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Being part of student council at Queen's has been an incredible experience that has shaped me in so many ways. Over the past three years, I've had the opportunity to work alongside passionate and hardworking students, gaining leadership skills and learning the true value of teamwork. These years have been filled with challenges, growth, and moments that have pushed me beyond my comfort zone in ways I never expected. I'm grateful for the friendships, experiences, and lessons I've gained, and I couldn't be prouder to be part of such a dedicated and inspiring community.

SOCIOLOGY DSC

BEHIND PHENOMENA

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ABOUT ME:

As I finish off my third year in Sociology and second year with the DSC, I can honestly say this journey has been nothing short of remarkable. through this community I have been able to grow as a person, both academically and personally. I have gained knowledge, courage and compassion in ways that I never would have otherwise. Sociology has changed my perspective of the world and my place in it. Without this community I would not have had these teachable experiences to carry on with me, for that I am truly blessed. Queen's Sociology is incredible, both academically and as a community and I am proud to be apart of it.

SOCIOLOGY DSC

BEHIND PHENOMENA

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As a first-year student at Queen's University, being a part of the Sociology DSC, Journal Team, has been an incredible experience and amazing opportunity for growth. The DSC has given me the allowed me to strengthen my editing and writing skills, pushing me to connect with other who share the same interest and passion towards sociology as me. Queen's has given me the opportunity through this club to learn and contribute to a wonderful academic community. Being surrounded by peers who share the same interest as me, in an academic club has helped me grow into a better student, and has impacted my first-year experience in a very meaningful way.

Social Structures and Institutions

By: Jaina Ambwani

The relationships, roles, norms, and organization within human society come together to form a recognizable social structure. This structure is upheld and stabilized by various institutions, such as hospitals, doctor's offices, and classrooms. These institutions ensure individuals adhere to established societal norms. Numerous theorists have offered various perspectives on the nature of institutions, their functions, and their impact on society. For instance, Parsons underscores the pivotal role of physicians and the concept of a "sick role." On the other hand, Erving Goffman explores the experiences of stigmatized individuals and how they navigate the societal prejudices thrust upon them. Michel Foucault, as a further example, focuses on the history of thought and how it creates institutions in society using docile bodies as an example.

In modern society, mental health is increasingly vital to these structures and institutions. Each theorist brings a unique lens to this topic, shedding light on the associated roles and expectations. One theory that has notably evolved is Goffman's theory of stigma. Understanding the relationships in social structures and institutions is critical to understanding the roles and norms that govern society as a whole. The varied theories of Talcott Parsons, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault offer invaluable insights into the dynamics of today's society. For example, Goffman's theory concerning the experience of living with mental health stigma has witnessed significant transformation since its inception.

Social Institution

Social structures represent the underlying patterns that govern societies as they embody collective understandings guiding individual behaviour. For example, daily customs and norms shape our broader societal framework, which in turn influences hierarchies and statuses. These norms are thus reflected in the organization of society to ensure harmonious coexistence.

Social structures can be examined from macro or micro perspectives, meaning the routine of entire societies or individuals can be analyzed. This analysis extends to their habits, tendencies, and how these elements intertwine (*The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology,* 2011, p. 578).

Institutions embody patterned behaviours codified into enforceable rules (*The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2011, p. 465). A society without institutionalization is deemed to lack essential social standards. Like social structures, institutions can be examined at macro and micro levels. For instance, Goffman's examination in "*Asylums*," analyzes roles within an asylum on both scales. There are macro-level interactions between residents and doctors within the total institution and micro-level interactions among residents themselves. The combination of these interactions shapes the behaviours constituting an institution. The various institutions within a society collaboratively construct the social structure guiding daily life.

Institutions and social structures are distinct but jointly maintain societal order. However, they can also impose limitations on individuals. Parsons contended that societal roles fall within five categories: economic, political, cultural, kinship, and stratificational. While these roles offer opportunities for growth within their confines, crossing their boundaries proves challenging. While society sets collective objectives, disparities in means to achieve them can lead to inequity. Not all

individuals will have the same means needed to achieve the collective goals due to boundaries from their social class. Nonetheless, institutions and social structures collaborate to ensure stability and facilitate adaptation, fostering societal resilience.

Theorists

Parsons, Goffman, and Foucault are key theorists who focus on different facets of institutions and their roles in shaping social structures.

Parsons' primary focus was on the concept of the “sick role”. This is not merely a medical condition, but rather a distinct social role within society. This means an individual plays the part and does the job of a sick person in society. Parsons explored the reasons why specific roles are regulated and how they contribute to maintaining social order (Parson in Abrams, 2023, p. 14).

According to Parsons, for an action to be understood, it must involve an actor, a goal, a cultural reference, and adhere to established norms. In the context of the sick role, there is a general social equilibrium between a patient and a doctor that facilitates a structured path to recovery. There are six essential components of the sick role including exemption from customary responsibilities, such as taking time off work or temporarily relinquishing regular duties. Parsons underscores the temporary nature of this role, emphasizing that individuals make concerted efforts to swiftly return to their normal roles. Seeking and accepting medical assistance from qualified professionals is another critical aspect, indicating a level of trust from the sick individual in the expertise of the medical practitioners. Additionally, the sick person must manifest symptoms to substantiate their claims of illness to both others and the practitioner. Moreover, they are not to be held personally accountable for their ailment, viewing it as an unfortunate circumstance. Lastly, the sick role necessitates approval from others through displays of sympathy and support (Parsons, 1951). In this dynamic, the doctor's role lies in prioritizing the patient's well-being, not necessarily acceding to the patient's desires, and offering unwavering support (Parsons, 1951)

Collectively, both the patient and the doctor assume roles, actions, and ethical responsibilities in the pursuit of healing, all of which are integral to the sick role and the broader social structure.

Erving Goffman's research centred on stigma and social identity. He delved into the categorizations and attributes ascribed to individuals, as well as how individuals establish routines in their daily lives to navigate and adapt to these labels. Goffman explored how stigma profoundly influences individual identity and interactions within society. He defines stigma as a profoundly discrediting attribute that transforms an individual from a whole and customary person to one tainted and discounted (Goffman, Erving, 1963). He introduced the concepts of "passing" and "covering" as strategies employed by individuals to conceal their stigmas.

Institutions exacerbate or alleviate the stigma associated with particular conditions, consequently impacting how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Goffman's focus extends to two distinct types of stigma: structural and personal. These stigmas exert a significant influence on the formation of social institutions within society. Stigmatized individuals are often viewed through the lens of prevailing norms, which can lead to their exclusion or marginalization. As mentioned earlier, norms and expectations play a pivotal role in determining an individual's position in the social hierarchy, thus contributing to the

overarching social structure. Goffman further hones in on face-to-face interactions within broader social institutions, such as medical and psychiatric facilities, which are in turn structured by larger societal institutions. These institutions are highly influenced by interactions shaped by prevailing social norms. Michel Foucault offers a unique perspective on institutions. Foucault focuses on power dynamics embedded in the history of knowledge. He examines how society has constructed specific institutions based on historical truths, and how individuals operate within these established paradigms (Foucault in Abrams, 2023, p. 4).

Foucault explains this concept through the theory of "docile bodies," wherein one undergoes a process of discipline and training that renders them more compliant to control and regulation by external forces. These external forces are expressed as institutions, authorities, or societal norms, which are perpetuated through means such as education, surveillance, and control. In essence, the concept of docile bodies underscores how power subtly operates through mechanisms of discipline within society, influencing and regulating the systems and institutions within it.

Foucault contends that various techniques contribute to the effectiveness of discipline. For example, this includes the notion of enclosure within an isolated space. However, this approach encountered a challenge in maintaining constant enclosure. Consequently, partitioning emerged as a solution, allocating specific spaces for discipline, along with functional sites that served to supervise and facilitate a conducive environment for the institution (Foucault, 1977). These interpretations of discipline stem from a historical understanding of how discipline functions and how it shapes a "docile body."

Analyzing Goffman's Theory

Erving Goffman's examination of psychiatric hospitals and stigmas have undergone a substantial transformation since their initial documentation. His research was fundamentally instrumental in establishing a foundation for comprehending the experiences of individuals with mental health conditions. In the wake of his contributions, there have been noteworthy advancements in the treatment of mental illness, alterations in societal perceptions of mental health, and shifts in psychiatric care approaches.

One of the most pivotal changes has been the departure from prolonged institutionalization in psychiatric hospitals. Goffman's research focused on the lives of residents within the confines of these institutions, often isolated from broader society (Goffman in Abrams, 2023, p. 12). Contemporary society has transitioned towards more community-based and outpatient care models, designed to offer more humane and integrated forms of support for individuals with mental health conditions. This shift in the institutional landscape, not only alters the roles and norms previously established within asylums but also reshapes the overall social structure of mental illness treatment.

In addition, there has been a significant reduction in the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. As a result of the emergence of new medications, the implementation of recovery and empowerment programs, as well as the propagation of anti-stigma campaigns, individuals with mental illness are no longer marginalized. Sustained efforts to combat the social stigma associated with mental illness have resulted in a reconfiguration of roles and norms for individuals within this demographic. As they are no longer perceived as lesser, they have the opportunity to ascend to different

hierarchical levels, thereby influencing societal structures.

There has also been a concerted effort towards integrating mental health care with general healthcare. This convergence is restructuring the roles of both institutions, forging a novel social framework with distinctive roles and norms. This combination acknowledges the intrinsic connection between physical and mental health, striving to deliver more comprehensive and cohesive care for individuals.

These transformations of Goffman's insights reflect broader societal shifts in understanding and addressing mental health. While Goffman's theories concerning stigma and psychiatric institutions retain their relevance, the landscape of mental health care has undergone significant evolution. Present-day approaches emphasize providing more person-centred, inclusive, and integrated care for individuals with mental health conditions.

Conclusion

Within human society, the interplay of social structures and institutions establishes the framework for collective existence and societal order. These are the fundamental underpinnings upon which our lives are constructed. Intricate dynamics, cultural norms, and institutional frameworks are the foundation that guides our interactions.

The study of social structure explains the underlying patterns that govern the behaviours, aspirations, and interactions of individuals. It offers insight into the delicate balance between individual agency and the constraints imposed by societal expectations. Through this lens, we gain a rich appreciation for the structural equilibrium that enables societies to function, adapt, and progress.

Institutions form the foundation of societal organization, providing continuity and stability in our social relationships. They serve as regulators of interactions, mediators of power dynamics, and the scaffolding upon which individuals construct their identities.

Talcott Parsons, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault have collectively contributed theories to illuminate the institutions and social structures that shape society. However, given the evolution of society since their writings, these theories require building upon. Specifically, Goffman's theory of stigma and asylums needs expansion to remain pertinent in today's dynamic context.

In the intricacy of society, the interplay between social structures and institutions reflects our past, present, and the promise of a more inclusive future.

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Symbolic Scars: Understanding Self-Harm as Resistance in Goth Subculture

By: Brenna Byrne

Self-harm among youth has more recently emerged in alternative subcultures, specifically within the goth subculture, which has sparked growing worry and concern, this behaviour is often pathologized and labelled as deviant (Phillipov 2006). By drawing on the theory of subculture and the work of Patrick J. Williams (2007), this paper argues that self-harm within the goth subculture is not merely a symptom of deviance, but functions as a form of harmful symbolic resistance. This paper will first outline the key ideas of subcultural theory, followed by an analysis of how this framework explains the phenomenon of self-harm in goth culture. Finally, this paper will consider the practical implications of this interpretation in policy recommendations aimed at reducing harm while recognizing the symbolic significance of such behaviours.

Subcultures are relatively unique social subsystems within a broader social system and culture. Subcultures provide alternative frameworks of values, behaviours, and styles that often differ from mainstream norms, which act as platforms for both individual and group identity formation (William 2007). As framed by Williams (2007), subculture theory is grounded in the sociological study of youth-subcultural phenomena that deviate from mainstream norms, specifically concentrating on marginalized youth who express resistance through style, behaviour, and music. According to subcultural theory, subcultures emerge from commonly shared values, symbols, and practices that set groups apart from the dominant society (ibid). These groups often use distinctive styles, values, and behaviours to help differentiate themselves as a reaction to societal inequalities or a search for personal identity (ibid).

The goth subculture reflects these dynamics illustrating its members' discontent with social expectations, particularly regarding norms surrounding emotional expression, appearance, and identity (Knight 2004). Goths cultivate a unique aesthetic and worldview greatly shaped by dark themes in music, literature, and fashion (ibid). They reconstruct symbols from various sources, including Victorian fashion, gothic literature, and horror films in a process known as bricolage, to formulate a coherent identity that stands out from mainstream culture (ibid).

Williams (2007) points out that subcultures are not entirely separated from the wider society. Although they may resist certain norms, they remain interwoven within the larger social structures, often reflecting and navigating contradictions between their subcultural identity and wider cultural influences (ibid). This creates a dynamic where subcultures are both oppositional and integrative, influenced by their interactions with mainstream culture (ibid). The goth subculture represents this by promoting supportive communities that center around shared experiences of alienation and nonconformity, while concurrently negotiating its position within the broader societal contexts (Knight 2004).

In subcultural theory, style is emphasized as a crucial medium of communication. For goths, style expresses a deeper narrative regarding their rejection of societal norms concerning happiness, success, and emotional repression (Knight 2004). As Williams (2007) contends, youth subcultures, such as goth, not only are avenues for symbolic resistance but also operate as mechanisms for collective

identity formation. The shared aesthetic and emotional practices within the goth subculture enable members to discover solidarity in their experiences of marginalization, providing both a creative outlet and a form of social critique (Knight 2004). Through this framework, we gain insight into how subcultures like goths navigate their marginal positioning within society by generating new meanings and avenues for belonging.

Subcultural theory provides a useful framework for comprehending self-harm in goth subculture by framing it as a group collective act of opposition against prevailing social norms rather than just an individual issue (William 2007). While other theories, like labelling theory or strain theory, could offer alternative explanations for goth self-harm, they fall short of capturing the full complexity of the behaviour within this specific subcultural context. Labelling theory suggests self-harm may be a response to being labelled deviant by society, but it overlooks how goth culture actively embraces this label as a form of identity and resistance (Becker 1963). Similarly, strain theory frames self-harm as a response to societal pressures or failure to achieve socially approved goals, yet it fails to account for the symbolic and deliberate rejection of societal values within the goth culture (Agnew 1992). Subcultural theory provides a more nuanced understanding, positioning self-harm within a broader cultural framework of resistance to mainstream norms of emotional repression, alienation, and bodily control (William 2007). This theory moves beyond individual feelings and behaviours, framing the behaviour within the collective, aesthetic, and political dynamics of the subculture (ibid). Self-harm in goth culture cannot be understood without its cultural context, where it serves as symbolic defiance against societal expectations, offering a critique of conformity and alienation (Knight 2004).

While addressing self-harm, it is critical to acknowledge the reasons why people, especially young people, engage in this behaviour. Although self-harm can be presented as a symbolic resistance or empowerment, it frequently takes a darker turn in subcultures like goth, where emotional expression and alienation are prevalent themes (Young, Sweeting, and West 2006). Youth are particularly vulnerable to societal influences, whether from peers, media, or subcultural norms and may engage in self-harm as a way to fit in or navigate their emotions (ibid). What starts as an effort to take charge or defy social norms can easily turn into destructive patterns that bring forth negative feelings and feelings of isolation (ibid).

Self-harm can have deeply harmful long-term effects on one's physical and mental health, even though it may start as a form of rebellion or identity affirmation in the goth subculture (Hughes, Mairead, Knowles, Dhingra, Nicholson, and Taylor 2018). Youth who turn to self-harm may develop chronic, self-destructive behaviours in which they use physical pain as a coping strategy for their emotions (ibid). This can trap youth in a cycle of harm, where the immediate sense of control or relief becomes overshadowed by increasing emotional isolation, guilt, or shame (ibid). Over time, youth may eventually find it more difficult to stop the behaviour since it has become ingrained in their emotional regulation, which increases their risk of infection, severe physical harm, or even unintentional death (ibid).

Additionally, from these direct physical dangers, self-harm carries serious psychological consequences. Although the act may offer a temporary feeling of relief, it can worsen existing mental health, such as depression and anxiety, by reinforcing

sensations of helplessness and emotional detachment (Young, Sproeber, Groschwitz, Preiss, and Plener 2014). The act of self-injury can lead to a negative self-perception, causing individuals to view their scars not merely as symbols of defiance but as reminders of personal shortcomings or inadequacy (ibid). Self-harming gives people a temporary sense of empowerment, but it quickly wears off as they frequently feel more and more cut off from both themselves and their support systems (ibid). This behaviour can spiral out of control and cause people to become isolated, making it harder for them to get treatment or deal with the underlying emotional issues that motivate their actions.

The idea of power and control in this context is important, the act of self-harm is not simply about "coping with emotional pain but about transforming that pain into a form of power and control." (Phillipov, Taubert, and Kandasamy 2006). Self-harm eventually perpetuates a state of disempowerment, even though it may at first seem like a means for people to regain control over their bodies or emotions. Originally meant as signs of defiance, the scars frequently serve as tangible reminders of suffering, vulnerability, and an incapacity to deal with emotions in a healthier way (ibid). When people lose their sense of autonomy to the behaviour intended to restore it, this act of turning pain into power can backfire (ibid).

From a wider sociocultural viewpoint, participating in self-harm has a major impact on social connections (Phillipov et al. 2006). As people start to rely more on self-harm to manage their emotions, they might distance themselves from family and friends who could provide support or other coping methods. The marks left behind, intended to express pain or defiance, can also lead to alienation from those outside the subculture who view self-harm as a sign of instability (ibid). This may create a greater separation between the person and society as a whole, amplifying the feeling of isolation that initially attracted them to the subculture. Self-harm becomes not just a physical sign of rebellion but also an obstruction to reconciling with societal expectations in more positive ways (ibid).

It is important to point out that being a part of the goth subculture does not require or define participation in self-harm. While some aspects of the subculture may romanticize or explore darker emotional themes, engaging in self-harm is not essential for belonging (Knight 2004). Without turning to self-harm, many members of the goth community express themselves through art, music, and fashion (ibid). Self-harm does more harm than good, strengthening negative emotions and increasing feelings of loneliness, even though it may seem like a way to fit in or deal with personal difficulties (Young et al. 2014).

Addressing and mitigating the harm associated with self-harm in goth subcultures requires an understanding of this dynamic. Implementing counselling and mental health resources that are especially suited to the needs of the people in these communities is a crucial first step (Riquino, Reese, Molloy, Nguyen, Greenwood, LaFountain, and Cavasos et al. 2023). These resources can address the root causes of alienation and emotional repression that lead to such behaviours by providing safe spaces for goth youth to explore their emotions without turning to self-harm (ibid). Peer support programs are also essential because they give goths a chance to interact with other members of their community who have discovered healthier ways to express who they are (ibid). While discouraging negative behaviours, these programs can highlight the subculture's

communal elements, such as shared interests in fashion, music, and the arts.

Educational programs focused on subcultures can also play a crucial role in preventing self-harm. In addition to offering alternatives to self-harm as a coping mechanism, schools and community centres could provide workshops or other materials that foster awareness of the goth subculture, emphasizing its creative and expressive elements that appeal to young people (Riquino et al. 2023). To maintain authenticity and promote an accepting culture that does not conflate emotional exploration with self-destruction, these programs could include members of the goth community (ibid). Promoting artistic expression via fashion, makeup, and music can give goth youth a feeling of community without requiring them to harm themselves, thereby redefining what it means to be a genuine member of the subculture (ibid).

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that self-harm within the goth subculture functions as a form of symbolic resistance against mainstream societal norms of emotional repression and alienation, rather than dealing with emotions. By applying subcultural theory, particularly Williams' (2007) framework, we gain a nuanced understanding of how self-harm serves as a deliberate rejection of dominant values and a means for goth youth to assert autonomy over their bodies and emotions. However, while this behaviour can offer temporary empowerment, it also carries significant risks to mental and physical health. To address this, mental health resources, peer support, and educational programs tailored to goth youth are essential in promoting healthier forms of expression and belonging within the subculture, without resorting to self-harm.

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On and Off the Ice: A Struggle for Popularity and Professionality in Canadian Women's Hockey as Told Through Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

By: Madeleine Chiappetta

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital engages a discussion of class reproduction, particularly as he seeks to understand the structure of the social world. Bourdieu (1986) describes capital to be "accumulated labour…which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (p.15). Capital is a mechanism to mobilize people into a deployable and productive workforce, particularly to foster and maintain structures, like class, within the social world. Bourdieu (1986) seeks to explain the reproduction of class structures, proposing four different types of capital to indicate how this reproduction hinders movement through social stratification, particularly as capital is accumulated by those who already have it. In addition to economic capital, there is symbolic capital (ie. a socially co-constituted relationship of knowledge and power), social capital (ie. networking and institutional relationships), and cultural capital (ie. recognized qualifications and cultural goods), all of which work together overtly and to covertly reproduce wealth for the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1986).

Although Bourdieu (1986) uses his theory to understand how inequality in class structures reproduces beyond monetary disparity, this theory of capital can be applied in understanding other social structures and phenomena, such as that of gender inequality. As all social hierarchies operate through a dominant group holding power and resources over others, gender inequality can be understood through a relationship of capital, as women in society face a historical lack of all forms of capital, thus perpetuating patriarchal narratives around women's ability and success. An example of this still existent inequality is seen particularly in the treatment of female sports in Western society. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital as a framework, the struggle for symbolic capital in Canadian women's hockey can be attributed to its historic lack of economic, social, and cultural capital. The interrelation of these forms of capital "represents the immanent structure of the social world," particularly as they reproduce patriarchal structures that restrict women's ability, professionality, and popularity in the realm of sports (Bourdieu, 1986, p.15). However, the recent rise of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) demonstrates the possibility of breaking the institutional sexism that has limited women's sport in the past, especially as it has been developed to hold all four of Bourdieu's forms of capital.

Symbolic Capital: The Struggle for Recognition

Women's hockey is notably underrepresented in the sporting world; both professionally and locally, women's hockey is rarely promoted or recognized as a worthwhile pursuit, especially as the National Hockey League (NHL) dominates conversations around hockey, like men dominating society. In Bourdieu's (1986) terminology, this discussion indicates the lack of symbolic capital afforded to women's hockey. Symbolic capital refers to the ways in which symbols hold socially constituted meaning and value, only so far as the symbol is afforded recognition and power by those supposedly subservient to it (Bourdieu, 1986). By this definition, women's hockey lacks symbolic capital as society does not deem it worthwhile,

especially in comparison to men's hockey, a point of nationalistic pride for Canada.

The fragmentation of many attempts at a professional women's league is evidence of its lack of symbolic capital. There has been constant competition between the Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL) and the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL) in terms of resources and player division, thus limiting the growth of any sort of backing for a professional women's league (Szto et al., 2021). With the folding of the CWHL in 2019 for various reasons, most largely economic, many players formed the Professional Women's Hockey Players Association (PWHPA) to lobby for "a more sustainable professional league that could provide living wages, training facilities, medical staff, and health insurance, among other employee benefits. They vowed not to play in any league in Canada or the United States until these conditions were met" (Szto et al., 2021, p.325). As a result of the formation of the PWHPA, women's hockey was further fragmented as players refused to play in the NWHL, thus restricting the league's pool of elite players and its ability to develop. Media and fans placed the blame for the lack of a cohesive professional women's league onto individual players for joining the PWHPA, however this criticism fails to consider the structural, monetary, and organizational issues that deter the players from playing the NWHL (Szto et al., 2021). This is evidence of the institutional sexism that female players experience, particularly as adding more players to a league does not necessitate its growth of popularity or financial backing.

The divide of players and the lack of a sustainable professional women's hockey league contributes to the lack of popularity and professionality in the sport, which further facilitates the patriarchal narrative that women's sports are second rate, or not worthwhile to watch (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). Similarly, the promotion of women's sports is limited to that of major events such as the Olympics, and thus viewership is also limited to those events before quickly fading, "leaving women's sports in relative obscurity" (Cooky & Antunovic, 2022, p.150; Adams & Leavitt, 2018). Hockey, but only men's hockey is nationalistic in Canada, and as such, women's hockey falls into obscurity (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). The sport does not have the socially co-constituted relationship of symbolic capital required to cement its value in Canadian society. The struggle to generate symbolic capital can be traced to women's sport's lack of economic, social, and cultural capital. Additionally, patriarchal systems of thought continue to devalue women in hockey, particularly through the ways that professional and developmental hockey as well as sports media is influenced by capital.

Economic Capital: The Struggle for Funding

The battle for recognition largely begins at the level of economic capital, particularly as Canadian women's professional hockey has very little of it. Economic capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986) is capital that "is immediately and directly convertible into money" (p.16). Simply, it refers to having financial wealth, something that women's leagues notoriously do not have. Economic disparity is traced to be a large reason why several professional women's hockey leagues have folded; they do not have enough money to pay players a livable wage and facilitate the leagues' operations (Spencer, 2023; Szto et al., 2021). In the CWHL, players were only paid in stipends between $2 000 and $10 000 USD based on seniority, which was dramatically less compared to the NHL starting salary of $575 000 (Szto et al., 2021). Players had to take up secondary jobs to fund their lives, as well as their hockey careers, as they paid for equipment, training, and travel costs out of

pocket (Szto et al., 2021). To keep an air of professionalism, players hid this disparity (Szto et al., 2021). The lack of money funding women's hockey lowers the standards of the game as well as the public image regarding the skill level of women's hockey. Throughout its run, CWHL teams were inconsistent, as teams bearing smaller city names dropped in and out of the league based on their ability to afford the cost. Similarly, they played and practiced in community rinks rather than the stadiums afforded to the men's league. Without the ability to distinguish themselves from amateur hockey through the grandiose of an elite level, how can women's hockey develop the status and recognition of professionality? How can they develop the symbolic capital necessary for a professional league?

Funds are not only limited at the elite level, but also at the local, developmental level. There are insufficient facilities and economic support for grassroots hockey, making it difficult for young players to hone skills to get to the largely non-existent professional level (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). Additionally, most women's sports share this struggle for funding, often turning to corporate sponsors to back the leagues: "in the case of pay equity for women's soccer, corporations took an active role of addressing the systemic gender discrimination faced by the [United States Women's National Team]," however, these "corporations sell empowerment absent [of] meaningful structural change" (Cooky & Antunovic, 2022, pp.149). Companies, rather than the leagues themselves are made responsible to fix the systemic sexism in pay and promotion of sports. But corporate interest is limited to their ability to make money for themselves, thus the structural issues around gender inequalities remain. To address this issue, "there must be acceptance, or 'buy-in,' from all of the stakeholders," especially to garner enough interest to financially support women's sport (Edwards & Stevens, 2019, p.1812).

Social Capital: The Struggle for Support

Care and attention from stakeholders, in addition to their economic backing, is necessary to foster awareness and prestige. An important part of generating publicity and longevity in the foundation of women's sport is the development of a network of support that continues to garner interest and growth. These connections are what Bourdieu (1986) identifies to be social capital, the network of relationships and resources a person or group has and can be deployed into profitable exchanges that then reinforce those connections. The attempts at professional women's hockey have severely little social capital, something that becomes necessary to develop the stature and reputation tied to elite sport. The CWHL and the NWHL, and later the PWHPA demonstrates how restricted the accumulation of social capital, in the form of resources, players, and governance, has been because of its division across three organizations (Szto et al., 2021). Szto et al. (2021) particularly identifies the ties of the CWHL to the NHL and how this relationship overall stunted the league. The connection involved three affiliate NHL teams "provided approximately $30 000 [USD] to the league but 'sister' teams still had to pay full price to use their affiliate practice rinks, received little to no media amplification, and were not allowed to share training facilities" (Szto et al., 2021, p.328).

This relationship did little to support women's hockey, and ultimately exacerbated the lack of professionalism as it was positioned secondary to the NHL. This was also evidence of the poor organizational support of women's hockey, especially as quality coaching staff is driven away from women's hockey and towards the male developmental system because of the

devaluation of women's hockey. (Edwards & Stevens, 2019). Additionally, at the girls' developmental level, there is little support in organization; Adams and Leavitt (2018) cite that hockey associations in Alberta only have one position representing all of the girls' teams in the organization compared to the boys' teams who have representatives at each age level in addition to an executive. This governance structure of a limited network of people developing girls' hockey similarly restricts the ability to grow the league and foster skill in the players, thus limiting the capacity to cultivate women's hockey.

Another major aspect that has limited professional women's hockey from developing an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" is the lack of relevant media coverage (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21). The influence of media impacts the sport's ability to develop interest, in viewers, but also in sponsors and in developing industry connections. The media coverage of professional women's hockey has centered two conflicting narratives, that of individual fault and feminist advertising (Szto et al., 2021; Cooky & Antunovic, 2022). The precarious state of women's professional hockey has been attributed in the media to individual players, claiming that joining the PWHPA and refusing to play is what limited the development of the sport (Szto et al., 2021). This narrative contributed to the concealment of the structural issues within women's hockey, therefore constricting the possibility of their reparation through interested and concerned parties. In terms of promotional strategies, most publicity focuses on the increase of girls' registration in hockey programs as well as the promotion of female activism (Adams & Leavitt, 2018; Cooky & Antunovic, 2022). This ties the support of women's hockey to the support of the feminist social movement. While this coverage may work to improve overall societal attitudes towards women in sports, it does little to address the resource disparity in women's hockey as well as promotes the sport as something political rather than skillful. Sara Ahmed (2017), a contemporary feminist theorist, identifies the position of the feminist killjoy, particularly in how recognizing sexist issues marks the figure speaking as someone to be dismissed, attributed to a personal opinion rather than an institutional issue. It is this exact rhetoric, in the promotion of women's hockey, that facilitates the sport's dismissal. Watching women's hockey is presented as a political, feminist action rather than simply enjoying and supporting a high-level sport. As a result, there is little support and viewership of women's hockey, as society holds that negative association to the feminist movement, especially as there is an expectation for elite sports to present as apolitical.

Cultural Capital: The Struggle for Quality

The use of feminist narratives of progress and inclusivity as an advertising tactic also does little to develop the skill of women's hockey nor programs to encourage female participation (Cooky & Antunovic, 2022). Organizational inequity and patriarchal narratives about girls in sports restrict the development of cultural capital, the final form of capital that Bourdieu (1986) proposes. Cultural capital namely manifests as the qualifications, knowledge, and skills a person has in a particular field (Bourdieu, 1986). The pathways to the elite level of hockey for girls has been designed to mimic that of the boys, however, because of the disparities in girls' hockey, especially that of no viable career opportunity, there is a significant lack of guidance beyond a recreational level (Szto et al., 2021; Edwards

& Stevens, 2019; Adams & Leavitt, 2018). As a result of this, there is a significant decrease in participation in girls' hockey at older ages (Szto et al., 2021; Adams & Leavitt, 2018). Girls' hockey is simply not given the same treatment as boys' hockey in terms of a focus on fostering skill and improvement. The lack of a stable professional level, beyond that of the Olympics, only perpetuates girls' hockey as something not worthwhile developing. This ideology manifests in the tangible experiences of girls in minor hockey associations, particularly as multiple teams are forced to share extremely limited ice time and thus limiting their opportunity to hone skills to an elite level (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). If there are no recognizable qualifications attesting to the skill of women's hockey, such as a societally recognized professional league, then women's hockey will always be relegated to something lesser and uncertifiable.

Accumulated Capital: A New Way Forward

Attributing the historic lack of popularity and professionality of women's hockey to its lack of economic, social, and cultural capital is further affirmed by the recent emergence of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) in 2023, a league that is greater funded, supported, organized, and promoted than any previous attempts of professional women's hockey. The league is largely financially backed by Mark Walter, a prominent owner of several professional sport teams, allowing salaries between $35 000 and $80 000 USD for players as well as a greater opportunity for professionalism (Spencer, 2023; Clipperton, 2023). The league has also strategically placed teams in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Boston, Minnesota, and New York, six cities with a large hockey following. This placement has paid off as all the Canadian teams "declared sellouts for their home-openers, with Toronto selling out all 12 of its home games," inspiring hope for longevity in public interest and revenue (Spencer, 2023). The PWHL has also garnered a strong network of people, uniting high-level players in a way that previous leagues were unable to, as well as a better organizational foundation for developing social capital (Spencer, 2023). Rather than being run or economically supported by the NHL, its commissioners are offering logistical support as well as aiding in promotion to utilize the NHL's platform to increase the viewership and reputability of the PWHL (Clipperton, 2023). The independence of the PWHL allows the league to develop its own organizational structure that supports the particularities of women's hockey, as well as the opportunity to tackle the patriarchal structures within the game. The league has also developed its own network of sponsors, one of which is Molson Canadian who operationalizes the feminist perspective in its advertising in a way that begins to unravel those patriarchal structures. Molson launched the "See My Name" campaign, redesigning jerseys so that players names are placed at the bottom of jerseys and their logo at the top, allowing visibility of names which would otherwise be covered by player's hair (Molson Canadian, 2024). Although it is still a marketing tactic by Molson, the advertisement draws attention to subtle inequalities that female players experience as well as draws attention to the skill of players in a material manifestation, rather than performative advocacy. The PWHL has been able to accumulate all of Bourdieu's (1986) identified forms of capital, thus inspiring hope for the sustainability of professional women's hockey.

The struggles that women's hockey has faced throughout its attempts for professionality demonstrates the sport's position as lower class compared to men's hockey, particularly due to its lack of capital

according to Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital. Women's hockey's lack of symbolic capital, as recognized by its unpopularity and lack of societal respect results from its historic lack of economic, social, and cultural capital. The CWHL and the NWHL were significantly underfunded in money and resources, struggled to develop unification and good governance, and faced issues developing the qualifications of an elite level game (Szto et al., 2021). These strains extend past the professional level and into youth hockey, in which young girls similarly contend with the battle for recognition as a worthwhile investment as well as patriarchal notions of the value of women's hockey (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). However, the united focus and assemblage of resources dedicated to ensuring the success of the PWHL is changing the landscape of hockey for girls and women. Having a professional league for youth to strive towards increases the developmental potential of the game, thus giving young girls a way forward in professional hockey. On a broader scale, this battle for professionality and popularity reveals how intrinsically public opinion is tied to wealth, whether that be economic or otherwise. Further inquiry into women's hockey programs regarding development, professional level organization, and advertising will be necessary to understand the scope of inequalities and disparities, as well as propose informed solutions and paths of improvement going forward. Watching how the PWHL progresses past its inaugural season will reveal whether its wealth will be enough to challenge the patriarchal structures that restrict the social opinion of women's hockey.

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Swipe Right on Intersectionality: How Dating App Algorithms Exclude Marginalized Groups

By: Bella Copeman

POV: It's Friday night. You're nearing the edges of drunkenness from toasting drinks to a random purpose you can hardly remember. Maybe National Groundhog Day? It seems that when you're a little tipsy, your thumbs drift lazily towards Tinder-rindr-umble-inge. As you scroll through your prospects, wondering for the 3669372nd time if you should drop your age range maximum to something more socially acceptable, you find your eyes assailed by the usual dating app stereotypes. Several ungodly minutes later, you're in danger of throwing your phone if you see another dude boasting about how much he benches, or another "hey mamas" lesbian that looks like knock-off Kristen Stewart. As you're losing your will to live, you scream internally, *"seriously, where are all the hot people nowadays?"*

This is not because there aren't many attractive people—it could be because the app thinks *you* are unattractive. But are you unattractive, or do you not fit into the societal beauty standards?

Dating apps seemingly offer choices for partners, but this couldn't be more wrong. These far-from-neutral apps favour conformity to hegemonic (i.e., dominant) beauty standards: white, attractive, thin, and heteronormative. Women of colour, plus-sized people, overtly queer people and lower-class individuals have less success on dating apps due to common beliefs that they are unfeminine and undesirable (Banks et al. 2024:4). These biased algorithms routinely punish them by de-popularizing their profiles, reproducing and reinforcing systemic biases, particularly racist ideologies (ibid; Mineo 2024). Talk about terrible matchmaking…and some people pay for premium! While we love to believe we are beyond judging people by their looks, contemporary technology and practices continue to discriminate against marginalized groups. As identities intersect, our innate prejudices become increasingly evident, especially within dating apps (Crenshaw 1989:139,154).

Intersectionality refers to how social categories like race and class create unique and multidimensional experiences. Without acknowledging intersectionality, issues involving marginalized groups cannot be addressed (Crenshaw 1989:140,154). Intersectionality theory can help understand how experiences differ within dating app algorithmic biases, creating differing opportunities based on identity (Arranz Aldana & Salazar 2024:635).

Algorithms are software systems that track online activity to push curated content, encouraging engagement. Dating apps use collaborative filtering, where the algorithm measures current and past individual and group preferences to push profiles (Barbagello & Lantero 2021; Celdir et al. 2023). If someone constantly avoids matching with blondes, they will see fewer blondes, decreasing the overall push of blonde profiles. Attractive users, measured by engagement and hegemonic beauty standards, become heavily seen. Those not fitting these attractiveness definitions only see people rated similarly, creating a desirability hierarchy (Banks et al. 2024:2). If you stray from predetermined beauty standards, you may be ranked lower than somebody considered conventionally attractive.

Though collaborative filtering increases the likelihood of seeing profiles matching dating preferences, harmful biases can permeate this filtering (Barbagello & Lantero 2021). The filtering assumes nobody finds marginalized identities, such

as women of colour, attractive, as most users swipe left on visible minorities. For example, matches are often determined by racial preferences, such as reports of finding Black women less attractive than white women. Black women are reportedly the least desired and matched while being the most sexualized (Banks et al. 2024:4,5). Physical similarity algorithms prevent interracial couples by forcing politics and discrimination into dating app preference reflection, justified by the presumption that couples should and commonly do look similar (Williams 2024). However, platforms still use these algorithms because matches and engagement increase revenue which is their main objective (Celdir et al. 2023).

When racial minorities experience interracial matching, it is often fueled by racial fetishization based on their "exotic" appearance. This fetishization, conceptualized as non-consensual objectification and sexualization focused on physical image, increases sexual violence, and invalidates Black identities, diminishing them to objects for pleasure (Baker 2023:8; Banks et al. 2024:9). As dating apps are typically sexual spaces (just ask anyone to show you their DMs) this fetishization appears justified and normalized. Consequently, women of colour often avoid online dating, taking extra precautions with their online profiles to reduce sexualization (ibid:3,11). To conquer these discriminatory algorithms, reject dominant discrimination, and feel safer, marginalized groups form dating communities free from discriminatory exclusion (Baker 2023:8-10).

Black, queer women experience elevated fetishization, their online dating interactions often being hypersexualized messages to join polyamorous relationships. This tells queer women of colour they are exclusively a sexual object, dehumanizing them (Banks et al. 2024:9,14). Through an intersectional lens, it's clear how dating experiences become increasingly challenging for marginalized groups, particularly at the intersection of race and gender, forcing a discriminatory environment (Dattani 2024:10).

The more socially marginalized groups an individual is a part of, the lower their dating app success, as they are repeatedly excluded from the dating pool (Dattani 2024:9,10). Dating apps exclude the lower class, favouring those paying for premium subscriptions, which rapidly increases their success rates (Learmouth 2024). Plus-sized individuals, particularly women of colour, are shown even less because of discriminatory algorithms, reproducing fatness as shame (Banks et al. 2024:11). Gender-diverse individuals, especially transgender users' profiles are minimally pushed due to biases, prohibiting online dating success. Intersectionality theory is key to understanding this discrimination from a widened perspective, working to understand how privilege exists in the dating scene and how online platforms reinforce multiple forms of intersecting discrimination (Skeen et al. 2024:1160).

Why should we care about how dating apps classify attractiveness? Systems of power become present in algorithms through this promotion of hegemonic power, allowing these perspectives to become more dominant online (Bishop, 2021). When we follow these algorithms while ignoring our prejudices, we enable this oppression to continue. We must acknowledge our biases and actively work to change these systems and dating app behaviours to benefit users and alter what we consider "attractive" (Mineo 2024; Williams 2024). Maybe then, you'll find something else to complain about on drunken Friday nights. Maybe you wouldn't fall for the next drummer who plays you an Arctic Monkeys song with your name squished in (you probably still

will). Maybe, you'll meet someone who knows what "intersectionality" is, so you don't have to give them this spiel when the conversation dies.

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Synthetic Analysis Paper Curated and Commodified: The Struggle for Authenticity in Digital Spaces

By: Anthony Dagher

In the era of digital interconnectedness, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become central to how individuals construct and perform their identities. With approximately 5.16 billion users globally, accounting for about 59.3% of the world's population, social media deeply influences daily life, shaping how individuals curate their personas, gain visibility, and engage with audiences (Prioridata 2024). However, social media is far from a neutral space. It operates within systems of visibility, conformity, and commodification that shape not only what users share but also how they see themselves. These systems amplify pressures to conform to dominant norms, such as participating in viral trends or presenting curated lifestyles, while commodifying personal identity for profit. The tension between self-expression and structural constraints raises critical questions: How do social media platforms influence identity formation? What mechanisms afford certain performances while discouraging others? And what do these dynamics reveal about power and control in the digital age?

To analyze these questions, this paper applies three sociological frameworks that illuminate different dimensions of identity formation: Erving Goffman's concept of stigma, which explores how individuals manage their 'virtual social identity' to navigate societal expectations (1963:5); Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism, which reveals the structural mechanisms of surveillance that discipline behavior and enforce conformity (Foucault as cited in Deveaux 1994:200); and Adorno and Horkheimer's response of the culture industry critiques the commodification of individuality and creativity within capitalist systems (1944:96-97). These frameworks, while distinct, converge in their ability to unpack how social media identities are both shaped by user agency and constrained by structural and economic forces. By synthesizing these perspectives, this paper argues that social media reshapes identity through interconnected systems of performance, discipline, and commodification. This synthesis not only addresses the critical questions posed but also reveals the interplay between individual practices and broader systems of power, offering a nuanced understanding of identity in the digital age.

Social media platforms have created a space where identity is both performed and scrutinized, amplifying the stakes of self-presentation. Erving Goffman's concept of stigma provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals navigate their "virtual social identity" in these digital contexts. Goffman (1963:3-4) defines stigma as, "an attribute that is deeply discrediting", distinguishing between the "discredited," whose stigmatizing attributes are visible, and the "discreditable," whose potentially stigmatizing traits remain hidden. On platforms like Instagram, this distinction manifests as users curate idealized personas that align with societal norms to avoid judgment or rejection.

In *Mental Symptoms and Public Order*, Goffman (1967:188) emphasizes how situational propriety governs behavior, requiring individuals to conform to expectations to maintain social order. On social media, this is evident in how users craft content that adheres to platform-specific norms, such as beauty standards or expressions of success, to gain approval.

This process reflects Goffman's

observation that individuals actively manage impressions to control how they are perceived (Goffman 1967:191). However, while Goffman's framework highlights individual agency in identity performance, it neglects the structural forces that mediate these interactions in digital spaces. These limitations become evident in the context of social media's algorithms and visibility metrics, which act as structural feedback mechanisms that intensify pressures to conform. Likes, shares, and comments introduce new layers of judgment, blurring Goffman's distinction between "discredited" and "discreditable" identities. For instance, visibility metrics can expose hidden traits, as users internalize the expectations of an "imagined audience" to maximize engagement (Marwick and Boyd 2011:143). This dynamic extends beyond interpersonal management, suggesting that structural elements on social media shape the stakes of impression management in ways Goffman's framework does not fully address.

While Goffman's micro-level focus offers valuable insights into the performative nature of identity, it underemphasizes the broader systems of power that regulate user behavior. Foucault's concept of panopticism addresses this gap by revealing how surveillance mechanisms, such as algorithms, discipline behavior and enforce conformity. Together, these frameworks provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity formation on social media. The next section explores Foucault's theory in depth, demonstrating how algorithms function as digital panopticons, regulating user behavior on a structural level.

Michel Foucault's analysis of discipline and surveillance provides a powerful lens for understanding how social media platforms regulate behavior and shape identity. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1977:136) describes how power operates through mechanisms that produce "docile bodies," individuals controlled and productive through internalized discipline. Central to this process is panopticism, where the mere possibility of being observed compels individuals to self-regulate their behavior (Foucault as cited in Deveaux 1994:200). This model of power extends beyond institutions, influencing broader societal contexts.

Social media platforms act as digital panopticons, where algorithms regulate behavior by promoting content that aligns with platform norms. Visibility metrics, such as likes, comments, and shares, encourage users to conform to aesthetic or behavioral standards to maximize engagement. TikTok's algorithm, for example, rewards creators who align with dominant trends, subtly shaping user behavior to fit the platform's expectations (Ionescu and Licu 2023). This dynamic reflects Foucault's assertion that "visibility is a trap" (Foucault 1977:200), as users internalize platform expectations to maintain approval and visibility.

However, Foucault's framework assumes a largely passive subject who complies with disciplinary mechanisms, which underestimates the active negotiation of users. Many social media participants strategically navigate algorithms, resisting or subverting norms to amplify marginalized voices or challenge dominant trends. For example, creators often repurpose platform norms to maintain authenticity while appealing to algorithmic demands. This negotiation introduces agency that aligns more closely with Goffman's emphasis on impression management (1963:5).

Feminist critiques further highlight gaps in Foucault's framework, particularly its failure to address how surveillance operates differently across gendered and racialized identities. Tools like beauty filters

on Instagram exemplify how platforms disproportionately discipline women's appearances, reinforcing societal norms of femininity (Deveaux 1994:226). These examples demonstrate that Foucault's analysis, while effective in explaining structural control, requires supplementation to fully capture the complexities of social media dynamics.

Foucault's analysis, though focused on power and regulation, leaves open questions about the economic dimensions of digital control. While disciplinary mechanisms shape behavior, the commodification of user identities extends the reach of platform power beyond surveillance. Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry provides a critical lens to examine how social media transforms identity and creativity into products, extracting profit while enforcing conformity.

While Goffman and Foucault focus on identity performance and regulation, Adorno and Horkheimer expand the analysis to the economic dimensions of social media. In The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception (1944:95), they argue that capitalism transforms cultural expressions into commodities, eroding individuality and creativity in favor of standardized products designed for consumption. This critique aligns with how social media platforms monetize user-generated content, turning identity into a product.

On platforms like Instagram and TikTok, influencers curate and commodify their identities to attract audiences and generate profit. Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of "pseudo-individuality" explains this dynamic, as seemingly unique self-expressions are packaged to align with capitalist imperatives (1944:96-97). TikTok trends often reward conformity to specific aesthetics or behaviors, encouraging creators to produce content optimized for algorithmic promotion (Ionescu and Licu 2023). These processes not only homogenize identity but also extract economic value from user activity, as platforms profit from targeted advertising and data collection.

However, Adorno and Horkheimer's framework assumes a passive consumer, neglecting the participatory and agentic nature of social media. Users actively navigate commodification, balancing authenticity with algorithmic demands to maintain relevance. This negotiation aligns with Goffman's emphasis on impression management (1963:5), where individuals strategically curate their public personas. For example, creators often repurpose trends to reflect personal identities while meeting algorithmic expectations, illustrating how agency complicates the notion of homogenization (Ionescu and Licu 2023). Similarly, Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power complements Adorno and Horkheimer by revealing how algorithms reinforce commodification through surveillance, ensuring a steady stream of marketable content (Foucault 1977:200).

The commodification of identity intersects with issues of inequality, as marginalized groups face unique pressures to conform to dominant norms while reclaiming visibility through resistance. This is shown through algorithmic biases disproportionately marginalizing racialized creators. For instance, Black creators on TikTok report suppressed visibility compared to non-Black creators (Harris, Johnson, Palmer, Yang, and Bruckman 2023). At the same time, these creators use social media to foster community-driven content and challenge erasure, reclaiming agency within constrained systems (Harris et al. 2023). These dynamics reveal that while commodification standardizes identity for economic exploitation, users simultaneously resist and repurpose these systems to subvert exclusion.

By integrating Adorno and Horkheimer's economic critique with Goffman's focus on individual agency and Foucault's structural analysis, a more nuanced understanding of social media emerges. Commodification operates within a feedback loop where users both shape and are shaped by platform structures, illustrating how performance, discipline, and commodification intersect in identity formation.

Social media platforms fundamentally reshape identity through mechanisms of performance, discipline, and commodification. By synthesizing the frameworks of Goffman, Foucault, and Adorno and Horkheimer, we can identify an original insight: the co-creation of identity on social media is both a site of negotiation and a mechanism of systemic power. This synthesis reveals that the relationship between user agency and structural constraint is not binary but dynamic, where the boundaries of control and resistance are constantly redrawn.

The frameworks come together to illuminate an inherent paradox in digital identity: users exercise remarkable creativity and autonomy in curating their personas, yet their choices are mediated by algorithms and commodified by platforms. Goffman's emphasis on micro-level impression management captures the deliberate ways users present themselves to achieve social approval (1963:5). However, the digital context transforms these performances into visible, measurable outputs—likes, shares, and comments—that are embedded within broader systems of control. Foucault's concept of panopticism extends Goffman's insights, explaining how surveillance mechanisms regulate user behavior. Yet, Foucault's focus on discipline fails to account for the participatory dimensions of social media, where users exploit these same mechanisms to challenge platform norms. This interplay becomes most visible in the commodification processes outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer. Social media platforms profit by turning user identities into products, rewarding conformity through visibility metrics while extracting value from creative labor (1944:96-97). Yet, these platforms simultaneously provide tools for resistance. Racialized creators, for example, use algorithms and trends strategically to amplify marginalized voices and challenge erasure (Harris et al. 2023). These practices complicate Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of "pseudo-individuality," revealing how users repurpose commodification for visibility and empowerment.

Synthesizing these frameworks reveals a deeper implication: the feedback loop between individual creativity and systemic constraints does not merely regulate identity but actively redefines what identity means in the digital age. This process blurs traditional boundaries between agency and power. For instance, while users actively curate their online personas, these personas are shaped by algorithmic norms that prioritize marketability. Similarly, while platforms impose conformity through surveillance, they also rely on user innovation to sustain engagement and profit. This duality suggests that power on social media is not unidirectional but reciprocal, as platforms depend on user participation to maintain relevance.

The integration of these theories also exposes the blind spots within each framework. Goffman's micro-level focus fails to grapple with how structural forces mediate self-presentation. Foucault's disciplinary lens overlooks the agentic strategies users deploy to navigate and subvert platform constraints. Adorno and Horkheimer, while incisive in their critique of commodification, dismiss the participatory potential of digital spaces. Together, these limitations reveal that no

single framework can fully explain the complexities of social media. However, their synthesis provides a powerful analytical lens, showing that digital identity is co-constructed through a constant negotiation of power, agency, and commodification.

This perspective not only deepens our understanding of identity formation but also raises urgent ethical questions. If platforms shape identity through algorithms and commodification, how can we ensure these systems promote equity rather than perpetuate bias? Marginalized creators, who navigate these dynamics most acutely, offer a blueprint for resistance by leveraging platform tools to build visibility and community. Their practices highlight the need for platforms to account for intersectional impacts in their design, prioritizing inclusivity and fairness. Ultimately, this synthesis suggests that identity on social media is not just a reflection of societal norms, but a contested terrain where the boundaries of power, creativity, and resistance are continuously redefined.

This paper demonstrates that identity formation on social media is a deeply complex process shaped by the interplay of performance, discipline, and commodification. By synthesizing Goffman's micro-level focus on impression management, Foucault's structural analysis of surveillance, and Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of commodification, it becomes clear that identity in the digital age is co-constructed through a negotiation of agency and systemic power. Social media platforms, far from being neutral spaces, actively mediate how users see themselves and are seen by others, shaping identity through visibility metrics, algorithmic regulation, and economic imperatives. The integration of these frameworks reveals not only the mechanisms through which platforms influence identity, but also the paradoxes inherent in this process. Users actively engage with and navigate these systems, leveraging them for self-expression and visibility. Yet, their agency is constantly constrained by structural forces that prioritize conformity and commodification. This duality is especially pronounced for marginalized creators, who face both exclusionary biases and opportunities for empowerment within the same platforms. These dynamics illustrate that social media is not simply a tool for identity expression but a contested terrain where power, creativity, and resistance intersect.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond individual experiences, raising critical ethical questions about the design and regulation of social media platforms. If platforms commodify identity, while amplifying inequality, how can they be reimagined to foster inclusivity and equity? The practices of marginalized creators, who navigate algorithmic biases to reclaim visibility, suggest that resistance and innovation are possible even within commodified systems. These practices underscore the need for platforms to address algorithmic biases, prioritize ethical design, and create spaces where diverse identities can thrive.

Sociology, as a discipline concerned with the interplay of structure, agency, and power, is uniquely positioned to interrogate these dynamics. Social media reshapes fundamental aspects of social interaction, identity, and power relations, making its study vital for understanding broader societal transformations in the contemporary era. Examining these platforms reveals how digital spaces reproduce, challenge, or reconfigure social inequalities, providing critical insights into the workings of power in a hyper-mediated world. By critically analyzing the intersection of technology, culture, and economics, sociology can contribute to envisioning equitable futures

that prioritize human dignity and diversity in an increasingly commodified and surveilled digital landscape.

Ultimately, understanding the dynamics of identity formation on social media requires more than individual or structural analysis. It demands a synthesis of perspectives that accounts for the feedback loops between agency and power, visibility and surveillance, and creativity and commodification. By analyzing these dynamics, we can move toward a more equitable digital landscape that not only reflects but actively supports the diversity of human expression.

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Learning Disabilities, Stigmatization, and Subject Formation in the University Institution

By: Charlie Ippolito-Graham

Introduction

Recently, disabilities within universities have been increasingly visible due to coverage by social media and news outlets. Much of this coverage discusses the issues of university accommodation offices being inadequate in their assistance to disabled students, highlighting the fact that disabled students are nearly 20% less likely to graduate from post-secondary institutions than their non-disabled peers (Mowreader 2024). In this essay I will discuss the presence of learning disabilities within the university institution, and the issue of universities struggling to accommodate disabled students.

I pose the question: "why do some students with learning disabilities not claim university accommodations?" There are multiple ways this question can be suitably analyzed, such as an analysis of the insufficient resources allocated to disability services, or the hostility of the Western education system in general toward neurodivergent students. However, I will focus on a sociological analysis of why students with learning disabilities may feel uncomfortable accessing disability services offered by universities. In this essay, I will focus on the sociological frameworks of Goffman's concept of stigmatization, as well as Foucault's concept of subject formation. I will begin this essay by describing how the frameworks presented by Goffman and Foucault explain different aspects of learning disabilities within the university institution, and then move on to synthesizing these two theoretical frameworks in order to create a more thorough lens for assessing this issue. Henceforth, I will abbreviate "learning disability" to "LD."

Theoretical Framework

Goffman's theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism proposes that the self is dramaturgical in nature, and individuals perform in a specific way to manage their impressions. There are two aspects of the dramaturgical self: the front stage self, which is the curated presentation the individual shows to others (Goffman 1956:78), and the backstage self, which is who the individual is when they are alone (70). Connected to this understanding of the self is Goffman's concept of stigma, which, at its simplest, is a relationship between an attribute and a stereotype (Goffman 1963:4). Goffman explains that an individual with a stigma would be received as "normal" by ordinary society if it weren't for a certain stigmatized attribute that they possess (5). A dichotomy is thus created, the "normals," and the "stigmatized" (5). Goffman explains that due to the othering of stigmatized individuals from "normals," conscious and subconscious discrimination towards the stigmatized individual is excused (5).

When stigmatized individuals interact with "normals," they are under pressure to be self-conscious about their own impression (14), which leads to the careful curation of their "front stage" self. Goffman describes that stigmatized individuals' incidental failings or slight improprieties are often taken as a sign of their stigmatized attribute manifesting (15). For example, an individual who has been institutionalized for their mental health in the past may be afraid to display strong emotions due to outsider perceptions (15).

Individuals with LD fit Goffman's definition of "stigmatized." Goffman's two necessary components of stigma are an othering attribute and a connected negative stereotype (Goffman 1963:4), both of which individuals with LD possess. The othering

attribute individuals with LD possess is their disability, and there are various stereotypes associated with that attribute. The term "learning disability" is often associated with socially devalued traits of laziness and carelessness (Daley 2018).

Since individuals with LD are categorized as "stigmatized," they are set aside from Goffman's conceptualization of "normals," allowing them to be subject to both conscious and subconscious discrimination (Goffman 1963:5). Goffman states that this discrimination is excused since "normals" view the stigmatized individuals as "not quite human" (5). The separation of what is normal and what is deviant places individuals with LD in a vulnerable situation. Even though many forms of discrimination are not tolerated within the university institution, differential treatment is still prevalent (Hendricks 1994).

Stigmatized individuals often feel the need to heavily manage their impression when socializing with "normals." In this context, the "normals" are represented by neurotypical individuals, those who are not stigmatized by a disability or disorder. When individuals with LD practice impression management, it may be to distance themselves from stereotypes, or to conceal their disability altogether. Within the context of universities, individuals with LD may practice impression management by refusing to seek accommodations, as they may be self-conscious about existing stereotypes.

I present the example of a university student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The student has difficulty completing assigned tasks on time as a result of their LD, and is aware that extensions can be granted through their university's disability accommodations office. However, the student is aware of their status as a stigmatized individual, and the stereotypes associated with the othering attribute of "disabled" that they possess. The student knows that one related stereotype is "being lazy." The student, not wanting to display stereotypical behaviour of a stigmatized individual with LD, thereby refuses to request an extension, not wanting to portray a manifestation of "laziness."

Goffman's account of stigmatization offers a valuable framework for viewing the disabled individual. To assess the institution which the individual operates within, I will assess Foucault's framework of power, specifically, his concept of subject formation.

Foucault describes the concept of biopower as the set of mechanisms which makes the human species an object for political or general powers to govern. To understand Foucault's concept of subject formation, I will first describe Foucault's concept of "docile bodies." Power relations not only shape institutional practices, but also how those within institutions view themselves. Within Foucault's book "Discipline and Punish," he states that social institutions control and correct the functions of the body, creating individuals who are docile and malleable (Foucault 1975:136). The 'mechanics of power' systematically rearrange the individual, manipulating the docile body's elements, gestures, and behaviours (138). As the body itself is subject to new forms of knowledge, it is manipulated by authority (155).

In Foucault's 1982 text *The Subject and Power,* authority is described as a technique or form of power that categorizes individuals, forcefully attaching them to their own identity, and imposing a "truth" upon them which must be internalized and externalized (Foucault 1982:781). Truth is established through discourse, which can be understood as a narrative about a concept that shapes the way society views it. However, it is solely the dominant power that gets to define what is and what is not

true. The individual must recognize this prescribed truth within themself, and other individuals must recognize that truth within them as well (781). This is Foucault's theory of subject formation.

Subject formation is used to force individuals into passivity, creating a category for power to be exercised over (789). In other words, Foucault's concept of subject formation describes how new discourse creates new categories of people. Foucault makes a crucial distinction, however, stating that the institutions in question are not where the source of oppression lies, but the "individuality" that is forced upon those within (Foucault 1982:785). Individuality has the positive effect of asserting the right to be different, but it also attacks the traits which differentiate the individual, constraining them within the category decided by the dominant form of authority (781).

As the dominant form of power holds control over what is and what is not true, systems that produce knowledge within individuals (such as schools) are forced to perpetuate these truths. This leads to mass populations holding a common belief of what is true, and applying this truth to the way they perceive others and themselves.

When applying the concept of subject formation to disabled individuals, it is crucial to understand that the category of "disabled" is created through a "truth" imposed by a dominant form of authority. When a category is created to describe the "able mind," a category is created to describe the "disabled mind" as well. The categories of "able" and "disabled" only exist because the dominant form of power states what the "correct" nature of the mind is.

The university institution perpetuates this knowledge production and categorization. When students with LD wish to access disability accommodations, they are forced to acknowledge that they fall into the category of disabled. As Foucault describes, the individual internalizes this truth within themself, and outsiders must recognize that truth within them as well (Foucault 1982:781). For clarification, the issue here is not that the individual is disabled, nor is it that the word "disabled" is used to describe them. The issue is the fact that the dominant form of power declares a true, objectively "correct" form of the mind that is widely accepted by normative society, and forces those who are "disabled" to internalize a sense of "incorrectness" that is constantly perpetuated both internally and externally.

Power relations shape institutional practices and how individuals view themselves. The university institution projects further separation between "able" and "disabled" individuals by the actions and ideas instilled by a "disability office." Once again, it is not the existence of disability offices that should be critiqued, but rather the individualization that they force onto disabled students. Students with LD may not wish to approach disability offices, as the categorization of "disabled" may raise feelings of inadequacy that have been created by power relations. The truth of what proper brain functionality exists as a social construction prescribed by the dominant form of power, and is enforced through the existence of disability offices, which inadvertently serve to "other" students with LD from their peers by driving those who are "disabled" away from those who are not.

Synthesis and Argument Development

When combining Goffman's concept of stigmatization and Foucault's concept of subject formation, there are a few areas of similarity. Both concepts illustrate a double-sided nature to perception, with the way society perceives an individual based on their stigmatization/categorization, and the

subsequent way that individual internalizes their own identity based on the stigma/category forced upon them. For Goffman, the stigmatized individual practices impression management in order to remove themselves from the socially devalued aspects of their stigmatization. For Foucault, the categorized individual internalizes the prescribed "truth" of their identity, while also considering the outsider perceptions of that truth, driving them into a socially constricting individuality. Categorized individuals are forced to internalize a prescribed "truth" about themself and accept differential treatment from others based on that "truth," and stigmatized individuals are forced to be conscious about their own status as a stigmatized person and manage their impressions accordingly. These two concepts can co-exist and apply to the same group of individuals.

Foucault's concept of subject formation describes how categorization and individualization can be restrictive to the individual but does not describe how individuals of different categories interact with each other. Goffman, however, clearly illustrates how the roles of "stigmatized" and "normal" interact. What Goffman does not consider is how institutions perpetuate these roles.

Foucault's concept of subject formation provides a backdrop for Goffman's concept of stigmatization. The dominant power decides what truth is, which in this context, is what the "correct" state of the brain is. Discourse has shaped the "truth," which tells individuals that they are essentially defective if they do not fit within the correct categorization of "normal." Institutions, such as universities, further reproduce this prescribed truth in their differential treatment of students with LD. Disability offices offering services to assist students is not problematic, however, the forced individualization of the disabled student is. With this groundwork on how subject formation affects the university institution, Goffman's theory on stigmatization can be applied to gain a richer understanding of how individuals within that institution perceive themselves and each other.

The categories formed by discourse, "disabled" and "able," can be conceptualized through Goffman's terms of "stigmatized" and "normals." Discourse encourages stigmatization, as the prescribed "truth" states that disabled individuals are faulty. Understanding the category of "disabled" not just as different from "able," but actively stigmatized, further illustrates the impact that dominant forms of power have on socialization.

Foucault offers a possible solution to the issues of individualization and categorization, which can be applied to the issue of stigmatization in turn. Foucault proposes that individuals create a new form of subjectivity through the refusal of the individuality that has been forced onto them (Foucault 1982:785). If the creation of a new subjectivity is applied to students with LD in the university setting, the barrier of fear preventing them from accessing accommodations may be broken.

Conclusion

Students with LD may struggle to access accommodations from their university. This may be due to the infrastructure of the university or funding for disability offices, but it may also be for the sociological reasons outlined in this essay. Through understanding students with learning disabilities within Goffman's conceptualization of stigmatized groups, it is possible to view the double-consciousness possessed by these students: they must be aware of their status as stigmatized individuals, and also manage the impression they make towards non-stigmatized

individuals. By assessing the university institution through Foucault's concept of subject formation, it is possible to view the latent functions that disability offices have on categorizing students with LD, and enforcing individualization. By combining these two theoretical frameworks, Goffman and Foucault's concepts supplement each other, forming a more comprehensive thorough understanding of the way the university institution affects the students with LD within it, both internally and externally.

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The Perpetuation of Ahmed's Feminist Killjoy in the Reality Television Docusoap

By: Lily Kyte

Reality television has drawn in viewers with drama for decades. For the sake of entertainment, we tune in week after week to watch our favourite cast members argue over love, sex, and lies—but is there a point where the portrayal of this conflict becomes problematic? Many conflicts displayed in reality television center around a negative reaction to feminist discourse, strongly resonating with Sara Ahmed's theory of feminism and affect. When viewing reality television programs with Ahmed's theory in mind, it becomes apparent that this media exemplifies how a negative view of feminists, or the feminist as a killjoy, has come to be perpetuated within the social world. In this essay I will argue that Ahmed's theorization of affective feminism is strongly represented in the reality television docusoap, demonstrating how the view of the feminist as killjoy has been perpetuated. I first explore this argument by providing an explanation of what reality television is, with focus on the sub-genre of the docusoap. Following this, I present Ahmed's theory of affective feminism. Finally, I connect the docusoap sub-genre to Ahmed's affective feminism using the prominent docusoap program *Vanderpump Rules*, revealing how the view of feminist as killjoy has been able to continue within the social world. I conclude with suggestions on how reality television docusoaps can frame instances of affective feminism displayed within the programs differently to do their part in preventing this perpetuation of harm.

Reality television is a genre of television that has become increasingly popular within the social world. It is an unscripted and nonfictional program which features the interactions of real people rather than professional actors (Montemurro, 2008). These programs provide audiences with the ability to intimately observe the personal lives of others, developing a resonance between viewer and subject (Montemurro, 2008). This unique display of real experiences of love, loss, conflict, anger, and joy is incredibly different from scripted television, as the viewer believes the subjects of a program are truly experiencing these emotions (Andrejevic, 2004). When viewers are provided such a detailed and personal illustration of a subject's life, they develop a closeness to the subject which encourages further engagement with a given reality program (Andrejevic, 2004). Reality television can thus sometimes become a form of entertainment with a voyeuristic quality, as these programs knowingly cater to audiences that want to observe real situations which they have not been previously allowed to on television (Andrejevic, 2004). This voyeurism is the reason why reality television is so popular. The ability to observe others experiencing emotion is incredibly interesting for audiences, drawing them in episode after episode to see how subjects navigate dramatic situations (Andrejevic, 2004).

Despite the strong appeal the capturing of real-life experiences has to audiences, the authenticity of reality television is often questioned. Reality television programs have roots in documentary filmmaking, both at their core presenting a representation of the social world in its mostly raw form (Murray, 2004). Despite this shared core concept, reality television strategically prioritizes entertainment over informativity (Montemurro, 2008). As a result, throughout reality television's evolution, its authenticity has frequently been brought into question (Montemurro, 2008). In prioritizing

entertainment, there is strong potential for production teams to fabricate and edit storylines which frame subjects in ways that they feel will generate the best audience response (Montemurro, 2008). Reality television programs are highly edited in most cases, often presenting scenes which are a collection of clips and audio edited together to appear as though a specific event has occurred (Montemurro, 2008). The subjects of these programs are sometimes also influenced by production in the fabrication of storylines on set, in which production teams will set up a situation artificially (Montemurro, 2008).

Reality television is a broad genre, encapsulating many sub-categories of programs which make up a large body of media (Murray, 2004). Possibly the most prominent sub-category of reality television is the docusoap. Docusoaps primarily feature 'natural' settings and employ an observational mode of filming akin to cinema verité, without relying heavily on product placement and advertisements (Murray, 2004). This approach to capturing real life makes them one of the sub-genres of reality television most similar to documentary filmmaking (Murray, 2004). Docusoaps combine these techniques with the structuring devices of scripted soap operas, such as short narrative sequences, cliff-hangers, several plot lines, and a core focus on character personality (Murray, 2004). They represent an evolution in reality television programming, shifting away from documentary-style observation into an intimate relationship between viewer and subject which has become a quintessential part of reality television (Montemurro, 2008). Resonating with its embodiment of the soap opera, docusoaps have a key focus on stories relating to conflict, romance, deception, and betrayal, placing drama at the forefront of program development (Montemurro, 2008).

Reality television's relationship with feminism is interpreted strongly by Sara Ahmed's theorization of affective feminism. Ahmed (2017)'s work falls under the umbrella of feminist theory, a framework of ideas about the social world which is woman centered. Her conception of affective feminism focuses on the ways in which emotion, or affect, both creates feminist discourse and silences it (Ahmed, 2017). The creation of feminist discourse in this theory begins with the development of a feminist consciousness, which stems from emotional responses to injustice (Ahmed, 2017). Throughout the feminist's life, she experiences and observes various forms of being wronged which result from gender, sexuality, race, and countless other factors of identity-based injustice (Ahmed, 2017). These experiences initiate the sensing of a wrong which provokes intense emotion, setting into motion the beginnings of a feminist consciousness (Ahmed, 2017). Over time, the sensing of these wrongs accumulates and, because of their emotional nature, become embodied in the self (Ahmed, 2017).

The embodiment of experiences of wrongdoing forces the feminist to learn to inhabit her body differently, leading her to develop a true feminist consciousness. Women are assigned a set of strict rules by society of how to inhabit their bodies, which they must learn to do to prevent more occurrences of wrongdoing (Ahmed, 2017). They are encouraged to approach their surroundings with caution, acting in accordance with an assumption that their behaviour is the reason that wrongdoing occurs (Ahmed, 2017). In simply being a woman, the body becomes a sexual object, which must be treated as something to be controlled in order to be less susceptible to harm (Ahmed, 2017). It is expected that "boys will be boys," and the harm which women must be vigilant about is inevitable

(Ahmed, 2017, p.25). The feminist must quickly incorporate this into her understanding of the world, and often at first blindly trusts these societal assumptions (Ahmed, 2017). However, as she reflects on the wrongdoing she has embodied and the expectations which she must fulfill, the feminist brings her feminist consciousness into fruition (Ahmed, 2017). The way in which societal expectations structure the behaviour of men versus that of women becomes clear, and the feminist can come to redesign the world she exists within on her terms (Ahmed, 2017). This is not a straightforward process, and requires much effort (Ahmed, 2017). But, in doing so, the feminist becomes empowered by her emotion, and can direct feelings of pain and anger towards the structures which have placed the burden of wrongdoing onto its victims rather than those who have committed it (Ahmed, 2017).

In gaining empowerment, the feminist can find the words to describe injustice, attributing names to various problems that allow better recognition of them in daily life (Ahmed, 2017). It is the act of naming, however, which creates the image of the feminist killjoy (Ahmed, 2017). This role is played by countless feminists, framed as such because of a negative emotional response to identifying problems (Ahmed, 2023). The ability to name a problem is liberating for the feminist, but she quickly becomes disillusioned with it as she observes the emotional responses from those around her when she does so (Ahmed, 2023). In naming a problem, the feminist becomes a problem, making those around her uncomfortable (Ahmed, 2017). It is not just what she is saying, but the fact that she chooses to disregard societal norms and expose problems where they have historically not been acknowledged (Ahmed, 2023). For those who have not developed a feminist consciousness, to talk about a problem is to bring it into existence, as it has been ignored for so long that it does not seem like a real issue (Ahmed, 2017). The feminist is thus turned into a figurehead of causing issues, a "killjoy" who prevents those around her from having fun to identify problems (Ahmed, 2023, p.6).

There are countless reality television docusoaps which showcase how feminists become "killjoys" through their portrayals of conflict, but perhaps one of the most overt programs is *Vanderpump Rules* (Ahmed, 2023, p.6). *Vanderpump Rules* is a spinoff of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, focusing on the staff at cast member and restaurateur Lisa Vanderpump's West Hollywood establishment Sexy Unique Restaurant, better known as SUR (Baskin, 2013-2024). Vanderpump's employees are young, attractive fame-hopefuls working at SUR to support their attempts to make a career out of acting, music, and modelling (Baskin, 2013-2024). *Vanderpump Rules* is a quintessential docusoap, documenting the romance, conflict, and drama of the cast's interconnected lives (Montemurro, 2008). The program expertly lets audiences into the lives of its cast, providing a voyeuristic lens into their infidelity, betrayal, and recklessness that allows observation of how the cast transitions seamlessly from friends to adversaries from episode to episode (Andrejevic, 2004). Spanning eleven seasons and counting, *Vanderpump Rules* has given its large audience ample time to develop an intimate relationship with its cast (Montemurro, 2008). The program has been consistently successful, but exploded in popularity in 2023, when long-time cast members and romantic partners Ariana Madix and Tom Sandoval split due to the latter's cheating with another cast member (Baskin, 2013-2024).

Throughout its over 10 years on the air, *Vanderpump Rules* has consistently showcased Ahmed's affective feminism.

Each season, feminists on the cast call out countless harmful actions and, in doing so, are themselves turned into a problem (Ahmed, 2017). Occasions of being wronged that have resulted from various facets of identity, with specific focus present in the program on gender and race, are flagrantly on display by members of the cast (Ahmed, 2017). Women's bodies are specifically targeted by male cast members, as their understandings of the female body as a sex object come into conflict with female cast members' feminist consciousness (Ahmed, 2017). In one instance, cast member Jax Taylor decided to fund his girlfriend's breast enlargement surgery, specifically stating that because he is paying, he gets to decide how large her breasts will be (Baskin, 2013-2024). The female cast members in the room instantly explained to him that this is a harmful belief, but Taylor is able to play off his words with little to no repercussion (Baskin, 2013-2024). He becomes defensive, saying that the women are being overdramatic, and is frustrated with their inability to see that it was simply "a joke" (Baskin, 2013-2024). Because his defensiveness prevents the women from getting through to him, Taylor does not think that his behaviour is wrong, and is the main proponent of the objectification of women throughout his eight-season run on the program (Baskin, 2013-2024).

Interactions such as this displayed in *Vanderpump Rules* are incredibly representative of how harmful behaviours upholding the view of the feminist as "killjoy" are perpetuated (Ahmed, 2023, p.6). When feminists call out a problem, based on their affective response to wrongdoing, they are constantly met with negative emotion from those around them (Ahmed, 2023). In this meeting of affect with affect, constructive conversation is prevented, as defensive and frustrated responses from those around the feminist create a wall which she must try very hard to break through (Ahmed, 2023). No progress is made, and the behaviour which incited feminist discourse in the first place is often disregarded when trying to mitigate conflict (Ahmed, 2023). Reality television's portrayal of conflicts like this reinforces a lack of constructive conversation, as no real repercussions are faced by those who act harmfully on-screen. The feminists who are attempting to identify a problem are framed as dramatic and emotional, stripping them of their credibility as feminist thinkers by society (Ahmed, 2023). Occasions of harmful behaviour are framed inauthentically by production and accepted by audiences as something which is a given when engaging with reality television, particularly the docusoap, and are anticipated by viewers as a dramatic event (Montemurro, 2008). This acceptance strongly resonates with the societal expectation that "boys will be boys" identified by Ahmed (2017, p.25), in which the objectification of women's bodies is treated as inevitable and thus is attributed less importance. Both expectations are purely excuses for bad behaviour. They allow a cycle to be perpetuated in which, because harmful actions have been excused, the social world will continue to hold the opinion that this behaviour is not problematic (Ahmed, 2017). As a result, feminist attempts to bring light to this problematic nature continue to be viewed as a problem (Ahmed, 2017).

The positioning of the feminist as "killjoy" within the social world cannot be solely attributed to reality television docusoaps such as *Vanderpump Rules* (Ahmed, 2023, p.6). It is important in analyzing this topic to recognize that reality television's portrayal of harmful behaviours is only one component of a larger social issue which frames feminists as such. By

perpetuating the ability to use excuses such as "boys will be boys," society has developed a framework in which wrongdoing is often swept under the rug (Ahmed, 2017, p.25). Wrongdoing is not treated with the importance it should and is instead barely discussed, preventing feminists who have faced it from being engaged with constructively (Ahmed, 2017). In excusing wrongdoing and allowing on-screen feminist discourse to be framed as a "killjoy", reality television docusoaps have established themselves as one component of this societal framework which allows wrongdoing to be ignored (Ahmed, 2023, p.6). It is apparent that, if components of this framework like reality television and the entertainment industry at large begin to shift their approach to instances of affective feminism, positive change can begin to occur. If constructive conversation involving feminist discourse is more frequently engaged on-screen, viewers of the reality television docusoap are more likely to reflect on it and develop a clearer understanding of wrongdoing, in turn encouraging the development of a feminist consciousness.

In analyzing the reality television docusoap, using popular program*Vanderpump Rules* to illustrate, it is apparent that Sara Ahmed's theorization of affective feminism is strongly reflected in many major conflicts. When cast members are called out for their harmful behaviours by their feminist peers, they are combative and deflect responsibility for their actions, accessing a level of emotion which prevents any constructive conversation. This leads to a lack of progress in developing a feminist consciousness and normalizes the shutting down of feminist discourse to the viewer, perpetuating the view of the feminist as "killjoy" (Ahmed, 2023, p.6). I suggest that, when viewing docusoaps, viewers attempt to watch mindfully, developing an awareness of this pattern through reflection that will guide their relationship with reality television going forward. Overall, Ahmed's theory provides unique insight into how the image of the feminist killjoy has been perpetuated, especially within the realm of reality television.

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Research Proposal

By: Zoë Lam

Introduction

This paper will discuss the topic of restorative justice and how peer intervention groups are important to help offenders rebuild themselves in society and through the workforce. I will talk about the importance of the restorative justice system through attaining employment after conviction, and how it allows an ex-offender a second chance to repair harm and the ways to reduce recidivism. The context of this paper will address my research question "Does the presence of social support networks help offenders after release from an institution to reintegrate themselves into the workforce?". The independent variable is the networking groups and dependent variable is whether the offenders are able to attain employment. This paper consists of a literature review of ten academic scholarly articles where I will provide an overview of the topic in question, followed by my methods section where I will go into detail of how I would conduct this experiment (looking at the procedural measures, data collection, and researcher and participant ethical obligations), and then concluding with the significance of why my contributions to this topic is relevant to the study as well as how my experiment and findings support existing literature.

Literature Review

These ten academic sources give an overview that talks about how restorative justice provides a second chance for offenders through employment, the importance of social bonds (family and friends support) to reintegrate back into the workforce, how crimes are predominately committed by males, and the concern that focuses on the prevention of preventing criminal behavior in youths. Employment allows ex-offenders another opportunity to restore a sense of belonging, harmony, and self-worth by creating positive goals to allow themselves to reintegrate into the workforce and society, which is a start to creating a crime-free life (Bazemore & Erbe, 2003; Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016; Pleggenkuhle, Huebner, and Kras, 2016; Rhodes, 2008). Ex-offenders who have strong social support from family and friends will likely have an easier time reintegrating into society because close relationships with others provides conformity, allows for better social control, and helps parolees with the adjustment through the reintegration process (Bazemore & Erbe, 2003; Bazemore, 2001; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016; Cullen, 1994; Pleggenkuhle et al., 2016; Rhodes, 2008). Most sources focus on family connection after conviction, I want to make an addition to this topic of research by looking at how peer intervention groups can also help an ex-offender attain employment after incarceration. Many examples provided in these sources and results from conducted studies, all concluded that males are more likely to commit crime compared to females (Blagg, 1995; Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016; Cullen, 1994; Rhodes, 2008; Visher, Debus Sherrill, and Yahner, 2011). There is a gap in this body of literature because these sources only stated their results that showed males predominantly committing more crime than females with no explanation or further research as to the reason behind this. There is no scientific theory that answers the question of 'why' statistics show a differentiation between the genders. Throughout time, there has been an increasing and evolving concern with youths falling into criminal activity. Many of these scholarly pieces of literature focus on the prevention of criminal behavior on youths. Studies have found that youth involvement in crime stems from a lack of social bonds

with family, friends, and the community. Restorative justice through the help of social support, highlights the importance of youth and adolescents seeking early childhood intervention to have a strong support network that is significant to deter any criminal thinking, behavior, and activity at a young age (Bazemore, 2001; Bazemore & Erbe, 2003; Blagg, 1985; Cullen, 1994). Braithwaite (1998) summarizes for all sources and says that "restoring a sense of security and empowerment is often bound up with employment, the feeling of having a future or achieving [some] kind of success (p. 330).

Method Procedure for Administering the Experiment

An experiment is a "systematic attempt to test a causal hypothesis about the effect of variations in one variable (the IV) on another (the DV)" (A. Saulnier, 2023). My proposed project qualifies as a 'True Experiment' because it consists of random assignment, random selection, manipulation, and a control and experimental group. My independent variable is 'networking groups' and its attribute is peer intervention groups. I am going to manipulate this variable through random assignment as to whether offenders get treatment or not. My dependent variable is 'whether or not the offenders are able to attain employment'. I will measure this data through a focus group to see if ex-offenders were able to obtain employment or not.

On April 17th, 2024, I will conduct this study by sampling 100 youth male ex-offenders (ages 15-24) who have been released from an institution within the past six months. To obtain participants, I would use non-probability sampling in the form of advertisements where I would paste posters in the visitation room of the prison. After obtaining my sample of 100 male youth participants, I would randomly assign 50 participants to a peer intervention group run by a social worker and 50 participants would not receive treatment. I would then be able to track how well offenders are able to attain employment without giving them the treatment of being in a networking group after release. In this experiment, I am measuring the effectiveness of peer intervention groups to determine if ex-offenders can attain employment, compared to those who are not receiving treatment. I am running a 'true experiment' because I am testing the effectiveness of peer intervention groups my manipulating my independent variable and using random samples and assignments to determine how well ex-offenders can attain employment after release from an institution.

Procedure for Collecting the Data

The data collection method I would use to measure the effect of my experiment would be in the form of a focus group. A focus group is a "type of qualitative interview [that] brings people together in one place for discussion and observation" (Babbie, Edgerton, and Robert, 2018, p. 300). In a focus group, the researcher "discusses an issue with a small group of people rather than a single individual" (Babbie et al., 2018, p. 300). Conducting a focus group would be the most appropriate data collection method to measure my experiment because it would allow me to get both the 50 participants from the experimental group and 50 participants from the control group together, to understand the effect it had on their ability to reintegrate back into the workforce. By using a focus group, I am collecting qualitative data to gain an in-depth understanding and obtain information from the participants on their experience, behaviour, perceptions, and beliefs through reintegration in the workplace. According to Babbie et al. (2018), focus group methods "facilitate the gathering of in-depth, qualitative data about individuals' definitions of problems, opinions and feelings, and meanings

associated with various phenomena (p. 301). On April 17th, 2025, one year after conducting the experiment I will measure my findings. When conducting two separate focus groups (one with the controlled group and one with the experimental group), I would have a researcher ask questions regarding the difficulties both groups faced while trying to attain employment. By interviewing both groups, it would allow me to analyze the differences to better understand if ex-offenders who got treatment did better at attaining employment as well as having healthier coping mechanisms and strategies around difficulties they might've faced throughout the process. Although focus groups allow for great in-depth conversation with the researcher and participants, this method of data collection comes with its strengths and weaknesses. Using focus groups, it can be "cost-effective, research can be gathered simultaneously, [participants] respond to open-ended questions with their honest opinions, [and] the moderator is able to shape the discussion along fruitful lines of inquiry as participants bring up interesting and important points" (Babbie et al., 2020, p. 306). Drawbacks of focus groups include "the moderator effect [and] concerns of group think" (Babbie et al., 2018, p. 306).

Ethical Obligations to Research Participants

All research, including human participants, have four main ethical obligations (Babbie et al., 2018). The first is 'No harm to participants'. To mitigate any potential psychological harm, I am going to have either a social or mental health worker onsite during the group meeting who can assist participants who are going through traumatic experiences. The second ethical obligation is 'Deception'. In my study, I will not be deceiving my participants at all, as everything will be clearly explained beforehand. In case deception were to be used, I would debrief all my participants to "ensure they are fully informed and not harmed by their participation" (Babbie et al., 2018, p. 68). The third ethical obligation is 'Voluntary Participation'. My proposed study will uphold this obligation because I will not be incentivizing my participants into any benefit they may receive after their participation. I am not going to promise them that the experiment is going to be easy for them to get a job. I will make it very clear that this is an experiment, and the purpose of the study is to investigate the effect that this is going to have. Since I am dealing with a vulnerable population of participants coming out of incarceration, I will take extra steps to ensure that these individuals are voluntarily participation with informed consent. Given that they're a vulnerable population of youth, I will have to take extra concern and precaution. I will ensure that those individuals who are under the age of 18 years old have consent from their parents/guardians to ensure that the experiment they're participating in creates no harm, and that they're aware of its purpose. The fourth ethical obligation is 'Anonymity and Confidentiality'. In this form of data collection, it is not possible to keep participants anonymous. To follow the obligation of confidentiality, I will make sure that no participants' names are being used in the meeting to conceal their identity and protect their privacy.

Significance of the Present Study

As discussed in my literature review, the majority of studies on restorative justice focus on the importance of social networks and the reintegration process back into society. My study adds a new element to this discussion as it investigates the significance of peer intervention groups, therefore making a meaningful contribution to this body of literature. My study, if proven correct, could also have policy implications, assisting people with reintegration, therefore this is a significant study. I hypothesize that

individuals who take part in the peer intervention group will have an easier time attaining employment and face less difficulties. My research proposal and learning about the importance of peer intervention groups, is significant to answer the question "Does the presence of social support networks help offenders after release from an institution to reintegrate themselves into the workforce"?. By understanding and measuring the significance peer intervention groups have for offenders, it will determine if those who have societal connections after incarceration will have an easier time attaining employment in the workforce

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Media, Crime, and Power: The Cultural Construction of Criminality and Social Control

By: Nicholas Lykopoulos

Conventional sociological theory has referred to definitions of crime as the violation of an established societal norm or value that has been formally codified by a governing body. This conceptualization suggests crime is not the inherent quality of an act, but instead a deviation from the socially constructed boundaries of acceptable behavior which can vary across different contexts. Whether a product of individual aberration or systemic forces, engagement with crime traditionally necessitates punishment via legal proceedings. Society's development of punitive mechanisms to combat deviance suggests a collective acknowledgement of a reality of crime. Definitions of what constitutes a crime, what is deemed reasonable punishment, and the classification of a "typical" criminal all serve as manifestations of this reality. However, to suggest a reality of crime exists would be to imply its apparent objectivity, neglecting its embedded construction within systemic power structures. Crime itself is not a naturally defined, nor universal phenomenon, but rather a tool for dominant ideologies to operate through. Following this logic, a reality of crime does not exist, but rather is artificially constructed and employed as a tool for social control. The puppeteered reality of crime is a cultural construction intended to maintain socio-political hierarchies, reinforced by media spectacles that obscure systemic inequalities by framing them as forms of entertainment and information. This interplay between the media and the dominant culture normalizes narratives of crime that serve the interests of those at the top of the power structure. The media's portrayal of crime perpetuates the agenda of the elites, rendering their definitions as fact, despite its negative implications for a broader society.

To illustrate the mediated construction of crime, recognition of dynamic cultural forces aids in explaining how collective meanings and identities associated with crime become widespread. The cultural criminological framework asserts that meanings of crime are continuouslyunder construction, a process whereby culture adapts or renounces different symbolisms, representations, imagery, and sentiments into its existence (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:2). Traditional criminology is predominantly rooted in the physical and tangible aspects of crime, often neglecting the interpretive meanings embedded within culture (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:10). It typically emphasizes objective, measurable factors, such as statistical data, that remain confined to conventional frameworks. In contrast, cultural criminology explores the broader context of crime, delving into dimensions that extend beyond the act itself. This approach integrates a diverse range of theories, including urban studies, media theories, and critiques of capitalism, to provide a more nuanced understanding of criminal behavior and its cultural underpinnings (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:8). It highlights how the reality of crime and transgressions exist purely as a cultural construct originating from negotiations of authority, social conditions, and subcultures of resistance (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:3-8). Subsequently, through our growing integration with the virtual world, the modern media landscape acts as a means to disseminate cultural forces and shape public perceptions surrounding the

meaning of crime. However, this phenomenon is not a linear process of meaning-making; instead our understanding of crime is shaped by cultural "loops", facilitated by repeated mediated representations, meanings and symbols. Known as the "hall of mirrors", previously established cultural forces are reintroduced in the media with new meanings, which reshape their original representations into a distorted understanding of crime (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015b:5-6). The media serves as a vehicle for perpetuating loops, eventually generating a spiral of evolving crime perceptions, continually constructing new meanings while deconstructing old ones (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015b:9). For example, the criminalization of marijuana began with the war on drugs, which fostered ideals of aggressive enforcement. Following 9/11, the drug war intersected with counterterrorism, reshaping its meaning and trajectory (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015b:11). The media plays a critical role in reinventing the practices of the criminal justice system to further dominant cultural narratives. Inequalities are often transformed into media spectacles that subtly shape our worldviews (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:14). This process produces a discursive effect, normalizing and legitimizing practices designed to uphold power structures within cultural narratives.

The media and culture are mutually reinforcing mechanisms that inform public perceptions of crime. The media mirrors dominant cultural forces and values, amplifying its influence within the public consciousness. In turn, cultural preferences then dictate the kinds of narratives and media audiences consume, feeding into a cycle that normalizes behaviours and power structures. When elitist cultural representations of crime are embedded within media portrayals, crime is framed through their lens, perpetuating their dominance in shaping societal understandings. However, this is not to suggest that crime is not a real phenomenon, but rather to highlight that the concept of crime itself is not an objective reality. Instead, what is defined as crime and the extent to which it is enforced are ultimately shaped by the subjective interests of the elites. The media represents a powerful tool in constructing the conceptual boundaries of criminality by influencing public understandings of crime (Reiner 2007:316). However, the media is not a "passive conveyor" of crime news; as Sacco (1995) argues that networks frequently distort perceptions of the crime problem due to the nature of media production (146). Both news coverage and crime reality television frequently diverge from the statistical prevalence and demographic composition of crime, presenting inaccurate representations of offences as increasingly sensationalized, violent, and random (Sacco 1995:143). For instance, while the actual ratio of property crimes to violent crimes is approximately 9:1, the media's disproportionate coverage of violent crime depicts a distorted ratio of 8 violent crimes for every 2 property crimes (Reiner 2007:308). While dishonest, these narratives that mass communication platforms typically employ appeal to their definitions of "newsworthiness". The atypical, violent nature of the crime, the innocent victim, and the conventional symbolism of heroes and villains contribute to the dramatic element of the story, increasing the average consumer's engagement (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:455; Sacco 1995:144). From an organizational standpoint, media outlets are incentivized to distort crime news due to the inherent constraints of media production.

Stories must be condensed into brief segments, reporters often have only a surface-level understanding of issues, and the topic must be appealing enough to compete with other competing issues (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:454; Sacco 1995:146). By emphasizing or minimizing different aspects of an issue, the media promotes a specific framework for interpreting these issues in public discourse, shaping perceptions of the most effective ways to manage them (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:454).

It is important to note that audiences are not passive entities in this process, as viewers can extract different meanings based on their own predispositions. While acknowledging media messages are not absorbed universally, it still assists in focusing public interests on particular subjects (Happer and Philo 2013:321). By legitimizing an eminent threat of crime, the media serves as a tool for dominant groups to maintain social hierarchies. The ability to control public discourse through the police-media relationship enables the upper class to direct, rather than create, a fear of crime. Collins' (2014) research finds that the media's capacity to disseminate hegemonic symbolism and linguistic cues reinforces a power structure where the "typical criminal" is constructed through transforming the fear of crime into a fear of visible minorities (79). Her study of white offenders reveals that media portrayals disproportionately explain the aberrant circumstances and psychological factors behind their crime, implying white offenders are non-criminal by nature and require special explanation for their criminality (Collins 2014:80). Conversely, individualistic explanations for visible minorities were virtually non-existent, often linking their crimes with self-inflicted poverty that suggests the marginalized "deserve" their impoverishment due to their lack of self-determination (Collins 2014:94). This works to protect the privileged class by absolving the dominant group from systemic responsibility and shifting the focus onto individual moral deficiencies. Similarly, portrayals of victimization characterized white victims with "uncontested innocence", while non-white victims were associated with the chosen, gang-involved, poverty-stricken lifestyle (Collins 2014:94). Comparable studies of news media have identified that racialized groups are frequently overrepresented as threats to social order and as exhibiting criminal behaviour (Collins 2014:79; Harris and Gruenewald 2020:455). By framing risk through racialized depictions of both victims and offenders, the media reinforces a racial hierarchy that assigns each group a "typical" role in the crime narrative. However, despite this constructed concept of crime only holding truth within the media's production of this narrative, it carries reified consequences for racialized communities. The portrayal of the archetypal Black criminal becomes entrenched in dominant cultural narratives, further criminalizing Black individuals by perpetuating these stereotypes each time the media highlights another Black offender in its coverage. Through its fabrication of a crime problem and its perceived perpetrators, the intersection between media and culture has distorted the meaning of crime to be reinvented as a tool of social control.

The media's ability to direct and distort dominant perceptions of crime is contingent upon the framing of the current socio-political hierarchy as legitimate. When the media sensationalizes the prevalence of violent crime, it simultaneously portrays law enforcement as effective in maintaining order. The mediated

construction of villains, typically poor racialized communities, is contrasted with the virtuous and invaluable crime fighters. This portrayal of crime transpires due to the media's reliance on police agencies for periodic content cycles. However, situating police-generated information at the forefront of crime news frames the police as "apolitical crime experts", embedding their solutions and decisions with authority and objectivity (Sacco 1995:144). The positioning of law enforcement as the gatekeepers of crime news serves the interests of both the police and the government, legitimizing their approach to crime prevention (Happer and Philo 2013:322; Sacco 1995:146). The populace, which depends on the media to interpret the vastness of information in our society, is continuously informed by misguided characterizations of crime, dampening the potential for social change (Happer and Philo 2013:322). When law enforcement is depicted as the guardians of the status quo, the media becomes a tool for promoting certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others. This dynamic can reinforce dominant socio-political hierarchies as the media can legitimize the actions of the elites while encouraging subservient behaviours among the public (Happer and Philo 2013:333). Although the media is a contested space, powerful groups can establish and maintain dominant ideologies by repetitively reinforcing specific perspectives of crime and excluding alternative viewpoints, narrowing the scope of public discourse (Happer and Philo 2013:333). For example, during debates over cuts to social programs for individuals with disabilities, the media used it's platform to exaggerate the prevalence of disability fraud crime in order to shape public opinion towards the governments favour. Newspapers contributed to this by emphasizing "widespread fraud" of the program, which in reality only accounted for 0.5% of all claims, creating a perception that the system was easily manipulated (Happer and Philo 2013:327). While many with disabilities rejected this narrative, arguing that the lack of support posed a far greater issue, the media's framing of fraud was more readily accepted in the absence of alternative narratives. By constructing an inaccurate representation of crime, those in power leveraged the media as a tool to deflect attention from any proposals to increase taxes on the wealthy. Instead, public discourse focused on cutting social programs that predominantly served populations who are disproportionately poor and unable to work, ultimately benefiting the wealthy.

The legitimization of current systems extends beyond news outlets and has seeped its way into criminal justice dramas. Sohoni, Snell, and Harden (2021) analyze the popular television series "CSI" to illustrate how its mediated construction of drug offending has lent legitimacy to the criminal justice system (CJS) (691). Their research is explored through the system justification theory, a framework thatexplains how humans uphold and validate existing socio-political structures at the expense of collective interests (Sohoni, Snell, and Harden 2021:695). CSI employs ideological stereotypes and minimizes the failures of the CJS to fabricate a narrative that justifies the current cultural order. For instance, CSI's portrayal of the relationship between substance use and violence lacked the established role of poverty and racism in crime. The show disproportionately depicted substance users as upper-to-middle class, white individuals as a means to indirectly discredit systemic issues related to social inequalities (Sohoni, Snell, and Harden 2021:697). Moreover, CSI underrepresents the systemic violence

associated with the illegality of drug markets. Criminalizing drugs makes participants unable to rely on police or regulations to solve disputes, often resulting in the sale of narcotics leading to more violence than actual usage (Sohoni, Snell, and Harden 2021:694-700). Research has shown that intensified enforcement of drug markets is a strong predictor of violent crime linked to drug use, with increased police activity correlating with higher rates of homicide, as observed during the height of the crack cocaine epidemic in 1998 (Sohoni, Snell, and Harden2021:694). However, crime dramas like CSI rarely depict this link, as acknowledging it would raise critical concerns about the broader implications of drug criminalization (Sohoni, Snell, and Harden 2021:700). The consequences of these portrayals not only dissuade the public from challenging the socio-political structure, but also further sediments the conceptual boundaries of crime in our culture, associating drug usage with individual deficiencies rather than systemic inequalities.

Evidently, the reality of crime is a fabricated narrative fueled by the perpetuation of dominant socio-political structures. The media's legitimization of certain representations of crime has influenced public discourse, molding cultural understandings of deviance and punishment to fit within hegemonic beliefs. This is achieved when systemic inequalities are presented as forms of entertainment or information, obscuring underlying power dynamics by attributing "inherent criminality" to the consequences of social injustices. By highlighting cultural, racial, or social differences, the media deflects attention from structural issues and seeks to create division. This framing normalizes and justifies punitive measures as necessary tools for maintaining law and order. This is conceptualized by the process of "othering", a product of human insecurity when a social group perceives its status as being threatened. To safeguard their position, dominant groups embrace narratives and attributes about themselves and others to justify and reinforce their privilege (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:4). From a cultural criminological standpoint, this process erases the culture of subordinate groups by discursively organizing society through a reductive lens. For example, criminals are often portrayed as lacking the cultural virtue of law-abiding behaviour, effectively framing them as lacking culture all together, reinforcing deterministic ideas about deviant actors (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015a:5). When racialized or classist ideologies intersect with this process of othering, they generate misguided beliefs about inherent criminality, further entrenching biases in our culture and system. When these prejudices inform our criminal justice practices, it distributes punishment disproportionately based on fallacious metrics of deserving a nd undeserving populations. Thus, to control the narrative is to control who the main recipients of socio-political oversight are.

To better situate the process of othering within the media's construction of crime, it is important to examine how media outlets disproportionately focus on violent street crime, which obscures the prevalence and impact of white-collar crime. Marx argued that the production and distribution of ideas are concentrated in the hands of those who control the means of production, enabling them to shape the thinking of subordinate groups (Murdock and Golding 1977:15). Within mass communication structures, the flow of information is controlled by media organizations, which

are predominantly owned by elites. Commercial media prioritizes narratives and values that are widely legitimized to maximize audience engagement, inevitably reproducing ideas that trickle down throughout the social hierarchy (Murdock and Golding 1977:37). Moreover, when white-collar crime is depicted, those accused often have the funds to pay for media campaigns and sophisticated defences to resist any public shaming (Levi 2006:1041). Consequently, crimes of the poor are disproportionately reported on more than those of the rich, suggesting their inherent deviance and subsequent "deserving" punishment. When crime news restricts its focus on the actions of elite individuals or corporations with ongoing commercial practices, it can significantly shape public perceptions of harm (Levi 2006:1038). Media coverage tends to prioritize crimes of the poor, such as a $10,000 robbery, over large-scale corporate fraud that involves millions of dollars. This selective framing shifts attention away from white-collar crime, enabling the wealthy to exploit illegal practices with minimal scrutiny. Meanwhile, the poor are disproportionately represented as the face of crime, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

Historically, the process of othering has been deeply rooted in racialized discourse designed to maintain white dominance within societal hierarchies. Drawing on the sociological theory of group threat, negative portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities in the media works as a mechanism to counter perceived threats to white hegemony (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:457). When the media grames a growing minority population as a threat to political power, access to economic resources, and public safety, it legitimizes any practice aimed at preserving the status quo. Since white individuals dominate Western governments and media institutions, they have amplified criminogenic narratives surrounding minorities, reinforcing perceptions of inherent criminality (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:457).

When the media manufactures a distorted link between crime and so-called "deserving" communities, it acts as a vehicle to generate public support for punitive policies driven by a fear of crime. Government actors achieve this by "governing through crime", creating a distinction between idealized and demonized subjects to justify tough-on-crime policies aimed at defending "good" people and places (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:6). This process often relies on "racial commonsense", a culturally entrenched set of ideas that allow systemic racism to persist without explicit intent from government actors. The media perpetuates this by routinizing racism in public understandings of crime and enforcement, where narratives of a "Black crime problem" that fuel punitive measures targeting racialized communities are not seen as racist (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:7). For instance, Delaware's 1991 death penalty reform exemplifies how the local media constructed racialized conceptions of crime to warrant a more punitive approach to execution (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:6). In 1990, four African American men were involved in the robbery of an armored car, during which two guards were fatally shot. The local media amplified this case, framing the defendants—referred to as the "Philadelphia Four"—as dangerous and immoral outsiders through an overarching racialized narrative (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:11). The coverage emphasized the victims as fathers, husbands, and upstanding citizens while reducing the identities of the defendants to

their alleged offense, reinforcing a dichotomy between "good" and "bad" people. Public outrage followed when the defendants' convictions did not result in the death penalty, with media narratives framing the outcome as a failure of "soft on crime" policies, anti-death penalty juries, and unreliable legal processes (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:12). The constructed racialized hysteria played a critical role in pushing for harsher laws. Consequently, the 1991 reform quadrupled the number of individuals sentenced to death, with Black defendants accused of crimes against white victims being sentenced at double the rate (B. Fleury-Steiner, Dunn, R. Fleury-Steiner 2009:18). These outcomes underscore how common sense racism and the media facilitated the advancement of elitist agendas. By employing these racialized representations, it acted as a catalyst for the mobilization of tougher criminal laws, further sedimenting minorities as criminogenic.

News reports often work in tandem with crime reality television to create widespread support for punitive policies. For instance, border security dramas have curated a highly selective and dramatized portrayal of border enforcement, blending captivating narratives with action-packed sequences to reinforce the border as a vulnerable space (Walsh 2015:206). These portrayals position the show as an objective, unfiltered representation of border security, leading audiences to perceive these narratives as factual and free from ideological bias (Walsh 2015:202). However, these shows are often produced in collaboration with government authorities, where the network's access to officials is exchanged for the government's veto power over footage, ensuring the state maintains control over the depiction of crime (Walsh 2015:206). These shows typically present clear protagonists, government personnel, who are depicted as legitimate, effective, and rational guardians of the social order (Walsh 2015:209). Even in segments where suspects are found to be legitimate, officer judgments are portrayed as warranted as a precautionary measure (Walsh 2015:209-210). Contrastingly, the antagonists are the unauthorized travelers or immigrants, depicted as dangerous threats to national security. These individuals are often portrayed as one-dimensional as the show neglects their interpretation of the events (Walsh 2015:211). This framing portrays danger as ubiquitous, suggesting that even mundane objects, like box cutters, can lead to destruction, amplifying public fears surrounding the border (Walsh 2015:206).

Border security television series contribute to what is known as the "crime-immigration nexus", where media portrayals link immigrants to criminality, heightening enforcement, surveillance, and legislation that connect the two issues (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:452). This process, coined "thematic framing", suggests how two distinct social issues, immigration and crime, are related and mutually reinforce (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:454). When the media disproportionately frames immigrants as criminals, it fosters a rhetoric that paints them as crime-prone and holding crime-generating effects within communities (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:453). This conceptualization enables media outlets and entertainment television alike to depict the deepening of surveillance measures as essential. In particular, facial recognition technology is often depicted as a solution to the crime problem. However, the implementation of such technology disproportionately impacts minority communities, with evidence indicating that it is more likely to inaccurately identify people of color (Brewer, Bingaman,

Dawson, Paintsil, Wilson 2022:133). Research on the crime-immigration nexus in the media has revealed immigrants are disproportionately linked to substance abuse, threats to community safety, and national security risks (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:455). Despite a lack of empirical evidence, media framing strategies align closer with popular rhetoric than social research (Harris and Gruenewald 2020:461). As a result, dramatized border security shows contain powerful political functions in framing the border as a source of insecurity, reaffirming the logics of enforcement, and naturalizing ideas that territorial sovereignty needs to be maintained to ensure order (Walsh 2015:202-215). These portrayals legitimize racial prejudices, encourage racialized practices, and reinforce the "deserving" versus "undeserving" dichotomy that legitimizes dominant social structures.

Media spectacles are central to the construction of crime, obscuring systemic inequalities by presenting them as entertainment or objective information. Through a cultural criminological lens, the media's symbolic representations of crime create new meanings that align with the subjective interests of elites. These narratives often naturalize inequalities and reinforce stereotypes, framing marginalized groups as inherently deviant while absolving systemic contributors to crime. This process legitimizes the actions of those in power while shaping public behaviors in ways that hinder transformative social change. By crafting mediated images of crime, elites justify mechanisms of social regulation, employing processes of othering and endorsing punitive policies to uphold existing socio-political hierarchies. In doing so, the media not only perpetuates existing power dynamics but also narrows the scope of public discourse, limiting opportunities for alternative narratives and solutions.

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Decriminalizing Sex Work in Canada to Eliminate Barriers Concerning Violence and Health By:

Hannah Oommen

Background/Problem

The legal landscape surrounding sex work in Canada has long been a contentious issue, marked by debates between opposing viewpoints. While some perceive sex work as wholly exploitative and seek to criminalize it as a means to eradicate the demand for sexual services, others seek to have sex work recognized as a legal profession and obtain the rights associated with this status (Leggett, 2020). This contentiousness has persevered despite significant legal challenges, particularly those regarding the constitutionality of prior laws regarding sex work. This primarily includes the landmark case of *Canada (Attorney-General) v Bedford,* wherein provisions criminalizing certain aspects of sex work were struck down as unconstitutional, specifically those of maintaining a bawdy house, living on the avails of prostitution, and communicating for the purpose of prostitution (Bennett, 2013). These laws were deemed to infringe on sex workers' rights and increase harm in their working environments (Leggett, 2020). Despite seeming legal victories, these provisions were soon replaced with new reformed legislation in 2014 which, effectively criminalized the *purchase of*, including *communicating for* the purchase of sex (*Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, 2014). However, reforming legislation to criminalize the purchase of sex explicitly only *replicated* the same conditions due to which previous conditions were repealed in *Bedford* (Leggett, 2020). More specifically, the main problems regarding prior legislation persist in the current legal framework regarding sex work, as criminalizing the purchase of and communication surrounding sex work, *effectively obstructs the capacity of sex workers to operate in safe conditions*. This is particularly relevant in terms of increased experiences of violence and exploitation, as well as poorer physical, sexual, and mental health. This policy research brief will delve into the existing literature surrounding the limitations imposed by current legal conditions on the safety and well-being of sex workers. Moreover, it seeks to explore and implement a specific, evidence-based policy change that can effectively address the systemic barriers created by criminalization and promote safer working conditions for sex workers in Canada.

Literature Review

After the reformation of prior legislation, there has been a plethora of academic literature concerning the implications of the current legal framework in Canada on the precarious safety of sex work operations and environments. The following literature review will primarily focus on literature published post-reform legislation to cross-examine key safety concerns with the criminalization of sex work to demonstrate its significance as an issue. Moreover, it will provide insight into suggestions made by academic research to address the issue presented in the background of the present policy brief.

The Criminalization of Sex Work and Violence

The current legal framework in Canada surrounding sex work is often termed “end-demand” legislation, which is outlined in the aforementioned *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA). It was termed as such due to the intention of the act to eradicate the demand for sexual services by criminalizing its purchase. Regardless of intent, research suggests that client criminalization, a significant aspect of this legislation, is linked to reduced occupational health and

safety for workers, thereby exacerbating the risks of violence they face. McDermid et al. (2022) delineate that client criminalization impedes client screening and negotiation of services, increases reliance on cash transactions, and reinforces overall reluctance to seek police aid. This review will further explore each barrier and its implications on sex worker safety.

To start, client screening is an essential aspect of performing sex work safely and it must be done thoroughly. In fact, sex workers who interacted mostly with pre-screened clients reduced their odds of facing sexual workplace violence and condom refusal, demonstrating how vetting clients shapes their behaviour and enhance sex workers' safety (McBride et al., 2022). However, given that the current legislative framework explicitly targets clients, screening becomes incredibly difficult as the client's privacy becomes a significant issue. Given their risks of being criminalized, clients "have become more guarded about sharing personal information (eg, providing their full name, phone number, email, license plate, etc) in order to protect their identity, making it more difficult for workers to screen clients and subsequently keep themselves and their work environment safe" (McDermid et al., 2022, p.5). This reluctance to share personal information not only impedes sex workers' ability to assess the potential risks associated with a client but also limits their ability to negotiate safer working conditions. They consequently become increasingly vulnerable to taking on riskier, unvetted clients, and experience violent encounters.

Moving on, the criminalization of sex work clients led to a shift in payment practices within the industry. Many venues transitioned to cash-only businesses as a means to protect the privacy of their clients; however, not only did this limit screening abilities via verification of credit cards, the prospect of cash on the premises heightens the risk of robberies (McBride et al., 2021). This increased vulnerability to theft and robbery can escalate into more violent encounters, as perpetrators may resort to threats or acts of violence to coerce sex workers into compliance. Furthermore, client criminalization also increases a reluctance to rely on the police, which further leaves sex workers with increased exposure to violence. McDermid et al. (2022) note that client criminalization reinforces the stigma against the sex industry, leading to increased discriminatory policing practices and hindering workers' trust in or ability to access law enforcement. Thus, sex workers and third parties are deterred from relying on the police in aggressive situations, even when their lives are being threatened, due to fears surrounding escalation, discrimination, and the possibility of being criminalized (McDermid et al., 2022). As such, the criminalization of clients intensifies the vulnerability of sex workers to violence by deterring them from seeking assistance in aggressive situations, ultimately perpetuating a cycle of harm within the industry.

However, the safety implications of current sex work conditions extend beyond client interactions to encompass the spaces in which sex work takes place. Research shows that due to client criminalization, not only do sex workers take riskier clients, but sex work transactions are being displaced to areas that are unknown and secluded, such as industrial areas, which puts them at increased risk of experiencing violence and rape (Argento et al., 2020; Krüsi et al., 2014; Machat et al., 2019). This displacement is inevitable and is the result of a power imbalance, as sex workers may feel compelled to give into client demands regarding secluded spaces due to the client taking on much of the risk in the current

legal framework. However, research indicates this power imbalance makes clients more aggressive (McDermid et al., 2022). Thus, it is evident that the current legislative framework does not protect and rather exacerbates the negative situations and potentially violent encounters experienced by sex workers.

The Criminalization of Sex Work and Health

In conjunction with violence, the criminalization of sex work has significant implications for the health and well-being of sex workers. Argento et al. (2020, p.7) find that "sex workers who experience physical or sexual violence are less able to negotiate the terms of their transactions and are more likely to experience client condom refusal, significantly increasing risk of HIV/STI transmission". Moreover, due to communication and screening restrictions, sex workers are unable to negotiate their health and safety expectations in advance (Machat et al., 2019). As such, the sexual health of sex workers is being significantly compromised due to the exacerbation of violence under the current legislation. Additionally, while one of the explicit goals of end-demand legislation was to increase access to services and support for sex workers, there are no changes in sex workers experiencing barriers to counselling access for violence or trauma post-reform legislation (Argento et al., 2020). This indicates that aside from sexual health implications under the current legislative framework, there are also various mental health implications. The legislation does not meet its objectives or the issues that it claims to address; rather than protecting sex workers and increasing their well-being, it is acting as a barrier to essential health services. This perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and harm, as sex workers continue to face barriers to seeking counselling and support for experiences of violence post-legislation.

Solutions Addressing Safety Implications of Current Sex Work Conditions

In light of these findings, advocates and scholars have increasingly called for full decriminalization of sex work as a means to address the safety implications of the current legal framework. This includes international policy bodies such as WHO, UNAIDS, and Amnesty International, who have established the harmful effects of criminalization and enforcement-based approaches (Argento et al., 2020; Machat et al., 2019). A multitude of research has drawn on best practices from countries such as Australia and New Zealand to delineate the benefits of decriminalization. Legislative reform in New Zealand and parts of Australia has demonstrated that decriminalizing sex work effectively improved occupational health and safety conditions, with impacts on increased access to health services and overall workplace safety; it also augmented access to workplace protections and human rights among sex workers covered by their reform legislation (Argento et al., 2020; Pearson et al., 2023). As such, full decriminalization is perceived as essential for creating safer working environments, promoting the health and well-being of sex workers, and reducing the risks of violence and exploitation.

Proposed Policy Change

As examined, prior academic literature surrounding criminalizing the purchase of sex work demonstrates its implications on the worsening of sex worker experiences of violence and poor overall health. Also(In addition), the evidence presented within the literature largely points toward addressing this problem through full decriminalization; as such, this brief seeks to propose that sex work be fully decriminalized within Canadian legislation. The complete decriminalization of sex work

in Canada entails repealing legislation that criminalizes all aspects of sex work, including those that target clients and third parties (Pearson et al., 2023). Essentially, the buying, selling, or solicitation of sexual services by consenting adults will no longer be subject to legal repercussions.

Full decriminalization is necessary to address the various limitations and barriers imposed by the current legal framework surrounding sex work in Canada. While existing laws have been demonstrated to obstruct the ability of sex workers to operate safely and freely, removing these legal barriers through full decriminalization would empower sex workers to make informed choices regarding their work, negotiate safer working conditions, and access essential support services without fear of criminalization. The effectiveness of decriminalization has been demonstrated in countries that have implemented decriminalization measures, such as New Zealand's installation of the *Prostitution Reform Act* (PRA). The PRA sought to repeal the crimes of soliciting, brothel keeping, living on the earning of sex work, and procuring in New Zealand (Armstrong & Abel, 2020). This significant piece of legislation decriminalized activities associated primarily with the liability of sex workers. A review was mandatorily built into this legislation and reported five years after the installation of this legislation that the sex industry did not expand in size and sex workers perceived the PRA to have given them employment, legal, health and safety rights (Crichton, 2015). Moreover, prior to the enacting of the PRA, sex workers did not have adequate access to justice; however, following its implementation, the relationship between those in the justice system, such as the police, and those in the sex work industry was dramatically improved as well (Armstrong & Abel, 2020; Crichton, 2015). As such, by prioritizing harm reduction and human rights over punitive measures, decriminalization fosters a more equitable and inclusive society where sex workers are treated with dignity and respect.

This paper asserts full decriminalization to be the most effective policy change in reducing and potentially eliminating the barriers surrounding violence and health being upheld through the current legislative framework in the Canadian context. Other changes, such as continued criminalization, partial decriminalization, or legalization, would not be as effective for various reasons. Firstly, criminalizing part or all aspects of sex work fails to address the root causes of harm within the industry. Rather, as demonstrated in the literature review, criminalization perpetuates most of the barriers surrounding violence and health in the sex work industry (Argento et al., 2020; Machat et al., 2019). As such, continued criminalization only ensures that the cycle of harm present in the current Canadian legal context persists. Additionally, partial decriminalization is often informed by research that positions sex work in the context of slavery and rape, seeing it as a form of gendered sexual violence; in this model, legislation often criminalizes clientele to end demand for sex work (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). This model of legislative framework could leave sex workers vulnerable to legal and social stigma, particularly by ascribing stigmatic assumptions to their engagement in sex work, negating their perceptions, and uses discourses of risk to self and society to legitimize regulating the sex work industry (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). Finally, the legalization of sex work may seem like a promising solution but may come with unintended consequences. The legalization of sex work would mean imposing legal regulations and restrictions on sex work, which may retain the worst adverse effects

of criminalization; for example, in countries like Germany where prostitution is legal, those who cannot comply with bureaucratic regulations are effectively criminalized (Tani, 2015). Essentially, under the framework of legalization, sex workers may be subject to increased government regulation and oversight, rendering this policy change less effective when compared to full decriminalization.

Conclusively, only complete decriminalization can ensure that the same barriers surrounding violence and health in the sex industry are not replicated. Rather, it seeks to empower those who choose to work in the industry, while promoting their safety and autonomy far above legal repercussions.

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Fitness as a commodity: Analyzing My Fitness Routine Through the Lens of Consumer Culture

By: Sydney Ovadia

Staying active and maintaining a consistent fitness routine is an important part of my life as a university student. However, my daily gym experience extends beyond the one-hour workout itself; it involves a cycle of consumption that begins before I step into the gym and continues afterward. From selecting branded workout clothing and using trendy gym accessories to consuming caffeine, my fitness routine is deeply embedded in consumer culture. This essay examines how my pre-workout, workout, and post-workout routines reflect broader patterns of commodification, branding, and social influence, shaping both my consumption choices and fitness identity.

My daily fitness routine begins long before I arrive at the gym, starting with the process of planning my workout around my school schedule. One of the first decisions I make each morning is choosing what to wear, a choice heavily influenced by social media trends and branding. I gravitate toward activewear from brands like Lululemon, not only for their fit and functionality but also for their association with status and lifestyle marketing. The popularity of matching sets and "aesthetic" gym wear, particularly those promoted on TikTok, reflects how social media shapes consumption patterns and reinforces the idea that appearance in the gym is just as important as the workout itself.

In addition to clothing, accessories play a key role in my pre-workout routine. My Owala water bottle, for example, was chosen not just for its practicality but also for its sleek design and brand recognition, aligning with current consumer trends around wellness and sustainability. Another essential part of my morning is caffeine consumption. Whether I make coffee at home or purchase one from Starbucks, this habit reflects both a personal preference for caffeine's performance-enhancing effects and the cultural significance of coffee as a daily ritual. With these steps complete, I am ready to head to the ARC, my university's gym, fully equipped with the products and routines that define my fitness consumption.

After my 15-minute walk to the gym, I drop off my belongings in a locker and make my way to the second floor. Attending the ARC highlights how university environments shape access to institutional fitness spaces, where exercise is not just about health but also about participation in a broader fitness culture. The equipment I use—whether weight machines, free weights, or resistance bands—are all products of commodified fitness, reinforcing the idea that working out requires specific tools and gear. Beyond the equipment, the presence of other gym-goers also influences my behavior. Seeing others in the gym can lead to subtle social comparisons or even encourage me to push myself harder, demonstrating how fitness culture is shaped by social dynamics and external perceptions.

After completing my workout and often running into friends at the gym, my post-workout routine begins. A key part of my fitness lifestyle is food consumption, particularly my focus on protein intake. I frequently purchase protein-rich foods such as bars, shakes, Greek yogurt, and chicken, reflecting a health-conscious approach to consumption. However, beyond nutrition, brand loyalty influences my choices. I tend to repurchase products from brands I trust, such as Buddha Brand bars, which I prefer not only for their taste but also because they align with my dietary restrictions. While I do not currently take supplements, I often consider incorporating them into my routine since they are a major aspect of fitness

culture. This highlights how the fitness industry commodifies not just physical activity but also dietary habits, shaping consumer choices through marketing and perceived necessity. On some days, when I feel particularly tired or have a long day of classes ahead, I stop for a second coffee, usually from Starbucks or occasionally from Tim Hortons, depending on my preference at the time.

Throughout the day, during class or study breaks, I often find myself scrolling through social media, where fitness influencers promote gym wear, supplements, and gear, directly influencing my purchasing decisions. Buying new workout outfits or gear to stay motivated has a significant impact on me, as I feel an emotional connection to the products I purchase. Additionally, my engagement with fitness trends like #ThatGirl and the broader gym aesthetics culture further shape my consumption habits. Having worked out for years, I view fitness as a long-term commitment, which translates into an ongoing investment in workout clothes, equipment, and nutrition products. This reflects how fitness is not just a personal practice but also a continuous cycle of consumerism driven by branding, marketing, and social influence.

Having outlined the practical aspects of my fitness-related consumption habits, this section will critically analyze these practices through the lens of commodification, branding, and social influence, examining how my choices are shaped by larger social and economic forces. The commodification of health and wellness refers to the process of turning physical activity and well-being into marketable products and services, where fitness is not just about health but also about the image of health (Hand, Lecture 2a). My fitness routine reflects this trend, as my workout clothes, gym gear, and other products are all purchases that help me participate in a larger fitness culture. As Sassatelli (2007) argues, commodification involves more than just selling products; it shapes our understanding of what it means to be healthy, with the market providing a narrow set of "acceptable" practices. For instance, my choice to buy gym wear from brands like Lululemon is influenced not only by their functionality but by their association with an aspirational image of health. This reflects the broader commodification of wellness, where health becomes a product that must be consumed in specific, marketed ways (ibid.). Commodification involves the standardization of value, where products are exchanged based on their market worth, reinforcing a uniform standard of consumption (Hand, Lecture 2a). This extends beyond physical goods to cultural values, where consumption shapes individual identity and desires (ibid.). Under capitalism, as Marx suggests, consumption is tied to the continual accumulation of commodities, influencing how individuals define themselves and their needs (ibid.). In this way, my fitness choices reflect a larger consumer culture, where wellness and health are not just personal concerns but align with market-driven ideals.

Branding plays a significant role in how we navigate consumer culture, with certain brands offering social meaning beyond their practical function. As Slater (1997) suggests, consumer goods carry social significance that extends beyond their use-value, reflecting status and cultural identity. My fitness-related consumption is shaped by this branding dynamic, especially in my selection of post-gym products. For example, choosing Starbucks over Tim Hortons is not just about preference but about signaling membership in a particular social group. According to Bookman (2013), consumption choices are deeply intertwined

with social belonging and cultural distinction. The products I purchase, such as Starbucks coffee, demonstrate my desire to fit into a specific cultural ideal associated with fitness and wellness. As Bookman (2013) argues, "The choices we make about what to consume are not merely about satisfying basic needs but are deeply tied to our desire for social belonging and cultural distinction" (p. 407). This connection between branding and status-seeking illustrates how conspicuous consumption operates in the fitness world, where purchasing branded gym wear , Starbucks Coffee, or trendy water bottles becomes a way of signaling social and cultural identity.

While I enjoy many of my fitness-related purchases, I sometimes question whether they bring genuine satisfaction or simply fulfill a socially constructed expectation of what a 'dedicated' gym-goer should own. Herbert Marcuse's concept of "false needs" explains how consumer culture shapes these choices, as advertising and social norms create desires that feel essential but are ultimately externally imposed (Hand, Lecture 3a). Driven by "technological rationality," these needs integrate individuals into a conformist society, reinforcing the idea that branded products and aesthetic gym wear are necessary for success—even when their practical benefits are minimal. In fitness culture, choices like purchasing specific activewear or post-workout coffee are often influenced more by societal pressures and the idealized image of wellness than by personal necessity. These consumer goods become symbols of status and identity, perpetuating the cycle of "false needs" and continuous consumption.

Social influence plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior. The social environment, both physical (the gym) and virtual (social media), influences perceptions of what is necessary or desirable in fitness. As explored in *The Century of the Self* (2002), the consumer market, through advertising and social media, creates desires and needs that influence individual behavior. This is evident in my own routine, as I frequently engage with social media content from fitness influencers who promote specific products or practices.

In conclusion, my daily fitness consumption practices are deeply embedded in larger social and cultural patterns of commodification, branding, and social influence. Recognizing these patterns allows me to critically examine my own consumption habits and understand how they may evolve as cultural trends continue to shift. Ultimately, fitness-related consumption is a powerful example of how personal choices are shaped by broader consumer cultures and social dynamics.

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Gendered Power and Politics: Hegemonic Masculinity in Action

By: Claire Rinfret

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been fundamental to understanding gendered power relations, both in theory and practice. Hegemonic masculinity, which derives from Raewyn Connell's work, refers to the dominant type of masculinity that validates men's superior status over women and other oppressed masculinities (Husain 2024). This article carefully critiques hegemonic masculinity and recuperative gender strategies, using Justin Trudeau's boxing bout as a political example. Through an examination of both frameworks, I contend that, while both notions reveal key elements about gender and power dynamics, their practical consequences risk oversimplifying the fluidity of gender performance. By critically interacting with these theories, this essay emphasizes the significance of understanding how masculinity adapts to shifting cultural standards while sustaining structural inequities.

Hegemonic masculinity serves as a legitimizing tool, normalizing masculine domination in ways that frequently go unnoticed. It is dynamic rather than static, altering shape to sustain supremacy in shifting cultural situations (Husain 2024). For example, Erin Tolley and colleagues argue that male candidates are frequently evaluated based on traditional masculine traits such as strength and competence, whereas female candidates are judged based on their physical appearance or perceived emotional instability (Tolley et al. 2023). These differences highlight how hegemonic masculinity creates norms that harm women in public life.

Justin Trudeau's 2012 charity boxing match is a practical illustration of how hegemonic masculinity interacts with recuperative gender techniques. Trudeau, then an underdog in Canadian politics, used the match to symbolize conventional masculine attributes like physical strength, endurance and competitiveness (Maiolino 2015). As Elise Maiolino points out, recuperative gender strategies entail using conventional gender norms to reclaim political legitimacy in circumstances when such norms are being challenged. Trudeau's triumph against Patrick Brazeau not only confirmed his own masculinity, but it also allowed him to project leadership attributes that were consistent with voter expectations of male authority (Maiolino 2015). This strategic performance exemplifies the adaptability of hegemonic masculinity, as it accepts progressive ideas, such as Trudeau's feminist discourse, while reinforcing male authority with conventional symbols of power (Maiolino 2015; Husain 2024).

While hegemonic masculinity is a valuable paradigm for examining gendered hierarchies, its emphasis on legitimation may hide the complexity of how masculinity is negotiated in reality. Yang (2020) criticizes the theory for emphasizing the top-down character of power, claiming that it ignores the agency of subordinated groups in rejecting or altering hegemonic rules. For example, although hegemonic masculinity legitimizes male dominance, it fails to account for how different masculinities—such as racialized or queer masculinities—may dispute or reframe these norms in ways that undermine their supremacy (Yang 2020). This critique emphasizes the need for a more intersectional understanding of how gendered power functions in different social and cultural situations.

Recuperative gender techniques, as described by Maiolino (2015), have limits. While these measures can help to restore political legitimacy, they also risk

reinforcing traditionalist gender norms, which limit the opportunities for more inclusive gender performances. For example, while Trudeau's boxing match was a successful political move, it highlights how masculinity is frequently maintained via physical power, obscuring more inclusive and dynamic ideas of leadership. Furthermore, these techniques may unintentionally promote the notion that women must adopt traditionally masculine attributes in order to thrive in male dominated environments, perpetuating the exact inequities they attempt to address (Maiolino 2015).

Despite its shortcomings, both hegemonic masculinity and recuperative gender strategies contribute to a better understanding of gendered power dynamics. Hegemonic masculinity demonstrates how systemic inequities are legitimized and sustained, whereas recuperative tactics emphasize gender's performative character and responsiveness to societal transformations. Together, these theories help us understand masculinity as a relational construct that changes to maintain male dominance in various circumstances (Husain 2024; Maiolino 2015). Critically, these findings have far-reaching implications for reducing gender inequality in politics and beyond. Recognizing how masculinity responds to cultural and institutional developments allows us to discover chances to disrupt these dynamics and promote more inclusive forms of leadership and masculinity. For example, addressing the emphasis on conventional male characteristics in political judgments may pave the path for greater equitable gender standards in everyday life. Similarly, adopting a more intersectional perspective on masculinity may provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups to modify dominant narratives and undermine systemic power systems (Yang 2020; Tolley et al. 2023).

In conclusion, the recuperative gender strategies and hegemonic masculinity frameworks are useful mechanisms for comprehending the persistence and evolution of gendered power relations. These theories, using instances such as Justin Trudeau's boxing match, shows how masculinity is exhibited and legitimized in ways that meet changing cultural standards while supporting established hierarchies (Maiolino 2015; Husain 2024). However, these inadequacies highlight the need for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to gender (Yang 2020). An intersectional approach on masculinity, which considers how race, class, and queerness connect with gender, may reveal how hegemonic masculinities are not just policed but also transformed (Yang 2020). This transition would enable oppressed groups, including women, people of color, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, to challenge conventional masculine standards based on competitiveness, domination, and physical power (Yang 2020). By broadening our concept of masculinity to encompass these intersecting identities, we allow for a more diverse variety of gender performances, allowing these groups to join areas where masculinity has historically been a barrier (Tolley et al. 2023). This reframing of masculinity as a dynamic and inclusive notion has the potential to destabilize established power structures, promote more varied forms of leadership, and offer more job opportunities and positions of power within politics. (Yang 2020; Tolley et al. 2023). Therefore, integrating intersectionality in the study of masculinity is vital for not only questioning the existing quo but also developing a more inclusive and diverse society.

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The Role of Emotions within Racism and Antiracist Action

By: Margaret L. Shen

Through the concepts of emotions, morals, and affect, built on previous discussions of race, racialization, and antiracism, responses to racism and antiracism are examined by Audre Lorde, Sara Ahmed, and Sarita Srivastava. Audre Lorde examines the emotion of anger in the context of race and racism. Sara Ahmed similarly examines emotion, focusing on fear, but also introduces the concept of affect. Finally, Sarita Srivastava provides a case study of racism and responses to antiracist efforts within feminist organizations.

Writing in the 1980s, Audre Lorde challenges the assumption that feminist projects are inherently antiracist or free from racism (Tomac 2023). Lorde centers her call to acknowledge racism and race-blindness within feminism around the emotion of anger, calling it her response to racism, citing examples that she had experienced or witnessed both in general life and specifically in feminist settings (Lorde 1984: 124-126). Lorde discusses her realization of the power of anger, as a force used by the privileged to use against the oppressed but also as a tool of liberation in antiracist efforts if it can be productively directed and translated (ibid: 127). Lorde realizes that fearing and suppressing anger is not a productive endeavor as it is not the anger of people like herself which has wrought destruction and misery across the world. Rather, Lorde opens the possibilities of using righteous anger against racism as a tool in antiracist efforts (ibid: 133).

In her essay, Sara Ahmed introduces the concept of affect, differentiating it from emotion as something functioning at the collective level (Tomac 2023). Ahmed continues on Lorde's assertion that anger can potentially have useful value by examining how emotions can do things and are not merely psychological dispositions as emotions work "in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (Ahmed 2004: 119). Affect, which circulates between individuals and affects their behaviour, is nonconscious but experienced in bodily energy and intensity in response to stimuli (Tomac 2023). For Ahmed, emotions can therefore hold value similar to how capital holds financial value, creating what is known as an affective economy.

Sarita Srivastava applies the work around emotion to understanding reactions to antiracist action and perceived attacks on personal morality within feminist organizations, generally full of people who consider themselves progressive and aware. Srivastava finds that there is a moral preoccupation and binary thinking, white feminists are loathe to consider their own potential racial blind spots because doing so would question their individual morality and ethics, moving them from being "good" or "innocent" to being "corrupt" or "racist" (Srivastava 2005: 57). Srivastava finds a process that many go through when discovering racism and their own personal racism, from unawareness, to awareness, to feelings of personal guilt, to moving past fear and personal failings to accepting one's racism (ibid: 51). Srivastava ends with discussing the limits of individual guilt and the need for institutional change for effective antiracist action (ibid: 57-58).

While it has been almost 40 years since Audre Lorde's essay about anger as a tool in combating racism, displays of anger by oppressed minorities remains seen by the many as "inappropriate" or "overreacting." Anger can play an important role in combating racism but public displays of

anger at racism often remains an excuse used by oppressors to escape their culpability. For example, at a 2016 rally for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, former US President Bill Clinton claimed in response to Black Lives Matter that "I listened to them … and they don't wanna listen to me" (Bates 2019). Displays of rightful anger against racism have been used as a cudgel against the oppressed, used to dismiss their concerns and for the oppressor to deflect responsibility to the oppressed by portraying the lack of action against racism as the result of the oppressed group refusing to listen or compromise when in fact it is the oppressor using emotion as an excuse to redirect attention away from themselves.

Further, the idea that directed anger can be useful in combating racism has apparently not made much headway with the general public, many of whom continue to view displays of emotion, and anger in particular, as "inappropriate" or "unproductive". Instead, many hold on to a whitewashed version of civil disobedience, where participants protested without seemingly violating social norms or becoming emotionally charged. For example, the idea that protests must be completely civil, and that social change can only be achieved through calm action guided by rationality. In other cases, expressions of anger, particularly disorganized anger, have been used to discredit the validity of a protest. During the 2020 racial protests, the presence of activities such as property damage and looting was used to dismiss the validity of the protests, with then US President Donald Trump tweeting that the "thugs" were dishonoring the memory of George Floyd (Nguyen 2020). However, there appears to be some recognition of the productive power of anger. In the emotionally charged wake of the murder of George Floyd, where many Americans were shocked and angered at the actions of the officers involved, some articles appeared discussing how anger could be channeled into productive action against racism (Aubrey 2020).

In the decades since Lorde's proclamation that anger should be embraced as a tool rather than suppressed, it can be argued that little headway has been made in convincing the general public to accept anger's validity and use. Oftentimes, anger is used to discredit protestors or for culpable parties to weasel out of blame. However, it appears that in recent times, there has been some mainstream acceptance of utilizing anger to rally antiracist action. A topic for further investigation could be if the role of anger in private as a motivator for antiracist action has changed before and after Lorde's essay, such as if protestors during the Civil Rights era and the modern era were similarly or differently motivated by internal anger at racism even if their outward actions did not appear angry.

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Synthetic Analysis

By: Julian Temos

INTRODUCTION

How does the criminal justice system's treatment of Black Americans reflect a hidden barrier that shapes how Black Americans are seen, not as individuals, but as a part of the stereotype that continues to influence their reality till this day? This question is critical in addressing the issue of the treatment of Black Americans by police officers. This can be done using W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness and Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness, when combined with Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a comprehensive analysis for understanding how the criminal justice system's disproportionate targeting of Black Americans in cases of police brutality becomes compounded through the intersecting forms of racial, gender and class-based oppression; which inherently perpetuates cycles of marginalization, stereotyping and criminalization. While Du Bois theories focus on the racial experience and the psychological impact these experiences have on an individual, Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory broadens this by including how the complexity of the different forms of social identity and power structures intersect. Although both frameworks are essential in the understanding of the multifaceted nature of discrimination, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory extends this through its consideration of the overlapping and compounding aspects of identity that Du Bois' theories, in its historical context, may not fully capture.

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, in which Crenshaw (1989) states that anti-racist and feminist theory discourse needs to be addressed intersectionally for them to embrace, not only the "women's experience" and the "black experience" ,but to combine them together and make it the "black women's experience" (140). Here, she is emphasizing how individuals experience oppression in ways that eventually shape their intersecting social categories such as race, gender, and class. When it comes to police brutality cases, Black women and Black men experience this violence differently because of their overlapping identifying categories. For example, while both groups (Black men and women) are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement, Black women face an additional layer of vulnerability due to their gendered stereotypes that characterize them as both hypersexualized, a stereotype associated with them being a woman, and "angry" or "unruly," a stereotype of Black women. This, in turn, tends to exacerbate the brutality of their police encounters. Furthermore, when considering Black LGBTQ+ individuals, their experiences are not only shaped by their race but also by their sexual or gender identities, making them particularly vulnerable to both homophobic and racist violence from law enforcement officers and agencies.

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) applied intersectionality to structures of domination as she says that those who are black, female and poor have a clearer view of how oppression works than white women, as they have no idea that them being white negates female subordination and they have a clearer view than Black men, as they are unable to remove the stigma of being Black in America. This is seen in the disproportionate nature of police brutality cases as it all depends on where you fall in this structure of domination that society place you in and where your intersecting identities lie within it, as these structures are the ones that

perpetuate inequality and harm. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness is defined by Itzigsohn and Brown (2015) as the link that exists between the structure of the racialized world and the lived experiences of those that are racialized, meaning that there is no communication between the two groups on how they are supposed to co-exist (232). This internal conflict between the racializing and racialized manifests itself in interactions with law enforcement as stereotypically, Black individuals are often seen as threats or criminals, regardless of who they are or what they are doing.

Double consciousness reflects how Black individuals are seen by broader society; they are seen as "other" or less than fully human, specifically by law enforcement. In many cases of police brutality, Black people are viewed through a lens of suspicion, threat, or criminality, regardless of their actual behavior. Having a sense of double consciousness, as a Black American, could come to represent a false perception of how you may view yourself based on others, who see you as undervalued or dehumanized, making police violence against Black people seem justifiable or acceptable in the eyes of some officers in society. W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory provides insight into the racial inequality and oppression in the United States, while approaching it from different perspectives. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois addresses the Reconstruction era in America (1865-1877), with a focus on the efforts of formerly enslaved Black people and their building of political power and resistance of racial oppression after the Civil War. Du Bois critiques the efforts of White Southerners to rewrite history as they downplay the violence of slavery and the reasons for the Civil War (7). He argued that the distortion of this narrative, helped the White Southerners to justify their continued disenfranchisement of Black Americans during Reconstruction, as slavery and slave labor was territorially restricted, making sure it did not compete with free white labor (8). Additionally, the rise of violent tactics, such as lynching, also aided in maintaining racial domination. Even though, Du Bois (1935) does note that the victims of Southern slavery were often happy, with adequate food, health, and shelter (9). Additionally, Du Boi discusses how the plantation economy depended on the exploitation of Black labor as, according to Du Bois (1935), slaves in the South were the foundation of the Southern economy and social structure, Northern economy, and European commerce (5). The failure of the Reconstruction era, including the violence of newly established White supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan has led to the continued economic and social exclusion of Black Americans. Kimberle Crenshaw, on the other hand, argued that the legal system and social institutions fail to adequately address the experiences of Black women, whose lives are shaped, not only by race, but also by gender, class, and other aspects of identity. This is seen in Crenshaw's (1989) discussion of the case of DeGraffenreid v. General Motors, which was a case where there were 5 Black women who were fired because of alleged discrimination against the fact that they were women, and because they were Black (141). Crenshaw (1989) believes that they (the judge) did not consider the intersecting identities of these women, implying that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination are strictly defined by white women's perspectives and Black men's perspectives separately, instead of together (143). This can be extended to how police brutality is often framed, where the racial component of identity is emphasized over the gendered experience, especially in cases

of Black women being victims of police violence.

Du Bois, writing from a historical perspective, reveals a deeper complexity as it allows us to see how police violence and other forms of violence perpetrated by institutions in society having inherent roots in the Reconstruction era. This historical legacy is still present in the modern-day treatment of Black people by law enforcement agencies. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory reveals the complexity of police brutality, not being solely a racial issue, as Black women and other marginalized groups face different and distinct forms of violence and discrimination, as opposed to other groups such as white women. She is forcing us to use intersectionality, making us consider both race, gender, sexuality, and other factors that make Black people's experiences of police brutality not only multifaceted, but also distinct. Du Bois and Crenshaw have conflicting positions when discussing the intersection of identities, as

Du Bois believes that the intersection of race and class is the primary axis of oppression that exists for Black Americans, at least during his time. Crenshaw (1989), however, believes race and class to be an inadequate representation of how the multiple axes of identity interact as it reduces the experiences of those in the group who are otherwise privileged (140). By focusing strictly on race and class, like Du Bois does, we are ignoring the complexities of how gender, sexuality and many other social categories shape people's experiences of violence and oppression in cases of police brutality.

SYNTHESIS AND ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The argument that I will make to enhance the understanding of the societal issue of police brutality, using Du Bois' theory of double consciousness and Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, is that the issue of police brutality is not only an issue of race, but affects individuals in a variety of intersecting ways. While double consciousness explains the psychological and emotional toll of having to constantly navigate a world that sees you as a suspicious person and, when combined with intersectionality, it allows us to see the diverse experiences within marginalized communities through its multiple axes of oppression framework, highlighting the complexity of police brutality. Police brutality is not a simple issue, it is a multifaceted issue that affects individuals in intersecting ways.

For example, a Black transgender woman may face unique forms of discrimination including racial, sexual and gender-based discrimination, whereas a Black woman would only face racial and gender-based discrimination or a Black cisgendered man would only face racial discrimination, making the Black transgender woman more vulnerable to police violence. Through combining Du Bois and Crenshaw's theories, we can see how this would apply to the multifaceted issue of police brutality, as Black Americans are always vigilant of how they are perceived, more specifically, as suspicious or as a threat by the authorities in law enforcement agencies and society at large. For example, a Black driver may feel an overwhelming, intense feeling of anxiety when being pulled over by the police, as they are aware of all the movements they make and things they say so they do not escalate the situation, as they know this could lead to harm or even death.

Sticking to the same example, if that driver were instead a Black female who had been pulled over, she would also feel a sense of gender-based discrimination from the police, as she is aware of the stereotype of

Black women as "angry" or "unfeminine," and she knows that if she is perceived in this way, it may be seen as non-compliance or defiance of the law, resulting in a more brutal, harsher treatment. The synthesis of Du Bois' double consciousness theory and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory reveals that the impact of police brutality on Black Americans with intersectional identities is deeply interconnected with both an individual's psychology and their society's structural oppression. The psychological burden of managing how one is perceived by others (double consciousness) in a society which holds multiple forms of oppression in play (intersectionality) may lead to one being deeply and emotionally exhausted as this burden is not simply about survival of racial profiling or police violence. Rather, it also comes to include the trauma one has of always being forced to navigate marginalization in multiple and overlapping ways. People living with this sense of dual awareness, that is, of both their identity and how they wish to be perceived, must continuously make decisions about how to behave in the world, especially when interacting with figures of authority, such as the police.

Intersectionality brings into focus how systemic and structural forces are not just racially biased, but they are intersectionally discriminatory. A Black American's class, gender, or even immigration status affects how they are policed and how they interact with police. For example, the over-policing of poorer Black neighborhoods directly reflects the structural oppression and inequality that takes place in multiple forms in our society, such as racism, sexism, classism and economic disenfranchisement, which all act in tandem with one another. People who are both Black and women are likely to face not just racial profiling but also it increases the chance of sex-based discrimination and violence. Additionally, these structural forces allow for the normalization of violence in systems of control which target marginalized groups, both Du Bois' theory and Crenshaw's theory highlight this issue (normalization of violence). The persistence of police brutality has become an issue that is inherently engrained in our society; it is no longer just one of many isolated incidents or an individual officer's biases.

Double consciousness reveals, in this case, how Black individuals historically have and will continue to live in constant awareness of potential violence, while intersectionality reveals how this awareness of a double consciousness is compounded, depending on one's multiple forms of identity. Together, these frameworks help us understand that police violence and brutality is not simply about a few bad police officers, but it is a structural system of oppression that continues to routinely criminalize certain identities, making police violence and brutality not only expected, but in certain communities, it has unfortunately become normalized.

CONCLUSION

In my examination of the criminal justice system's treatment of Black Americans historically and how that affects the present-day treatment, this paper has illustrated how deeply ingrained these stereotypes are and how the intersecting layers of racial, gendered and class-based oppression continue to contribute to the pervasive issue of police brutality. Through the synthesis of W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, there becomes a more comprehensive understanding of how Black Americans experience being policed; not as individuals, but as a part of broader societal stereotypes that tend to criminalize their identities. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness reveals the psychological toll of constantly

being aware of how one is being perceived in society, specifically, by law enforcement agencies, leads to a sense of heightened vigilance and anxiety. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory further complicates this by emphasizing that experiences of oppression are not undifferentiated, but are shaped by overlapping, multifaceted identities such as race, gender, class and sexuality. The combined theories make clear that police brutality is not merely an issue of race, but is compounded by these multiple, interesting layers of discrimination. The implications of these findings are extensive; police brutality, as a reflection of these intersecting systems of power, is not a crisis simply about racial injustice, but a broader manifestation of how marginalized communities become dehumanized and are subject to violence by state agencies. By integrating the insights from Du Bois and Crenshaw, it underscores the necessity of applying an intersectional approach to activism and reform. Additionally, it calls for a recognition of the diverse experiences of Black communities, highlighting the importance of establishing policies and movements that address these complexities in the pursuit of justice. The persistence of police brutality through the lenses of both double consciousness and intersectionality demands that we confront, not just individual acts of violence, but the larger societal structures that perpetuate them. In doing so, we, as a society, will move closer to creating a justice system that genuinely serves and protects all individuals, regardless of their identity.

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Society's Expectations of Chronic Illness and Disability and the Impact of Stigma

By: Isabelle Todorofsky

What happens when society's expectations of health and productivity clash with the lived realities of chronic illness and disability? Society often holds individuals with chronic illnesses and disabilities to expectations of recovery and productivity, which, when unmet, sustain stigma and exclusion (Parsons 1951:453). Parsons' Sick Role (1951:455) suggests that illness provides an exemption from societal responsibilities, but this exemption assumes recovery is both possible and necessary for reintegration into society. As institutional injustice reinforces health inequalities, individuals' complex identities and lived experiences are often overlooked, intensifying the marginalization they face in society (Hui et al. 2021:2). Thus, this assumption marginalizes individuals with chronic conditions, for whom recovery is unattainable, leaving them vulnerable to rejection. Goffman's Theory of Stigma (1963) offers a deeper understanding of this exclusion. He defines stigma as an attribute that discredits an individual, reducing them from a "whole and usual person" to one who is "tainted" and "discounted" (Goffman 1963:3). Stigma arises when there is a discrepancy between societal expectations, or the "virtual social identity," and an individual's reality, or the "actual social identity." (Goffman 1963:3). This gap leads to discrimination, causing individuals to experience a "spoiled identity" that limits their social opportunities (Goffman 1963:2).

This paper argues that society's expectations of recovery and productivity reinforce stigma and marginalize individuals with chronic illness and disability, limiting their participation in society. While Parsons' framework explains societal expectations, Goffman's analysis highlights the persistent devaluation and discrimination that occur when these expectations are unmet. This analysis begins with an exploration of Parsons' concept of the Sick Role, addressing societal expectations of illness and its limitations for chronic conditions. It then turns to Goffman's Theory of Stigma, focusing on the implications of stigma and social exclusion. By synthesizing these frameworks, this paper offers a comprehensive understanding of how structural societal expectations and the personal impacts of stigma interconnect to maintain disadvantage, revealing the challenges faced by individuals living with chronic illness and disability.

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Parsons' Theory of Social Action

Parsons' concept of the Sick Role is an important lens for analyzing the marginalization of individuals with chronic illnesses and disabilities. The Sick Role frames illness as a form of deviance because it interferes with an individual's capacity to meet societal expectations related to roles such as employment or family obligations (Parsons 1951:453). The Sick Role temporarily exempts individuals from these responsibilities but imposes conditions: they must seek medical treatment and work toward recovery (1951:457). For those with chronic conditions, recovery may be impossible, placing them in an ongoing state of social deviance and complicating the Sick Role concept by leaving an unclear path to reintegration into society (Varul 2010:86).

Parsons' framework can explain how societal expectations contribute to marginalization, as chronic illness disrupts societal functioning and reinforces exclusion. Individuals with ongoing conditions may struggle to meet productivity norms, leading to exclusion

from employment and social networks (Parsons 1951:455). Additionally, individuals with chronic conditions often face emotional and psychological pressures due to these expectations, which can contribute to their isolation (Varul 2010:81). This structural focus on recovery reinforces societal norms that value productivity and normalcy, increasing stigma and exclusion. The Sick Role's idea that illness can be 'cured', therefore ignores the lived realities of chronic illness, in which people are stuck between the Sick Role and societal expectations of normal functioning, creating feelings of inadequacy and social isolation (Parsons 1951:460).

Goffman's Theory of Stigma

Goffman's Theory of Stigma is critical for addressing the limitations of Parsons' Sick Role paradigm in his Social Action Theory, particularly in understanding the marginalization of those with chronic illness and disability. Goffman's analysis complements Parsons' by shifting the focus from structural roles to the lived experiences of stigmatized individuals, highlighting the interpersonal and societal processes that sustain their exclusion (1963). He defines stigma as a gap between an individual's 'actual identity' and society's 'virtual social identity,' where failure to meet societal expectations leads to a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963:3). Unlike Parsons' structural approach, Goffman emphasizes the interpersonal and emotional challenges that stigmatized people encounter when interacting with "normals," which lead to feelings of shame, fear of judgement, and isolation (Goffman 1963:5-6) These strategies highlight how stigma operates beyond structural roles, affecting everyday interactions and individual well-being.

Comparison of Frameworks

Both Parsons and Goffman examine how societal expectations about health and sickness influence inclusion and exclusion, but their frameworks differ in important ways, reflecting opposing assumptions about the nature of illness and its social consequences. Parsons views illness as a temporary disruption of societal roles, in which this exemption from societal roles is based on the expectation of recovery (Parsons 1951:455). This makes integration into society dependent on medical treatment and a return to 'normal' functioning (Parsons 1951:453). Parsons' emphasis on recovery highlights societal values of health and productivity, unintentionally marginalizing those whose conditions defy this expectation. By failing to address the realities of chronic conditions, Parsons' model reinforces exclusion, contrasting clearly with Goffman's recognition of continual marginalization through stigma.

In comparison, Goffman challenges the assumption that disease and its social implications are only temporary. His idea of stigma shifts the focus away from structural roles and (take out and) onto the interpersonal and psychological processes that sustain inclusion (Goffman 1963:3). Unlike Parsons, Goffman addresses that societal perceptions of deviance persist, confining individuals in a "spoiled identity", despite their efforts or medical interventions (Goffman 1963:7). Chronic illness and disability thus becomes an indicator of chronic deviance, with individuals experiencing ongoing social devaluation even when they seek to satisfy societal norms. Goffman critiques the temporary lens of Parsons' framework, explaining how stigma prolongs exclusion even when individuals strive to meet societal expectations (Walker 2010: 629).

The implications of these differences are immense. Parsons' emphasis on recovery reflects a society that values productivity and normalcy, viewing chronic

illnesses as a failure to achieve these expectations (Parsons 1951:452). This perspective creates structural inequities by measuring individuals with these conditions against unrealistic goals that ignore their lived experiences. Meanwhile, Goffman demonstrates how these societal failures emerge on a personal level, as individuals internalize stigma and are constantly pressured to conceal or mitigate their conditions in order to avoid rejection (Goffman 1963:4). His analysis highlights the extensive nature of exclusion, arguing that societal structures and attitudes must adjust to allow diversity in health experiences, rather than imposing rigid rules (Goffman 1963:4).

Furthermore, these frameworks highlight an important contradiction between societal stability and individual well-being. Parsons' model prioritizes societal functioning, presuming that illness disrupts critical roles that must be restored (Parsons 1951:453). However, this focus ignores structural barriers that limit an individual's capacity to satisfy these expectations, such as inaccessible work environments or discriminatory behaviours (Walker 2010:635). Goffman's view alters this perspective, demonstrating how the continuation of stigma reflects society's resistance to change. His findings illustrate the broader effects of exclusion, since the stigmatization of those with chronic illnesses weakens social cohesion and reinforces inequality (1963).

Ultimately, Parsons and Goffman's contrasting perspectives reflect the complexities of health-related marginalization. While Parsons views exclusion as a brief disturbance (1951), Goffman identifies deeper, more persistent roots in stigma and societal attitudes (1963). Together, these frameworks highlight the need for a more inclusive understanding of health that challenges societal norms and minimizes stigma. In this way, the different realities of those living with chronic illnesses and disabilities can be acknowledged, as this issue is critical for creating a society in which all individuals, regardless of health status, can feel included in society.

SYNTHESIS AND ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT

Societal norms must evolve to better accommodate chronic conditions, addressing both structural inflexibility and stigma. This evolution is crucial for creating an inclusive environment for individuals living with chronic illness and disability, which requires changes in healthcare, employment systems, as well as public attitudes. Societal pressures on chronic illness recovery have a direct connection to cultural values of productivity and individualism, in which people are expected to be self-sufficient and economically productive (Walker 2010:636). When chronic conditions disrupt these standards, individuals are frequently excluded and stigmatized (Goffman 1963:2).

Parsons' Theory of Social Action presents the Sick Role as a foundational understanding of how illness is treated within society, describing it as a temporary, deviant state from which people must recover in order to return to productive, normative roles (Parsons 1951:455). While the Sick Role emphasizes recovery and compliance with medical treatment, this framework argues that illness is only brief and that complete recovery is always achievable. This assumption fails when dealing with chronic illness, which does not follow the expected path of healing (Walker 2010:635). This synthesis enhances the understanding of how chronic illness, particularly in the case of long-term conditions, challenges the societal

emphasis on recovery, exposing deeper issues of marginalization and norms that limit inclusion.

One of the limitations of Parsons' Sick Role is its focus on recovery as a moral obligation (Walker 2010:635). This can lead to the social exclusion of individuals whose conditions are chronic or incurable, as they fail to meet the expectation to "get well" (Varul 2010:85). Chronic illness, such as diabetes or multiple sclerosis, require long-term management, rather than a permanent cure (Walker 2010:634-635). Thus, Parsons' model is unable to account for the complicated, continuing nature of illness, leaving those with chronic conditions in a position between the Sick Role and the normal role (Varul 2010). Goffman's Theory of Stigma provides a deeper understanding by explaining how people with chronic illnesses experience social rejection because of their "spoiled identity" (1963). For example, individuals with chronic pain or visible disabilities may be stigmatized as unproductive, reinforcing the idea that illness is failure of self-reliance rather than a condition requiring long-term adaptation (Walker 2010: 634).

Furthermore, the societal obligation to recover as outlined by Parsons (1951), places emotional and psychological strains on people with chronic illness. According to Varul (2010:83), this expectation isolates individuals even more because they are judged not only for their illness, but for failing to adapt to societal norms regarding productivity expectations. Goffman's work is important here because it focuses on how stigma contributes to feelings of inadequacy, often forcing individuals to participate in strategies such as "passing" or "covering" (de Vrij 2024). These coping mechanisms, which try to conceal or minimize the external signs of illness, provide short-term relief but do not address the underlying issues of social exclusion and loss of identity that are encountered. This distinction helps us understand how chronic illness is not just a personal health issue, but a social one, where individuals must manage both medical treatment and societal stigma.

Combining these two perspectives provides a more thorough understanding of chronic illness. Parsons (1951) takes a structural approach to how illness is integrated into societal standards, emphasizing healing and reintegration, whereas Goffman (1963) provides a psychological and social viewpoint on the stigma that can trap individuals in a cycle of exclusion and self-doubt. The experience of leaving paid employment due to chronic illness, as noted by Walker (2010), exemplifies the intersection between Parsons' Sick Role and Goffman's Stigma. Individuals who are unable to work due to illness may be perceived as deviating from expected productive responsibilities, and the stigma associated with their condition increases their social isolation (Walker 2010:633). According to Walker's analysis, chronic illness causes does not just result in a loss of income, but in a significant disruption of one's personal and social identity, highlighting the broader societal consequences of ongoing conditions that Parsons' model alone cannot address (2010:635).

Real-world studies, such as those by Gehrke and Feuerstein (2017), demonstrate the practical applications of these theories. Gehrke and Feuerstein examined cancer survivors, particularly those with comorbid diseases, who experience not only physical challenges from their illness but also workplace prejudice (2017). Despite their ongoing health issues, cancer survivors often face difficulties in the workplace, including discrimination in promotions, wages, and benefits (Gehrke and Feuerstein 2017:4). These challenges highlight how

Parsons' Sick Role fails to address the long-term effects of chronic illness on both personal identity and economic security, with Goffman's Theory of Stigma (1963) explaining how these individuals are marginalized in the workplace. The discrimination that cancer survivors suffer can be understood as a form of "spoiled identity," where their inability to match societal expectations of productivity leads to their marginalization (Goffman 1963). Thus, together these theories reveal how illness is both a personal and social experience, emphasizing the need for systemic changes in healthcare and workplaces to reduce stigma and better support those with long-term health conditions.

CONCLUSION

Societal expectations surrounding recovery and productivity often marginalize individuals with chronic illness and disability, reinforcing stigma and limiting their full participation in society. Parsons' Sick Role concept illustrates how these expectations are structured, yet it fails to fully address the complexities faced by individuals for whom recovery is not realistically possible (1951). Goffman's Theory of Stigma provides a critical perspective, demonstrating how failure to meet societal norms can lead to social exclusion and discrimination for individuals with chronic conditions (1963). Together, these frameworks show that the connection between societal expectations and the lived experiences of people with chronic illness and disability is more complicated than a clear distinction between recovery and deviance. While Parsons focuses on the structural challenges to reintegration, Goffman emphasizes the emotional interpersonal consequences of stigma. This combined perspective requires a more inclusive approach, such as one that not only reforms policies but also questions public perceptions of health and normalcy. Only through these efforts, can society begin to create an environment that truly supports the participation and dignity of those living with chronic illnesses and disabilities.

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Shaping Consumer Preferences

By: Zoe Trachy

Consumption choices and preferences are shaped by an intersecting web of social factors, needs, desires, and representations. The values, ideas, and emotions associated with a product are key influences over consumer preferences. These preferences and associations with commodities are not unique to individuals, but rather the result of accumulated psychological perspectives. Commodities have historically represented and replicated class distinctions, and this continues in modern times, taking new forms and shifting with generational perceptions. The values that inform class categorization have been linked to specific types and modes of consumption, influencing people to have preferences that align with social categorization. Certain class informed consumption practices are not conscious, but rather a result of childhood material conditions. Commodities are increasingly associated with identity, seeming necessary to realize oneself. Large-scale surveillance and marketing strategies serve consumers the same narrative, shaping their preferences in a profitable way, while simultaneously perpetuating ideas of choice, value, identity, and individuality.

Bourdieu identified cultural capital as key in understanding consumption. In Bourdieu's consumption theory, goods are symbolic indicators of social ordering and distinguishability, making the world intelligible (Hand, 2024). They serve as representations of broader meanings, messages, and structure the way individuals perceive each other, specifically in class distinction. Cultural consumption is key in analyzing the motivations of consumer choices, behaviours, and preferences. Lury (2011) states "The reproduction of a shared cultural style contributes to class reproduction." (p. 90). Cultural consumption allows differentiation between social class groups, where individuals' consumption, as well as the ways they consume things, are indicative of messages of social worth and class belonging (Lury, 2011). For example, food is an easily understandable form of cultural capital. When individuals observe a family eating at McDonalds, they attach certain values and judgements onto the family, such as having low income, weak attention to health and wellbeing, disorganization, and more. Upon analysis, these judgements are indicative of a lower social class. That being that, those who make less money and have little leisure time due to an excess of working, are therefore sacrificing their quality of food. This example provides insight into the large impact of class on consumer choices and preferences. Families may not refrain from going to McDonalds because of obvious reasons of health and wellness, but rather because of the associated social consequences and labels that would be imposed onto them. In this way, consumer preferences are not strictly individual, but tied to a larger social world of quick judgements, hierarchical categorization, and performativity.

However, class influence on consumer preferences is not always conscious and strategic. Bourdieu identifies the concept of habitus as taste and preferences that are class-based dispositions (Hand, 2024). Habitus is shaped through an individual's entire background, that being family, peer groups, and class position. Childhood is especially influential in creating and shaping habitus, where the material conditions of one's upbringing are internalized and shape their future taste and preferences (Lury, 2011). Habitus are taken-for-granted preferences, meaning individuals are often unaware of their habitus and why they prefer certain commodities and modes

of consumption. Children that were raised in higher class families were likely dressed a certain way, eating certain foods, and engaging in different activities than children of middle-class families. For example, a person who grew up in the upper class may have an interest in sushi, acquire a style that is more formal, and have a passion for golfing. By comparison, someone who grew up middle class may prefer to wear ripped jeans, eat burgers, and play street hockey. These generalizations, although not universal, help demonstrate the ways that people may be unaware of the origins of their current consumption preferences, accepting them without critical thought.

When discussing class consumption differences, it is important to highlight the power dynamics associated with class preferences. It is not simply that different class groups have different consumption preferences, but that the higher class holds the ability to determine what tastes are 'objectively best' (Hand. 2024). This causes a trickle-down effect among lower classes, distinguishing what consumption should look like. Furthermore, there is competition between social groups to determine what Bourdieu defines as 'legitimized cultural capital', or the objectively best commodities and forms of consumption (Hand, 2024). This serves as a way for groups to assert dominance over each other (Lury, 2011). Lower class people experience structural constraints on cultural capital development because they do not have access to key resources, such as knowledge, experience, relationships, and economic means. Lower class people creatively adapt to their constraints by focusing on more achievable and realistic consumption (Hand, 2024). In lecture, discussions of ethical food and eating reveals that lower class individuals likely do not have access to the same 'ethical eating repertoire', nor the economics means, but they can focus on practical consumption habits regarding waste, recycling, littering, and everyday tasks (Hand, 2024). Evidently, high class groups hold the power to determine and greatly influence consumer preferences, as the masses attempt to achieve the same level of socio-economic success by mimicking their consumption.

Previous discussion reveals the complexity of consumption preferences, linking consumption with one's place in the social world and "affirming the superiority of their taste and lifestyle with the view to legitimizing their own identity as what is right to be." (Lury, 2011, p. 90). Members of a social class become identified with their class-shaped values, and therefore identified with the consumption that embodies these values. However, class is not the only influence on consumer preferences. Individuality is a core motivator for consumption. Even within a specific social class, diverse branches of identity are found and specifically linked to their consumer lifestyles. The ability to express identity through consumption originates from post-Fordism, where niche modes of production are introduced (Hand, 2024). Through mass production and specialization of commodities, consumers link identity with consumption, as it becomes an everyday essential. Slater states "The very idea that acts of consuming are seriously consequential for the authenticity of the self (as opposed to mere physical survival or social climbing) is an unintentional consequence of these early developments, as are many of the 'authentic values' in which modern consumer goods come wrapped." (Slater, 1997, p. 16). The industrial revolution allowed consumption to change, as things were increasingly chosen according to exchange value, rather than use value. The 'authentic values' that Slater (1997) describes include ideas of cleanliness, intelligence, attractiveness, and

much more. Bookman states “Consumers are encouraged to use the brand and the frames that it provides to co-create identities, shared meanings and social relations in a manner that contributes to (rather than detracts from) brand image and value.” (2013, p. 408). Consumers develop their consumption preferences according to an inner idea of self, attributing their goods to a fuller realization of who they are on the inside. Evidently, consumers should be cautious to attribute their self-worth to material things, as this is the goal of companies in boosting their revenue.

Many ideas surrounding self-identity and value-attributed commodities are a result of manipulation. Consumers experience the illusion of choice, where consumer culture is used as a form of social control (Hand, 2024). The mass production of goods is slightly different, allowing the consumer to ‘choose’ their commodity. However, these goods are virtually the same. An example of this is modern urban housing, the same building layout is often replicated with slight customizations. Consumers are manipulated through a multitude of methods, turning them into passive and uncritical (Hand, 2024). They are compelled to buy goods that are often unnecessary, and even unwanted. The manipulation of individuals' needs, understandings, self-recognition, and beliefs allows consumers to feel in control of their consumption while being a victim of strategic monitoring, profiling, and targeting. (Hand, 2024). Smart (2011) outlines a key example of manipulation where marketing strategies targeted youth populations in smoking advertisements, by associating smoking with youth-attributes. Research has shown that young people smoke for the social image (Smart, 2011). Evidently, “The industry actively searches ‘for ways to bend and circumvent the voluntary regulations set in place to protect young people.” (Devlin et al. 2003, p.2 in Smart, B., 2011, p. 64). As medical concerns arose surrounding smoking, these strategies adapted to address them. One advertisement stated that smoking promotes good digestion and beats stress (Smart, 2011). Marketing strategies greatly influence the ‘demand’, which justifies the ‘production’ of goods, framing consumerism as an act of free will. However, markets use psychological (values), promotional (excitement), and existential (identity) tactics to sway consumer preferences in a way that encourages profit.

Consumer preferences are shaped by class distinction efforts, consciously and subconsciously. Individuals attempt to achieve self-identity through their consumption of goods, as they are associated with desirable characteristics. People are made to feel that consumption is essential in determining oneself, specifically through advertisements. Marketing strategies take advantage of consumer desires to place and distinguish oneself in the social world. However, the endless pursuit of happiness, fulfillment, and identity falls short, as consumers continue in an endless cycle of consumption that never truly satisfies their needs (Hand, 2024).

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Transgender Women in the Sex Work Industry: Physical and Social Health Issues Caused through Work

By: Vienna Wiens

Male-to-female transgender women are still a minority group in the United States and Canada to this day (suggest removing this). They experience many forms of discrimination because of how they identify, since it does not fit society's 'normal' standards. American and Canadian society is primarily heteronormative - suggesting that there are only two genders, male and female, and that they each have associated gender roles, masculine and feminine. Transgender women who also participate in sex work have a higher social stigma, as they are part of a minority group *and* engage in a socially disfavoured line of work. An analysis of transgender women engaging in the sex work industry demonstrates that this line of employment can result in long-lasting, and often permanent, mental and physical issues due to the stigma, abuse, harassment, and lack of social support from police and medical professionals that these individuals face; this includes depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, scars, broken bones, traumatic brain injuries, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Frequently, transgender women do not choose to enter the sex work sector perpersonal choice (instead put "by choice") ; rather, it is often a last resort for those who are facing employment and financial struggles, such as high healthcare costs and housing instability (Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. 2020). In recent years, about 29 percent of transgender women have been living below the poverty line in the United States, and approximately 33 percent have been unemployed (Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. 2020). In my research, this serves to be the most compelling reason that trans women have entered sex work at some point in their lives.

Using an intersectional lens, it is evident that transgender women experience many forms of transphobic and employment discrimination in connection with sex work and gender nonconformity; this is an example of how discriminatory and repressive social systems relate to the interconnectedness of being a trans woman and a sex worker (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). Intersectionality can be defined as a lens through which we perceive an individual's life and experiences. It may be characterized as the interrelationship between race, class, gender, sexuality, and other categorized groups (Thornton Dill and Kohlman 2014). This allows us to view transgender women's issues intersecting with sex workers' issues to form a better understanding of both groups' issues as one. Transgender women face stereotypes that suggest that they're confused, abnormal, and insane. In addition, sex workers experience stereotypes such as being sex-craving/nymphomaniacs, criminals, unintelligent, drug addicts, homewreckers, careless of their bodies, and objects instead of people (Nadal, Davidoff and Fujii-Doe 2014). These sorts of stereotypes affect the way trans women in sex work view themselves as people. For example, a participant in Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno's (2020) study stated, "you get the disgusting comments. You start to feel like you're just an object and the longer you leave yourself susceptible to that it can damage your psyche tremendously when you start to believe that's what you are," referring to comments from customers and strangers while working.

Additionally, transgender women in sex work experience high levels of fetishism, which makes them feel less like persons and more like objects of sexual fantasy predominantly exploited for pleasure

by curious men (Zoli, Johnson, Cingolani and Pulcini 2021). As one female trans sex worker mentioned, "we are objects of fetish of men who seek sex. There is something in us that makes us exotic. Men seek us out. This type of objectification is itself a type of violence because we are not treated as human beings" (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). This has a significant toll on mental health as it creates a sense of self-worthlessness, but it creates an issue of increased odds of physical and sexual abuse occurring as well.

Physical assault in the United States and Canada is much more likely to occur against transgender women compared to cisgender women, especially those who work in the sex work industry; this includes being punched, slapped in the face, kicked, strangled/choked, and stabbed. Brooke, a trans woman with experience in sex work, stated that she had been threatened with a knife, had a gun pointed at her head, and has been raped and robbed by strangers (Baumann et al. 2018). Another trans woman, Darlene, was repeatedly punched in the head by a male hockey player when negotiating payment for her service. She added, "I didn't get paid for those either" (Baumann et al. 2018). Many of the injuries caused by these attacks lead to substantial and prolonged health issues, such as traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). Some ways in which trans female sex workers received TBIs were by being hit in the head with an object, being punched, slapped, or kicked in the face, being shaken or jolted, being strangled, and having one's head smashed against a hard surface; resulting in lacerations, bruising, fractures, whiplash, memory gaps, loss of consciousness, and feeling dazed (Baumann et al. 2018).

Not only do transgender women in the sex work industry in the United States and Canada experience higher levels of physical assault on the job, but they also have to endure sexual assault and harassment as well. This presents a greater opportunity to contract sexually transmitted diseases and infections. According to Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno's (2020) study, "transgender people are 49 times more likely to be living with HIV than the general population, [and] sex workers are 10 times more likely to have HIV." Furthermore, transgender women in sex work have the highest percentage of HIV rates out of any other female-identifying populations (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). One of the reasons that supports this is the lack of condom use at work for trans women sex workers, whether it's by choice or forced. For instance, Mira, a transgender woman in sex work, stated that "some of the girls […] don't always have a choice of using a condom or not. […] Sometimes a [man doesn't want to] use a condom, and if the money's right, the girls are gonna put themselves at risk" (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). Evidently, this affects physical health as well as sexual health, since the contraction of sexually transmitted infections may lead to severe pain, heavy bleeding, bumps and rashes, weight loss, motor issues, paralysis, extreme illness, and sometimes death.

Many sex workers, especially transgender female sex workers, choose not to seek medical help from a hospital or clinic because since they felt stigmatized and mistreated during medical encounters, many dismissed, ignored, or postponed seeking treatment when they did not deem a head injury to be severe (Baumann et al. 2018). After Naomi had her head bashed against some stairs by a client, she didn't even think about going to get medical help, but instead was hoping that she would heal normally and that there would be no serious issues with her organs. Bailey told a similar story, stating that she experienced abuse from a date but did not go to see a doctor as

she hadn't been badly knocked out or anything of such severity (Baumann et al. 2018). In terms of sexual health treatment, "several trans women felt that HIV clinics were not sufficiently equipped to care for trans women, lacked transgender clinicians, and unfairly characterized the magnitude of HIV in trans communities" (Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. 2020). Additionally, in the study of Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. (2020), it was mentioned that healthcare for sexual infections is not "very trans woman focused. A lot of it is, frankly, ran by older, white, cis, gay men who lived through the AIDS epidemic." This creates a whole segment of society that feels as though they cannot or should not access physical or sexual healthcare because of their 'out of the norm' gender identity and occupation.

Due to both a high level of poverty and involvement in a population that is regarded as non-confirmative regarding sexuality and gender, there is limited accessibility to healthcare resources for transgender women in sex work, including in emergency situations (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). Firstly, many insurance companies will not even provide coverage for transgender healthcare (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). One participant from Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al.'s (2020) study noted that "almost all of [her] blood tests and doctor's appointments have not been covered." Another participant in the same study mentioned that it is challenging since she has medical expenses and every time she inquires about Medi-care, they constantly claim there is no money for it; her credit is now plummeting (Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. 2020). For trans women who require medication for mental health, physical injuries, or even hormones, they sometimes do not have enough funding to get the medication each month. Many go for long periods without medication as they lack financial support, especially if they have to take time off work for health-related reasons.

When transgender women in sex work experience mental health issues, they frequently lack the financial resources to find therapists willing to speak with them (Basu, Ketheeswaran and Cusanno 2020). One trans woman in the sex work industry stated, "we need more trans counsellors. We can't just have a male or female as a counsellor because they won't understand our needs and what we're dealing with" (Jennings Mayo-Wilson et al. 2020). Even among the public workers who are supposed to be welcoming of everyone in need, there is still discrimination involved.

Reporting violence and abuse to the police became hard for trans women working in the sex work industry to do, as the police did not do much to help, blamed the women for being violated, and/or abused them themselves. One trans sex worker explained, "the police look down on us. They think, 'Oh you got what you deserved. If you weren't out there it wouldn't happen to you'" (Baumann et al. 2018). Another trans female sex worker, Natasha, revealed that "the police questioned her choice of clothing: 'Well if you weren't wearing that'…" (Baumann et al. 2018). Some police officers have gone so far as to inflict abuse on transgender women in sex work themselves. One participant stated, "I've been hit with a billy club, I've gotten both of my leg[s] broke[n], I've gotten my ankles broke[n], my hips broke[n]. I'm almost blind in one eye [be]cause he hit me upside the head so hard. I've gone to the hospital with a shattered skull […] when the cops discovered I was male bodied but identified as a female" (Nadal, Davidoff and Fujii-Doe 2014). Being discriminated against by police officers is what forces these trans women in sex work to not report assault or harassment out of fear of how they will be treated by those who are supposed to enforce the law.

This research is important in educating the general population, as well as public-workers, on matters of discrimination and violence that are still taking place toward transgender women in sex work in Canada and the United States. Healthcare workers and police officers need to gain the proper training and knowledge of the stigmatized group of trans women in sex work so that they may feel more comfortable seeking medical help and reporting crimes in the future for their own safety. Implementing training and courses before becoming a healthcare worker or police officer in Canada and the United States focusing on the safety of transgender women and sex workers may enable better understanding and an overall increase in safety among this group, which is what the majority of them have been asking for. I believe more research should be considered in future studies focusing on ethnically diverse trans women in the sex work industry, including trans women of colour and other racially minoritized groups. Some researchers have focused on the role of sex work of white versus black transgender women in Canada and the United States, but lack research on other ethnical populations. Including more diverse groups in future research will broaden our understanding of experiences of *all* transgender women in the sex work industry, rather than select groups.

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Dear Readers,

We are so incredibly thankful for the support from the DSC and the Sociology Department, without them this journal would not be possible. The Phenomena is a powerful outlet for Sociology students to express their work and to grow as academics, both as readers and authors. This would not be possible without all the applicants, we truly appreciate every single submission that was received and all the interest shown in this year's edition. We are so proud of this community and are delighted in sharing the accomplishments of it's students.

This year's Phenomena focuses on expanding our minds outside of theoretical concepts, to show that sociology is truly all around us, in every aspect of life. We hope this encourages you to look at the world with a more critical eye, both in and outside academics.

Sincerely,

DSC Journal Team

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