our constant being-towards-death, or the tacit structures of relevance that we rely on to carry out our worldly tasks. But this need not be so for subjectivity to be real, albeit a measure divorced from the ontological conditions of our existence. When we describe someone's opinion as "subjective" in lay dialogue, or when we read Descartes' *Meditations*, these terms have meaning for us. Its meaning is enacted in the common

world (not the Being of *Dasein*). In this, revised sense, subjectivity is a measure of human existence, just one that is made and shaped in the shared world.

My personal response is less charitable to Heidegger. His personal life is not to be emulated. As his "Black Notebooks" (named for their covers) continue to be published in German and translated into English, we are becoming more and more aware about the political extremes to where his thought was pressed (little wonder why he famously rejected biographic details of philosophers past). Phenomenology, if the content of the notebooks still can be called that, has a deeply political potential, to put it lightly. If I must choose a path, I will choose Ahmed's. In taking a phenomenological perspective on her own existence, she offers us the potential not only to describe the many ways in which human lives can be shaped or neglected, but also an opportunity to shape them for the better. If Heidegger's philosophy gives us some insight into this greater journey, then so be it. If not: so be it.

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18

Dangerous Bodies:
Blackness, Fatness, and the Masculinity Dividend

Marta Usiekniewicz
University of Warsaw

Contemporary obesity epidemic discourse galvanizes racism and classism under the veil of "care," and is used to further stigmatize mostly poor people of color. I examine the intersection of fatness, race, and masculinity to show how in the case of black male bodies fatness is criminalized and used to legitimize excessive violence inflicted on those bodies. I discuss the oftentimes conflicting projections attached to fat black male bodies to analyze the mechanism that enable not just the criminalization of race and poverty, but also of fatness in the American culture of personal responsibility. I also discuss the unacknowledged racial and gender biases or fat studies, which partially impede the analysis of non-white non-female bodies.

Key words: *race, masculinity, fatness, masculinity dividend, disability*

> *You know, I'm not at all sure that we are the ones who are being hurt the most. In fact I'm sure we are not. We are the ones who are dying fastest.*
> - James Baldwin in *Esquire* interview

According to *Killed by Police*, an independently run website aggregating all instances of civilian deaths at the hands of law enforcement officers, 1081 mostly non-white people died as a result of officer-involved incidents in the United States in the year 2014 alone. Such staggering statistics, combined with the numerous reports of officers not facing punishment, for example in the cases of Tryvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, have created an atmosphere of racial tension, which culminated in public protests (e.g. in Ferguson, MI), the rise of new social movements (e.g. the Black Lives Matter campaign), as well as other forms of resistance against the systemic racism diagnosed in the American judiciary and penitentiary systems.

One of the better-known cases was the death of a New Jersey resident, Eric Garner, who was choked to death for illegally selling cigarettes. His death sparked another campaign under the slogan "We Can't Breathe." In an episode of *The Daily Show* called "We Can't Breathe" following the

failure to indict Eric Garner's killer, Jon Stewart summarized the coverage and explanations offered for Garner's death in the following way: "So we've established that the police used appropriate force for *the dangerously large, but incredibly fragile, out of shape monster weakling*" (emphasis added). Stewart was referring to the paradoxical accounts that had attempted to explain Garner's death away and justify the violence he experienced. On the one hand, to justify the need for six arresting officers, Garner was depicted as a very big and strong man whose aggressive behavior mandated extreme force. At the same time, Congressman Peter King (R), in an interview for CNN, claimed that Garner had died because of his obesity and related health issues: asthma and a heart condition. According to King, it was these illnesses that caused Garner's death, not the illegal chokehold performed by one of the arresting officers (Khazan 2014). In his customary style, Stewart highlighted the conflicting images attached to big black bodies in the media.

Though challenged on their reliance on racist tropes, including the image of the scary black man with superhuman strength (Bouie 2014), most conservative defenses of police actions were not criticized for their sizeist and ableist assumptions.[14] The misrepresentation and criminalization of African Americans as a means of legitimizing violence against them and their incarceration has been an established practice in the United States since the abolition of slavery, throughout the Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era,[15] the conservative turn of the late 1970s and 1980s, the war on drugs, and especially now, with the rise of the Prison Industrial Complex in which bodies of color have become commodities necessary for the business model to prosper (Ben-Moshe 2013: 137).[16] Thus imagined as hyperstrong, hypersexual, and inherently evil, black men in the United States have been equated with criminality and therefore as requiring constant surveillance and preemptive violence.[17]

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[14] There are notable and important exceptions to this silence that have inspired this article. Frank M. Perry in "When disability and race intersect" comments on the intersection of race and disability, and the "failure of law enforcement to accommodate disability." He continues by saying that "Garner's case is not the first to suffer from these deadly intersections [race and disability] -- the language we've heard echoes numerous other cases in which police and their defenders blame disability for the results of police violence." Melissa McEwan in "Today at an Intersection of Racism and fat Hatred" discusses the how sizeism contributes and intersects with racial oppression.

[15] See also Morris *Targeting Black Masculinity: An Analysis of the (mis)Representation of Black Men in the History of Early American Popular Culture*.

[16] See also Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*.

[17] In the Preface to *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics,* Anthony J. Lemelle notes that the representation of black masculinity has been traditionally limited to two oppositional tropes: the hypersexualized or the effeminate and the sources of these images were sought in the period of slavery and its immediate aftermath. Lemelle asserts that in fact black masculinity is a "major U.S. industry" and that hierarchies are

At the same time, the black man in America has been continuously depicted as morally and intellectually inferior: a masculinity in perpetual self-inflicted crisis, which garners no sympathy in the American mainstream culture of personal responsibility. One aspect of this image that has been overlooked in discussions of black masculinity, however, is the way in which the notions connected with fatness and illness play into representations of black male corpulence. Given that among the 1081 dead in 2014 the majority were men of color, it seems that those black male bodies usually connected with a threat of violence are also, at the same time, vulnerable.[18] Not just as targets of police brutality, but also as fat-shamed and fat-oppressed bearers of another body-stigmatizing feature: fatness. Within the contemporary obesity epidemic discourse—an heir to an earlier discourse of the "war on obesity"—which galvanizes racism and classism under the veil of "care" (Berlant 2011: 102), failure to fit an arbitrary norm of a "healthy size" is used to further stigmatize mostly poor people of color (Biltekoff 2007: 39-43). As a result, fitness and able-bodiedness become markers of class and citizenship, further justifying the discrimination of those who do not meet the prescriptive paradigms of embodiment. It seems that it is the confluence of weakness and threat ascribed to corpulent black male bodies in a culture of personal responsibility that legitimates a lack of concern and a disregard for black lives.

Thus it would seem that critical tools developed by fat studies and disability studies could work to account for the mechanisms of exclusion that render black men and women vulnerable. At the same time, as noted by Ben-Moshe about disability studies, and Amy Erdman Farell about fat studies, both fields have suffered from an inability to see through their own racial and gender biases, though it appears that the former has acknowledged its lacuna much quicker than the latter. This is why in the upcoming sections I will focus on analyzing the ways in which fat studies have been ignoring masculinity and race in their research of fat hatred and sizeism, as well as ways in

results of "fleeting situational hegemonies" (2010: xii). Lemelle's take also enables a less homogenizing approach to black masculinity. Though I find his criticism of the approach chosen in this text informative, I believe that there are ways in which the analysis of the evolution of cultural tropes may help the broader social analysis of individual masculine embodiments and experiences.

[18] During a plenary session titled "Precarity and the Politics of the Nation: Settler States, Borders, Sovereignty" at the NWSA 36th Annual Conference in Milwaukee, November 13, 2015, Lisa Marie Cacho, discussing the case of CeCe McDonald, a trans-woman of color, observed that though black men fail to receive justice they are nevertheless recognized as legitimate victims of crimes, while women of color and trans people do not even merit the illusion of justice. I agree with that statement and argue that it is the constant victimization and criminalization of black men that renders them intelligible to the justice system. At the same time this system refuses to acknowledge other non-male victims; gender is a key element in criminalization, as well as victimization and recognition of those who suffer from the systemic racism present in the US judiciary system.

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which the critical tools of this discipline may be salvaged to discuss the mechanisms of oppression that render black men easy targets of institutional violence.

Though fat studies scholars notice the intersectionality of fat oppression with race and class, rarely do they address these issues in depth, focusing on the – no less important – efforts to destigmatize fatness. Despite their professed investment in diversity, fat studies take up the positioning of bodies that are white, cis gender, female, and middle-class, thus ignoring the various ways in which fatness and the war waged against it affect men, people of color, trans people, and the poor. As such, scholars not identified with the discipline, such as Lauren Berlant, may offer insights that are less tainted with the predominant and often unacknowledged assumptions of whiteness and femininity underpinning a lot of fat studies research, though the researcher's own bias is also visible in her account. In *Cruel Optimism* Berlant introduces the concept of "slow death," which she defines as "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (2010: 95). It would seem then that for black people in the United States vulnerability to violence is just such an experience of existence. This consistent violence leads not just to slow death, but an "accelerated death" justified by the conflation of contradictory representations of black (and in some cases fat) bodies.[19]

1. Gap One: Race, Fatness, and Civilization

Richard Dyer observes that "whiteness . . . colonizes the stereotypical definitions of all social categories other than those of race. To be normal, even to be normally deviant (queer, crippled) is to be white" (1997: 6),[20] which is true for most conceptualizations of fatness in Western history with the exception of studies of "savages" undertaken during the period of colonization concurrent with the rise of modern sciences of the body. In *Obesity: The Biography*, Sander L. Gilman (2010) provides an account of the medical condition of "morbid obesity" from ancient times[21] to the 21st century, focusing on how ancient ideas of medicine were absorbed into Western, predominantly

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[19] It is also dangerous to homogenize individual people into groups, as not all black men will face the same oppression; neither will black women or the poor of any race. Nevertheless, such labels make visible the broader socio-cultural and political mechanisms.

[20] Race is investigated in contemporary disability and mad studies, as evidenced by Ben-Moshe's text or Lukin's "Disability and Blackness." Historically these fields of study were formed by white scholars and activists, while popular imagery of disability as the "worst quality of life" seemed the starkest when paired with the most privileged status of whiteness.

[21] For a discussion of the Ancient peoples becoming white, see Painter's *The History of White People*, specifically pages 1-15.

Anglophone theories of nutrition, particularly in the United States. He outlines how corpulence, which up until the 20th century was coded as masculine (or in historically accurate terms "neutral"), has been divided into good and bad fat, yet the definitions and significations of those categories have been context-dependent and shifting.

Gilman (2010) notes that within the racist discourse of colonization the "savage" body remained lean due to the demands of labor in the uncivilized society. When, however, those bodies were introduced to civilization, they become gluttonous. This in turn was attributed to the weakness of their minds, as opposed to the mind of the civilized men. This idea was so widespread until the 18th century that in fact James Cook was surprised to find obese men in the native population of Tahiti (2010: 160-1). The projection of the "weak-minded savage" travelled into the 19th century representations of Native Americans and was used as an argument against their humanity. The 19th century also generated the first notions of raced fatness as specifically gendered, with the popularization of the discourse inspired by the figure of Saaratije Baartman of the South African Khoikhoi (Hottentot) tribe, whose women were known for their ample posteriors. Since the adipose black body contradicted the then popular image of the "noble savage" black fatness became a sign of degeneration (2010: 164-5). Cyril Percy Donnison, writing in 1930 in the field of tropical medicine, observed that "[a]diposity is rare in the primitive native but is seen occasionally in mild degree in towns and is common in the American Negro. . . . Over-nutrition seems to be associated with the civilized state" (qtd. in Gilman 2010: 168). Therefore, the "corruption" of the black body by civilization was not meant as a proof of the problems of civilization, but of racial inferiority.

Racialized notions of obesity continued with ideas concerning some races being prone to diseases related to nutrition. Gilman notes that in the early 20th century diabetes was called the "Jewish disease" and was attributed to the inferiority of the Jewish race, and specifically to affluent Jewish men who ate and drank excessively. Their illness, however, was connected not with their racial makeup, but with their abominable lifestyle (2010: 86). In a similar vein, later 20th century notions of racialized obesity also focused on lifestyle choices rather than inherent degeneracy, thus connecting obesity to psychoanalytical interpretations of the failure of the family – an approach that had a significant impact on how black fatness was understood. Gilman observed that the perceived collapse of the African American family in the 1960s and 1970s led to

understanding excessive body size not as beautiful or healthy but as a disease process that originated within the family and led to multiple somatic illnesses. The public discussion of the collapse of the 'black family' was the major precursor for the shift within that community toward seeing body size as a marker of illness. (2010: 106)

The meanings ascribed to fatness have changed over time, with some notions becoming forgotten only to resurface under a different guise. It had been common in the popular understanding of raced fatness to assume that in cultures marked by scarcity of resources bigness was coded as power, importance, or beauty. Similar claims were made about historical periods when consumptive diseases lead to a wasting away of bodies, hence a plump body was a sign of health (Gilman 2004: 11) – a notion inconceivable within the logic of the obesity epidemic. Such understandings led to popular explanations as to why women of color were supposedly less affected by body-policing practices addressed to white women.

Doris Witt observes that most discussions of black fat refer to women, whose fatness is naturalized as the embodiment of nurture: both as object of consumption (symbolically and sexually) and provider of food. "African American women have, then, always been 'presences' in discourses about food and U.S. identities, particularly in specular form as the naturalized fat body" (1999: 191). Despite conflicting images of "deviant" femininity often invoked by representations of Saartije Baartman, "black women have been situated as the 'natural' in the domain of eating disorders, there have been no discourses emanating from white culture in recent years that expressly target (and construe as 'unnatural') black female appetite" (1999: 191). It may be argued that because of the intersection of oppressions that affect the representation and discussions of black female bodies, fatness does not function as a separate category but as a part of female blackness itself, especially in the case of the Mammy-inspired stereotype. To some extent, the cultural obsession with the black female body has narrowed the discussion of black fatness to fat black women. In the discursive and critical realms, the fat black man appears sporadically and rarely as a specific object of study, except for instances where his racial otherness is used as a point of comparison for usually unmarked white masculinity.

The predominantly white fat studies scholars tend to homogenize non-whiteness and share a common assumption that fat black bodies are policed less than white ones, while size is a non-stigmatized attribute celebrated in popular culture. Jerry Mosher refers to two male rap groups to justify such a claim:

> African American culture has traditionally been accommodating to fat; as recent rap groups like the Fat Boys and as Sir Mix-A-Lot's hit single "Baby Got Back" (1992) attest, fat does not have to be a source of shame: it can be claimed and asserted as a positive sign of cultural difference. In this light, dieting may be viewed skeptically as an assimilationist attempt to conform to white culture's restrictive corporeal ideals. (Mosher 2001: 176)[22]

Resistance to the "tyranny of slenderness" is seen as active rejection of both the patriarchal demand for thinness and the white racist society's demand of assimilation. Nevertheless, it seems that racial minorities though responding to different manners of body policing are still affected by norms, which are unmarkedly white. Minority communities may also have their own sets of bodily norms that their members internalize, such as the wide hips and prominent buttocks expected of sexy black women mentioned by Mosher above. It is interesting that in order to suggest a lesser disciplining force in African American culture Mosher chose male voices to have authority over the fatness discourse. Though he is right to claim that there are differences in ways in which bodily norms are internalized in various communities, his homogenizing view takes away some of the gender specificity of the various black embodiments and the objectification of black women by black men.

This simplifying rendition of raced fatness, especially in the context of the "obesity epidemic" discourse singling out bodies of color, is not the only available approach.[23] Berlant joins the criticism of the presentation of obesity as a crisis or epidemic, but her claim is that these metaphors allow for a miscasting of what she thinks is a fact of life in a capitalist society. Seeing the obsession with obesity as another iteration of a moral panic,[24] as do other scholars, she reads it in the context

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[22] See Joan Morgan's "From Fly-Girls to Bitches and Hoes," where she points out the misogynistic objectification present in these "celebration" of black beauty in hip hop.

[23] See also LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*.

[24] "Obesity has today triggered a moral panic, much as did AIDS in the 1980s, with real political and social

of contemporary labor organization and unequal distribution of wealth. Though all America is growing fatter, says Berlant, due to poor healthcare it is the working class and the subproletariat (often non-white) whose bodies are most affected. Meanwhile the food industry emaciates both the land and workers (abroad) to produce the food that, once highly processed, will reach the economically disenfranchised consumers (2011: 106-7). She asks:

> How do we think about labor and consumer-related subjectivities in the same moment, since, in my view, one cannot talk about scandals of appetite . . . without talking about the temporality of the workday, the debt cycle, and the consumer practice fantasy. . . . [W]hat does it mean that African Americans and Latinos and Latinas are especially bearing this body burden along with the symbolic negativity long attached to it? (2011: 105)

Farrell adds that especially towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries "[f]atness was a motif used to identify 'inferior bodies'—those of immigrants, former slaves, and women—and it became a telltale sign of a 'superior' person falling from grace. In today's terms, fat, if it had a color, would be black, and if it had a national origin, it would be illegal immigrant, non-U.S., and non-Western" (2011: 8). Yet it seems that fat studies' efforts to reconfigure race in their discussion of fat stigma remain a work in progress, with a handful of scholars addressing the issue without romanticizing the perceived black fat resistance.[25]

2. Gap Two: Gender, Fatness, and Hyper(in)visibility[26]

The other omission of fat studies has been a tacit assumption that fat is gendered female. In "Feminism and the Invisible Fat Man," Kirsten Bell and Darlene McNaughton offer a critique of this

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implications. It is also evident that the impact of being overweight on health is real and our medical responses are determined as much by the developments of medical knowledge and technology as by the social meaning associated with the disease" (Gilman 2010: xii). See also Biltekoff's "The Terror Within" which deconstructs the specter of the obese racially othered American soldier.

[25] Though not free from the romanticizing gesture, Gross's "Phat," offers an interesting intervention, as do LeBesco's *Revolting Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*, and Doris Witt's *Black Hunger*, yet those accounts focus on black women more than men. Lee F. Monaghan in *Men and The War on Obesity: A Sociological Study* discusses the story of Lenny, his only black respondent, and challenges some of the notions connected to black male size, while Biltekoff focuses on fat soldiers (see note 11).

[26] In *The Hyper(in)visible Fat Woman: Weight and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Society*, Gaily introduces the term "hyper(in)visibility" to talk about the way in which female fatness both attracts the attention of onlookers (i.e. is hypervisible), but at the same time renders fat women sexually non-attractive and therefore invisible in the logic of the heteronormative sexual marketplace.

gender bias and trace the origins of that particular shortcoming. They claim that because early fat studies were written from a distinctly second wave feminist perspective that saw patriarchy as the source of fat oppression, there was no space for an account of male fatness in that conceptualization. Early fat studies commentators, including Orbach, Millman, Chernin, Lawrence, Spitzack, Wolfe, MacSween, and Bordo shared a conviction that the disdain for fatness is gendered and is a means of policing women's bodies, while leaving men's bodies alone. In fact, both Orbach and Chernin agreed that men's weight issues were insignificant, and men "reveled in their fatness" (Chernin qtd. in Bell and McNaughton 2007: 110):

> By now it must be evident that the fat man has been spared this burden of negative symbolic meaning [attached to fatness] only because the fat woman has taken it on. . . . It is because the fat man believes the imagery his own culture has created that he can gorge himself with impunity and strut about the pool with his bulging belly, while the fat women are all wearing blouses in the water. (Chernin qtd. in Bell and McNaughton 2007: 110-111)

As a result, most of the academic interest in fatness focused on women's embodiment and hence the signification and stigmatization of fat has been conceptualized with an assumption of a female body. Bell and McNaughton argue that the early fat studies and fat activism have unwittingly contributed to the image of femininity as dieting, body-discipline, and body-shame. What is more, the distinctly second wave origin of fat studies contributed to the disregard of the racial (as well as class and trans) issues discussed in previous section.

Though I agree that this second wave heritage is complicit in determining fat studies' focus on women's bodies, I disagree with Bell and McNaughton's thesis that it is not patriarchy that governs body-policing. In their understanding of the concept, patriarchy refers to a system that privileges what is male over that what is female. A more contemporary view of patriarchy sees it as a network of hierarchies that interweaves identity categories of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity, and ablebodiedness. bell hooks deems this system a "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks 1992: 96), but I would also add heterosexist to this depiction, and keep the diagnosis that it is in fact patriarchy and its cronies that maintain the hierarchization of bodies also according to their weight.

While not disavowing the two critics' rightful objections to mainstream fat studies practice nor rejecting earlier notions that fat is a feminist issue, it is important to see that fat oppression has been the experience of women, yet it did not turn into the present form of severe female body control in Western societies until the 20th century. Like many other social categories, fatness has been constructed as feminine only recently, which does not mean that it has not been successfully naturalized and used as a weapon against women and men performing non-hegemonic masculinities. It is no coincidence that the shift in the gendering of obesity took place at the same time as the early 20th century political and economic emancipation of women. Granting women some economic and political freedom necessitated the emergence of another form of policing: weight-watching.

Most historians of fatness agree that fat had been vilified in white men and women equally till the end of the 19th century, though reduction ad campaigns of that time were already advertised according to specific genders. Nonetheless, around the 1920s there was a split, and discourses of fat entered what Stearns calls the "misogynist phase" that lasted till the 1960s (Bell and McNaughton 2007: 114). According to Gilman, by the 1940s the obese patient became a woman, whereas men's obesity was mentioned only in passing (2010: 113). Gilman quotes Harold Dearden's observation from 1927 to illustrate the shift and its quick naturalization: "To a man the affliction [fatness] is grave enough, but to a woman!—who save a woman shall attempt to measure its really dread significance" (2010: 5). Hence, the power of the misogynist phase in fat history combined with the feminist backlash launched by Orbach et al. solidified fatness as a woman's issue. As a result, even examinations that analyze male fatness necessarily address the issue of emasculation, effeminization, and infantilization by fat. Lee F. Monaghan summarizes this, saying that

> fat oppression [is] a real, emergent process that is not tied to female bodies though it is aimed at bodies that are positioned as feminine (disgusting, despised, dependent, passive, unhealthy) regardless of their biological sex. Within this field of masculine domination—which is potentially injurious not only for particular women but also men whose bodies supposedly symbolize 'failed' manhood—it is hardly surprising that fat oppression is often trivialized. (2008: 6)

Still, it is possible to see male fatness in positive terms. Lee Monaghan and Helen Malson show on the basis of their sociological research that for some men fatness is indeed connected to power and sexual appeal. This is especially true for their black respondent: "In these extracts being a 'big guy' is construed as masculine, connoting strength, an ability to 'look after yourself,' and heterosexual desirability. The 'big guy' is constituted as 'manly' such that 'bigness' works here to enhance hegemonic masculinity" (2013: 308). Likewise Mosher explains how fatness comes to signify power: "self-proclaimed kings of their castles whose layers of fat buffered them from the world and assimilated social turmoil into the more visual and understandable realm of individual corporeal deviance" (2001: 168).

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Yet Monaghan and Malson observe that despite the symbolic power and importance implied in the occupation of more space, "[t]his construction of bigness as masculine is, however, highly subject and context specific. Such specificity is evidenced when, for example, the discursive regulation of gendered and racialized subjects interface to produce the 'big' bodies of black and/or working-class men as problematically too masculine" (2013: 308). Bigness as power is a notion dating back to the image of adiposity as success. Fatness as success was later associated with images of early capitalist exploiters, who fattened on others' work and suffering. Their corpulence begun to represent undeserved power, status, and greed. To some extent it is that image of the fat male body that seems to trigger the extreme hate fat people receive today, yet paradoxically the hate is now often projected on the poor who are also seen as undeserving and greedy. Yet the corpulence-as-power interpretation of male fatness is possible due to the images of fatness stemming from the pre-misogynist period in fat history, where oftentimes "good fat" was associated with power and affluence. Thus, Gilman observes: "[w]e all sense that our society makes the obese or fat or corpulent body more visible because it does not fit. Yet this visibility is seen to have multiple, often conflicting meanings" (2004: 13).

Despite a certain protective layer with regards to fat masculinity, there exits an ever-moving arbitrary line that differentiates between the potentially "good fat" of power and social status, and "morbid obesity" perceived as "bad fat." This "bad fat" has been associated not only with poor health, but also with negative mental traits such as unchecked appetite, laziness, inertia, stupidity, and non-productivity (Gilman 2010: 23, 35-6). Both the "war on obesity" and "obesity epidemic" discourses latched on to the connection of fatness with ill health and non-productivity seen as its

logical consequence. If in Berlant's model productivity is the measure of citizen's worth then seeing lack of productivity as inherent to fatness justifies the fat shaming discourses. Fat people are understood as useless in the capitalist society organized around production, thus fat contributes to a loss of citizenship defined as (re)productivity in a society.

The effects of fatness on masculinity are numerous, yet in the post-mysogynist era of fat-shaming these effects signify an othering, a non-hegemonic status. In men as in women, fatness represents "extraordinary consumption of everything, including space" (Gilman 2004: 29). By the second half of the 20th century fatness has began to signify a loss of status and power, as fat men in 1970s representations connote both averageness and crisis of hegemonic masculinity (Mosher 2001: 170-1). Fatness also signifies in terms of sexuality. According to Gilman "[h]ypersexuality [was] a quality ascribed to the premodern fat boy, but repressed in modernity" (2010: 24). The sexuality of fat men has been repressed to such an extent that in most modern renditions of fat masculinity a fat man is either infantilized or rendered asexual.[27] He is represented as less of a man according to a phallocentric patriarchy where the measure of masculinity corresponds to the length of a penis and the ability "to stick it" in consenting owners of various orifices. Fat men, whose penises are proportionally smaller, seem less manly (Mosher 2001: 170). Finally, the intense coding of fatness as feminine, also due to the collateral of the early fat activism of Orbach et al., contributed to the image of fat men as worse at performing masculinity.

3. Black Masculinity vs Fat Studies

Though complicit in perpetuating its unacknowledged racist and gender biased assumptions, fat studies methods have been applied with some success in analyses of the bodies of men and (to an extent) non-white women, which has neither romanticized nor homogenized those groups. Yet, even if fat studies have acknowledged their biases, the question remains if this critical lens can be applied to the analysis of black male fatness.

If the archive determines the outcome of a query, then what happens if the very tool designed for the analysis is unwittingly entrenched in racism? After all, most of the scholars mentioned so far

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[27] I am using the term "asexual" to denote a person perceived as not having or inspiring in others any sexual desire. I am aware that the term is also a label for a sexual identity on the LGBTQA+ spectrum, but it is not a meaning that I am deploying here. Therefore, my observations about asexuality are not meant as comments on actual people identifying as As.

wrote from a position of relative privilege: either as white men, or as white women writing within a women-empowering discipline of fat studies. For them blackness and masculinity have worked as the other that enables a discussion of a naturalized category. Thus far in the discipline, fat blackness rendered as exotic has been used to illustrate how meanings of fatness have been established and how fatness in the US context has gradually come to signify non-whiteness or non-citizenship (Biltekoff 2007: 40). Fat blackness as deviancy of body or mind has been used to denaturalize the connection of diet and virtue. Black fatness as scary bigness has been used to fortify the myth of slenderness as normativity. Finally, though fat studies have been invested in exposing the "obesity epidemic" discourse for its racism and classism partly due to the discipline's institutional ties with academia, those most affected by that discourse have rarely been represented. In a sense, fat studies is a paradox. As a discipline stemming from a social justice movement and feminist perspectives, it aims to challenge racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of oppression. At the same time, as described above, its heritage as well as location within academia manages to perpetuate racism or disregard for racial and gender diversity. Nevertheless, fat studies methods seem to deconstruct the ways in which a certain image economy is invoked to justify the violence against black men in the United States. In the following sections I will attempt to show what fat studies methods may yield when used to analyze misrepresentations of fatness which fuel the already racist misrepresentation of black men.

4. Black Masculinity in the US

In order to examine how the category of fatness informs the category of black masculinity, it is crucial to understand the contemporary image of black masculinity in American society. There are three domains of (mis)representation: sexuality, violence, and productivity. In Marlon Riggs's documentary, *Ethnic Notions* (1986), Barbara Christian observes that cultural representations of blackness have shaped not just the contemporary perceptions of blackness, but also public policy and to some extent the ways black Americans see themselves. The film presents an analysis of the formation and evolution of racial stereotypes of black Americans, and comments on the way political events and changes found reflection in those tropes. *Ethnic Notions* begins with the account of the rise of the Sambo character in the 1820s and continues with the origins of other racial types, including the Mammy, the Pickaninny and the Coon. It shows how the changes in the political system and the abolition of slavery reshaped the antebellum figure of the docile and happy black slave into the post-Civil War dangerous, cunning and even savage Coon and animal-

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like Pickaninnies. In a similar vein, Susan Booker Morris (2011) presents the evolution of the image of black masculinity in the 19th century, showing the transition from that of docility to that of threat. She reiterates Christian's observations that the abolition of slavery in the white supremacist society required a recasting of the figure of the black man to justify the suppression of his newly-gained (only in theory) political and economic agency.

Morris writes that the pre-Civil War account of black masculinity depicted black men "as lazy and childlike, docile and happy, in the role of servant. These misrepresentations served to disseminate the view of black men as well suited to slavery" (2011: 77). In time this figure of the Sambo also attained negative characteristics. He began to be perceived as gluttonous, lazy, and stupid. Farell notes that fatness especially in connection with stupidity were another means of perpetuating racial oppression, as they legitimized the degradation and humiliation of black men. She also suggest that these images, which come from vaudeville or minstrel productions, continue in contemporary film and television productions. She adds that "These controlling images link blackness, fatness, and the 'uncivilized body,' making it easy for (white) viewers to read these characters as silly and inferior" (Farell 2011: 75).

But the docile former slave is by no means the only figure to rise from the 19th century racists representations. After the Civil War black men were reimagined as "brutes harboring a ready anger that threatened at any minute to erupt as violence against whites" (Morris 2011: 79). The assumption of a pending or brewing black vengeance became the justification for the preemptive violence inflicted on black men. However, the violent black male was not the only figure meant to legitimize violence towards black people. Patricia Turner observes that the representations of black children in constant peril also served that purpose: "there was a need to imagine black children as animal-like, as savage. If you do that . . . then it's much easier to rationalize and justify the threat that's embodied in having an alligator pursuing the child" (*Ethnic Notions*, 1986). Nursery rhymes such as "Ten Little N***" highlighted the perishability of black lives and the humor thereof.

The other component that sealed the image of threatening black masculinity was the specter of a violent and sexual threat against white women projected onto free black man. This image stemmed from a previous misrepresentation of black men as uncivilized, where civilization meant whiteness (see below). Lack of civilization was connected with not being in control of one's own urges

(gastronomic or sexual), which lead to a depiction of black men as obsessed with consumption. It is no coincidence that the majority of depictions of black people in the 19th and 20th centuries, except for those associated with entertainment, came in the form of food packaging. Syrup, flour, tobacco, and black beans were all labeled with pictures of a smiling black faces. This was a nostalgic throwback to the "happy slave" paradigm, docile and content to serve a white family, devoted to procuring food.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins argues that these images conflated appetite for food with other appetites, also sexual (2011: 55). As a result, the smiling Sambo offering beans became the sexually threatening non-human whose favorite treat was virginal white women. The wide white smile that in earlier depictions symbolized docility and happiness became the gaping mouth that shall consume all. Tompkins observes that at the center of late 19th century texts was "the constitution, protection, and reproduction of the chaste, white body; at the center of the project [was] the erotic and political life of the mouth. . . . The mouth, a socially visible opening in the body, was one site where the threat of racial inversion and bodily dissolution lingered" (2011: 55). In a culture preoccupied with both the disciplining of white female sexuality and enslavement of black men, the perpetuation of the figure of the black sexual predator was a useful ideological device.

Inspired by treaties by Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglas concerning lynchings as means of political control, Angela Davis suggested that the "justification" for these brutal public executions originated in the myth of the black rapist. The figure of the black sexual predator, combined with the widespread practice of white men raping black women, became "instrument[s] of racist terror" in the South (1983: 185) that fixed the characteristic of uncontrolled sexuality onto the racist stereotype of blackness. Black men represented the unmanly too-muchness with their uncontrollable lust and violence, while black women depicted as seductresses of white men were seen as having uncontrollable sexual appetite that mandated continuous and unacknowledged rape.

These hypersexual figures enabled Southern men, who experienced a perceived loss of status as a result of the shift in social and racial relations after the end of slavery and a shift of the masculine ideal from the Victorian gentleman to a tougher manhood, to vent their frustration by sexually abusing black women or physically abusing black men. Bederman notes that "by constructing black

men as natural rapists and by resolutely and bravely avenging the (alleged) rape of pure white womanhood, Southern white men were able to depict themselves as ideal men: 'patriarchs, avengers, righteous protectors'" (Bederman 2011: 47). This construction enabled the justification of lynching.

As mentioned above, the ideology that created the myth of the black rapist relied on the gendered assumption that men are driven by their sexual desires and it is their civilization (i.e. race) that enables them to control those desires. By positing black men as savages, it was argued that they cannot control their desires and thus need to rape. Another implication was that since blackness was coded as ugly, both for men and women, the hypersexual black man was more likely to go after a white woman, who at that point was (and to some extent now still is) the ideal of beauty. Though created at the end of the 19th century, like other racial tropes, this myth has been perpetuated and affects today's racial dynamics. Davis observes that the myth was redeployed in the 1970s white feminist struggle against rape culture, thus solidifying the connection between black masculinity and sexual assault. The strength of that myth may also be illustrated with the coverage of the 1997 Nushawn Williams case. Williams was convicted as a sex offender for knowingly infecting his sexual partners with HIV. Though less explicit in invoking the black rapist myth, some media outlets even admitted that the reason why the case met with such interest was the fact that the Williams is black and his sexual partners were white (Neale 2006: 3-5).

It is important to note for the further discussion of the value of black life that as long as black people were slaves and considered valuable property they rarely or never fell prey to lynchings (Davis 1983: 183). Lynching as a cultural practice consolidated the racist belief in the worthlessness of black lives that haunts American society till now. Bederman also noted that the contemporary press coverage of lynchings both in the North and South presented the victims as weak, "savage, unmanly cowards who deserved their fates" (1995: 51). In fact the journalists established their own masculinity in opposition to both the black lynch victim and the lynch mob (1995: 51).

These images of threatening, hypersexualized, yet lazy and intellectually inferior black men circulate in contemporary racial imagery and fuel not only white prejudice but also, as diagnosed by hooks, black attitudes. She concludes her discussion of representations of masculinity thus:

> Unfortunately, black people have not systematically challenged these narrow visions, insisting on a more accurate 'reading' of black male reality. Acting in complicity with the *status quo,* many black people have passively absorbed narrow representations of black masculinity, perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and offered one-dimensional accounts. Contemporary black men have been shaped by these representations. (hooks 1992: 89)

hooks's accurate diagnosis of the present condition explains the ways in which the stigmas of blackness and fatness overlap to further oppress the already disenfranchised population. It would, however, be inaccurate to argue that nothing has changed in popular representations of blackness since the 1990s.

Though there has been little change in terms of the systemic and institutional discrimination of minorities in the United States, there has been more diversity in terms of representation. Nevertheless, authors such as Mark Anthony Neal argue that in the 21st century the American black male is in crisis and should reexamine his investments.[28] Neal shifts the focus from the hip hop culture thug, who was often central to modern discussions of black male crisis, to the member of the black middle class (2006: 3). Prior to Neal's reworking of the black masculine types, Matthew Henry, in an analysis of the 2000 remake of the blaxploitation film *Shaft*, mentioned other tropes of black masculine representation: the criminal, gangster, and pimp. Henry argues that the 1970s culture created a new model of black masculinity that hip hop culture invoked in the 1990s, but whereas the original blaxploitation hero had elements of political consciousness, the revamped one was a retrograde apolitical creation (2004: 121). The content of the tropes and their variety might have changed. It seems, however, that those racist tropes did not vanish and continue to be invoked. They often masquerade as something else, as may be illustrated in the raced discourse on of the obesity epidemic, which tends to target minorities without explicitly addressing race.

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[28] I agree with Bederman (1995), Kimmel (1994), and Carroll (2011) who posit that masculinity is never in crisis, as a crisis would suggest that masculinity or manhood is a fixed, essential category, thus I am not convinced by Neal's narrative of a black male crisis. Nevertheless, his account of modern black masculinity is an important voice in the discussion of black masculinities. Also see footnote 23.

5. Black Fatness and Fat Blackness

Though both blackness and fatness are internally contradictory and overdetermined by a racist and sizeist culture, they are also complicit in maintaining the hierarchies which reinforce them. For example, the predominantly white fat studies may see black fatness as somehow more natural. Alternatively, fat studies may seek proof of othering practices of fatness in their relation to race, thus exoticizing the fatness of the other. A passage in Monaghan's *Men and The War on Obesity* does just that:

> Crucially, if sizeism is also comparable to racism (Cooper 1998) then it is telling that race has been understood historically as a hierarchy of bodies and the hierarchical ordering of masculinities. As discussed by Connell (2000: 61) in relation to imperialism, this positioning has in some circumstances resulted in the 'feminization' of colonized men and 'in many parts of the colonized world indigenous men were called 'boys.' (2008: 23)

But is it possible to maintain the comparison between sizeism and racism suggested by Cooper? It seems that assuming a similarity of experience and projecting the platonic ideal of sizeist oppression indiscriminately of racial embodiment further alienates groups that should be included in the anti-oppression discourse. Thus an ideal analysis would avoid pitching racial markedness as an additional variable, a separate category, but engage in an intersectional approach.

In his account of masculinities Todd Reeser insists that "race should not be a later addition to the study of masculinity . . . but should in some way be part of any study of gender. Gender and race are so often connected and dependent on each other that it is difficult to talk about one without talking about the other" (2010: 144). Thinking along similar lines, Farell points out that

> many scholars have observed that fat denigration seems to have had less hold among people of color in both the United States and England, usually citing either the existence of more pressing issues of survival or simply a different standard of beauty . . . a greater tolerance for corpulence has something to do with the racial identities and experiences of people of color. What has not been explored, however, is the way that the denigration of fatness is intricately linked

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to the racial identities and experiences of white people in the United States and England. . . . Nineteenth-century thinking about the 'natural' evolution of human races into stages of civilization meant not just the complex articulation of racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies, but also the construction of certain types of body types as superior. (2011: 59-60)

I suggest the need for examining the similarities and differences in meanings assigned to bodies perceived as black or fat and ways in which they inform or contradict one another. This approach will show also where the two overlap, but will not be an attempt to use one category as a metaphor for the other.

One major difference between racist accounts of blackness and sizeist accounts of fatness is that despite current investigations into the causes of obesity, centered on either genetics or infections (Gilman 2010: 114-20),[29] and despite the "obesity epidemic's" metaphor of fat people as helpless victims (Berlant 2011: 95-7),[30] the popular assumption is that one becomes fat[31] but one is born black. As such, the stigmatization of fatness results from an assumption that a persons' fat is a direct result of a mental or behavioral flaw, which manifests itself on the body. By contrast, race which is seen as inherent,[32] suggests to the bigoted that a racially marked person is already located in a hierarchy of bodies and shares the hodgepodge of traits the racists society ascribes to that particular pigmentation. Fatness is seen as individual failure in a culture that prizes personal responsibility, whereas race is a social position that precludes agency. Surprisingly both locate a body in a hierarchy that justifies discrimination and both function as figures of excess, which within

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[29] When discussing depression and the obesity epidemic, Berlant notes that both share an element of genetic explanation, which goes against corporate and personal responsibility accounts, and renders causality moot. While the genetic explanation is an attempt to deshame stigmatized people, it obscures other impersonal factors, contributing to obesity such as poor life quality (2011: 110).

[30] See also Monaghan and his discussion of Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*: "Susan Sontag describes the harmful meanings our culture has imposed on tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS. She points out that we often associate certain diseases with specific types of personalities, blaming the victims and shaming them into silence. In a similar vein, I would argue that we have imposed equally dangerous cultural meanings onto fatness. Fatness in the United States 'means' excess of desire, of bodily urges not controlled, of immoral, lazy, and sinful habits. Much more than a neutral description of a type of flesh, fatness carries with it such stigma that it propels us to take drastic, extreme measures to remove it" (2008: 10).

[31] Nathaniel C. Pyle and Michael I. Loewy observe that within homophobic and sizeist societies fatness (like queerness) is perceived as a choice and that discrimination of it is justified by the logic: if people tried hard enough they could change in order to conform to the norm (2009: 144).

[32] The inherence of race is a perniciously resistant presumption that survived its complete disproval in contemporary scholarship.

patriarchal logic is a failure of normative masculinity seen as white (Gilman 2004: 28), ablebodied and athletic.

When considering fat black masculinity and excess, perceptions of sexuality seem a good starting point. The too-muchness of blackness leads to the image of hypersexuality, while the too-muchness of fatness may code effeminacy, emasculation, and asexuality. Todd W. Reeser observes that due to the image of a black man as well-endowed, in a phallocentric society

> he might be taken to be excessively violent or excessively sexual. . . . The African-American man is so gendered or so sexualized, or so the racist logic goes, that he is unable to control himself since he wants to have sex, to break into houses, or to rape women. The man of excess, then, can be just as subject to the rule of hegemonic masculinity as the effeminate man, and consequently, the construct of non-excessive or moderate applies to the white man or to another racialized group seen as ideal by contrast . . . the implied contrasting man or group of men or people – the moderate one or the one in control – is justified in attempting to control black men, whether by simply watching him closely on the street or by incarcerating him where possible. (2010: 149-50)

Reeser adds that the perceived excess of masculinity is transformed into a lack, and in the case of African American masculinity, the lack in question is that of control over sexuality and violence (2010: 150). The white man is therefore positioned as the one in control, but also charged with the necessity to violently curb black hypersexuality. This, in turn, done symbolically through various practices of institutionalized and systemic racism, is a means of emasculating black men[33] (contrary to the effeminating effect achieved through the earlier image of the docile slave, who was infantilized and rendered asexual).

Fatness also challenges the perception of virility, but the starting point is that an excess of fat signals a lack of sexuality. I have mentioned above that in a sizeist culture the smallness of the penis ascribed to fat men takes away their manliness. When discussing representations of fat

[33] A poignant discussion of black masculinity may be found in Philip Brian Harper's *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*, who rejects the discourse of crisis to examine and challenge the notions of authenticity and manhood conveyed in the label "black."

masculinity in the post-second wave 1970s television, Mosher observes that the "fat and flaccid male body proved to be a handy visual metaphor for the impotence of patriarchal power and masculinity under siege: large and vulnerable, the fat male body became a recognizable symbol of insecure male performativity, its phallic potential buried under folds of flesh." He adds that there was an effort to suppress fat sexuality for fear of grotesqueness (2001: 170-171).[34]

What happens then to black hypervirility when it meets fat flaccidity? According to the almost color-blind account offered by Mosher, for African American characters "[f]at provided a convenient, visible 'softening.' . . . In this infantilizing strategy, the fat body served to contain excessive orality, implying that such characters were not threatening but rather were 'all mouth,' and thus incapable of action" (2001: 175).[35] As was suggested in the discussion of racial imagery on food packaging above, this is not the first time blackness is reduced to orality. Though Mosher does not mention such a possibility, it seems that the softening of the characters was meant as a counter-image to the athletic hypervirile and violent protagonists of blaxploitation cinema popular at that time (which in later decades evolved into the black action hero and the gangster). Mosher argues that in the gradually fattening society fat black men are a figure of contradiction, both as representations of the average (less policed and self-conscious) body, and a figure of deviancy if put in any potentially risky context.

Monaghan and Malson provide a different view of embodied fat black masculinity on the basis of one of their study's interviewees, Lenny, who by his own admission considered himself both "capable and sexually desirable." Yet, as Monaghan and Malson note, Lenny's reading of himself changed according to the context in which he found himself. The sexually confident bigness had to be dialed down in the company of predominately white middle-class women:

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[34] Instead fat continued to be a source of humor (a trope not discussed here due to limitations of space). Fat sex also runs the risk of seeming deviant as noted by both Neda Ulaby in her account of the Arbuckle Scandal, and Pyle and Loewy in their account of fatness and homosexual desire.

[35] Mosher notes that these characters were accused of being a rehash of minstrel characters. Kyla Wazana Tompkins offers an interesting corollary to this analysis, when she observes that "the common representation of African Americans as eaters as well as food to be eaten opens up ambivalent possibilities inherent in a civic order sutured by Civil War and torn between segregation and limited political suffrage for blacks. Thus if black appetite and black bodies evoke the comedy of the eater being eaten, they cannot fail also to represent the black subject taking, as it were, a bite of the world" (2012: 172).

Lenny, as the marginalized student rather than happy husband, presents a distinctly negative construction of the 'big black guy.' In this account, *his bigness still signifies masculinity but its articulation as hypermasculine (in terms of racist 'gangster' stereotypes and other prejudices) 'spoils' his identity, positioning him as threatening and possibly criminal.* His racialized size is made to signify a very negatively construed (stigmatized rather than valued) masculinity. (2013: 308, emphasis added)

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Lenny's example illustrates the fact that the emasculating effect postulated by Mosher is not as straightforward when black fat masculinity is discussed. Bell and McNaughton recall Joan Gross's point that in hip hop culture fatness is considered hypermasculine. Gross argues that "in this definition masculinity is control – being in control of other men, women, and financial resources. Through brute force, which is closely correlated with body size, men gain respect and access to wealth. Literally and figuratively they can throw their weight around. Fatness is not viewed as a sign of lack of control but as a means by which control is attained" (qtd. in Bell and McNaughton 2007: 125)

Importantly, both Gross and Monaghan show that within black culture, power, virility, and size are supposedly connected with the ability to exert violence. Intimidation and domination are coded as masculine. This leads to the second dimension of fat black masculinity, i.e. its relation to threat. Within the racist logic that sponsored the creation of the myth of the black sexual predator, and later the black gangster,[36] preemptive violence towards black men was justified by the threat they supposedly posed. Yet the ability to pose a threat is part of the positively-coded notions of black fatness. Hence the bigger the black man the scarier he seems to the racist onlooker. Confirmation of this stereotype can be found in justifications of the excessive use of violence by police officers involved in the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. The size of the men was cited to legitimate the excessive force used.

Thus the racist trope of the scary big black man is extended to include the notion that the fatter the black alleged "assailant" is, the more force the police should use. This questionable logic was used

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[36] This is not to say that black men have had no control over their representation and may have purposefully or inadvertently contributed to the perpetuation of some characteristics associated with black masculinity. See Harper's *Are We Not Men?*

to explain why Garner had to be detained by six officers, and why Darren Wilson, Michael Brown's killer, had to shoot him. Interestingly, the moment it turned out, as in the case of Eric Garner, that the victim was ill and therefore not a threat, the other prejudices connected with fatness kicked in. The logic seemed to shift from "the person is black and big, so he must be dangerous" to "fat (implicitly poor and lazy) people are responsible for their failing health that contributes to their earlier deaths." Just as in the case of Lenny, who felt sexy in his domestic, predominately black context, the unarmed big black man is powerful and important only in the context of his community. The moment he is faced with the racially biased law enforcement, his bigness is deployed as yet another justification for violence and surveillance. This time there is no masculine dividend involved.

This brings the discussion to its final point connecting race, fatness, and disability.[37] In the sections above I attempted to discuss the commonalities and contradictions of meanings ascribed to black and fat male bodies. In conclusion, I want to suggest how the social hierarchy and institutionalized racism contribute to the further marginalization of poor people of color. Berlant observes that poverty malnourishes both the emaciated and the fat, and, as such, contributes to the slow death of these populations (2011: 107). She opposes the idea inherent to fat activism that being fat is unquestionably a position of resistance (2011: 107). Fat studies and fat activism have a positive potential that may eventually disturb and denaturalize the notion that fatness equals ugliness, laziness, illness or desexualization. Fat studies may help challenge the medicalization of fatness that so often translates into systemic discrimination of those diagnosed as obese. Body positivity movements may challenge beauty norms. At the same time, fat studies have so far done little to prevent institutional and interpersonal physical and psychological violence that affects the lives of

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[37] Fatness is often conceived as a disability (see Perry 2014). There is still little research done specifically on disability and fatness other than fatness as disability. Some scholars, including Gilman, concur that "morbid obesity" is a disability as it fits the description of this condition: people with morbid disability "continually encounter various forms of discrimination, including outright intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers, overprotective rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation, and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs, or other opportunities'' (2004: 14-5). What I am trying to show in the present article is that it is not enough to extend a category to include another type of body (fatness to include black fatness or male fatness), but to examine the criteria that lead to the ignorance of that body in the first place (blackness as the permanent other in white academia). What is more, though both disability studies and fat studies have overlapping interests and represent people who suffer from both sizeism and ableism, it would be a mistake to consider the two disciplines as variants of each other. Though they are both invested in challenging the notions of norms, they target specific iterations of normativity and prescription. Fat people might be discriminated because of their weight, though the images invoked may not relate to illness.

those discriminated in a racist or sizeist society.[38] It seems that because fat studies have operated under the assumption that racial difference is just another factor of oppression, they have offered little fine-tuned analysis of fat black bodies.

Though the value of anti-assimilationist moves allowing an African American woman to reject white patriarchal forms of beauty is unquestionable, it still does not enable her to overcome institutional and social obstacles created by a sexist, racist, sizeist and ableist society. The fact that a fat black man might be considered attractive within a subculture does not mean that he will be less harassed by law enforcement. Race, size or ability should not function as metaphors for one another, but should inform the intersectional study of each embodiment. I have attempted to indicate ways in which the fatness of the black male body may simultaneously connote power, status, and vulnerability to violence. It may be seen as capable of inflicting violence, especially sexual violence, while at the same time provoking violence towards itself. Consequently, some combinations of intersectional oppression do not just put people on a trajectory of a "slow death"; the conflation of racist, sizeist, ableist, and classists assumptions shifts them to a trajectory of "accelerated death," as exemplified by the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and countless others continuously added to the *Killed by Police* list.

Note

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[38] It should be noted that fat activism done mostly online seems more progressive and inclusive than scholarship, but this might be due to the difference in the paces at which each medium publishes.

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A Possible Cripistemology of the Queer:
Modes of Dismantling "Ability" and "Heterosexuality" in Transgender Autobiographies

Oindri Roy
The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad
Amith Kumar P.V.
The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

Based on A. Revathi's The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life-Story *(2010) and Kate Bornstein's* A Queer and Pleasant Danger *(2012), the paper explores the possible connections that arise between the two autobiographies while articulating the similar praxis of living beyond gender norms, though in very distinctive cultural contexts. The comparability of the texts provides grounds to construe "queer" and "disability" in the transsexual experiences as symptomatic but not solely based on the common negation of "compulsory heterosexuality" and "compulsory able-bodiedness" as imposed social constructs. The process of "transgendering" (Ekins and King 34) as initiated by the sense of disability/queerness of being in the "wrong body" is also explored through the study of the narratives. Both Revathi and Bornstein are affected by an innate desire for a "feminine" form of existence as well as the social injunction of following the dictates of "normality" and "ableism" vis-à-vis the gender attributed at birth. The surgical and hormonal transformations do not lead to a psychosocial "rectification" and may culminate in a dysfunctional womanhood. Revathi's unrequited love and failed marriage and Bornstein's inability to "qualify" as a lesbian will be read as instances of how the inadequacy of social structures is misconstrued as a "gender-impairment" in the individual and instituted as "hijra" or "butch."*

Keywords: transgender, hijra, disability, autobiography

Normalcy, Resistance and Theories of Queer and Crip: An Introduction

Disability Studies, which began to gain theoretical relevance in the beginning of the last decade, has also contributed to a common epistemological interface with Queer Studies. In fact, the discrete conceptions of "disability" and "queer" have provided similar grounds for deconstructing structures of normalcy and an understanding which moves beyond existent categories of identification. The exploration of the varied trajectories of "difference" in the context of gender and dis/ability also pertains to the shared relevance of interconnectivity of the societal and the somatic. Research in the field has not only focused on the additive effects of dis/ablism and

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non/heterosexual existences but it has also tried to use the theoretical model of one to interpret the other. Hence, Dan Goodley (2011) refers to the cultural model[39] of Disability Studies as one of "particular knowledge positions (Goodley 2001) to address and refute disablism (Thomas 2001)" (10) with the propensity to "connect analyses of disability studies with transformative ideas from feminism, queer and critical race studies" (14). Robert McRuer's works are of considerable significance in indicating how analyses in each of the two field anticipate one another. The seminal argument of his works is that "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness: that in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness and vice-versa"(2) . On such grounds, he initiates the functionality of Crip Theory based on Queer Theory as a critique of the neoliberal capitalism in the social order that demonizes/denigrates non-heterosexual and disabled existences, having produced able-bodied heterosexuality as the natural order of things. The functionality of Crip theory may be explained as similar to the evolution of queer "oppositionally and relationally but not necessarily substantively, not as a positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing, but as the resistance to the norm" (Halperin 66 qtd. in McRuer 31).

The centrality of resistance in both queer and crip invites us to investigate the phenomenology of the same. As Ellen Samuels explains, the resistance is only subsequent to the dominance of the constructed normalcy over the individual: "Once embedded in the cultural realm, fantasies of identification stubbornly persist, despite being disproved, undermined or contradicted and this persistence provokes resistance and disidentifications from subjects attempting to escape the fantasy's totalizing imposition of identity" (3). This implies that prior to the resistance, there are the existences that cannot be accommodated within "fantasies" of identification which results in resistance. These existences may be termed "disidentification" and it is also necessary to explore these "attempts" at "disidentification" to find out whether they can be comprehended as more than resistance.

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[39] The cultural model of Disability studies is explained in reference to Garland-Thomson (2) "who posits that disability is a cultural trope and historical community that raises questions about the materiality of the body and social formulations that are used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences. Affiliated scholars reject a firm distinction between impairment and disability because they view biology and culture as impinging upon each other" (Goodley 14).

Such a study derives from the distance/differences between the spaces of lived experiences and theoretical paradigms. The questionability of theory as an abstraction of lived experience is one of the major contestations in both the epistemological spaces, given the primacy of the ontological in areas such as Queer Studies, Transgender Studies or Disability Studies. Referring to disability, Sumi Collagen (2004) has already anticipated the necessity to render this counteraction to normalcy in a way that is sensitive to the reality of existence observing that "whereas flexible categories may be an antidote to the pressures and techniques of normalization, our imagining of these categories should not become too malleable and disengaged from the real bodies and lived experiences of these individuals with these bodies" (46). The debate intensifies in the context of Queer Theory[40], as scholars such as Vivian K. Namaste have misgivings about how queer theory accommodates the "everyday life for transgender people" indicating that while "critics in queer theory appeal to the social location of cultural texts, they offer little analysis of how social relations are inscribed within, and virtually no examinations of the institutions in which these texts are produced, nor those in which they emerge and circulate" (20). Hence, the existent discourses of Queer and Crip are contested or questioned about the modes of subverting normalcy.

This study is inspired by such contentions but seeks to chart out its own trajectory which is based on autobiographical narratives about transsexuality vis-à-vis the relational spaces of the queer theories and disability studies. The aim is to explore whether the "queer" and "disability" in the

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[40] Certain Transgender Studies scholars have contended that the prevalent notion of gender performativity often compromises the ground realities of the drag and the transsexual. Jay Prosser argues that transsexuality in queer discourses, is thus construed without referring to the "desire" of the person to be differently gendered, the "constitutive significance of somatic feeling" (271). It is further added that the "displacement of sex from material interiority into fantasized surface" omits the transgendered expression of transforming the sexuality, emphasizing its "un-phantasmatic status" (271). Also, Vivian K. Namaste disagrees with the theorizations of performativity by Butler and Sedgwick among others, that directly and indirectly derive from transsexuality but are not beneficial to the transsexual visibility. Butler's proposition that "the drag exposes the imaginary relations of compulsory heterosexuality." As Namaste points out, although Butler locates these spaces in relation to heterosexual hegemony, she refuses to examine this territory's own complicated relation to gender and gender performance." (10). Eve Sedgwick's construing a relation between "drag performance and homoerotic identity formation and display", Namaste argues, disavows drag subject position. It also makes "sexuality and gender work against each other, as systematically aligned" entailing that "[d]rag is about performance, while the homoerotic is about identity" (11). She, hence, infers that "queer theory begins it analysis with little thought to individuals designated as objects of study" and "it belies a kind of academic inquiry that is contemptuous and dismissive of the social world" (16). While Prosser questions the conceptualization of performativity that dissociates sexuality from physicality, Namaste finds the means of conceptualization inadequate. This, therefore, supports the fact that there is a certain dissatisfaction with the discourses of Queer Theory in relation to Transgender Studies.

non-heteronormative[41] experiences can be symptomatic of but not solely based on the common negation of "compulsory heterosexuality" and "compulsory able-bodiedness" (2) as imposed social constructs. This inquiry has already been initiated by McRuer. Here such exploration will contribute towards creating a relational space between Transgender Studies - which includes discourses on most gender-based marginalized identity-positions - and Disability Studies. The possibility of the alliance will also be based on sexuality as a mode of self-expression. The study will chart a trajectory that does not rely on the appeal of the unproblematic idea of resistance but takes into account several situational complexities, deconstructing not only the binaries of the normative/non-normative or ablism/disablism, but also possible newer binaries like that of normalcy/resistance.

Towards a Comparative Episteme for Transgender Autobiographies

Narratives about transgender experiences are increasing becoming available; examples include Rose Treiman's *Sacred Country* (1992), David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* (2000), Eugenides' *The Middlesex* (2002), and a number of autobiographical accounts like Jan Morris's *Conundrum* ([1974] 2011) Kate Bornstein's *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* (2012). In the Indian context, to which this paper will also refer to, the hitherto stigmatized sexual identities are increasing gaining visibility, for example, in such novels as *The Pregnant King* (2008) by Devdutt Pattanaik, and autobiographical writings like *The Man Who Would be Queen* (2011) by Hoshang Merchant or A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010). Revathi's autobiographical account describes a series of dangerous psychosocial and physiological quests to become a woman and to find the love of a man. The text is written in Tamil, and has been translated into English (by V. Geetha, a translator-historian-activist based in Tamil Nadu), as well as several other Indian languages. As a "hijra" who fought ridicule, persecution and violence both within and outside her home to find a life of dignity, Revathi refrains, for the most part, from making broad social commentary and always speaks for herself, rarely on behalf of the hijra community, recognizing the individual freedom in interpreting

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[41] The origin of the term 'heteronormative' can be traced back to Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality"(in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Signs:Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:631-60 1980 and Gayle Rubin's "sex/gender system". Michael Warner initiated the usage of the term in the "Introduction" to *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991). Later, Samuel A. Chambers employed the term in "Telepistemology of the Closet; Or, the Queer Politics of *Six Feet Under*". *Journal of American Culture* 26.1: 24–41, 2003 and "Revisiting the Closet: Reading Sexuality in *Six Feet Under*", in *Reading Six Feet Under* (McCabe and Akass, eds. IB Taurus, 2005). The term non-heteronormative is used as an adjective to qualify any existence or practice or desire that does not pertain to heterosexist privileges.

and being queer. On the other hand, she offers a sensitive approach to the lives of the fellow hijras, whose lives are articulated only in relation to hers, thus acknowledging their influences and never limiting their agency. At times, the hijra community seems almost as oppressive to its individual members as the mainstream society that refuses to accept them. Thus, she is not contributing to any politicized gender positions but has a more educative, informative purpose. In the "Preface" to the book she invokes her objective of "telling" her story as "one such individual who has been marginalized because" she "was born a male and wanted to live . . . [her] life as a woman." Revathi expresses the desire that "this book . . . will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work" and who do not merely "seek sympathy" but "do have the right to live in this society" (Preface v-vi). The Indian text will be juxtaposed with a more popularly known transgender autobiography - Kate Bornstein's *A Queer and Pleasant Danger*. The latter book is an exploration of Bornstein's gender journey, including uncontrived narrations of her lifelong eating disorders, her bodily experiments, and her erotic adventures, all of which are significant to her conception of the self and gender. Bornstein gives us the opportunity to see behind the scenes and into the early gender outlaw days as she grapples with coming out as a lesbian-transsexual, learning how to work as an embodiment of gender, and to find self-understanding in the body she transforms. Often Bornstein also makes forays beyond her personal experiences in reconfiguring gender; she recounts her mother's first steps toward individual freedom after her father's death, describes the trial of Brandon Teena's murderer,[42] her early activist days when she visited the house where Tina died, as well as the audience's reaction to her first queer stage performance. The work mostly succeeds in striking a balance between the dark and controversial and the witty and hopeful.

An essential point to be noted is that the juxtaposition of Revathi's and Bornstein's texts does not entail the subsuming of Revathi's articulation of the indigenous hijra identity by that of Bornstein's transgender identity. Instead, possible connections are drawn between their decisions to reject the gender identity attributed at birth. A comparison is made between the significance that is attributed to their unconventional experiences pertaining to sexuality in both the narratives. Finally, the analogy is examined between the endeavors by both authors to articulate the self in the context of the changeability of sex and gender. It is true that in the Indian context the academic

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[42] Brandon Teena was an American trans-man who was brutally raped and murdered. Since then, his life has become the subject of several discourses on gender fluidity, including the movie *Boys Don't Cry* (Pierce 1999) and the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* (Villarejo 19).

trans discourse is yet to be substantiated. While occasionally using the umbrella term of "transgender" to refer to the experiences of Revathi, the paper maintains that it is very important to understand the experiential specificities of being a hijra and being a transgender. On the other hand, it is also necessary to understand the similarities (which is very different from sameness) in Revathi and Bornstein's experiences, similarities that can also be understood in the context of discourses of Disability Studies. The aim is to offer a comparative illumination of both texts without any intention of homogenizing the hijra-narrative with the trans-narrative.

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Evidently, the narratives are of very different socio-cultural affiliations. At the very beginning of the narrative, Revathi actualizes her rural, regional-India space ("a small village in Namakkal taluk, Salem district" [1]) with references to the village school, the *kollam* in front of the house, the temple and the *puja*s, and the coconut trees. Kate Bornstein identifies herself as typically American with urban sophistication. Her authorial position involves frequent references to Harry Potter, Church of Scientology, her tattooed body, and Hollywood. In the process of contextualizing the self in the society at large, Bornstein makes a very conscious attempt to depict the stringent gendered practices in the upper middle class home of an American surgeon ("Gender in our family was simple: real he-men were supposed to hate women, or at least know they're a whole lot better than women" [1]). It is, therefore, of interest to notice that Revathi makes no such specific statement about the role of gender in the home, though she does explore the travails of poverty. Yet she also reveals the gender imbalance through the description of her every-day circumstances and how in the act of struggle with poverty, the man and the woman have separate roles to play, the man outside the house, and the woman within it. However, what is most remarkable is the difference in the understanding of the quotidian gender practices by the two transgender authors. For Bornstein, the comfortable space of prosperous urban life becomes that of unwilling conformity to gender. Revathi, on the other hand, finds scope in her more precarious living conditions for reciprocal tactics to release her feminine angst. Her mother, too busy and impoverished to pay attention to gender propriety, lets her son do chores that he (yet to become she) should not be doing, but that he likes to do. Whereas Bornstein refers to the first encounter with a prostitute paid for by his father, struggles with anorexia, as well as discovering other gender-bending people, theatrical performance, alcohol, and weed, Revathi talks of Hindu customs and rituals that permitted cross-dressing, hijra-communities of beggars and sex workers, the religious authorities' approval for such

existences, and NGOs that only seemed to offer respite from the parochial social reality and other hegemonic intrusions in the personal realm, in the Indian regional space.

Interestingly, however, both the narratives, in spite of the vastly different spaces of origin emulate the lived experiences, mirror the interaction with the social system and also interact with the social consciousness through the readers articulating quotidian experiences and also providing a critique of the societal notions of gender roles. This leads to the formation of a relational space between the gendered realities of an Indian hijra and an American transsexual which provides scope for exploring certain parallels that may be read more effectively through the observations of Disability Studies rather than Queer Theory.

Moreover, these being autobiographical narratives, the centrality of self-representation implies that the agency of commenting on the society is now given to those in the "position of powerlessness" who "have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself" (Swindells 7). Transgender Studies has been drawing on memoirs and personal narratives of transgenders who hitherto "functioned only as a metaphor for gender instability in some places and gender stability in others," now, through personal narration, have begun to "speak for themselves about their experiences of embodiment and to voice their own interpretations of gender and sexuality in relation to the surgically and hormonally altered body." They have produced "valuable new knowledge about the persistence of gender, the materiality of the body, and the production of sex" (Halberstam 313). Autobiographical narratives have gained relevance in Disability Studies. *Encyclopedia of Disability* (2006) defines them as texts that try to rise above "cultural constraints" that "continue to limit the counter-hegemonic potential" and hence the authors "undermine the limited medical paradigms . . . in their consciousness of their own condition as culturally constructed as shared by others" (2026). There is also a commonality in which scholarship in both the fields has become attuned to the usability and the flexibility of the autobiographical genre as a mode of self-representation.

The aforementioned cultural differences, the generic connection, and the shared psychosomatic experiences of transsexuality "in the two texts under discussion will be here contextualized in relation to local symbols, beliefs, practices and history" (Bale and Philo 42) that follow "the logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience, namely, birth, marriage,

reproduction and death" (Halberstam 2), and thus will be based on the comparative episteme[43] will be thus ordained. The advent of gender studies within Comparative Literature, therefore, pertains to such a turn in the history of the discipline. The decennial "Report of Standards" by ACLA, that was led by Charles Bernheimer in 1993 tried to provide an overview of this transformation within the discipline:

> The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures . . . between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying. . . . (41–42)

Interdisciplinary studies bridging Queer Studies and Comparative Literary Studies have thus far suggested that "the parallels between different kinds of comparison as well as the in-betweens they set up might be related to the concept of intersectionality, which has become key in the field of queer studies, as many have critiqued the whiteness and masculinist biases of many definitions of queer" and thus enabled the comprehension of "how categories such as sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation and acculturation overlap and inflect one another in any given individual and within the social field" (Hayes, Higgonnett, and Spurlin 6). This study, however, caters to the context of Queer conceived as more "a point of contention than a form of working assumption—standing in, as it often does, for non-normative erotic acts and identities in general and same sex ones in particular, as well as for non-normative performances of gender" (Trubb 217). This study will aim at understanding gender fluidity in these two autobiographies vis-à-vis critical paradigms of disability.

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[43] The disciplinary space of Comparative Literature provides grounds to investigate the shared experiences, the "patterns of connections in literature" (Bassnett 1) to comprehend how the idea of Disability, as explanatory about sexualities, can be read in these narratives. This comparative episteme is put to use by the new directions in the discipline by which as Susan Bassnett explains "study of themes and movements not only continues unabated, but possibly is even on the increase. The difference is, of course, that the impulse is now coming from within areas of work defined under other headings . . . such as postcolonial studies or gender studies" (116). Comparative literary studies, even deriving from the traditional notion of "mutual illumination of several texts . . . considered side by side" (Prawer 101) also refer to an academic practice by which similarities can be deciphered without submerging the differences in any space or situation.

Reading Queer-Crip through the Comparative Episteme of Transsexuality

The intended comparative episteme will interrogate certain elisions and gaps in the theoretical paradigm of Queer. The inexplicability of certain moments in the transgender narratives from the Queer position will be addressed in the study. Firstly, the comparative paradigm will enable the tracing of how both narratives converge in such moments; then, observations and inferences drawn by scholars of Disability Studies will help address and analyze these convergences. The sustained conversation between disability and the narratives of transsexuality will also be used to further verify the comparability of the narratives and contribute towards the strengthening of the comparative episteme of transsexuality.

Invocations of "disability" occur in both narratives under discussion. They begin with the recognition of the intensifying need to be differently gendered. The birth-attributed gender is rejected and a "transgressing" of gender boundaries is already initiated in childhood. Both Revathi and Bornstein are affected by an innate desire for a "feminine" form of existence as well as the social injunction of following the dictates of "normality" and "ableism" vis-à-vis the gender attributed at birth. Both narrators recount moments of clarity, when they realize their inability to live as a boy, and their disposition towards being a girl. Hence, Revathi writes that she "did know" that she "behaved like a girl" which "felt natural" as she "did not know how to be like a boy." To explain this further, she uses a metabolic analogy that pertains to the bodily "dis-ease" with the birth-attributed gender: "It was like eating for me – just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl because others told me I ought not to be so" (7). Bornstein articulates herself with reference to more material issues, such as a television show she disliked, in which "a gang of preadolescent boys" started "the He-Man-Woman-hater's club". Albert Bornstein, as a child "wanted to grow up to be Audrey Hepburn: skinny, graceful, charming, delighted, smart, talented, a star, and a lady and "didn't want the Little Rascals to hate" her. The dis-ableism is further pronounced as she remembers trying to be a boy: "What it was that boys did, I couldn't do naturally. I learned how to act" (13). Thus the writer's language denotes the obstructions of normal gender-conduct on the authors' body and indicates how the disability of the body to perform the birth-attributed gender is constructed. The body can be read as dysfunctional in terms of heteronormativity as it does not have the abilities it "should" to perform according to the birth-attributed gender.

Judith Butler defines gender as "neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as 'internal' and 'hidden' nor . . . reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play between psyche and appearance (where the latter domain includes what appears in words)" and therefore it is also " a "play" regulated by heterosexist constraints though not, for that reason, fully reducible to them" (178). Hence the limiting cultural construction of gender is the chief concern in these discourses. The role of the "psyche" pertaining to an element of the "choice" or the "will" of self in gender is explained away through the comprehension of performativity in terms of "being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (185). Therefore, queer theoretical understanding has promoted gender-ambiguity to "put a denaturalizing pressure on sex, gender, sexuality, bodies and identities" which "might inadvertently reinforce that heterosexual hegemony they are programmatically opposed to" and which "has generated an imperative—even a willingness—to adopt analytical models that question the authenticity of identity, and particularly those that critique the putatively causal relation between a secure identity and an effective politics" (Jagose 90-93) It should, therefore, be noted that though Revathi and Bornstein's dis-ease with the imposed male-performativity is explained by the above discourses, what remains unexplained is why this situation of imposition is actualized or the reasons why the male identity is felt to be imposed.

It becomes evident in these narratives that the source of this dis-ease is the other disability, that of yearning to and not being able to be a woman, not explained in the theoretical discourses. To refer again to the narratives, the complexities of disabled femininity in a male-body are the central concern. This is better explained with reference to Disability Studies where "disability is not a pathological condition, only analyzable via individual psychology, but a social location complexly embodied" (Siebers 283). Hence discourses on disability are dependent on an individual's problematic interaction with the society in terms of physicality. This helps in comprehending the gender-fluidity of an individual not only in terms of negating social constructions but also in terms of the possibilities of attaining the desired existence.

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Take for example, Revathi's comprehension of the desired womanhood when she was a boy. Shocked at the secret sexual liaisons of companions she found outside the heterosexist domains, Revathi, who was still then the boy Doraiswamy, "did not want to have sex that way and above all . . . desired to become a woman, marry an educated man and only then have sex." Her companion "laughed derisively" and "told [her] that it was not all that easy to become a woman" and after the operation and the other drudgeries of a hijra life, she could only "hope to become one" (19). Meanwhile, Bornstein remembers being a male teenager having sex with men, but it "got too painful - doing sex just for sex" and lacking "the feel of being girl." So, sometimes she would have a relationship with "a wonderful girl, and knuckled down to being a real guy" till it was not possible to take "being a man any longer," so she took to "weed and alcohol" (35). Evidently, Revathi and Bornstein articulate a vortex of social relations, affective needs, and physical issues that are better explained by the range of corporeal experiences that scholarship in Disability Studies pertains to. Kristin Lindgren in "Bodies in Trouble" refers to the "distinction between 'being' a body which denotes the body as perceptive and 'having' one," where the body is an object of perception, a distinction which fuels the "the debates about the nature of embodiment" (149). Hence, "a healthy body that is absent from the consciousness" is distinctive from a diseased one that is negatively present in the consciousness." The observation can be appropriated to suit the somatic urge for a different sexuality than the one attributed to the body. The need to be different in this context pertains to a negative presence in the consciousness, though not necessarily a disease, as suggested by both Revathi as Doraiswamy, who perceives the inaccessibility of surgery as an obstacle to womanhood and Bornstein who takes to substance-abuse.

There is evidently a sense of the body being dysfunctional that is not a social construction but an individual internalized feeling. This influences the way one construes the "sensory insistence of pain [which] draws the corporeal out of self-concealment, rendering it thematic. No event more radically and inescapably reminds us of our bodily presence" (Leder 76 qtd. in Lindgren 148). Disability Studies thus refers to a model of embodiment that is changeable, enabling us to comprehend the convergences in both narratives about the process of "transgendering" (Ekins and King 34) as initiated by the sense of disability/queerness of being in the "wrong body."

Reassigning Gender: Reading (Dis)Ability, (Dis)Identification and Desire

The question of bodily limitations, differentiated from social injunctions but detrimental to the self-comprehension of gender, can be further explored in terms of gender-reassignment surgery,[44] which is an issue of much contention in queer discourses. This act may be incompatible with resistance to heterosexist notions. Gender-reassignment surgery, felt to be necessary by most transgender people, has made most queer theorists arrive at the conclusion that the procedure does not "challenge [the] reliance upon a fixed two-sex model to secure notions of identity" (Hall 95). This often leads to an unproblematic articulation of "transgendering" as "new technologies that make biological sex a potentially changeable aspect of human life" which ostensibly makes it "far different from what was the case in de Beauvoir's day, one can indeed now 'become' a woman whatever one's biological sex at birth" (Hall 95). This kind of "transgendering" is prone to the threat constituted in becoming a woman, "a culturally overloaded term that carries with it so much heterosexual baggage" (95) thus contributing to the crisis of sexed categories. While it is essential to challenge the gender categories in the social consciousness which Queer Studies is trying to achieve, there is a possibility of miscomprehension of the exact role of the gender-reassignment surgery and hormonal procedures when it comes to transsexuality. There is, hence, a hesitancy and the need to change the focus to other seemingly more important details in relation to sex-change. Nikki Sullivan writes: "*Whilst* transgender people and organizations continued (and still, by necessity, do) to lobby for greater access to surgery, policies which would enable changes to be made to official documents such as birth certificates, the right to marry, the right to adopt children, and so on, *a more outspoken* . . . kind of approach became increasingly popular amongst those who . . . felt it imperative to expand the bounds of culturally intelligible gender, and to speak in their own voices *rather than 'passing'* into silence and invisibility" (112, italics mine). It will not be presumptuous to infer that queer theorists associate sex-change surgery with possibilities of repressing the resistance to gender categories. Likewise, trans theorists contribute to this debate about gender fluidity and gender continuity: while Margaret O'Harrington, Holly Devor, Jay Prosser, and Bernice Haussman have referred to the "value of gendered realness" (Hausman 473), Pat Califia, Judith Halberstam, and Kate Bornstein have asked: "Why do transsexuals have to become

[44] Gender-reassignment surgery is also known as genital reconstruction surgery, or more popularly, sex-change surgery. The procedures began to develop between the 1920s and the 1950s, and were initially used to victimize and control people who did not conform to the gender binary (Mackenzie 40). This is why it becomes essential to explore the element of choice in resorting to the surgery as it emerges in both narratives under discussion.

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'real women' or 'real men' instead of just being transsexual. . . . And why can't people go back and forth if they want to?" (Califia 181-2). The questions persist whether surgical sex-change undermines the notion of fluid identities that is so central to Queer Theory and to what effect.

It will, thus, be of importance to note the parallels in the tow autobiographical narratives pertaining to sex-change. In two significantly titled chapters, "Over the Borderline" and "Stages of Life," Bornstein writes about the phases of sex change, the psychotherapy sessions, the one-year process of transgendering to a woman and the hormonal and surgical procedures. All these were undertaken because she had come to a certain conclusion about her gendered reality. As she had "ruled out cross-dressing as an option," the "only other options were drag queen, she-male working girl, and real woman—well, as close to that as I could get." As she felt she "wasn't pretty, graceful, or feminine enough to make it as a drag queen or working girl" and "too old for any sex work except phone sex," the "only road left took [her] . . . to the door of the Mount San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado, where ol' Doc Biber turned boys into girls and girls into boys with wacky meatball surgery" (187). This involved processes of "correcting" her gender. At this point she makes a very significant statement: when she was a girl, she was also a thirty-eight-year old man who "had to make up for lost time . . . and had to learn girl from the ground up, just like" he had "had to learn boy" (183). However, because she herself deemed the medical intervention and learning process necessary, it felt less of an imposition than trying to be a boy and a man in the earlier stages of her life.

Echoes of similar psychosomatic infractions can be traced in Revathi's narrative. She writes that while "wearing men's clothes" she "wanted to wear what women did." However, "after wearing women's clothes and trying to live like a woman," she "still felt [like] a man." The elders in the hijra-house where she had sought shelter decided to sponsor her sex-change procedure (her train-tickets and seven-thousand rupees). She "felt that finally the female . . . would be freed from her male body" and "was ecstatic" (67) despite the gross medical negligence in her situation, because in India sex-change was still taboo and "this sort of operation was done stealthily" (75), as Revathi was soon to find out. What becomes evident here is the need for "hijra-houses," which function as surrogate families and are not informed by the Euro-American Human-Rights framework or the postmodern and post-structural notions of identity politics, but are born of and grounded in the problems of everyday life. As Revathi explains, such surrogate families are necessary because

"[only] a pottai knows another pottai's feelings, pain loss and anguish" (82). There is hardly any post-operative medical care except from the guru-hijra (the elder hijra who takes a few younger ones under her wing) and other elder hijras.

These particular affinities in the two autobiographies point to gender-reassignment as a solution to problems of self-comprehension rather than as conforming to a pre-determined identity. The relevance of the surgery is a matter of choice and consent of the individual. Hence, it is possible to address its problematic meaning with the idea of "medical intervention" in Disability Studies. It should be noted that from the perspective of Queer Studies the idea of "cure" is problematic, for it implies that homosexuality is a pathological condition. This study proposes that medical intervention should be a matter of individual choice. In both Revathi's and Bornstein's case, the preliminary decision to undergo surgery cannot be explained as undertaken solely under social pressure; it is rather the result of an internal (or perhaps internalized) idea of gendered reality. Consequently, there is a degree of relevance of the medical intervention when it comes to these bodily situations in Transgender Studies as in Disability Studies. This, especially, pertains to the gap between the nature of requirement and availability of medical benefits which is "problematic, both because no single condition of 'disability' is universally recognized, and because physical and mental incapacity are conditions that can be feigned for secondary gain. Hence, the concept of disability has always been based on a perceived need to detect deception" (23), which is also the case with the need to be differently gendered. To gain clinical approval for a sex-change, the individual must submit to psychological counseling, as Bornstein writes, and to questioning about his or her sexual desires and practices. This exposes the individual to unwanted interference and harassment. In Revathi's narrative, the almost total lack of medical facilities for sex-change procedures can also be explained by construing the "problem of a validating device" (Stone 23) that leads to the "official recognition of transsexuality." In this context, a question may arise about the concept of "official recognition of disability," determined by the medical model of disability which has been considered as "one rooted in an undue emphasis on clinical diagnosis, the very nature of which is destined to lead to a partial and inhibiting view of the disabled individual" (Shakespeare 20), a view that is, then, imposed through legal measures to acquire certain authoritatively granted benefits. Therefore, there is an affinity between the two concepts, both repressive and enabled by a clinical-legal comprehension of a bodily situation, without considering the need for individual choices and desires. Here, again, it becomes necessary to read medical

intervention as a matter of choice and in the process enabled by the individual self. Moreover, medical intervention in gender identity also pertains to the cycle of anticipation and assurances about a satisfactory gendered reality. In effect, such procedures also operate on the balance of "the desire to believe that medical treatment is effective" and "the admission of medical failure to cure or restore" (Stone 151). In the autobiographical retrospection, Bornstein and Revathi are not only certain that clinical transformation of sex and gender was necessary but also that the medical intervention is not the end but the means (albeit acquired with difficulty) to a satisfactory gendered reality.

In view of the above discussion, the decision to maintain connectivity between sexuality and gender identity may not necessarily support a heterosexist framework of existence. Nor should it be mandatory to maintain a fluid identity to disrupt the heterosexist framework. Having become a woman, Revathi has breached certain hetero-patriarchal codes, especially of being a son in an Indian family. Having aligned the psychosomatic urges with her bodily appearance, Revathi visits her family who insist that "he" (as opposed to "she") take off the female disguise. She replies: "Disguise? Costume? . . . Everything that happened before, the clothes I wore, the life I led, the way I had to be – that was when I was in disguise, when I wore a costume" (114). Kate Bornstein speaks of the alignment in similar terms, in the name of all those who undergo the treatment: "Each of us left behind us the ghost of the man or woman we'd been pretending to be for so long that it hurt enough to make us want to go through with this surgery or kill ourselves" (188). Evidently, both Revathi and Bornstein are speaking of medical intervention as a means of coming to terms with the self rather than the society. This can be further explained by the concept of "passing" explored in Disability Studies with the "passer's marginal identity . . . as an instance of defiance" and passers as "deviant people trying to achieve, or even eke their way back to, normalcy" (Titchkosky 69). This does not entail merely "copying" but also "knowing" and hence "a way to work with cultural knowledge" (70-71) about normalcy. The act of transgendering leading to surgical gender-reassignment, therefore, need not be read in terms of living up to social expectations but rather as negotiating the chosen gendered reality with the social milieu.

Further evidence for the above claims can be found in the morphological implications of the narratives which are not built upon the achievement of "real" womanhood, but rather on the experiences of transsexuality. By living as a woman and even reconfiguring the body in that

manner, neither of the authors is trying to articulate her desire to "pass" as a woman. The linear narrative form, the lack of fictional strategies, particularly in Revathi's text, and the very transparent usage of the terms "hijra" and "queer" in the title, all refer to the narrative motivations to describe two existences that are non-normative. The structural integrity of both narratives is derived from the way they negotiate, modify, violate and appropriate the "normalcy" in womanhood to cover a trajectory of self-fulfillment. To refer again to the previous argument of convergences in diversity, the contrivances of both narratives are similar with respect to a self-articulated womanhood.

Deconstructing the "newer" binary of "normativity" and "resistance"

Revathi's and Bornstein's narratives are also comparable in terms of conflicted interactions of self and society vis-a-vis their self-articulated womanhood. Revathi and Bornstein do not treat surgery as a means of normalization. They note in their respective narratives that surgical and hormonal transformations do not lead to a psychosocial "rectification" culminating in a non-heteronormative womanhood. Instances can be drawn from both narratives of how the inadequacy of social structures is conveyed as a "gender-impairment" in the individual and instituted as "hijra" or "butch," rather than in terms of a self-articulated "womanhood." Every-day trivial matters engender complications. Noticeably, both the narratives refer to damaging public spaces. Revathi writes about how she was "dismissed as a pottai" and "shooed away from" both women's and men's toilet (54), harassed in public transport and secluded from the mainstream professional sphere because she would be "the ruin of all the boys" there (163). Bornstein, in turn, refers to her "humiliating" predicament in her workplace, where "building management said a flat no to the ladies room, and" she "refused to use the men's room," while the "private bathroom" assigned to her had "no door" or "toilet paper" (177). Such conflicted social interactions also take place in more emotionally charged spaces. Revathi comments on how her family members reacted with hostility to her sex change, wondering aloud how she had managed to stay "alive" after such transgression, and stating that "[j]ust because you've worn a sari we cannot call you a woman" (113). Bornstein's situation parallels that of Revathi when her mother, and her elder brother refused to acknowledge her for some time and her daughter from her first heterosexual relationship continued to do so till the end of this narrative. In such circumstances. Identity is not a normalized one, a form of ableism. One of the many stands that queer theorists take is a complete disavowal of the social milieu and of the identities that are built in relationships embedded in the social milieu as heterosexual. Queer identity is thus taken up only in terms of challenging rather than reconstructing a space for

existence. As Lee Edelman writes, the "embrace of queer negativity, then, can have no justification if justification requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself. For by figuring a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity, while refusing as well any backdoor hope for dialectical access to meaning, the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith in the consistent reality of the social-and by extension, of the social subject" (6).

However, it is evident from the narratives that this dissociation does not occur in the everyday reality. Mainstream ideologies specifically are not coherent entities but intermingled with our daily practices, our entire modes of sense-making. Spaces for the marginalized, ostensibly not associated with the heterosexist-able-bodied social order, often entail forms of disablement. Analogous situations in the narratives under discussion exemplify this idea. Revathi writes about her gradual dislocation from the hijra community when the "aravani" communities fail to understand and hence dissociate themselves from Revathi's choice to have a job in the NGO Sangamma for sexual minorities. The job makes her unpopular among her fellow-hijras who still prefer the traditions of begging and prostitution. She subsequently marries one of her superiors at that organization, who himself asserted the marginalized self-identity of a bisexual and then said that the marriage was "one of the biggest mistakes" of his life (289). Bornstein felt (and was) increasingly isolated from most sexual-minority groups because she "was a lesbian and so couldn't be a real transsexual" (189) and a "transsexual in a group of real women" (191).

What is derived from such convergences can be read through Disability Studies as the tendency of the "[a]ble-bodied (or temporarily able-bodied) people" to "safely wall off the severely disabled so that they cannot be seen as part of a continuum of physical differences" (Davis 7). What happens is segregation based on the degree of normalcy of the body, which further contributes to the argument that Revathi's self-identification as a woman and Bornstein's desire to be a woman are, in fact, unrecognized forms of subversion. The obliteration of the desire for specific gendered abilities (which are not birth attributed entities) from queer discourses can be read a case of "methodological distancing." As Mitchell and Snyder explain, "denigrated identities are "rescued" by understanding gendered, racial, and sexual differences as textually produced, distancing them from the 'real' of physical or cognitive aberrancy projected onto their figures" (2). To extend the

process further, "individuals with physical disabilities have historically disassociated themselves from those who have intellectual disabilities" (3). Discussing disability, Robert McRuer also refers to Mitchell and Snyder to explain how "members of marginalized communities in effect identify an even more marginalized group in order to resist the stigma imposed by a dominant culture" and hence, "people with physical and mental disabilities who are *perceived* as a bit queer can demonstrate that such a difference is textually produced by distancing themselves from the 'real' queerness or perversion (embodied by those who are not straight)" (225). In the above cases, as Revathi and Bornstein become isolated, there are varied degrees of normalcy intervening in the existence of the non-normative. Queer Theory has posited that normalcy cannot be resisted as a coherent entity. So the actions and agencies that pertain to the appropriation of the normal must also be explored. When individualized resistances only seem to be giving in to certain social expectations, they need not declassify them as resistance.

At the climactic points in their autobiographies, both Revathi and Bornstein seek recourse to the enunciation of gendered abilities of the self vis-à-vis the consistent need and occurrence of self-comprehension. Revathi has a flexible association with the hijra-culture, as she never becomes fully dependent on the younger hijras she helped (which is an age-old tradition, still practiced in hijra-houses). Her identity as a working woman, living alone while fulfilling the role of the bread-earner and nurse to her aged parents, in spite of the Indian setup of heteronormative patriarchy, is conveyed in the words: "I had lived on my own, as a single woman" and so "went back to working at Sangamma" (303). In an interview for a national daily she revealed: "In your teens, the dream of becoming a complete woman is so fantasy-like I can't begin to explain. But soon the reality hits you; while that transitioning from man to a woman is a big struggle, to live as a woman is equally a big struggle. But really this pain is my strength and will keep my activism going. We have mountains to move." Such a gendered construing of the self can also be traced in Bornstein's individualized understanding of gender categories and appearances and in her final declaration of fulfillment as "a boy looking hot in girl clothes. Boy, not man—two different genders" (244). She then goes on to say: "Most importantly, I'd discovered the nature of my desire: I wanted to be the kind of girl I was attracted to" (244), and "Cute is a valid way to express yourself, just like any other way you want to express the kind of man or woman or boy or girl or whatever it is you feel like being" (251). These words again validate the centrality of the act of knowing the self, without the knowledge-producing tools. Such self-knowledge may or may not bear any resemblance to pre-

existing conceptions. This indicates that the objective is not conforming (or not) to gender categories but finding out a gendered self with which to interact with the psychosocial realm. A parallel can be found in how studies in disability configure the idea of normal and the resistance to normalcy. Sumi Laggen writes that "rupture rarely marks unconditional openings for progressive social change" and "the promise and benefits of normalization are, at best, partial, and at worst, downright deceptive and contradictory, leaving room to articulate ongoing cultural critiques and oppositional strategies." Therefore, "normal does not always successfully parade as authentic" and "its incomplete replication sometimes creates a space for subversion and transgression" (53). Revathi and Bornstein as transsexual women choosing their own gendered reality may not be resisting heterosexist normalcy by subscribing to gender fluidity but flouting gender norms by appropriating normalcy.

Conclusion: Queer-Trans and Crip-Trans: Further Possibilities

Evidently, these references to Disability Studies to understand transsexuality, work towards a possible Cripistemology of the Queer that perceives resistance to compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness as arising out of the primary need of an every-day process of self-articulation contributing to a continuous process of self-comprehension, and hence secondary to a more constitutive form of existence. The diversified nature of both the fields of studies cannot obliterate the above examples from the transgender narratives that pertain to Disability Studies. The present study hopes to demonstrate that in narrating the everyday in the transgender situation, it is not possible to operate on the binary of conformity and non-conformity, and often there is a problematic confluence of both. The nature of the confluence cannot be uniform, just as modes of resistance to normalization cannot be uniform. So the idea of "Cripistemology" refers to the knowledge derived from Disability Studies to provide an alternative understanding of the queer in transsexuality. The comparability of the narratives, (and not the two fields of study) makes it sufficiently clear that though subscribing to two different socio-political motivations, the models of studying disability can be used to explore some of the pre-existent contentions in the Trans-Queer alliance. The study does not so much try to forge a Queer-Crip alliance, as it tries to use insights from Disability Studies to provide an alternative to Queer Studies' interpretations of the experiences of transsexuality in relation to issues of normalcy and resistance.

One of the emphases of this study has been the cultural specificity of the narratives, with Revathi speaking from the Indian understanding of gender (where Queer theories are mostly absorb from American thinking), and Bornstein from a more visible space of popular and academic understanding of Queer. Though the patterns of Disability can be traced in the both narratives, yet the circumstances are evidently very different. Both Revathi and Bornstein contribute to the ideation of alternative existences that seem to derive from the normal, but they also expose the shortcomings of normalization in a culture-specific manner. The modes of gender imposition and the choices of gendered reality for the self in Revathi's narrative, contextualized in spaces of the familial, the occupational, and the medicinal, are specific to regional India - particularly Southern India. Bornstein's narrative focuses on more material privileges, freedom from familial conservatism, as well as the lack of indigenous practices of community-formation. This re-emphasizes the idea of normalcy as constructed with culture-specific practices. The resistance to normalcy constitutes an alternative existence as has already been explained, which is also culture-specific. Hence, the intersectional understanding of non-normative gender functionality validates the lack of uniformity in understanding the Queer-Crip alliance.

Interestingly, therefore, when structures of disabling can be located in spite of the disparity in the cultural formations, it becomes possible to negate the uniformity of what McRuer terms as the "specter of globalization" and increasing concern with the "global bodies or desires" which have caused much anxiety to scholars of both Disability and Queer Studies. A comparative episteme of transgender narratives, read with inferences drawn from Disability Studies, can be posited as an alternative to understanding the already existing Queer-Crip alliance. This alliance, which embraces unity without subsuming differences, reflects McRuer's understanding of "postidentity politics that allows [us] to work together, . . . that acknowledges the complex and contradictory histories of our movements, drawing on and learning from those histories rather than transcending them" (202). As such, the Queer-Crip alliance should contribute towards resolving the crisis of globalization in the discourses of the non-normative.

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Intersectionalities, dis/abilities and subjectification in deaf LGBT people: An exploratory study in Sicily[45]

Claudio Cappotto
Frederic II University of Naples
Cirus Rinaldi
University of Palermo

The article discusses the multiple discrimination, normalization and stigmatization experienced by deaf LGBT youth in Sicily, Italy, on the basis of a study of their everyday life (specifically school years and peer interactions). So far in Italy, very little attention has been paid to multiple discrimination and, specifically, to homophobic violence towards disabled individuals. It is, therefore, impossible to consider any valid sampling of the desired population and very few reports have been produced. The authors, a sociologist and a psychologist, carry out an analysis of the results obtained from interviews with 15 LGBT individuals recruited through social networks, thematic chats, and associations. This preliminary analysis aims at identifying the key arguments which could form the basis for future strategic inclusion programs and further research projects.

Key words: *LGBT youth, disability, homophobia, normalization, intersectional analysis*

Introduction

The present essay sums up the results of research carried out in the south of Italy (Sicily) regarding the problem of discrimination against deaf LGBT people. This is, in fact, a preliminary analysis aimed at identifying key arguments which could form the basis for possible future strategic programmes, with the objective also of further exploring the research themes that emerge and of expanding the sample population to reach statistically relevant dimensions. There are at present no statistically relevant studor research, at least in the Italian context, with regard to the multiple discriminations suffered by the deaf LGBT population. The only data available is extrapolated from various grey areas of literature and unpublished research reports carried out by third-sector and volunta ies ry associations. The very concept of multiple discrimination is open to many contrasting

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[45] This paper is co-authored and as such stems from a joint reflection. Cirus Rinaldi edited sections 1, 2 and while Claudio Cappotto wrote sections 3 and 4. The conclusions are to be accredited to both.

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interpretations which can be difficult to apply. A certain group or a social category might be discriminated against for different reasons or because of diverse characteristics which coexist simultaneously (for example an illegal immigrant who is also homosexual) or in different periods (a homosexual who has become disabled); and either for inherent conditions (a deaf homosexual) or for subsequent ones (a deaf person who discovers his/her homosexuality). In this way the same conditions may have been present since birth, they may coexist, or they may even interfere with each other. Therefore it is clear that these stigmatized social groups or categories are liable to suffer various types of discrimination that in many cases can also be multiple. For example, the access to housing assistance (public or private) of a lesbian couple could be inhibited not just by the obviousness of the relationship between them but also by social prejudice and by legal difficulties relative to the lack of freedom for homosexual couples to express publicly and legally their intimate choices concerning cohabitation and relationships (at least in Italy). We could, for example, imagine a situation where one of the partners is from a different ethnic background, and predict her difficulty in obtaining employment; moreover, she might simultaneously suffer gender discrimination as she is a woman. Our hypothetical couple might be discriminated against because they are lesbian, or because they are mixed race, or again because of gender (being female). It is possible to imagine a case of a person stigmatized for his sexual orientation - a male homosexual - who is also deaf. As we will demonstrate below, this person could find himself isolated in the queer world, and also be discriminated against should he dare to express a desire for paternity, not only because he is homosexual but also as he might be considered an unsuitable father on account of his disability. He would then find himself doubly isolated: inside the queer world and within the conventional world. We could, of course, also imagine social situations in which there is no multiple discrimination in the strict sense of the term, but instead subtle forms of discrimination regarding various prevailing elements and secondary features and traits of the group or person concerned. But how can we construct a hierarchy of the diverse potential and concrete factors of discrimination? From a theoretical point of view, the concept of multiple discrimination is insidious precisely because anti-homosexual and anti-transsexual prejudice is not just deeply rooted in popular culture but it becomes a reason for discrimination even inside the LGBT community. This factor induces us to reflect critically about the way "discrimination" can be defined as "multiple" on the basis of which group or category the subject belongs to, in accordance with the biophysical characteristics of the individual and of his/her physical dis/abilities, gender, ethnic group and social status. It is therefore implausible to give a conceptual definition of the term "multiple discri-

mination" except in the open and flexible form provided here, and to confront with rigid social structural concepts the actual multiple involvements of individuals and social groups, their individual characteristics and the diverse combinations between these functions. Let us not imagine any definitive unalterable definition of "multiple discrimination", bearing in mind that it is necessary to always address the context of these discriminations and consider the historical, social, cultural, political, legislative and even "local" processes and developments.

Nevertheless, in methodological terms and following a meta-sociological deliberation, the issue of multiple discrimination provides opportunities for general theoretical reflection on the topic of the social construction of identities and the sense of belonging to a particular group or groups, even within the scope of a wider analysis of the various LGBT movements and factions. Also in light of the empirical data that will be collected, a new interpretation will be presented with reference to the problems regarding the sociological perspectives of the analysis of the queer community and the notion of intersections (Collins 2000). These are hypotheses that refuse every attempt at simplification, and demand a proper comprehension and a critical interpretation of the processes of normalization of violence and of discrimination against the LGBTQI community and also of the "normalization" of the above-mentioned forms of subjection. Analyzing the intersections and consubstantiality between genders, sexual orientations and physical (dis)abilities enables us to highlight how subjectivities are defined based on specific structural aspects with which the dominant heterosexual and heteronormative power system rules and governs (Warner 1993). Meanwhile, the filter of queer sociological analysis allows us to identify the risks of perpetuating within representations of the LGBT community a "normalization" model that imposes new forms of corporeal stratification and subordination systems.

1. Anti-identitarian marginalities: Intersectionalities, physical disabilities and sexuality

The dominant sexual categories (the homosexuality/heterosexuality dichotomy) and the structures of power continue to hold a place of privilege. They are *normalized*, *naturalized* or *forgotten* in the double significance of having become the norm and being taken for granted, because they are both grounded in a single and totalitarian story of "fixed views". Likewise, for example, whiteness, heterosexuality and even able-bodiedness are socially constructed as being the dominant, normalizing (with the double meaning of the statistical norm and of the normal moral virtue) and

as such universal social institution. The co-existence of the male/female dichotomy system, the forced attribution of heterosexuality as a universal sexual orientation and the imposition of identity (whether homo or hetero) is particularly evident in the diagnostic and medical-surgical-cultural treatment reserved for subjects outside the norm, but it becomes a hierarchal imposition even when defining a disability, with the aim of constructing *normal subjects*. These issues have still to be implemented within the scope of a sociological research programme that must take into account the instability and arbitrariness of the categories used and of the divisions defined by these categories (such as the homosexual/heterosexual or able bodied/disabled divide). Then we also need to consider the conceptual inadequacy of the construction of identity (be it homo or hetero) as a static, ahistorical and anti-social dimension, as well as the effects in the real world of any "scientific" programme, measure or service. The universalistic ideal that defines the citizen has, in fact, excluded all these subjects from citizenship, as their existential, expressive and affective needs do not fit in well with the abstract, neutral and universal structure represented by the state. We could argue that the state has situated corporealities on an aesthetic axis that effectively legitimizes the denigration and humiliation of certain bodies (women, immigrants, lesbians, gay men, the disabled, etc.) that do not conform to the *norm*. If, on the one hand, minority movements – and especially the LGBT movement – have contributed to the inclusion of homosexuality in the public debate, on the other hand, they have ended up normalizing homoerotic desire, highlighting the extent of the discrimination (especially of male white homosexuals) and defining a quasi-ethnic identity within subcultural theories. The main effect of the theories was to stall the debate on the social construction of heterosexuality and the cognitive divide deriving from the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy (Murray 1979), but also and above all to define homosexuality as a universally applicable identity category, and of a uniform and pure identity. This refers to the construction of methods of desirability and sexual subjections, to the types of legal claims (requests which are considered high compromises from a heterosexual point of view, but which are often inadequate for many of us LGBTs) the *normalization* of what is different which translates into forms of (male) heterosexualization of homosexuality, with specific relapses (both theoretical and in terms of policies) connected to the annulment of the different intersections between gender, ethnicity, social status, sexual orientation and physical (dis)abilities among others. Scholars who study the queer scene regard the analysis of the knowledge deriving from the cognitive mechanism represented by the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy and by the categorization of identities as an essential element. The homosexual/heterosexual binary has structured social awareness

throughout the late 19th century. This control mechanism has worked by establishing classification systems which sort people by type of body, of personality and human subtype, but also by other aspects such as the organization of knowledge, of social life, and of expectations and ways of thought regarding human relations (Ingraham 2005) and the public debate regarding "unnatural" sexualities. Every desire and practice, just as every hypothetical form of "belonging", has been described in minute taxonomic detail with regard to the choice of the desired sexual object on the basis of the usual homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy; yet a major part of the types of human subjectivities cannot be reduced to, or included in, these counter-positions.

From the standpoint of the political practices relating to scientific papers, we can consider that queer cognition allows us to understand experiences that concern subjectivities outside the norms from within their social world and through their own "categories". An extra dimension has been provided through the methods and methodologies of the feminist movement which repositioned women as sexual beings, while working as researchers or co-researchers within a research team. Queer scholarship is thus inclined to question the methods of scientific research that serve to identify and reproduce "normal" and standard bodies, genders and sexuality.

Queer methodologies are political insofar as the emancipation of individuals outside the norm actually starts with the use of a new vocabulary which is capable of taking the floor. In fact in the very instant that a subject is represented as "deviant", that person becomes liable to be labelled and questioned as such, the same label is applied and reapplied and becomes an implicit form of monitoring, control and identification. In order to escape imposed denominations and overturn theoretical and "ontological" boundaries, one must create and use a customised lexicon which allows one to define oneself in terms which transgress conventional boundaries. The issues affecting the queer subject, which are in many ways similar to the ones confronted by the postcolonial subject, should raise awareness in researchers and help them to navigate these lexical boundaries, question the hypothetical and spatialized interpretation of these categories, and confront said categories and spaces – in other words, to de-centralize. Living on the edge of the dominant identity structures (heterosexuals or homosexuals) and thus inside a wider society which includes the able-bodied, the LGBT community and activists and pressure groups involved with disability issues - with consubstantiality between diverse types of belonging, which confront in the case of physical disability the hierarchies of physical stratifications (at the pinnacle of which stands

the heterosexual or homosexual white middle-class and physically fit male); they challenge the concept of identity and belonging (the community aspect). Discussing the theme of identity hybridizations and of their simultaneous co-existence (black gay bodies, Afro-Italian transgendered bodies, deaf LGBT Asian-Americans, etc.), Rosanne Bersten argues that identity as such is a dangerous concept and that there are other patterns of identity formations relating to the definition of minority communities that are equally problematic (Bersten 9). Every identification process is imperfect, no group is ever homogeneous, and the individuals involved, argues Bersten, do not perform perfect identities, as identity processes are often recurrent, and each time the process commences anew, a new degree of fragmentation is added into it (Bersten). In the case of hybrid and intersected identities, theories focused on the notion of identity contribute to reinstating the myth of identity essentialism and ultimately allow *edge identities* no more than three viable options: to abandon their own traditional practices with a view to accepting a constructed self seen as preferable and legitimate within the scope of specific interpretative communities; to learn to blend in, chameleon-like, adapting themselves and their personal identities to fit into whichever group they wish to belong; or lastly, to attempt to re-territorialize a community which rests on minority identity models. Focusing on material practices rather than on taxonomic identification enables us to consider the risks of universalizing and of neutralizing disabilities; these analyses allow us to understand the intersections between the workings of power that humiliate and those that oppress, between the construction of aesthetic ideals, between sexual and identification categories and assimilated subjects (Muñoz 1999; Anzaldúa 2007). This involves performing a circumstantial analysis of the areas of *tension, stitches and scars*, rather than on the coherence of any configuration of identity (Bérubé 2006). Under these criteria, a queer analysis of disabilities enables us to understand how in late capitalist and neoliberal society, individuals are obliged to be both able-bodied and heterosexual (McRuer 2006). In strictly sociological terms, the intersections can converge in simultaneous axes of subordination and multiple dimensions of oppression, demonstrating how the very concept of disability does not apply to an individual problem (or simply a medical condition) but rather is a social and collective experience (Thompson, Bryson, and de Castell 2001, 51). In fact, stereotyped depictions of disabled people and disability can cause the actual experiences of a person to become distorted: the myth of bodily perfection in which the disabled clash with the able-bodied; the myth of the asexuality of the disabled; the stereotypes linked to sexual orientation and regarding the effects of *heterosexualization* (if someone is disabled there is the presumption of asexuality but if various drives or desires should

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manifest themselves, these drives can only be heterosexual ones according to the beliefs of doctors and social workers), thereby making emancipation more complicated for the disabled. A web of social inhibitions controls non-normative sexuality and usually the sexuality of the disabled as well, because they are considered subjects who could *lose control at any minute* (Thompson and Bryson 59). In light of the feminist, constructivist and queer research perspectives, sociological reflection should direct its analyses towards the *deconstruction of the universal and naturalizing expectations of able-bodiedness* (McRuer 1).

2. Studying multiple discrimination through microsociological applications

As regards social interactions in everyday life, processes of normalization refer to all those rituals that individuals use to control their own behaviour in order to appear normal, or to those practices which in one way or another cause people to re-evaluate and change behaviours, conditions or attitudes that have previously been stigmatized (Goffman 1963). Within the scope of microsociological analysis, the concept of normalization should be analysed considering the processes which lead to question social expectations (deviance) as well as consequent blame and normalization mechanisms such as stigmatization processes. The social interaction order is therefore built on a perception of trust based on normal appearances and actions that contribute to its foreseeability, reliability and interpretation (Goffman 1959). Social actors are constantly involved in normalcy-constructing processes, based on which they routinely elaborate and experiment with everyday interactions. The very definition of normalcy is based on reproducing and reinforcing these routine normalcy practices which are embedded in individuals as a form of tacit knowledge, necessary to convince oneself – and especially others – that everything is "exactly as it should be". Thus we find ourselves involved in activities that have the ultimate purpose of enabling us not to lose face by reproducing the (legitimate) order of appearances and normalcy, Goffman suggests (1971). Such activities are in fact categorized and become constitutive of "normal" experience; in this way the representation of normality and its orderly construction become collective activities supported by ritualistic interactions. Whenever a certain behaviour (or a characteristic, a habit, a personality trait, etc.) is perceived and considered as inappropriate for the circumstances, this challenges the normal smooth running of events and occurrences and provokes others to feel that *something must be done* to *ring back under control* or *to remedy* and *there is someone who needs to be adjusted*. The processes of stigmatization can be interpreted as tools used by *normal* people to highlight the *abnormality* of others who possess *alarming* personality traits,

conditions and characteristics, with the aim of reverting everything back to the norm, if that is possible – such as in the cases of juvenile delinquents, and drug addicts inside a rehabilitation centre, of disabled people who need to be "fixed". The concern with normality and the need to appear normal, because of the need to maintain order and legitimate it, thus becomes an objective even for the very people who are stigmatized. This situation leads us to reflect on *how normality is really a precarious condition*, which has to be continually renegotiated through performances aimed at making the individual seem reliable and pass off as normal. These theoretical premises seem particularly important when referring to groups with a stigmatized status, either identifiable or already identified, such as LGBT people with a dis/ability, who are liable to be discriminated against due to *their invisible membership* of stigmatized groups. Cramer and Gilson identify a series of existing analogies between groups belonging to sexual minorities and groups of disabled people: they often see their own civil rights go unacknowledged, and they live in constant tension between choosing to declare themselves and then putting up with a stigma (because of their sexual orientation or their disability) or to conceal these facts, choosing evasion and thus passing for non-disabled and heterosexual (Cramer and Gilson 1999, 26).

3. The research design

As mentioned above, the present analysis focuses on data gathered in a specific setting (Sicily) in 2010. It has not been possible to take into account a statistically representative sample both for reasons of social advisability (the LGBT deaf community being already victims of a double stigma) and due to the difficulties that arise in the recruitment of LGBT deaf individuals, which would have involved a greater investment of resources and time. We therefore utilized as our first point of contact a gay LIS (Italian Sign Language) interpreter who enabled us to access the desired target group (by accompanying him during an interview with a group of LGBT deaf subjects), some remote contacts (chat) and also the publication of a video containing a questionnaire specifically designed for the purposes of this research and indicated in LIS (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGI3CAqy_Ko). Thanks to our LIS interpreter contact we were able to involve the associated network (Deaf LGBT Group of Sicily) who graciously agreed to take part in the research activities. (Though later some of the subjects showed diffidence towards us, this was overcome thanks to the intervention of the LIS mediator.) We managed to recruit 15 LGBT deaf subjects (6 of whom defined themselves as lesbians, 6 others as gay and 3 persons who described themselves as bisexual; average age 24.5 years). Among this group, five people returned

the completed questionnaire via email, four were interviewed as a group with the help of the LIS interpreter, and the remaining six were contacted by the researcher through social networks and chats (Facebook). As described above, the search for and the involvement of LGBT deaf subjects brought about certain difficulties, mostly due to the difficulty in recruitment but also to more technical problems regarding the administration of the material and the written correspondence. As one of the interviewees – the promoter of the Deaf LGBT Group of Sicily associated network – claims, "for some deaf people these are questions that they cannot answer . . . these are long

questions and deaf people are not usually able to give long-distance replies with long sentences" (Interview M., gay male, aged 22, chat on 26th May 2012). In this respect, the difficulties with the deaf population regarding recruitment and provision of social research material is heavily conditioned by their level of education, and their knowledge of written and sign language, apart from other more general socio-economic and cultural factors. Having overcome the initial resistance of some subjects included in the sample, and having dealt with the problems connected to the lack of suitable mechanisms of social appraisal necessary for the analysis of the needs of the deaf population, it has been particularly helpful to agree on a critical and highly sensitive approach to the LGBT deaf culture. In fact, as one of the homosexuals contacted via chat (R., lesbian, aged 26, from Caltanissetta) explained, "usually the deaf are wary of strangers. They wonder why a doctor whom they do not know is collecting questionnaire . . . . at times we feel like guinea pigs".

4. Data analysis

The people interviewed were asked to discuss their school years and their everyday life in order to consider the main challenges faced during youth. The intervieews have, for the most part, attended mainstream state schools and only later on in their learning pathway chose to attend special schools. Within their educational and family context, they complain of the lack of socialization to the rituals, customs, norms and rules of behaviour that their orientation involves (but this logic can be extended in order to include every type of erotic-affective exchange); and declare to have lived, especially during the period of mandatory schooling, in prevalently heteronormative and *normal* surroundings, which lead to the lack of a proper vocabulary with definitions they could use to describe themselves as LGBT and deaf individuals. In this way, a majority of these subjects have associated deafness and homosexuality as aspects which caused unease and discrimination during their upbringing, education and social life. M. states that while she was in the middle of her secondary education, she could not manage to "lip-read the literature teacher." "The professor,

when he explained things or asked me questions, talked to the left or right of me or turned his back to me, and when he had finished, he still expected an answer from me. I could not manage to get a single word that he said, although I studied a lot and would certainly have answered his questions if only he had let me understand them." As far as her homosexuality was concerned, she never managed to talk about it or confide in any of her peers (M., lesbian, aged 20).

The double stigma of deafness and homosexuality is particularly emphasized in the words of N.: "I attended mandatory state schools from the age of 3 to 13 and I was the only deaf person there. These were years in which I suffered a lot. Already in the very first years of my life I felt misunderstood for two parallel reasons – for my deafness and for my sexual orientation. I remember that I felt sorry for myself, and often thought that I was different, unique, that there was nobody else like me, and above all, I thought that it would be impossible to find good social occasions and professional opportunities in the life of a deaf person. I had these thoughts daily because as a deaf person with homosexual tendencies I had consistent negative experiences with almost all my classmates" (N., lesbian, aged 25). The same difficulties are mentioned by S., who claims: "my relationships with my classmates were not good, especially when I attended secondary school. There were negative events that left me feeling very low. I remember that as soon as I got home I would burst into tears. This was all because of people's ignorance. They would tease me, calling me handicapped or homosexual. Back then, I hadn't yet come out as a homosexual" (S., gay male, aged 25).

R. also experienced the impact of this double stigma both at home and in school: "I attended mainstream state schools with normal-hearing people. In primary school I had the best teacher in the world. She knew how to handle my condition and always took great pains to make sure I was taught properly. Then, in secondary school, I had to deal with teachers who completely neglected my handicap, and it was a hard blow. A few teachers were particularly bad as they didn't even want to show me their lips when they spoke. One would speak with his back to me, and the other one had a long moustache that covered his whole mouth and which he always refused to trim for my sake, despite my parents' protests. In middle school, on the other hand, I received the necessary care and attention and performed well academically. I was happy and I had a big crush on my math teacher. I would often bring her up in conversations with my mum. Then my mum grew jealous of her and one day she scheduled a meeting with her and told her I was in love with her. I was really

crushed. I felt that my mum had betrayed my trust and I felt so ashamed to have these feeling which before I had experienced as good, for my teacher. I was never able to look her in the eye after that" (R., lesbian, aged 22).

It would be difficult for the people we interviewed to see themselves in a global dimension. As Goffman remarks, people with a particular stigma tend to have the same cognitive experiences as far as their minority problem is concerned. We see analogous changes in their self-perceptions, and a similar "moral career" which is both a cause and effect of their need to undergo every stage of adaptation in similar ways. One of the phases of this socialization process is that through which the stigmatized person learns to interiorize the points of view of normal people, thereby acquiring the belief system that the wider society has on identity questions as well as a general idea of what it means to have a particular stigma (Goffman 1963, 68). The construction of an identity and of a common language and rituals occur outside the regular processes of socialization and the majority of the subjects have attributed the reasons for their own discomfort to the reactions of the people closest to them (family and peer group). The main reasons for suffering could therefore be found in a sort of loosening of relationships within a social context. This separateness from the drama of close connections is determined, in the opinion of the participants, by the non-belonging to a community or group that is immediately visible and can be clearly distinguished, and also by the non-possession of a shared and current repertoire of symbolic rituals both easily accessible and transferable, to the contrary of what is to be found in the hearing and heterosexual community which has access to reference models. The possibility of using a shared symbolic/cultural reference system is considered an essential resource, not only with regard to all those factors that can be brought back within the notion of social inclusion but also to assist the orientation of behaviour in the various contexts of daily life and interaction.

One of the contradictory issues that emerged from the discussion with respect to the discomfort of not belonging is the difficulty the subjects had to feel part of a group or community: the reasons given by these individuals for strategically considering themselves unsuitable for being part of a group are determined by the types of discrimination and a universal and exclusive vision practised by heterosexuals, who, according to the participants, tend to define homosexuals by confining them to a fixed social category. As F. reported: "Well, I attended absolutely normal state schools and I can say that in general I felt reasonably good about them. When you're in primary school,

obviously you are more carefree and innocent; you still don't understand the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Apart from that, I already understood that I preferred boy . . . I envied the girls because I wanted to be like them. All in all, I can state that I had a good childhood in primary school. Certainly there were those who mocked me for being effeminate but more so for my obesity. However, in lower middle school the story changed. Obviously with adolescence there was a greater awareness, so even my homosexuality was more noticeable, and consequently I was more easily teased by the other boys, although not that much. So I can say that I got through those three years reasonably well. The only negative thing, which also made me suffer a lot, were the remarks made by two teachers, the French teacher and the physical education teacher. Basically they insisted that I behave more like a man and not like a sissy, and told me not to suck up to the other boys. This really upset me a lot. I definitely thought that they talked about me behind my back, and about my veiled homosexuality" (F., gay male, aged 23).

The lack of communication in the educational environment due to the hearing disability, coupled with the schools' incapacity to make deaf children feel at home (often due to the absence of a learning support teacher), is aggravated by the perception of the real or presumed homosexuality of the deaf people interviewed. From the analysis of the data it turns out that, in fact, the mainstream schools appear unready to handle hearing disabilities, and do not provide support regarding non-orthodox sexual choices. F. declared: "My teachers in the normal school always tried to teach me something; they were generally kind towards me. One or two were strict in the right way. For example, my speech therapist helped me to learn to speak correctly from when I was very young, even if I did not understand the exact meaning of every word, nor the sense of some of the Italian sentences. There was just one professor who was different. It was the Italian language teacher whom I never understood: when he tested me in front of the class it was awful; nobody ever seemed to realize that for me, as for other deaf pupils, it was impossible to read his lips due to his defective jaw. I never knew how to express my discomfort, nor explain where the communication problem resided. Therefore, I stayed as silent as possible, trying to avoid discussing any subject with the teachers. I had one teacher, though, in the lower middle school, the art teacher, who always encouraged me. . . . this disturbed me a lot because of the condition I was in, to imagine myself projected into a future where I taught normal hearing pupils seemed to me a surreal image. For that teacher nothing was impossible, but even if she knew about the potential of deaf persons, she never mentioned this to me. Still, everything that the adults could do outside of

school was a utopia for me. But the teachers at my special school were completely different; they were lots of fun (apart from the most serious professors); they talked about everything and so, little by little, I managed to voice my thoughts, and my opinions, and above all I learnt how to take part in the group discussions when I felt like it. I managed to master the Italian language reasonably well from the very first day of upper middle school. Until then, even up to a few months previously, I could not construct a decent sentence" (gay male, aged 26).

To be specific, the gender roles (especially masculinity) are often defined more by their distance from rather than desire for something; to learn to be a man means learning not to be feminine, and to be careful, even within the context of explicit male complicity (peer groups, college mates, barrack talk, etc.) to dodge and exorcise every doubt that could ever arise regarding one's own sexual orientation (which reveals itself by the adoption of a crude and vulgar vernacular, knowing how to treat girls, showing oneself to be *tough*, and by avoiding every possible association with femininity, both in appearance and behaviour). This is often rendered, as we have already seen in the various extracts, in the ritualization of homophobic behaviours in an exaggerated manner, while at the same time distancing oneself from every possible association with homosexual behaviour (negatively sanctioned in the various social contexts) and proclaiming a pronounced hostility towards homosexuals through public declarations (judged positively by the peer group and the social-cultural context) of their own heterosexual identity (Rinaldi 2012). These traits seem to degrade and stereotype all those individuals, whether male heterosexual or homosexual, who do not possess them – such as any individuals who deviate from social norms and from those values linked to the male sex. Violence in all its forms becomes a socially accepted phenomenon. One could additionally mention circumstantial factors, such as the existence of group norms which seem to justify explicit expressions of violence (including sensation seeking, the need to achieve a status and maintain it or to get a masculine reputation). In these cases, the victims are not just homosexuals but all those people who are thus interpreted through that cognitive and categorical filter.

The condition of deafness can also be associated with the stigma linked to gender roles and homosexuality. Let us consider the case of bullying in school: if adolescents realize that there will be no negative consequences or punishment for their actions, it is more likely that they will go

ahead and also repeat the bullying; with all the more reason to do so if the victim is also stigmatised by deafness.

We should also consider how these processes influence one another and intersect with other subordinate dimensions. When we take into account the relationship between the genders (and specifically masculinity) and sexuality and dis/ability, these last two elements are often considered a social-cultural oxymoron, as disabled people are constantly desexualized and infantilized. They are not expected to have sexual agency, especially homosexual agency. Their environmental context, with its rules and its hierarchy of bodies, genders, sexuality and desires, becomes the primary benchmark for comparison. Also people with disabilities (like elderly people) are desexualized. In the past, the common term for the disabled in Italian was "minorato" which has a common linguistic root with "minore" (infant). Victimization forms must therefore be considered with an eye to potential identity overlaps and consubstantiality.

One of our interviewees clearly sets out the dynamics and the context of the victimization she was subjected to as a deaf, female and lesbian person, at school and within her peer group: "From my perspective, my normal-hearing classmates were abnormal. I would tolerate everything they put me through both bad and good, because until I turned 25 I was unable to stand up for myself and say "no"! Most of my normal-hearing peers seemed to think it was a piece of cake for me and would speak really fast all the time, yet I never got what they were saying. I never understood any of their sentences. We would communicate through body language, looks and gestures on a daily basis. They would take advantage of me sexually and I never liked it, as I only had eyes for the girls. In girls, I secretly looked for the tenderness and kindness of being human" (S., lesbian, aged 19).

It is in the educational context of secondary school, which coincides with adolescence, that so much persecution and violence occurs. A. reports that "at primary school I was completely carefree with the other girls and even in middle school I never felt the burden of being deaf. The problems started at secondary school; I remember that my classmates used to tease me, and slandered me behind my back, and never missed a chance to use me as a scapegoat. I could never understand what was happening around me, because normal-hearing people spoke fast, in fact they whispered a lot, and I never had any way of defending myself. Often they took me by surprise, which put me at an additional disadvantage. With regard to the girls, I was very keen on some of my classmates

who were really pretty, but I never revealed this. I also had my eye on a female teacher. At the time I had no idea that there could be loving relationships between members of the same sex. I had never encountered the words lesbian, homosexual, or gay; nor had I ever met a homosexual; for these reasons I felt myself to be different and unique - basically abnormal" (A., lesbian, aged 20).

The victimization mechanisms consistently reported across the various interviews lead us to hypothesize, in general terms, that the group of LGBT deaf subjects represents a social target with an increased perception of risk and insecurity. It should be noted, however, that even though the rate of victimization is relatively low, as is the exposure to risk, the dimension of vulnerability, understood as the ability to defend oneself and to support the consequences deriving from victimization, is felt much more deeply also by our interviewees. Even though these subjects tend to react badly, at least cognitively, to the defenceless "deaf" stereotype, their capacity to cope seems rather limited if they are additionally burdened by the stigma of homosexuality. It is also a matter of understanding how the fear of being victimized can be seen as a sort of "indirect victimization," because such fear has repercussions for those who may not have actually suffered any persecution but are fearful of this happening. This arouses real fears that are activated in the daily life of the LGBT deaf, which determine both physical and emotional reactions. The issue of violence towards disabled people, let alone that of their ill-treatment by their families, is always underestimated and underrepresented in the political sphere, the mass media, research and public opinion. This cannot be exclusively attributed to the reticence felt by the victims in reporting discrimination (even though reticence is prevalent enough) but rather can be interpreted by the notion that violence towards the disabled (especially women and LGBT individuals) is a legitimate and accepted violence, which corresponds to the context of relationships between "normal" people. The greatest risks of victimization for these types of violence and offences are often found in places, environments and relationships which are thought to be safe, such as the victim's domestic, family and work environments. Violence towards disabled LGBTs can be conceptualized as normalized violence in that it perfectly mirrors historical and cultural practices that define the relationship between dominant structures and those they oppress. In this sense, deaf LGBT people could be considered designated cultural victims, as the data clearly spotlight the construction of the deaf LGBT individual as a cultural "target" and reveal the workings of power that underlie the roles of gender, physical ability (able-bodiedness) and heterosexuality.

These aspects are further brought to light by G.'s account: "My normal-hearing schoolmates were the same age as me, whereas the other deaf students were not. So the good relationships I had with my deaf schoolmates were always silent; generally we preferred to play together in various ways, so as to get to know each other better, rather than just have random conversations. By contrast, the bad relationships I had with my normal-hearing peers were very stressful: I can still remember how I lived in fear (now I realize this fear was unjustified as I was only 9 at the time) for two whole years, both because I felt condemned by religion for impure acts and because I was afraid of getting pregnant" (G, lesbian, aged 34). This account also focuses on the role religious stereotypes play in the educational settings.

The family relations of the people interviewed seem to be conditioned on the personal level by having or not having parents who were deaf themselves. In this sense, the discovery that their own child is gay or lesbian as a "bewildering" event does not usually facilitate the psychological support needed because there is also a lack of support from the LIS services. "My parents are deaf, as is my aunt. Until I was 25 years old, the actual dialogue between us was a total zero; we only spoke about ordinary day-to-day events. However from the moment I mastered sign language, I managed to have conversations about everything with my relatives, and I also encouraged my parents to express themselves better, especially with me. With regard to my homosexuality, years ago I sent a long letter to my parents in which I told them I was lesbian; however I quickly regretted this long-distance correspondence as I decided it was useless. A few months ago, I came out again at a dinner with them and introduced the special woman of my life. My mother still does not approve, which upsets me a lot. I am looking for Agedo people [Agedo is the Italian association of relatives of gay people, a supportive group] in our area who know how to communicate in sign language" (F., lesbian, aged 25). The path towards the acceptance of one's own homosexuality therefore appears problematic. The process of coming out within the family is felt as a major obstacle and another potential crisis that these individuals could encounter due to their deafness.

The people we interviewed usually have stable relationships with other LGBT deaf subjects (except for one person who has a relationship with a hearing LGBT individual); to search for a partner, they generally use social networks and themed chat rooms; less frequently, they find partners through recreational activities or LGBT associations. Significantly, the deaf LGBT community seems to be engaged in an (internal) battle against the prejudices of other deaf people towards their LGBT

orientation and in an equally difficult "external" battle against the world of heterosexual hearing people and of the hearing LGBT community. As C. said, "I mixed with all sorts of local groups and many other associations and communities all over Italy. Unfortunately, even there you can meet discrimination. It is really a matter of civic education" (C., gay male, aged 24). In a similar vein, N. complained: "Certainly at times it irritates me a lot to see the arrogance of some gays in public areas, as if they want to look down on you, pick holes in you" (N, gay male, aged 26). Most of the interviewees use these motives to justify the need to participate in some type of LGBT association that takes into account the specific difficulties of deaf people; many of them feel that they are discriminated against even inside the LGBT community (in associations, pubs, discotheques, meeting places, etc.).

One request that did emerge both in the group interviews and in the online ones was the urgent need to break down visual communication barriers in educational, relational and institutional settings, so as to raise public awareness about LGBT issues in general: "The institutions in Italy have produced lots of good, well-meant advertising and made many promises, but when it comes down to facts, we are failing to deliver on those promises. And this is just the tip of the iceberg, because for us deaf people things are even worse; we feel like downright third-class citizens, ranking after immigrants and homosexuals in the eye of the establishment. It is paramount that we break down every possible visual communication barrier!" "We need to bring down all communication barriers. I want to find a designated help desk in every public institution with people behind it who are specifically trained to communicate with deaf people. In every school there should be a 'sexual orientation' class and a 'history of homosexuality/heterosexuality' class, and these subjects need to be appropriately taught to deaf people by using plenty of images" (L., lesbian, aged 24).

Conclusions

The insights and reflections set out in the initial part of the paper were intended to introduce and examine the topic of multiple discrimination, emphasizing how disability and homosexuality can constitute factors which increase the risk of victimization. We observe how femininity and disability are both considered indicators of "passivity" and how, for example, the dis/abled male (homosexual) might be doubly discredited as an inadequate male - first, for his disability, and second, for his homosexuality. The perception by society at large of the dis/abled as infantile and

desexualized needs to be challenged, together with the normative and normalized aesthetic messages sent out by LGBT communities.

Families, social workers and teachers do not seem to have the knowledge and tools necessary to help disabled people emancipate themselves in terms of their sexual agency, and so far other institutions have failed in providing guidance. Even the topic of sexual education should by itself trigger a reflection on diverse issues that should really be looked at in much greater depth. We need to take stock of the fact that dis/abled people (as well as minors and elderly people) have sexual agency and are able to develop gender and sexual cultures. This is an argument bursting with theoretical and hermeneutic potential, but still not really touched on in Italy, as the society has not yet divested itself of moralistic implications and taboos that hinder an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon.

Another important concern is related to the need for specific policies and interventions. For example, school classes and everyday interactions still often reinforce winning models and standards of (hetero)sexuality. Sex is still defined as principally for reproductive purposes and abstinence is valorized. If the disabled are referred to at all, they are defined as "dysfunctional" and therefore unable to guarantee the reproduction of the "standard." Sex education understood in holistic terms should spur a reflection on the ways the dis/abled, elderly, young and very young people can take part in the education process, on the quality contents of the training of future educators, and on what is meant by "empowerment" (who strengthens and emancipates whom or what, and does this not make one suspect staunch but subtle forms of paternalism?). The present formative and educational policies reproduce and maintain the inequalities and the iniquities that characterize social life.

Regarding sexuality in general, and specifically in Italy, we observe the absence of the most basic vocabulary regarding sexual rights, and we are concerned about the way the policies of institutional training reproduce gender roles and conventional dichotomies, gender hierarchies, as well as corporeal and ethnic/racial stratifications of sexuality. We need to start considering ourselves as active participants in the debate about sexuality, rather than mere receivers of imposed interventions outside our own capacities to negotiate and create sexual meanings. The less able ("minorati"), understood as pre-sexual or non-sexual infants, make the roles and the objectives of

sex education rather problematic. The problem can be traced to the educators' inability to imagine every social category as composed of incorporated sexual individuals, and to the clumsy attempts to suppress information about the standardization and therefore about the "normalization" of a process of generic psycho-social-sexual development. If information is made available, it is decontextualized and often complicit with those same services (social, prevention, training, etc.) which programme, orient and define sexuality yet do not comprehend the space of sexualities. Therefore policy makers, researchers, social workers and all those who plan, evaluate and implement policies, operations and services should be aware that these processes have effects and social consequences: to single out some categories and certain stages of development is to effect symbolic violence, even if involuntary. To indicate one form of sexuality as more worthy of recognition means both implicitly and explicitly contributing to the spread of "acceptable" and "shareable" representations from which institutions, services, social workers, nurses, doctors, politicians and psychologists can draw conclusions as to which subjects are more worthy of these measures, services and policies. What are the real-life effects of sexual education measures related to non-normative sexual identities and sexual, gender, race and class inequalities? Will the result be the emancipation of these subjects or the creation of new forms of normalization with a view to constructing new "user" categories? We need to be mindful of the fact that every sexual education measure introduced is, at the end of the day, a political decision, because it implies a conflict between different (and often opposing) political powers on a specific policy.As suggested by Alldred and David, specific meanings and workings of power are thus established (Alldred and David 2007, 13).

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Against the Ugliness of Age:
Towards an Erotics of the Aging Sexual Body

Allison Moore
Edge Hill University, Ormskirk
Paul Reynolds
Edge Hill University, Ormskirk

Within the heteronormative construction, older people are positioned as asexual, post-sexual or predatory on young bodies. Ageist assumptions deny their sexual desires exist at all or, if they are acknowledged, frame them within pathological medical, sexological and cultural discourses that characterize older sexual agency as grotesque, ugly, unattractive and sexually undesirable. These normative constructions have a negative impact on older sexual subjectivities. This article begins to develop a constructive representational form – or erotics - of aging sex and sexuality. Queer, as a deconstructionist, anti-foundational and anti-essential perspective, would seem the most prominent means by which to challenge pathologies of the ageing body and ageing sexuality. However, this discussion will suggest that there is both scope and limitations with regards to the ability of Queer critiques to undermine ageist erotophobia. Whilst queer proposes that we are free to construct and reconstruct our sexuality in multiple ways, our changing subjectivities are not just experienced emotionally and intra-psychically but are also bounded by our physicality. Our ageing corporeality prevents a constant and continuous reinvention of the sexual self. This does not preclude an erotics of age that -moves away from genito-centric and heteronormative/ homonormative constructions of sexuality and open up the potential for an erotic aged sex and sexual intimacy.

Key words: *heteronormative, pathology, age, sex, desire, erotics*

> *. . . The body is a* materialization, *a socially mediated formation, lived individually and in communities* as real effects. *The physicality of the body establishes some of the potentials and limits for what we can do with our bodies, but these limits are not always absolutely fixed. The social world enters the physical body as we develop skills and capacities, altering even the body's molecular structure, its anatomy, physiology and metabolism. The body is thus a sturdy but fragile thing, an historical matter of political struggle.*
> - Jacquelyn N. Zita, *Body Talk,* p. 4

> *Body is certitude shattered and blown to bits.*
> *Nothing's more proper, nothing's more foreign to our old world*
> - Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus,* p. 5

Introduction

Jean-Luc Nancy's corrective to discursive articulations of the body is that they often dissolve the body into discourse, approaching it from our mind's eye rather than in the flesh, materially, as *corpus*. Our relationship with the *corpus* is an act of confronting the foreign, the obverse, the other. As he observes:

> The body proper, the foreign body; *hoc est enim* displays the body *proper*, makes it present to the touch, serves it up as a meal. . . . But instantly, always, the body on display is foreign, a monster that can't be swallowed...
>
> And all thoughts of the "body-proper," laborious efforts at reappropriating what we used to consider, impatiently, as "objectified" or "reified," all such thoughts about the body are comparably contorted; in the end, they only expel the thing we desired. (Nancy 5)

In Nancy's narrative, this indigestible body is a symptom of western enlightenment reason, where the idea, or ideal, of the body has replaced flesh. The desire to possess and consume the body 'exscribes' or translates it into a digestible form which we take to be the body, whereas looking at bodies - *corpus* - as they are confronts the indigestible, beyond discourse, present in the material yet in our examination foreign to us (Nancy 3-9).

This problem of the intelligibility of the body – an enduring and always agonistic, insoluble struggle – leaves how we construct our bodies, positively or otherwise, within the domain of discourse and discursive practices, where pedagogisation imposes upon attempts to 'come to terms' with the bodies we inhabit and the bodies we touch (Foucault 1976, 1984a, 1984b). Whilst the problem of the intelligibility of the body might be an enduring constant in struggles to possess the self and bring it under some juxtaposition with the consciousness that provides for desire, pleasure and peace, it is the problem of discursive struggles against pernicious and disabling discourses that characterises the everyday sense of struggle against pathology and prejudice.

A key domain in the struggle is the articulation of the sexed body. The sexed body, translated into consumable discourse, is young, fit, supple, lithe, toned and shaped to compose desire in the mind's eye, whatever the object or subject of desire may be. Sexuality, plastic in identity in

contemporary societies, is normatively youthful. Diverse representations of desire, whether heterosexual or not, vanilla or 'kinky', have a broad conformity to masculine and feminine 'Vitruvian's', proportionally pleasing with the completeness of strong against yielding, control against abandon, breach against violation.[46] What does not meet that normative cast is the non-sexual or the fetishised, the exception that amuses or repels. The struggle for the sexual gaze, then, is to both come to terms with the *corpus*, insofar as it can be made intelligible in a discursive world where its representation is fetishised in media and culture, and at the very least to engage with or produce constructive discourses of the body to avoid exceptionality where it debilitates. Yet, and as if proof for Nancy's claims about the indigestibility of our bodies, we include in that exception a condition that none escape the condition of aging and being 'old' except those who die you and are remembered in frozen youth.

Within but not exclusive to the heteronormative construction of sex and sexuality, older people are positioned as asexual, post-sexual or undesirable, and where they enter the sexual world it is to be predatory on young bodies that represent their loss and their desire. The aged body is naturalised, denied desire, or where there is acknowledgement that sexual desire is still present, medical, sexological and cultural discourses are constructed with pathological representations. Aging bodies are subject to sexual dysfunction, frailty, fragility and impaired performance, or fetishized notions of sexual relations, such as 'old with young'. Aging bodies are seen in a range of positions from being incapable of physically engaging in sexual activity, to being sexualised in only fetishised form, to being characterised as grotesque, ugly, unattractive and sexually undesirable. Only where the body can be remade young in its appearance, whether by cosmetic surgery or other *somatechnics*, is there even the semblance of extending the 'shelf life' of desirability.

If we follow Nancy and all encounters with the body challenge the subjectivity we constitute, these normative constructions about older people's sexuality, with their different forms of sensual lack, have significant negative impacts on their sexual subjectivities. They constitute a pedagogy that strips away whatever fleeting senses of sensual desire and interaction formed in their 'prime' as part of the process by which corporeality is conceived as withering and dying. The erotophobia that

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[46] 'Vitruvian' is used as metaphor, here, and one Nancy would appreciate. Da Vinci's model of human proportions is a representation of perfection that, in its shaping has bow legs and for one critic, asymptomatic left inguinal hernia. See: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2562403/How-bulge-groin-revealed-Da-Vincis-Vitruvian-Man-wasnt-perfect-specimen-all.html accessed 20/05/2015

arises from these normative articulations of age wear down the sexual subject and reduce them to the characteristics of being 'aged'. They are beyond and outside of being sexual.

Zita's observation provides a starting point for exploring both the construction of aging sexuality and the possibilities by which pathological pedagogies can be subverted and an 'erotics' of the aging sexual subject can be explored. The task is to develop a constructive representational form – or erotics - of aging sex and sexuality by which older people can re-enter the discursive world of being sexual. This form involves not just the replacement of negative with positive, but a recognition that for older people, coming to terms with the *corpus* has its own material challenges. This is not to argue that an erotics of the ageing body provides special insight to see the *corpus* beyond discursive contexts, but only that in constructing an erotics of the ageing body - and note that they are represented as real bodies, aging rather than in a particular stasis called 'old' - the juxtaposition between *corpus* and discourse is more acute. This latter is important, since the body is both a constant in our gaze but always aging in its corporeality. The gaze is discursively articulated as 'old' in relation to 'young', and thereby always discursively ordered negatively, whereas aging is a constant for all bodies, requiring different strategies or changing re-articulations of the desirable to accommodate.

If pathological, prejudicial and debilitating discourses of constructions of body, sexuality and desire are to be subverted and dismantled, it is necessary to look elsewhere from conventional naturalised, biological and normalised foundations. Queer, as a deconstructionist, anti-foundational and anti-essential perspective, would seem a potent means by which to challenge pathologies of the aged body and ageing sexuality. However, there is both scope and limitations with regards to the ability of Queer critiques to undermine ageist erotophobia. Queer proposes that we are free to construct and reconstruct our sexuality in multiple ways, and that our bodies should be understood as a text upon which we can inscribe and re-inscribe multiple and multi-layered meanings that reflect our changing subjectivities. This certainly offers the opportunity for sexual agency in any context, including that of aging. Yet, our changing subjectivities are not just experienced emotionally and intra-psychically but are also bounded by our physicality. As such, our corporeality and especially an ageing corporeality, limits and may prevent a constant and continuous reinvention of the sexual self. At the same time, an ageing body due to physical and, to a lesser extent, cognitive changes, might require individuals to move away from genito-centric and

heteronormative/homonormative constructions of sexuality and open up the potential for queering sex and sexual intimacy.

In this discussion, we assess the problems and possibilities of a queer critique of the aged 'ugly' body and sexual desirability, and explore the intersection of discursive and materialist critiques to provide a less provisional and more applicable basis for an erotics of aging sex and sexuality.

Sex, Intimacy and Ageing

Sex and sexuality have taken centre stage in contemporary Western societies and are considered essential features of what Giddens (1991) called the reflexive project of self, a fluid and dynamic process whereby individuals are no longer restrained by structural barriers but instead are free to exercise choice and reflexivity in the creation and recreation of their identities. These choice narratives are thought to have led to the emergence and celebration of a myriad of possibilities of intimate expression. However, whilst there has undoubtedly been a proliferation of representations of sex and sexuality in the Anglophone West, to such an extent that some commentators have argued that we now live in a sex-saturated or hypersexual world, the meanings ascribed to these representations have become restricted rather than more plural. Sex continues to be the preserve of young able-bodied adults and continues to be normatively constructed as heterosexual. Within this context, it is assumed that those individuals who fall outside the narrow parameters of young adulthood are not, or should not be, sexual. Children and young people under the age of majority are positioned as asexual or pre-sexual and sexuality is seen to be something that they must be protected from. Older people are positioned as asexual or post-sexual and sexuality is seen as irrelevant to them. Until relatively recently, older people were viewed "as not sexually desirable, not sexually desirous and not sexually capable" (Vares 503). Indeed, so pervasive is this ageist erotophobia that "many older people see themselves as too old for sex" (Bouman et al. 153).

Despite the fact that many Western societies have witnessed the growth in ageing populations over the last two decades and there has been a growing awareness that sexual desire and sexual response does not suddenly disappear in old age, myths and stereotypes about older people's sexuality persist. According to Oppenheimer (2002), it is possible to identify four distinct but related attitudes regarding sexuality, intimacy and older people.

The first is "the attitude of discreet silence; it's nicer not to talk of such things" (Oppenheimer 872) Although there might be a positive aspect to this in so far as older people's privacy is maintained because others do not want to intervene, do not want to ask questions because they do not want to know/hear the answers, there are also clearly negative connotations because older people's sexuality is silenced. Ken Plummer (1995, 2001, 2003) has identified telling sexual stories, making public what was hitherto private, as an essential component of intimate citizenship. The attitude of discreet silence is the elder equivalent of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', the United Sates policy on gay personnel in the military which was enforced for many years.

The second attitude is the attitude of disgust. "Sex in old people is considered ugly . . . grotesque and incongruous. . . . This attitude has a long cultural tradition; images of lecherous old men purchasing unwilling maidens, or of pained madams tempting youths to their downfall" (Oppenheimer 873) The notions of disgust and grotesque used here are underpinned by two taboos. The first concerns the incest taboo (Oppenheimer, 2002) or Western cultural prohibitions against intergenerational intimacy where older people, usually men, are portrayed as predatory on the supposed innocence and naivety of youth. Normative assumptions about youth sexuality and the sexuality of older people are, therefore, maintained and perpetuated. The second sense of the grotesque implied in this attitude concerns the ageing body itself as ugly and incongruous with sexual desire and desirability. In her discussion of the scarcity of media representations of sexuality in later life, Tina Vares (2009) suggests that this is due, largely, to the construction of elder sexuality as 'unwatchable', ugly and grotesque. However, this, too, is a gendered concept of the grotesque as it is women's ageing bodies that generate the greatest levels of disgust (Sontag, 1997; Oberg, 2003; Vares, 2009). Where the attitude of discreet silence renders elder sexuality as unspeakable, the attitude of disgust positions it as unimaginable or unthinkable.

The third attitude towards ageing sexuality is characterised by Oppenheimer as 'upbeat'. This can be seen as an attempt to challenge negative stereotypes of sexuality in later life and raise awareness about the continuing importance of sexual desire and intimacy as one ages. To illustrate this attitude, Oppenheimer cites an example of a car sticker that states "I'm not a dirty old man, I'm a sexy senior citizen" (873). However, replacing negative stereotypes with positive stereotypes still relies on homogenising assumptions and is still dehumanising (Thompson, 1998, 2001; Udis-Kessler, 1996). Not only does the 'upbeat' attitude create new normative standards of ageing

sexuality, it can also deny the lived experiences of the many older people who do experience problems with regards to their sexual functioning.

The final attitude is, what Oppenheimer calls, "'tunnel vision': the mental set that conceives of sexuality only in terms of genital organs and of relationships as only heterosexual" (873). This attitude ignores the vast array of fantasies, desires and actions that sexuality encompasses. Further, not only does the dominance of heteronormativity deny the sexuality of lesbian, gay and bisexual elders, because of the continued assumptions about the ageing body as frail and in decline, there is a belief that older heterosexual men and women are unable to engage in penile-vaginal penetration and, therefore, elder sexuality is seen as impossible.

Existing alongside these largely negative attitudes towards ageing and sexuality, and somewhat contradictorily, is the view that lifelong sexual functioning is identified as one of the key components of 'positive ageing', 'successful ageing' or ageing well (Gott, 2006; Sandberg, 2008). For men, this means the ability to achieve and maintain an erection. Marshall and Katz (59) note: "The erect penis is now elevated to the status of a vital organ" but it is not just the presence of the erect penis that acts as an indicator of sexual functioning in older men, it is also its ability to penetrate (Sandberg, 2008). Successful sexual functioning for women, however, seems to be limited to the ability to be penetrated. Ageing well with regards to sexuality then reinforces heteronormativity and perpetuates, what Tamsin Wilton has called genital identities, which are predicated on the assumption that "a body with a vagina and uterus is allocated meanings that include its being *for* penetration / impregnation by a penis, while the meanings of a body which has a penis include its being *for* penetrating / impregnating a vagina / uterus" (104).

Such is the centrality attached to sexual function in narratives of 'successful ageing' that an inability to be sexually functional has been characterised by some public health and government officials as a public health concern and potential epidemic, particularly with respect to older men experiencing erectile dysfunction (see Gott 2006 and Mashall & Katz, 2002 for a more detailed discussion of this development). The framing of sexuality in later life as in 'natural' decline positions it as inherently dysfunctional, which, in turn, legitimates medical and pharmacological intervention in the form of medications like Viagra, for example, in order to prevent a public health crisis. In other words, successful ageing assumes successful sexual functioning and requires older people to conform to a

neoliberal model of individualism, management of risk and bodily regulation. It is the individual's responsibility to ensure that they access the necessary treatments and adhere to the required bodily regimes in order to remain "forever functional" (Marshall and Katz 59).

This example gives a powerful caution to any critical engagement with the erotophobia of the aging sexual body. There is a distinction between eroticising the aging sexual body and augmenting or procedurally intervening with the body to preserve characteristics – like maximal function – that are the domain of youth. It is a fine distinction, and cosmetic strategies for treating the ageing sexual body might straddle both sides. It is not, however, in itself a response to erotophobia to engage in strategies that are focused on 'turning back the clock' and thus preserving the basis of erotophobic pathology.

Re-constructing the sexual aging body: Queer?

The starting point for re-constructing the aged body as sexual would appear to be with a conception of sexuality that recognises fluidity and plasticity rather than rigidity in how sexuality and the sexual body are seen. The most prominent approach to take this position is queer. Although usually associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans theorising, politics and activism, which seek to deconstruct pathological discourses of identity and behaviour, queer approaches have a broader purview. By its very nature, queer can be difficult to categorise and resists easy definition because of the diversity and divergence of opinion that falls under the 'queer umbrella'. David Halperin states, "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.*" In other words, queer is always and necessarily relational; "a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (Halperin 62). It is precisely its relationship to the normative that makes queer theory so appealing in theorising ageing sexuality. Normative sexuality is not only heterosexual but also age-defined, inaccessible to or illegitimate for those considered too old (or too young). Its relationality, and by extension, its challenge to the normative, means that queer "can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalised as a result of their sexual practices" (Halperin 62). Queer permits agency, where the sexual subject draws from their cultural, sexual and experiential contexts to make and remake themselves. As Warner observes: 'Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer' (Warner xiii). Queer is, then, a form of enabling practice of the sexual agent, whereby they have the

tools by which to subvert traditional normativities with respect to sexuality, notably heteronormativity and hetero-patriarchal normativities.

Queer provides this opportunity because it is inherently deconstructive, and the elusiveness of saying what queer is arises from an afoundational and deconstructive impulse at its centre. Queer is almost metaphor for these practices put in motion by sexual agents, with an implicit transgressive assumption - that the sexual subject will seek to perform being queer against dominant normativities whilst creating their own subjective identities and practices of sexual desire and pleasure for themselves. As such queer involves rupturing assumptions and preconceptions of sexual identities, relations, orientations, behaviours and practices. What sex is, how it is enjoyed, with whom, in what discursive contexts, are all subject to malleability by the agent.

Two concepts, in particular, are central to this understanding of queer theory and its application to ageing sexuality: Judith Butler's performativity and Michel Foucault's notion of desexualisation. Butler maintains that gender is a cultural and regulatory fiction (Spargo, 1996). Sex and gender are both discursive constructions existing within a matrix of relations that legitimate and perpetuate heterosexuality because it is assumed that there is a causal relationship between "biological sex, culturally constituted gender and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through practice" (Butler 1990, 23). For example, conventionally, a woman has been normatively constituted as female and feminine, which is expressed in heterosexual desire for her opposite, the heterosexual, masculine male. In order for women's gender to be intelligible, the expectation is that it conforms to the heterosexual matrix and that there is congruence between women's sex, gender and sexuality.[47] For Butler, the laws that determine intelligibility are based on particular epistemological assumptions about the "knowability of the human" (Butler 2006, 183). Gender should not be understood as something we have but rather as signifying "a kind of doing" (Butler 2004, 1) or a performance. This recasting of gender and sexuality as performative - constantly made and remade by the performance of difference and against the cultural conventions than encourage conformity within gendered and sexual dominant discourses - gives power and agency to the sexual subject. If they understand that their gender and sexuality has been constituted for them, internalised within them, normalised around them and imposed upon

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[47] There is a substantive difference between how Butler and Nancy see intelligibility and the two should not be confused.

them, they can also understand their performance can disrupt those conformities and allow them to reshape their sexual (and gendered) selves.

Foucault's notion of desexualization disrupts the assumed causality between sex, gender and sexuality, or more specifically, it challenges the normative relationship between sex organs, sexual practice and pleasure. He used the term 'desexualization of pleasure' in the context of sadomasochistic practices to refer to the separation of "sexual pleasure from genital specificity, from localization in or dependence on the genitals" (Halperin 89). Although he was writing specifically about SM practices, desexualisation can be applied more widely to encompass all sexual activity that decentres the sexual organs and/or eroticises other parts of the body.

When applied to the aging sexual body, queer would seem to be suggestive of a strategy to deconstruct pathologies and prejudices. Linn Sandberg (2008) has suggested that queer theory represents an underutilised tool for theorising old age and that concepts such as abjection and performativity can help us critically analyse and ultimately deconstruct what it means to 'do' ageing in intelligible ways.

Sandberg is sensitive to the distinction between the possibilities of queer disruptions of old age and positive recastings, particular in tune with neo-liberal consumerist discourses. For her, discourses of positive ageing are analogous with gay assimilationist strategies. Just as gay men and lesbians are tolerated in a heteronormative world as long as they do not represent too much of a threat to the 'ideal' of heterosexual coupledom, a position that has led to the increasing prevalence of what Lisa Duggan (2002, 2003) calls homonormativity, hence "being old does not have to be a negative thing as long as you live life like you used to live it" (Sandberg 124). Sandberg concludes:

> Queer theory's turn to negativity and embracing shame can be seen as a way to deconstruct these ageist discourses and theorise old age differently. Regarding old age as performative in a similar way to gender moreover opens up a discussion of the role of failure in relation to age. Not being able to perform one's age has consequences also for one's gendered self, albeit differently for men and women. Sexuality plays a central role in this and queer theory's discussions on heteronormativity and hierachisations of sexualities could well be used also to

discuss sexuality and old age. To include ageing and old age further in queer theory may in addition be a way of expanding and rethinking notions of normalcy and sexuality, where the discourse so pervasive on older people's sexuality; asexuality, needs a whole lot more attention. The discourses of positive ageing, how to become a successful retiree are based upon an understanding of ageing as a form of moral laxity, an inability to control and perform a desirable self, and moral discourse is on the whole very strong in relation to old age. These pre-given and naturalised moral codes of old age may be challenged through queer temporalities revealing the constructed nature of the life course framed by time of reproduction and time of inheritance. (134-135)

Sandberg may have some credence in seeing the potential of queer theory to subvert the pathology of aging sexuality, yet the intersubjective possibilities it holds out for – a recasting rather than deferral of pathologies and prejudices – is somewhat limited to the particular intersubjective circumstances of the performative act. Queer provides the means for exceptions and exceptional performances of the aging sexual self, but within the constructs and confines of an erotophobic heteronormative pathology of aging sexuality, which can be reinforced by class, disability and race (for example see McRuer 2006 and Kafer 2013). Queer performativity has often been itself queried as to how far it constitutes a politics of performance in its focus on discursive disruption within a material world where ideological power and material contexts subvert cultural politics (see Kirsch 2000, Floyd 2009). Butler has herself recognised this both in her working out of the balance of cultural and material forces (1999, 1993, 1997) and more recently in political meditations exploring the performative in the context of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou 2013). Here, the individuating and dispossessing discourses of neo-liberalism around property, ownership and consumption are contrasted with a self-dispossessing relationality that emphasises human interdependence and so contrasts a debilitating critique with a more promising (if limited) notion of how performativity can bring about materially constructive relations .

Such concerns raise the issue of how you *perform* this exceptionalism. In respect of an aging sexuality, the dominant approaches to older people's sex and sexuality detailed above are *dissembling*. Whilst relationality and interdependence of social subjects along axes of difference may be acknowledged, there is a specific sense in which queer encourages performativity in the

context of particular closures that debilitate the capacity for performative politics. Indeed they constitute the oppositional constructs to be performed against, and represent potent and regressive formations.

Gilleard and Hicks (2011) provide an insightful reflection on this struggle in focusing on the notion of abjection in old age and the possibilities of its transgression. They outline the potency of abjection and the problems of engaging with abjection as a process that is continuous, making a distinction between the increasing frailty and lack of autonomy in the 'fourth age' as undermining those common strategies for attempting to retrieve dignity from abjection in the 'third age'. They offer two tentative possibilities for engaging with the persistence of abjection, which both transgress the naturalised and normalising discourses of aging and pathology and engage, in part, with Nancy's more enduring problem of intelligibility. They argue that a conjoined intimacy in caring has some possibility of providing an alternative to the slow debilitating impact of age as abjection, and they argue that the process of engaging with the 'other' of the aged sexual body is a potent reminder of the ontological vulnerability of the human condition.

Queer, then, provides a zone of engagement at which some tentative possibilities for transgression and reframing can arise to counter the power of abjection and debilitating discourses of the aged sexual body. Yet queer has its limitations in challenging the constitution of these pathologies beyond intersubjective change, with the possibility of cumulative transgressions shifting cultural discourses rather than providing exceptionalisms. Does a more qualified and pessimistic approach offer more?

Jacquelyn N. Zita (1998) provides a possible extension to framing strategies for transgression when she offers a speculation on the possibility of male lesbians in the context of the postmodernist body. Here, women centred men have a number of strategies by which to break the relationship between gender, sex and sexuality against the historicity of these conventional normative positionings of the body (85-108). If men identify as women-centred and seek to follow Stoltenberg (1989) in refusing to be a man and identify as lesbians, they have open to them the different strategies of: transsexual physical and psychological reconstruction of the body to the morphological criteria of 'female'; figuratively present themselves and valorise their experience as trans-gender and reject their somatic form; read themselves and insist on being read in a way that

is genitally de-essentialising and so rejects somatic links to identity and being altogether; engage in 'genderfuck' and give priority to the meaning and performance of their sexuality as primary for themselves and for others in locating self (Zita 99). These might be seen as different performative strategies that enable the sexual agent to exercise their remaking of their sexual selves. Zita is ultimately pessimistic that this engagement of the transgressive self is sufficient to effect change, but does provide a framing that can rehearse the scope and limits to such possibilities.

If we begin to explore what strategies are open to older sexual agents, a number of possibilities suggest themselves that might mirror the framework Zita offers. Undoubtedly the 21st century is replete with technological and medicalised, procedural attempts to subvert the construction of aging and its debilitating impositions of aging sexual agents. Drugs like Viagra and Cialis allow for the elongation of sexual capacity. Surgical techniques can give the appearance of youth by changing the surface of the skin or through implants and augmentations. ICT offers a range of opportunities for presenting the self beyond age, whether in avatar form mediating the physical in the virtual, or through textual or mediated/visual representations and sexual interactions online. Technologies have advanced to the point where robotics and prosthetics mean that sophisticated replicates of human partners are becoming possible. Virtual reality programmes, computer generated augmentations such as pressure pads and visual aims that can be placed on the body, and the proliferation of the availability of diverse forms of pornography allow for self-contained sexual expression. In short, the 21st century has enabled the technological extension of the sexual. These opportunities are largely ageless and can be afforded by anyone with access and disposable income - thereby raising the issue of class division - but these developments can clearly benefit the ageing sexual subject.

Of course, they do so primarily by changing the representation of the body to give it the appearance of being more youthful or adopting representational vestiges of youth - skin absent of blemishes, taut curves - or by negating the body of even its representational ideal altogether. Technology provides an opportunity to 'turn back the clock' as opposed to negate the clock altogether, or to render the clock a fiction in virtual time. Whilst somatic technologies provide alterations of the body, it is open to question as to whether the augmented *corpus* represents a confrontation or an exercise in deferral. As a discursive strategy, it offers the possibility of reclaiming hegemonic ground, but this is not the same as making bodies intelligible to the erotic

gaze. Indeed, the maintenance of such a discursive strategy when written onto the body in technological or cosmetic forms is often one of acute medicalisation. Likewise, virtuality offers a completely different set of reference points to engaging the erotic, but they do not speak to corporeality unless it is to claim that it can be satisfactorily left behind, which sets an important agenda for exploration but addresses the 'problem' of the aging body by refusing it.

In a sense, this is a reprise of the discussion triggered by Sandberg (2008), but it does expand that discussion to recognise that whilst there are strong elements of regression to pathology present, or a limited intersubjective production of the exception to dominant discourses, this is one field of struggle that should not be wholly abandoned, and offers some possibilities for transgression if it is seen in its broader context. The extent to which it can be utilised more transgressively might depend on wider political agendas such as access, intersectional recognition and debates around post-human and augmented sexualities as different sexualities (see Weiss 1999 and Bradotti 2012, 2013).

Figurative strategies that reject somatic form might be seen as similarly partial in addressing the ageing body. They are explicitly engaged with putting distance between any explicit intelligibility of the *corpus* through discursive strategies that claim authorial authority in representation. Either, the reading of the ageing body is persuasively eroticised or the ageing body that is usually discursively represented as losing 'eroticism' is reconstructed with an erotic gaze. The fetishisation of sexual stereotypes such as 'cougars' - older women who are identified as sexual and indeed somewhat predatory of youthful partners - might be constituted as a rearticulation of the ageing body as erotic.

Of course, whilst it might provide an enabling discursive context for some women - a niche to occupy that allows the exercise of their sexuality - it might also be regarded as an exception that is subject to ridicule or stereotype, and this sort of discursive strategy trades off these positives and negatives. Here, the capacity to develop discursive strategies that are not easily incorporated into normalised and naturalised dominant discourses is important, and whilst it is another avenue – cultural representation – of struggle – it should be again measured in relation to the constructs that dominate the cultural realm. Furthermore, the project of rejecting the somatic form for culturally constituted discursive readings is questionable and arguably a deferral rather than an engagement with the pathology of the aging sexual body.

This discursive rejection of dominant somatic forms might be accompanied by a recasting not only of the body as erotic but the meaning of erotic itself. This corresponds to an approach that draws on Foucault's (1976) notion of desexualisation and Zita's (1998) genital de-essentialising. What is valuable about this extension of discursive strategy is that offers the possibility not simply of concentrating on how to retrieve or transgress for an eroticised aging sexual body, but to do so with a transformative eye to the contexts of age, sex and body that completely rejects any foundational points as to the necessary – particularly naturalised – aging of the *corpus*. It does not deny the corporeality of decay in the body, and the material context within which bodies move, but it does invite a strategy that links materiality and its discursive reading with wider struggles to retrieve sex from hetero-normativity, patriarchy, genito-centrism, reproductive biologism and medical performance models across the life course. In this sense it broadens and deepens the project of eroticising aging sexual bodies by inviting a rearticulation of contexts and constituents of the very conception of bodies, sexuality and eroticism and age.

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This, in a sense, leads to the possibility Zita offers that it might be possible to 'engage in 'genderfuck' and give priority to the meaning and performance of their sexuality as primary for themselves and for others in locating self' (99). Zita is rightly wary of such a possibility. In a sense, it represents a perfect 'in the moment transgression' of self and sexual from all boundaries, where plasticity and fluidity can be repeatedly performed and autonomy celebrated. It could be said to be the highest expression of a queer intersubjectivity. Yet it crystalises the potential for queer to become closed from wider contexts within an intersubjective performance, potentially overstating the discursive against the material, and dissolving bodies into language – and thus failing to see the importance of Nancy's ontological caution.

Whilst queer does provide the basis for possible challenges to the hegemony of naturalisation and normalisation, seeing the terms of debate through the gaze of Nancy and Zita gives a sense that engaging with the sexual body, any *corpus*, is always an unending struggle of intelligibility, in which any sense of enabling comes through discursive struggles to dissemble and reconstruct first the focus of the ageing sexual body and then the very discursive and material constituents that frame that struggle. If this excursus on the ageing sexual body has any conclusion it is that this is a continuous struggle against a materiality that provides determinant points at strategies must be

rethought and refreshed, not just against changing discursive pathologies but against that unintelligible yet signifying materiality of bodily change.

Whilst such a strategy might be daunting and imply at its most modest transgression in performance and at most a recasting of the sexual and the body in material contexts, it should not be seen as oppressively daunting. Sex is erotic play as much as a particular sensual performance. Brecher (2013) talks about the centrality of postponement and acting as a part of transgressive reaches for the erotic, and this particular political struggle can be pursued in part, in micro-contexts, through theatre, dress, elaboration in performance, explorations with sensations, textures, pain and pleasure, smells and sounds. Small steps politically, but profoundly enjoyable and for all ages?

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Doing It Together, The Gay Way:
Queer Coupling in Marilyn Hacker's *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* and Carl Phillips's *Cortège*

Jason Bryant
Arizona State University

This article explores the poetry of Marilyn Hacker and Carl Phillips by drawing attention to the poems' representations of same-sex couples living in domestic space via two basic strategies. First, the article examines how Hacker's Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons dramatizes the performative work of "doing coupledom" as opposed to depicting same-sex lovers intent upon inclusion within the normative frame of marriage. The second approach the article takes is to examine the ways that Phillips's Cortège describes intimate, often unflattering, love narratives that reveal a queer sensitivity to the subject of joy/pain/desire, reflective of the degree to which queers are forced to meditate on such topics as why, how, and whom one can desire. Phillips seeks to describe a queer sensitivity, an alertness and aliveness to social and sexual relations implicit in many queer discourses on the subject of love. In their respective poetics, Love, Death and Cortège contemplate ordinary domestic space as a site of performative processing of partnered relationships, and they recommend queer living and loving practices sensitive to the complexities of joy/pain/desire.

Key words: *queer coupling, love, performativity, Marilyn Hacker, Carl Phillips*

Introduction

This article explores the poetry of Marilyn Hacker and Carl Phillips by drawing attention to the poems' representations of same-sex couples living in domestic space via two basic strategies. First, I examine the poetry's reflections on a socio-cultural shift in emphasis regarding coupled relations: from a definitional perspective ("What makes a couple?") to an operational approach ("What makes a couple *work*?"). This shift in the American imaginary has not advanced uniformly in a consolidated, singular movement from one to the other in social rhetoric about marriage, family values, or sexual morality. Still, the "work" of loving and living together draws much contemporary social attention; this corresponds to critical and popular emphases on the postmodern concept of performativity to explain reality. So, the first approach that this article takes is to examine how Hacker's *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* (1986) dramatizes the performative work played out in coupled domestic spaces. Seen via this approach, the domestic work of lesbian

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coupling evinced in Hacker's poetry reflects an understanding of the domestic as performative and illustrates particular aspects of housework that are often overlooked by heteronormative texts.

The second approach the article takes is to examine the ways that the poetry recommends a certain domestic mode of queer living, what has been called a "gay way of life." Political conservatives have cited loudly the public visibility of gay couples and families as destructive of the institution of family and marriage, but scholars claim "queer families" as the "vanguard of the postmodern family condition, because they make the denaturalized and contingent character of family and kinship impossible to ignore," proving that there exists no longer a "consensus on the form a normal family should assume, every kind of family has become an alternative family" (Stacey and Davenport 356-7). Even so, neoliberal gay "rights" advocates clamor for same-sex marriage recognition, according to a friable political perspective that seeks the normativization of gay subjectivity. This is *not* what I mean when I claim that Hacker and Phillips depict domesticated gay ways of life.

Instead, I argue that the poetry queers the weak ground upon which same-sex marriage "reform" bases its lite-politics: a singular, over-sentimentalized fascination with romance that privileges heterosexuality as an "originary" model for contemporary relationship-building. Hacker and Phillips cast their domestic coupled love narratives through the Foucauldian lens of *parrhesia*, an "activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness," through which he establishes "a certain kind of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty" (*Fearless Speech* 19). Thus, I argue throughout that Hacker's and Phillips's collections find strength by appealing to a mode of critical frankness that refuses to characterize gay domestic partnership via a model provided by normative romance narratives. Instead, the poetry privileges the realm of the common and ordinary, the vulgar and disgusting, the taboo and sacrosanct to suggest alternative ways of living and loving queerly.

In fact, Foucault mentions that *parrhesiastes* must speak freely in order to recommend honest speaking practices to others as a kind of ethical practice. This is what I mean by a "gay way of life" that the domestically-situated coupled speakers of Hacker's and Phillips's poetry describe: they provide open, often unflattering love narratives that reveal a queer sensitivity about the subject of desire. In particular, I argue that Phillips's *Cortège* (1995) casts gay partnered relations in the

domestic realm as an ethical practice of communication in service to honesty and intimacy about this sensitivity to imagine sexual and social desire. Associations of artifice that cling to "romance" buzzwords, which include "mystique," "enchantment," even "hanky panky," demonstrate that romance involves a degree of withholding and release. As most of Phillips's poems demonstrate, *Cortège* resists this approach by concentrating on how joy/pain/desire enlivens the gay subject committed to another *in light of* the fact that his joy/pain/desire cannot be contained by his union to a lover. In other words, Phillips reveals that narratives about gay domesticated partnership can acknowledge that sexuality and subjectivity are impossibly slippery conditions.

Both Hacker's and Phillips's collections narrate domestic coupledom as a process that unites ordinary people in ordinary spaces doing ordinary things: partners eat, sleep, shit, love, and fuck one another in the shared space of the home. These are processes ordinary to all kinds of Americans of whatever sexual orientation, but I argue that what is "gay" about the art of domestic relations that Hacker and Phillips illustrate is that it resists conforming to a heterostatic script of coupled intimacy that the rhetoric of romance situates as natural and necessary among healthy adult relations. In doing this kind of revision of coupling, I call attention to David Halperin's claim that queers "are forced to engage in at least a modicum of critical reflection on the world as it is given," which prompts the cultivation of a productive "second-order processing and reprocessing of immediate experience" (*How to Be Gay* 454). To value a gay art of domestic coupledom is to be critical about what it is that clings to the rhetoric of domestic romance, which I argue, Hacker and Phillips perform. They take the mundane little world of the home; charge it with all kinds of sexual, emotional, and philosophical intimacies; and refuse to hold up the space as evidence of success, achievement, or validity. In so doing, the poems privilege critique, doubt, and questioning as valuable methods of narrating queer sexual and social relations.

Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons uses a long sequence of sonnets (over one-hundred-fifty) interspersed with villanelles and sestinas to frame domestic space as the site in which couples do the work of domestic life. They catalogue a lover-speaker who woos, couples with, and then loses her beloved over the course of just-under one year. The collection invokes the tradition of formal poetry, by using conventional forms as a way to interrogate contemporary American love relations. Carl Phillips's *Cortège* differs radically in its approach to form, as it employs free verse, experimenting with broken lines and playing with stanza breaks for rhetorical effect. Thematically,

his collection reflects Hacker's emphasis of the domestic space as central to organizing his speakers' contemplation of long-term coupling with a same-sex partner. Though *Cortège* lacks the thread of a stylized narrative found in Hacker's *Love, Death*, his collection represents domestic coupledom as an ongoing process in which lovers discern how their lives have impacted and are impacted by their partners.

In their respective poetics, Hacker and Phillips emphasize the ability of form, content, and language to communicate the concept that ordinary domestic space is a site of performative processing of a relationship that is always open to the vicissitudes of living and loving with a partner. In these ways, *Love, Death* and *Cortège* support my argument that lesbian and gay perspectives have contributed to the shift in imagining coupledom as a performance rather than as an ontological state. My second argument investigates how poetic expressions like Hacker's and Phillips's describe queer "love life" narratives that are sensitive to the complexities of human desire.

Working for Love & Loving It in *Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons*
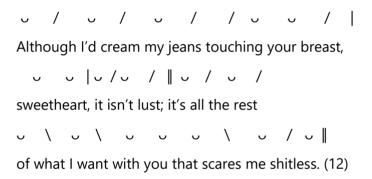
Most consistently, Marilyn Hacker employs the poetic form of the Italian sonnet as a way to posit the social form of lesbian domestic coupledom. As a form whose traditions demand a particular correspondence to an ideal, the sonnet works beautifully as a lyric metaphor for the conventional concept of home. First, like any traditional poetic form, it is "closed," in that in order to be accepted as a sonnet, it must correspond to particular standards. This is similar to the conventional definition of home, which, to many people, must reflect certain basic traits.

As with any discussion of a traditional form, for all of its formulaic durability, both the sonnet and the home are malleable and diverse, too. Hacker has professed an appreciation of tradition only because it allows poets the joy of stretching conventions to apply to their own time. This is also her approach to allusion: for Hacker, it isn't so much that "the sonnet as a form in itself is 'pertinent,' but that it lends itself to pertinent topics, to which, by the weight and richness of its history, it adds a counterpoint of what has gone before, setting the contemporary issue into stronger relief" ("Sonnet" 144).

One way that Hacker plays with sonnet form in order to enliven the tradition of domestic coupling can be found in her inventive approach to meter. Hacker writes elsewhere that meter is especially

important to her poetics: "metrics is the bone-structure, the armature, of poetic form, of open forms as well. They, too, must have some kind of metrical coherence, make some kind of aural sense" (qtd. in Finch 26). Like that of many contemporary American poets, Hacker's verse is vernacular, which contributes to rhythms that mimic the ebb, flow, and stoppage of spoken English. In a clever sonnet such as the unnamed one that begins "Didn't Sappho say her guts clutched up like this?" the speaker's engrossment with digestive cramps is caused by her nervousness from imagining coupledom with Ray, her lesbian beloved, who, over the course of the collection, becomes the speaker's house- and love-mate (before breaking off their relationship). The poem's final tercet ends with these lines:

> ◡ / ◡ / ◡ / / ◡ ◡ / |
>
> Although I'd cream my jeans touching your breast,
>
> ◡ ◡ | ◡ / ◡ / ‖ ◡ / ◡ /
>
> sweetheart, it isn't lust; it's all the rest
>
> ◡ \ ◡ \ ◡ ◡ ◡ \ ◡ / ◡ ‖
>
> of what I want with you that scares me shitless. (12)

As the sonnet's resolution, these lines incorporate a thematic concentration of Hacker's collection – the intimacy of domestic coupledom that boldly associates the sexually charged (the titillations of lust) with the dull quotidian (the day-to-day humdrum). Here, "lust" appears just before the only full caesura in the geographic center of the stanza, forcing the speaker to pause before moving forward. The greatest stress of that line is implied by "rest," which would likely be expressed in italicized form in conversational speech, as it is meant to clarify and emphasize the speaker's *true* concern over the supposed motivation for her anxiety (lust). After "rest," the final line employs a *sotto voce* pace meant to spool out as an aside, an under-spoken confession.

In this way, the meter carries forward the thematic release of the sonnet – clutched up guts are released with the final "shitless" in an ironic tweak of the love sonnet form, which might have been used normatively (and is so used by Hacker in subsequent sonnets) to celebrate the lover's lustful delight. This is a sonnet whose final line elides the domestic ("all the rest") while centering it as a form of commitment, work, and love that is deeply significant and powerful enough to cause fright (and other messes).

Throughout the collection, Hacker incorporates meter that juxtaposes the graphically sexual with the banal to produce a statement that relates the functional aspects of coupling with its orgasmic potential. In one of her many untitled poems, she uses relatively fluent pentameter to join two phrases:

> ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / |
>
> I kiss you till my clit's about to burst,

> ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ‖
>
> and catch myself reorganizing shelves. (13).

Both orgasm and de-cluttering space are given equal value here – both in terms of thematic and metric equivalence. The suggestion is that both the ecstasy produced by sexual intimacy and the mundane task of straightening up space are delightful. This is especially so because the lover is preparing room for the entrance of the beloved into the domestic space. In order to accept the beloved into her home, the narrator – named Hack, who is meant to be taken as a poetic model for the author – must "make space." She suggests here that, as an orgasm that unites the lover to her beloved in a sexually intimate way (and powerfully felt body experience) makes room for her beloved to be integrated into Hack's "love life," it inspires her to make physical space in her home for the body of her lover to occupy it. Both of these activities are related. It's an obvious point to make, and Hacker makes it here clearly, but it is a simple expression of the powerful relation between the sexual and the domestic. Both work to sustain the other: the coming creates the need for the occupying with the hope that the occupying will produce more opportunities for the coming.

A central aspect of the work of domestic coupling emerges in the form of choice: choosing to remain committed to the sexual and/or affective parameters of a dyadic relationship, choosing to perform tasks to satisfy a partner, and choosing to respect each other as cohabitants are all vital concerns for the maintenance of a coupled relationship. The role of choosing within the performative work of domesticated coupledom has dramatic importance throughout *Love, Death*. In a committed relationship, Hack points out again and again, each lover must choose either to maintain the relationship by working with the other or to abandon the work of the relationship and leave. Often, the latter option is emphasized as a risk that hangs over each lover, which she must

safeguard against by pleasing her beloved with the domestic work that lovers perform to function as a couple. Early on in a relationship, at least, Hacker shows her lover-speaker emphasizing performative domestication in a celebratory light. In the crown of sonnets entitled "Eight Days in April," in which Hack and Ray first settle down together, the lover sighs near the end of the crown, "we are free / to choose each other perpetually" (71).

Because Hacker's Hack is meant to stand in for an author who has experienced long- and short-term relationships with men and women and has identified as a "lesbian of choice," the idea of choosing takes on even more livelihood in the context of domestic love/work. In "On Marriage," which follows the "April" crown, Hack acknowledges that she is "likely to be called on" to explain her decision for coupling up with Ray – after only eight days of domestic life together (72). Here, Hack evokes her social relation to long-term friends, who she suspects would scrutinize her choice to mate with a woman after only eight days of dating. She imagines her friends' scorn and her own frank assessment of this choice as "Tack / -y" (72).

In her characteristically playful aesthetic here, with the enjambment of the word "tacky," Hacker relates poetic form to social form regarding the concept of choice. The poetic decision to enjamb "tacky" is bad poetic form, used for rhetorical effect to communicate the social taboo transgressed by lesbian partners when they choose to settle down together early on in their relationships.[48] This is the camp approach that Hacker's collection employs throughout, which involves a series of poetic in-jokes and formal improprieties.

It is the work of choosing that keeps the domestic partnership functional, though Hack is aware that commitment is always provisional. She closes "On Marriage" with the sestet that focuses on choice and its relation to domestic orientation and the energy couple-work requires:

/   /   ᵕ   ᵕ   /   ᵕ ᵕ   / ᵕ ᵕ ‖
No law books frame terms of this covenant.

---

[48] The well-worn joke Hacker suggests here asks, "What does a lesbian bring to a second date?" and answers, "A U-Haul." Hacker's voice is ironic and playful throughout, reflective of a "gay aesthetics" that can involve an approach to all matters of life with an amalgam of irony, lightness, pleasure, self-deprecation, shamelessness, curiosity, histrionics, and other modes.

ᴗ   /   ᴗ \ ᴗ / ᴗ ᴗ ᴗ / |

It's choice that's asymptotic to a goal,

  ᴗ   /   ᴗ /   ᴗ   /   ᴗ   /   ᴗ   /

which means that we must choose, and choose, and choose

  / ᴗ   ᴗ | / ᴗ ‖   /   /   ᴗ   ᴗ   /

momently, daily. This moment my whole

  ᴗ / ᴗ ᴗ   ᴗ /   / | ᴗ   ᴗ   /   /

trajectory's toward you, and it's not los-

ᴗ   ᴗ   /   ᴗ ‖

ing momentum. (72)

Here, Hacker characterizes heterosexual coupledom as a closed form, sealed into place and recognized by a number of private and public social customs ("law books," "covenants"). By contrast, her representation of homosexual domestic coupling is fuzzier because it is a social form that "does not compute," hence the asymptotic approach to understanding what it might look like.[49] On the one hand, as lesbian domestic coupling *looks* like romance – it involves all of the basics: love, sex, housework – yet, on the other hand, the lovers' same-sex gender identifications do not correspond with the official markers that valorize romance as a heteronormative form of coupledom. The first line of the sestet declaims, and the following one explains, providing clarification, that domestic lesbian couples must found their homemaking around the "choice" of working together without the conferral of matrimony reserved for heterosexual lovers. This "openness" of choosing also suggests non-monogamous domesticity, for Hack deliberately has broken up Ray's previous relationship with another woman. Moreover, Hack admits that her commitment to Ray as a kind of "wife" will not force her to surrender the sexual affairs she maintains occasionally with French girlfriends, her "*copines*."

To ground long-term domesticated commitment with another individual upon something as provisional as choice might strike many as foolish, but more and more people today do so. Notwithstanding statistics, Hacker situates the role of choice (however flimsy) as a central fundament of the work of doing coupledom. And, as the poem expresses in the exaggerative

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[49] As the fact that Hacker is so devoted to metrics suggests, mathematics as metaphor runs throughout Hacker's oeuvre.

iambic phrase that celebrates the couples' freedom "to choose," there is satisfaction in this performative way of approaching coupledom. It serves as a type of refrain because of its repetition – "to choose and choose and choose" effuses grandly the delight that underpins the work of domestic coupling if one appraises choice as a positive ground to approach loving another person.

Love, Death points out one of the fundamental reasons why this concept of coupling-as-a-doing emerged as a way to reframe cohabitation, partnership, or marriage: choosing requires perpetual work on behalf of *both partners*. Ever histrionic, Hack pleads with her beloved in one of the final poems, fearing Ray will soon reject their shared love project: "We worked for love, loved it. Don't sling / that out with Friday's beer cans" (210).[50] By imploring her lover this way, Hack raises the point that the very mundane activity of throwing out the trash is something that *must be done* in living together. The phrase suggests that, by equating the chore with the work of loving they developed, Ray trashed the extraordinary possibilities of domestic coupledom altogether.

Like the tone throughout the collection, Hack is melodramatic in another sonnet that begins, "Who would divorce her lover with a phone / call? You did. Like that, it's finished, done – or is for you." There is an undeniable nod to the experience of sadness that opens and closes the sonnet. That correction the lover gives to herself early on – "or is for you" – so shamefaced, suggests that the break-up has done little more than hurt her feelings. But through the course of the poem, that wounded pride is transformed into a greater loss at its close, mourned with lyrical rhythm and couplet-rhyme (a rarity in Hacker's oeuvre):

    ᵕ / ᵕ / ᵕ ᵕ ᵕ / ᵕ ᵕ

    You closed us off like a parenthesis

    ᵕ / ᵕ / ᵕ / ᵕ / ᵕ / ‖

    and left me knowing just enough to miss.

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[50] Most remarkable about Hacker's tone in *Love, Death* is her grasp of irony in playing with the standards related to relationship-building and the often too-personal response lovers have to their beloveds by concentrating upon Hack's self-aware but maudlin fixation on Ray. But, Hacker also creates moments of great beauty, loss, and sympathy, especially in the final poem that closes the collection, "Did you love well what very soon you left?" which mirrors the end line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, which reads, "To love that well which thou must ere leave long."

For clarity, I argue that we must look to the parenthetical as a visual simile, as Hacker requests we do, though she does not include the literal visual:

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The image *requires* us to think of a couple. It is as if, in just suggesting the image, Hack wants to insist upon cementing into place some visual metaphor that seals lover together with beloved because the beloved will not allow the couple to be realized in a literal way.

The parenthetical would be the perfect expression of a complete dyad in visual form, but Hacker doesn't allow that, even. She invokes a single parenthesis here, emphasizing the singular symbol:

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If we look at what she's done visually, we sense a single lover, looking back at what is final, completed, finished. There's something visually unfinished-looking about this closing parenthesis symbol. Somehow, it looks sad, alone, incomplete. The lover at home alone – which is referenced in the sonnet following this one as "Home alone is home, alone" – seems wrong in the same way. This is especially so because, throughout the collection, Hack has recounted enthusiastically the joys of the domestic that she and her lover have shared. Hacker has illustrated in words and suggestion how the domestic's poetics are affected by this abandonment with this lonely parenthesis with which Ray has answered Hack. Nonetheless, she emphasizes this discordance by sealing the ending of this sonnet in an exalted, rhythmic, rhyming couplet – in a flash of irony, Hacker making poetic the unwanted experience of being jilted.

By including all of the messy details involved in the failure of a relationship, Hacker acknowledges that processes of coupling and uncoupling are complicated, performative experiences. As I have acknowledged above, there is *parrhesia* throughout the collection, which refuses to discountenance the unsightly and untoward effects of gay love relations in addition to accessing the social form of camp to tease traditional forms and poetics related to the Western romance narrative tradition. I move now to investigate Carl Phillips's modern verse as it communicates the gay way of life that resists being conditioned by a static model of romance. It is in this mode of queering romance that Phillips uses *parrhesia* thematically to critique heteronormative relations.

Cortège and Questioning Desire: "There *is* no way to explain / what happens"

Phillips's poem, "Domestic" provides a glimpse into his concentration on the ordinary domestic realm shared by two gay lovers in a mode of expression that emphasizes the lover's feeling of

intimacy with his beloved. The speaker confers upon the domestic realm a monumental significance, claiming that the home he shares with his partner is "the whole world, / all I want of the world" (55). In the hands of another poet, this generalized celebration of domestic space might reflect the urge to romanticize the home. But, in all of his poetry, Phillips never does this. "Domestic" is an attempt that captures in place a microscopic concentration on the intellectual and affective intimacy of a person contemplating his relationship to his partner. This is his poetic approach to queer *parrhesia*, the truth-telling capacity of the poet to express himself in the context of other relations. A point that Michel Foucault raises has particular application to Phillips's way of expressing a partnered gay way of life: "The one who uses *parrhesi* . . . is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse" (*Fearless Speech* 12). Via "Domestic," Phillips's complete truth about gay domestic coupling involves the imaginative claim to the home as "all I want of the world," but it also involves the lover's imaginative rejection of his beloved for another man. The poem uses this unromantic mode of expressing intimacy in order to investigate how the possibilities of a "gay way of life" reach beyond one way of domesticated partnering.

Though the domestic has the capacity to stretch as wide as to be a world for the speaker, he acknowledges that he experiences moments living with his partner when he fails to communicate his true feelings about their relationship. First, he admits that he is "always forgetting" to tell his lover about the small discoveries that pop into his mind throughout the day (54). There are other times, he suggests, that he forgets to confide these things or deliberately chooses to withhold them from his partner. He admits to a daily ritual he performs each morning from a room downstairs from his partner, who practices his morning bathroom routines upstairs:

> I
> keep myself from saying too loud I
> love you until the moment you flush
> the toilet, then I say it, when the
> rumble of water running down through
> the house could mean anything: flood,
>
> your feet descending the stairs any
> moment. (55)

The force of the speaker's perspective is located in the line and stanza breaks. There's a hinge, a stutter, after each of those two "Is" if the stops in each line are read: "I / keep myself from saying too loud / I." This read demonstrates the careful attention Phillips pays to allowing the level of the language to express paradox in a poem, which pays tribute to the complications of living with and loving another person. The stoppages might suggest trepidation about the speaker's ability to profess openly his love for his beloved. Or his fear might come from a place explained earlier in the poem: the expression of love for another person can belie so easily a feeling of mawkishness in the lover professing ("can I help it if / all I can think is things that are / stupid, like he loves me he loves me / not?"). Whether from fear of being found emotionally guarded or overtly sentimental, these are two feelings that prevent the speaker's full acknowledgement of affection.

The stanza also counterweighs the expression of love with the most ordinary of all domestic activities – the flushing of the toilet. In the way it is presented, "I / love you" is the subject/action/object weighed against the subject/action/object with which "you flush / the toilet." There seems to be an intentional jocularity of representation here that doesn't so much suggest that the speaker's state of love for the other is met with the beloved's careless flushing as much as it plays with the idea that both the most significant felt-aspects of life (counting "loving" as one of those) and the most routine of matters ("a morning dump") occur in the same space.

While, on the surface, equating a profession of love to the toilet flushing certainly isn't attached to any romantic tradition, these equivalences also do not explain how the poem speaks to a larger truth about a gay way of (domestic) life. I argue that the poem's central concern is with a strikingly unromantic perspective that Phillips buries in the poem's fifth stanza. Folded in together with those things the speaker forgets, or chooses not to express, or utters when the beloved is not available to hear the expression, is his conclusion that to die alone, away from, and without his partner, well, that wouldn't be so bad:

> Yesterday, in the café I
> keep meaning to show you, I thought
> this is how I'll die maybe, alone,
>
> somewhere too far away from wherever
> you are then, my heart racing from

espresso and too many cigarettes,

my head down on the table's cool

marble, and the ceiling fan turning

slowly above me, like fortune, the

part of fortune that's half-wished-

for only – it did not seem the worst

way. (54)

Here is Phillips's *parrhesia*, the truth-telling of domestic coupling seemingly at its most indecorous, appearing in the poem as a tortured truth. How are readers meant to take this expression that completely discountenances the domestic relation that unites the two men? For, it is rude and potentially desire-killing that a lover would profess that the work of love that daily life with another person engenders can produce what could only be interpreted by his partner as a cold epiphany. The speaker organizes this discovery as another of those *frissons* akin to disclosing love too profusely or too bathetically. It appears among them because it is nonetheless true to the speaker's feeling, representative of his critical attention and care toward expressing a feeling about domestic life. While the speaker admits this is a truth that is "half-wished- / for only," he nonetheless wishes it.

To read this representation of domestic coupledom through the lens of romance, marriage, or domestic partnering is to find the speaker's coupled relation imperfect, broken, failed. But queer relationships – here, as in Hack's admission that the very openness of her relation to Ray keeps it durable – can demonstrate the multivalent understandings of desire to organize sexual and social lives. Elsewhere in *Cortège*, a blonde man invites the speaker of "Cotillion" to dance and tells him that something – the subject of which he is unsure is "joy" or "pain" or "desire" – is "like when a small bird / rises, sometimes, like the difficult thing is not to" (17). Phillips's description of joy, pain, and desire, here, rising out of an inevitable, invisible source, conflates them, which speaks to his mode of expressing gay erotic life as though a term that combines joy, pain, and desire would approximate discursively the experience of queer love. In conflating the terms, Phillips claims that queers consider the possibilities for joy of the self (and for others) in addition to the possibilities for pain of the self (and for others) when they desire. Queers, of course, have no claim to ownership of this experience of desire. Still, David Halperin reminds us that, as a way to negotiate their desires, queers are forced to develop a degree of "critical reflection" about themselves, their desires, and

the models of living and loving available (and less-available and unavailable) as avenues for expressing love. I argue that, with his cultivation of this conflated joy/pain/desire term, Phillips seeks to describe a queer sensitivity, an alertness and aliveness to social and sexual relations implicit in many queer discourses on the subject of love. As I describe below, this is a "gay way of life" that *Cortège* engages. Rather than recommending a singular, identifiable gay way of life, the collection depicts *a* way of living and loving queerly that is honest to this sensitivity to joy and pain implicit within many representations of queer desiring.

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Add to that characterization of a gay way of life another that Phillips makes in "Aubade for Eve Under the Arbor" by way of emphasizing sexual and social joy/pain/desire as an infinite uncertainty: "the questions I still can't understand: how / long, when is too much not enough – what price desire?" (61). Phillips's questions reveal something about queer subjectivity, which is altogether invested in questioning, indeterminacy, curiosity. We can take *Cortège* to be a truth-telling exercise about queer domestication, one that asks "what price desire?" and never insists upon an answer because the limits to social and sexual desire spill out beyond whatever constructions of intimacy we conceive to frame our desires. His speakers acknowledge that the ever-offstage, free-flowing sexual and social power of joy/pain/desire exists both within and outside of the limits of partnership. *Cortège* insists that, even and especially from the perspective of the domesticated lover, traces of joy/pain/desire exist within and beyond the bounds of partnership.

In contemporary American culture, lovers often provide romance narratives as a discursive practice to justify their relationships with their beloveds. These explanations can take on the attributes of personal myth shared between partners. Two poems, "Teaching Ovid to Sixth-Graders" and "What Myth Is," interrogate the appeal of myths to explain human behavior. In the first poem, Phillips explains,

> any myth
>
> is finally about the lengths the mind will
>
> carry a tale to, to explain what the body
>
> knows already, and so never answers:
>
> that there *is* no way to explain
>
> what can happen. (35)

"Teaching Ovid" positions mind as keening and body as intuitive, demonstrating how experiences of joy/pain/desire felt by the body emerge in myths as ways to rationalize *why* the body has felt something so immediate and inevitable. Perhaps this is one explanation for the persistence and of the discursive patterning of personalized romance narratives to structure lives. For, the long-standing narrative tradition of uniting one lover to one beloved justifies heterosexuality, reproduction, and the development of norms as constitutive of the *meaning* of human sexuality. Hence, the singular pattern of personal romance myths seeks to determine normative subjects. For example, the common questions about one's personal romance myth – Where did you meet him? How long have you two been together? – often uncomplicatedly lead to questions about "next steps," as if to explain where "all of this" is heading. But, as "Teaching Ovid" explains by channeling a claim to *parrhesia*, "there *is* no way to explain" the possibilities of joy/pain/desire because explanations to claim systemic knowledge about living with and loving another person fail always to address the possibilities left aside by "coupling up" with that person. By contrast, personal romance myths always fail to address this truth.

This is because, as *Cortège* describes, joy/pain/desire is a queer acknowledgment that social and sexual relations are so messy that any mechanism that portends to institutionalize it fails. The poems narrate queer relations as impossible to define, revealing Phillips's speakers to be martial-romantic remainders, whose contemplations of joy/pain/desire affirm that a gay way of life means always to slip outside of explanation, justification, assimilation. The poems' consistent depictions of curiosity about social and sexual relations show that Phillips's central poetic concern is describing the difficulty of expressing how joy/pain/desire constructs queer subjectivity.

I argue that his poetry constructs gay domestic love as a relation that is honest about the social construction of joy/pain/desire. Phillips risks telling the truth about joy/pain/desire: it is a condition structured by narratives, and those narratives cannot claim to have captured joy/pain/desire in a singular, permanent, or fixed state. It is in this way that Phillips's erotic poetics acknowledge gay claims to ways of life and love as speaking truth to normative claims to romance.

The importance behind Hacker's and Phillips's constructions of gay ways of living lies in the risk internal to the poems' *parrhesiatic* rhetoric. Hacker pitches a histrionic lover seeking to lay domestic claim to her beloved with an exaggerated and overblown style, attuned to gay aesthetics

of overstatement in matters of love. In *Love, Death*, Hack's overbearing "style" of lovemaking is performed at the risk of driving her beloved away, which she eventually accomplishes. Phillips, whose collection is less invested in gay style, uses thematic inquiry to plumb the vicissitudes of joy/pain/desire that construct queer subjectivity, avoiding neat conclusions about domestication upon which so many representative models of coupledom insist. Tiny, conventionally desire-killing truths about gay social and sexual relations among partners permeate the love poems within *Cortège*. Those admissions are risky, too, because they deny the stereotypes that underpin the myth of romance their power to convince and control ways of living and loving. Phillips and Hacker demonstrate that desire runs a thousand different directions and is not limited by the imagined constraints that professions of conjugal love propose.

Because it is the construction that energizes LGBT advocates' contemporary push to crowd the chapel with gays and lesbians, romance needs more critical and popular interrogation. As one construction among many with which people form social and sexual relations with others, romance narratives relate only one way to relate, and they are typically normative. But, as Phillips and Hacker demonstrate, desire runs a thousand different directions and is not limited by the imagined constraints that professions of conjugal love suppose. *Love, Death* and *Cortège*, in their respective ways, then, recommend queer living and loving practices that are sensitive to the complexities of joy/pain/desire.

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Straight Separatism: Ten Theses on the Queer Archive

Stanimir Panayotov

Central European University, Budapest

This text is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference *In/visible: The Sexual and Political Regimes of the Archive*, in a panel titled "The Queer Location of Culture: Nationalism, History, Sexuality" (Skopje, National Gallery of Macedonia – Chifte Hamam, 25 February 2012).

Definition: Straight separatism is the culture of self-assimilation in the forms of institutionality and memorialization.

Thesis 1: All culture is the archive of heterosexuality and identity, because they imply each other. The battle for remembrance is the battle for the recognition of exclusionary identity and not of the excluded one. All culture is about the political self-determination of one identity – the straight one – against the organized self-destruction of all others. Queers exist through the death drive. The institution of the archive is the alleviation of that drive.

Theses 2: Since society is today fragmented down to culturalized bits of identities and a politics of identitarian totalitarianism, all society and institutions – including the museum – are camps of erotically decorated straight separatism. The forms of formalizing memory are separatist strategies of straight survival. The queer archive is a huge dark thanatological and eschatological abyss of desires, the formalization of which does not reform the false universality of straight separatism. Queer inclusion is the ghettoization of the question of difference within the biopolitical camp of straightness. One has to either change the form of institution or abandon recollection altogether.

Thesis 3: The form of institution, apart from being a biopolitical site of exclusion, is the battlefield of identity. Since identity in and of itself is heterosexual, the very form of institution is a straight ghetto. However, the battle is on the ground of the straight imaginary and the straight body. The question of remembrance is not the question of exclusion; rather, the

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question is: do we, queers, want to mummify ourselves in identity: a form of transhistorical survivalism that has been designed for mythomanic heterosexuals?

Thesis 4: The institution is the reproduction of (straight) identity. As such, it is the self-enclosure which says "not you". Insofar as this form is straight, and insofar as identity is the formalization of heterosexuality, the institution is a sociocultural ghetto of heterosexuality. The desire of queers for self-archiving and identitization is an inverted form of straight sadism. To invade the straight ghetto is not to prove human universality, but to join the spoils of particularity and false consciousness.

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Thesis 5: The inclusion of queers in the very form of institution is not a step towards universality: it is to succumb to the imperative of recognition. Just as the question of gay marriage involves the mere right to marry, and not the obligation to, just as we want to be part of an already corroded history of universality - marriage - which is buttressed by its violent past, so the inclusion of the queer archive under the institutional panoply is no more than the desire for diversification of the very form of institutional oppression in history - the ghetto of exclusion.

Thesis 6: The creation of (and queering the form of) institution is an act of nihilism, self-contempt and yet another converted form of socially imposed self-destruction. Therefore, the making of the queer archive should be done by straight separatists – that is, the society of the identitarian-fascist form of institution, It is only by relegating this work to straights that we can continue the enjoyment of our anomic desires, for all desire is anomic. If straight separatists are not able to face and declare their particularity through the repressive paradigm of recognition (which is their only way to performatively experience the exclusions perpetrated), we cannot change the course of history and remembrance.

Thesis 7: The queer memory and archive are immanent; they embody immanent materiality (or: communal-telepathic transmission of the histories of love). Unlike the straight separatism of the form of institution with its identity-fascism, the queer archive is the practice of everyday life. The excluded artifacts of sexual difference are on display in the collective memories of our entangled bodies and their stories of fucking, love, affection. Our memories are our museums.

Thesis 8: The formalization of remembrance and memory of sexual difference cannot be non-normative. What binds all such attempts, queer and straight alike, is the failure of a common universality and a common social project. The most we can hope for is to convert the inherent anti-sociality between us into the politics of successful miscommunication.

Thesis 9: The only queer archive we can make ourselves without it being appropriated by a false universalism and straight separatism is our transgression of the paradigm of love and the paradigm of recognition. The only way to change the formalization of memory and to counter forgetfulness is to abandon the paradigm of recognition. Leave it to the queer-straight bureaucrats to remember.

Thesis 10: The making of the queer archive is merely the exposure of false consciousness: both the one of pseudo-universal heterosexuality and assimilated queerness. The only change and difference we can make is (1) expose both the institution and identity-fascism as false consciousness, and thus (2) either join the rewriting of straight separatism into a collective one (3) or else abandon all forms of remembrance.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thomas Abrams is a postdoctoral fellow at OISE/University of Toronto's Department of Social Justice Education. There are three themes that he has pursued as of late. First, he is interested in the phenomenological philosophical tradition, and how disability is explored (or more often, ignored) therein. The two other themes stem from this philosophical interest, exploring how disability is managed through income and labour support policy, and the micropolitics of rehabilitation therapy. This work draws from many different resources, ranging from the abstract philosophical work of Martin Heidegger, to empirical policy studies, and his own personal experience of muscular dystrophy.

Jason Bryant defended his PhD dissertation at the Arizona State University and graduated in December 2013. The dissertation, *Queering Home: Domestic Space and Sexuality in Postmodern American Literature*, reflects his research interests in theories of space, domesticity, and sexuality. In particular, he uses a queer, deconstructive lens to interrogate norms that cling to representations of domesticity.

Claudio Cappotto is a psychologist, psycho-therapist, and sexologist. He is currently doing post-doctoral research at the Frederic II University of Naples (Centro Ateneo SInAPSi). His research interests include: mediation and conflict resolution, prevention of homophobia, juvenile delinquency, community and normative violence, social identity and intergroup relations, psycho-sexology and LGBT studies. He has widely conferenced and written for national and international readers.

Amith Kumar PV is an Associate Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and Indian Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He has been a Fulbright Visting Fellow at Portland State University, Oregon, USA from August 2007 to June 2008. He has published research articles in international journals, mainly on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic principles, with a focus on their extension and appropriation in the context of "Indian literatures." He has presented papers in international conferences in Denmark, Finland, Greece, the USA, and the UK. He has delivered several keynote addresses at national conferences in India. His areas of research specialization include Bakhtin Studies, Comparative Literary Studies, Translation Studies and

Disability Studies. Currently, he is the principal director of the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research sponsored special project on Disability Studies in India. His book titled *Bakhtin and Translation Studies: Theoretical Extensions* will be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in February 2015.

Allison Moore is a senior lecturer in Early Childhood Studies and Sociology at Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, England. Her research interests include sexual politics, sexual citizenship and the regulation of sexuality, especially the regulation of youth sexuality.

Stanimir Panayotov graduated in Philosophy from Sofia University and holds MA in Philosophy and Gender Studies from Euro-Balkan Institute (2011) with a thesis on Plato's natural philosophy and the problem of femininity/maternity in the ancient concept of space (*khôra*). He is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Comparative Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest, working on the problem of disembodiment in the cosmologies of Neoplatonism and New Realism. His research interests and published work are centered round issues in feminist and continental philosophy, queer theory, and gender studies. Stanimir is also part of New Left Perspectives in Sofia, where he is the co-director of Sofia Queer Forum, and of IPAK.Center – Research Center for Cultures, Politics and Identities in Belgrade, where he co-organizes the Summer School for Sexualities, Cultures and Politics.

Paul Reynolds is Reader in Sociology and Social Philosophy at Edge Hill University. He is co-convenor of the International Network for Sexual Ethics and Politics and co-Editor in Chief of its Journal - http://www.budrich-journals.de/index.php/insep. His research focuses on sexual ethics and politics with particular reference to sexual consent, literacy and well-being and radical theories of sexuality and sexual citizenship.

Cirus Rinaldi is Senior Lecturer of sociology, as well as a researcher in the sociology of law, deviance, and social change at the Department of Cultures and Society, University of Palermo, Italy. His main research inerest include the sociology of the body and sexualities, the relationship between the social construction of norma-tive masculinity and violence; prostitution (transgender prostitution, social space and identity negotiations; social policies); as well as LGBT studies and queer theory. Among his international publications is the article "Normalizing violence: Homophobia as masculinity's test," co-authored with Claudio Cappotto (*HERMES* 2014) as well as

the entries on Homophobia, Homosexuality, Intersexuality, Normalization, Public sex, and Transsexuals in the *Encyclopedia of social deviance* (eds. C. Forsyth and H. Copes, Sage 2014).

Oindri Roy is pursuing her Ph.D in the Department of Comparative Literature and India Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. She has presented papers, mainly in the fields of Gender Studies and Comparative Literature at conferences in India. Her publications include "Of Spaces, Boundaries and Movements: The Recurrence of the Travel Motif in Narratives of Gender Fluidity" in *eDhvani* (Issue V, July 2014 ISSN: 2279-0209) and "The Possibilities of Re-versifying: Comparing the Translations of a Poem" *Abong Sanskriti* (ISSN: 2348-3504). Her domains of interest are Queer Studies, Gender Studies, Commonwealth Literature, and Comparative Literature.

Marta Usiekniewicz earned two Masters at the University of Warsaw, Poland, in English and in American Studies. She is currently working on a dissertation about food and masculinity in crime fiction, "The Eating Detective: Food and Masculinity in 20th Century Crime Fiction," and teaching at the University of Warsaw and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland. Her academic interests include gender studies, food studies, fat and disability studies, as well as studies of popular culture.

ABSTRAKTY W JĘZYKU POLSKIM

Thomas Abrams

Niepełnosprawność, fenomenologia queer i polityka osobowości

Niniejszy tekst stanowi refleksję na temat ważnej książki Sary Ahmed, Fenomenologia queer, z perspektywy studiów nad niepełnosprawnością. Sama Ahmed kładzie nacisk na kategorie rasy i pożądania. Warto się jednak zastanowić, czy istnieje możliwość wykorzystania jej queerowej fenomenologii kulturowej w rozważaniach na temat społeczno-materialnego podłoża niepełnosprawności i interaktywnego powstawania niepełnosprawnych podmiotowości. Pierwsza część artykułu analizuje trzy główne rozdziały książki Ahmed. W kolejnej części autor zastanawia się, jakie pytania zadałaby Ahmed, gdyby badała niepełnosprawność. Następnie zwraca się ku fenomenologicznym badaniom niepełnosprawności, zadając pytanie, jak funkcjonuje podmiotowość w świecie dzielonym z innymi, nie jako atrybut dany raz na zawsze wszystkim osobom. W końcowej części artykułu autor powraca do głównego zadania fenomenologii, by poszukiwać odpowiedzi na pytanie, co takie zrewidowane pojęcie podmiotowości oznacza dla fenomenologii Heideggera i Husserla, oraz jak może zostać wykorzystane w dalszych badaniach.

Słowa kluczowe: fenomenologia, niepełnosprawność, teoria queer, urasowienie, Sara Ahmed

Marta Usiekniewicz

Niebezpieczne ciała. Rasa, grubość i dywidenda męskości

Współczesny amerykański dyskurs epidemii otyłości przywołuje w nowej formie dyskursy klasistowskie i rasistowskie, jest też kolejnym wcieleniem moralnej paniki wykorzystywanej po to, by pod hasłem „opieki" stygmatyzować biednych i niebiałych członków społeczeństwa. W tekście przyglądam się splotowi grubości, rasy i męskości, by pokazać, jak w przypadku czarnych mężczyzn w USA otyłość jest kryminalizowania i wykorzystywana w celu uzasadnienia stosowania przemocy wobec czarnych grubych ciał. W artykule omawiam sprzeczne wyobrażenia na temat grubych czarnych ciał, pozwalające pokazać, w jaki sposób otyłość, tak jak wcześniej rasa i bieda, stała się w Stanach Zjednoczonych „przestępstwem". W pracy zajmę się też analizą samej dyscypliny fat

studies, by pokazać, że i ona nie jest wolna od rasowych i klasowych założeń, które częściowo uniemożliwiają analizę niebiałych, niekobiecych ciał.

Allison Moore, Paul Reynolds

Przeciwko brzydocie starości. W stronę erotyzmu starzejącego się seksualnego ciała

Ludzie starsi są postrzegani przez pryzmat heteronormy jako aseksualni, post-seksualni lub jako drapieżcy żerujący na młodych ciałach. Założenia ideologii ageistowskiej albo odmawiają ludziom starszym jakiegokolwiek pożądania seksualnego, albo włączają ich pożądanie w dyskursy medyczne, seksuologiczne czy kulturowe charakteryzujące osoby starsze aktywne seksualnie jako groteskowe, brzydkie, nieatrakcyjne i niegodne pożądania. Takie normatywne osądy negatywnie wpływają na podmiotowość seksualną osób starszych. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę wypracowania konstruktywnej formy - czy też erotyki - przedstawiania starzejącej się seksualności. Oparta na dekonstrukcji, anty-fundacyjna i anty-esencjalistyczna teoria queer wydaje się być najbardziej odpowiednim narzędziem do podważania dyskursów patologizujących starzejące się ciało i starzejącą się seksualność. Jednak niniejsze rozważania wskazują zarówno na pewien potencjał jak i na ograniczenia teorii queer jeżeli chodzi o możliwość podważania ageistowskiej erotofobii. Chociaż według teorii queer możemy swobodnie w konstruować i rekonstruować naszą seksualność na wiele sposobów, to doświadczamy naszej zmieniającej się podmiotowości nie tylko na poziomie emocjonalnymi i psychicznym, ale również fizycznym. Starzejące się ciało uniemożliwia ciągłe wymyślanie na nowo swojego seksualnego ja. Nie wyklucza to jednak możliwości istnienia erotyki starości, która oddala się od seksualności rozumianej w kategoriach genitalnych czy też heteronormatywnych/homonormatywnych, lecz otwiera potencjał dla erotyki seksu i seksualnej intymności ludzi starszych.

Oindri Roy, Amith Kumar P.V.

Kalekologia queeru. Dekonstrukcja koncepcji „sprawności" i „heteroseksualności" w autobiografiach osób transseksualnych

Artykuł stanowi analizę porównawczą dwóch narracji, The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life-Story (2010) autorstwa A. Revathi oraz A Queer and Pleasant Danger (2012) Kate Bornstein. Jego celem jest ukazanie powiązań i podobieństw pomiędzy praktykami życia codziennego w dwóch odmiennych kontekstach kulturowych. Porównanie to prowadzi przemyśleń znaczeń pojęć „queer" i „niepełnosprawność" w kontekście doświadczeń związanych z transseksualnością, które negują „przymusową heteroseksualność" i „przymusową pełnosprawność" jako narzucone konstrukty społeczne, choć nie sprowadzają się do negacji. Narracje te służą również za pretekst do zastanowienia się nad procesem „trangenderyzacji" (Elkins i King 34) wywołanej odczuciem niepełnosprawności/odmienności związanej z byciem „w niewłaściwym ciele". Zarówno Revathi jak i Bornstein działają pod wpływem wrodzonego pragnienia „kobiecej" formy istnienia, a także społecznego przymusu stosowania się do zasad „normalności" i „sprawności" związanej z płcią przypisaną im w chwili narodzin. Interwencje chirurgiczne i hormonalne nie prowadzą do psychospołecznej „rektyfikacji" i mogą doprowadzić do dysfunkcyjnej kobiecości. Autorzy odczytują nieodwzajemnioną miłość i nieudane małżeństwo Revathi, jak problem Bornstein z byciem uznaną za lesbijkę, jako przykłady sytuacji, w których nieadekwatność struktur społecznych tłumaczona jest jako „niepełnosprawność płciowa" jednostki zwanej „hidżra" czy „butch".

Słowa kluczowe: transpłciowość, hidżra, niepełnosprawność, autobiografia

Claudio Cappotto, Cirus Rinaldi

Intersekcjonalności, nie/pełnosprawności i podmiotyzacja u niesłyszących osób LGBT. Badanie rozpoznawcze na Sycylii

Tematem artykułu jest dyskryminacja, normalizacja i stygmatyzacja niesłyszącej młodzieży LGBT na Sycylii we Włoszech, badana w oparciu o relacje na temat życia codziennego (szczególnie lat szkolnych i interakcji z rówieśnikami). Dotychczas we Włoszech poświęcano niewiele uwagi problemowi wielorakiej dyskryminacji, a w szczególności homofobicznej przemocy wobec osób niepełnosprawnych. *Niemożliwe jest tym samym by uwzględnić tu trafny i rzetelny dobór próby tejże*

populacji. Autorzy tekstu - socjolog i psycholog - analizują wyniki wywiadów z piętnastoma osobami LGBT zwerbowanymi poprzez media społecznościowe, czaty tematyczne i stowarzyszenia. Celem tej wstępnej analizy jest wyodrębnienie kluczowych argumentów, które mogłyby służyć jako podstawa strategicznych programów na rzecz włączenia społecznego i dalszych badań.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież LGBT, niepełnosprawność, homofobia, normalizacja, analiza intersekcjonalna

Jason Bryant

Robiąc to razem, na homo sposób: queerowe pary w* Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons *Marilyn Hacker i* Cortège *Carla Phillipsa

Artykuł jest spojrzeniem na poezję Marilyn Hacker i Carla Phillipsa, w ramach którego autor proponuje dwie strategie analizy reprezentacji jednopłciowych par żyjących pod wspólnym dachem. Po pierwsze, artykuł bada, w jaki sposób zbiór Marilyn Hacker *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* ukazuje performatywność „bycia parą", w przeciwieństwie do takich opisów jednopłciowego partnerstwa, które nastawione są na włączanie w normatywne ramy małżeństwa. Drugie podejście dotyczy zawartych w *Cortege* Phillipsa opisów intymnych, często nieprzyjemnych narracji miłosnych, które ukazują odmieńczą wrażliwość podmiotu radości/bólu/pożądania, przez co Phillips wskazuje, jak bardzo odmieńcy są zmuszeni zastanawiać się nad tym, dlaczego, jak i kogo można pożądać. Phillips usiłuje opisać odmieńczą wrażliwość, czujną świadomość społecznych i seksualnych relacji wpisanych w wiele kłirowych dyskursów na temat miłości. W swojej poetyce, *Love, Death...* i *Cortège* skupiają się odpowiednio na przestrzeni domowej jako miejscu performatywnego „przerabiania" związków partnerskich oraz na praktykach życiowych i miłosnych uwzględniających złożoność radości, bólu i pożądania.

Słowa kluczowe: związki jednopłciowe, miłość, performatywność, Marilyn Hacker, Carl Phillips

Stanimir Panayotov

Heterycki separatyzm: dziesięć tez o kłirowym archiwum

Cała kultura jest archiwum heteroseksualności i tożsamości, bowiem jedno implikuje drugie. Odczuwane przez kłirów pragnienie własnego archiwizowania się i przybrania tożsamości jest odwróconą formą heteryckiego sadyzmu. Kłirowe archiwum jest ciemną, tanatologiczną i eschatologiczną otchłanią pragnień, której formalizacja nie prowadzi do zreformowania fałszywego uniwersalizmu heteryckiego separatyzmu. Należy albo zmienić formę instytucji, albo w ogóle porzucić pamięć.

Słowa kluczowe: archiwum, upamiętnianie, formalizacja, instytucjonalizacja, heterycki separatyzm

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Mosaic, an interdisciplinary critical journal
University of Manitoba, 208 Tier Building
Winnipeg MB R3T 2N2 Canada
Tel: 204-474-8597, Fax: 204-474-7584
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