

THE RHETORIC OF PUBLIC BODIES: RESISTING THE NORM/OTHER BINARY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to all of those who look at their bodies and wonder if society will ever accept them for who they are. May you recognize how truly beautiful you are.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation develops a methodology to re-examine how we consider the embodiment of individuals across intersections of identity categories. This project applies a constellation of theoretical perspectives, including rhetorical, disability, Thirdspace, decolonial, and feminist/womanist theories. The methodology decolonizes the binary approach to embodiment by suggesting that we all both/and rather than defined by norm/other categories, particularly categories related to gender and size. Looking at public bodies, who are celebrities with an established ethos related to their bodies, this project applies the methodology to Chris Pratt, Peter Dinklage, Chaz Bono, Laverne Cox, Mindy Kaling, and Melissa McCarthy. Through the application of the methodology, it becomes clear that these public bodies have changed the public perception through thoughtful representation of their embodiment. Rather than fitting neatly into binaries each of these public bodies represents a both/and approach to embodiment. In our modern episteme, we look toward public bodies as forms to be emulated, thus this methodology goes beyond the parameters of public bodies and can be applicable to all bodies in an effort to decolonize the body.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The body is corporeal and epistemological. The body is material and rhetorical. The body is meaningful and metaphorical. The body is real and imagined. The body is influential and influenced. The body is a recursive, complicated form that brings together all of these ideas and more. This project recognizes a complicated view of the body that brings together both corporeality and rhetoric. It acknowledges a long rhetorical tradition of the body as a key component of rhetoric. From ancient times, the body has been the location of rhetoric; the speaker uses their body to deliver an address to another group of bodies¹. This tradition continues today, as bodies are inherent in multiple forms delivery, including, but not limited to, cultural representations. The difference between ancient rhetors and modern rhetoric is that delivery is dispersed among many different cultural representations across different forms of media.

This project aims to interpret representations of bodies in specific cultural situations. These interpretations are based on a methodology created specially to understand how bodies function rhetorically to influence concepts of normality and

¹ This project will use they as a singular in some uses as a gender neutral pronoun.

otherness². This methodology resists binary labels such as norm/other and instead recognizes the complicated constellations of all bodies, meaning both that many components make up the physical body and that there remains a multiplicity of embodied experiences³. This project employs feminist and decolonial research practices that not only question societal expectations of bodies but also my subject position in this research. Like many researchers, I maintain a personal connection to this work. I identify as a white, fat, Appalachian, ciswoman. As a fat woman from one of most impoverished regions in the country, my experiences inspire me to encourage acceptance of bodies of every socio-economic identity category. Thus, there is an element of advocacy in this project for my body, but also for all bodies who have been othered or shamed in any way. While this project does not employ the multivocal discourse⁴ that is often part of decolonial research, it aims to challenge power structures and recognize shared history and experience that are too often ignored in the separation of bodies as normed and othered.

² I use the terms normal and other to acknowledge societal expectations, not the real, lived experiences of people. This project will not capitalize those terms as part of its goal to decolonize the binaries that limit identities. Chapter II offers a detailed explanation of normality and otherness and how they function culturally.

³ This project uses a constellation of theories based on the cultural rhetorics. The constellation of theories approach comes from on “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics” by Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson. Their discussion explains how cultural rhetorics offers a constellation of different approaches to theory and research as well as materiality. Further explanation of constellation will be addressed in the Bodies in Culture section below.

⁴ An example of this multivocal decolonial approach can be seen in “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics.” While this project remains focused on my voice, I hope future research can create a more multivocal approach.

This project employs a grounded theory rhetorical analysis⁵, including, but not limited to, cluster, ideological, pentadic, and generative analyses (Foss) as well as feminist and womanist⁶ approaches. I use critical analysis practices both to question body standards and recognize those who transgress body standards. While these artifacts could address any number of traditional markers, such as race, gender, ability, and size, my rhetorical analysis focuses on gender and size. Using gender and size highlights the inherent interconnectedness of marginalization based on identity categories. For example, there are specific expectations of thinness associated with female bodies: “A thin woman is a ‘valued’ woman” (Hesse-Biber 2). The thin female body provides a standard that conflates both gender and size. Gender and size are two identity categories that often work together. Other intersections, such as categories of race and social class, also function in conjunction with these and other categories. The connections between identity categories provide a rich opportunity for analysis because they more closely represent the embodied experiences of people. No one fits into just one category, but different categories are used as forms of oppression, often limiting people to one or two categories rather than the rich analysis of the multiple categories in which all bodies exist.

⁵ The definitions of rhetorical analysis, except for womanist, are based on Sonia K. Foss’s explanation of types of rhetorical analysis.

⁶ My womanist theory is informed by Layli Phillips assertion: “Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black Women’s and other women of colors everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension” (xx). Phillips makes a clear distinction between feminism and womanism.

This project does not offer the first examination (nor I hope the last) of embodiment and normality, but it does offer a methodological approach to understanding how normality and otherness function in American culture. While many projects discuss normality and otherness, less research focuses on how these standards shift with cultural expectations. Most scholarship challenges assertions of normality and otherness with little examination of the physical representations of normality and otherness. Through Thirdspace and liminality⁷, bodies can be examined in their constellated forms. These theories allow for an exploration into how bodies exist in normal and other spaces and how bodies are marked to fit into the norm/other binary. By exploring the marking and the stigma that surrounds bodies, we can begin to see how normality functions. We regularly just accept these conflicting views of normality without digging into its roots and questioning the very concept of normality. Challenging normality as a concept allows for a deeper questioning of the marginalization of bodies.

Thus, this study not only seeks to reduce the stigma surrounding bodies but also question the scholarly approaches we use to establish the norm and the other. For example, feminist studies have long used a norm-other dichotomy when it comes to discussions about gender-related oppression. The simplistic view of gender as the only site of oppression leaves out issues of race, class, queerness, and even those who do not fulfill gender binaries. Thus, theories such as womanism, queer studies, and transgender studies question the finite gender binaries. Scholars such as Judith Butler, Gayle

⁷ Thirdspace and liminality will be explained in more detail in Chapter II. These theories allow for a both/and view of bodies rather than an either/or approach that functions through binaries such as normal/other or male/female.

Salomon, Gloria Anzaldua, and Layli Phillips again create, transgress, and interrogate binaries. For example, womanism promotes inclusivity, but rejects traditional feminism (Phillips xx-xxi). What would womanism, or other investigations of oppression, look like if they rejected the static nature of the norm? Often the arguments imply there is difference in individuals, but what if we reconsidered that difference to exclude normality itself? By finding new ways to discuss the norm/other dichotomy, we may be able to resist the binary all together and embrace multiple bodies in culture as well as scholarship.

This research also has a timely application, as there are an increasing number of body acceptance movements, but many of these movements limit their points of view and focus on one aspect of body identity (such as fat activism). This approach neglects the multiplicity of bodies and ways body ideals affect all bodies. To avoid this continued division of movements, this research addresses the more complicated and intersectional reality of bodies. Leaning on Gloria E. Anzaldúa, I argue bodies are in a “un choque, a cultural collision,” or a key moment in which the discussion can move beyond working on identity group at a time (Anzaldúa, “La conciencia” 86). Instead, we must establish bridges that recognize that all bodies have meaning and merit by embracing multiple identities, which Anzaldúa would call a mestiza way.

Inspired in part by Anzaldúa’s mestiza recognition of multiple viewpoints, this project uses an interdisciplinary approach. Because the project will draw on theories from rhetoric, philosophy, feminist, and queer theory, it invites a dialogue with those disciplines as well. In addition to reaching academic audiences, the interrogation of

cultural texts invites broader interests in public scholarship as well. By investigating the mass media, I open up my research to be in dialogue with what people watch, read, and interact with on a daily basis. This research serves as a bridge between academic and public discourse through its examination of existing cultural texts.

My analysis focuses on what I call public bodies, which includes public figures who have established a form of ethos that connects to their physical bodies. The primary analysis for public bodies is visual media, which provides two-dimensional images that are culturally situated and mediated. Technology has created unstable images that are easily manipulated, particularly in celebrity culture. Through media, we make determinations about bodies that are removed from their physical bodies. Rather than negotiating meaning through corporeal bodies, we negotiate meaning through metaphorical representations of bodies. We engage with these images, and the images affect culture as well as our own personal cultural impulses. In other words, these images become part of our culture, part of the ways we see the world.

Because there is not a physical body present, we interpret our bodies through these images. But, we are mediating images that are already mediated. In his interpretation of Kenneth Burke's work, David Blakesley suggests that photos work as a Burkean terministic screen because photos are an "interpretation" that only shows part of the subject or a perspective on a subject: "An image is in the end result of an act of perception, which itself is more than just looking" (109). In viewing images, we bring a specific interpretation to that image. The way one sees the image changes based on individual cultural situations. Visual grammar theorists Gunther Kress and Theo van

Leeuwen assert that visuals and texts create meanings across culture, but how we understand visuals is different from how we view texts (2). In either case, visual grammar is situated culturally, thus we maintain a set of culturally created guidelines to read images.

This project uses a set of criteria to focus on embodied representations in media. Every artifact addresses the embodiment of a public body. The analysis of these public bodies begins with the consumption of the media and then makes interpretations of that media. I employ a set of criteria for determining how embodiment functions. The first criteria determine whether the public body fits the parameters of gender and size in this project. Secondly, the artifact must feature a way to determine the physicality of the person, asking questions such as: How does this public body perform acts of embodiment? Do these celebrities discuss their bodies? Do they wear clothing that highlights those bodies? There are myriad other questions that address embodiment, but the goal is to look at the artifact through a lens of embodiment and the ways in which the physical characteristics of the public body are addressed.

Once gender, size, and embodiment are addressed, then questions of interpretation come into play. The first level of interpretation analyzes whether these bodies fulfill expectations of normality or otherness. Instead of using a binary approach, the analysis questions the ways in which the bodies are both fulfilling expectations of normality and otherness at the same time. This approach addresses potential ways of endorsing normality and transgressions against normality. Once making the determination of normality or otherness, then the analysis focuses on the liminality of the public body.

This project utilizes Thirdspace theories. Thirdspace allows for bodily interpretations through a both/and lens. These analyses show how bodies always exist in a both/and space where they can fulfill societal standards for normal and other at the same time.

While this project focuses on size and gender, this methodological approach is not limited to those specific categories. This approach can shift to other categories or to other issues of embodiment, such as social class and size. By combining an analysis of size and social class the analysis may highlight how fat people are often portrayed as blue collar workers.

What is a Public Body?

No matter how much we want our bodies to remain private, all bodies exist in the public sphere. We share our bodies with the public on a regular basis. Psychologist Susie Orbach says “our body is our calling card, vested with showing the results of our hard work and watchfulness or, alternatively, our failure and sloth” (Orbach 6). When we travel into public spaces, our bodies become sites of interpretation, read by those who surround us. This calling card has become even more visible through the proliferation of social media and the extended avenues to present public bodies through various forms of media.

While most bodies have public representations, not all bodies have the power to influence others. In American culture, celebrities often provide a guidepost of how everyday people are expected to live, or, in a sense, normality. Celebrity bodies both provide standards for normality and establish standards of normality. While celebrity culture may seem like a shallow area of analysis, the personas created by these celebrities

provide for a rich exploration of how bodies manifest in real and imagined realms. While celebrities are real people, the public rarely interacts with the real person. Through cultural representations celebrities exist through forms of media that people cannot physically interact with. For example, when someone creates a photo for a social media post, they have the power to manipulate that photo to create a specific image for a specific audience. Conversely, when someone watches a movie, they are provided an interpretation of a celebrity's body with limited interaction. Additionally, celebrities offer glimpses into their personal lives, whether through interviews or social media accounts. As public bodies, celebrities establish carefully crafted personas related to their performances, whether that is acting or on the red carpet. They are also subjected to the constant scrutiny that marks bodies as normal or not normal. In other words, these celebrities often travel between being the norm and the other, depending upon the rhetorical situation. Celebrities also provide an aspirational persona, a body that discourse communities can emulate. As public bodies, they are in a sense Burke's paradox of purity: they are what we aspire to achieve, yet their bodies are unattainable, because we can never become the celebrity and generally cannot physically interact with their bodies.

Understanding celebrity culture is key to understanding public bodies. Most people could think of a celebrity right away—whether an athlete, a performer, or even a scholar—that receives a lot of acclaim. We have a concept of what a celebrity is, but the twenty-first century celebrity has proliferation of means to reach their audience. While celebrities have long been a cultural phenomenon, the twenty-first century with the proliferation of social media more access to celebrities than in past eras. Celebrity culture

permeates American culture; as Bill Moyers and Joseph Campbell say, people “worship celebrities” and desire to become celebrities (163). Contemporary celebrities utilize multiple platforms, both social media and traditional media, to create create cultural exchanges and cultural moments that often reify cultural expectations.

Celebrity bodies become a site for idealized representations of what the average person aspires to achieve. Those aspirations can often be embodied, like, wanting to achieve a celebrity’s body shape, but it can also be a lifestyle to achieve. Media scholar Russell Meeuf asserts that celebrities offer a path toward meritocratic achievement “that fuels the mythology of upward social mobility” (Meeuf 209). That mythology focuses on an emulation of the celebrity’s physical form as well as their behaviors. The path to wealth and success can come through celebrity: “Instead of questioning the structural distribution of wealth and power, people strive for celebrity status to be saved from the designation as ordinary” (Meeuf 209). Thus, the celebrity is both extraordinary and seemingly within reach.

For a celebrity to maintain relevance, they maintain a complicated nexus between their personas and their own choices. Actors choose their roles, but every role is not available to them. Often the physical characteristics of the actor determines the parts they play. For example, leading man roles in action movies often go to men with athletic bodies, such as Tom Cruise. Conversely, an actor like Peter Dinklage, who is a dwarf, remains less likely to receive action movie offers but more likely to be offered supporting roles in fantasy films, a genre that regularly uses people of short stature to support the main action hero. That is not to say that actors cannot take parts outside of their

expectations, but those parts are less likely to be offered to them. Oftentimes, the term used for this is typecasting, when actors are given specific roles that fit their body type. For example, Cruise has a long, successful career as an action hero, and when he stars in a movie, it creates an expectation of a big movie. That does not mean every movie is a success, but rather that Cruise's presence in the movie changes the expectations for the movie. Cruise's ethos as a top-tier celebrity creates new expectations for a movie. Whereas, Dinklage remains a character actor and the audience expects a change in character from role to role.

The ethos of the actor affects the public perception of that actor, who carefully crafts those public personas to speak to the public sphere. Rhetoric scholar Christina Haas examines the work of three philosophers—Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Nancy Fraser—who explore public rhetoric with the metaphor of “space” (225-226). According to Haas, these scholars build to an understanding of a “third space” or liminal space in which people exist in both public and private realms. For example, Arendt offers a specific distinction between public spaces for action and private spaces for privacy, while Habermas discusses private spaces in which public matters are discussed such as a salon or coffeehouse (C. Haas 226-227). Haas adds Fraser to the discussion to show shifts in Habermas's liminal public/private spaces to a “subaltern counterpublic,” which uses spaces such as “feminist bookstores, festivals and local meeting places, academic programs and conferences, self-managed workplaces, day-care centers, and residential communities” as sites to establish community and/or resistance (C. Haas 228-229). Haas

explores these theories of the public sphere to highlight the liminal spaces where the public and private coincide.

The body exists in this liminal space between public and private because the body is a public site, but also contains very private elements as well. For a simple example, we show our bodies in public, but not our entire bodies as we cover up portions of it with clothes, and there are internal elements of the body that no one can see. The twenty-first century world offers a constant push and pull between the public and private, particularly in growing media options such as social media. Social media and the web blur the lines between public and private every day. We are inundated with hundreds of images, many of which remind us of how we should look. Social media also serves as a space for discussing the body and its relevance. Orbach sees a correlation between the expansiveness of the Web and body appreciation: “The rise in public bitching about the body is accompanied by the dissemination of images throughout the World Wide Web” (Orbach 7). Orbach implies that the more images we see, the more it creates a negative association with our own bodies.

Many of the images we see are of celebrities, who serve as public guideposts for how bodies should look. While many celebrities just offer examples of bodies to emulate, other celebrities offer more complicated ways of considering bodies. Some bodies carefully craft personas related to their embodiment. Celebrities such as Chris Pratt or Mindy Kaling create an ethos, sometimes an embodied ethos, which affects how we see and interpret their bodies. Some cultivate their ethos through their physical presence as well as their choices of projects, social media, and interviews. When celebrities combine

this careful cultivation of public persona with an embodied persona, they become the public body.

There are dozens of public bodies that could fulfill these criteria, but I limit the focus to six men and women, who are both cis and transgender. Chris Pratt, Peter Dinklage, Chaz Bono, Laverne Cox, Melissa McCarthy, and Mindy Kaling maintain public personas that intersect with their own embodiment. Each has established an ethos related to their bodies and has reached some level of success. Each of these public bodies exists in this space between real and imagined and thus provide a space to explore the establishment of and resistance to norms and others, a primary focus of this project. I examine these public bodies through a constellation of various media, such as photos, books, television, movies, social media, and interviews. Through this collection of material, this project attempts to gain insight into how these bodies affect cultural representations of bodies.

Because masculinity closely aligns with normality, this project starts with masculinity and the complicated ways public bodies represent masculinity. One representation of that normalized normality is Chris Pratt who shifted from a chubby leading man to a muscular leading man. As a dwarf and a respected actor, Peter Dinklage embodies some aspects of normality, but remains outside the expectations of normality because of his stature. Of all the public bodies in this project, Chaz Bono has spent the longest time in the spotlight as a trans man and the child of famous parents. By publically transitioning, Chaz offered a complicated view of masculinity and life as a public body. Much as these men offer different types of masculinity, the women of this project do not

fit into a hegemonic construction of femininity. As a trans woman, Laverne Cox balances work as an actress and trans advocate while physically matching many of the expectations of female embodied normality. Actress/writer Mindy Kaling creates a character who challenges concepts of female passivity and sexual passivity. Comedian Melissa McCarthy plays characters who transgress expectations of femininity through their aggressive personalities. Through their affirmation of and resistance to normality, all of these public bodies provide complicated ways of looking at the intersection of gender and size.

Historical Roots

While the analysis using this methodology focuses on contemporary texts, the work has roots in how the body has been interpreted since ancient times. Corporeality has been part of rhetoric since ancient times. Scholars such as Debra Hawhee also acknowledge that embodied intelligence was often tied to rhetoric. Dubbed *mētis*, Hawhee asserts that *mētis* functions as a form of embodied intelligence⁸. Hawhee explores a “wily cunning, crafty *mētis*,” using examples from ancient Greek stories about Odysseus as well as stories about animals, such as the fox and the octopus (46). The

⁸ This spelling is the way Hawhee uses *mētis* in *Bodily Arts*. The style of *mētis* inconsistent in Hawhee and Dolmage. Hawhee uses *mētis* unless she discusses the goddess, then there is no macron. In Dolmage’s “Metis, Mêtis, Mestiza, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions,” *mêtis* is written with a circumflex. In *Disability Rhetoric*, Dolmage uses *mētis* with a macron. In all of these texts, *mētis* is generally italicized. This text will use an unitalicized *mētis* unless it is a direct quote from a text with a different style to clarify the difference between when it comes from research and this project. Also, Hawhee italicizes words from Greek. This project will leave the italics in place and will only acknowledge italics in Hawhee’s text that I want to specifically emphasize.

mētis connected to these characters remains firmly embodied; the mētis represents thought directly tied to the body (Hawhee 57, original emphasis). Hawhee's description of mētis suggests that it remains an embodied intelligence, which gives Odysseus, the fox, and the octopus unique skills that non-embodied intelligence does not. These metaphorical or fictional characters represent a corporeal experience of mētis. While imaginary, they highlight cultural representations of societal standards. While the fox cannot really outsmart the human, specific knowledges exist in physical forms. The physical form of the fox provides the cunning intelligence. The fox offers a specific knowledge belonging solely to the fox. The fox's embodied experience provides a specific form of knowledge, in this case, cunning intelligence. Disability rhetoric scholar Jay Dolmage builds on Hawhee's mētis, which he describes as "cunning, adaptive, *embodied* intelligence" (Dolmage, "Metis" 5, original emphasis). Dolmage suggests that we have always carried this embodied intelligence, but have forgotten or ignored its existence.

Mētis represents a specific type of intelligence, one that functions both as "a mode of knowledge production" and as training for "athletes and sophists alike" (Hawhee 48, original emphasis). Thus, mētis becomes epistemological in direct connection with the body, or the corporeal self: "Thought does not just happen within the body, it happens as the body" (Hawhee *Bodily Arts* 58). Hawhee's interpretation of mētis suggests a body, or a corporeal form, becomes part of knowledge production. Corporeality provides a form of knowledge that cannot be accessed by the mind alone. Hawhee also uses these arguments as a foundation to discuss the sophists, the early rhetoricians. Hawhee connects her

examples of *mētis*—Odysseus, the fox and the octopus—implying that these examples are really sophists, thus trying to tie this cunning intelligence to sophistry. She connects the shifting physical nature of *mētis* to the “trickster-sophists” who can change their stance based on the rhetorical situation (Hawhee 62).

Considering *mētis* in the realm of rhetoric, it could be considered a combination of the canons of invention and delivery. Invention often functions as a tool of knowledge and delivery often entails the body in the process of rhetoric. The connection with invention could simply tie back to Aristotle’s “available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1:2:1). Like Hawhee, Dolmage connects *mētis*, an embodied and cunning intelligence, saying: “In a world of chance and change, *mētis* is what allows us to craft available means for persuasion” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 5, author’s emphasis). Using your *mētis*, or cunning intelligence, means rhetoricians use the means at their disposal. The use of the embodied intelligence also ties to delivery, as the body becomes the vessel for rhetoric. While *mētis* recognizes the role of the body, often throughout rhetorical history the body’s role in rhetoric has been diminished or been considered secondary. While Cicero and Quintilian recognized the importance of delivery, rhetorical history scholars credit Peter Ramus’s *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian* with separating the rhetorical canons, criticizing ancient Roman rhetoric teacher Quintilian for conflating rhetoric and the dialectic. Instead, Ramus says: “... invention, arrangement, and memory belong to dialectic, and only style and delivery to rhetoric” (686). This separation gives more epistemological (and rhetorical) importance to invention, arrangement, and memory, and suggests that style and delivery are merely artifice. While

this does not erase the body from rhetoric, it creates a hierarchy of rhetorical canons that places delivery at the bottom.

Delivery has done little to recover from this delineation. The elocution movement in the eighteenth century revived some aspects of delivery, but some of these works, such as Gilbert Austin's drawings of modes of delivery, are merely handbooks and not theoretical explorations of delivery as a device of rhetoric (Austin). By the late twentieth century, delivery reappears in the use of computers in composition. For example, James Porter discusses how the body becomes a form of electronic expression through emoticons and virtual avatars (Porter 212-213). Also, delivery often becomes about the mode in which material is delivered, rather than an embodied representation of delivery. Some twenty-first century examinations of digital rhetoric consider how the body produces digital texts, but there is little discussion of the body as a site of delivery on its own.

Through the relegation of delivery to a second-class role, the corporeality of rhetoric became diminished. This dismissal of the body as a site of delivery keeps the body's role in rhetoric focused on ancient traditions, which center the white, male able body and make any other body an aberration (Dolmage, "Metis" 3). The white, male able body becomes the only reputable site of delivery, marking the aberrant body's rhetoric as easily dismissable. Therefore, rhetoric maligns the other bodies in favor of the idealized white male metaphorical body (Dolmage, "Metis" 3). Dolmage suggests that a futile attempt to erase the body from rhetorical studies has added to a tension surrounding the body, but says that studying the influence of the body remains key because "to care about

the body is to care about how we make meaning, to care about how we persuade and move ourselves and others” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 4). Dolmage wants to resist the erasure of unmarked bodies and instead allow rhetoric to “reclaim the body” (“Metis” 5). For Dolmage, bodies make meaning and retain the power of rhetoric. Dolmage suggests that the body is not only part of the available means of persuasion, but body provides a key component in the creation of rhetoric. For Dolmage, bodies are inherently rhetorical and any attempts to erase the rhetorical relevance of corporeality are short-sighted.

This project joins a growing group of twenty-first century rhetoricians who attempt to reclaim the body’s role in rhetoric and, in Dolmage’s words, redefine rhetoric as “the circulation of discourse through the body” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 5). This definition of rhetoric accounts for both physicality and discourse inherent in rhetoric. Rhetoric is always discourse, and it is always enacted through the body in some way, whether through the author/speaker or the audience or a combination of both. Rhetoric is created by and for bodies. Situating rhetoric in the body recognizes not only the physical aspects of rhetoric, but also the complicated identities that affect rhetoric.

Philosopher Kenneth Burke connects identification⁹ and rhetoric, and this project takes up that tradition and extends Burke’s project. Identification remains a key component of rhetoric, but identification is a neutral term that does not address the

⁹ Burke says: “Traditionally, the key term for rhetoric is not ‘identification,’ but ‘persuasion.’ ... Our treatment, in terms of identification, is decidedly not meant as a substitute for the sound traditional approach. Rather, as we try to show, it is but an accessory to the standard lore. And our book aims to make itself at home in both emphases” (Burke, “Introduction” *Rhetoric* xiv).

complicated identities that we all inhabit. Burke sought connections between people, but this project recognizes that the difference is how we are connected. We are all complicated beings that cannot be limited by the identity markers that categorize people. Burke recognizes the importance of complicated identities in some of his theories, including his paradox of purity. Burke implies a fundamental paradox in the concept of purity whereas when a person truly becomes pure, they in turn become inhuman (Burke, *Grammar* 35). This Burkean paradox acknowledges the inability to achieve human perfection. To apply this concept to embodiment, the paradox acknowledges the unattainability of embodied perfection. Once a body becomes perfect it no longer exists as a body.

Despite this philosophical recognition of the limits of perfection, discourse often encourages bodies to achieve societal standards of normality. Sometimes normal reflects embodied perfection, sometimes it does not. Whether or not perfection is the goal, bodies fall into a series of hierarchies. Burke acknowledges hierarchies and even posits an ultimate hierarchy, which shows how group members are “arranged *developmentally* with relation to one another’ (Burke, *Rhetoric* 187, original emphasis). In embodiment theories, an ultimate hierarchy would delineate normal bodies and place non-normal (or othered) bodies lower on the hierarchy. In Burkean theory, normal would become what he calls a God term, placing normal higher than other manifestations in the hierarchy. In this hierarchy, rhetoric enforces normal and other.

The body as a tool of rhetoric and an important participant in discourse provides a foundation for how we talk about bodies and, in turn, how we interpret bodies. Mētis

shows us that bodies can be a site of discourse, a site of intellectual power, and perform rhetoric in physical ways. All too often the focus remains on the body in non-physical or non-corporeal ways, ignoring the body's intellectual and physical performance.

Psychologist Susie Orbach suggests that the body becomes so malleable that "the body can be anything we want it to be, with corporeality no more than a symbolic construct" (Orbach 91). Too often the body becomes a symbol, removed from its physicality. When bodies remain solely in the verbal discourse, then they lack corporeality. As rhetoric scholar Jack Selzer says: "Words have been mattering more than matter" (Selzer 4). Ignoring the material body in favor of a solely verbal discourse reduces the body to a symbol that lacks rhetorical and cultural significance. The body becomes immaterial and more susceptible to the influence of binaries such as the normal/other binary.

Bodies in Culture

This project rejects the limitation of the body to mere discourse and instead considers the body's corporeal presence just as relevant as the discourse that defines and describes those bodies. Bodies are not mere symbols to start conversations; bodies are the way that humans interact with the world. As Anzaldúa says: "All responses to the world take place within our bodies. Our bodies are tuning forks receiving impressions, which in turn activate other responses" (Anzaldúa, "Speaking Across the Divide" 292).

Corporeality offers the guidepost for how humans interact in the world. The body cannot be removed from its materiality, from its culture, its epistemology, or its rhetoric. The removal of any of these forces the body to become metaphorical rather than an actual body. Through the twenty-first century obsession with multimedia, we can very easily

remove the body from its significance and make it an object.

This project resists the metaphorical approach to bodies and instead recognizes that even the bodies we cannot physically touch carry a constellation of corporeality. Borrowing from cultural rhetorics, the body is constellated from its materiality, its cultural influence, its knowledge creation, and its rhetorical influence. Cultural rhetorics offers a transdisciplinary approach that recognizes that “all rhetorics are cultural. All rhetorics are global. All rhetorics have histories and traditions” (Powell, Levy, Riley-Mukavetz, Brooks-Gillies, Novotny, Fisch-Ferguson). Cultural rhetorics acknowledges that everyone has “culture” and “rhetoric” and resists rhetorics or disciplinary traditions that reinforce binary thought. Cultural rhetorics does not dismiss theoretical approaches that recognize historical marginalization. Rather it offers a decolonial approach that resists singular definitions of culture and rhetoric. It acknowledges that embracing myriad views of culture and rhetoric leads to deeper conversations and expands rhetorics into new realms such as material rhetorics and embodied rhetorics.

Theories of constellation not only create space for material rhetorics, but recognize the body exists from constellated material: skin, bones, blood, limbs, brains, etc. In fact, Anzaldúa points out that “one’s own *body* is not one entity,” but rather in addition to the components of the body, bodies also host multiple microorganisms (“Making Choices” 158). The concept of the body as a constellation provides a groundwork for an intersection between the material body and the cultural representations of the body. Bodies have become a way of understanding culture because they are constellated from cultural influences and *physical* components. For example,

Hawaiian scholar Manu Aluli Meyer discusses epistemology in both a cultural and physical way: “I believe culture shapes our view of the world and thus how knowledge is experienced because how I enter an ocean is totally different from how you would” (Meyer 194). Meyer uses a physical example to show the complicated ways in which our bodies interact with and learn from the world. Meyer reinforces the idea that bodies exist as a physical representation of cultural forces.

Sometimes culture attempts to erase the physical presence of the body and instead create a homogenizing force to promote a specific ideology. This homogeneity endorses one type of body over another. As Simone de Beauvoir says: “No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself” (De Beauvoir 6). Likewise, the endorsement of a homogeneous body establishes one body as the normal and creates an assumed binary opposite to reinforce the importance of that homogeneity. For example, Dolmage points out that rhetoric has “ignored the body” in part because “this ignorance is reinforced by a fear of imperfection, a fear about the boundaries around our own bodies, and a fear of the strange bodies of Others” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 5). By ignoring the bodies of others, rhetoric has been used to culturally reinforce a normal/other binary that often limits embodied experiences into these two sides of the binary. Moreover this placing of bodies within a binary structure ignores the constellated body and reinforces cultures that marginalize bodies.

American culture perpetuates the norm/other binary through categories, such as gender, size, race, sexuality, ability, age, and income. These are just some of the ways bodies become categorized and hierarchized through cultural influences. Feminist scholar

Elizabeth Grosz recognizes that culture has a lasting effect on the body: “It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of determinate type” (Grosz, “Introduction,” x). Thus, the body is its own entity but also changes based on cultural influences. The corporeal form cannot be removed from its cultural (or rhetorical) situation. Grosz suggests the body and its cultural influences work in a symbiosis, they intricately connect to one another.

Oftentimes embodiment scholars, including Grosz, discuss the relevance of the material body, however material is rarely defined. Grosz sees the material body as influenced by culture, but also as a site of materiality. Feminist scholar Judith Butler attempts to destabilize materiality through gender and performativity: “The unsettling of ‘matter’ can be understood as initiating new possibility, new ways for bodies to matter” (Butler, *Bodies* 30). By deconstructing the ways to enact normative gender, Butler tries to reformulate bodies to resist limitations of traditional gender roles. In disability studies, Dolmage asserts that the disabled body is both socially contracted and also carries a “materiality of disability” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* Kindle ed 117-118, author’s emphasis). All of these works consider corporeality and its undefined in materiality, in a both/and process. The material body offers a physical, material presence, and culture also affects the experience and perception of the body.

The materiality of the body remains intrinsically linked to culture because culture remains a constant presence for the person who inhabits the body. Culture affects external and internal expectations of identity categories. Culture remains a broad term that can

incorporate many qualities: “All cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based on the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief” (Powell, Levy, Riley-Mukavetz, Brooks-Gillies, Novotny, Fisch-Ferguson). Culture remains rooted in people and the relationships they develop with one another through a series of practices. Therefore culture can exist in any space with a shared set of practices or beliefs. This definition of culture provides a decolonial approach to culture, but oftentimes culture becomes a tool for marginalization.

Rather than considering culture as a shared experience, binary enforcement pushes culture to shift and homogenize thus erasing differences. When it comes to embodied experience, using the homogenization of bodies functions as a tool of marginalization for individual identities. After all, bodies connect to our identities. On the surface, this connection seems simplistic, but there are myriad implications in connecting bodies and identities. As the first site of delivery, bodies provide the foundation for our judgments and determinations about people. Because bodies are something we all have in common, bodies become a site of discourse in American culture. Thus, we scrutinize bodies to a level of minutia to what Orbach calls “a transgenerational transmission of anxious embodiment” (Orbach 12). This anxiety becomes part of culture and can be passed through generations by creating sometimes unrealistic body standards. Cultural representations serve as reminders of the cultural expectations of bodies. From dieting

product¹⁰ advertisements to clothing choices, culture offers myriad reminders of how bodies should look and behave.

Talk about bodies fills our national conversation, particularly in the twenty-first century where fitness, body size, and health conflate. Additionally, bodies and images of bodies are more malleable than ever. Medicine and computer technology allow not only for the physical transformation of bodies, but also the manipulation of images so that traditional identity markers, such as race and size, can be obscured, reshaped, or even eliminated. This malleability allows for unrealistic body images that shape society's expectation of what bodies should look like. In fact, the expectation (norm) does not exist. No body mirrors another body; every body is different. No body conforms to the expectations of normality, as the alteration of images provides an inaccurate representation of even the bodies presented as if they were normal bodies.

In rhetorical terms, some cultural representations often deliver mediated forms of embodiment that does not account for the actual corporeal form. These mediated bodies eclipse the meaning-making potential of the natural body and instead consider the body as a figure that requires meaning inscribed upon it. Dolmage asserts that bodies have always delivered meaning, but ignoring bodies reifies norms ("Breathe" 119). By pretending the body lacks meaning-making potential, normality receives the space to

¹⁰ While dieting marketing traditionally has focused on women, now dieting products reach traditionally male markets. For example, the diet company Nutrisystem, in a 2013 press release, touts Super Monday (the day after the Super Bowl) as one of the "one of the biggest dieting decision days of the year." It also touts the weight loss of former football player Dan Marino on the Nutrisystem program (Business Wire).

perpetuate. If the body lacks meaning, it becomes more malleable and susceptible to cultural influences. Dolmage asserts that norms affect rhetoric's influence: "Further, the imposition of narrow norms delimits our available means of persuasion, here and now" (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 19). Narrow interpretations of what constitutes a normal body limit the rhetorical power and meaning-making potential of the body. Ignoring corporeality in favor of mediated forms of bodies makes the constellated body irrelevant and subject to the controls encouraged by normality.

If normality reflects mediated identity rather than corporeal reality, then what does that say about how bodies are represented in culture? Multiple cultural influences, such as news articles, television shows, movies, video games, and even book covers, provide these images of normality. These are just images, not corporeal beings, yet these images have meaning. To consider this in semiotic terms, the metaphorical bodies represent the sign and normality the signified. But, despite this sign functioning only in a metaphorical realm, the signified maintains its staying power. The body as a metaphor can reinforce itself again and again without question. The metaphor exists without acknowledgement of the faultiness of the sign. Since the metaphor lacks reality, the signified maintains its power through the creation and support of a norm/other dichotomy. The relationship with mediated images, with the faulty sign, signifies what bodies should look like and negates the individual embodied meaning intrinsic in all bodies. These images pass from a public to a private realm, allowing mediated images to colonize the conception of normal bodies.

Biology, genetics, and environment (both social and physical) all factor into these expectations of normality. Bodies cannot ever fulfill the expectations of normality and when they do not shame becomes a tool of oppression. Orbach asserts that this scrutiny of bodies manifests as our own desire to fulfill normality, often influenced by “our personal perception of our own bodies and other bodies” (4). The way we see bodies in contrast to society affects individual perception of bodies. The normal provides a guidepost and the expectation becomes that people will change their body to fulfill the expectations of normality.

In contemporary American society, both capitalistic enterprises and government regulations develop these concepts of normality. These types of apparatus (to use the Foucauldian term) provide guidelines for reading body normality and transgression. There is more than one apparatus that affects the regulation of bodies. A common one pointed out by many is the dieting industry, which regularly advertises a connection between health and losing weight¹¹. Another example would be airline seat sizes. Over the past 30 years, the airline industry has made airline seats smaller in both pitch and width (McGee). The pitch affects the amount of legroom, which has decreased to increase the number of seats on each plane (McGee). The smaller pitch makes it more

¹¹ While scientific evidence differs widely on this topic, the dieting industry counts on constructions of a normal body as a thin body. In fact, this construction led to a \$64 billion industry in 2014 (Kell). With revenues that large, companies have a vested interest in keeping customers on a diet. So dieting companies may sell health, but in truth have a vested interest in keeping customers on diets. In fact, when customers choose to focus on their holistic health, the revenue for these companies decreases (Kell). So, consumers choosing to eat healthier and not following discrete diet plans costs these companies money. Choosing health is not a financially sound option for dieting companies.

difficult for people who are tall to comfortably sit on planes. Also, the pitch can be decreased even more when people take advantage of the reclining features on most airplane seats. In 1985, the average seat pitch was 31-36 inches and in 2014 those same seats were 30-33 inches (McGee). Seat width decreased as well with the 1985 average of 19-20 inches and the 2014 average of 17-18.5 inches. Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the obesity rate¹² in America has risen over this same time period. In 1990, the obesity rate was no greater than 15 percent in any state and by 2006, 46 states had a rate of higher than 20 percent with some states higher than 30 percent (“Obesity”). In 2015, CDC statistics from every state were higher than 20 percent, with four states having rates higher than 35 percent (“Adult Obesity”). While Americans’ waistlines have been growing, airlines have reduced the size of seats. The increasing size of Americans compared to the decreasing size of airplane seats shows that airlines can function as an apparatus to endorse a specific body type. Bodies, like those of fat and tall people, that exist outside of the parameters to comfortably sit in seats must live with discomfort, purchase multiple seats, or choose not to fly. Airlines focus on the financial benefit of increased numbers of seats and ignore the real, lived experiences of

¹² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention use a telephone survey called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System to determine obesity rates. That means the 40,000 people surveyed must self disclose their weight, which could lead to statistical inaccuracy (BRFSS). The CDC has also changed how the methodology of the survey during this time period. The 1980s to 2010 surveys used “post stratification” method (BRFSS). Since 2011, the CDC has used “iterative proportional fitting or raking,” which allows accounts for demographic differences and addresses the decrease in land line phones and increase in cell phones as the primary household phone (BRFSS). Despite these potential limits of the survey, the CDC data is considered the standard for determining obesity rates and is routinely cited as the source for such data.

bodies. Instead the focus becomes how bodies should conform to fit into specific financially driven guidelines.

The airline industry serves as a cultural guidepost for expectations of normal bodies. There are many others, such as the dieting industry or the fashion industry, and these standards often shift as society changes. For example, the early twentieth century woman's body expectations differ greatly from the early twenty-first century expectation of women's bodies. Cultural representations of the changing ideal body are pervasive, manifesting in objects such as advertising, videos, photos, and drawings that examine the change in women's body standards over the past 100 years. One example from the health website Greatist.com uses paper dolls to represent "perfect" bodies from the 1910s through the 2010s (Hart). The 1910s Gibson girl has a narrow waist and wider hips, a standard that disappears as the century moves forward (Hart). By the 2010s, the standard becomes a slight variation between the waist and hips with an expectation of a larger butt associated with celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and Kim Kardashian (Hart).

These standards create an expectation for bodies to fulfill those available standards. Whether created through an apparatus like the airline industry or through images of famous people, some cultural representations function as a means of promoting specific body types while criticizing bodies that do not fit those types. But that is just one way of considering culture. At the same time, many bodies transgress these standards and instead celebrate the individuality of body types. Body acceptance has become a early twenty-first century buzzword, recognizing individual bodies as a form of subjectivity. Grosz says the body is "the very 'stuff' of subjectivity" ("Introduction" ix). This

acknowledgement of the corporeal form allows bodies to resist the power structures on inflicted bodies. For example, the online lifestyles magazine *Bustle* featured photos of women showing scars and other skin “imperfections” without makeup to cover them up (Dalessandro). These images transgress because they show the real, human body and its innate imperfections. The photos celebrate the real experience of lived-in bodies. These bodies send the message that all bodies are different. This transgression shows everyday Americans rarely fulfill the expectations of normality and that resistance to normality can be celebrated rather than shamed.

These images become part of the cultural landscape where discourse affects our understanding of bodies. Gender theorist Judith Butler sees discourse as an embodied action through her theory of performativity. The theory suggests that through physical actions and discourse, bodies perform gender and fulfill gender expectations. But Butler posits the power to resist these limiting views of gender through the use of language: “The power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression” (Butler, *Gender* 158). Discourse both establishes the body standards but also can be a way to resist those standards.

One way of understanding the effects of language on bodies is by using Burke’s theory of terministic screens. Terministic screens represent the context through which one understands meaning (Burke, *Symbolic* 51-53). For example certain words or symbols carry specific meaning that affect the context of the text. Blakesley interprets Burke’s terministic screen as how the terministic screen is like a “framing of experience” because it hones in on specific elements that affect meaning (95). The framing creates boundaries

in understanding because the word choice limits the possibilities of what is seen (Blakesley 95). Placing this terministic screen theory into a cultural discussion about bodies, specific terms evoke specific meanings. The word *body* brings to mind a corporeal being, but if you change it to a phrase like normal body, that creates a whole new context for understanding bodies. Using the terministic screen of the normal body provides a variety of options of what normal looks like. For example, should reality television star Kim Kardashian be considered the norm or is normal actually plus size swimsuit model Ashley Graham? Both women are described as normal¹³, but different forms of normal.

This example shows the complicated ways in which we view normality in American culture. While there are specific standards established through cultural representations, most bodies do not fulfill these standards. Because most bodies do not fulfill these standards, bodies have become a site for transformation in an attempt to achieve those standards of normality. Orbach argues that a shift from an agrarian and manufacturing society to our contemporary technological society has changed our approach to bodies and how they relate to work: “Our bodies are and have become a form of work. The body is turning from being the means of production to the production itself”

¹³ Both Kim Kardashian and Ashley Graham have been shamed and praised for their stances on body positivity. In March 2016, Kardashian posted a nude selfie, which led to both Internet backlash for showing a naked photo and praise for her “body positivity” (Pomarico). In February 2016, Graham, who was the first size-16 model to make the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, was lauded for her body positivity (Saul). Quickly after model Cheryl Tiegs criticized Graham for being unhealthy because of her size (McAfee). A few weeks later, Graham also lamented her difficulty in finding a dress for the Oscars, showing the limitations of this body acceptance (Oppenheim).

(Orbach 8). Where once bodies were used to complete physical tasks, the twenty-first century becomes the site of work. In other words, people used to work at the factory or in the fields, but now bodies have, in a metaphorical sense, become the factory or the fields. The focus on the body becomes the ability to change the body to fulfill cultural standards rather than accepting the constellated body.

Chapter Outlines

To illuminate the interconnectedness of size and gender as categories, this project does not organize the chapters based on those categories, but rather on intersections of categories. “Chapter II: Bodies and the Binaries” provides the theoretical framework for this project. The chapter explores the philosophical roots of embodiment theory. Additionally, the chapter defines key terms, such as normal and other. It also offers a look at theories about gender and size. Lastly, the chapter outlines the theory of Thirdspace that provides the key point of analysis for the chapters that follow.

The two chapters of analysis focus on masculinity and femininity because these adjectives offer an interpretation of how gender functions in society. This project does not conflate masculinity and femininity with gender but recognizes that culture often conflates them. Also, the analysis begins with the masculine because masculinity is associated with normal in American culture. “Chapter III: Bodies and Masculinity” offers an analysis of three male public bodies: Chris Pratt, Peter Dinklage, and Chaz Bono. The chapter interrogates the ways in which each of these men reifies and rejects traditional notions of masculinity as well as how their physical sizes affect their ability to promote or reject normality. Similarly, “Chapter IV: Bodies and Femininity” examines examples

from female public bodies: Laverne Cox, Mindy Kaling, and Melissa McCarthy. These analyses show how each of these women perform traditional notions of embodied femininity in ways that actually transgresses those expectations. The final chapter attempts to bridge the psychic distance between the public body and our own individual experiences by using the methodology and applying it to artifacts from my own life.

CHAPTER II

BODIES AND THE BINARIES

This dissertation not only takes up a scholarly tradition of recognizing the voices of marginalized people, but it also challenges our epistemological framework for understanding how bodies function. Rejecting a solely essentialist or constructionist framework, this project starts with the premise that “*We are all moving, breathing, thinking, rhetorical bodies*” (Johnson, Levy, Manthey and Novotny, original emphasis). Considering bodies as the site of multiple forms of meaning, as creators of rhetoric, resists Cartesian mind-body dualism and its long-standing epistemological resistance to bodies as sites of meaning. This project develops a theoretical framework to reconsider bodies as sites of meaning and sites of knowing. It follows the call by scholars, such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa, who suggest that the epistemological privileging of the mind over the body reinforces colonial ideologies that value some bodies over others (“Foreword to *Cassell’s Encyclopedia*” 230). Instead, this project accepts the body as a site of knowledge and resists the “facile dichotomy of ‘essentialism’ and ‘constructionism’ to embrace other theoretical paradigms inclusive of embodied and in-spirited knowledge” (230). Bodies function neither as an essential unchanging force, nor as an ever-changing entity constructed from cultural influences. Rather than fitting into pre-defined categories of essentialism or constructionism, bodies develop meaning through both essentialism and constructionism.

Additionally, bodies create and inscribe rhetorical meanings affecting our epistemological and ontological frameworks. As rhetorical agents, bodies consistently negotiate meaning through various contexts. For example, we view dance as form of interpretation¹⁴. The dancer creates a rhetorical situation in which they convey an ethos in their quality of performance, a logos in their interpretation of the material, and a pathos in their emotional effect on the audience. Through dance, the dancer engages in an embodied rhetoric that persuades the audience to understand the story of the dance. An effective dance performance engages in new knowledge of the way bodies work as well as a new way of interpreting our way of being. Thus dance can function both epistemologically and ontologically. The rhetorical function of dance can be translated into other corporeal experiences of bodies. After all, the way we understand each other begins with the physical engagement, whether that be through sight, sound, or touch¹⁵.

Recognizing the corporeal body's contribution to epistemology resists long-standing philosophies affecting the body. Those philosophies start with the essentialism defined by Aristotle continue through Cartesian mind-body dualism, through post-Enlightenment colonialism and development of statistical measures of normality, and through twentieth century social constructionism. Philosophical views of the body not only establish how we view bodies but also establish foundational guidance for binaries

¹⁴ This example is inspired by Daisy Levy's dissertation *This Book Called My Body: An Embodied Rhetoric*. Levy argues for the significance of the body as a site of meaning making.

¹⁵ Sight, sound, and touch are all physical interactions that are performed by the body. I stress sight, sound, or touch here to emphasis that ability shifts from person to person and how they engage with others is affected by that ability. It does not account for other sensory ways of knowing.

such as normality and otherness. Binaries reduce the epistemological and ontological relevance of bodies and lead to a dehumanizing of specific bodies marked as other. Western thought has theorized about the body for centuries, but many of these philosophies have limited the body's potential rather than expanded it.

Philosophical Roots

The epistemological foundation for the body goes back to ancient Greek writings, including Aristotle's theories of mimesis and entelechy. In *Poetics*, Aristotle outlines how drama functions as an imitation, or as we continue to call it in literary criticism, mimesis (19). Aristotle presents mimesis as intrinsic in human nature, that we experience humanity through imitation (*Poetics* 22-23). When art imitates the human experience, it can evoke a pity and fear, which function as a form of catharsis. This catharsis provides pleasure that is “*embodied* in the actions” represented in the art (Aristotle, *Poetics* 39, my emphasis). Embodied experiences are inherent in both art creation and consumption. For example, writing and reading are both corporeal functions. But Aristotle's mimesis particularly discusses performance. The embodied actions of the stage present complicated metaphorical and embodied actions. The performance often functions on a metaphorical level by recreating human interaction through dialogue, poetry, or music. The catharsis comes from the audience's consumption of the fictionalized account of human behavior. Even so, a human performs the dialogue, poetry, or music. Additionally, a human experiences the emotional catharsis, which could have a physical reaction as well. Thus, there is always a metaphorical and embodied action that occurs through art.

The catharsis that Aristotle discusses comes through a complicated interaction between metaphorical and physical interactions.

Another Aristotelian theory related to embodiment is his theory of entelechy, which is discussed in many of his works. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines Aristotelian entelechy as “the realization of the potential of a thing, or the mode of being of a thing whose essence is fully realized, as opposed to being merely potential” (Blackburn). Thus, entelechy goes beyond an essence, but rather recognizes how someone or something fulfills the expectations of that essence. Thus entelechy functions as part of Aristotle’s view of essential qualities of bodies. Those that did not fulfill that essential quality were a deviation. In *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle asserts that the male form is the essential form and, thus, women function as a “deviation” of the male form (401). Also in that text Aristotle says, “others do not take after a human being at all in their appearance, but have gone so far that they resemble a monstrosity, and, for the matter of that, anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type” (Aristotle, *Animals* 401). Disability Theory scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson said that Aristotle viewed the norm as “a ‘general type’¹⁶ against which all physical variation appears as different, derivative, inferior, and insufficient” (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 20). Disability rhetorics scholar Jay Dolmage also addresses that Aristotelian (and

¹⁶ Garland Thomson cites Aristotle’s *Generation of Animals*.

Platonic) ideal as an “unmarked¹⁷” male body, as opposed to the marked “aberrancy of the female” (Dolmage, “Metis” 2). Because of this unmarked body as ideal, those that did not fulfill that ideology were erased or considered weaker, particular female bodies, which he considered “disabling and disabled” (Dolmage, “Metis” 3). Thus, Aristotle erases the female or the disabled body.

For Aristotle, the essential position remains an “unmarked” male and his theories of mimesis and entelechy reflect the essentialist position he endorses. To fulfill a body’s potential and to be worthy of imitation, that body must be essentially male. Kenneth Burke adds to this essentialist argument through his incorporation of mimesis into entelechy. Burke asserts that entelechy goes beyond just a type of imitation, rather it is “the idea that a given kind of being fully ‘actualizes’ itself by living up to the potentialities natural to its kind” (Burke, *Symbolic* 8). Thus, entelechy represents a symbolic ideal, what one should inhabit if they were the perfect representation of that thing. Similar to Burke’s discussion of the paradox of purity, one can never fully actualize the symbolic ideal (Burke, *Grammar* 35). In the paradox of purity, once someone becomes the fully realized version of the idealized, that person becomes inhuman. Much the same way with entelechy, an ideal represents a quality that a person can aspire to but they never fully achieve. Burke uses rationality as an example. Men are capable of rationality, but a purely rational person would actually be inhuman because

¹⁷ Based on Dolmage’s discussion of the unmarked body, this project will use “unmarked” as a representation of the “normal” body and “marked” as the representation of the “other” body. The phrase “marked” remains intentionally vague as bodies often are othered based on more than one category.

humans cannot be rational in every situation (Burke, *Rhetoric* 14). Rationality becomes an entelechial ideal of what people can aspire to become, but people can never fully occupy the rational space.

Rationality provides a good example because rationality functions as a key concept of Western thought. Rationality as a key ideological construct can be tied to Cartesian mind-body dualism, which endorses rational thought as the highest function of man. Philosopher René Descartes recognized the corporeal experience of bodies, but, in his *Meditations*, privileged the mind as epistemologically superior. The rational mind interprets the body, therefore meaning is actually situated in the mind rather than in the body. More specifically, Descartes asserts that the body maintains the ability to be divisible into parts, whereas the mind is not, thus the mind is superior (*Meditations* 33). Additionally, he views the body as “located outside me” (*Meditations* 32). Descartes distances his intellect, his rationality from his physical body, establishing a long-standing ontology that views the body as lacking in meaning and potentiality. In privileging the mind, Cartesian epistemology rejects bodies as sites of meaning making.

In addition to his rejection of the meaning making of bodies, Descartes distrusts the senses, suggesting the senses often give false information (*Meditations* 30). Because these senses are untrustworthy, the mind becomes even more important than the senses that come from the body: “As to my ideas of bodies, so far as I can see they contain nothing that is so great or excellent that it couldn’t have originated in myself” (*Meditations* 13). In a sense, Descartes argues that the mind creates the body or that the mind controls the body. The body then becomes something that can be measured by the

mind, so Descartes establishes a list of criteria by which to consider bodies, which includes size, shape, position, motion, and “substance, duration and number” (*Meditations* 13). These categories do not measure or gather knowledge from the body. Rather they assess how the mind can measure the body. He establishes a hierarchy that places the mind on top and relegates bodies as submissive to the mind’s work.

Descartes addresses mind, body, and soul in his *Meditations*, including a brief discussion of the will: “*a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will*” (*Meditations* 20, original emphasis). The will gives Descartes the ability to be indifferent about the “corporeal nature” of the body. When the mind imagines the body (or any other entity), the mind gives meaning to the body: “The mere fact that I find in my thought an idea of something x, and vividly and clearly perceive x to have a certain property, it follows that x really does have that property” (Descartes, *Meditations* 25). The mind can create the properties of things, and even bodies. This hierarchy of mind gives the mind the power to imagine or establish what qualities should or should not belong to people, places, and things. Thus, the mind functions as a powerful influence over interpretation of quantity and quality and any other factor that Descartes associates with the body¹⁸. Therefore, the mind should have the power to change the body, to make the body conform to society’s expectations.

¹⁸ Although Descartes does give the mind a wide sense of power, he recognizes the higher authority of God. Thus, the hierarchy may look more like God, mind, body rather than mind and body alone. This project does not delve into spiritual ideas, so this aspect of Descartes’s work will not be addressed at any length here.

The separation of the mind and body privileged the mind as the location of knowledge. There are multiple benefits to placing the mind in the dominant position, but the most important is that it allows room for scientific exploration and rationale. If the mind is most important, then what is done to the body carries less significance. In other words Descartes describes the body as “just a statue or a machine made of earth” (Descartes, *The World* 99). The description of body as machine not only dehumanizes the body, but also removes agency and meaning from the body. As feminist scholar Susan Bordo points out, mind-body dualism allows the “the *construction* of the body as something apart from the true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, spirit, will, creativity, freedom ...) and as undermining the best efforts of that self” (Bordo 5, original emphasis). Thus, this privileging of the mind eliminates the body as a potential site of individuality, instead focusing individuality in the mind. Therefore bodies offer no epistemological function. Rather bodies merely provide a mechanical home for the mind. This view of the body privileges bodies with minds that fulfill the expectations of reason and rationality, particularly reason associated with white, educated men¹⁹. When bodies do not respond to that reason, then they are considered faulty or an other. For example, post-Enlightenment rational thought focuses on knowledge through observation. If a scientist would be unable to see, then the experiments the scientist conducts could be

¹⁹ The example only intends to indicate Descartes’s likely audience. While literacy in the Renaissance suggests that his audience was likely white men, Descartes’s audience in the centuries since his death certainly includes more than just white men.

considered faulty²⁰. Because of a physical characteristic, the scientist could be considered less capable of the observation associated with rational thought. Thus, in Cartesian thought, being blind reveals functions as a weakness of mind rather than just being a physiological state that offers its own ability to make meaning. This approach could be used to address nearly any marginalized group because making the mind central dismisses the body as a site of any meaning.

Cartesian thought removes the corporeality of the body, which makes the body a shell that can be studied, manipulated, colonized, or, as literary critic Hortense Spillers discusses, enslaved. Spillers asserts a difference between the “body” and the “flesh” as a key way of understanding the relationship “between captive and liberated subject-positions” (Spillers 67). As a precursor to the body, the flesh offers physical corporeal form with its “concentration of ‘ethnicity’” and any other physical attributes²¹ (Spillers 67). The flesh becomes the way to mark bodies as physically different. The physically different bodies are marked as other and can then be denied personhood and be controlled. Conversely, the body suggests some level of personhood or freedom, although scholars recognize that even “free” bodies are subjected to power structures and control mechanisms. African-American studies scholar Alexander G. Weheliye reads Spillers as a discussion of how bodies, particularly black bodies, shift from flesh into a “bodied

²⁰ This example solely highlights a challenge to Cartesian thought. It does intend to support ableist arguments, but rather suggest those ableist arguments are weakened by the limitations of Cartesian thought.

²¹ While this project does not analyze public bodies based on the category of race, theories of race provide an important factor in understanding the complicated ways in which bodies are colonized. Future research using this project’s methodology would consider how race provides a more complicated understanding of public bodies.

subject”: “If the body represents legal personhood qua self-possession, then the flesh designates those dimensions of human life cleaved by the working together of depravation and deprivation” (Weyheliye 39). The body represents a complete personhood while the flesh would be a less than human state. Weyheliye suggests that in order to become a body subject, people “must be transformed into flesh before being granted the illusion of possessing a body” (Weyheliye 39). This illusion is an important distinction. Weyheliye asserts that Spillers “hieroglyphics of the flesh” shows how the “liberated” body still carries the scars from the flesh²². Calling them racializing assemblages, Weyheliye suggests that black bodies still carry the scars, particularly political scars, from enslavement even though in contemporary society those bodies are “liberated” (Weyheliye 39-40). Weyheliye acknowledges that some corporeal bodies always function as a metaphor for the harm done to these bodies in the past. The ending of colonization of those bodies does not remove the scars of that colonization, even if discourse implies those scars do not exist.

Denying the scars from enslavement or other forms of colonization shows the lack of meaning or importance associated with the body. By denying corporeality and the connection between the mind and body, we deny the humanity of bodies, oftentimes specific bodies that are colonized through systems of power. Weyheliye asserts that the theories of the body often consider these power systems, but ignore the racial issues underlying the exertion of power. One example Weyheliye uses is philosopher Giorgio

²² I put liberated in quotes here to clarify that both Spillers and Weyheliye are not saying that bodies are actually free. Both imply that the scars from slavery remain markings on black bodies even in the twenty-first century.

Agamben's homo sacer theory, which is based on the concept of an ancient Roman figure who lacked status to a point that they could be killed "without incurring the penalty of murder" (33). This homo sacer figure carries over into modernity as figures who are "both literally and symbolically stripped of all accouterments associated with the liberalist subject," thus representing a "bare life" (Weyheliye 33). Slavery and colonization are examples of this homo sacer figure, someone who is stripped of their humanity. Invoking the idea of the state's biopower, Weyheliye interprets Agamben's bare life figure as representing the state's exertion of the power, "its force of legislating life and death, which, in this framework, provides one of the central features of the modern nation-state" (Weyheliye 33). The bare life theory, according to Weyheliye, offers distinctions between "zoe (mere biological life), as opposed to bios ("full" human existence) forms" (33). The state can create a "zone of indistinction," which does not acknowledge distinctions between zoe and bios, and makes it easier for the state to justify the death of people or groups of people (Weyheliye 33-34). The corporeal form becomes dehumanized, which then justifies violence inflicted on bodies. Weyheliye sees Agamben's interpretation of bodies as important, but asserts that it is applied mainly to white bodies and ignores the complicated racial identities of people who have also been subjected to this dehumanizing behavior.

Weyheliye sees similar limitations about issues of race in philosopher Michel Foucault's work. Foucault recognizes the problems with colonialism, Weyheliye says, but does not address the complicated racial issues that remains part of the lingering effects of colonialism: "Though Foucault does not deploy the term alien races, his

insistence on the spatiotemporal disjuncture between the race from 'here' and the race that came from 'another place' as well as the reemergence of the race from the past within it cannot but echo colonialist tropes and 'recapitulation theory'" (Weyheliye 61). Essentially, Weyheliye's problem with Foucault is that his theory maintains that there is an us and a them; Foucault's theory maintains a dichotomy that suggests superiority of one group of people. While Foucault has some limitations, the philosopher's theories are grounded in power structures, which focus on dichotomies of those in power and those who are not in power.

That exploration of power structures provides a key understanding of corporeality as well because power is often inflicted upon the body. Foucault posits a "knowledge" that encourages the control of the body, which he dubs "the political technology of the body" (Foucault, *Discipline* 26). The political mechanisms of bodily control manifest in many institutions, including, as Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, the prison system. Foucault outlines the concept of discipline, which is more than just power being inflicted upon a body, but the recipients of discipline also disciplining themselves, dubbed the Panopticon. While Foucault uses prisons as an example, the prison serves as a metaphor for how power functions on the corporeal form. Foucault also uses medicine as a form of bodily control. Rather than a centuries-long consideration of the holistic body²³, post-Enlightenment medicine began considering the body as a series of parts in need of repair. The body becomes a series of mechanical devices that can be repaired rather than

²³ In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault argues that medicine became a means of fixing illnesses rather than a method examining the body's holistic health.

recognizing the body as an integrated whole that works together. By considering the body as parts rather than as a whole, the body becomes easier to control, to manipulate, to colonize.

A colonized body lacks its own subjectivity; it is colonized and removed from its own agency. The body becomes what Psychologist Susie Orbach describes as a problem to be solved: “Our bodies are increasingly being experienced as objects to be honed and worked on” (Orbach 2). When the holistic body becomes reduced to parts, then those parts become problems that can be fixed. Viewing the corporeal form as parts in need of repair treats the body as a machine rather than as a holistic form that carries its own subjectivity and relevance. The reduction of the body to parts also makes it easier to maintain dichotomies, such as the norm/other binary, that categorize bodies according to those parts. Dichotomies provide a key component to the colonizing of bodies discussed by Spillers, Weyheliye, Agamben, and Foucault. Dichotomies and binaries establish a ranking system that place bodies according to identity factors. These hierarchies rank specific bodies as more important than others, thus creating a system of privileges that elevates some bodies and marginalizes others. One of those key binaries is the norm/other binary, which creates a system that establishes some bodies as normal as some as other. There are a series of social factors that have established these two categories.

Defining Normal

A central research question in this project is simply “what is normal?” Too often in American society, normal becomes an unspoken standard by which people, and their bodies, are measured. Norms affect all bodies, according to Dolmage, “they are

ubiquitous and fundamental. Norms also ensure their own systemic enforcement” (Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* 21). That enforcement not only makes normal aspirational, it also marks the other and reinforces norm/other binaries. The normal becomes the preferred way of being, the ontological standard. Thus, other ways of being, other ontological imperatives become dismissed. Too often, normality lacks definition and merely exists as an essentialist or foundational ideology. Instead, we are given elaborate definitions of socially constructed otherness²⁴. But bodies are neither fully an essentialist normal nor a socially constructed other. They often exist in the spaces in between or in both the normal and other positions. In both essentialist and social construction theories, the other often remains identified while the norm remains an unspoken understood (and unspoken) opposite of the other. To reject this understood assertion of normality, not only does this project explore both essentialist and social construction theories, but it also offers an extended discussion of normality and how society maintains normality. Thus, this project starts with the normal and expand into concepts of otherness and how writers attempt to “normalize” otherness.

²⁴ By pointing this disparity between research of the norm and other I am in no means attempting to criticize the work of bringing marginalized voices to academic discourse. I merely want to point out that our understanding of normal is so ingrained in all forms of society that it does not receive the same level of scrutiny that other ideological concepts receive.

While many disciplines have begun to explore normality, disability studies²⁵ scholars such as Lennard J. Davis and Rosemarie Garland Thomson provide a detailed exploration of embodied normality that is useful here. Davis asserts that before our modern idea of normal, art often focused on the ideal. The ideal body of the seventeenth century would be an amalgamation of multiple bodies to create an ideal. Often artists would combine the physical attributes of many people to create this unachievable ideal: “These models individually can never embody the ideal since an ideal, by definition, can never be found in this world” (Davis 25). Davis uses examples such as “Venus or Helen of Troy” to show an ideal representation of beauty (Davis 25). There is no aspirational component to the ideal, as no human can fully fulfill the expectations of the ideal. A fully embodied ideal exists only in myth-making. Thus, the ideal connects with Burke’s explanation of entelechy as something that is innately part of humanity, but never fully attainable by humans. The components of the ideal work together to create something beautiful, but no human can contain all of those elements of beauty.

The entelechial ideal eventually became replaced with concepts we associate with normal with the rising use of political economy in the nineteenth century. Davis traces the roots of normality to French statistician Adolphe Quetelet, who established the idea of “l’homme moyen” or the average man” (Davis 26). This average man becomes the basis for “middle-class ideology. The average man, the body of the man in the middle,

²⁵ Disability studies is not the only academic discipline that interrogates normality. Other disciplines like whiteness studies and masculinity studies also offer in-depth analysis into concepts of normality. I use disability studies because of its focus on bodies in relation to normality.

becomes the exemplar of the middle way of life” (Davis 26-27). Thus, this “middle way of life” becomes a norm, a statistical basis for physical comparison. Additionally, Quetelet’s work is part of a larger philosophy that positions the bourgeoisie in the “mean position of the great order of things,” which Davis argues establishes groundwork for sciences that would come to “justify the norm” (27). Thus, Quetelet’s work establishes a scientific grounding and a statistical basis for normality; a normality that a physical body can occupy. Unlike the ideal that no person can become, the average man offers an aspirational goal of normal. The average man provides groundwork for the expectations of bodies to fulfill normality.

One of the statistical methods for determining norms was the bell curve, which by its nature establishes a norm-other dichotomy. Those at the top of the bell become normal and those outside the bell are marked as deviant: “When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants” (Davis 29). It is not only the disabled who are deviants, but all those who do not fulfill the norm created through these statistical means. The reduction of people to numbers creates deviants, those outside of the bell curve. No statistical variable can account for all human difference, but the reliance on statistics makes bodies problematic and deviant. Additionally, Davis asserts that the use of statistics to create the normal and the shaming of deviant bodies endorses eugenics as a practice. By using Darwinian genetics combined with statistics, politicians, scientists and others can more easily argue for the erasure of deviant bodies (Davis 29). The rise of statistics provided a empirical argument to erase bodily difference: “The new ideal of ranked order is powered by the

imperative of the norm, and then is supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be” (Davis 35). Bodies then become not sites of individuality, but instead either part of the normal or a deviant from the normal.

The statistical standards established in the nineteenth century became the standard by which people are measured. In a sense, the statistics combine the essential and social construction standards imposed on bodies. Bodies’ essential qualities become measurable through statistics. For example, we can measure whether people have opposable thumbs, an essential quality that primarily exists in humans. The “average man” would be expected to have thumbs and therefore thumbs exist as a form entelechy. But, the measurement of thumbs and the interpretation of data on thumbs remains a social construction. With this example, then, those who do not have thumbs would exist outside of the statistical norm. Because thumbs are considered an essential aspect of humanity, it is normal to have thumbs and those without thumbs become othered. Thus, Davis suggests a social construction of normality and otherness where society establishes standards that are not necessarily essential to the body’s function. Statistics allow essentialism to become socially constructed.

Disability Studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson recognizes Quetelet’s statistical influence in developing the “average man” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 64). Thus, she also follows a social constructionist theory in the development of the “normate”

(Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8). Constructed as a “social figure,” the normate gains authority through their body’s assimilation of societal norms:

If one attempts to define the normate position by peeling away all the marked traits within the social order at this historical moment, what emerges is a very narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of actual people (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

The normate functions through a position of power, which comes from their “bodily configuration” (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8). As the expectations for bodily configurations change, the normate can also change. Garland Thomson suggests that only a small group carry the power of the normate, but that power influences others to try to achieve normate status. Through the theory of the normate, the body functions as a “seemingly irrefutable foundation upon which the prevailing power relations can be erected” (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 64). Thus, the normate represents a foundational guidepost for the “average man,” which Garland Thomson describes as “masculine, white, non disabled, sexually unambiguous, and middle class” (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 64). This normal man lacks the marking of difference, representing an ideal that others should achieve. To consider this in relation to Davis’s discussion of the bell curve, the normate would be the top of the bell curve, and all other parts of the curve would aspire to reach the top.

Garland Thomson bases her definition of the average man on the work of foundational stigma scholar Erving Goffman. Through his work in sociology, Goffman

recognizes a norm/other binary that uses stigma to regulate bodies. Goffman defines normal as: “a young, married, white, urban, northern, employed, of good complexion, weight and height and a recent record in sports” (153). Goffman recognizes this is an Americanized version of normal that cannot be fulfilled by specific individuals. In turn, those who cannot fulfill these normal expectations are stigmatized and considered “not quite human” (Goffman 15). The stigma encourages those who are not normal to achieve aspects of normality (Goffman 17). The stigmatized attempt to eliminate stigma by becoming the expectations of normality.

Of course, not everyone can fulfill Goffman’s normal or Garland Thomson’s normate. Both of these standards recognize the limitations of normality as a mythical ideal that cannot be achieved. In fact, Audre Lorde calls her definition the “*mythical norm*”²⁶,” which she defines as: “In america²⁷, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (115). This discourse of power empowers those who fit the mythical norm and disempowers those outside of normal. Therefore, difference becomes the source of all oppression, when oppression operates in a more complicated fashion (Lorde 115-116). The mythical norm perpetuates homogeneity and discourages difference and dismisses the multiple forms of oppression that affect people, particularly women of color (115-116). Lorde recognizes that the mythical norm provides a key to the creation of the norm and of the other.

²⁶ Lorde uses italics for emphasis (115).

²⁷ Lorde does not capitalize America or Christian in this section.

The Creation of the Other

If the mythical norm, the normate, or any other related term provide guideposts for what normal looks like, how do we understand the other? Extensive research in multiple disciplines explores the experience of the other. For the purposes of this project, I examine ways in which the other was created alongside the normal. As noted earlier, statistics represent one model for highlighting difference. Philosopher Michel Foucault asserts that scientific categorization exemplifies another model. Scientific classification creates a set of criteria to separate plants and animals in categories. Those that meet the criteria are the same, while those who do not meet even the smallest detail of the criteria are then others (Foucault, *Order* 53). The others do not fit into any categorization and instead become anomalies, something that defies categorization.

Beyond just marking plants and animals as same or other, categorization serves as an endorsement of emulation, a type of mimesis which functions through the celebration of sameness. In a sense, sameness connects to Aristotelian mimesis, which says the desire to imitate is the essence of human nature²⁸ (*Poetics* 22-23). Similarly, Foucault argues that sameness has a powerful influence through different modes, including sympathy and analogy. For example, sympathy not only reaffirms the Same, but “it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling them, of

²⁸ Aristotle says: “For imitating is co-natural with human beings from childhood, and in this they differ from the other animals because they are the most imitative and produce their first acts of understanding by means of imitation; also all human beings take delight in imitations. A sign of this is what happens in our actions, for we delight in contemplating the most accurately made images of the very things that are painful for us to see, such as the forms of the most contemptible insects and of dead bodies” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 22-23).

causing their individuality to disappear—and thus of rendering them foreign to what they were before” (Foucault, *Order* 23-24). Foucault argues that sympathy can encourage the masses to remain connected to the “featureless form of the Same” (*Order* 24). More than just an internalized understanding of another person, sympathy enacts a powerful desire to connect and imitate another person. Sympathy represents the grounding of the desire for assimilation to standards of the same. Through sympathy, the normal and the other become more fully entrenched, as many cannot fully assimilate the standards of categorization therefore they continue to remain othered. Nevertheless, the other desires to become more like the same. Much like Aristotle, Foucault suggests that sympathy feeds into an internal nature that encourages mimesis or a desire to see the same rather than the other.

Bodies that do not fulfill the same (or the norm) become marked as other and, in turn, stigmatized. Goffman says that people maintain a “social identity,” which encompasses both physical and emotional attributes (12). Bodies become marked by three types of stigma: “abominations of the body,” “blemishes of individual character,” and “stigma of race, nation, and religion” (Goffman 14). These stigmas are interrelated, and one can experience more than one category of stigmatization. Building on Goffman, sociologist Gerard Falk asserts two types of stigma, “existential,” which is a “stigma one either did not cause or over which one has little control,” or “achieved,” which is based on one’s conduct or behavior (11). Additionally, Falk discusses “labeling” as a way of marking bodies that carry the “negative judgments imposed upon them” (20-21). These labels create insiders and outsiders, another way of saying norms and others. So, the

normal doesn't function in a vacuum instead it determines what characteristics can function to marginalize roles in society based on physical characteristics, whether the person can control that characteristic or not. Stigma creates and perpetuates binaries that create means of separating people, making some bodies normed and some othered.

Another mechanism for controlling bodies would be discipline, which Foucault argues regulates normality (*Discipline 184*). A Foucauldian discipline develops normality through government systems, which perpetuate surveillance as a means of control: "It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (Foucault, *Discipline 184*). Discipline endorses homogeneity and resists difference. It encourages what Foucault calls docile bodies, which "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, *Discipline 136*). The surveillance of non-normative bodies leads to both an external and internal surveillance, which Foucault calls the Panopticon. Using the utilitarian prison concept, the Panopticon²⁹ allows one person to observe many prisoners at the same time without the prisoners being directly aware of specific moments of surveillance. In other words, they could be under surveillance at any time, thus the prisoners discipline themselves. Thus, those in power do not need to constantly watch those who are othered, the othered watch themselves. We are left to police our bodies and other bodies through a panoptic gaze that reinforces concepts of normality.

²⁹ Initially presented by utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is a prison (or other facility) that offered the ability to watch prisoners from a single, anonymous vantage-point (Bentham 40). Foucault sees application of the theory of Panopticon beyond prisons and into the other areas where "subtle coercion" can be used to regulate the future actions of people (Foucault, *Discipline 209*).

Foucault's Panopticon could be considered a type of colonization. Bodies internalize the expectations of normality, and those who do not fulfill outward expectations of normality are marked. Those marked bodies must be controlled through stigma or a panoptic gaze. Garland Thomson asserts that the other becomes an exotic antithesis to the normal. By marking the other as exotic, the other becomes contained within the power structure of the normal and threats to that normality are contained (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 66). This power structure marks the other as a freak, a novelty designed for consumption or exclusion by the normal. Thus, we marvel at the other as a means of maintaining an internalized sameness with the normal. When we see the other on display, it reinforces the internalized power of the normal.

In a sense, the othered body functions as a form of Burkean rhetoric of identification. Viewing a body outside expectations of normality functions to persuade that the other is the problematic body. In his discussion of persuasion, Burke suggests a rhetor may merely try "to establish rapport between himself and the audience" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 46). In viewing an othered body, a rhetorical performance occurs. The marginalized other body reminds the viewer of the boundaries of normality and otherness. In the act of identification with the symbolic image of otherness, the normal differentiates itself from the other. The other is seen as unrealistic and abnormal, and the normal becomes a "master that sets its mark upon all human relations" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 46). The normal establishes its authority over the other, marking the body as abnormal.

The marking of the body transforms that body from a corporeal form to a metaphoric form that material actions can affect. In research on the linguistic and

physical affects of slavery, Feminist scholar Hortense J. Spillers outlines the transformation that bodies undergo when they are captive, or slaves:

1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being* for the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of ‘otherness’; 4) as a category of ‘otherness,’ the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning (Spillers 67, original emphasis).

In this transformation, the captive body begins as an oddity to view and slowly turns into a “*being*” and eventually into the physically powerless other, or, as Spillers calls it, “flesh”³⁰ (Spillers 67). Therefore the body transforms into a site of colonization. Just as land is taken for the purpose of spreading the power of an empire, the body manifests this colonization as a being subjected to the dominant power.

³⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa discusses a slightly different theory of the flesh in her works. In *This Bridge Called My Back*: “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). Anzaldúa’s discussion of this theory of the flesh suggests that specific experiences of women of color inspire action. Conversely, Spillers defines that flesh as a body controlled by sources in power.

While Spillers discusses the physical body, she analyzes how discourse affects the physical body, particularly through slavery. The discourse that reduces bodies to objects allows dehumanization. Additionally, discourse bolsters power structures through epistemologies and ontologies. Edward Said offers an example of how these power structures function ontologically in his theory of orientalism. As a construct of European colonialism, Said argues that the term oriental carried an ontological meaning that associated certain regions and people with a romantic and exotic experience for Europeans (1). Said says the creation of the oriental and, its binary partner, the occidental, had deep cultural influences that can be seen in the literature and other texts of the nineteenth century, which in turn influenced our modern understanding of these regions (12-13). Said does not suggest that the ontology surrounding orient and occident maintains any stability, but that this binary establishes a cultural hegemony that influenced the writers and thinkers of a time (Said 14).

Binaries, such as oriental and occidental, rely on applying the essential position to bodies. The unmarked body, the normate, becomes the standard for normal, and the marked body becomes the other. By establishing a binary, the normal becomes the standard and the other becomes the exotic. By eroticizing the other, the normal takes what they desire, rejecting any subjectivity for the other³¹:

There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former
dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually

³¹ There are numerous examples of westerners trying on aspects of oriental lifestyles, but ultimately they remain solely western. The westerner can always try on oriental goods, but they have the option of taking them off and returning to their state of normality.

means having their land occupied, their internal affairs
rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the
disposal of one or another Western power. (Said 36)

The effects certainly mean the loss of land, but it also represents a loss of epistemological certainty. African history scholar Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts that the coloniality not only takes land, but also has effects on epistemologies (11). Coloniality becomes embedded in the knowledge structures and cultures of colonized people³² (12-13).

Philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon also discussed ways colonization carries lingering effects in “man’s attitude toward these conditions” (Fanon 65). The colonized body internalizes the expectations of those in power and the residue from the colonization remains today.

The establishment of the norm/other binary provides one form of colonization, but that colonization is perpetuated by the many binaries that also enforce normality and otherness, including, but not limited to, male/female, fat/thin, ability/disability, black/white, gay/straight, native/immigrant, old/young, or any of the many intersections of these binaries. This project analyzes two of these binaries, male/female (gender) and fat/thin (size), and the intersections of those binaries. This does not mean that the artifacts selected are not subjected to the marginalization of other binaries, but that this analysis focuses specifically on two of the many binaries that affect normality and otherness.

³² Ndlovu-Gatsheni specifically discusses African coloniality, but I am suggesting that western colonialism of the body potentially affects all bodies.

Gender Binaries

In defining normal, Goffman gives the attributes of married and white, both of which imply a heterosexual, cisgendered³³ man (155). Though rarely overtly addressed, this means that there is one gender that fulfills society's understanding of normal. Thus, a white³⁴, cisgendered male remains the expectation of normal, and bodies that are not white, cisgendered, or male are the other. Therefore, the normate male body creates the other for female, multi-gendered, non-gender conforming, and transgender bodies. Rather than reflect the hierarchical practices that norming creates, this project explores how gender plays a role in the normalization of some bodies as well as how we can view these bodies through more complex matrices that resist the norming and othering of all bodies. The analysis recognizes what Kimberle Crenshaw calls intersectionality, which acknowledges the multiple points of systemic oppression that affect women of color (1243). Since Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, the term has expanded to acknowledge the complicated matrices of power that perpetuate marginalization of some bodies. Patricia Hill Collins calls the hegemonic affects of this power the "matrix of

³³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the first use of cis in 1997, long after the 1963 publication of Goffman's *Stigma* (OED). This project is asserting that in our modern episteme the cis body has been determined to be normal.

³⁴ This dissertation will discuss race as it is relevant to describing complicated identities, but it is not a detailed examination of the social construction of race. The work on embodied experiences of bodies marked by race has an extensive amount of research that is beyond the scope of this project. So, this project will not ignore race but also will not be able to address the complicated constructions of race that affect in our modern episteme. I envision my future research to include a more in-depth examination of the embodied experiences of race that are important to the conversations about all bodies.

domination” and suggests that intersectionality can represent connections such as race, gender, sexuality, and nation (21). While both Crenshaw and Collins address issues related to women of color, this project does not focus solely on women of color. Instead, it uses gender as well as body size as guideposts for analysis. The chapters are organized around concepts of masculinity and femininity, but not solely on gender because gender occupies a specific location that shows the conflict between essentialist and social constructionist positions.

Some theories suggest gender³⁵ inhabits an essential position, as a condition by which someone is born, thus cisgender offers an essentialist framework. This essentialist position can be reaffirmed through Cartesian thought, with the body solely a physical entity with no epistemological grounding. As a site that lacks meaning, gender can be assigned simply as a biological function. Men’s studies scholar R.W. Connell argues: “the power of this perspective lies in the *metaphor* of the body as machine” (Connell, original emphasis, 48). Criticizing sociobiology, Connell suggests that reducing the body to a biological machine reifies concepts such as “natural masculinity,” which attributes actions as masculine or feminine (Connell 47). A solely essentialist view of gender does not account for behavior or societal influences that affect how gender functions in society.

Conversely, social constructionists view gender as a societal creation, which we are all taught through various constructions. Gender theorist Judith Butler asserts the

³⁵ Much like Gayle Rubin, this project does not conflate gender and sexuality. Sexuality offers another intersection of identities that will be discussed in a limited capacity in this project.

construction of gender is maintained through a binary that inspires “our belief in its necessity and naturalness” (Butler, *Gender* 190). In other words, the construction of gender convinces us of the necessity of two discrete gender categories (a binary) rather than on a spectrum of fluidity. Thus, societal constructions inspire us to construct discrete ideas of what is male and female (and their corollaries masculine and feminine). These discrete ideas categorize and rank bodies using social controls such as stigma. In American society, normal is the male body and bodies that are not male face what Falk would call an existential stigma. Additionally, bodies that experience gender fluidity exist outside of the binary and fall into what Falk calls an achieved stigma. Both these forms of stigma function in the same way: The stigmas reinforce the normality of the male body and suggest any body outside of the male body must be scrutinized, criticized, and controlled.

Essential or “natural” views on gender create and maintain binaries. They also limit bodies by suggesting bodies exist in only two natural states, dismissing physical or social variation. The binary also asserts that one of those states, the male body, remains the normal body. One of the ways that society maintains the superiority of the male body is through masculinity, particularly the white, middle-class male body that gender theorist Jack Halberstam associates with “notions of power and legitimacy and privilege” (Judith (Jack) Halberstam 2). American society constructs masculine in a way that maintains the white male body as superior. By maintaining masculinity as a male domain, men remain physically stronger and more capable than women. Connell asserts that masculinity as male leaves male bodies as the only ones capable of physical work: “Heavy manual work

calls for strength, endurance, a degree of insensitivity and toughness, and proud solidarity” (Connell 55). Connell asserts the “strength” of men allows them to maintain the hierarchy that places women below men. Physical strength becomes a quality associated with men and physical weakness becomes a quality associated with women. The physical inferiority of some bodies directly ties to an essentialist viewpoint, basically that women are born physically weaker than men. The binary becomes not just an assertion that male and female genitalia are different, but that there are physical characteristics that can only be applied to men and not to women.

This binary view of body physicality ignores the real, lived experiences of bodies. Bodies are both essential and constructed by societal expectations. Bodies have certain essential qualities,³⁶ some finite existences, but bodies are also malleable. Bodies maintain some certainties, but are also subject to vast differences. Queer theory scholar Gayle Salamon suggests this fluidity comes from a lack of “epistemological certainty” about the corporeal body (1). This does not mean that bodies lack epistemological influence, but rather than there is not one epistemological certainty related to bodies. There is not one way for bodies to know or to exist. Salamon makes this argument to support a fluid understanding of gender.

The concept of gender fluidity contradicts a framework that seeks gender binaries because those binaries are supported and enhanced through the othering of non-normative

³⁶ Butler points out that “bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, measure, endure illness and violence; and these ‘facts,’ one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction. Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these primary and irrefutable experiences” (Butler, “Preface” xi).

bodies. Butler points out that gender is created “through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but thorough a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation” (Butler, *Bodies* 8, original emphasis). In deconstructing gender, Butler shows that the normal is created and reified through the other (the human vs. inhuman in this example). Through the “problem” of the inhuman, we affirm what is considered normal. Through exclusion, we are left with a smaller group that eventually becomes the norm.

This normal does not necessarily represent the experiences of all lived bodies, like Garland Thomson’s assertion of the normate, the normal becomes a small group of people who establish standards for a larger group of people. The gender created by exclusion reaffirms the expected performances of gender, negating the more complicated experiences of corporeal bodies. Salamon points out that “the production of normative gender itself relies on a disjunction between the ‘felt sense’ of the body and the body’s corporeal contours and that this disjunction need not be viewed as a pathological structure” (Salamon 2). Salamon argues that genders that do not conform to a strict binary do not need to be considered problematic. Gender does not have to be an essential binary or a constructed version of what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine.

Just like other sociopolitical identity categories, gender does not have to exist in strict binary fashions. Genders, even when complicated, function through embodied actions. Butler argues we perform gender and the expectations associated with that gender

“through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender self” (Butler, *Gender* 191, original emphasis). Thus, Butler asserts that gender is a “*social temporality*” (*Gender* 191, original emphasis). In other words, gender depends upon the cultural structures and expectations of a specific time. The expectations of femininity from the early twentieth century vastly differ from the expectations of femininity in the early twenty-first century. Temporal variations shift because of the culture of a given time, and thus, how we read gender differs through time. As Garland-Thomson’s *normate* suggests, the normal can shift depending on the cultural situation.

Size Binaries

One example of shifting expectations of normality can be seen in the cultural expectations of body size³⁷. What is considered a normal body size shifts with cultural influences. Laura Fraser argues that American attitudes toward body image from a plump woman to a thin woman began in the late 19th Century due to a multitude of factors, such as a shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, the poor gaining access to more food and thus gaining weight, and women’s shift from traditional domestic lives that led to advertisements that focused on unrealistic body types³⁸. Fraser also suggests

³⁷ Explorations of body size remain a fairly new discipline, so much of the work done in this area comes from activists and not from traditional scholarly sources. This section attempts to combine both activist and scholarly sources.

³⁸ Fraser asserts that plumpness was a sign of wealth: “Americans knew that a layer of fat was a sign that you could afford to eat well and that you stood a better chance of fighting off infectious diseases than most people (11).

that in America, larger bodies have been tied to immorality: “There is a long tradition in American culture that suggested that indulging the body and its appetites was immoral, and that denying the flesh was a sure way to become closer to God” (Fraser 13). Fraser suggests that a thinner body ties into America’s association with Puritan values.

Some embodiment scholars, like sociologist Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, also tie body size expectations to Puritan morality. Hesse-Biber says American attitudes suggest: “Slenderness represents restraint, moderation, and self-control—the virtues of our Puritan heritage” (Hesse-Biber 2). Thin bodies would be more morally pure than fat bodies, because “Fat represents a moral failure, the inability to delay gratification, poor impulse control, greed and self-indigence” (Hesse-Biber 2). Then, the thin body represents moral purity while the fat body represents sin. Literary historian Sander Gilman says the moderation of eating as a religious ritual was cemented in the early modern period: “The long history of the skinny bodies of saints, so well examined by students of ‘holy fasting,’ is paralleled by a litany of the fat bodies of sinners” (Gilman 53). Fasting becomes a religious ritual that only the most devout can follow. Thus, the thin body can represent a moral purity that cannot be obtained by the fat body. Fraser, Hesse-Biber, and Gilman all suggest that these moral associations seep into our cultural viewpoints on body size and frame thin as the good, or to put it another way, normal body, and fat as the bad or othered body.

This does not suggest that all binaries have a specifically moral component, but binaries of size sometimes do delve into morality. After all, gluttony is one of Christianity’s seven deadly sins. Moreover, binaries of size suggest a lack of self-control

in the corporeal form. Kim Chernin discusses eating disorders as a way to control the body and make it fulfill societal expectations. A resistance to food, which she describes as “a simple, uncomplicated sensual pleasure,” is part of the obsession with thinness (Chernin 17). Chernin uses morally-tinged language to explain how those obsessed with thinness tend to ignore the reality of their bodies and instead look on their bodies with disgust:

Few of us ask to be *redeemed* from this *struggle against the flesh* by overcoming our antagonism toward the body. We do not rush about looking for someone who can tell us how to enjoy the fact that our appetite is large, or how we might delight in the curves and fullness of our own natural shape. We hope instead to be able to reduce the body, to *limit the urges and desires* it feels, to remove the body from nature (Chernin 23, my emphasis).

The term redeemed highlights the moral connection to body size. The phrasing that Chernin uses suggests that a body that is not thin is somehow beyond redemption. Other language suggests a desire to resist the sin of the flesh, such as “struggle” and “urges and desires.” The language highlights how fatness represents a lack of control, whereas thinness represents a control. But Chernin is not advocating for thinness; she is just outlining the internal processes that promote eating disorders. She suggests that the obsession with thinness removes the body from its natural state and creates a state of suffering. Because starving the body goes against the body’s essential needs, there is a

suffering that is inherent in resisting what the body needs. This suffering also perpetuates the female body as the weaker body. Without essential nutrients the female body can never physically surpass the male body, thus keeping the male body as physically superior.

Chernin's early 1980s work helped usher in a new discussion about eating disorders and how people, particularly women, starve themselves to look thin. Even though this disordered eating remains an unhealthy standard, thinness remains a standard for normality, particularly among young white women. Writers such as Naomi Wolf and scholars such as Hesse-Biber and Bordo suggest that eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, remain widespread issues and are perpetuated by mass media. In particular, Wolf suggests that these eating disorders are so commonplace "that they have become virtually normal" (Wolf 6). Wolf argues that thinness is part of an American fixation on the "beauty myth," which she associates with a resistance to the rise of American women after second wave feminism: "*The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance*" (Wolf 14, original emphasis). The beauty myth establishes the younger and thinner versions of women as the normal and all other bodies in competition with those younger, thinner models.

Wolf suggests this controlling of women's behaviors has resulted in normal for "young, middle-class American women" being a body marked by eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia (182). Dieting discourses are so commonplace that we often do not even recognize their pervasiveness, according to Fat studies scholar Katariina Kyrölä "(D)ieting discourse has become such a mundane part of our everyday media

environment that we rarely stop in front of a before-and-after image to look at it more carefully, or question the ways in which diet talk is a normalized part of especially women's social interactions" (Kyrölä 62). Media routinely discusses body size, such as magazines touting weight loss or weight gain by celebrities, before and after pictures that lack the need for explanation; or fashion discussions that often praise the bodies of famous people. There are endless reminders of how bodies are supposed to fulfill expectations of size normality.

Conversely, fat activists reject this thin normality and create a space for the celebration of fat bodies. Fat activist Marilyn Wann says the word fat works almost like a slur: "Most Americans would rather get hit by a truck than get fat. Amputation of the leg is preferable. Some would rather die" (Wann 13). The word fat carries implications of body imperfection as well as health issues. Wann reclaims the word fat as an affirmation of the acceptance of fat bodies³⁹. Additionally, Wann, and other fat activists, argue that health cannot be determined by body size alone, but that does not mean that fat does not carry the implications of unhealthiness.

Fat bodies are often marked as out of control, a form of "social disability" that must be repaired or fixed (LeBesco 75). Much like writers about thin studies, fat scholarship limits this view of fatness as a body marker that requires control. Communications studies scholar Kathleen LeBesco examines the discourse of fat bodies and posits that there are both essentialist and anti-essentialist positions about fat identity.

³⁹ I follow in Wann's reclamation of fat both in my own body and the description of bodies in this project.

Essentialists see the fat body as a “biological or sociocultural” imperative, that “fatness is necessary” (LeBesco 14). Those who take up the essentialist stance see fatness as a problem with a cause that can be researched and repaired. Conversely, the anti-essentialist rhetoric ignores causes and “instead it focuses on the ability of human actors to participate in the creation of meaning (including the meaning of material bodies) through discursive processes of communication and politics” (LeBesco 14). The anti-essentialist position remains the more fat activist position in which the fat body offers its own meaning-making practices. The anti-essentialist stance does not see fatness as a problem, but just as one way of interacting in the world.

While LeBesco discusses the anti-essentialist viewpoint, she acknowledges that the acceptance of fat bodies does not come easily, even for those who are fat. Many forms of rhetoric “create, police, and destroy essential ‘fat’ bodies” (LeBesco 7). Discourses routinely point out the problems with fat bodies, and it is not easy to just ignore this discourse. LeBesco asserts that those who are othered, including fat people, “internalize things (like oppression), thus rendering their *surfaces* invisible” (LeBesco 3, original emphasis). Oftentimes fat people try to make their bodies unseen or distract what is seen in another direction to hide those bodies. This leads to what LeBesco sees as different forms of fat activism: the “assimilationist” or the “liberationist.” The assimilationist supports fat rights, “but still possibly conceives fat as a problem” (LeBesco 42). The assimilationist would see the fat body as one that could, and possibly should be, fixed. Conversely, the liberationist “celebrates fatness and tries to secure for the fat a positively valued experience of difference from the norm” (LeBesco 42). The

liberationist values and endorses the individual experiences of fat people. Fat activists like Wann support the liberationist viewpoint.

Most of this discussion about size binaries has been focused on women, but many of these texts acknowledge the growing pressure for male bodies to conform to societal standards. The research on men's bodies, particularly on the rhetoric of the size of male bodies, is less extensive and just developing. A 2014 study by psychologists Mary Pritchard and Brooke Cramblitt showed that college age men seem to have a greater focus on muscle growth and leanness (Pritchard and Cramblitt 213). As Orbach points out: “‘Young boys’ yearnings to emulate a great sportsman’s agility are now focused on the desire for the look of a six-pack” (Orbach 4). Perfect abs, pecs, and other forms of muscular perfection become the driving force for the male body. For some, the body can be created through the action of working out, lifting weights, or other activities that suggest hard work.

On the other hand, the fat male body often is marked as either childlike or feminine. With a lack of clear gender boundaries, Kyrölä suggests: “the fat male body represents in some ways gender incongruity” (Kyrölä 104). Additionally, this lack of clear gender boundaries marks fat bodies as “perverse” because “not only do they originate from a desexualized, barely human-like body, but they are directed at self-sufficient oral pleasure instead of heterosexual union” (Kyrölä 144). As feminized and desexualized, the fat male body cannot fulfill expectations of masculine, or normality.

The problematic fat male body is not a twenty-first century phenomenon. Gilman connects the negative association with fat men to ancient Greek views on health and the

balance of the humors: “Thus fat reflected a pathological state of the body caused by imbalance” (Gilman 36). Additionally, fatness was “*ugly*” compared to the normalized athletic body (Gillman 39, original emphasis). While Gilman’s work relies mainly on historical representations, he does acknowledge that modern representations of male fat bodies function differently than female bodies: “[T]he social perception is that women are obese due to a lack of self-control (which they themselves feel to be the case), while men attribute their obesity to outside factors beyond their reach (i.e., genetics)” (238). Men’s bodies are seen as works in progress or as a pathological condition that needs to be fixed rather than lacking self-control in the same measure as women (Gilman 239). Gilman’s interpretation is that men’s bodies can be fixed through medicine or through work, whereas women’s bodies are out of control and need, as Wolf suggests, their behavior modified.

The examples that Gilman discusses are based on heterosexual men, but representations of the bodily expectations of gay men have received more attention from scholarship. Fat studies scholars Nathaniel C. Pyle and Michael I. Loewy assert that the pressures to fulfill the lean, muscular body type remain as strong for gay men as they are for heterosexual women” (145). That pressure also manifests in shaming those who are attracted to fat (or “stigmatized”) bodies (Pyle and Loewy 144). The fat body becomes either a site for shame or there is shame associated with the fetishization of fat bodies. Kyrölä suggests the lack of desirability of fat male bodies is not limited to the homosexual community. In her analysis, fat men must justify “their (hetero-)sexual and romantic desires” (Kyrölä 162). Fat men must earn their heterosexual partners through

actions, whereas fat women must focus on becoming more desirable (Kyrölä 162). Men can achieve heterosexual attraction through their actions or forms of privilege, such as intelligence or wealth, whereas women must change their physical bodies to become desirable.

The conversion is the important point to remember here. Body size, just like gender or any other socio-economic category, becomes a site for bodily control. Bodies that exceed the expectations of size are considered problematic and in need of fixing. But bodies do not fit into discrete categories. Even in this discussion of size binaries, there is no clear definition of what is considered thin and what is considered fat because thinness and fatness are subjective. Body size remains an unstable category that can change through myriad conditions. Additionally, there is no clear marker for thinness or fatness because bodies cannot be limited in representations of size. Bodies come in multiple sizes and shapes, not limited to the viewpoints of advocates, society, or biological expectations.

Thirdspace and a New Space for Bodies

The othering of the fat body, like any other form of othering, provides a limited view of individual experience. Scholars resist the limiting labels of otherness and instead consider a more complicated view of identity that does not limit any body to a single identity category that could lead to otherness. For example, Lorde recognizes the multiplicity of identity that the mythical norm erases, arguing instead for a complicated recognition of identities. While power structures establish normal/other binaries, people of color and queer theorists reject any binary or dichotomy that categorizes people. As

queer theorist David Valentine points out, the problem isn't with the categories, but with the way the categories are used and as a means of suggesting singular lived experiences⁴⁰ (217). Scientific categorization discourse marks individuals by a set of criteria that must be the same for all members of that category. That marking of human bodies functions as a form of inclusion or exclusion. But when bodies transgress, they potentially resist that binary of inclusion and exclusion.

That transgression of binary resistance is a key component of Anzaldúa's work. Anzaldúa embraces the heterogeneity of all people, acknowledging that people cannot be solely defined by traditional identity categories: "Adjectives are a way of constraining and controlling" ("To(o) Queer" 164). Anzaldúa suggests that identity markers limit people to a single identity, rather than allowing them to be like a "river," constantly changing in both external and internal ways ("To(o) Queer" 165-166). If identities are not static, then they cannot be pinned down to specific identity markers. They can be all of those markers, a mixture of those markers, or none of them.

To resist the norm/other dichotomy, we must create a new space that does not function within any dichotomy or binary. As Anzaldúa suggests, we are all multiples that cannot be defined by any one binary. Even Goffman's definition of the normal offered multiple identity categories. Burke sees the binaries as ways of defining each other. One part of the binary cannot be understood without respect to the other part of the binary.

⁴⁰ Valentine says "This is, indeed, the basic problem of language: to describe something as seamless as lived experience, one needs categories. Yet a danger arises when those categories come to be seen as valid descriptions of experience rather than as tools used to apprehend that experience" (217).

They coexist, so while one may consider the othered term as pejorative, embracing the potential pejorative and giving it new meaning can challenge and complicate the relationship between norm and other dichotomies. For example, Anzaldúa reclaims the term queer as means of complicating identity and illuminating the spaces between binaries. It recognizes the interstitial space and embraces the ambiguity. This feeds into the Burkean dramatism, which recognizes the ambiguity of language as a place to begin the conversation. The real conversation begins when we challenge the static and embrace the both/and aspects of identity.

Rather than bodies that function mimetically or repeating the same/other dichotomy repeatedly, bodies can resist the repeated expectations of norming and othering. When the connection between norm and other is illuminated, it underscores the problematic, diametrically-opposed relationship. The real, lived experience of bodies should challenge any limited identity category and instead follow an Anzaldúan approach that embraces the multiplicity of identity. Bodies can never be a norm or an other, but rather always exist in the both/and space.

In addition to Anzaldúa, post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha and geographer Edward W. Soja discusses how this interstitial space can be used to forge new identities. Using the term Thirdspace⁴¹, both Bhabha and Soja challenge the homogeneity that endorses norm/other binaries. Instead Thirdspace theory allows for a new reading of identities, and, in turn, bodies: “It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself,

⁴¹ Bhabha uses the phrase “Third Space” as two words, while Soja uses it as one word. In the interest of simplicity, this project will use Thirdspace as one word unless in direct quotation from Bhabha’s work.

which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 55). Through Thirdspace theory, we can reconsider meanings and identity labels. The Thirdspace allows a resistance to a static normality and instead recognizes normality as a shifting cultural force that is always tied to the other. By looking at the space in-between, we can more clearly see the normal and the other and argue for a space that embraces the both/and.

Soja’s connects history, society, and the spatial in the development of his concept of Thirdspace⁴² (Soja 2-3). Using the work philosopher Henri Lefebvre, Soja’s spatial version of Thirdspace offers a transition between what he describes as Firstspace (the real) and Secondspace (the imagined). In a sense Firstspace and Secondspace interconnect, as the real cannot be explained without the imagined. Firstspace offers the experience and Secondspace offers the interpretation of that experience. While they are separate, they cannot function without each other for there is no real if there is no way to understand the real. Like Bhabha’s liminality resisting primordial polarities, Soja sees Thirdspace as a way “to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meaning” (Soja 2). Thus, Thirdspace provides a theoretical approach to understand changing meanings. For Soja, the ideas of Firstspace and Secondspace become intertwined whereas Thirdspace recognizes both Firstspace and

⁴² Soja capitalizes Thirdspace, Firstspace, and Secondspace in his book, therefore I will capitalize them as well.

Secondspace, which allows for new insight and interpretations. Thus, Thirdspace offers hybridity, a bridge between the two polarities.

Much like Bhabha's interstitial spaces provide a link between the culturally situated norm and other, Soja also resists binaries and sees a Thirdspace between the spaces we occupy and how we interpret those spaces. Thus, Thirdspace theory can exceed the limitations of binary thought and function as "some form of potentially emancipatory *praxis*, the translation of knowledge into action in a conscious—and consciously spatial—effort to improve the world in some significant way" (Soja 22, original emphasis). Rather than perpetuate the limits of binaries (we can only be norm or other), Thirdspace allows for the both/and. Thirdspace theory provides a methodology to resist binaries and embrace diverse embodied experiences.

Bhabha's Thirdspace theory remains grounded in cultural interpretation while Soja focuses on physical spaces. By utilizing both of these theories, this project analyzes artifacts that explore both the physical body and the cultural interpretations of those bodies. In twenty-first century American society, public bodies provide a complicated understanding of embodied identity. Public bodies are both physical bodies and mediated bodies at the same time. For example, a social media photo could be mediated by the person in the photo, by the photographer, by any photo editing process, by the associated text with that image, by the social media platform's guidelines, and by the social media user's personal settings. Any of these processes affect the interpretation of the photo, but many of these processes remain invisible to the viewer. Even through these many interpretations, at the center of this photo is the real body of the person pictured. The

public accesses these bodies through various forms of edited media before the public ever sees it. To put this example into Thirdspace theory terms, the photo represents the thing, or the Firstspace. The text, social media platform and editing processes become the interpretation of that photo, thus the Secondspace. The Thirdspace would be interpreting the photo through both the photo and the provided interpretation of that photo.

For the purposes of this project, the definitions of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace match this example. The Firstspace represents a body. The Secondspace represents a presented interpretation of that real thing, which oftentimes will mean the interpretation that is offered through the form of media. Keep in mind that this project only offers some of the interpretations of those bodies because it is impossible to understand all possible interpretations. In turn, Thirdspace becomes both the real thing and the interpretation, but offers a new interpretation of the real thing based on both Firstspace and Secondspace. In other words, Thirdspace provides a new way of considering the real thing and the interpretation of that real thing. My interpretation of Thirdspace also always recognizes the cultural and spatial implications of the bodies discussed. Even if the discussion focuses on a cultural artifact, there is always a real physical person featured in that artifact. Through the use of Thirdspace theory, this project offers new ways to consider public bodies and resists norm/other, male/female, or thin/fat binaries.

In the next two chapters, I apply Thirdspace theoretical approach to artifacts from six public bodies. Thirdspace theory determines how these people exists in both/and spaces and how those spaces either reaffirm norm/other binaries or transgress those binaries.

Thirdspace theory provides a specific insight into how we understand bodies in public spaces, showing how many of these bodies represent a multiplicity of identities. In the next chapter, Thirdspace theory addresses the complexities of masculinity for three public bodies—Chris Pratt, Peter Dinklage, and Chaz Bono. The analysis considers how the embodied ethos of each of these public bodies can be complicated through Thirdspace theory.

CHAPTER III

BODIES AND MASCULINITY

When twenty-first century texts engage with masculinity, those texts can both affirm and challenge masculinity and, in turn, normality. Because masculinity connects with normality, this analysis starts with the examination of what is considered normal. The malleability of normal gender representations is a key to understanding the complicated and fluid representations of gender. Just as transsexuality suggests the fluidity of gender, a reformulation of what is considered masculine also reformulates what is considered normal. Gender malleability can be tied back to Sociologist Gerard Falk's assertions about two types of stigma: existential and achieved. In a normate view of gender, the assertion would be that all people fit in the male/female binary. Thus, if the normal is a man, then a woman faces an existential stigma. Conversely, those who do not accept the normate male/female binary would have an achieved stigma, an interpretation of gender that affirms normality by suggesting that gender is an essential quality that is not subjected to change. Male and female become finite categories, or existential categories. Therefore, those who are transgender or gender fluid would face this achieved stigma; a stigma that marginalizes those who do not fit a gender binary. To place gender into these existential and achieved gender categories, limits gender to a normative view point. The resistance to normative gender expectations would not put gender into finite

existential or achieved categories but rather recognize the fluidity of gender. The growing acceptance of gender fluidity, there could be a collapse of these stigmas, which carry different weight depending upon the rhetorical situation.

To understand the rhetorical situation, Burke's dramatism can be a helpful analytical tool. For Burke, experiences can be interpreted differently depending on act, agency, agent, scene, and purpose or on the ratios of any combination of Burke's pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose). The pentad shows the importance of context in understanding how different elements of drama (or even life) work together. In other words, what we understand and how we understand it are always culturally situated. The expectations of culture shift as culture shifts; thus, Goffman's definition of normal was established in the early 1960s, but that definition has shifted in the 50 years since he defined normal. Goffman's white, athletic, heterosexual, cisgendered man transformed into a muscular loner. Gender studies scholar Ellexis Boyle points to the rising women's and LGBT movements, the struggles post-Vietnam War, and the Cold War all led to a "perceived atrophy of white men's bodies" which implied that American bodies were inferior to European bodies (154). In response, from the 1970s to the early '90s, hyper-masculinized versions of heteronormative masculinity used the bodies of action stars such as Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, or Sylvester Stallone, all of whom often played loners who had to save the day often by defeating vaguely European or Cold War villains. For example, in *Die Hard*, Bruce Willis's John McClane works alone to save a group of people from a group of terrorists led by a European man. A slightly different version occurs in *Predator*, when Arnold Schwarzenegger becomes the sole hero who

can defeat an alien who targets humans in a hunt. These are just many of the examples of heteronormative masculinity focusing on the loner hero. Boyle specifically addresses Schwarzenegger's masculinity, as the action star marketed himself as a "model of heteronormative manhood" (154). Schwarzenegger, an Austrian turned American, represents this resistance to the atrophy of American white men's bodies. Schwarzenegger muscular body provides a metaphor for what Boyle calls a "hypermasculine image of America" (154). This hyper-masculine image regularly pops up in movies, television, and other cultural artifacts with the loner hero becoming the key component of this hyper-masculinity.

The concept of the hero and its association with masculinity shifted in the post-September 11 landscape. An anxious America shifted its heroism to focus on police and firefighters or other first responders, according to literature and film scholar Kevin Alexander Boon. Furthermore, Boon asserts that heroes provide grounding for our understanding of "manhood": "It largely defines the masculinity to which many western men aspire and just as thoroughly defines their inevitable failure" (Boon 304). Unlike the loner heroes, post-September 11 heroes maintain some level of fallibility. Police officers don't always catch the criminal and firefighters don't always rescue fire victims. Boon asserts an essentialist view of masculinity, but his assertions about how heroes manifest in our cultural expectations of manhood merits discussion. The hero becomes both what man should be and what they can never fully achieve. (After all, even the iconic Superman has his own kryptonite.) In other words, no one can ever fulfill these larger than life expectations of heroism, but they remain an ideal to which we want to aspire.

The idea that no one can be infallible becomes even more prescient in the post-September 11 world, where Americans now feel vulnerable to attacks inside our borders. In response to the fallibility of the post-September 11 hero, the next shift was toward a superhuman hero. Superheroes, most often white men, represent a reformulated version of masculinity. Gender studies scholar Yann Roblou asserts the hybridity of masculinity in superheroes, both as bodies capable of masculine behaviors as well as bodies that exist outside the parameters of body normality (81). Superheroes exist in a liminal state of masculinity, where they are both a man and an inhuman heroic ideal and thus, feel and behave as outsiders because of that liminality. Superheroes are also often fallible and infallible. As noted above, Superman has his kryptonite, but kryptonite is the only way to harm the superhuman.

Superheroes have become a dominant character type in post-millennial America, crossing multiple media platforms from comic books to television to movies to video games. Despite the “abnormality” of the superhero, the physical representations of superheroes shape our expectations of how men, particularly actors, should look. One of those manifestations is the “superhero body.” Fitness magazines and online stories offer plenty of advice for how men can obtain the body of famous superheroes such as Thor (Chris Hemsworth), Captain America (Chris Evans), and Star-Lord (Chris Pratt)⁴³. The super hero body may fulfill what R.W. Connell describes as “hegemonic masculinity,” a form of masculinity that “occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender

⁴³ A *Salon* article pointed out that these fitness programs were expensive with an estimate of up to \$36,000 a year in food costs alone (Lang).

relations” (76). The hegemonic position is not stable, but rather changes to support “the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). Hegemonic masculinity reaffirms expectations of dominance in masculinity, particularly white masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity reaffirms normality in the form of a white, athletic, heterosexual, cis man.

Chris Pratt

In our early twenty-first century world, the superhero provides a guidepost for hegemonic masculinity, a masculinity that can change with the cultural situation. One of the best examples of the changing superhero form of masculinity comes from the public body of Chris Pratt. Before his role in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), Pratt was best known for being a chubby funny sidekick on the sitcom *Parks and Recreation*. Pratt lost weight and bulked up for a movie career, which led to a role in *Guardians* and, in turn, he has become not only a huge box office draw but also an example of masculinity for the new millennium. Pratt’s new masculinity shifts from the loner hero to a superhero aesthetic that both celebrates superhuman qualities but also mocks them at the same time. Pratt represents a masculinity that recognizes the limits of hegemonic masculinity, but still affirms that masculinity in new ways. Pratt’s shift from sidekick to hyper-masculine leading man can be traced back to an Instagram selfie (self-portrait). In July 2013, Pratt posted a shirtless picture of his newly transformed body, which was honed for roles as a soldier and a baseball player. Gone was the flabby stomach, replaced with a six-pack. Even though the picture shows a transformed physical appearance, Pratt established his own form of masculinity by maintaining humor and humility in the accompanying text:

“Six months no beer. #GOTG Kinda douchey to post this but my brother made me” (Pratt). The post about his movie role training generated 112,000 likes and garnered instant attention beyond the actor’s Instagram account.

While the photo certainly reaffirms embodied expectations of normality, the accompanying text does not. Pratt makes fun of himself in the post and suggests that new shape of his body was solely from not drinking beer. Of course, the image itself disputes that assertion because he is standing in an exercise area surrounded by free weights. He also suggests that posting pictures of your toned body is “Kinda douchey,” showing a humility that does not connect with the hegemonic masculinity that Connell discusses. This act of humility seemingly resists acts of dominance that are associated with hegemonic masculinity.

Through his use of social media, Pratt creates a space for identity creation. This is a celebrity identity creation, so there is always some mediation between our understandings of who celebrities are behind the press and the characters they play. Through the use of social media, interviews, and public appearances, celebrities cultivate a carefully crafted ethos to enhance their careers. This ethos connects to the mediated identity that Pratt shares with the public. For Pratt, a career-defining ethos was established through his social media, such as Instagram, which focuses on images and thus offers embodied representation. Pratt even jokes about this focus on images in the description of his Instagram account: “I use my twitter for jokes mostly. But I use my Instagram for deeper more meaningful stuff like pictures mostly” (“prattprattpratt”). In this description, Pratt recognizes the role that images play in defining his public persona.

To consider this in terms of Thirdspace theory, Pratt's body represents Firstspace. The Secondspace becomes the various interpretations of the image, from the caption that Pratt provides to the conflicting notion that the photo hints at his exercise routine to any other meaning that the viewer inscribes upon the image. This project addresses some of the myriad interpretations possible. While Secondspace recognizes multiple interpretations, there is no way to articulate or assess every interpretation that a body, image, film, or any other form of media evokes. Thirdspace becomes the combination of the Pratt's image and the interpretations of that image. Pratt creates a selfie showing his shirtless torso in a gym. By showing his shirtless torso, Pratt highlights the physical transformation of his body into a standard of normality. The newly toned body fulfills the superhero body aesthetic and shows an athletic frame considered part of normal bodies. He also crafts the text that accompanies the photo, offering an interpretation for how to read the photo. It both shows off his body and maintains a self-effacing demeanor. Thirdspace theory shows how this image exists both as a representation of Pratt's actual body and an interpretation of how viewers should read that body.

Therefore, this image actually functions as normative. Pratt's photo reifies hegemonic masculinity, but redefines that hegemonic masculinity through a new interpretation of masculinity. So, unlike the theoretical applications of liminality and Thirdspace theories that embrace new identities for marginalized groups, Pratt uses Thirdspace to solidify a new, twenty-first century masculinity, which combines a physically normal body with a self-effacing humor mocking that same body. Thus, Pratt does not remain liminal (or both/and) but borrows the liminality to create a new

masculinity. In his Instagram photo, Pratt employs a sense of humility to switch into a liminal space that creates a slight variation on normal. While the image represents a normate body, asserting white, athletic heteronormativity, Pratt's accompanying text resists the dominance of hegemonic masculinity through his humble and humorous self-characterization.

Pratt resists characterizing himself as the dominant figure, even though his body represents that hegemonic ideal. Even though his texts suggest a resistance to hegemonic masculinity, the celebration of a body that fulfills expectations of hegemonic masculinity ultimately reaffirms that masculinity. The accompanying text provides a shift into and out of liminality that slightly changes normal into a new form. Part of the reason for the shift in and out of liminality is because the image adds to Pratt's public ethos. His joking text could be considered just an aspect of his personality, but that text adds to an ethos that is carefully created through social media. One of the aspects of public bodies that provide useful analysis is that they are both real people and created personas. They have physical bodies, but they also shape those bodies for movies, television shows, music videos, and social media. They are a liminal space between the created and real. For Pratt, that liminality is a temporary position, but for those who are othered, liminality offers the main way of functioning in life.

To understand how public bodies like Pratt's function as both created and real, a Burkean act-scene ratio may be the best way to consider the photo. The act-scene ratio allows for the grounding of the image in spatiality, thus connecting it to Soja's concepts of Firstspace and Secondspace. Through the placement of this photo on Instagram, Pratt

acts to change his ethos. His action changes his image, but the scene shapes how we understand that image. If this selfie had been in a bedroom or bathroom, it would read differently than how it reads in a gym setting. Seeing Pratt surrounded by fitness equipment changes how the image is read. No matter how much he jokes about losing weight by not drinking beer, the image shows us that this body was shaped by athletic work. Pratt's body did not change through the passivity of removing stereotypically male items, such as beer and drinking, from his diet, but from the active work of exercise. Pratt embodies both an expectation of male normality (the muscle-bound tough guy) and a more humble, self-effacing version of normal. This renewed persona builds on Pratt's existing career as a sidekick and moves him into the realm of leading man.

Much like the mediation of photos, characters represent interpretations on multiple fronts. A writer creates a character and actors and directors interpret those characters and present them to the viewer. Thus there are multiple layers of interpretation in each character. First, actors are often chosen for parts because of their physical characteristics that address key components of the characters. Then, the actor creates an embodied interpretation of character, but oftentimes the actor has little control over other aspects of character representations. Thus, actors remain the embodiment of character, but they have limited agency as their work remains contingent on others. Additionally, directors, cinematographers, writers, and personal interpretations all affect how audiences see characters. While this project cannot consider every audience interpretation of a character, film theory offers insight into how filmmakers affect the creation of character. Film rhetoric scholar Seymour Chatman defines "slant" (narrator's attitude) and "filter"

(“character’s consciousness”) as two ways of understanding character (143-144). To clarify between the two, Chatman uses Gérard Genette’s work to clarify the difference “between who ‘tells’ and who ‘sees’ the story” (144). Chatman asserts that the character experiences events while the narrator merely shares the story of the event (144).

In film and television, writers and actors create characters, but the presentation of those characters comes from directors, cinematographers, and editors. Even though actors choose and mediate parts, there is always some mediation between the actor’s embodied presence and the interpretations of that embodied presence. In Chatman’s terms, the actor may be the filter by which we see the character, but the slant becomes shaped by the production process. Thus, characters always exist in Thirdspace with the actor as Firstspace and the various character interpretations (including the actor’s own embodied ethos) as Secondspace. As an audience, we always see both the actor and the interpretations at the same time. Thus, when actors perform parts, they are continuously carrying multiple interpretations from their own embodied ethos to the writers’ words to the directors’ camera angles to the editors’ decisions to cut parts of a scene.

Pratt’s characters offer an example of that complicated interpretation of character. Pratt gained prominence with his role as Andy Dwyer on the television show *Parks and Recreation*. On the show, Andy transitioned from a loveable goofball to someone who took that goofball attitude and turned it into a full time career. In Pratt’s movie roles, such as Star-Lord (Peter Quill) in *Guardians of the Galaxy* and Owen in *Jurassic World*, Pratt slightly changes normal, but continues to reify normality through his embodied presence. In *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Pratt reaffirms a new type of masculinity through some self-

deprecation, but the character ultimately remains firmly planted in masculinity. Likewise, in *Jurassic World*, Pratt's character experiences a brief emasculation but reaffirms his masculinity through heteronormativity.

In the first season of the *Parks and Recreation*, Andy provides a catalyst for one of the show's major plot points, the creation of a park: He fell into a giant pit, breaking both legs ("Pilot"). The show, which uses a documentary style format, clearly uses a narrative slant that portrays Andy's character as a lazy slob who lays on the couch watching television. By the end of the first season, we get a sense of Andy's immaturity and slobbish behavior, such as when his cast is removed, there is an excessive amount of debris beneath the cast, including his girlfriend's iPod ("Rock Show"). In this same episode, we learn that Andy kept his cast on for two extra weeks, so his girlfriend could continue taking care of him. The only motivation that Andy has relates to his rock band, which has a revolving series of names. As a character, Andy is lazy and slobbish and has no interest in fulfilling many of the normative expectations of masculinity. Andy does not take charge of situations; he functions as a passive observer of life. As the childlike figure, Andy serves as a reminder of purity of heart. Andy is not hedonistic or selfish; he is a man-child in constant need of care. He happily allows his girlfriend Ann to make money and take care of him. Andy Dwyer does not function as the hero; in fact, he often needs to be saved (such as needing care after breaking his legs).

Laziness functions as a trope for fat people, that, according to literary historian Sander Gilman, harkens back to ancient Greek notions of health. Gilman asserts that fatness was the sign of the "lazy, phlegmatic persons" who "lived in a concomitant state

of slothfulness and stupidity” (37). Fat men represented a direct contrast to the cultural expectation of constraint. Additionally, the masculinity of fat men was challenged: “The association between unmanliness (even in a god) and fat stems from the notion of the fat male body as not man enough. It is a body out of control” (Gilman 38). This lack of control and lack of constraint carries over into our modern association with fatness as a disruption to masculinity.

Because of this disruption to masculinity, there is often an infantilization of fat characters⁴⁴. Thus, Andy often takes on the role of buffoon, such as someone who is so oblivious to the world that he falls into a large pit and breaks both of his legs (“Pilot”). Through much of the show, Andy functions as a man-child who somehow gets through life. Later in the series, Andy tries to take things more seriously, but as long as he maintains his flabby body, success remains beyond his reach. For example, when he decides he wants to join the police force in season 5, Andy receives help training for a two mile run. Before the training, he says: “The physical exam is about three months away and I am in terrible shape. But I can already do this (as he flexes his butt muscles)” (“Soda Tax”). Again, Andy shows his immaturity. He lacks the physical wherewithal to be a police officer, so he turns to sophomoric hijinks. After his first attempt at running, Andy is exhausted and takes off his shirt and shorts, wearing only his boxer shorts, showing his flabby body. He then lays face down on the ground and says: “I am never

⁴⁴ I discuss this infantilization and how humor is used to maintain that infantilization in my previous work, “Mike & Molly: An Other World” (Johnson). By treating a man as a child, then he cannot fully fulfill cultural standards for masculinity. He remains othered.

going to be a cop. I am going to have to be a robber” (“Soda Tax”). Again, this shows an immaturity of seeing things only in extremes. Also, we see how physically unfit Andy is.

As Pratt becomes a movie star, he begins to shed the flabby exterior and Andy, in turn, becomes a slightly more mature and more masculine man. In the opening episode of season 6, Andy remains a slimmer and fitter version of his previous self. While walking up the stairs, Andy and Ben have a conversation about his weight loss. While Andy is usually filmed in a medium shot or a close up of his face, this camera angle is different. The conversation is framed in a high angle shot,⁴⁵ which shows Andy and Ben walking up a flight of stairs. The audience sees Andy from a new perspective just as his body has physically changed. The dialogue from the conversation also offers insight into the character:

Ben: “So the only thing you stopped doing was drinking beer?”

Andy: “Yeah, I lost 50 pounds in a month.”

Ben: “How much beer were you drinking?”

Andy: “I know, right. Probably too much” (“London”).

This small cutaway scene provides a lot of insight into both Pratt and the character of Andy. First, Ben stands in for the audience who can clearly see a physical change in Pratt. This episode, originally aired in September 2013, a couple of months after Pratt’s Instagram photo showed his newly muscular shape. In addition, the show makes a similar joke about giving up beer being the key to Andy’s (read Pratt’s) weight loss. Unlike the

⁴⁵ Bernard F. Dick says the high angle shot is also called the “God’s eye shot” because it implies “an unseen presence looking down on the subject” (56-57).

Instagram photo, the scene provides little insight into Pratt's real weight loss and muscle building regime. In fact, the show's scene has shifted to London rather than Pawnee, Indiana. In a different location, Andy looks different. Also, the suggestion that he gave up beer shows a level of more maturity. This combination of different looks, different location, and increased maturity show a measured difference in the character after the character changes his body. Despite the difference, there remains a level of immaturity to Andy. Later in the same episode, he eagerly enjoys playing with remote control helicopters ("London"). But this time, Andy's desire to play with the toys of a wealthy aristocrat leads that aristocrat to hire him for a job. So, unlike the fully infantile flabby Andy, a leaner Andy becomes employable and, in turn, begins to show more maturity. While writers certainly created this story, the story creation mirrors the physical changes in Pratt's body. Pratt's changed body leads to a story in which Andy functions as a more mature adult.

With a changed physique, Andy becomes more productive, less lazy, and a more reliable person. By the end of the series, Andy transfers his childlike persona Johnny Karate into a successful television show ("The Johnny Karate Super Awesome Musical Explosion Show"). Through this show, Andy portrays several of the imaginary characters he employed throughout the show, but he has monetized these playtime behaviors. Andy no longer functions as a man-child who must be guided through life, he creates his own opportunities. The changed body from the "London" episode eventually leads to a successful man.

Considering the character of Andy through Thirdspace theory highlights the complications of character on Pratt's persona. Firstspace would be Pratt's body and in turn Secondspace becomes the character he plays, which is in turn affected by the writers' and directors' interpretation of that character as well as the audience's interpretation and other cultural influences such as Pratt's social media. The Thirdspace becomes Pratt and the all the interpretations of the character he plays as well as the how the viewers see Pratt. Through this character, Pratt's public persona shifts, and he becomes somewhat associated with the lovable, childlike, but ultimately successful, Andy even though Pratt and Andy are not the same person.

Pratt's persona carries with him the Andy character because it is one of the ways we have seen Pratt, but it is not the only way. Pratt's embodied ethos shifts again as he moves from television to movie actor. Pratt moved from television actor to a movie star with his role as Peter Quill/Star-Lord in *Guardians of the Galaxy*. The movie's plot serves as a metaphor for Pratt's experience as a leading man and star. As the character of Star-Lord⁴⁶, Pratt gets to play with masculinity and the expectation of "the masculine" within a genre that allows both masculinized acts, but also questions the limits of masculinity itself. The movie starts with a Star-Lord, as a capable but silly outlaw. The opening credit sequence features a hidden faced Star-Lord walking around a deserted planet looking at holographic images of past inhabitants. This short scene before the credit sequences hints at the slant of a loner character looking at images of the past. But

⁴⁶ The character's name is both Star-Lord and Peter Quill. Both names are used throughout the movie. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use Star-Lord for moments when the character evokes a hero dynamic and Quill for other moments.

the movie quickly reveals a different dimension to the character because once he removes his mask, he dances and sings along to “Come and Get Your Love” while using an animal that tried to attack him as a microphone (*Guardians*). This dynamic shift shows that the movie’s hero is not the movie hero of the past. He is shaped by the past, but not defined by it. Unlike the loner hero, Star-Lord enjoys being a loner outlaw, an outlaw who enjoys his life. Star-Lord enjoys music and has fun while he goes around the galaxy stealing items for his financial gain. Star-Lord does not seek revenge or justice; he seeks his wants and desires. Star-Lord remains a loner, but one who enjoys life to its fullest with a self-effacing quality that separates him the most from many past action heroes⁴⁷.

Even though Star-Lord remains self-effacing, that doesn’t mean he functions without pain. The pre-credits sequence shows a young Peter Quill at his mother’s deathbed while the song “I’m Not in Love” plays. We learn even before the credits begin that Quill harbors deep pain from the loss of his mother and then is kidnapped by aliens right after her death. In other words, we learn that Quill’s loner tendencies are marked by the pain of loss. Quill was stunted in his emotional growth because of the death of his mother, and he must grow up (*Guardians*). This path would be what Joseph Campbell dubs a hero’s journey. In order to achieve emotional maturity, or to become a man, Quill must go on a journey that leads to “a death and resurrection” (Campbell and Moyers

⁴⁷ I am focusing here on specific types of action heroes who serve as the lead characters in movies. There have often been sidekick characters who resist some of these types. One example would be Han Solo in the *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*. Star-Lord has many similarities with Han Solo, but unlike Han Solo, Star-Lord is the main character of the movie.

152). So, Star-Lord remains a reluctant hero as long as Peter Quill remains stuck in his emotional immaturity.

That emotional maturity comes through a death and resurrection. When Star-Lord actually sacrifices his life to save another life, a shift of character occurs. Star-Lord places his body in danger to save Gamora, but also to win her affection. This scene of Star-Lord and Gamora fading in space has an ethereal and surreal look. The light diffuses both of their profiles and makes it appear as if they are slowly dissolving. Then, the light from the rescuing ship illuminates them and Star-Lord and Gamora are rescued. But even though this is a resurrection of sorts, Star-Lord's character resists the mythic archetype to an extent. After the rescue, Quill tells Gamora: "I saw you out there and I don't know what came over me. But I couldn't let you die I found something inside of myself. Something incredibly heroic. I mean, not to brag" (*Guardians*). Gamora questions this statement as stalling, making the scene a humorous scene rather than a romantic scene. While Star-Lord's lines are certainly played for humor, there is some truth to them. Star-Lord/Peter Quill made a sacrifice, something that he had not done before. Pratt plays these lines with both a seriousness and a wink at the humor. Pratt's portrayal recognizes how Star-Lord represents a new type of hero as well as how Star-Lord fulfills traditional heroic archetypes. This hero remains in a liminal space that cannot truly represent the traditional hero or the traditional bad guy. Star-Lord's character, because of Pratt's portrayal, lives in the space in-between: never fully good and never fully bad. For example, at the end of the movie when the crew gathers, he asks: "What should we do next, something good, something bad, a little of both?" (*Guardians*). In this moment,

Star-Lord defines his character. He is not a hero; he not a villain. Star-Lord exists in the space in-between.

In addition to his emotional liminality, Star-Lord maintains a physical liminality as well. Late in the movie, Star-Lord discovers that he is only half human, and his other half is described as “something very ancient we have never seen before” (*Guardians*). So, there is an element of the unknown in Star-Lord’s physical presence. That unknown seemingly gives him the strength to defeat Ronan and recover the orb. Star Lord as a liminal physical being harkens back to Roblou’s arguments about American superheroes not fulfilling the physical standard of masculinity. Even so, Star-Lord performs tasks often associated with heteronormative masculinity. He physically overcomes his enemies while remaining sexually promiscuous and, most importantly, physically desirable. While he does not fully fulfill Goffman’s definition of normal, Star-Lord fits many of the characteristics, including being “young,” “white,” and of “good complexion, weight and height” (Goffman 153). Goffman also notes the idea of a being good at sports, which in a superhero universe could be represented in being physically capable of defeating supernatural entities. In many ways, Star-Lord represents a modernized version of the normal marker that Goffman established although he does not fully occupy the space of normality.

It is no accident that Star-Lord, the only white, heterosexual man, becomes the leader of the group. In serving as leader, Star-Lord fulfills the role of hegemonic masculinity. He becomes the person that all of the characters listen to, the source of guidance and control for the group. Connell says: “Nevertheless, hegemony is likely to be

established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual” (Connell 77). By becoming a leader, Star-Lord becomes the “cultural ideal” and the “institutional power.” Star-Lord becomes the institution that guides others’ actions. Even at the end of the movie, Star-Lord assures the Nova Corps officer that he will control the other members of his group. He knows his position has power over the other members.

Nevertheless, Star-Lord is not a traditional action movie hero. He does not get the girl in the end, he makes jokes at his own expense, he supports doing both bad and good, and he resists traditional modes of power. On the surface, this may seem as if he really is not perpetuating normal, but Star-Lord perpetuates a malleable normality. Star-Lord, even in his liminality, represents an existential normality, as he still physical represents expectations of normality. Star-Lord reformulates normal to allow for outlaw heroes who make fun of themselves. By reconsidering the action hero, Star-Lord’s character creates a new type of action hero. One who works with the support of the people around him. Star-Lord could not succeed if he were not in charge of other people.

To consider this through Thirdspace theory, Firstspace would begin with Pratt’s body. Secondspace becomes the Star-Lord character and Pratt’s, the writers’, and the director’s interpretation of that character. Thirdspace then represents yet another way of considering Pratt as both as his physical body as well as his characterization of Star-Lord. Pratt’s performance helps reformulate the normal by altering the approach to the action hero. He does not do this alone. The movie’s writing and direction contribute to this as well, but Pratt becomes the physical manifestation of the new type of action hero. Pratt’s

action hero is self-effacing but firmly grounded in the concept of normality (white, heterosexual, cisgendered man). This does not mean that Star-Lord mimics Pratt's real life, but Star-Lord helps shape Pratt's persona as an action star.

Another shift in persona occurs through Pratt's role in *Jurassic World*, where he plays a former Navy officer who uses his masculine skills to save the female park manager and her nephews. Unlike the self-effacing Star-Lord, Owen Grady fulfills more traditional expectations of masculinity. Owen masters the animal kingdom by becoming the alpha in a group of raptors, but he also has a healthy respect for nature. He is the only one who recognizes the problem with the way the new super dinosaur was created and raised, showing his connection with nature provides an insight lacking in other characters. Owen tells the lead female character, Claire, "Animals raised in isolation are not always the most functional" (*Jurassic World*). This recognition that isolation can be problematic challenges traditional views of masculinity represented by Vincent D'Onfrio's⁴⁸ Hoskins, who represents a stoic loner masculinity while Owen posits a new form of masculinity that rejects the loner lifestyle and instead values emotional connections to others.

One of the ways Owen challenges the loner hero form of masculinity occurs with his relationship with the female lead. *Jurassic World* depicts Claire and Owen as a team searching for Claire's nephews. Owen has expertise in dealing with animals and nature,

⁴⁸ Vincent D'Onfrio is a character actor who has often changed the shape of his body for the parts he plays. Analyzing D'Onfrio's representations of masculinity will be the work of future projects.

but Claire is a capable and smart counterpart to his role. Claire⁴⁹ recognizes Owen's expertise and masculinity but does not rely on him to save her. In one of their escapes from the dinosaur, Owen puts his hand out to help Claire walk through a jungle path. Claire ignores this traditional mode of chivalry and runs past him. When flying dinosaurs attack, Claire saves Owen, who almost gets carried away. After Claire saves Owen, he kisses her. This scene shows the greatest difference between the old action hero and the modern action hero. The old action hero would save the girl, who was generally helpless, and remain isolated. Rarely would a woman save the old action hero. Of course, Claire's saving of Owen does not solely make her an equal in Owen's physical strength. Owen kisses Claire to reinforce his masculinity. While Claire may have emasculated him through saving his life, he reclaims his masculinity by kissing Claire. He is, in a sense, remasculated through this display of heterosexual action.

To consider Owen's characterization through Thirdspace, Owen occupies a redefined masculinity, but that masculinity reformulates into hegemonic masculinity. By Claire saving Owen, the power dynamic between the white heterosexual male and the white female shifts temporarily. When Claire's rescue temporarily emasculates Owen, Owen becomes a liminal figure. Because of his established masculinity, Owen remains masculine, but because he is rescued by a woman, he is also emasculated. In that moment, he remains liminal. That liminality disappears through Owen's embodied action

⁴⁹ This argument is not analyzing the character of Claire, rather just pointing out her relationship with Owen and how that affirms or shifts his masculinity. A feminist analysis of Claire could point to problematic characterization, particularly in her role as a mother figure.

of kissing Claire. By reclaiming the power, Owen takes on a stronger masculine persona. Once he reclaims his masculinity, he creates a new form of normality. The new masculine man can be rescued by a woman, but remain a normate. In fact, Claire's nephews witness this interaction, and it just leads to them praising Owen as more masculine. Even though Claire rescued Owen, the boys feel safe in his masculine leadership. They even tell Claire, "You boyfriend's a badass" (*Jurassic World*). Owen provides a guidepost for new masculinity for the boys, who emulate his behavior.

To consider this further through Thirdspace theory, Pratt's portrayal of Owen also shifts Pratt's persona. The Firstspace would be Pratt, and thus Secondspace becomes how he portrays Owen as well as how others interpret that portrayal. Thirdspace combines Pratt and the various interpretations of the character of Owen. While *Guardians of the Galaxy* proved that Pratt could star in a movie, *Jurassic World* made Pratt a movie star. For example, in *Guardians*, Pratt never kisses the lead, but in *Jurassic World* he does. *Jurassic World* functions closer to the loner hero of past movies (such as *Die Hard*) and reformulates it to resist the loner action star. Pratt's Owen can be a hero and work with others. This reformulation combines some aspects of Pratt's persona (his affability and humor) along with the action movie expectations (physically capable, able to defeat enemies). After *Jurassic World*, viewers see Pratt as an action movie star. He fully embraces the action movie star expectations through his own embodiment of Owen.

Both the roles of Star-Lord and Owen show how Pratt was "remasculinized" into an action hero. This masculinization is a direct result of how Pratt changed his body. Before the aforementioned Instagram photo, Pratt was the lovable everyman sidekick.

Transforming his body has transformed Pratt's career. In Hollywood terms, he has moved from the B-list to the A-list. But that transfer was easier as a white man. With a minor adjustment to his outer appearance, Pratt can transform from everyman to superman from almost normal to a standard-bearer for normality. In a sense, Pratt has become the normate, the site of expectations of normality, even if that normality looks different than that of past action stars such as Bruce Willis, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Pratt redefines masculinity by borrowing aspects of liminality, thus developing a new form of hegemonic masculinity that resists the stoic models of past action stars.

Peter Dinklage

But how do expectations of masculinity change when one's body has some of the qualities of the normate, but they can never fully become the normate? An example of this would be Peter Dinklage. As a white, heterosexual male, Dinklage has many qualities of normality, but, as a dwarf⁵⁰, he can never fully fulfill the expectation of the normate. As a person whose height and proportions keeps him outside of the standards of normality, Dinklage can always be considered other. His physical form recalls a long-standing complicated history of dwarves in the entertainment industry. Often employed in freak shows or entertainment venues, dwarves remain an oddity: "The persistent artistic stereotypes of dwarfs that endured for centuries did so because society continued to cast them as curiosities" (Adelson). Psychologist Betty M. Adelson suggests that the twenty-first century offers some updated and varied representations of dwarfism in literature and

⁵⁰ I use dwarf here because Dinklage uses the term to describe himself both in interviews and as his character on *Game of Thrones*. Dinklage's dwarfism is called achondroplasia (Meeuf 205).

the theater. But the residue from the freak show oddity of dwarfism remains in various cultural representations. Aware of this residue, Dinklage chooses projects that do not participate in the stereotypical associations of his body type. Even as a struggling actor, Dinklage refused to play even minor roles as leprechauns or other fantasy figures (Kois). In pointing out the prejudice associated with dwarves, laying the blame both on the media and the dwarves who portray stereotypical dwarf roles, Dinklage says: “You can say no. You can *not* be the object of ridicule” (Kois, original emphasis). Throughout his career, Dinklage resisted roles like “elves or leprechauns” and focused on character-driven pieces, like his breakout role in *The Station Agent* (Kois).

By establishing himself as an actor who will not participate in many stereotypes of dwarves, Dinklage creates an ethos as a serious actor. Dinklage carefully chooses parts to cultivate his acting skills rather than fulfill the existential stigmas associated with his body size. Even his popular part on *Game of Thrones* was something Dinklage hesitated to take. One of the show's creators, David Benioff says Dinklage was the first choice to play the character of Tyrion (Kois). In taking the part, Dinklage laid out conditions of “no beard” and “no pointy shoes”: “Dwarves in these genres always have this look. My guard was up. Not even my guard—my metal fence, my barbed wire was up” (Kois). Part of what changed Dinklage’s mind about Tyrion was the popularity of the character among the book series’ fans (Kois). What drew Dinklage to the part was how different Tyrion was compared to other fantasy dwarf characters: “It is just something that I was so eager to embrace, because it just turned the dwarf stereotype in the fantasy genre on its head. And he’s a hero at the same time” (Windolf). As a hero whose body does not fulfill

expectations of normality, Dinklage offers a complicated portrayal of Tyrion Lannister. Tyrion has a prominent family name, but remains an outcast among his family. With his dark hair and dwarf stature, Tyrion looks vastly different than his older blond haired and taller siblings. Tyrion's physical difference has always been a thorn in their prominent family's side. His older sister and father blame Tyrion for the death of their mother (she died giving birth to Tyrion). Because of his stature, Tyrion was never expected to become the leader of the Lannister family, but he routinely functions as the smartest and shrewdest of the Lannisters.

Early in the series, Tyrion participates in the complicated gamesmanship the Lannisters employ to remain on the Iron Throne⁵¹. Although Tyrion never expects to sit on that throne, he attempts to assert his own form of masculinity through his aggressive heterosexuality. Tyrion shows the only way he would be considered attractive would be if he paid a woman to sleep with him, so he routinely sleeps with prostitutes. For example in the season two episode "Blackwater," the episode begins with Tyrion's regular prostitute, Shae, calling Tyrion a "lion." The moniker is important because Tyrion does become lion-like as the episode continues. As the key advisor to his nephew King Joffrey, Tyrion must plan a battle to defend King's Landing from an eminent attack from the sea. Although, never being a soldier, Tyrion develops a plan to blow up the bulk of the ships, evening out the troops from a city that is left with few soldiers to defend it. When Joffrey runs away from the battle, it is Tyrion who must inspire the troops to fight

⁵¹ The Iron Throne is a throne in King's Landing and serves as a metaphor for power over several kingdoms. As the show's title suggests, most of the show's characters participate in games (or battles) to acquire the Iron Throne.

on, saying if he is half a man, surely they can be full men and protect their property.

While Joffrey, although essentially little more than a child, should be the traditional bearer of masculinity, Tyrion takes up the expectations of masculinity to defend the city. Tyrion becomes an accidental hero and a leader (“Blackwater”).

Because he remains othered, there are limits to Tyrion’s leadership. While he goes into battle, he is quickly felled by a cut across the face. Just as he falls, a group of troops rush into King’s Landing to finish the battle that Tyrion started. Although he served as the military strategist and as the person who saved the city, the battle can only be won through an incursion of traditional soldiers. In other words, the only way to end the battle is to bring in traditional bearers of hegemonic masculinity. After Tyrion falls, he can only see the battle sideways, his, and the viewers’, point of view skews showing that Tyrion sees and experiences the world in ways that the rest of the characters do not. Using a subjective shot, the episode provides an insight into Tyrion’s point of view. The viewer, just like Tyrion, sees the world askew, showing how the world looks to someone of Tyrion’s stature and position in life. In his speech to the troops, Tyrion stood on the stairs and urged the men to be full men. In battle, Tyrion again sees the world from below, but because he has experienced, although briefly, what it feels like to be a “normal” man, the world has become askewed. The camera shows that he sees the world sideways and from below, never being a full participant in hegemonic masculinity. Tyrion always looks up at normal men, never able to see the world from the same height as the bearers of hegemonic masculinity.

But does Tyrion assert a new masculinity? Seeing the world from another perspective gives Tyrion unique insight, an embodied knowledge or *mētis*. Because of his physical viewpoint, he can see angles that others cannot. Those manifest both metaphorically (he is generally the smartest person in the room) and physically (such as the example of seeing the battle from the ground). Additionally, Tyrion knows that he is seen differently and, in season four, begins to point out the limitations that others have placed upon him. After being wrongfully blamed for the death of his nephew Joffrey, Tyrion defends himself claiming his innocence, but saying: “I am guilty of a far more monstrous crime. I am guilty of being a dwarf” (“The Laws of Gods and Men”). In his defense, Tyrion attacks his father and others who marginalize Tyrion because of his dwarfism. Tyrion’s size, his otherness, leads others to believe he is capable of murdering his nephew. Through this statement, Tyrion shows that the blame is not based on his behavior, but that he remains an other, a constant oddity to those around him.

This shift in defending himself leads Tyrion to assert his masculinity, but a new form of masculinity. Refusing to be limited by being a dwarf, Tyrion stands up for himself and for what he believes in. He remains honest and forthright and calls out others who refuse to behave in the same fashion. Tyrion’s honesty offers a shift in character in a show that is all about how morals shift in seeking power. Before being accused of his nephew’s death, Tyrion participated in morally disreputable activities in support of his family’s ruling of Westeros. After being accused of killing Joffrey, Tyrion develops a conscience. He no longer sits by and idly accepts his family’s schemes. In a sense, Tyrion has developed a new ethos, one that recognizes his own internal power and skills. The

ethos connects to a form of *mētis*, or embodied knowledge, that his physicality provides him. The turning point for Tyrion comes when the prostitute that he loves, Shae, testifies against him. Dinklage acknowledges how this the betrayal from the woman he loves provides an important turning point for Tyrion: “And this was Tyrion’s moment to pull back that curtain and pull the rip cord on the whole Lannister legacy, and especially expose his father; things that have been stuffed down deep inside of him” (Hibberd). The courtroom provides an important turning point for Tyrion, which leads him to forge a new path for himself.

By the end of the season, Tyrion escapes and confronts his father and Shae (“The Children”). Tyrion kills Shae and then confronts his father Tywin, who is on the toilet. As seated Tywin places Tywin and Tyrion on equal footing. Because they are on equal footing, they have an honest conversation and Tyrion asserts his masculinity in a new way. After Tywin calls Shae a whore, Tyrion shoots him in the stomach with a crossbow⁵². Tyrion reloads and Tywin tells him “You’re no son of mine” (“The Children”). In response, Tyrion says: “I am your son; I have always been your son” and then fatally shoots Tywin with the crossbow (“The Children”). This scene is among the most important for understanding Tyrion’s character. Always shunned by his father, Tyrion struggled to define his own masculinity. Only through killing his father can Tyrion become a man letting go of the criticisms that have limited him.

⁵² The crossbow is a weapon more suited to Tyrion’s size rather than the long bow which requires more physical strength.

In a sense, Tyrion creates a new space for his masculinity. Considering Tyrion's character through liminality, we can see how Tyrion was defined by his family as inadequate. He tried to reinterpret himself through heroic deeds, but in the end, he had to exist in an interstitial space. While Tyrion may kill his father, he will never be rid of the marginalization he experienced in his family. Killing his father eliminated an outward representation of the marginalization, but the inner effects remain. Although, killing his father did awaken a new aspect to his inner self and now he can become his own man, carrying the expectations of the future as well as the pain from the past. In a sense, post-season four Tyrion is a liminal character who represents both who he is and what others interpret him to be.

Playing an untraditional dwarf character provides a basis for that masculinity. Oftentimes fantasy dwarf characters serve as a moral barometer or as a guidepost for the hero's journey (Campbell and Moyers). Tyrion takes charge of his own life, asserts his own masculinity by killing his father and escaping King's Landing. The portrayal of this character also changes the perception of Dinklage's persona. To put that in Thirdspace terms, Firstspace is Dinklage's physical body. In Secondspace, there are the interpretations of the Tyrion character, from Dinklage's acting choices to the way that Tyrion represents a new physical manifestation of a hero. Thirdspace acknowledges both Dinklage and the interpretations of the character of Tyrion. As an actor who resists the stereotypes of the dwarf character, Dinklage chooses the part of Tyrion because of how the character complicates understandings of heroes, of masculinity, and dwarves. Through his portrayal, Dinklage reformulates how a dwarf can function in a fantasy

story. Through a lesser actor, Tyrion could become an oddity with little gravitas.

Dinklage gives Tyrion the strength to take on a heroic stance. Tyrion cannot escape being a dwarf or being interpreted by others as less than a man, but Tyrion can create his own narrative and subvert the expectations of being a dwarf. For example, in his speech while on trial, Tyrion gives a hero speech, but he is never considered a traditional hero. In speaking for himself, Tyrion stands forth as his own man who does not need to be rescued by others. In turn, Dinklage can show a dwarf character who functions heroically, thereby changing his status both as an actor and as a dwarf.

Both Pratt and Dinklage portray characters who represent different forms of masculinity, although neither represents Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity." Pratt establishes a new hegemonic masculinity that embraces some humility, but ultimately reaffirms normality. Conversely, Dinklage's portrayal of Tyrion shows the limits of hegemonic masculinity. With a body type that can never fulfill the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, Dinklage's portrayal shows a new way of being masculine that exists in a liminal space between masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. Dinklage can never be interpreted to fulfill the normal "masculine" role, but he remains masculine nevertheless.

Hollywood offers many barometers for masculinity, but one of the most common is whether one is considered sexy. Since Pratt's aforementioned Instagram photo, his name is often associated with stories about his sexiness and his physical routine. For example, a *Bustle* article, argues that he should become *People's* Sexiest Man Alive "because being sexy is about so much more than a pretty face. (He's got that too,

though.)” (Felter). Of course, the article also talks about his abs in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (just in case you forgot there was physical criteria on sexiness). Conversely, Dinklage acknowledges traditional expectations of sexiness often do not include someone of his size: “They’ll say, ‘Oh, he’s sexy,’ but women still go for guys who are 6’2”. ... It’s nice that people are thinking outside the box, but I don’t believe any of it for a minute” (Parsley). This quote shows some self-deprecation on Dinklage’s part, but there is an element of truth to it. While Pratt jokingly points out in his self-portrait that he is being a bit egotistical, Dinklage points out that society has boundaries for a person of his size. Pratt can joke about his appearance because it fulfills societal expectations of normality. Dinklage provides a gentle reminder that society still has a long way to go before it accepts someone of his size as a sex symbol.

But unlike the normative sexiness Pratt offers, Dinklage offers a more complicated sexiness. Dinklage fulfills normative standards of handsomeness, but as a dwarf he can represent a sort of “alluring taboo” (Meeuf 216). As philosopher Michel Foucault suggests, there remains a connection through power and taboo (*Sexuality*). The desire for an othered body could be one manifestation of that power excursion. On the other hand, Meeuf also suggests that Dinklage’s attractiveness provide him a special entry into the ranks of celebrity: “Deflecting attention away from the structural and cultural barriers that keep little people relegated to stereotypical roles, the construction of Dinklage as a sex symbol justifies his rise to fame from the ranks of little people entertainers” (Meeuf 216-217). By considering Dinklage extraordinary, it reduces the possibility of other little people becoming celebrities. By defining Dinklage as sexy, he

does not gain equal rank with Pratt, but he receives a special dispensation for being famous.

Even as an unwitting sex symbol, Dinklage does not shy away from sex in the parts he plays. As noted earlier, Tyrion Lannister often paid for sex, yet fell in love with a prostitute. In other roles, Dinklage plays a hyper-sexualized or sexually repressed character. For example, in *The Boss*, Dinklage plays Ronald, a successful businessman intent on destroying his former lover, Michelle. Like Tyrion, Ronald's incredibly smart, but he has been hurt by a woman. When Michelle gets a promotion over him, Ronald changes his name to a French pronunciation (Renault) and becomes more aggressive in his dealings with Michelle. He orchestrates her downfall and prison time. Even in this aggressive behavior, Ronald does not fully fulfill hegemonic masculinity. Ronald has his personal assistant fulfill many of his needs, including, at one point, feeding him brownies created by Michelle's girls' organization. In a sense, this scene shows the ridiculousness of hyper-masculinity, but it also infantilizes Ronald. As disability scholar Simi Linton points out: "The degree and significance of an individual's impairment is often less of an issue than the degree to which someone identifies as disabled" (Linton 12). By being fed, Ronald becomes complicit in his disability. Despite being in a leadership position, Ronald remains childlike which serves as a reminder of his size.

While Ronald does behave in childlike ways, the characters' backstory provides a reason for this behavior. Ronald and Michelle were once a couple until Michelle betrayed him to receive a promotion. The childish behavior connects with this incident, as Ronald remains singularly focused on destroying Michelle at all costs. Thus, the hyper-

masculinity Ronald portrays derives from his heartbreak from a past relationship. In addition to the childish behavior, Ronald also dabbles in orientalism. His office features multiple Asian artifacts, and the final showdown between Ronald and Michelle features a sword fight. Edward Said's methodological approach to orientalism focuses on "strategic location" and "strategic formation" (20). In analysis of Ronald's character, strategic location may be more effective as it examines how Ronald exists among the oriental objects he possesses. In an office filled with artifacts, the artifacts seem to represent Ronald's power to purchase items. The objects are a sign of wealth and status rather than an interest in specific Asian culture. Thus, they suggest a form of colonialism, or Ronald's ability to own aspects of other cultures. For example, when Ronald and Michelle have their confrontation, Ronald picks up a sword and says: "You know what the fascinating thing is about the Japanese martial arts? The discipline, the integrity, the loyalty" (*The Boss*). In this moment, Ronald borrows from the Japanese as a means of defeating his enemy. He co-opts a culture that is not his own to achieve his own personal goals. But even in borrowing orientalism to establish his masculinity, Ronald's masculinity is immediately challenged when another heterosexual male character offers to give him oral sex. Thus, Ronald remains outside the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and again functions in a liminal space of masculinity. As an othered body, Ronald can never fully function as the norm, but he tries to take on characteristics of normality. His orientalism is one manifestation of that attempt to become normal, but he never fully occupies the space of normality.

After bringing out the sword, Ronald and Michelle get into a physical altercation.

In a not so subtle way, Ronald's sword represents his penis. He asserts his masculine force through the sword. When Michelle says he is not going to hurt anyone with his "knife," Ronald cuts her hand. When his masculinity is challenged, Ronald reacts with violence, but he becomes distracted with Michelle's sexuality throughout. When he falls on top of her and lands with his face in her lap, he says "Hello, old friend. Oh God I've missed this" (*The Boss*). The fight leads to the destruction of many of Ronald's Asian artifacts, and then he admits that he has not "been with" another woman since Michelle (*The Boss*). As representations of his masculinity are destroyed, Ronald becomes more vulnerable and admits his feelings. He resists the stoic representation of manhood, but again because his body does not conform to normality, he does not reconstitute normality. Instead, Ronald solidifies his position as a liminal figure. After defeating Michelle, she tells him he was terrible in bed, to which Ronald responds "I know" and pushes her off the top of the building (*The Boss*). Moments later, Ronald is also pushed off the roof and lands next to Michelle on the next floor down. There Michelle punches him in the face, to which Ronald asks for Michelle's forgiveness and identifies himself as Ron instead of Renault.

Through his renewed affection for Michelle, Ronald redefines himself again. After his initial rejection, Ronald takes on a Renault personality to assert a form of masculinity that allowed him to colonize and destroy Michelle's success. After receiving Michelle's forgiveness, we see a new identity. The movie does not explore this identity, rather we only know Ron likes to make out with Michelle. As both Ron and Renault, Ronald plays two binary extremes of masculinity. Renault performs a hyper-masculinized

desire to conquer, taking on orientalist traits. Ron succumbs to his desire for Michelle, even to his own betterment, as Ron was used by Michelle as a stepping stone to her success. The Ronald character is a binary with two opposite personalities, but we as an audience are never privy to the liminal space between. If he were not just a broadly comic character, Ronald could be considered through liminality, but that never remains an option for the audience. Instead, we see two forms of gendered performance: hyper-masculinity and emasculation.

Considering the portrayal through Thirdspace theory provides some insight into how this comedy also shifts the persona of Dinklage. Firstspace again represents Dinklage while Secondspace becomes Dinklage's portrayal and the interpretations of that portrayal. Thirdspace then becomes how Dinklage and this portrayal affect perceptions of Dinklage. While Tyrion provides a serious actor side of Dinklage, *The Boss*, shows a comedic portrayal. Both characters challenge the expectations of dwarf characters in a way. Tyrion resists fantasy stereotypes while Ron/Renault plays with leading man stereotypes. Ron/Renault is a role that did not need to be played by a dwarf, but the portrayal by a dwarf changes the perception of that role. The movie does not address his dwarfism, but the residue of the dwarfism remains for viewers. For example, the scene where his assistant feeds Ron/Renault changes because of Dinklage's physical presence. The joke would be much different if Ron/Renault were a 6 foot tall thin white man than it is with a dwarf. Dinklage's size provides an immediate association with childhood that would not be so readily acknowledged with a differently bodied man.

The audience's perception of Dinklage's acting shifts with performances. As an

actor who has performed a variety of parts, the audience recognizes that Dinklage is neither the Ron/Renault nor Tyrion. But the residue from those parts affect how perceptions of Dinklage as an actor. Because of the variety of parts he portrays, Dinklage gains credence as a series actor. In an interview for his role in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Dinklage points out that “from job to job, I’m an actor; I like to not repeat myself” (IGN). So, as an actor, Dinklage shifts from cultural situation to cultural situation. Each character brings forth different aspects of his physicality and personality, but none of the characters represent him fully.

While that cultural shift is certainly true of all of the public figures in this dissertation, Dinklage more overtly discusses how he likes to inhabit his characters. Unlike Pratt, whose body fulfills expectations of being a movie star, Dinklage has to reaffirm his position within the acting community and the public sphere to establish his ethos. Garland Thomson asserts that bodies outside of the norm often must redefine their roles in culture:

By its very presence, the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation, and incite regulation.

The unexpected body fires rich, if anxious, narratives and practices that probe the contours and boundaries of what we take to be human (Garland Thomson, *Freakery* 1).

Because Dinklage’s body exists outside of the cultural expectation of a leading man, in his acting he consistently must redefine its cultural relevance. In other words, Dinklage has to remind the audience that his body exists within the realm of humanity. While Pratt

can change the shape of his body to change the trajectory of his career, Dinklage must constantly remind us of his skill as an actor to justify his career trajectory. Dinklage remains othered, existing outside of the expectations of male public bodies.

While Dinklage participates in this affirmation of his talent as an actor, he also takes on roles that challenge a binary that relegates him to an other. In *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Dinklage plays the villain, Boliver Trask, a scientist who creates gigantic robots to kill mutants. Trask sees the elimination of mutants as a key to uniting humanity against a common cause—mutants. Unlike Tyrion, who is an acknowledged dwarf, or Ronald, who is infantilized and emasculated, the movie does not directly address Trask's stature. In his first scene in the movie, Trask sitting at a desk before a governmental committee, viewers cannot see his stature throughout the entire scene. Trask quotes from Professor X's dissertation and suggests of those who are not mutants: "Now, we are the Neanderthal" (*X-Men*). Trask uses the rhetoric of fear to get funding for his program, which fits with the fear that he seems to fear about the success of mutants. Throughout the movie, he refers to mutants as "it" and dehumanizes them. Trask elevates the effectiveness of his machines (sentinels) to eliminate the mutated gene. When asked if he hates mutants, Trask says that he admires them and their ability to untie humanity: "A common struggle against the ultimate enemy... extinction. I believe our new friends are going to help us usher in a new era. A new era of genuine and long-lasting peace" (*X-Men*). Trask sees mutants as evolutionarily superior and sees the key to humanity's survival is to eliminate a new species that could replace them. The mutants, although treated as others in the X-Men story, potentially could outnumber and eliminate the

humans. Thus, the foundation of the X-Men story is that the other provides a dangerous alternative to the norm.

In the movie robots become weapons to eliminate the dangerous others. As product of enlightenment thought, science, through its reason and rationality, attempts to erase the embodied difference of the other. The body, particularly the marked body, becomes a site of difference. Although never discussed in the dialogue, Trask's body provides a site of difference. No one acknowledges Trask's height; the audience only knows Trask's height difference from his embodied representation. Through seeing Trask, the audience identifies Trask as different. The audience also receives reminders of Trask's lack of power, as the committee rejects his proposal for sentinels and then mutants interrupt his attempt to sell sentinels to foreign leaders. Not until a newscast confirms the existence of mutants does Trask receive support for his sentinel program. In a brief moment of power, Trask reacts by increasing the price for government support for his program. But that brief moment of power is quickly erased as Magneto seizes control of his sentinels. Even though Trask is clearly a successful scientist and businessman, he remains othered throughout the movie. As Dinklage says: "Trask has had to work a bit harder to get his agenda across maybe than a lot of the other people have—at least humans" (IGN). As the actor acknowledges, Trask's role as an other provides challenges to how people perceive him.

In a body that would not be considered normal, Trask's adherence to normality evokes long-standing theories about how the marginalized can be complicit in the othering of bodies. Trask says that mutants provide a groundwork for uniting humans,

suggesting that humans would be homogenous, thus eliminating difference. In fact, Trask sees the mutants or difference as an enemy that must be defeated. As Foucault would suggest, normal collapses differences, eliminating individuality (Foucault, *Discipline* 184). By uniting as humans, Trask suggests that individual differences would not matter as humans could focus all difference into the mutant enemy.

Thus, as one whose body remains outside of normal, a homogenous view of humanity would eliminate Trask's individual difference. As an other, Trask lacks power, as seen throughout many of the early scenes where no one listens to him about the threat posed by mutants. Trask lacks power in the human world, but if that human world were to be more homogenous Trask could regain power. In Foucauldian terms, Trask experiences antipathy, which "maintains the isolation of things and prevents their assimilation; it encloses every species within its impenetrable difference and its propensity to continue being what it is" (Foucault, *Order* 24). As an other, Trask remains an outsider who can never fully assimilate into what he sees as the human race. Difference becomes a problem to be solved. Instead Trask endorses sympathy, which Foucault suggests offers the power of "*assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling them, of causing their individuality to disappear" which then creates a "Same" (Foucault, *Order* 23-24). Trask sees the homogeneity of Sameness as a powerful force that unites humanity and potentially erases his own difference. Thus, Trask remains a liminal character, one who resists othering but remains an other. Like the heroes in a superhero movie, Trask's villainy exists outside the realm of normal. But

unlike the superhero who is both human and inhuman, Trask also exists in the space in-between. While human, his dwarfism places him outside of normal humanity.

Taking on the role of a character who supports homogeneity also adds to Dinklage's persona as a serious actor. To examine through Thirdspace theory, Dinklage remains the Firstspace, and his portrayal and interpretations of that portrayal function as Secondspace. Thirdspace then represents both Dinklage and the interpretations of his portrayal of Trask. In *X-Men*, Trask remains the villain because of his desire to be human whereas the mutants are the heroes because of their desire to recognize heterogeneity between humans and mutants. Dinklage's portrayal of Trask shows the complications and villainy of homogeneity. Again, if played by a different actor this layer of complexity in Trask's character would not exist. Dinklage time and again chooses roles that complicate the meaning of normality through his embodied presence.

Thus, Trask, like other Dinklage characters, can never fulfill hegemonic masculinity. As an embodiment of otherness, Dinklage's characters always carry the other in their presence. But they can display otherness in new ways. For Dinklage to play a serious villain (as opposed to *The Boss's* villainy for comic effect) shows a transgression into new characterization. We can see Dinklage's attempt to create characters who resist stereotypes of dwarfs. In choosing characters such as Trask and Tyrion, Dinklage creates an ethos of an actor who challenges normality. While he may not change normal, he creates a form of masculine energy that exists in his liminal space. Through these parts, Dinklage creates an ethos, an ethos as an actor who wants to find parts to challenge the embodied expectations of someone of his size.

Chaz Bono

While Dinklage and Pratt both have carefully crafted personas as actors, some public bodies do not have that same privilege. Some public bodies, such as that of Chaz Bono, have been part of the public perception for their entire lives. As a trans man and the child of a famous couple, Bono provides a case study in the complications of transitioning body shape and gender in the public sphere. Born Chastity Bono to parents Sonny Bono⁵³ and Cher, Chaz Bono has spent most of his life in the public spotlight. A young Chastity was a regular on the *Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour*⁵⁴, often brought in for a comedy gag at the end of episodes. Some of these scenes are still on YouTube, where you can see Chastity⁵⁵ dressed in outfits, often dresses, matching her parents' clothes. One of the hallmarks of the *Sonny and Cher* show was Cher making fun of Sonny Bono. Chastity also was expected to make fun of Sonny. In one clip, Sonny Bono holds Chastity who is wearing a shirt that says "Chastity on it." When Sonny Bono asks her what it says, she jokes that he can't read (Chereverywhere). To this Sonny Bono replies: "Well, you are getting more like your Mom every day, aren't you" (Chereverywhere). When he insists he can read, Chastity says: "You can? Then why can't you read this?" (Chereverywhere). This clip serves as an example of how Chastity serves as an extension

⁵³ This project will use Sonny Bono's full name. References to Bono will solely be used for Chaz Bono.

⁵⁴ There were two iterations of the *Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour*, one that ran from 1971-1974 and another that ran from 1976-1977 (Galloway). The YouTube clips used here do not clarify which seasons that the clips are from.

⁵⁵ I use Chastity and not a full name here as a reminder that this is the pre-transition version of Chaz Bono. When using the phrase Bono, it will only refer to the post-transition Chaz Bono.

of her mother's behavior. In American culture, mothers often function as models of behavior for little girls. Most of the time, this modeling comes in the private sphere of the home, but the expectation for Chastity was to perform this emulation in front of an audience. As Butler points out, we create gender "through repeated *acts*" (Butler, *Gender* 168, original emphasis). In many cases these acts are emulations of those performing gender. For Chastity, Cher provides a model of gender behavior, and the show provides a public performance of those gender expectations.

Another example of this emulation is a clip where Chastity asks her father about a gag earlier in the show where Cher pulled a cord and Sonny Bono fell through the floor. Chastity wants to re-create the moment. While Sonny Bono stands above the trap door, he tells Chastity that she can be a "good little girl" or a "naughty little devil" (mytube4youtube). Chastity responds with "I want to be a naughty" and then pulls the cord (mytube4youtube). While amusing, this clip shows how Chastity re-creates her mother's behavior by pulling the cord like Cher did. It also shows a bit of a pushback to the "good little girl"⁵⁶ concept. Greer Litton Fox says the good girl model of behavior functions as a mode of control for women, a control that is often perpetuated through women's self-regulation of behavior (805-806). By accepting her "naughty" side, Chastity resists this "good girl" expectation. While viewing this clip, it is hard to deny that this is clearly a set up gag (after all there is a trap door and a cord already available in

⁵⁶ Anne Helen Peterson discusses actress Jennifer Garner as a contemporary example of this good girl behavior. Garner must model idyllic female behavior, which includes standing by her unfaithful husband to perpetuate the good girl image she markets (Peterson).

the scene). But viewing this clip through an early twenty-first century lens helps the viewer see how a young Chastity redefines her own expectations. Reconsidering this clip with a post-transition Chaz Bono in mind changes perceptions of Chastity's actions.

Through liminality, the clip becomes a representation of the past as well as a prediction of the future. Considering the clip through a past lens of a cute girl performing a joke on her father would be a Firstspace view. A Secondspace interpretation would bring in the understanding of a post-transition Chaz Bono, particularly since Bono has said that he always felt a disconnection from a female gender. Combining these two interpretations leads to a Thirdspace that shows the complicated ways in which Bono has performed gender throughout his life. Bono's long history in the public sphere provides complicated ways in which we consider gender. A newly embodied Bono changes the perception of what was seen in Chastity's body and her behavior. The longtime images of Chastity interposed with present-day images of Bono show how both exist in the public landscape. There remains a liminality to the public perception of Bono. As post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha says: "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 3). Bono represents a cultural hybridity, a both/and in the minds of many who have seen him in the public sphere for most of his life.

Unlike many public trans bodies, Bono has a long pre-transition public history. For example, the trans actress in this project, Laverne Cox, came into the public spotlight post transition. Bono has a pre-transition and post-transition identity in the spotlight.

Bono's body thus brings forth a key point of discussion in the trans community, which is the concept of "passing." Feminism scholar Katrina Roen asserts that there is a tension within the transgender community between those who favor and those who resist passing (504). Passing in this sense would be passing as if a trans person were a cisgendered person. Roen describes these differing viewpoints as both/neither and either/or: "Both/neither refers to a transgender position of refusing to fit within categories of woman and man, while either/or refers to a transsexual imperative to pass convincingly as either a man or a woman" (Roen 505). Roen's research does not show that trans people always align with one or the other but rather some do both. Even though passing remains a political debate within the trans community, Bono does not have the same opportunity to engage in that debate in the same way as many trans people. Because he has been a celebrity from a young age, Bono's pre-transition body exists in the minds of many as well as in television archives and throughout the Internet.

Bono's body also maintains the residue of her famous parents. Sonny Bono's widow Mary acknowledges that images of Sonny, Cher, and Chastity resonate for many (*Being Chaz*). His mother, Cher, says growing up with famous parents was difficult: "It changes everything. You do as much as you can but you just are always having to do the best you can which is a lot of times just not good enough" (*Being Chaz*). Bono says he remembers little of his time on the *Sonny and Cher* show: "I don't remember anything from my early childhood. You are thinking of the *Sonny and Cher* show, you aren't thinking of reality" (*Being Chaz*). Bono was four when Sonny and Cher divorced, which led to the end of the iteration of their first show. While Bono says he does not remember,

that does not mean the public forgets. Growing up with famous parents affected both Bono's public and private personas.

In *Being Chaz*, the documentary about his transition, Bono says that with famous parents, the focus remains on the parents and not on the children: "So, I just learned to kind of stay under the radar" (*Being Chaz*). Bono says one of the lingering effects of early fame is how he hates to get his photo taken, but he also acknowledges that may be related to his displeasure with his body. Since his transition, Bono has been very open about how he more closely associated with maleness as early as puberty: "I felt like my body was literally betraying me. I got smacked everywhere with femaleness. That was really traumatic" (Wilson). Bono says in interviews and in *Being Chaz* that he never felt comfortable as a woman but that gender transformation was not something he considered until the 1990s. In the documentary, Bono discusses how he began living his life as a male, wearing binders over his breasts for example, but he did not undergo "physical changes" (*Being Chaz*). While he was living as a male, he met his then-girlfriend Jennifer Elia, whom Bono says was supportive from early in their relationship. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam says that sometimes female to male transgendered people identify as "butch in a queer female community before they decide to transition" (Halberstam 150). Halberstam says those ties with the queer lesbian communities often continue after the transition.

As a body functioning in liminality, Bono maintained his queer female relationship through his transition. For example, when Bono had his top surgery, he did not invite his family and instead only Elia is there. Elia remains with him as the doctor

physically marks his breasts for the six and a half pounds of body material that will be removed (*Being Chaz*). The chest surgery requires wearing a binder for several weeks to stop the breasts from forming again. Once, the binder is removed, Chaz sees his new body and says: “It looks beautiful,” with an intonation that Elia describes as “ecstatic” (*Being Chaz*). Even though this is only one step in this transition, Bono’s body transformation causes Chaz to see his body in a new way. Pre-transition, Bono did not like his breasts and did not find them sexually stimulating or attractive. A post-surgery Bono calls his reformed chest “beautiful.”

To consider this view of himself through Thirdspace theory, Bono has transformed the spaces in which he inhabits. His Firstspace, his physical body, has undergone a transition to a new form. His Secondspace, the descriptor he uses for his body, also transforms into beauty. Through Thirdspace, Bono has reconsidered his body in a new way through the transition. He finds the newly formed body to become something beautiful. Through the consideration of both his new physical body and how he describes that body, Bono’s attitude toward his body seems to change. He even says after the surgery: “It’s the only time I have ever felt like a complete person” (*Being Chaz*). The surgery allows Bono to see his body in a new way through a new interpretation of that body.

Bono’s top (breast removal) surgery is just one of his embodied changes. He also undergoes extensive hormone therapy to transition to a man. These hormones cause physical and emotional changes. One example that Bono offers is that his sex drive changes dramatically: “It’s a shame that women can’t feel it (the sex drive) and know

how biological it is” (*Being Chaz*). The sex drive provides benefits and challenges to his relationship. Elia says there is more intimacy because of Bono’s increased body comfort, but there are also “different ways of doing things” because Bono’s body has changed through the hormone therapy (*Being Chaz*).

Elia speaks of Bono’s physical changes in traditionally masculine ways, pointing out the hardness of his features, his increased sex drive, desire to be correct, and stubbornness (*Being Chaz*). The way Elia speaks of Bono suggests stereotypes associated with traditional masculinity. Elia’s responses enforce a male/female gender binary. Elia suggests that Bono switched from a female body to a male body and now performs as a man. This interpretation of Bono’s behavior suggests that Bono was in the wrong body. Halberstam says that the concept of being in the “wrong body” can sometimes reinforce “the politics of stable gender identities” (Halberstam 171). Halberstam sees “stable gender identities” as problematic and inaccurate as people of all genders perform acts of masculinity. Elia’s interpretation of Bono’s behavior reinforces gender binaries and hierarchies.

Through the documentary, Bono slowly begins looking like a man, even getting hair on his back and face and learning to control the effect on testosterone has on his emotions and reactions (*Being Chaz*). Even as Bono and Elia discuss his male behavior, others continue to see him as a woman or as a gender in transition. His mother, Cher, continually refers to Bono as “she,” acknowledging a discomfort with switching to a new pronoun. Others, such as paparazzi at public events, ask him questions that support traditional masculinity, such as “boxers or briefs” and “what beer do you drink?” These

examples show the liminality of Bono's existence. Bono cannot fully pass as male because of a long history in the public sphere as a female. He must constantly exist in a both/and space, a theoretical space discussed in Thirdspace, but also in theories like Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Coatlicue state: "Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* 68). This does not suggest that Bono can subsume women of color identities that Anzaldúa's work discusses, but the liminality of identity remains relevant to Bono's experience. Bhabha says that "newness" in culture does not shed the past, but instead the past and the present intersect: "The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (Bhabha 10). This suggests a consistent connection between the present and the past, a continuous connection that reaffirms each other. The past cannot be totally erased through the newness of the present because the present is always shaped by the past. In Bono's situation, he bears the residue of manhood and womanhood in the public view. This does not exist for every female to male transition man, but because of Bono's unique ethos, he cannot easily shed the public perception of female identity.

The documentary shows this tension between public perception and Bono's own personal view of his gender. Elia says that to cope with his depression, Bono would play video games and tune out of life. Oftentimes, Bono would create male avatars: "I think there is something about living in this virtual world when your body doesn't match how you feel" (*Being Chaz*). Bono says he would create avatars representing male physical qualities that he wanted to have, such as muscularity and height. The movie suggests that

Bono would hide in the video games because of his unhappiness, but now he plays them less because he is more comfortable with his body.

Even as Chaz has this private world of his video games, he cannot fully escape his public persona. After all, this private world has become a public discussion because Bono has allowed the public to see his transition through a documentary. Even these seemingly private discussions are public because they are being held in front of cameras. The choice of documenting his transition shows Bono's recognition of his public persona, but also shows his obligation to serve as an advocate for the LGBT community. In the interview where he announces his transition, Bono says: "I want to try to help people. I want to put a face on an issue that people don't understand" (*Being Chaz*). This advocacy has been a long part of Bono's public ethos. The movie notes that Cher asked him if he could be more private about the transition, but "That wasn't her plan" (*Being Chaz*). In fact, Bono says he has decided to care less about others' opinions.

Although Bono does not seem to care about his public perception, he recognizes that this is a privilege. Even before his transition, Bono has been a longtime advocate for LGBT causes. In the documentary, Bono's activist work is shown through his work with a group that provides support for parents of trans children. Bono works as an advocate to help others with their transition. The group focuses on parents because parents' acceptance of the transition provides a crucial support network for the children. While the documentary does not overtly state this, it is clear that Bono does not have the same parental support as many of the children in this group. As noted earlier, Cher has trouble changing to a male pronoun and has concerns about his long-term health on hormone

therapy (*Being Chaz*). Bono's father, Sonny Bono, was a conservative congressman before his death. A then-Chastity said about her father's death in 1998: "He was very supportive of my personal life and career and was a loving father. I will miss him greatly" (Galloway). Because of Sonny Bono's death, there is no way to know if he would have supported Bono's transition, but the documentary suggests that other family members think he would have. But Bono clearly feels a connection to his father, as when he received his legal name, he took his father's name, Salvatore, as his middle name.

In addition to any family acceptance issues, Bono has been open about his body dysphoria⁵⁷, particularly related to his body size. In the documentary, Bono discusses how his body remains in progress: "I definitely feel like I am still in the oven right now" (*Being Chaz*). He recognizes that his body may undergo many changes in the years to come, but hopes that "then it'll be just be like everyone else's life" (*Being Chaz*). One of those changes that Bono has undergone since the documentary is weight loss. Bono has lost 75 pounds, saying that he would have never been able to lose that weight pre-transition: "I was too disconnected from my body, and the dysphoria that I had with my body was too much to be able to have cared enough" (Agard). The key point that Bono makes here is that before his transition, Bono was disconnected from his body.

While Bono does not represent all trans people, his story shows the complications of feeling separated from the physical body. Because Bono felt his mind as separate from

⁵⁷ *The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* defines dysphoria as "A feeling of uneasiness, discomfort, anxiety, or anguish" (Colman "dysphoria"). Some psychology dictionaries also offer definitions for gender dysphoria, as a potential psychological disorder associated with Gender Identity Disorder, but this project will not address trans identities as a psychological issue.

his body, he did not feel a connection to that body and instead felt an anxiety that removed himself from his physical body. In Bono's mind he was a man, but his body did not match that mental perception. In the documentary, Bono says: "I'd like to be Michael Chiklis, body-wise. I'd like to keep my hair. But he's, you know, stocky, muscular. I'm never gonna be a little guy and I don't really want to be" (*Being Chaz*). The body that Bono envisioned for himself was never a small guy, but rather a "stocky, muscular" man. Even though Bono's fat body resisted normative expectations of the female body, he did not envision himself in the thin body standard for the female body. Instead, he envisioned a masculine, muscular frame. When he did not accept that finite gender category, he resisted his own body, forcing his body into resisting even normative female bodies. Bono viewed his fat body as a resistance to the thinness associated femininity. Even as a woman, Bono shifted his body into a liminal space where he could no longer be considered traditionally female even though his body presented as female.

To complicate matters further, Bono handled his transition while remaining in the public sphere. Even though transitioning remains a personal decision, there was always a public component to Bono's transition. Because of his longtime public persona, Bono was always going to have to share his transition publically, something that not every trans person has to experience. For example, when Bono was on *Dancing with the Stars*, he told interviewers that his role on the show helped broaden understandings about transgender identities: "And there's so many just completely inaccurate stereotypes and thoughts that people have" (Kenneally). Bono recognized the nature of his public persona and how that public persona could help others.

That does not mean that Bono thought the public would accept him. Bono worried that he would experience “active” hostility with a public transition, so he resisted medical treatment, but he realized he “needed a male body” (Wilson). That realization was one reason Bono decided to get top surgery. Bono still has not received bottom surgery because there are not reliable and effective surgeries for that transition (Wilson, *Being Chaz*). While some may criticize Bono by suggesting he still does not have “male” anatomy, Bono lives his life as a man, even deciding that in his acting career he will not play transgendered characters, saying: “I just don’t want to get pigeonholed in that” (Martinez). Bono does not rule out eventually playing a transgendered character, but instead wants to focus on establishing himself as an actor (Martinez).

Soon after his transition, Bono competed on Season 13 (fall 2011) of *Dancing with the Stars*. On the week Bono and partner Lacey Schwimmer performed the rhumba, a pre-weight loss Bono talks about being “happier than I have ever been” (Tracey “week 3”). The pair dance to Sonny Bono’s “Laugh at Me,” a song that Bono also listens to in the documentary. The song starts out with the lyrics: “Why can’t I, be like any guy?” Bono says the song is about “being a better man” and dedicates his performance to his dad (Tracey “week 3”). Even as Bono discusses his happiness, his performance shows a lack of embodied confidence. During the dance, Bono remains somewhat stiff with his partner mostly moving around him. Whether Bono remains uncomfortable with dancing, with being in the spotlight, or with his post-transition body, it is not entirely clear. His body does not comfortably shift into dancing mode. There remains a disconnect between

what Bono says about his happiness and how his body reacts to that. His dance does not suggest someone who is happy or comfortable with his body.

As the season continues. Bono begins to become more comfortable with his dancing, particularly after Schwimmer's father, Buddy, who is also a fat man and a dance instructor, offers some coaching to Bono. Schwimmer says: "I want him to see that big guys can shake it, too" (Tracey "week 5"). Buddy Schwimmer shows Chaz how to move his hips. Chaz says: "I totally can relate to Buddy. He's a big guy and if he can do all the stuff he does then I can certainly be doing it better than I'm doing it" (Tracey "week 5"). Bono acknowledges that the competition made him more open. In the samba performance, Bono shows more confidence in his performance, even doing a brief striptease. His movements are more fluid and he leads his partner rather than letting her just dance around him like in week 3. Bono credits part of this improved dance to recovery from injuries, but also says Buddy Schwimmer was an inspiration. After seeing an example of how a fat man can dance, Bono becomes more comfortable. Historian Sander Gilman says male obesity establishes limits on the male body because the body does not fit into what Judith Butler calls the "cultural form" of the body: "Clearly this notion of sculpting bodies into gender categories holds for the fat boy whose body is always imagined as a work in progress" (Gilman 239). Bono's body remains a work in progress through his transition and in the months and years after that transition. When offered an example of how masculinity can be performed in a fat body, Bono changed his embodiment to represent a new form of masculinity. After witnessing how fat bodies can

dance and move like everyone else, then Bono physically changes the way his body moves.

Again, Bono's relation to his body changes as the interpretation of that body changes. The week 3 Bono does not see his body as capable of dancing in the way that week 5 Bono sees his body. Bono's changed attitude toward what his body is capable of becomes represented in his physical performance. Gender theorist Gayle Salamon discusses how trans bodies can experience "a problematic slippage between the assertion of a felt sense of the body (which is surely necessary) and the consequent claim that what a body is and how it is assumed are self-evident things (which is not)" (Salamon 5-6). It is not as simple as asserting that one's mind does not match one's body. The real body of the transsexual provides a complicated existence between what someone feels, how someone looks, and additionally how that body becomes interpreted or read. Too often, there is little examination of how trans bodies live, how their embodiment functions in their own life. When Bono decides that he wants to live his "felt sense of the body," the previous intersecting internal and external views of his body do not easily slip away.

In addition to physically transforming his body, Bono also has to transform other people's interpretations of his body. Choosing to play only male parts offers one way of changing perceptions. Focusing on acting, Bono says he is fulfilling a longtime passion: "It's what I've always wanted to do. It's what I went to school for when I was younger" (Martinez). Bono said in 2012 that he he rekindled that passion for acting, focusing on character roles. Playing a character role, as opposed to a leading man role, allows the actor to transgress identities in different ways. Actors can pretend to be a broader range

of people when they focus on character parts. One of the examples of his acting work is a small role as Lot Polk/Brian Wells on the TV series *American Horror Story: Roanoke*.

Bono plays an actor who pretends to be a member of an incestuous, homicidal family. A longtime fan of the show, Bono lobbied for a part, using his connections to get examples of his work to producer Ryan Murphy (Martinez). The show plays with perspective and multiple narrators as part of the season is a documentary with a recreation of events and part of the season are events as they unfold. Bono plays an actor who is performing a part, so there is a multi-layered interpretation.

Bono has few lines in the series, leaving much of his performance up to physicality. The first glimpse of Bono comes in the first episode when he and his brothers attend a house auction. The brothers physically represent a stereotype of poor, ignorant, and resistant to outsiders. Bono's Lot has a belly and wears a beard, mustache, and dirty white tank top and glowers at the show's main characters ("Chapter 1"). Lot does not appear again until the third episode when he is among a group of people masturbating while watching another character having sex with a woman dressed as a deer ("Chapter 3"). By episode five, Lot and his family kidnap the main characters. Lot holds them at gunpoint, repeating what another man says and eventually killing an injured man on the table by beating him to death with a hammer ("Chapter 5"). By the end of the episode, Lot is briefly injured but recovers and recaptures the couple ("Chapter 5"). In episode six, the series makes a big shift as it turns out the previous episodes were actually a "reality" show with actors playing scenes from a real-life incident. In this episode, Bono has a small part, officiating the wedding between two of the previous show's actors ("Chapter

6”). Unlike the previous episodes, Bono’s Brian Wells wears a suit and dances and frolics with the couple. There is a physical shift in appearance between the actor and the character that Bono plays.

In this *American Horror Story* role, Bono’s physical performance pushes back against the liminality of his public identity. Lot Polk fully inhabits a masculine identity, with a beard and muscular frame. Much like Pratt borrows from Thirdspace to reaffirm normality, Bono borrows from Thirdspace to reinforce masculinity. The Firstspace would be Bono’s liminal body (he remains an in-transition body). Secondspace would be the masculine performance as Lot Polk. Thus, Thirdspace becomes a reinforced masculine identity placed on top of a liminal body. As Lot Polk, Bono inhabits masculinity, but also remains an actor portraying that masculinity. He is both an actor and the part he is playing. By portraying a male role, Bono may be trying to reinforce his identity as a man, transgressing his past as Chastity. In a sense, Bono resists the both/and aspects of his identity, embracing the man he has become.

The next chapter examines three more public bodies—those of Laverne Cox, Mindy Kaling, and Melissa McCarthy—through how ways challenge concepts of femininity through their embodied representations. Through Thirdspace theory, each of these actresses offers a more complicated understanding of femininity that challenges the stereotypes associated with femininity.

CHAPTER IV

BODIES AND FEMININITY

Just as the norm/other binary provides groundwork to establish male as normal, female becomes the binary other. Male functions as normal and the female becomes the other, always functioning outside of the realm of normal. But even this male/female binary limits, ignoring other forms of gender that do not fit into a binary. As the last chapter discussed, masculinity is assumed as normality, but even the normal occasionally transgresses normality to reformulate the normal. As an expected opposite, femininity always remains othered and can only function in normality when the female body fulfills its role as subservient to the normal male. The normal female body does not exist, but the female body must fulfill its role as variant to male to reaffirm masculinity. As Judith Butler points out, bodies perform expectations of gender through the performance of that gender “*on the surface of the body,*” but that performance does not necessarily represent a true gender (Butler, *Gender* 185). Rather, gender becomes an ontological expectation, but not an essential part of the physical body. Masculinity and femininity become expectations of the ontological imperative of gender rather than the actual gender of the person. Thus, there remains a conflict between expectations of gender performance and the internalized essential gender of the person. When cisgendered women perform gendered expectations, they fulfill normalized expectations of gender. When they do not, they transgress the expectations of gender. For example, in the last chapter, Chaz Bono

provides an example of the expectations of gender. Born female, Chastity Bono carried expectations of the feminine energy of her mother, Cher. As Chaz, Bono transgresses those expectations and develops his own version of masculinity.

While Chapter III addressed issues of masculinity and how it reaffirms and subverts normality, this chapter addresses femininity and how these public bodies subvert expectations of femininity. But what are those expectations? If following Butler's assertion, then femininity remains an ontological expectation that lacks corporeal meaning. In her theory, expectations of femininity act upon the body, and the body then performs those expectations. Gender expectations, particularly femininity, provide a guidepost for how one performs gender. Simone De Beauvoir discusses the way society constructs femininity as an opposite of masculinity: "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being" (De Beauvoir 5). As those who cannot be considered autonomous, women are considered weaker and must be guided by men. De Beauvoir also stresses that this lack of autonomy leads women to attempt their own forms of independence, but those forms remain contingent on the male world (De Beauvoir 638-639). Women are conditioned to function in a male world, thus even resistance to a male world functions within a sphere that men created: "And this is where the paradox of their situation comes in: they belong both to the male world and to a sphere in which this world is challenged; enclosed in this sphere, involved in the male world, they cannot peacefully establish themselves anywhere" (De Beauvoir 638-639). Because women exist within a space created by men, there is no respite from the influence of male dominance. Even resisting male influence

recognizes the power of male discourse.

The power of male discourse also implies the physical weakness of women, who need the strength of men to function. As two sides of a binary, the male represents strength and the female represents weakness. There is a constant connection between the feminine and the masculine as the masculine functions as the physical superior to the feminine. In a Foucauldian sense, these gender expectations provide the discipline to create docile bodies. Gender expectations provide the basis for the Panoptic gaze that controls bodies. Corporeal behaviors represent masculinity and femininity and the body performs those functions, basically self-disciplining itself. Thus, women consider themselves weak in comparison to men. To be feminine requires women to subject themselves to the control of men.

While expectations of normality certainly encourage the performance of gender, feminist scholarship has long resisted the expectations of these performances. Even Butler and Foucault discuss these forms of discipline to highlight the problem rather than reinforce expectations of normality. The forms of discipline that Butler and Foucault describe relate to the discourses surrounding gender. Discourse reinforces normality as well as establishes the other. Feminist scholars often point to men controlling the discourse and therefore having the ability to elevate masculine discourses and subordinate feminine discourses as weak and inferior. Feminist scholar Cheris Kramarae would say that women are muted by male superiority: “Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and norms for their use have been formulated by the

dominant group, men” (Kramarae 19). Traditionally, the discourse of women has been subjugated to a position of less relevance. Women have limited participation in male discourse and any female discourse becomes immediate inferior to male discourse. Thus, male discourse names the female as inferior and incapable of fully mastering the male discourse. French feminist Luce Irigaray points out how men have “have left us only absences, defects, negatives to name ourselves” (Irigaray 71). As the other to the male normal, women were not given language to define their own experiences, but instead must use the language established by men to define their experiences. Irigaray asserts that the language of men suggests that normal functions as the only true existence, but she subverts that expectation and suggests woman can create their own epistemological and ontological certainty. Instead Irigaray suggests women create their own language, or their own idea of what constitutes womanhood. She asserts that men perpetuate “sameness” and, in response to that sameness, women should recognize and celebrate difference (Irigaray 71). There is not one type of womanhood; instead we should also recognize a diverse view of being a woman.

Throughout these discourses, society constructs the woman as the automatic other to the man. The gender binary keeps two ends of the spectrum and ignores other intersections of marginalization that affect bodies. The female body must be controlled and maintained to represent that opposition to the male. By firmly asserting a male/female binary, those who do not fulfill either end of the spectrum remain marginalized even more. Sociologist Erving Goffman suggests that those who exist outside of normal (which he defines as a white, heterosexual, athletic male) face stigma.

Goffman resists a binary of stigmatized and non-stigmatized and instead suggests that everyone exists as both stigmatized and non-stigmatized: “The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives” (Goffman 163-164). The normal and stigmatized are not concrete, static guidelines, but rather change with culture. They are also perspectives that are directly linked with each other. You cannot have the stigma without the normal and vice versa.

While stigma and social conditioning address how women are limited, how does this translate into femininity? Through history, literature and media, femininity often functions across its own binary of the fallen woman or the pure woman. Nina Auerbach is a nineteenth century literature scholar, who discusses the fallen woman trope as a representation of Milton’s Eve (29). The Victorian fallen woman is often muted after she succumbs to a “sexual trespass” (Auerbach 30). The fallen woman serves as a reminder about the consequences of sexual promiscuity, that women face danger for engaging in sexuality. This fallen woman manifests from women’s bodies being dangerous for men, a trope going back to ancient times (Helen of Troy causing the Trojan War provides a perennial example). This ancient trope remains firmly in place even today as the woman’s body continues to be “dangerous to women and dangerous to men. The female body has been constructed to be so sexually powerful that it can overwhelm” (Orbach 141). Thus the sexuality of the female body must be muted, be controlled to avoid the danger inherent in its existence.

Greer Litton Fox asserts that three methods have been used to control women: confinement, protection, and normative restriction, the last of which associates with the

“good girl” (805). Confinement and protection both are about keeping women physically within spaces, such as confining one to the home or placing a woman constantly under the physical protection of a family member (805). The *normative restriction* Fox discusses is a “form of control over the social behavior of women is embodied in such value constructs as ‘good girl,’ ‘lady,’ or ‘nice girl.’ As a value construct the latter term connotes chaste, gentle, gracious, ingenuous, good, clean, kind, virtuous, noncontroversial, and above suspicion and reproach” (Fox 805, original emphasis). This “good girl” behavior represents an opposite of the fallen, sexually promiscuous woman. The “good girl” remains chaste and pure and the symbol of femininity. The “good girl” becomes the ideal to which all women are supposed to aspire. The “good girl” represents idealized femininity, one that is demure, sexually pure, attractive, and kind. Any transgression against this femininity places women outside of the sphere of normality.

Another form of control of women comes through the concept of hyper-femininity. Social psychologists Sarah K. Murnen and Donn Byrne defined hyper-femininity as a reaction to rape culture: “Hyperfemininity was defined as exaggerated adherence to a stereotypic feminine gender role” (480). Some of the hallmarks of this hyper-femininity would be a woman prioritizing a heterosexual relationship with a man, using her “sexuality to obtain the goal of relationship maintenance” and an expectation that men will be the aggressors in the relationship (Murnen and Byrne 480-481). Murnen and Byrne established a scale to examine hyper-femininity, using questions such as whether men should pay for dates, choosing a date over other relationships, and behavior designed to attract men (482-483). The questions on the scale offer a determination of the extent of

hyper-femininity. Building on this research, Melannie Matschiner and Murnen theorize that hyper-femininity reinforces the normality of male gender, which makes men seem more competent and women, in turn, “might adopt interpersonal behaviors that are less threatening in the presence of higher status individuals (such as men)” (632-633). The study showed that women and men placed less intellectual value on the hyper-feminine woman, but that men were more likely to want to date a hyper-feminine woman (Matschiner and Murnen 638-639).

The hyper-feminine woman presents a more sexually attractive option for heterosexual men. Their behaviors fit expectations for female sexuality in American culture. In a sense, the hyper-feminine woman works in connection with the Victorian fallen woman. They are both valued primarily for their sexual currency. For Victorian women that sexuality carried with it the danger of the fall. For the modern woman, the hyper-feminine woman represents a feminine ideal of sexuality, but one that is valued for little except that sexuality. The women featured in this chapter play within these feminine stereotypes and transgress femininity in different ways. Through these transgressions, they offer their own complicated forms of femininity.

Laverne Cox

Binaries, whether pure/fallen, male/female, masculine/feminine, or fat/thin, eliminate complicated identities. For example, the gender binary does not allow for non gender conforming, gender queer, multiple genders, or transgender identities. The adjectives of male or female are, as Gloria E. Anzaldúa says, limiting and cannot account for the myriad experiences or expressions by bodies. One example of a body that exists outside

the male/female binary is trans actress Laverne Cox⁵⁸, who subverts normality by playing with the conventions of normality. Cox rose to fame through her role as a transgender inmate in *Orange is the New Black*. As black trans woman, Cox embodies a complicated ethos that she often uses in activism, particularly in celebrating representations of trans people in social media with the hashtag #transisbeautiful (Chernikoff). This hashtag and her public performance of her body show Cox's complicated understanding of normality in our modern culture. On Cox's Tumblr page, she recognizes the privilege of being someone who was called "drop dead gorgeous" for her Time magazine cover, but also points out how the compliment is actually an affirmation of expectations of normality: "what I think they meant is that in certain lighting, at certain angles I am able to embody certain cisnormative beauty standards. (Cox "June 2 2015," unedited from original post). The key here is her use of "cisnormative," as Cox often embodies both cis normality but transgresses that normality through her trans body. This transgressive version of normality allows Cox to portray womanhood in more complicated ways than cisgendered women are often allowed. Cox continuously defines her experience as that of a woman, but recognizes that her body does not fulfill the cisgendered expectations of normality.

Instead, Cox often performs some aspects of cis-normality, particularly in her production of femininity. Outside of her character roles, Cox dresses in a manner that other cisfemale actresses are expected to dress. She wears dresses that flatter her breasts

⁵⁸ Laverne Cox also starred in a 2016 TV movie version of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show: Let's Do the Time Warp Again* as Frank-N-Furter, a "transvestite" character. This project will not address Cox's Frank-N-Furter performance, but further research could examine the complications of playing a transsexual woman playing a role originated by a man playing a "transsexual" character.

and curvy physique. Her long blond hair follows a long-running standard of Hollywood beauty⁵⁹. While Cox may dress in a heteronormative fashion, but because her body is not cis, her performance of those aspects of gender also challenge expectations of femininity. To put Cox's femininity in Butler's term, Cox's dress and "corporeal style" are "performative," suggesting that Cox establishes her femininity through the construction of her appearance (Butler, *Gender* 190). Butler asserts a "binding power" through performance" (Butler, "Critically Queer" 19). Cox's appearance performs expectations of Hollywood beauty and cis-body expectations, but remains firmly grounded in her trans identity. Cox knows that in order to be a successful actress that she must perform femininity.

Cox both performs femininity and her trans identity at the same time. In viewing images of Cox's female identity, we see Cox's identity as well as the identity that interpretations of cis gender place upon her. This does not mean to suggest that Cox is not a woman or does not feel as a woman. Rather the audience who sees images of Cox often knows that she was born a man but identifies as a woman. For the viewer, Cox remains in an interstitial space where her identity is a woman, but she remains forever born as a man⁶⁰. Cox performs what feminism scholar Katrina Roen calls a "both/and" trans identity (505). Through the ways Cox portrays femininity, she seems to understand the liminality of her gender as well as the limitations of the "good girl" form of

⁵⁹ From Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe to Reese Witherspoon and Charlize Theron, blondes are a long-established standard for Hollywood beauty.

⁶⁰ This does not suggest that gender identity is something that must be assigned at birth, but rather that our societal standard established gender based on certain physical characteristics at birth.

femininity. Fox points out that “good girl” femininity is an “*achieved* rather than an ascribed status” (809). Cox recognizes that she can never fully “achieve” this good girl status, but instead plays with the images of sexuality in her embodied liminality. For example, her stage name both suggests femininity and masculinity, by using a female first name and a last name that offers an alternative spelling of male genitalia. Even in her name, Cox recognizes she carries male and female identity expectations.

One of the reasons that Cox cannot fully embody the “good girl” status is because the good girl represents a white version of femininity. For black women⁶¹, stereotypes of femininity function through three stereotypes: “Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire” (Harris-Perry 33). The mammy represents a fat motherly type who is sexless while the Jezebel represents sexual promiscuity (Harris-Perry 33). The Sapphire is defined as: “The brash, independent, hostile black woman rarely shows vulnerability or empathy” (Harris-Perry 88). Cox’s embodied ethos does not directly address any of these stereotypes, instead she plays with the stereotypes in ways that subvert those stereotypes. While Cox’s body is thin, in her activism and support of other trans people, she serves the supportive role that could be associated with the Mammy stereotype, but Cox subverts that maternal mode by serving as an advocate not as a mother. Also, as one who is physically incapable of bearing children, Cox can never fully embrace a motherly stereotype. Through her

⁶¹ While there will be some discussion of race in this section on Cox, race provides a much more complicated identity category that will not be fully explicated in this project. Future work would offer a more in-depth analysis of the intersections of race, gender, size, and other modes of intersectionality.

clothing choices that represent sexual desire, Cox could be performing the Jezebel stereotype, but Cox's public persona does not suggest any sexual promiscuity.

As for the Sapphire stereotype, Cox does work as an advocate for trans rights, but does not embody the brash and invulnerable stereotype. Cox openly discusses her transition, making speeches across the country. For example, at a Haverford College speech in 2014, Cox delivered a speech⁶² entitled "Ain't I a Woman" (Cregan Zigler). The speech's title mimics the famous 19th Century speech by Sojourner Truth⁶³, who as a traveling speaker was also a public body. Truth often used her body in her speeches. One famous example was at a speech where Truth exposed her breast as a reminder to the audience that her body had been used to feed white children; her body was the site of slavery's effects (Painter 138-139). Truth erased implications that she was a man by showing both a site of her femininity and of her body's mark of slavery. So, in invoking Truth's words, Cox reminds us of the complicated identities that she inhabits as a trans woman.

While she doesn't expose her breasts in the way that Truth does, Cox uses her body to subvert expectations of femininity, while also maintaining femininity. This liminality is on particular display in a 2015 *Entertainment Weekly* cover story. On the cover image and in at least one image inside the issue, Cox dresses as the Statue of

⁶² In this article, Hannah Cregan Zigler reports that Cox's preferred pronouns are she/her.

⁶³ Although many scholars agree Truth gave a speech with a similar title at the May 1851 Akron, Ohio, Woman's Convention, the way we know the speech today comes through the written account of her speech by woman's rights advocate Frances Dana Gage (Gage, "Address" 4). The first known account of this speech was printed in the Salem, Ohio, *Anti-Slavery Bugle* in June 1851 by the paper's publisher Marius Robinson (Robinson).

Liberty in an article called “Lady LIBERATED” (Hay). Dressed as Lady Liberty, Cox simultaneously performs activism through traditional identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, size, and ability. While these photos affect those descriptions, they also transgress those descriptions. But the Statue of Liberty also represents the limitations of American freedom. As an icon of America, it also carries the weight of America’s marginalization and colonialism of bodies, including people of color as well as cisgendered women and transgender people. Thus, Cox challenges the concept of American freedom⁶⁴ and who in America has freedom. Cox’s body resists the capitalistic, or American ideals, of gender as well as race. In other words Cox turns the icon marked by gender into a more complicated icon marked by intersectional embodied identities. The interpretation of Cox’s body as a representation of cisgendered normality allows her to transgress that normality and reposition normality as complicated by individual subjectivity. To consider these images through a Thirdspace theory, start with Cox’s body, which would be Firstspace. The intersections of all of the meanings associated with Cox’s trans body and with the symbolic use of Lady Liberty would be Secondspace. Thirdspace considers the intersections between Cox’s body and the complicated interpretations of her body. Thirdspace highlights the multiple meanings that these photos place upon Cox’s body. Dressed as Lady Liberty Cox serves as a reminder of the freedom to celebrate her own identity but also the limitations that American culture imposed upon

⁶⁴ The U.S. Park Service website says: “‘The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World’ was a gift of friendship from the people of France to the United States and is recognized as a universal symbol of freedom and democracy” (“Statue of Liberty”). The statue is a woman and was based on the mother of the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi (“Frequently Asked Questions”).

her body. These photos of Cox represent an empowered trans identity as well as the longtime colonization of marginalized bodies. Thirdspace allows a way of looking at these photos that shows the transgression Cox enacts through using a symbol of Lady Liberty and placing her in a trans body.

Cox's body functions as an interstitial space where she was born a man, but her identity connects with womanhood. This conflict between the masculine and feminine identities she inhabits functions as an ongoing tension in her role as Sophia Burset in *Orange is the New Black*. The show's slant focuses each episode on a specific inmate providing both their current experiences and flashbacks showing pre-prison life. The slant tries to elicit empathy for the character's situations, oftentimes showing the difficult choices that women made before their convictions. The series features Sophia both as a post-transition inmate and in her pre-transition states in flashbacks. The pre-transition Sophia is played by Cox's identical twin, M Lamar, a decision that was based in part because director Jodie Foster did not think Cox could be "masculine" enough to play a pre-transition part (Buxton).

Foster directed the show's episode that explores Sophia's backstory as a firefighter named Marcus who stole the identities of fire victims to pay for his transition to become a woman. The episode transitions between a lot of pre- and post-transition images of Sophia. The first shows a pre-transition Sophia in a men's locker room and going into a stall wearing a pink bra and panties and then staring at his face in a mirror. This shot transitions to a post-transition Sophia in a prison issued tan bra and white panties putting on her makeup using items such as Kool-Aid. The episode makes it clear

that Sophia has medically transitioned when a fellow inmate Nikki says Sophia's "pole is a hole now," and when Piper walks in on Sophia in the toilet, Sophia says: "That's all right honey, you can look. I spent a lot of money for it" ("Lesbian Request Denied"). This bathroom scene establishes not only Sophia's surgical transition but also the care she puts into her appearance. In addition to her makeup, Sophia makes her own shower shoes from duct tape because the commissary does not make shoes in her size 13.

The episode also offers reminders that as a trans person and as a woman, her body faces the discipline relegating her to an other. One example is when the guard Pornstache sexually propositions Sophia and she turns him down. Even though minutes before, Pornstache calls Sophia a "different species," he says Sophia likely has a "Cyborg pussy" that is "fucking perfect" ("Lesbian Request Denied"). When asked by another guard if Pornstache would have sex with Sophia, he says: "I live in the present, not the past. Besides, she used to have a dick so she knows what it likes" ("Lesbian Request Denied"). As woman, Sophia falls prey to the same harassment and objectification that every other woman in the prison experiences. The female warden offers a reminder that Sophia's position as a trans woman places her in a unique position: "Why would anyone give up being a man? It's like getting the lottery and giving the ticket back" ("Lesbian Request Denied"). The warden's response shows that Sophia continues to be seen as a man and a woman at the same time. Even though Sophia identifies as a woman, the residue of manhood remains.

The inability for those around her to separate her female identity from her masculine identity becomes clearer as the prison decides to cut costs and changes

Sophia's hormone medicine. When she tells her prison counselor that the medicine changes will cause physical changes, including her hair growing back and night sweats, Sophia is told she cannot see a doctor unless it's an emergency, so she takes an ornament off the counselor's desk and swallows it. When she sees the doctor, he takes her off the pills, puts her on suicide watch even though she tells the doctor: "Look Doc, I need my dosage. I've given five years, \$80,000, and my freedom for this. I'm finally who I am supposed to be. Do you understand? I can't go back" ("Lesbian Request Denied"). Sophia clearly outlines the lengths she went through to become the person she is, but society rejects that and takes action to return her to a pre-transition mode.

Sophia's othered body becomes the site of a Foucauldian discipline. As a trans body, Sophia does not fulfill a docile body expectation. Therefore, her body becomes a site of resistance to normal. But this is not a Panoptic form of discipline (even though she is in a prison). Sophia does not succumb to the expectations of returning to masculinity. Sophia regulates her own body to fulfill expectations of femininity. The ritual where she puts on makeup wearing only her bra and panties shows how Sophia wants her body to be feminine. Sophia's adherence to femininity is also clear in her role as the head of the prison salon, where she does inmates' hair in trade for commissary items. She wants to be feminine so much that Sophia asks another inmate and her ex-wife to smuggle in hormones for her. When she realizes that her only option is to trade sexual favors with Pornstache to get hormones, Sophia decides to accept her fate and begins plucking the hairs growing on her chin ("Lesbian Request Denied"). Sophia performs feminine rituals, such as putting on her makeup, to reassert her womanhood. Butler says that gender

“(p)erformativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted” (Butler, “Critically Queer” 22). Sophia performs these rituals of womanhood to repeat the norms of womanhood. Sophia’s rituals become a performance of her gender, whether others recognize her gender or not.

In a later episode, Sophia’s experience in prison has completely changed her physical appearance. After an incident where Gloria questions Sophia’s womanhood, Sophia is sent to the Special Housing Unit (SHU), a form of solitary confinement. Sophia is told she is sent the SHU for her own protection. After months in the SHU, Sophia returns to the main prison population. Sophia no longer has access to her wig and is not wearing makeup. Additionally, a group of women are now selling drugs in her former salon (“The Animals”). The time in the SHU cost Sophia many of the aspects of femininity she relied on. Unlike in the previous episode, when Sophia sees herself in the mirror you can see the bandages on her wrists, suggesting a suicide attempt. When Sophia sees Gloria, she says: “Don’t make the mistake of thinking just ‘cause I look weak I am. Get the fuck out of my face” (“The Animals”). Sophia acknowledges that she gains strength from her physical appearance, but that is not the only place where she gains strength. Sophia will not easily bow down to the person who caused her to end up in her present physical condition. Eventually, Gloria becomes the person who helps Sophia brush out her wig and put it on (“The Animals”). Despite their differences, both Gloria and Sophia are part of a community: a community of others, a community of women of color, and a community of prisoners.

By playing a transsexual character, Cox complicates her own persona, particularly if you consider this through Thirdspace theory. In this analysis Firstspace would be Cox's physical body. Secondspace becomes Cox's interpretation of Sophia plus the various audience interpretations of Sophia. Thirdspace then becomes both Cox and the interpretations of the character of Sophia. As a trans woman playing a trans woman character, Cox's physical interpretation of Sophia complicates her identity. If Sophia were played by a cisgendered person, the interpretation could be different. The audience sees that Cox is playing a character who potentially has similar life experiences. That does not say that Cox and Sophia share the same life experience, but rather the audience can recognize that Cox understands the experience of being a trans person. Because of Cox's embodiment of transsexuality, the audience can get a more empathetic and complicated understanding of trans identities.

Cox's performance as Sophia provides an example of how she transgresses femininity through performance as a trans woman. Cox's performance as a non-trans character offers a slight contrast to the character of Sophia. Cox has a guest spot on *The Mindy Project* as Sheena, who is an aspiring stylist. Unlike Sophia, who performs rituals of femininity to fulfill expectations of embodied normality, Sheena is a hyper-feminine⁶⁵ woman who dresses in bold patterns and embraces her sexuality. Sheena helps Mindy deal with a lack of confidence with her pregnant body. When Mindy says confidence

⁶⁵ By hyper-femininity I mean a form of femininity that exaggerates the performance of femininity. I do not use hyper-femininity here to suggest an exaggerated performance of femininity because of Cox's trans identity. Rather that this form of femininity is a mode of behavior represented in culture. Another example of hyper-femininity could be the Elle Woods character early in *Legally Blonde*.

comes from within, Sheena says: “Within? Who the hell told you that? Confidence comes from amazing outfits and perfect makeup (“What to Expect”). Although it is played for laughs, Sheena recognizes an aspect of femininity and the expectations of women to fulfill beauty standards. This joke plays into what Naomi Wolf calls “beauty pornography,” which ties beauty to consumerism (Wolf 11). By making fun of these beauty myths, Cox’s character points out the problems with beauty pornography. As a hyper-feminine character, Sheena represents beauty confidence gone too far.

Despite her focus on beauty standards, Sheena does ultimately remind Mindy that her attitude provides a key component of beauty: “You look fine. It’s your attitude that’s terrible. Now we all have insecurities we need to get over. But you need to own it and be as confident and as beautiful as any other bitch in the room” (“What to Expect”). Sheena demonstrates how this confidence works by making several poses in front of the mirror saying, “bam,” while moving her hips and then moving toward the ground making animal sounds. During this action, she says “I’m owning it, owning it” and hisses (“What to Expect”). That confidence is the key to Sheena’s character. Sheena’s hyper-femininity ties directly to her confidence. Later in the episode, Sheena yells at Mindy’s boyfriend Danny about how he needs to make Mindy feel confident in her beauty: “You better make things right with Mindy or I will devastate your self-confidence” (“What to Expect”). Sheena shows the confidence to stand up against beauty standards perpetuated by men, but still dresses and performs femininity in her appearance.

Through her performance as Sheena, Cox highlights the problems and limitations with exaggerated forms of femininity. Again Firstspace becomes Cox and Secondspace

the interpretations of Sheena, including Cox's interpretation. Then Thirdspace again is the combination of those two elements. While Sophia shows the complications of being a trans woman, Sheena functions as a reminder of the ridiculousness of hyper-femininity. For example, Sheena's movements in front of the mirror show her confidence, but they are ridiculous bordering on farce. Cox physically embodies Sheena in a way that makes her hyper-femininity problematic. This serves as a reminder that Cox can never fully perform the rituals of hyper-femininity because she is not a ciswoman. This performance challenges the expectations of femininity because the performance of femininity exists in a non-normative body. The transgression shows the social expectations of femininity and how they are problematic. The real message of Sheena's character comes from her encouraging Mindy's confidence in her pregnant body. The real beauty that the episode promotes is in confidence no matter body size or shape.

Mindy Kaling

The Mindy Project often discusses the complicated expectations of women's bodies, using humor to mock beauty standards that women face. The show's creator and star Mindy Kaling often answers questions about body positivity when she does interviews and even addresses some of those issues in her book, *Why Not Me*. Kaling, an Indian-American woman⁶⁶ whose parents emigrated to the United States, recognizes the embodied expectations for famous women: "If someone told me that I was stupid or that I wasn't a leader, or that I wasn't witty or quick or perceptive, I'd be devastated. If

⁶⁶ This project focuses primarily on gender and size as area of analysis. Future analyses would further examine the intersection of race and how it affects the rhetorical analysis of Kaling's embodied ethos.

someone told me that I had a gross body, I'd say, 'Well, it's bringing me a lot of happiness.' Like, I'm having a fine time of it. Having my priorities aligned like that has helped me have a happier life, I think" (Hoby). Kaling resists the standards set for famous women and instead focuses on reliance of her wits. She recognizes as a famous woman of color that she is a role model for women and tries to "be a better person" to influence little girls (47-48).

In *Why Not Me?* Kaling mockingly addresses the expectations of being a famous woman, including having to smile when pictures may be taken because: "Nobody wants to hear that any aspect of my awesome life is bad. I get that" (44). Kaling knows that her photos and public activities are regularly open to the scrutiny of the public. She also addresses the ridiculousness of magazine's "Who Wore It Best" sections: "I can actually save the magazine editors behind 'Who Wore It Best?' some time. Here's the answer 100 percent of the time: it's always the more famous or classically beautiful woman!" (47). In this quote, Kaling shows how media often perpetuates beauty standards through discussions of fashion. She affirms what Sociologist Rosalind Chou says, which is that "'Beauty' is a normative value that is socially constructed" (Chou 77). Chou says beauty functions as site of patriarchal power, which encourages women's bodies to conform to beauty standards (77). Those standards often focus on white women, who represent the "classically beautiful woman."

In her book, Kaling admits to a complicated relationship with her body and how being on a television show has forced her to have a "stance" on her body (192). Through her discussion of body issues, Kaling remains vulnerable, confessing to trying to be body

positive and confessing: “I’m completely *not* at peace with how I look” (192, original emphasis). She goes on further to say: “My deep dark secret is that I absolutely *do* try to conform to normal standards of beauty. I am just not remotely successful at it” (Kaling 194, original emphasis). Through this discussion of body image issues, Kaling addresses experiences that women often experience, the conflict between how one’s body looks and how society says one’s body should look. In her discussion of the beauty myth, Naomi Wolf says that women experience a conflict between “female liberation and female beauty” (9). Even when women are successful in professional realms, they continue to feel the pressure to conform to beauty standards. Kaling offers an example of a successful woman who continues to feel that pressure to conform, and the pressure is even higher for a public body. As a role model, Kaling experiences this conflict to remain a positive role model, but also to conform to societal standards of thinness and beauty.

One way in which Kaling challenges these beauty standards is through her show *The Mindy Project*. The show’s title character plays with concepts of the “good girl” and hyper-femininity, often complicating the ways in which femininity is represented on television. The character of Mindy dresses in bright colors and is obsessed with celebrities and romantic comedies. She is also a successful obstetrician who throughout the show also opens her own fertility practice. Mindy represents standards of “good girl” femininity, being respectful of her parents, working hard, enjoying “girly” things like clothes and romance movies. Mindy also employs some hyper-femininity, focusing on her romantic relationships, embracing her sexuality as a means of gaining male companionship. Even though Mindy offers aspects of the good girl and hyper-femininity,

Mindy routinely exerts her own agency in her relationships and at work. Oftentimes, Mindy chooses the path that best suits her life even if it comes at the cost of her romantic relationships. As the show's creator, Kaling not only creates the character of Mindy, but she also creates the actor's interpretation of the character. Although she does not write every episode, Kaling has more influence on how the character functions than many of the other actors featured in this project. Through Mindy's character, Kaling creates a complicated woman who plays with aspects of femininity, but also subverts those aspects.

One example of this complicated exploration of femininity is the episode "Indian BBW," where Mindy has started secretly dating her fellow obstetrician Danny, but worries that the relationship may not get started when a sex tape from a previous relationship shows up. The episode begins with Mindy deciding not to have sex with Danny, saying: "Usually when I sleep with a guy we have gone on at least five dates or he has spent \$2,000 on me, whichever comes first" ("Indian BBW"). This quote plays with both the good girl and hyper-femininity stereotypes as she both suggests a committed relationship is necessary for sex, but also that a man spending money on her establishes her worth. Mindy even objectifies herself in another scene when she comes to Danny's office and says: "Good morning Danny, I brought your favorite breakfast, oatmeal with a side of brown sugar. And by brown sugar, I of course mean my butt" ("Indian BBW"). Using playful, flirty banter, Mindy turns a body part (her butt) into an object (brown sugar) in a sexually suggestive way. She suggests that her body is an object for sexual pleasure, particularly Danny's sexual pleasure. Even though she makes a joke

about her body being used for sexual pleasure, the camera position does not coincide with that suggestion. In a medium shot, Mindy is seen fully clothed walking into an office. The camera does not linger on her body, but instead shows her completing an everyday task of walking into work and going into an office. While Mindy makes a sexual joke, the scene does not evoke sexual action. But the character does play into expectations of male pleasure. The episode also features a sex tape where Mindy dresses as a young girl selling cookies door to door. Also, Danny tells his brother Richie that Mindy enjoys sex: “She’s no prude. I’ve seen her number on two different bathroom walls in her own handwriting” (“Indian BBW”). Danny thinks she is not having sex with him because she does not like him. In actuality, Mindy chooses to wait on sex with Danny because she likes him and wants to take the relationship slow to make sure it is right.

Mindy’s sexual exploits turn out to be related to her desire for a committed relationship with a man. Even her sex tape was with a man she had a relationship with. In this exploration of Mindy’s sexuality and her availability to men, she plays with stereotypes about Asian women. Chou says: “Asian American women have consistently been constructed as sexually available to white men” (Chou 9). Generally, the women are of “East Asian descent,” whereas, there has been “very little representation of women of South or Southeast Asian descent. South Asian women are often invisible or lack sexuality” (Chou 11). By making Mindy a woman comfortable with her sexuality, Kaling challenges traditional models of sexuality for Asian women. Additionally, Mindy may open herself to sexual relationships, but she focuses on relationships and not just being

sexually available to all men like other Asian stereotypes suggest. By being comfortable in her own sexuality, Mindy challenges expectations of sexuality in Asian women.

The “Indian BBW” episode discusses body standards for women, as the episode’s title suggests. When Mindy goes to the porn site Sploders.com to ask them to take down her sex tape, they point out the “growing market for Indian BBWs” (“Indian BBW”). Mindy doesn’t know what BBW stands for and asks: “Is it like brainy, birdlike wife material?” (“Indian BBW”). When she finds out it actually means big, beautiful woman, she gets angry and says: “Are you kidding me? Look at these wrists, look at how dainty they are. They can barely hold up the enormous calzones that I eat” (“Indian BBW”). This statement shows how Mindy sees her body as thin even as others fat shame her. Kaling plays with size expectations for women, expectations that often shift and are based on specific perspectives. Susan Bordo points out that: “Female slenderness, for example, has a wide range of sometimes contradictory meanings in contemporary representations, the imagery of the slender body suggesting powerlessness and contraction of female social space in one context, autonomy and freedom in the next” (Bordo 26). In this episode, Mindy recognizes that the thin body is the ideal, but she also acknowledges that she eats how she wants to eat. In this example, the thin ideal represents a type of autonomy or freedom for Mindy, but there is also an acknowledgment of the value associated with thinness. Mindy sees how thin bodies are more valued and how this sex tape offers an exploitation of her body.

Thin standards for bodies also affect Mindy’s perception in a season three episode where Mindy is pregnant and starts having body confidence issues. Early in the episode,

Mindy is sad that her clothes do not fit because of her pregnancy and Mindy calls herself fat: “This is the fattest I’ve been. And that’s coming from a girl who in middle school had a chocolate fountain in her bedroom.” (“What to Expect”). When Danny tells her she has a glow, she gets upset and says the glow is made up: “And do not call me radiant. If one more person calls me frickin’ radiant, I’m gonna kill someone. ... This isn’t a glow. This is sweat from exertion from trying to pull these jeans over my fat ass” (“What to Expect”). Lacking body confidence, Mindy does not want to have sex with Danny and seeks help from Sheena (played by Laverne Cox and described above). After getting a makeover, Mindy wears a skin-tight body suit in animal print and tells Danny: “I have a little surprise for you. I’ll give you a hint. It’s curvy, soft, brown, but it’s not a chocolate Santa” (“What to Expect”). When Danny laughs at her, she becomes angry and frustrated about her size. Through a coworker’s problem, Mindy realizes that she should appreciate her own body by the end of the episode. She tells Danny: “I realized the only person who can make you feel better about yourself is yourself” (“What to Expect”). Danny tells her that the thing he finds most beautiful about her is her confidence. To that Mindy responds: “Well, I’m not gonna say that I’m prettier than Gisele, but there is a quality in my face that I think is kind of more appealing” (“What to Expect”). Mindy returns to a confidence in her appearance that again associated her with the thin standards of beauty embodied by supermodels like Gisele Bündchen.

While it can seem like there is a perpetuation of female standards for sexuality and beauty, Thirdspace theory shows how these episodes complicate Kaling’s identity and actually challenge female body standards. The Firstspace in these episodes would be

Kaling's embodied self while the Secondspace would be the perceptions of Mindy as fat as well as Kaling's portrayal of Mindy. Through Thirdspace, Kaling's body and the perceptions of her body come together. As an actress, Kaling recognizes the perceptions and expectations of her body. Mindy's character plays with these perceptions by acknowledging them and reformulating them into a form of confidence.

While some perceive her as a "big, beautiful woman," Mindy sees herself as thin or as normal by society's standards. In the BBW episode, Mindy does not see anything wrong with her appearance and celebrates eating what she wants as well. While this could be perceived as some by a delusion about her body, the reality is that Mindy is not fat, just perceived as fat by societal standards that endorse thinness. To counteract that, Mindy describes herself as dainty, a trait associated with femininity. Mindy's self acceptance of her body is challenged in the pregnancy episode, but by the end of the episode, she again recognizes her own physical beauty and resists societal standards that place her body outside of the norm. While society establishes a set of rules for Mindy's body, she resists those rules and embraces her own shape.

In addition to playing with conventions of size, *The Mindy Project* challenges conventions of romantic comedies. First, romantic comedies generally do not have a woman of color, particularly a woman who is averaged size and not thin, as the lead. As Chou points out, generally South Asian women are depicted as "sexless" (Chou 148). Not only does the character Mindy resist sexless stereotypes, Mindy actually enjoys sex and routinely discusses her sexual prowess. Additionally, the standard trope of boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses girl gets flipped around in the show, where it is more like Mindy

meets boy, Mindy dates boy, Mindy chooses her own strength and decides to end relationship with the boy. Additionally, the show flips a stereotype of Asian women's sexual availability to white men: "[T]here is a long history of high rates of interracial marriages, especially between Asian women and white men" (Chou 139). While Mindy routinely has relationships with white men, rarely are those men attracted to her for a solely orientalist fascination with the exotic. The relationships often form through her professional associations. Also, Mindy does not sacrifice the things she wants solely to fulfill the desires of the white men she dates. She makes compromises but ultimately chooses what she wants rather than falling into a good girl trap where she sacrifices herself for the betterment of the men in her life.

One major example of this subversion of romantic comedy tropes in the show is Mindy's relationship with her co-worker Danny. The relationship maintains a traditional TV sitcom "will they or won't they" trope, where they clearly like each other, but they do not become a couple due to a series of circumstances. The will they or won't they trope comes to a culmination in the season two finale "Danny and Mindy," where the two become a couple. At the beginning of the episode, Mindy gives a flirtatious look to a fellow subway passenger. Her friend Peter accuses Mindy of "eye-banging" the man and Danny chastises her for flirting:

Danny: "Nice girls don't make eyes with guys on the subway."

Mindy: "So you admit I'm a nice girl."

Danny: "No, but you should know what nice girls do so you can try to be more like them."

Peter: “How would you feel if all the guys in here were eye banging you?”

Mindy: “I’d love it” (“Danny and Mindy”).

Through this exchange, Mindy’s sexual confidence plays off against the nice girl idea, which is just a rewording of the good girl standard. Good girls should not flirt with men on the subway, but Mindy does not follow that good girl rule. Even so, Danny reminds Mindy how good girls are supposed to act, but Mindy resists that good girl label and instead acknowledges her own sexuality.

This scene also plays with the concept of the male and female gaze. Mindy initiates flirtation through her gaze of a man on the subway. The male gaze makes the woman the object of male desire (Mulvey). Instead Mindy makes the other man on the subway an object of her desire. When the male characters challenge that and ask if she would like to be treated like an object of desire, she says, yes. Mindy equalizes the gaze, suggesting that both women and men can recognize their sexuality through their gazes. An equalization of the gaze could associate more closely with what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls beholding: “A stare is a response to someone’s distinctiveness, and a staring exchange can thus beget mutual recognition, however fleeting” (“Beholding” 199). Conversely, an “unethical stare” does not see the humanity of another; rather an unethical stare objectifies the person involved in the stare (Garland Thomson, “Beholding” 200). When Mindy views the man on the subway, she envisions a mutual recognition, a sharing of human contact, rather than just a fleeting objectifying gaze.

Mindy sees the stare as mutual recognition because she seeks out relationships and not just sexual encounters. While Mindy is comfortable in her sexuality, this desire

for romantic relationships in which she can explore that sexuality show how she changes up the good girl paradigm. Mindy is a good girl who is unafraid to express her sexual desires with her partner. When her police officer boyfriend leaves her house in the morning, she says: “I hate to see you leave, but I love to look at that butt” (“Danny and Mindy”). She objectifies her boyfriend for her own pleasure, turning the tables on traditional femininity. After all, good girls don’t praise their boyfriends’ butts.

While Mindy’s sexuality subverts traditional romantic comedy tropes, the rest of the episode mimics traditional romantic comedies like *When Harry Met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle*. In fact, in one scene, they watch *When Harry Met Sally*. Danny pretends to be the man on the subway to encourage Mindy to meet him at the Empire State Building for a romantic encounter. When Danny gets scared and does not meet her, Mindy thinks the man on the subway is a stranger and turns to Danny for friendship. In a scene that mirrors *When Harry Met Sally*, Danny and Mindy are seen in a “traditional” getting to know each other montage throughout New York. Mindy finds out Danny was secretly sent her the message and that he stood her up at the Empire State Building. Danny says he was trying to be romantic, and Mindy responds with “that’s the stupidest thing I have ever heard” (“Danny and Mindy”). Mindy’s obsession becomes challenged through this interaction. When Danny performs like he is in a romantic comedy, Mindy calls it stupid. This line recognizes the innate problems with the romantic comedy. Silly misunderstandings that keep people from connecting with each other and far-fetched romantic gestures are not the stuff of true romance. Instead, the show highlights the

inadequacies of these romantic gestures and suggests the real connection comes through love.

Also, Mindy refuses to be manipulated by Danny's conventions. She chooses to protect herself from the societal conventions that tell her that she should respond to grand romantic gestures. When Danny tells her he loves her, she responds: "I don't believe you because you love me until you don't" ("Danny and Mindy"). When he asks her to meet him again at the Empire State Building, she says can't go: "because I have plans to not be the stupidest person in the world" ("Danny and Mindy"). In these statements, Mindy stands up for herself and recognizes that she needs to protect herself. She won't be a tool for Danny's romantic gestures. She extends her own agency and refuses to fall prey to societal expectations of love. Not until her coworkers show Mindy that Danny truly loves her does she consider meeting him. The episode ends in a montage where both show physical exertion to meet each other, with Danny running to the building and Mindy having to climb the stairs to reach the top of the Empire State Building ("Danny and Mindy"). They both made a physical sacrifice to reach each other (Danny even is briefly hit by a car). They subject their bodies to physical exertion as a way to earn their relationship. Without that physical exertion, neither would have been worthy of the other.

To examine this episode through Thirdspace theory, again Kaling's body would be Firstspace, and her interpretation of the romantic comedy genre as well as the characterization of Mindy would be Secondspace. Thirdspace becomes how Kaling embodies the romantic comedy genre and the characterization. Through these performances, Kaling subverts romantic comedy conventions that are at play because

those conventions do not match the reality of a relationship. Through their physical exertion, both Mindy and Danny show that sacrifice is part of relationships. They give a physical part of themselves to the relationship, which is seemingly worth it, but the falsities of romantic comedy tropes ignore the complexities of that sacrifice. Romantic gestures are nice, but the real work comes through each person coming to each other through love and respect. A romantic gesture cannot replace romance, as the real romance is finding a partner who loves you for your foibles.

In season four, Mindy and Danny have a son together and Mindy begins to challenge the conventions of traditional motherhood. When they return home from the hospital, Danny expects Mindy to stay at home and he has removed all forms of electronic entertainment. He does leave her with some books, and she begins to read “Jack Sprat” from Mother Goose to her son Leo and says: “Okay, this is hitting a little too close to home” (“Leo Castellano”). This nursery rhyme joke fits the relationship between Danny, a fitness obsessive, and Mindy, who routinely enjoys a morning bear claw. The joke also serves as a reminder about how Mindy does not fit the conventional notions of embodied beauty, as she is not thin. As a contrast in this episode, Mindy and Danny get in a conflict with their neighbor Chelsea who is having noisy sex next door. Chelsea serves as a reminder of single life versus the committed relationship that Mindy and Danny share (although they never get married). The contrast could simply represent traditional notions of the good girl vs. the fallen woman, but Kaling makes the story more complex. When Chelsea complains that she was slut shamed by Mindy and Danny and that she really just wants to be in a relationship, Mindy says: “I thought you were slutty

for modern female empowerment reasons not for old-fashioned sad ones” (“Danny and Mindy”). Mindy acknowledges that women can be sexually empowered and not limited to societal conventions. This also begins to empower Mindy as Danny has been controlling of their lives since Leo came home from the hospital. By the end of the episode, Mindy stands up and tells Danny that he needs to allow her to be the mother that she wants to be.

This episode offers complicated examinations of women’s roles, from the empowered single woman to the empowered mother. Thirdspace theory focused on embodiment complicates motherhood even further. Firstspace would be Kaling’s body and Secondspace would be the interpretation of motherhood and the interpretation of the character of Mindy. Thirdspace becomes both Kaling’s body and the interpretations which are complicated because Kaling is portraying a pregnant woman but is not pregnant herself in this story arc. Kaling puts on the physical performance of pregnancy to challenge notions of motherhood. The storyline plays with the expectations of womanhood (such as put motherhood first and being sexually promiscuous). Chelsea asserts her sexuality but receives shame for it. Mindy gets shamed when she does not behave like a mother is supposed to behave. But by the end of the episode, both of these women reject shame and make their own choices. The episode suggests that women have the power to have sex or be a mother in any way they see fit. Kaling subverts the expectation of women’s roles by showing that women can function in more complicated ways.

Through the show, Kaling subverts stereotypes associated with Asian women as well as the tropes of romantic comedy genres. Mindy fulfills some aspects of the model minority as a successful doctor. But she also resists those stereotypes through divergent interests, such as being a successful doctor, who also loves celebrity culture and remains ignorant of many world issues. She is successful, but often shows how she does not manage her finances well. Thus, she is both the model minority and the non-model minority. As for the stereotypes of women, such as the good girl, Mindy is both the good girl and the bad girl, the model minority⁶⁷ and one who challenges Asian stereotypes. Through the character of Mindy, Kaling mixes these stereotypes and shows Mindy as a both/and character. Mindy is both the good girl and the bad girl. She seeks out heteronormative romantic relationships, often with white men. In these relationships, Mindy tries to assume normality and fulfill stereotypes in which Asian woman are sexually available to white men. At the same time, Mindy asserts her own sexual desire and exudes a confidence that resists good girl stereotypes. She does not shrink into the background as mere support for the men in her life. She actively seeks romantic relationships and shows sexual desire. Mindy does not fit neatly into the good girl or the fallen woman stereotypes. She actually exists in both.

⁶⁷ “A mass ‘intellectual migration’ began in the 1950s, bringing highly educated and skilled middle- to upper-class East and South Asians to the United States for work in professional industries. East and South Asian Americans are often deemed ‘model minorities’ and have higher household incomes than all other racial groups, including whites” (Chou 19).

Basically, Mindy and the show *The Mindy Project* celebrate the both/and. Mindy does not fit into neatly conformed stereotypes. Neither does the show's romantic comedy plotlines. While the show often offers romantic resolution in specific episodes, such as Danny and Mindy coming together in a *Sleepless in Seattle* homage in the season two finale, rarely do these resolutions create happy endings. An episode may end like a romantic comedy, but the next episode shows the realities of these relationships. Even the Danny and Mindy plotline ends with Mindy deciding to leave Danny because of his controlling behavior. Mindy may want the romantic comedy ending, but she always chooses her own happiness over giving into romantic comedy tropes. In this way, the show both celebrates and criticizes the romantic comedy genre. Kaling recognizes the emotional impact of the romantic comedy, but also points out how the romantic comedy does not represent reality. There are fanciful highs in the show, but it always comes back to a more realistic place in which Mindy stands up for her own desires and needs.

Through this playing with stereotypes, Kaling challenges normality and recognizes a more complicated view of the human experience. She intervenes in normality and resists the expectations associated with normality. As a woman in a non-normative body, Kaling provides a viewpoint that acknowledges the complication of normality. She provides a guidepost for how to resist the expectations of normality by taking the conventions of normality and shifting them to a different view of normality. Kaling shows the limitations of normality and provides guidance for how to subvert normality. In this sense, Kaling and Melissa McCarthy are alike. They both use comedy

as a means of challenging the expectations of normality. They provide guidance for how to intervene and resist normality.

Melissa McCarthy

While McCarthy relies on comedy for subversion, she creates a persona that encompasses both her comedic chops and her business sense. After her breakout supporting role in *Bridesmaids*, McCarthy transitioned into a leading actress, a producer, and a plus clothing designer. Additionally, McCarthy's body size has made her a target for celebrity magazines, including celebrating her weight loss. Not giving specifics, McCarthy says that she lost weight and could possibly gain weight again and criticized the questions about her weight: "There are so many more intriguing things about women than their butt or their this or their that. It can't be the first question every time, or a question at all" (M. Haas). In this statement, McCarthy points out the body standards for women differ from those of men. Female celebrities are routinely asked about their bodies, while male celebrities do not necessarily face the same scrutiny.

Her resistance to these standards is one reason why McCarthy has been praised for her body positivity. Another reason is her clothing line, which focuses on plus size clothing. Writing about her own fashion line, McCarthy says as a woman who has shifted body sizes through her life, she supports women of all shapes and sizes: "I've never understood why women above a certain size are treated so differently. I say thank God we come in all different shapes, sizes, colors and personalities—how boring would it be if all women really were as homogenized as those ad campaigns told us we should be?" (McCarthy and Coyne 96-99). She stresses that she wants her fashion line to be for

women of multiple sizes and not limited to the categories created by the fashion industry (99).

McCarthy challenges body standards not only through her clothing line, but also through the parts she plays. Often playing the comedic role, McCarthy routinely changes her appearance to fit the characters she creates: “When I read a character that I really, really love, I know immediately what they look like. ... It’s like I want to 100 percent become that person” (Jordan, Nelson, Cagle, Coyne 51). She often dons wigs, wears prosthetics, and character specific clothing to embody the characters she portrays. Her comedy also often relies on physical actions, not just pratfalls, but characters who embody a specific physicality. One example would be Susan Cooper in *Spy*, who McCarthy says she wanted to play because of the character’s “heart”: “I tend to really love a character who means well and maybe doesn’t have the greatest follow-through” (Jordan, Nelson, Cagle, Coyne 49). For *Spy*, McCarthy said she knew how to physically embody the character, including the wig that she credits with drawing out the character: “I’m the idiot that’s always like, ‘Can I look even worse? Please?’” (Jordan, Nelson, Cagle, Coyne 49). While McCarthy describes this as looking worse, really McCarthy is willing to subject her body to changes in appearance to fuel the comedy.

McCarthy’s comedy remains subversive in part because she is willing to physically change her appearance for the sake of the characterization. There is a recognition that physical appearance can be shifted for different situations. She also recognizes that specific physical characteristics elicit emotional responses from the audience. A wig conveys the comedic approach to a character because the wig elicits the

laughs that McCarthy seeks. While McCarthy could just use these physical attributes for comedy alone, she actually uses her embodied performances to subvert the gendered and size expectations. Her characters often play with masculine energy through aggressive behavior and often do not address her body size. In *Spy*, McCarthy subverts the spy genre by suggesting a fat woman could be a spy. In *The Boss*, McCarthy provides a complicated portrayal of a woman who is head of a multimillion-dollar corporation. In both, she plays with aggressive characteristics, thus playing femininity in new ways.

In *Spy*, McCarthy's Susan Cooper transforms from a passive office worker to a powerful and effective field agent. At the beginning of the movie, Susan Cooper serves as an assistant to field agent Bradley Fine, a James Bond-esque spy. The movie establishes early that Cooper remains the calm and competent person in their relationship as she guides him through the entire process of finding Fine's target. The camera flips back and forth between Fine in the field and Susan in an office where a animal infestation manifests. Once Fine finds his target, he sneezes and accidentally kills the man who he was trying to get information from. Susan blames herself for this death because she did not tell Fine about the allergy medicine she placed in his jacket pocket. Susan guides Fine to an escape from this compound, all the while dealing with a massive bat infestation in her office. All the while, Susan clearly has a crush on Fine, who manipulates the crush by calling her "my girl" and praising her "beautiful voice" (*Spy*). Susan eventually saves Fine with a drone strike. The scene shows the differences between the two, as Fine acts and Susan works a seemingly passive observer. The cuts back and forth between Susan and Fine stress Susan's inaction, but it also challenges them as well. While Fine may be

in the middle of the action, he cannot succeed in his mission without Susan's help. Fine flirts with Susan to help cover his own incompetence. For example, after the mission Fine asks Susan to complete some errands for him, including firing his gardener. Fine asks Susan to complete a task he does not want to do. Susan cannot fire the gardener and instead mows the grass, saying: "You're a killer Susan" (*Spy*). This introduction to Susan establishes her competency, but she remains passive and prone to the whims of a male, whom she views as superior.

Susan retains a passive role in her life, fulfilling the expectations of femininity as support for a male superior. But because Susan does not fit the physical aspects of normative femininity, particularly being thin and young. Susan dresses conservatively, wearing cardigans and slacks while wearing reddish blonde hair. Susan is placed into contrast with the successful female spy, Karen Walker, who is thin and well dressed. When Susan and Karen are in a bar together, the bartender refuses to acknowledge Susan, but comes to Karen's attention without Karen even seeking it (*Spy*). The contrast highlights the difference between Susan and the spies. Susan is not glamorous or traditionally beautiful, so she does not think that she fits into the spy mold. Additionally, Fine treats Susan as asexual, flirting slightly with her to get his way, but desexualizing her with gifts like a huge cupcake necklace. After giving this gift, Fine jokes that she could never be a spy. Susan laughs along and agrees (*Spy*).

While the Susan in the beginning of the movie fulfills feminine expectations of weakness, the Susan who heads out into the field as a spy transgresses the expectations of women and instead takes on the strength often associated with masculinity. But because

she is a woman in a male world, Susan is put through some humiliations before she discovers her own identity. On her first mission, Susan and her friend Nancy discuss what their spy names could be, which emulates a game where people determine their porn names (pet names combined with street names). This joke about name choices shows how spies, particularly women in spy movies, are sexualized and devalued. But Susan does not become sexualized, her bosses choose Susan's undercover name, Carol, even though her undercover name matches the name of Susan's childhood bully. Additionally, Susan's undercover disguise is a de-sexualized mom who is given weapons disguised as Anti-fungal spray, stool softeners and hemorrhoid wipes. When she dresses in her undercover outfit, Susan describes herself as a "homophobic aunt" (*Spy*). The initial spy persona created for Susan shows the total lack of agency in her life. Susan remains subjected to the male standards of becoming a spy and lacks control over her own experience.

Despite this lack of control, Susan remains the only person capable of doing the spy work that needs done. With Fine killed on Susan's watch, Susan volunteers to step into the field. Susan as a spy receives direct resistance from fellow agent Rick Ford, who represents an over-the-top version of hegemonic masculinity. When Ford and Susan meet in a hotel room on her first mission, Ford tells Susan that he is the only one capable of handling this mission. Ford gives a series of ridiculous examples of how tough he is, including saying he once ripped off his arm and reattaching it by using his other arm (*Spy*). Ford believes he is invincible and continually interrupts and causes problems in Susan's mission. In another meeting, Ford insists "nothing kills me," but quickly falls

prey to a switched backpack carrying a bomb (*Spy*). Susan prevents the explosion and chases down one of the people who switched the bags. Although she seems beat by the man, Susan actually beats up the man, who falls to his death.

Susan then takes on another persona, that of a woman with 10 cats, to travel to Rome. At the airport, dressed in her cat lady persona, Susan sees other women catcalled by men while they ignore her. When picked up by her contact, Aldo, he sexually harasses her, making lewd sexual comments and grabbing her behind. After being dropped off by Aldo, Susan realizes that she needs to change her look if she is going to get close to Rayna, the woman the agency suspects has a bomb. Susan drops the cat lady persona and instead opts to wear a black full-length trenchcoat dress that shows the shape of her body. Once she changes clothes, Susan gets catcalled. After her transformation, Susan makes a connection with Rayna, who makes fun of Susan's clothing choices and says Susan reminds Rayna of a sad clown (*Spy*). In fact, Rayna continues to make fun of Susan and Susan says nothing back.

An assassination attempt on Rayna on a private jet leads Susan to change her attitude. After rescuing Rayna, Susan takes over claiming to be a private bodyguard and she starts insulting Rayna in return. Additionally, Susan takes over flying the plane remembering the controls from an eidetic memory. Through the rescue of Rayna and taking control of the situation, Susan shows mental and physical competence. Susan seems to be a step ahead of most of the people she encounters, outsmarting them or being able to physically harm them. Once she changed her appearance, Susan became intolerant of the insults and limitations placed upon her by men. In the casino where she met Rayna,

Susan confronts Ford and his ridiculous claims at masculinity. After rescuing Rayna on the plane, Susan emasculates and physically overcomes Rayna's male bodyguard, whom she describes as "a reject from the Sound of Music" before taking his trenchcoat and turning it into a dress (*Spy*). While it may seem like an innocuous choice, trenchcoats are a genderless clothing option. Twice Susan wears clothing that does not necessarily assign gender, but because she is a woman they are presented as feminine. Her black dress looks like a trenchcoat and is mocked by Rayna. For her next outfit, Susan literally takes the clothes of a man and reformulates them to fit her female physique. In the trenchcoat clothing Susan performs as both male and female, not falling into limitations of either gender.

While Susan challenges expectations of what it means to be a spy, she still is subjected to a series of humiliations. During a high-speed chase, she must use a moped. When she makes a jump in the moped and screams "I am so badass," she falls into a pile of wet cement and must slowly drive out of it. Susan literally has to drive through muck to accomplish her task, which offers a symbolic representation of the limitations placed upon her. Later in the movie, a captured Susan must work with Aldo to untie their bonds. Aldo places himself in a sexual position and gratifies himself while untying Susan. Recognizing her humiliation, Susan says: "I was having such an empowering moment before this started" (*Spy*). The series of humiliations Susan faces shows she does not represent a normative version of a spy. As a fat woman, Susan does not fulfill male or female expectations of being a spy.

Despite not fulfilling the expectations of being a spy, Susan creates a new space for her type of spy. Using comedy, McCarthy's performance provides a complicated way of examining cultural norms. Susan Cooper is a fat woman who remains a capable action hero; two intersections that resist normality. Susan represents a character that has been commonplace, but often ignored, according to gender scholar Jack Halberstam: "(W)hat we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies" (Halberstam 2). McCarthy's character of Susan performs heroic masculinity, not only in a female body but also in a fat body. Communications studies scholar Kathleen LeBesco stresses how fat bodies often are marginalized and considered less important: "Within the context of a consumer market economy, female bodies are differentiated from each other simply to augment market potential. Fatness is an especially important signifier in this process of demarcation" (LeBesco 57). Susan's fat body becomes marked as other, as incapable of handling the demands of spies, who are traditionally male and thin. By creating a successful spy in a non-normative body, McCarthy creates a character that subverts normality.

Thirdspace theory can highlight how Susan's character affects the persona of McCarthy. Firstspace would be McCarthy's physical form and Secondspace would be her interpretation of Susan as well as the audiences' interpretation of Susan. Thirdspace then becomes both the McCarthy and the interpretations of the character. McCarthy creates a character who successfully accomplishes spy work in a body not normally associated with that spy work. Susan's capability becomes an important subversion to normality. Other clearly see her as a "cat lady" stereotype, but Susan remains capable throughout the

movie, often accomplishing what others in her position do not, such as befriending and infiltrating Rayna's life. Susan overcomes these perceptions and proves her worthiness as a spy. By the end of the movie, her boss praises her work and sends her out on new missions. Susan carries the residue of the limitations that other place on her, but chooses to resist those limitations and achieve her goal of being a spy. McCarthy establishes a character who challenges conventionality and in turn shows her strength as a movie actress. Essentially, McCarthy proves that a fat woman can be the lead of an action movie.

While characters like Susan represent a subversion of normality, there is also an underlying anger that feeds into many of McCarthy's characters. When Susan goes into action mode, she often becomes more angry, aggressively criticizing a male bodyguard for example. Another character who represents this anger is Michelle Darnell from *The Boss*. Michelle plays with another form of female masculinity, as she is a successful businesswoman who is willing to succeed at the expense of others. Early in the movie, Michelle performs a hyper-masculinized affectation of success on stage. She arrives on stage on a golden phoenix with pyrotechnics and then dances while the rapper T-Pain performs "All I do is win" (*The Boss*). The performance shows how Michelle displays her power through a masculine energy that denotes her success. Michelle also resists other forms of femininity through her emasculation of men, such as her assistant, her lawyer (who she hits in the neck with a tennis ball), and her former lover Ronald (who she tricked out of promotion). She also objectifies men, such as a helicopter pilot who she makes take off his shirt.

Even though she portrays these more masculine traits, Michelle remains mostly feminine in her appearance. She wears many suits, often with a pussybow shirt. Even so, she never shows her neck, which could be a way to high aging but also could be a way to suggest that she could be hiding an Adam's apple. Through her appearance and her behavior, Michelle offers some level of ambiguous gender: "Ambiguous gender, when and where it does appear, is inevitably transformed into deviance, thirdness, or a blurred version of either male or female" (Halberstam 20). Michelle does blur stereotypical notions of male and female, taking on aggression often associated with masculinity, and femininity in her appearance.

Before going to a meeting with former coworkers, Michelle covers herself in fake tanning and shaves her legs. In another scene, Michelle describes her breasts as "100 percent silicone and not the kind that's ever supposed to be inside the body" (*The Boss*). Combined with the pussybows and suits, Michelle performs a type of femininity through her embodied choices. These choices are a uniform in a sense; a uniform that gains her entrance into the male world of business. Fat studies scholars Dina Giovanelli and Stephen Ostertag assert: "Women's clothing, hair, body size, and movements are all shrouded in meaningful discourses and interpretative suggestions. Viewers are simultaneously reminded that violating expectations of physical appearance, perhaps by being fat and female, will be recognized and subject to gossip and discrimination" (290). The performance of dressing in particular feminine ways are a reaction to the fat woman not being considered "appropriately feminine" (Giovanelli and Ostertag 290). Combined

with Michelle's aggression, her appearance has to maintain gender ambiguity to challenge the expectations of a fat woman in the business world.

The movie offers a contrast between Michelle's masculine traits with her former assistant Claire, who takes on traditionally feminine roles such as being a mother and a good cook. Michelle represents masculinized greed while Claire represents a selfless form of femininity. Because Michelle transgresses femininity, she is punished for her behavior. She is convicted of a minor crime and when she leaves jail, Michelle can only turn to Claire for help. Michelle receives a series of punishments, including the loss of all of her money, a folding bed throwing her against a wall, and being rejected by former male colleagues and then falling down stairs (*The Boss*). All of these scenes are played for comedy, but comedy can reinforce societal standards, according to fat studies scholar Katariina Kyrölä. Kyrölä claims "that laughter be seen as a kind of corporeal training through which our body images may open up or become constricted" (94). She further claims this corporeal training functions to regulate "gender and body size norms" (Kyrölä 94). In *The Boss*, Michelle does not fit those body standards in either gender or body size. As a fat woman who aggressively goes after what she wants, Michelle suffers for that aggression. The comedy functions as a reminder that Michelle exists outside of societal norms.

While Michelle does play with an ambiguity outside of social norms, the movie suggests that her aggression comes from her lack of family. As an orphan, she was rejected and thus, the movie suggests, she lashes out. When meeting with her former mentor, Michelle shares her motto "families are for suckers, right?" (*The Boss*). When

Michelle babysits Claire's daughter Rachel, she shows her *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. After Michelle takes Rachel to her Dandelion meeting, Michelle creates a spinoff group, Darnell's Darlings, to sell brownies, becoming her new business venture. Darnell's Darlings use aggressive tactics to sell their brownies and even get into a street brawl with the Dandelions. When Michelle leads a group of young women, they become more like her, aggressively pursuing business. But Michelle does shy away from family and when Claire and Rachel begin treating her like family, Michelle moves out and eventually sells the business to her old lover Ronald.

This becomes a turning point for Michelle, who begins to take on more the Claire's characteristics. She realizes that selling the company costs her a makeshift family and hurt Darnell's Darlings: "I kind of lost my friend and hurt a bunch of kids in the process" (*The Boss*). Michelle goes to apologize to Claire and Rachel, saying: "You are the closest thing to a family that I have ever had and I am real sorry I screwed that up" (*The Boss*). Through this admission, Michelle begins to show more feminine and nurturing energy. She learns to connect with others. Even so, she does not become a traditionally feminine woman. Even by the end of the movie, a changed Michelle is never fully the good girl persona. But Michelle does not represent the fallen woman either. In recognizing the power of family, Michelle embraces some aspect of the good girl persona. She puts family ahead of her own needs. But Michelle remains a savvy businesswoman and even spends time making out with Ronald, who had tried to kill her shortly before that, making her more like the fallen woman. Michelle exists in a space in between. She is neither fully a good girl nor fully the fallen woman; she is both/and.

To consider the implications of the Michelle character through Thirdspace theory, Firstspace would be McCarthy's physical body. Secondspace would be McCarthy's interpretation of Michelle as well as the other interpretations of the character from the audience. Thirdspace becomes both McCarthy and the interpretations of Michelle. McCarthy subverts the expectations of a female lead by playing a character with both masculine and feminine attributes. Michelle is both a cutthroat businesswoman and Claire and Rachel's makeshift family member. Thirdspace allows us to see McCarthy's portrayal of Michelle as not just as corporeal training of normality, but as a subversive character who uses both in masculine and feminine energies. Michelle transgresses normality, creating a space in which success in business does is not limited to one gender or personality type. In turn, McCarthy shows she can play complicated versions of masculine and feminine. McCarthy broadens her persona by expanding the ways in which she embodies characters. McCarthy's characters often play in the extremes, but Michelle actually embodies more than one of these extremes. Rather than being just a angry fat woman, Michelle is an assertive strong woman who discovers community as a way to be powerful.

The final chapter replicates the analysis form used in Chapters III and IV by analyzing artifacts from my own life. By using Thirdspace theory to examine my own life, I hope to ground the methodology created for this project in the experiences of everyday life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Thus far, this project has used the embodied ethos of public bodies to challenge the binaries such as normal/other, male/female, and fat/thin. These are just some of the many intersections of identity markers are used to hierarchize and label people. Public bodies provide a tool for highlighting how normality and otherness are perpetuated or transgressed, but public bodies do not necessarily easily translate into everyday life. Pointing out that Chris Pratt changes how normality is structured or that Mindy Kaling uses romantic comedy tropes to show the problematic expectations of femininity are just first steps to show how the binaries limit experiences and marginalize people.

One of the major goals of this dissertation is provide a methodology or a framework for how we can assess and challenge binaries that affect bodies. While there is a psychic distance between the public body and our own individual bodies, those public bodies affect our individual bodies. We are routinely influenced by the images that surround us and one way we can challenge those influences is through critical engagement with the texts we encounter daily. By applying the methodology I outlined in Chapter I and applied in Chapters III and IV, we can see the ways in which normality and otherness shift based on cultural situations.

This consideration of normality and how it shifts was the major starting point for this project. I began to wonder how “normal” shifts in different situations and wanted to

investigate this idea further. The lingering implications of normality have been an undercurrent in the scholarship I presented thus far. My earlier research focused on fat studies and how comedy was used to marginalize fat people. But I felt that research did not go far enough. The idea that only one body type was subjected to marginalization felt too small and an incomplete examination of bodies that are marginalized. The marginalization of bodies starts with marking the bodies as other, but it goes much further than that. The shifting nature of normality makes it nearly impossible for anyone to actually achieve normality, so bodies become marginalized again and again. I wanted to delve into this inconsistency of normality in my research and figure out how to question the very nature of normality.

Because normality and otherness shift, it is important that we acknowledge the shifts and how those shifts apply to our everyday situations. A methodology using liminality and Thirdspace theory provides a means for understanding those shifts and reducing the power of binaries to place bodies in positions of normality and otherness. Thirdspace complicates the understanding of bodies by considering both the physical body and the interpretations of those bodies. Thirdspace allows for the consideration of bodies not merely in binary structures but on a wide spectrum of complicated identities.

I also am drawn to this research because of my own embodied experiences. As a feminist scholar, I recognize the importance of situating my own biases and privileges in my work. I am a fat, white, cisgender, Appalachian woman. I was born into a lower middle class economic bracket. I also have a bachelor's degree in journalism, a master's degree in English, and, with this project, am completing a PhD in rhetoric. While these

identity markers do not fully describe me, they provide some understanding of my physical body and how it navigates the world. I maintain some specific privileges, such as my gender, education level, and my race, but also fit into traditionally marginalized groups, such as being fat and Appalachian.

I have been fat for most of my life, including most of my childhood and adulthood. While I do not consider it a limitation, I recognize that society has increasingly made life more difficult for fat people. For example, I have been a regular airplane passenger since my childhood, but only in the past 10 years I have had to ask for seat belt extenders when I get onto planes. As mentioned in Chapter I, airlines have reduced the size of seats and my body becomes one of the bodies disciplined through this process. Thus, airplanes become contested spaces, or rather spaces that do not consider or welcome my embodied presence. The concept of normality establishes a “normal” for airplane seats that does not consider the multiple shapes and sizes of bodies on that airplane. Just like many people, I wonder about the limitations that society places upon my body and routinely question my own embodiment. Philosopher Michel Foucault calls these limitations discipline: “a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour” (Foucault, *Discipline* 137-138). The effects of normality routinely function as a form of discipline on my body. Society reminds me that my body presents a problem that I should solve, despite my resistance to such disciplines. Airplane seats provide one example of a discipline, but I also have been subjected to fat jokes, too small chairs, uncomfortable staring, and many other forms of discipline that affect fat people.

Additionally, as an Appalachian woman, I routinely deal with the stereotypes of the poverty and ignorance associated with my home. A West Virginia native, I have routinely had to explain to people that Virginia and West Virginia are in fact two separate states. Other times, I have to hear criticism or jokes about the ignorance of Appalachian people. One example is the 2016 election where opponents of the elected president blame the ignorance of people from West Virginia as one reason he was elected. Other jokes point to the use of words like hollow (pronounced holler in Appalachia) as a sign of ignorance or the poverty long associated with the region. While my Appalachian heritage may not be abundantly clear in my physical presence, the disclosure of this heritage can affect how others interpret me.

These examples of my size and my Appalachian heritage show examples of how bodies can become easily limited to one identity category. I am not just one of those things, I am both and so much more. My resistance to the limitations of identity categories directly ties to my resistance to Cartesian mind-body dualism. I see the mind and body and intimately connected, and they cannot be separated. Just in the two examples above, fat represents my body and Appalachian represents my cultural upbringing, which affects my mind. I do not see those as separate, they are connected because they are both part of me. I am both fat and Appalachian as well as a white woman and a well-educated woman. I cannot be only one of these things; I am always all of these identity categories at the same time.

Recognizing the mind and the body as connected aligns with ancient definitions of *kairos* according to rhetoric scholar Debra Hawhee: “In other words, the capacity for

discerning *kairos*—especially in the context of the struggling *agōn*—depends on a ready, perceptive body” (Hawhee 71, original emphasis). Hawhee stresses that *kairos* is more than just a key moment, but also a way of knowing based on embodied experience. Our bodies in specific moments provide insight into ways of knowing. The moment is key here, because this chapter captures a key moment in my understanding of my embodied presence. I am not a public figure, but I am publically discussing my own body as a means to help others understand the limitations placed upon all bodies. My desire to share my own embodied experiences offers a key component to my embodied ethos. I have a unique knowledge of embodiment that provides a guidepost for others to understand embodiment. This is my *kairos*, my moment to share the praxis for others to understand their own bodies. We are all affected by society’s standards about bodies, but we can find our own *kairos* to resist those limitations and accept our bodies.

While I aspire to accept my body, that does not mean that I am always confident about my body. As Mindy Kaling points out: “(T)he scary thing I have noticed is that some people really feel uncomfortable around women who don’t hate themselves. So that’s why you need to be a little bit brave” (Kaling 221). I am taking up Kaling’s call by not only loving myself, but also by bravely sharing my own story. I share my story in order to diminish the limitations of binaries and celebrate the wide spectrum of bodies that exist in American culture. It is a recognition that we are all living in our complex bodies every day.

To celebrate the complexity of bodies and to show some bravery, I examine a couple of my own personal photos to show how this methodology can be used beyond

just the examination of public bodies. I use two photos of me that show me in different parts of my life when my confidence was high, but also exhibit an embodied experience. These are images that have been posted on my personal Facebook page, thus they were shared in public spaces, and they also show my own physical experience. These images are also from the past five years, so they show two different embodied experiences within this time period.



Figure 1: Graduation

The first image comes from the graduation ceremony for my master's degree in 2013. The photo was taken at the end of my walk across the stage when my family and friends were cheering. In the photo, I am wearing my graduation robes and hood and have a large smile of surprise on my face as I hear my name from the audience. I am also holding the paper handed to me by the university president as I walked across the stage. Behind me, university officials are lined up for the next graduate, and there is a faded audience in the background. Burke's scene-agent ratio may be a good way to analyze this photo. The scene of the image conveys the context of the situation, as it is clearly a

graduation ceremony with people dressed in regalia on a stage. Also, I am at the end of the walk across the stage because I am holding a diploma-like piece of paper. As the agent, I am clearly actively participating in this ceremony and reacting to the ceremony, which is conveyed through the smile of surprise on my face. Also, because I am wearing a robe and a hood, the photo shows that this is a graduate school graduation. Because I am wearing a traditional cap and not the doctorate cap worn by my university officials in the photo, I am graduating with a master's degree.

While the scene-agent ratio provides one way of looking at the photo, it does not fully address the embodiment in the photo. When looking at the image, some of my above identity categories become clear, as I physically represent attributes of a white, fat woman. While I am wearing a robe that hides some of the curves of my body, it is clear that the robe covers my fat body. But the smile my face does not elicit any shame or disappointment in my body. Rather the smile conveys a moment of pure joy. While fatness is often described as a "spoiled identity," this moment of joy subverts the negative associations of fatness (LeBesco 7). That spoiled identity often associated fatness with laziness. But my graduation photo resists that laziness stereotype. Completing a college degree requires action, hard work, and dedication, all qualities rarely associated with fat stereotypes. This graduation photo celebrates accomplishment and hard work, qualities that transcend experiences of specific bodies, regardless of their size and ability.

To consider this image through Thirdspace theory, the Firstspace would be my physical body. The Secondspace would be the interpretations of my body, from my own pride in the moment to the commonly held negative stereotypes that associate fatness and

laziness or as a spoiled identity. The Thirdspace becomes both my physical body and the implications of the interpretations of my body. Thirdspace conveys my physical presence as well as the accomplishments of my degree, the subversion of fatness as a spoiled identity, and the joy associated with my embodied experience. Even with an interpretation that celebrates my accomplishment, the spoiled identity of fatness remains. Just because I resist the stereotype of laziness, it does not eliminate that stereotype from the interpretation. Even though I see the photo as a moment of pride, others may still see my body as a spoiled identity that needs to be fixed.

While this photo recognizes a major milestone in my life, I, like many others, use social media to mark some minor milestones as well. One of those was my decision to wear a bikini for the first time in my adult life. As an embodiment scholar, I have long promoted body positivity but do not always afford the same positivity to myself. I decided to wear a bikini to the beach in 2016. It took me a couple of days at the beach to build up the courage to do it, but once I wore the bikini I shared my photo on Facebook. I posted the photo with a simple caption: “Yep I’m wearing a bikini” (“Bikini”). Posting the bikini photo was a moment of bravery for me; an attempt to transgress the expectations of my fat body. I am not the first, nor the last, fat girl to don a bikini; more women of all sizes wear bikinis to transgress embodied expectations. Bikinis have become one way women transgress the expectations of body normality.



Figure 2: Bikini

A slightly shifted Burkean agent-scene ratio can be helpful in analyzing this photo. My fat body is centered in the frame with a purple bikini top and black bikini bottom. You can see my fat rolls on my thighs as well as the exposed skin around my bustline, stomach, arms, and legs. The skin on my exposed stomach is a shade lighter than the rest of the skin, showing how this part of my body does not get exposed to the sun because I am rarely brave enough to show my belly⁶⁸. I am also wearing a hat and sunglasses to shield my fair skin, but also slightly mask my identity. The hat and sunglasses provide a shadow onto my

⁶⁸ While I have done this for the bikini, I generally keep my belly covered, which is also a form of Foucauldian discipline that I subject myself to. Fat women are supposed to keep their bellies covered.

face, which makes my small smile harder to see. Unlike my graduation photo, this smile is less open and joyous. It is more a smile for the camera rather than a spontaneous moment captured on camera. As for the scene, I am standing in the sand with the Atlantic Ocean clearly behind me. A beach umbrella appears along one side of my body. Taken together, I am clearly wearing a bikini at the beach. This means I am wearing this bikini in a public space where others can interpret my body. Much like the graduation, the scene of this image remains important. Wearing a bikini on the beach is subversive, but not as subversive as in a different location. The beach invites swimwear, so the location offers a more welcoming space for a bikini than it would, say, at a grocery store. As I wore the bikini that day, I did wear a cover up when I was not at the beach because it is even less socially acceptable to wear a bikini in a space outside of the beach. While wearing the bikini in public was subversive, there were still some societal norms that affected my subversion. I made the beach a brave space, but I was able to do so, in part, because the space allowed for that bravery.

To examine this photo through Thirdspace theory, again Firstspace would be my physical body. Secondspace would be my fat body in a bikini and all of the interpretations that are associated with it. That means Secondspace takes into account both the confidence I exhibit by wearing the bikini as well as bodily criticism that would be associated with my wearing a bikini. Taken together in Thirdspace, then the image comes to represent my physical body as well as interpretations, both good and bad, of my body. Exposing my body through wearing a bikini opens myself up to interpretations, but my choice to embrace body positivity far transgresses expectations. Societal standards discipline fat

women from publically displaying their fat bodies. Bodies are criticized in various media, such as magazine covers, pointing out the problems with fat people exposing their bodies. These media also promote a specific type of body as the bikini body, a body that fulfills standards of thinness. Thus, the public display of fat bodies becomes both an action rather than a passive site for criticism. I do not use these examples to point out that I am somehow a perfect representation of body positivity. For example, I posted my bikini photo on my Facebook page, which includes a carefully crafted audience of my friends. In some ways, I created a safer space for my bravery. Publishing the photo on a public Instagram page would mean something else entirely.

I use these two examples to stress how complicated each of our own embodied experiences can be. This project aims not only to provide a methodology that can be used to analyze embodiment in other texts but also to recognize the complicated beautiful embodied experiences that we all have in our everyday lives. I want to reduce the chasms between binaries and instead celebrate the beautiful complications of resisting the normal, the other, and the spaces in between. While I use my own body as a site for interpretation in this chapter, I hope that others will use this methodology to show their own complicated embodied identities. Acceptance of bodies of multiple shapes, colors, and sizes resists the lingering implications of normality.

While societal standards often place people into binaries, in reality we are all multiples and should never, can never be as easily categorized. Through this project I have recognized this simple idea that we are all complex beings that defy categorization. As I started this project, I wanted to challenge the ideas of bodily perfection and

normality in a way that recognizes multiple ways of existing. I was unsure of how to address these issues of normality, but I wanted to challenge the powerful influence of normal. As I complete this project, I see the messy complications and how categories reduce those complications and marginalize. Ultimately, this project has helped me change my attitude toward my own body, which reminds me of Gloria E. Anzaldúa: “For if she changed her relationship to her body and that in turn changed her relationship to another’s body then she would change her relationship to the world. And when *that* happened she would *change* the world (Anzaldúa, “Dream of the Double-Faced Woman” 71, original emphasis). Anzaldúa’s words encompass my ultimate goal for this project. In changing my own attitude towards my body, and my attitudes towards other bodies has a potential to change the world. When we recognize the complicated embodied identities that we all inhabit, we can see each other’s humanity in new and respectful ways.

I end this project with an assignment for the reader. Take a moment and consider yourself through Thirdspace. Just like me, you exist both as your body and the interpretations of that body. You are always both/and, but too often society tries to limit bodies to specific categorization. The next time you are placed into a category, consider how that placement happened. Take a moment and consider all of the other aspects of who you are that this category ignores. Take heed of Anzaldúa’s call by changing your relationship to your own body. If you resist the categories placed upon you, you may be less likely to categorize others. Once you change your relationship to your own body, you may be more open to seeing the multiplicity of other bodies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERMISSIONS

4 September 2017

Lori Wolfe
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Maureen Johnson

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