Gendered Embodiment

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Abstract

This chapter introduces social theories about gender and the body. Rather than focusing on sex (that is, the physiological characteristics typically associated with maleness and femaleness) this chapter instead looks at how cultural norms for femininity and masculinity shape people's relationship to their own bodies and the bodies of others. Examining the association of masculinity with active bodily subjects—and of femininity with passive bodily objects—this chapter studies the ways bodies reproduce and, sometimes, challenge gendered power dynamics.

1 Introduction

In one of the foundational texts of the sociology of gender, Candace West and Don Zimmerman define gender as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (1987, 127). Sex category consists of the bodily displays one presents to the world, which others then use to judge whether one is male or female. Gender is not determined by the body, yet as social performance it is always evaluated *in reference to* the body. Thus, any attempt to understand gender—particularly gendered inequalities—must ask how gender is embodied.

This chapter addresses the question of how *gender* shapes and is shaped by the physical bodies we live in. Gendered embodiment differs from biological sex. *Bodily sex* generally refers to reproductive organs, hormones, chromosomes, and the meanings we attach to them; in contrast, *gendered embodiment* refers to the ways gender —as an individual identity, as a product of social interactions, and as a component of social institutions (Risman, 1998)—shapes our experiences of living within particular bodies. Gender affects how we learn to use our bodies, how we experience pleasure and pain, and how our bodies exist in relation to others.

The following sections will address these questions as they show up in contemporary embodiment scholarship. "Gendered Subjects, Gendered Objects" looks at theories about the construction of two ideal types for gendered embodiment: the masculine subject and the feminine object, which are defined as opposite and unequal. Subsequent sections look at each of these ideal types in practice, reviewing the literature on how diverse bodies operate within masculine- and feminine-typed institutions and social settings. The final section takes up the

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question of inequality and social change: if feminine embodiment has historically been disempowering, should everyone instead aspire to masculine embodiment—or are there other possibilities for expanding our bodies' capacity to feel, to act, and to relate to others?

2 Gendered Subjects, Gendered Objects

> The young girl acquires many subtle habits of feminine body comportment… She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity that increases with age…The more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition—Young (1990, 154)

One of the defining features of sex and gender as systems for organizing social life is their binary division of human beings into two "opposite" and unequal biological sexes—female and male—and two corresponding genders—woman/feminine and man/masculine. This binary associates men and masculinity with action, agency, and the status of subject. Masculine embodiment demands bodily competence, control of self and others, and a certain unself-conscious ease: the goal is to think as little about the body as possible, focusing only on what the body can do and not on what can be done to it. In contrast, binary thinking about gender associates femininity with passivity and the status of object. Feminine embodiment manifests as self-consciousness: a constant awareness of the body as vulnerable, as an object of desire (or of violence), and as an imperfect tool for accomplishing one's aims.

Feminist theorists from de Beauvoir (2011 [1949]) to Ortner (1972) and MacKinnon (1982) have long noted this binary, and scholars of visual culture argue that in media representations of gender, "men act and women appear" (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). As a result, men learn to think of their bodies in terms of capacities and action; women learn to think of their bodies as objects to be looked at, desired, and acted upon. Feminist philosopher Young (1990) offers one of the most incisive analyses of how gendered expectations shape bodily experience. Young begins with a simple question: what does it mean to "throw like a girl," and why do women do it? Young is not only interested in throwing ability. Rather, she takes throwing as emblematic of gendered differences in how women and men perform functional movements oriented toward "a definite purpose or task" (Young, 1990, 143). For Young, "throwing like a girl" describes a way of throwing that is mechanically inefficient, engaging only the throwing arm while the rest of the body remains at rest or even resists the throwing motion. This type of movement, she argues, reflects a learned orientation to one's own body and to the world—"feminine body comportment"—in which the body is experienced as subject and object simultaneously. As subjects, women are self-aware actors who initiate movements, make decisions, and engage their bodies in a variety of tasks. Yet, writes Young, "A woman frequently does not trust the capacity of her body to engage itself in physical relation to things. Consequently, she often lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along and at the same time protected" (Young, 1990, 148). In this way, feminine embodiment is characterized by the body's alienation from the self.

In contrast, norms for masculine embodiment prioritize physical strength, mastery, and competence. If feminine embodiment is characterized by being both subject and object, masculine embodiment, writes Young, strives toward pure subjectivity. This does not mean that male bodies are more *skilled*; rather, even "the relatively untrained man nevertheless engages in [activity] with more free motion and open reach than his female counterpart," experiencing his body as the means with which to accomplish his desired ends (Young, 1990, 145). Other scholars of masculinity argue that while physical ease and ability are ideals associated with masculine embodiment, such traits are socially acquired and constructed—and they are not equally achievable for all men (Bordo, 1999; Connell, 2005[1995]). For example, Pascoe

(2007) describes how high school boys she studied equated masculinity with mastery; any sign of clumsiness, physical softness, or sexual inexperience was ruthlessly mocked as unmasculine. Just as feminine body *inhibition* is learned, then, so too is masculine bodily *ease*; just as norms for feminine delicacy teach women to perceive their bodies as ineffective and fragile, so too do norms for masculine efficacy teach men to trust in their bodies as sturdy, capable, and effective.

Thus, the gender binary gives us two ideal types for gendered embodiment: masculine subjecthood and feminine objecthood. This dichotomy not only shapes individuals' relationship to their own bodies, but also defines certain activities, institutions, and even whole racial/ethnic groups and nationalities as masculine or feminine (regardless of individual members' genders). These ideal types oversimplify the realities of embodiment, of course, as all bodies possess both a capacity for effective action and a physical form that can be perceived and acted upon—the ability to be both subject and object. To put it more precisely, we might say that "doing femininity" means engaging in action while remaining highly conscious of one's body—how it feels, how others perceive it, etc.—while "doing masculinity" properly means acting with as little regard for the body as possible. These gendered pressures on action—to attend to the body or to transcend it—carry consequences for people of all genders.

3 Unselfconscious and Active: Masculine Embodiment in Everyday Life

While everyone is born with a body—and while those bodies differ in form and ability—societal institutions further differentiate bodies early on based on gender and other characteristics. In U.S. preschools, for example, Martin (1998) found that teachers were more likely to manage girls' clothing and hair, reprimand girls for inappropriate bodily behavior (such as shouting or crawling on the floor), recommend specific activities to girls such as doing crafts at a table, and express concern that girls who engaged in rough play might get hurt. While Martin notes that school was likely only one of many institutions shaping children's embodied experiences, the end result was that girls' physicality became increasingly restrained and self-conscious, whereas "boys come to take up more room with their bodies, to sit in more open positions, and to feel freer to do what they wish with their bodies, even in relatively formal settings" (Martin, 1998, 503). Such freedom, however, is complicated by race: U.S. Black and Latino children of any gender are more likely than white children to face bodily surveillance and correction by school officials (Ferguson, 2000; Morris, 2005).

3.1 Training the Masculine Body

Masculine embodiment shows up early and in a wide variety of institutions, but a couple of settings—sports and military training—illustrate this mode of embodiment most acutely. Rules for men's sports—and for masculine embodiment generally—demand that men's bodies be large, powerful, and courageous, "engaging in reckless acts of speed, showing guts in the face of danger, big hits, and violent crashes" (Messner et al., 2000, 389). Masculine embodiment in these settings must be proven by winning and exerting one's bodily will over others ("losers") in competition, demonstrating the body's strength, skill, and fortitude in the process (Messner et al., 2000; Theberge, 1997). Yet while sports often adopt a rhetoric of celebrating "natural" masculine toughness and aggression, the evidence suggests that these traits—as well as a certain disregard for personal safety—are learned and cultivated through sport-specific training (Malcom, 2006).

Foucault (1995[1977]) theorizes the functions of such training in his study of disciplinary power in the 18th century, looking particularly at military training: "the soldier has become something that can be made … a calculated

constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit" (p. 135). Rather than teaching soldiers to make individual determinations about the best course of action, the new discipline strove to create automatic movement: the purest distillation of a (masculine) body that acts rather than reflects on itself. This technique remains a powerful component of sports and military training today, and scholars have studied how training reshapes soldiers' and athletes' emotional responses to high-stress situations (Samimian-Darash, 2013), how they handle pain (Dyvik, 2016; Samimian-Darash, 2013; Wacquant, 1998), and even how they breathe (Lande, 2007).

The aims of this training are multiple. First is the cultivation of habit, where repetitive drilling creates "automatic, visceral, and instinctive reaction" in the body of the trainee (Dyvik, 2016, 141). A soldier or athlete who acts automatically should, the thinking goes, behave more predictably and without wavering in the face of danger (Samimian-Darash, 2013). Second, training helps to acclimate the body to pain and discomfort, rendering that body capable of both withstanding violence and inflicting violence on others (Samimian-Darash, 2013; Spencer, 2009; Theberge, 1997; Wacquant, 1998). Third, military and sports training are used to facilitate masculine solidarity and allegiance to the group. Dyvik (2016) explains, "The nurturing of traditional masculine values such as physical strength, resilience and action cements the bond between 'the boys'—as opposed to those who are defined as being outside the operational environment, such as most girls or men who do not live up to the expectations of the 'combat body'" (p. 141). Interestingly, even as soldiers and athletes train their bodily reactions to become more instinctual and less thought out, discourses within the institutions reframe such training as *agency*: bringing the body under one's control rather than surrendering to fear. In so doing, these institutions frame their participants' bodies as fundamentally masculine: aggressive, effective, invulnerable, and controlled.

3.2 Masculinity and Marginalized Bodies

The institutions described above are gendered masculine, and they tend to assume (or nurture) a specific form of masculinity within their participants. Yet masculinities come in multiple forms (Connell, 2005[1995]), and the gender configuration of an institution may not always align with the gendered identities and expressions of all its participants. What happens when diverse bodies enter stereotypically masculine fields?

For women in these institutions, training appears to work similarly as it does for men. Subjected to the same sorts of military or athletic training as their male counterparts, women learn how to physically dominate others (Lande, 2007; Theberge, 1997), shrug off pain and injury (Malcom, 2006), and display "self-control and stoicism" (Silva, 2008, 941). Women who undergo such training experience their bodies as tools for their own use, build identities as athletes or soldiers, and take pleasure in their physical ability to master difficult skills and—in some cases—the bodies of their opponents.

Yet while women can and do cultivate masculine embodiment, that task is complicated by their own and others' persistent attempts to hold them accountable to norms for femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Silva (2008), for example, interviewed female ROTC cadets who appreciated the military training program's "more empowering vision of their bodies which emphasized action and achievement over passive decoration" (p. 944), but her respondents did not identify as masculine. Rather, they adopted a "gender neutral" subjectivity or reframed their duties as an extension of nurturant femininity (as when one fighter pilot described combat as a way of caring for her "Air Force family"). In other cases, gender accountability comes from onlookers. Sociologist and amateur boxer Elise Paradis describes her difficulty finding a sparring partner because coaches declared her "too pretty to fight," simultaneously objectifying her sexually and denying her the chance to develop her body's

instrumental capabilities (2012, 99). Like their male counterparts, women in sports like tackle football (Carter, 2015), ice hockey (Theberge, 1997), rugby (Ezzell, 2009), and roller derby (Carlson, 2010; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2015) often show off their bruises as evidence of their toughness. Yet outsiders unaccustomed to thinking of women as athletes may instead interpret these bruises as marks of domestic abuse: evidence not of masculine bodily subjectivity but of feminine vulnerability and objectification. Participating in masculine-typed activities requires one to strategically disregard bodily risks; however, it seems likely that developing and maintaining this attitude toward the body will be harder for women—or anyone—who are constantly being reminded of their fragility by others.

If femininity, generally, is marginalized within these masculine-typed activities, intersections of race and gender further complicate participation for people of color. Gendered racialization occurs when entire racial/ethnic groups are stereotyped as being "masculine" or "feminine" relative to the dominant racial group in a society, regardless of an individual's sex (Collins, 2005; Lei, 2003). In the U.S., for example, Black people have tended to be framed as hyper-masculine relative to whites (Collins, 2005; Trawalter et al., 2012), with significant effects on Black men's *and* women's participation in masculine-typed activities. For example: they are less likely to receive pain medication from health care personnel (Hoffman et al., 2016; Trawalter et al., 2012); Black professional male athletes are given less time to recuperate from injury before returning to play (Trawalter et al., 2012); and Black women are expected to excel in stereotypically masculine sports like basketball while facing barriers to entry in "feminine" activities like ballet and figure skating (Collins, 2005; Cooper, 2015; Malcom, 2006).

3.3 Masculinity and the Feeling Body

Gender norms discipline how bodies *act*, but they also shape how bodies *feel*: how—and whether—the body experiences pain, pleasure, and a range of other sensations. Participants in masculine-typed activities like the military learn, for example, to disregard pain (Samimian-Darash, 2013), but these activities bring pleasure as well. Soldiers that Dyvik (2016) studied described a near-euphoric experience of feeling their bodies and senses spring into action in combat, reacting even before their conscious minds had registered a threat. Gender norms for sexuality frame proper masculine sexuality as active, desiring, and "hard" (Bordo, 1999; Fausto-Sterling, 1992[1985]). Adolescent boys learning how to perform this masculinity frequently engage in rituals of looking at women's bodies and speculating about what could be done to them (Pascoe, 2007); groups of college-aged men go out to clubs to "hunt" girls for sex in a ritualized performance of heterosexual desire (Grazian, 2007); and transgender men recount how cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) men signal acceptance by inviting trans men to join them in objectifying conversations about women (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). These discourses teach men not only that their desires are important, but also that the "correct" way to experience pleasure is by objectifying someone else—never as the object of another person's desires.

Masculine embodiment encourages some feelings but discourages others such as pain and fear. Training the body to strategically ignore these feelings may help one succeed in masculine-typed activities. However, it has significant consequences for health that are disproportionately borne by men. Boys and men learn from an early age that masculinity requires them to meet risk bravely, even to seek it out (Bordo, 1999). White college-aged men drink excessively to prove their body's ability to tolerate alcohol and avoid charges of "weakness, homosexuality, or femininity" (Peralta, 2007, 741), and sports coverage in the media lionizes masculine athletes who go against doctors' orders and play while injured (Messner et al., 2000). While hegemonic masculinity may, in this case, prove self-destructive, it frames the body as impregnable—thus, unfeminine—and capable of

withstanding risk. Sports for the sake of competition are masculine; in contrast, fitness, body consciousness, paying attention to worrying symptoms, and seeking medical care are framed as feminine (Courtenay, 2000; Moore, 2010; Petrzela, 2017). Thus, while embodying hegemonic masculine values carries social privilege and power, it also has a significant downside: men in the U.S. "are more likely than women to die of almost every disease and illness and to die earlier," particularly due to violence and unintentional injury (Sorenson, 2011, S353).

As this section has demonstrated, masculine embodiment is neither inevitable nor located only within male bodies. Through training, socialization, and discipline, bodies *become* masculine subjects: that is, they develop confidence in their capabilities, focus on what they can do to others, and avoid thinking about what can be done to them. Experiencing the body as subject in this way can benefit both individuals (who find satisfaction through exploring their body's capabilities) and the institutions to which they belong. At the same time, the link between bodily subjecthood and masculinity carries significant costs. First, this linkage often excludes women from opportunities to develop their bodies' effective capabilities, then frames their resulting bodily unease as a natural—rather than learned—disability. Second, the linkage with masculinity matters because of *how* masculinity manifests, particularly in the U.S.: as what Kimmel (2005) terms "compulsive masculinity," which is characterized by "violence, aggression, extreme competitiveness, a gnawing insecurity …[this is] a masculinity that must always prove itself and that is always in doubt" (p. 93). The masculine bodily subject must not only develop its talents and toughness but also prove them, often by inflicting violence on others and facing violence in turn. Lastly, the linkage of masculinity and bodily efficacy carries over into how society views whole groups of people: as hegemonic discourses gender entire racial and national groups as being excessively masculine or feminine (usually, in the West, relative to whites), they limit those groups' opportunities for experiencing subjecthood or objecthood.

4 Self-conscious and Objectified: The Ambiguous Subjects of Feminine Embodiment

The converse of the masculine ideal that bodies be self-controlled, active, and taken-for-granted is the ideal of the feminine body-as-object: passive, self-conscious, and aware of itself as a target for others to gaze and act upon. Historically, many believed women's inhibited embodiment to be a natural consequence of female anatomy. Medical theories in the 19th century viewed women as frail, sickly creatures at the mercy of their delicate reproductive organs (Ehrenreich and English, 2005(1978); Fausto-Sterling, 1992[1985]). Popular discourses presumed that some degree of disability was inevitable for women, making them unsuited to vote or pursue an education, and subjecting them to male doctors' authority (Baynton, 2016; Bordo, 2003(1993); Ehrenreich and English, 2005(1978); Fausto-Sterling, 1992[1985]; Garland-Thomson, 2002). These discourses essentialized disability in white, class-privileged women (for whom leisure denoted status) while paradoxically (but conveniently) assuming that lower-class and non-white women would be physically fit to perform the hard labor upon which higher-status women's leisure depended (Ehrenreich and English, 2005[1978]).

Today, social theorists find that feminine embodiment in the West results from a socially enforced body consciousness: the awareness of how one's body looks, of how it exists in relation to others, and of what can be done to it. Women themselves may participate in this socialization process, holding themselves and one another accountable to bodily norms that place a premium on appearance. At the same time, such surveillance is reinforced externally through a variety of social institutions and interaction rituals.

4.1 Disciplining the Feminine Body

Girls become aware of the gaze trained upon their bodies young. Popular and scholarly

accounts document the sexualization of young girls' clothing, including items like abercrombie's thong underwear for pre-teens (with the phrase "eye candy" written on them), infant onesies printed with phrases like "future wife" and "future bride," and t-shirts for girls declaring "I'm too pretty to do math" (Samakow, 2014). Girls' clothing frequently includes both explicit messages about women's status as objects ("eye candy") and implicit ones, communicated by styles that are neither practical nor comfortable to wear but exist to display the wearer's body. School dress codes often target girls' clothing as "provocative" and "distracting" to boys, teaching girls that their bodies—not boys'—are routinely being looked at (Morris, 2005; Raby, 2010).

Formal school rules combine with informal cultural norms to reinforce the objectification of girls' bodies. In Luttrell's (2003) ethnography of pregnant high schoolers, she found that pregnant teens faced particular sexual objectification by peers and school staff alike (their pregnancies marking them as sexually active); administrators responded by making these girls less visible—segregating them into separate classes or having them sit at the back of the auditorium. Sexualization is particularly pronounced for working-class and non-white girls, where cultural differences in style are read by school officials as expressions of deviant or excessive sexuality (Bettie, 2003; Ortner, 1991). Boys and men learn to participate in this objectification as a way of emphasizing their own strength and agency, using both verbal (catcalling, boasting about sexual conquests) and physical means (wrestling, restraining, or fondling female classmates) to demonstrate their status as subjects and girls' status as objects (Pascoe, 2007).

Institutionalized athletics also contribute to women's bodily objectification and inhibition. One place this occurs is in sports that are seen as appropriately "feminine," such as figure skating and gymnastics, which emphasize bodily display in their judging (Lorber, 1993). For example, USA Gymnastics (2016) states that women's floor routines will be performed to music and requires them to intersperse their tumbling passes with dancing. Female gymnasts are then judged on whether they have a "dancer-like command of music, rhythm, and space," which they may combine with "movements of playful theatrics." Men's floor routines require neither dance nor music, much less "playful theatrics." Mastering the required elements of women's gymnastics (and similar pursuits like figure skating) thus requires a self-conscious display of the body as object, simultaneously active and visually pleasing to the spectator's gaze. A second way athletics contribute to women's inhibited embodiment is through rules designed to protect female bodies and minimize risk. For example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)'s rules for women's lacrosse forbid intentional body contact between players and permit only light padding and protection, instead urging players to exercise restraint to avoid injuring one another. This rule reflects Young's observation that feminine embodiment requires women to "enact [their] own body inhibition" (1990, 154). In contrast, NCAA rules for men's lacrosse allow body checking and call for more substantial padding and equipment so that men can play roughly. In sports like ice hockey, ski jumping, cross country running, and decathlon/heptathlon, official rules construct the women's version of the sport as of shorter distance or duration, requiring fewer events, and/or limiting contact. In essence, women's sports are regulated to be safer and less strenuous, reflecting the belief that women's bodies are fragile and must be protected.

Bodily objectification takes a different form in the workforce. Within many stereotypically feminine jobs—such as waitresses, secretaries, and flight attendants—women's willingness to flirt, wear form-fitting clothing and make-up, and otherwise appeal to male desire is an unofficial job requirement (Hochschild, 2012[1983]; Rich, 1980; Wolf, 2002[1991]). Women whose bodies fail to achieve mainstream beauty standards face barriers in hiring and professional advancement (Averett & Korenman, 1996; Mason, 2012). Even in fields where women's looks bear no relation to job requirements, Wolf (2002[1991]) argues that employers have an economic interest in targeting women's bodies: keeping women

docile and focused on their bodies as objects may make them less likely to demand higher pay or better working conditions.

4.2 Femininity and Marginalized Bodies

Historically, feminist scholars have generally viewed objectification as a negative for women; the dynamics of objectification and feminization are further complicated when we consider their intersections with other characteristics such as ability/disability, race, and sexuality. Cultural images of disability, for example, frame it as an inherently objectified and feminized status. Many disabled people[1] rely on assistive services, deviating from the masculine ideal of the independent, effective body. Yet if disabled bodies are stereotyped as not sufficiently masculine, neither are they granted the status of desirable feminine objects: disabled people are frequently asexualized by caregivers and popular culture (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Kafer, 2016; Wilkerson, 2002). Some disabled men (such as the wheelchair rugby players in the film *Murderball*) reassert their hegemonic masculinity by emphasizing their heterosexuality, their bodies' ability to participate in violent competition, and their self-sufficiency (Barounis, 2009). For these men, seeking status as masculine subjects is a way of claiming power and gender identity. Disabled women's responses vary: some women reassert their bodies' desirability via conventional heterosexual scripts, rendering themselves objects while claiming feminine identity and sexuality (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Hammer, 2012). Others welcome the freedom from feminine body expectations that disability brings (Clare, 2015[1999]; Kim, 2011).

Racialized gender norms also shape bodily objectification. While—as noted earlier—Black bodies in the West are often framed as *over*-sexualized and *hyper*-masculine, Asian bodies are more likely to be framed as asexual and feminine. As recently as the 1980s, evolutionary psychologist Philippe Rushton claimed that "Orientals" are innately less interested in sex, are more sexually restrained than either whites or Blacks, and possess smaller genitalia (Rushton & Bogaert, 1987; cf. Fung, 2008). For Asian men, these racialized gender discourses deny them access to hegemonic masculinity, target them for violence and bullying (Lei, 2003), and make it difficult for them to claim not just heterosexual identity but queer sexualities, too (Fung, 2008). Asian women, meanwhile, are often fetishized as *hyper*-feminine in their embodiment: small and delicate-bodied, excessively passive, and responsive to the desires projected upon them (Cho, 1997; Lei, 2003). In her study of high-end sex workers in Vietnam, Hoang (2014) found that women consciously played to these stereotypes for profit, cultivating graceful mannerisms, deferring to clients, and meticulously managing their bodies with make-up, plastic surgery, and more. Even though Hoang's respondents managed to capitalize on their feminized status, the ideal they worked to approximate was a body that could be objectified, touched, and looked at without having any desires of its own—a body that, at best, can be understood to be "bargaining with patriarchy" rather than challenging it (Kandiyoti, 1988).

4.3 Femininity and the Feeling Body

Whereas normative masculine bodies are expected to ignore pain and actively pursue their desires, feminine body norms place a high premium on ignoring one's own desires while being highly sensitive to physical and emotional pain. Fairy tales like *The Princess and the Pea* teach

[1] I intentionally use identity-first ("disabled people") rather than people-first ("people with disabilities") language here. I do so because the former reflects this chapter's larger argument that the body—including its abilities and disabilities—is co-constitutive of self and identity, not merely a fleshy container for the self. This does not, however, mean that identity-first language is always correct; many people with disabilities prefer to use people-first language for self-identification and activism. See Liebowitz (2015) for further discussion of these two terms. https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/.

children that the most desirable, feminine women are those who are so sensitive that their sleep will be disrupted by a single pea hidden under a stack of mattresses; as Nancy Malcom (2006) explains, "traditionally feminine attitudes toward pain … permit[] and even encourage [girls] to react to minor injuries by emphasizing their frailty" (p. 520).

Even as gender norms sensitize feminine bodies to respond to certain feelings, they deemphasize the importance of other feelings like desire. Bordo (2003[1993]) explains, the "general rule governing the construction of femininity [is] that female hunger—for public power, for independence, or sexual gratification—be contained" (p. 171). Bordo connects the ideal of passive female sexuality to a range of feminine norms: being thin, effortlessly pretty, and taking up little space. Rubin (1975) suggests the political uses of taboos on female desire: "From the standpoint of [patriarchal marriage systems], the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desires of others, rather than one which actively desired" (p. 182).

While the legal, cultural, and political status of women in the West does not fall under traditional patriarchy, elements of that system still exist today. Armstrong et al. (2012) find that an "orgasm gap" exists on college campuses, particularly among men and women in casual sexual relationships: "men may be more selfish because of their tacit lack of respect for women's right to pleasure in a casual context. Women participating in hookups may not feel entitled to communicate their sexual desires" (Armstrong et al., 2012, 438). Women who enjoy sex too much or who participate too enthusiastically in their own objectification are frequently shamed (Bogle, 2008), and Waskul et al. (2007) note that basic misunderstandings and societal silences about female anatomy—specifically, the clitoris—often leave women unprepared to satisfy their sexual desires alone or with partners. In short, gender norms sexually objectify women's bodies within sexual encounters—limiting women's bodily autonomy and access to pleasure—but this objectification also carries over into non-sexual realms, with consequences for self-esteem, educational outcomes, and career success.

5 Gender Subversion and Bodily Joy

> People are sexual objects, but they are also subjects, and are human beings who appreciate themselves as object and subject. This use of human bodies as objects is legitimate (not harmful) only when it is reciprocal. If one person is always object and the other subject, it stifles the human being in both of them.—Wittman (1997[1970], 385)

The association of masculinity with embodied subjecthood and femininity with bodily objecthood is a primary means through which gendered power differentials are created and maintained. Experiencing one's body as strong and capable can reinforce a person's sense of power and efficacy; experiencing the body as violable and incapable can be disempowering. Thus, feminist scholars have long viewed feminization and objectification as undesirable. Writes Young, "it is not necessary that *any* women be 'feminine'—that is, it is not necessary that there be distinctive structures and behavior typical of the situation of women" (1990, 144–5). Young's comment raises the question: is it preferable that women—or anyone—be *masculine subjects*?

For several reasons, the answer to this question may be no. First, masculine embodiment ideals demand mastery and control, not just over oneself but over one's surroundings and other people. The ability to use one's body skillfully in competition with others may be satisfying, but it also entails dominating and turning other people into objects: one's own subjectivity comes at the cost of another person's. Second, masculine embodiment frequently normalizes pain and violence, indeed often frames these as the necessary preconditions for achieving subject status. This holds true even when women enter masculine-typed occupations and activities. Third, the requirement that one's body be always controlled, always effective, privileges productive embodiment while minimizing the pleasures of losing control or enjoying leisure. Finally, the

expectation that one pay as little attention to one's body as possible brings increased risks to health and wellbeing. Thus, while feminine objectification is disempowering, normative masculine embodiment may not be desirable, either.

Many theorists (including Carl Wittman, cited above) suggest that it is enforcement of the binary itself that is the problem. Wittman, writing at the start of Gay Liberation in the U.S., believed that gay men needed to reject the requirements of compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, including the requirement that men should dominate and desire others (but never be desired in turn). In the decades since Wittman penned his manifesto, scholars have asked what a more integrated embodiment of subjecthood and objecthood might look like.

Some of the most compelling attempts to answer this question come from the marginalized communities described in earlier sections: queer people, disabled people, and people of color. For example, while dance has often been feminized —and thus deemed inappropriate for men— Maxine Leeds Craig notes that this "supposition … was never about all men" (2014, 4). Rather, that assumption relied on "a chain of signifiers that support long-standing racist associations between blackness, femininity, sensuality, the body, emotional expressiveness, and lack of control" (p. 4). In other words, *white* men often don't dance, but men of color—who are already excluded from hegemonic masculinity—are more likely to be comfortable expressing sensuality with their bodies. Halberstam (1997) notes something similar in the performances of racially diverse drag kings (usually cisgender women entertainers performing as men): while Black, Latinx, and Asian drag kings she studied drew on tropes of "rapping and dancing" or a "cool gangsta aesthetic" to perform masculinities of color, white drag kings often struggled to perform a masculinity that was basically nonperformative: "masculinity in white men often depends on a relatively stable notion of the realness and naturalness of … the male body" (p. 111). Indeed, given their position on the margins of power, racial and gender/sexual minorities may be well positioned to challenge binary divisions between subject/object and masculine/feminine.

Not all such challenges manage fully to escape heteronormative gender binaries, though. Legendary drag queen Willi Ninja, who pioneered the gender-subversive dance style of vogueing, described his work teaching women to model, saying, "Basically, I'm trying to bring [my students'] femininity back, and bring some grace and poise … because it's more attractive to men" (Livingston, 1990). In this way, Ninja encouraged his students to adopt a traditionally feminine orientation to their bodies as objects of male desire, but did so by using his own (Black, queer, male) body to demonstrate. More recently, Stone and Shapiro (2017) examined how queer drag kings and BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, and sadism/masochism) practitioners continued to privilege masculinity in their subcultural scenes, even as they sought bodily pleasure and performed gender in decidedly non-normative ways. And recent work on hybrid masculinities (e.g., Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Barber & Bridges, 2017) notes that while the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity have expanded to incorporate elements of "various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and —at times—femininities into privileged men's gender performances" (such as the rise of the "metrosexual" male who combines heterosexuality with a stereotypically feminine attention to grooming), this expansion has not led to greater power for racial, sexual, and gender minorities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Instead, some of the most promising work on expanding the possibilities for gendered bodies come from scholars and practitioners who look beyond *styles* of gendered embodiment—that is, gendered bodily aesthetics—and return to the question of *power*. After all, at the root of the gender body binary is a persistent inequality between subject and object, masculine and feminine. Sports sociologists like Theberge (1997)

argue that it is not enough for women to enter masculine-typed sports and adopt the sport's existing values; rather, "a more fully transformative vision … would offer empowerment in a setting that rejects violence and the normalization of injury in favor of an ethic of care" (p. 85), thus unsettling the masculine ethics that underlie the institution. Further challenging the ideal of the competitive, successful, and capable masculine body, queer theorists in recent years have noted the importance—even, sometimes, the joy—to be found in *failing*, in being unproductive, and in feeling melancholy (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Love, 2007). While hegemonic masculine value systems uphold winning as the "right" way to experience joy, Halberstam suggests that "maybe failure is easier in the long run and offers different rewards" (Halberstam, 2011, 3). *Queer*, as a political stance, marks a resistance to the normal that we might also call failure; instead of finding happiness within the status quo, feminist queer theorists have suggested that the "different rewards" of failure might include authenticity, political consciousness, and a greater freedom to explore one's body and its desires (Ahmed, 2010; Halberstam, 2011; Simula, 2013). Similarly, disability scholars argue for the value of bodies that are sick, broken, or disabled—bodies that may need care, but which may not need or want a cure (Clare, 2017; Garland-Thomson, 2002). Feminist disability perspectives note that the stigma borne by people framed as "dependent"—usually women, disabled people, and other objectified bodies on the margins—is premised on the unrealistic expectation that everyone, at all times, must be independent and self-sufficient, an impossible standard for anyone who has ever been a child, been sick, or who will grow old (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Garland-Thomson, 2002). As these perspectives show, the most interesting challenges to gendered body binaries do so not merely by showing how people can combine or transgress gendered body aesthetics but by questioning body *ethics*: the values we hold for what a whole, empowered, body should be.

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