



Alterity In/Of Happiness:

Reflecting on the radical possibilities of unruly bodies

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Abstract

This paper examines how fat and disabled subjects may be taught to appear as happy through biopedagogies in order to manage shame and disgust evoked by their unruly, non-conforming bodies. We begin by articulating what we mean by "biopedagogies". We then unpack how the requirement to be happy feeds directly into a neoliberal agenda, which demands we must take care of ourselves both economically and emotionally in order to be considered good citizens. We explore how, in the midst of the requirement to be happy while living in bodies not recognised as inhabitable, we create and find moments of alterity in/of happiness. Through analysing art by disabled and fat activists and artists, we examine how disabled and fat people find happiness in difference, rather than in spite of it while at the same time, hanging on to rage and dull pain within this alterity of happiness.

Keywords: *disability; fat; biopedagogy; happiness; art*

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I. Introduction

There are many tropic representations of disability and fatness in westernized cultures (Garland-Thomson, 1997, 2002; LeBesco, 2004). Included in these tropes are the happy, smiling, non-sexual, typically white, typically physically disabled girl or younger woman figured in many charity campaigns which encourage us to engage in the neoliberal practice of giving money (or a small portion of it, at least). Such a girl is figured as being happy despite her unfortunate circumstance. There is also the trope of the jolly fat man or woman often featured in television, cinema, and theatre to provide comic relief. This fat figure is happy despite being “overweight”, their intersecting identities (of gender, class, race, and sexuality) functioning to excuse or exempt and oftentimes to condemn them for their failure to maintain a normative size. Cultural representations do more than reduce complex embodied, social experiences into flattened stereotypes: these tropes also function as “biopedagogies” through conveying messages that teach disabled and fat people¹ how we should live in our bodies; that we should feel shame in and for our bodies; that we should apologize for them; that we are objects of disgust; and that we should turn to healthcare to fix our unruly non-normativeness (Morris, 1999; Harwood, 2009, 2010; Rail, 2012; Rice, 2014). Cultural tropes, such as the smiling disabled girl and the jolly fat man or woman described above, teach disabled and fat people that we are suppose to be, or at least appear to be, happy.

In the midst of the requirement to be happy while living in an ableist, fat-phobic culture in which our bodies are not recognised as inhabitable, how can we, disabled and fat people, create and find moments of alterity in/of happiness? How can we locate, and even dwell in an alterity, where we can express happiness in difference rather than in spite of it and, at the same time, not discount social suffering caused by ableism and fat-phobia? Our paper explores these questions by pulling together feminist, queer, fat, and disability studies, arts, and activism. We begin by explaining what we mean by biopedagogy and explore how it functions to control unruly bodies by engendering ableist and fat-phobic logic, the logic of healthism (Raisborough, 2011). Further to uncovering some of the ways that tropic representations of disability and fatness teach us how we ought to live in our bodies, we then telescope on to the particular biopedagogical requirement for disabled and fat people to be, or to appear, happy in

¹ We recognize that there are many differences between the social experience of being fat and of being disabled. Disabled people are pitied for their perceived lack of ability and fat people are blamed for perceived laziness, as an example. We also recognize that experiences of fatness and disability overlap and interlock in the fat disabled body. However, for the purposes of this chapter, we focus on how the experience of being fat and being disabled often include living with the shared biopedagogical requirement to appear happy.

order to manage shame and disgust evoked by their non-conforming bodies within a culture of neoliberalism, wherein deviant bodies must be managed and controlled (Ben-Moshe, 2013; Chapman, Ben-Moshe, & Carey, forthcoming). By exploring cultural representations, we unpack how the requirement to be happy feeds directly into a neoliberal agenda, which demands we must take care of ourselves both economically and emotionally in order to be considered good citizens. Using critical fat and disability studies to think through a video made by disability artist Jan Derbyshire and an installation by maximalist activist and artist Allyson Mitchell, which we take up as body-becoming pedagogies (Rice, 2014), our final section examines how disabled and fat people create alterities of happiness in which we express happiness in difference rather than in spite of it; we find beauty, pleasure, and satiation in non-normality while at the same time, hang on to dull rage and pain within this alterity.

Biopedagogies

By biopedagogy, we mean the loose collection of information, advice, and instruction about bodies, psyches, health, and well being, often moralizing or lecturing in tone, that works to control people by using praise and shame alongside “expert knowledge” to urge their conformity to mental and physical norms (Evans & Davies, 2012; Jutel, 2006, 2009; MacNeill & Rail, 2010; Rich, 2010, 2011; Wright, 2009; Rice, 2014). These “assemblages,” as Leahy (2009, p. 177) describes them, of instructions and directions about how to live, how to be embodied, what “health” is, and what to do in order to be “healthy” and happy (Harwood, 2009, p. 16), and avoid “risk” (Fullagar, 2009, p. 109) are not only transmitted in formal educational contexts but through media, health care settings, families, leisure spaces, and everyday interactions as well (Azzarito, 2009; Harwood, 2009, 2010; MacNeill & Rail, 2010; Rail, 2012; Rich, 2010, 2011; Wright, 2009). Drawing on the work of prescient educational sociologist Basil Bernstein, contemporary critical health scholars have argued that ours is a “totally pedagogized society” (Bernstein, 2001, pp. 365-366), which institutes “systems of control from instruction” (MacNeill & Rail, 2010, p. 179) in all aspects of social life (Evans & Rich, 2011). As noted by these researchers, many current biopedagogical instructions relate specifically to solving the “problem” of the obesity epidemic (Harwood, 2009; Wright, 2009). While physical or mental differences deemed as modifiable are often targeted for normalization (e.g. fatness and learning disabilities), biopedagogies may apply differentiated instructions to bodily differences categorized as unchangeable, natural, or fixed (such as certain physical impairments and gender differences in physical ability) in order to shift responsibility for “failure” to the abnormal body and so maintain ablest and sexist standards of normal (Harwood, 2010; Rice, 2014; van Amsterdam, Knoppers, Claringbould, & Jongmans, 2012).

The concept of biopedagogy draws from philosopher Michel Foucault’s notion of biopower—the idea that governments regulate individuals and populations not through overt force but through imparting values and knowledge that teach people how to manage their bodies and selves in ways that fit with state interests (Foucault, 1979, 1980; Foucault & Gordon, 1980). In contrast with sovereign power, biopower is focussed on the preservation, “improvement,” and control of life – or bios – at the level of the individual and the population, via the inculcation of values through disciplinary practices to which individuals are subjected (Harwood, 2009). Values become internalised by individuals as they are subjectified, which leads to the development of a self-monitoring and self-disciplining population (Harwood, 2009), and allows for the control of deviants (van Amsterdam, Knoppers, Claringbould, & Jongmans, 2012). For example, schools place students under surveillance by evaluating their fitness levels, setting differentiated fitness goals depending on children’s perceived abilities based on interpretations of their impairments, sex and age, checking their lunchboxes for “bad” foods, imparting the notions of good character or citizenship, and in other ways instructing them on how to monitor their bodies/selves in order to become worthy, healthy, happy, and productive citizens (Rice, 2014). While these lessons can be benign or even beneficial, they also work to control through instruction: they define the normal bodily self (thin, white, fit, male, mentally normative, and able-bodied) and then proceed to label those who diverge from the norm (fat, non-white, unfit, mentally or physically disabled, female) by using praise and blame alongside expert knowledge to urge conformity to norms

(Leahy, 2009) or frame non-conformity as a problem of the failed or faulty body/mind (Harwood, 2010; van Amsterdam, Knoppers, Claringbould, & Jongmans, 2012).

In accordance with Foucault's theory of subjectification and self-discipline, biopedagogical instructives and directives cannot be understood merely as transmitted knowledge, but as active information that shapes subjectivity itself (Petherick, 2011; Rose & Novas, 2005). As Ellsworth writes, pedagogy (and therefore biopedagogy) is a "social relationship [that] is very close in. It gets right in there in your brain, your body, your heart, your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and impossibilities in all those realms" (Ellsworth 1997, p. 6, quoted in Leahy, 2009, p. 177). The inculcation of affect, specifically through the internalization of shame and disgust (Evans, Rich, Allwood & Davies, 2008), emerges in the literature a key means by which biopedagogical instructions about bodily selves are taken in. In characterizing a certain mental and physical type as normative (white, male, able-bodied, self contained, happy, bounded, thin, and fit), biopedagogies uphold racism, sexism, sizism, and ableism (Azzarito, 2009; MacNeill & Rail, 2010; Rail, 2012) as well. They also serve to deny the history and reality of sexism, ableism, colonization, and neoliberalism (Azzarito, 2009; MacNeill & Rail, 2010) that have constructed the desired mental and physical attributes as norms and continue to frustrate people's efforts to embody them. The ultimate objective of biopedagogy is to produce good biocitizens, individuals who internalize instructions for managing their bodies/selves in order to optimize their health and happiness, increase their productivity, and strengthen society (MacDonald, Wright & Abbott, 2010; Murphy, 2009; Rose & Novas, 2005; Vesely, 2008). The "moral economy of hope" upheld by discourses of biocitizenship tends to denigrate the possibility that aspects of our embodied lives are not within the control of the individual (Rose & Novas 2005, p. 442), positing instead that biocitizens can and must save the state from being forced to pay for costly biotechnological or social interventions and supports in order to improve the individual's health, happiness, and fitness, or to prevent unproductivity and death (Macdonald, Wright & Abbott, 2010). Good biocitizens produce and consume correctly and do not squander their "biovalue" (Rose & Novas, 2005, p. 442). Since biopower is productive, and "comes from everywhere" (from those above and below) (Foucault, 1980, p. 93), it is not totalizing, which allows for the development of resistance and divergent or critical positions (Harwood, 2009).

II. Biopedagogies of Happiness

In our visually-oriented, homogenizing, and normalizing culture, representations of bodily selves and embodied differences often function as biopedagogies. This is because such representations tend to carry (often implicit) instructions for how we should live in our bodies and to establish a set of embodied norms to which we all must conform. Even non-normative bodies, such as fat, differently sized, disabled, and "mad" embodiments (Aubrecht, 2012; Fabris, 2011; Foucault, 1973; LeFrancois et al, 2013; Reaume, 2012; Voronka, 2008), have normative standards of being, which we are often taught through representations of differences. Representations are not simply reflections of our corporealities but are tightly bound up in how we come to know our own and others' bodies through a specific cultural context. Since at the very moment that we experience life we are also representing it, experience and representation always are touching and being touched by one another. For these reasons, it is important to pay careful attention to representations of bodily selves and embodied differences in discussions of biopedagogies. In this section we unpack the convergences and divergences in how disabled, mad, and fat/differently-sized bodies are represented in normative culture. We pay particular attention to how these normative representations of non-normative bodies function as biopedagogies consistent with a neoliberal agenda.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, "The history of disabled people in the Western world is in part the history of being on display, of being visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased" (2002, p. 56). Pre-dating the welfare system in 16th and 17th century England, certain kinds of anomalous bodies lived and performed

as court jesters and fools while other bodily forms were exiled from public space by poor laws, which made it illegal for disabled, atypical, poor, and non-working bodies to be seen in public places (Schweick, 2010). The infamous American “ugly laws” served a similar function – that of exiling undesirable bodies from public space (Schweick, 2010). Throughout the 19th century, parts of Europe, the US, and Canada saw the emergence of freak shows, displaying various kinds of physically and mentally different embodiments (disabled, racialized, super fat, and queer and trans) for entertainment and profit feeding directly into the agenda of global capitalism and the beginnings of what we now know as neoliberalism. In line with custodialism, a key component of nation-building, the middle of the 19th century also marked the beginning of large scale, state-sanctioned institutionalization for people with physical disabilities and mad people (Reaume, 2012; Voronka, 2008). Institutional spaces – the buildings themselves and the sprawling lawns which typically surrounded them – functioned to contain and thereby hide “deviant” bodies/minds while also serving as topographical symbols of insanity, criminality, and danger thus guaranteeing, though impossibly so, that all other public spaces were geographies of safety and sanity (Voronka, 2008). Disabled and mad people displayed on the grounds of these institutions served as reminders that those living outside the institution were sane, civil, and “normal” (Reaume, 2012).

Fat bodies, though historically not slated for institutionalization in the way that physically disabled and mad bodies have been, were also understood to be disruptive to the normative order. Before the Enlightenment in Europe, there was some discussion of physical and social problems associated with fat, but interpretations of overweight as a symbol of sickness, weakness, and excess began to increase throughout the 20th century (Schwartz, 1986; Stearns, 1997). Over the past twenty years, public health institutions have fuelled fear of fat by interpreting obesity as an escalating epidemic that threatens the health, fitness, and security of nations (Ontario, 2004; World Health Organization, 2000). Attention-grabbing hyperbole abounds within anti-obesity discourse, where obesity is said to pose a greater threat to the world’s health than “influenza or the plague,” according to one former director of the US Centers for Disease Control (“Americans experiencing,” 2003, para. 2). Beyond problems with health, an increasing number of political and environmental problems are being blamed on fat, from global warming (Jacobson & McLay, 2006) to America’s vulnerability to terrorist attacks (“Fat is,” 2006). One extreme example of fat blaming can be found in remarks made by US Surgeon General Richard Camona who in 2006 claimed that obesity represented a new “terror within” because disease-causing fat compromised America’s ability to defend its borders (“Fat is,” 2006, para. 3). From a critical health perspective, the obesity “epidemic” can be understood as a moral panic since exaggerated claims about its scope and consequences combined with misplaced morality and ideological assumptions underlie our war on fat (Gard & Wright, 2005; Gard, 2011). The framing of fat as a dangerous disease further allows deep-seated dread of fat “others” – women, the poor, and the racialized – to be disguised and expressed as fear and hatred of fat (Campos, 2004). In this way, fear of fat masks even as it reinforces class, race, and gender discrimination. Although there are many similarities between cultural responses to fat and disabled bodies – most notably that both impaired and fat bodies are regarded as medical problems that need fixing (Cooper, 1997; Lupton, 2013) – the idea that disability is an inherent attribute contrasts sharply with the belief underpinning most anti-obesity discourse that fatness is self-induced and can be changed. In the moral climate of today, fat people are condemned for consuming too much and for being lazy – offered as evidence that Western society itself is in decline (Crawford, 2004; Gard & Wright, 2005). This history shows how fat bodies were, and still are, taught to reduce their weight or remove themselves from public view, though not through state-enforced but rather by socially sanctioned, self-imposed normalization/segregation.

Within our contemporary cultural context, disabled people and super sized people are still put on display, hidden away, and constructed as burdens on or threats to the state (Clare, 2003; Voronka, 2008; Raisborough, 2011). Garland-Thomson describes how putting disabled and, we would add, super-sized people on display teaches the non-disabled and normative-sized public that it acceptable to look and even more, to stare at disabled and fat bodies

(2002, p. 56). “Disabled people [Garland-Thomson tells us] have variously been objects of awe, scorn, terror, delight, inspiration, pity, laughter, or fascination—but they have always been stared at” (2002, p. 56). She continues:

Staring at disability choreographs a visual relation between a spectator and a spectacle. A more intense form of looking than glancing, glimpsing, scanning, surveying, gazing, and other forms of casual or uninterested looking, staring registers the perception of difference and gives meaning to impairment by marking it as aberrant. By intensely telescoping looking toward the physical signifier for disability, staring creates an awkward partnership that estranges and discomforts both viewer and viewed (pp. 56-57)

Putting disabled and super-sized people on display and premising people to stare at these bodies, registering them as different and marking them as aberrant teaches us, and our culture, how to approach disabled and obese bodies. We stare at objects; we stare at things that peak our curiosity; we stare at things that fascinate us and things that repulse us; we stare at things that we find fascinating and repulsive at the same time. Staring is different than a veiled glance which we bestow upon things that we cannot figure out but at which our looks are not permitted to linger. We stare at inanimate things that cannot stare back. Representations of disabled, mad, and fat people in medical theatres, on freak show stages, on the grounds of asylums, on our television screens during telethons, charity shows and reality TV programs, teach us that disabled, mad, and fat bodies are objects we can stare at. This stare extends to people who are visibly disabled or overweight on the street. When we walk or roll down the street in our different bodies with our different ways of traversing public space, people stare at us. The unabashed stares that representations of disability and size difference permit, and the extension of these stares onto our bodies in public and private spaces, teaches us, disabled and differently sized people, how to live in our bodies.

Through practices of hiding and displaying, we are taught that our disabled, mad, and differently-sized bodies are anomalous and, more than this, intolerably so. We are taught that our bodies house an intolerable difference, that we are public spectacles, that we should expect stares, and above all else, that the problem of disability and the problem of healthism is located in our bodies rather than the social (following Oliver, 1991, 1996; Shakespeare, 2006; Hughes & Patterson, 1997). Thus, when attempting to solve the problem of disability, madness, and so-called fatness/unfitness, it is our bodies, rather than the social, that should be scrutinized and manipulated. The way disabled, mad, and differently sized people are represented, and this includes the ways we are looked at, teaches us much about how we should live in our bodies and about what non-disabled and normatively-sized people should expect from us and treat us.

One way that some disabled people are represented is as passive, helpless victims of our own circumstance. This kind of representation “produces the sympathetic victim or helpless sufferer needing protection or succor and invoking pity, inspiration, and frequent [financial] contributions” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 194). This representational way of understanding disabled people (a biopedagogy) was popularized by the “charity model,” which emerged in North America in the 1960s and has since migrated into the retail sphere of late capitalism. Charities, such as the Jerry Lewis Telethon, used sentimental images of disabled children raised up on their crutches or being patted on the head to raise money for the Jerry Lewis Foundation under the guise of raising awareness. These images bring occasion for the viewer to create their own narrative for improvement, development, and progress made possible by the charity and good will of others all the while containing the threat of disability in the helpless and sympathetic child (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Some, but not all, disabled people are represented as, and instructed to be passive, non-agentive, objects of pity. When suggesting that disabled people are represented as pitiable, we must be cognizant of the many ways that disability and embodied difference is clarified through all other ways that a body is marked (McGuire, forthcoming). It is no coincidence that the “face” of disability charity campaigns is most often the face of a young, white, physically disabled girl or young woman, who appears as

though she acquired disability through no fault of her own. It is also no accident that this face is typically a smiling face. Culturally, we recognize this face as passive, non-agentive, non-threatening, grateful, and pleasant. We recognize this face as one who is deserving of charity. We do not recognize all differently-embodied people as deserving of our sympathy and charity. For example, an older, Aboriginal, homeless, man who is experiencing psychosis may be blamed for his circumstances and subsequently represented as threatening and not deserving of out charity. Fat bodies and differently-sized bodies are also represented as threatening and undeserving of charity, as we elaborate on.

In a culture that judges a person's moral worth by their weight, fatness has emerged as a sign of physical and social unfitness. According to cultural and fat studies scholar Kathleen LeBesco, "history is long on representations of fat people through their depictions are typically quite limited in scope" (2004, p. 75). Some common tropes include the greedy, over-consuming fat cat; the klutzy funny guy a la John Candy or the loud, lewd, wisecracking Rosanne, whose superabundant size signifies their lack of restraint and will power; sufferers of mental illness who carry their inner affliction on their overweight like the agoraphobic Momma in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* or the abused gay teen Sweet William in the *Hanging Garden*; the fat drag performances of Martin Lawrence and Eddie Murphy where the big Black hyper-maternal-sexual figure becomes the butt of the joke—fusing two older stereotypes of Black women, the jezebel and the Mammy, into one hybrid type (Manigault-Bryant, 2013); and finally, and the ubiquitous fat sidekick exemplified by Melissa McCarthy in *Bridesmaids* and Rebel Wilson in *Perfect Pitch*. One recurring representation of fat people in popular culture and social interaction is the sympathetic yet comedic figure – generally a white, middle class fat man or woman who both cloaks and exposes their emotional problems through their excess appetite and size. We recognize this funny fat person as affable, likeable, easygoing, pleasant, and unthreatening. We recognize him or her as deserving of our acceptance, kindness, and friendship. Yet as with disabled people, we do not recognize all differently-sized and supersized individuals as deserving of our acceptance or support. Poor and racialized fat people, for example, may be blamed for their overweight, and hence seen as unworthy of our friendship and sympathy.

It is critical here to distinguish what LeBesco calls "fat mockery"—fat drag where non-fat actors don fat suits to parody fat people—from self-deprecating fat humor—where fat comedians mock themselves for laughs (2005, p. 231). The current popularity of fat mockery is evidenced by movies such as *Shallow Hall* (2001), *Big Momma's House* (2000), *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), and *Norbit* (2007). According to LeBesco, the subversive power and possibility of fat drag that comes in "denaturalizing the thin original body of the actor" (p. 233) is missed within the fat drag genre in these types of popular films since typically the lead actor's fat embodiment is highly exaggerated and played for cheap laughs. Produced within a social context that frames obesity as a frightening disease, such fat ridicule may work to diffuse audience fears of engulfment and contamination in the face of an imagined menace (Campos, 2004; Manigault-Bryant, 2013). Since many of the most recent fat drag films feature slim Black male comedians parodying fat Black female characters, some critics have argued that these representations also function to unite men across the so-called races against a common enemy: feminizing fat (Campos, 2004; LeBesco, 2005; Manigault-Bryant, 2013). This does not mean that marginalized groups' own use of self-deprecatory humor necessarily lacks subversive power. While Rosanne and Melissa McCarthy's use of reductive stereotypes may fuel sexist, classist, and anti-fat attitudes in audiences, the self-deprecating comedy each performs also makes hegemonic anti-fat beliefs about embodied difference the butt of their jokes (Gilbert, 1997). Thus rather than simply taking aim at their own fat bodies, they often target stereotypes about fat embodiment in order to skewer broader social attitudes and beliefs.

When we are thinking about how embodiments are made to mean under neoliberalism, it is particularly important to attend to how the clarification of disability and fatness through other identity markers impacts the meaning we make of embodied difference. We know that under neoliberalism, some bodies are valued and other bodies are valueless (Harvey, 2006). Neoliberalism values bodies that are self-sufficient, productive, and wholly

independent.² People who are not productive, as in not participating in the market economy of late capitalism, and are not able to live independently (without economic or personal support) are understood as valueless. Through representation and other biopedagogies, we are taught that disabled, mad, and differently-sized people take from, rather than contribute to, capitalist economies, and we are thusly understood to be part of the valueless, undesirable population. This is evidenced by US and Canadian government-sponsored childhood anti-obesity campaigns that though ostensibly motivated by the laudable desire to prevent disease, expose another, more moralizing, drive: to uphold certain notions of national fitness and strength. It is also evidenced in the ways that cutbacks by New Labour, Conservative, and Democratic governments in the UK, Canada, and the US have dramatically decreased the supports for disabled people by eliminating programs such as home support and various disability living allowance programs (Kelly, 2013; Owen & Parker Harris, 2012; Prince, 2012; Reaume, 2012; Stewart, 2010). Such cutbacks obviously have negative effects on disabled people's quality of life. The government's solution to the problems caused by such cutbacks (problems such as disabled people becoming poorer and more excluded from public life that we've already been excluded from) is to "reintegrate" disabled people into the job market while doing little (structurally and attitudinally) to promote a culture of inclusion (Owen & Parker Harris, 2012). The goal is a neoliberal one, to put individuals in charge of their own economic gain, rather than to promote the rights of disabled and fat people and to combat the pervasive culture of ableism/healthism, of which the plenteous inaccessibility of most workplaces and the pressure to achieve a corporate body (well-groomed, fit/not fat) are significant effects (Longhurst, 2001) (for more on the connection between ableism and inaccessibility, please see Titchkosky, 2009).

Within a neoliberal climate wherein each citizen is understood as being morally and socially obliged to work lest they be considered a social parasite, we see that the "sick role" developed by medical sociologist Talcott Parsons in 1951 remains operational today. Parsons argued that sick and impaired people could occupy a role of "sanctioned deviance" and could be excused from the obligation to work (1951, p. 437). Under this role, being sick was neither temporary nor simply a condition; rather, it was relentless state-of-being which was forever attached to one's body as well as their moral character. In order to manage and control disabled people, the sick role laid out a set of rights and responsibilities that one had to uphold in order to be recognized as a "sanctioned deviant" deserving of charity, with which only certain kinds of disabled people could comply (1951, pp. 436-437). Those occupying the sick role had the right not to be held responsible for their condition and had the right to be exempt from the social responsibility to work (1951, pp. 436-437). In exchange for these so-called rights, those in the sick role had the responsibility to seek and follow medical advice from a professional. These people also had the social obligation to appear sick at all times, to refrain from enjoying any of the pleasures of social life, and most importantly, appear grateful—happy even—for any of the charity they receive (Parsons, 1951, p. 437; Barnes & Oliver, 1993). However, only certain disabled and sick people were recognized under the sick role: those who were able to fulfill the role's rights and responsibilities in a way that was socially recognized. These were, and still are, people not disabled through their own doing (excluding mad people and many fat people, for example), and people who appear as remorseful for their disability, who are adequately removed from social and civic life, and who appear grateful for the small bits of monies they receive (Parsons, 1951). Most of all, one had (and still has) to appear passive, pitiable, non-agentive, and non-threatening. Such an appearance is largely only accessible to young, white, physically disabled, and apologetically overweight women and men. For those with physical disabilities, a smile also does well to fulfill the responsibility to appear grateful for the small bits of monies received through charity.

² Many disability studies scholars, including Colin Barnes (1990) and Mia Mingus (2010) challenge the assumption that anyone is "purely independent," suggesting instead that we are all inter-dependent on one another.

While the representation of disabled and differently sized people under the sick role does little to meet the needs (or contribute to the cultural recognition of vitality, autonomy, and respect) of those in the sick role, it does serve those who donate to disability charities and those who seek to prevent obesity in children. The ritual of donation, following Paul Longmore and Andrew Batavia, contributes to a “conspicuous cultural ritual where the ‘economically able’ garishly donate in public venues to help disabled people and bolster their own celebrity” (1999, p. 3). In a neoliberal climate that emphasizes taking personal over collective responsibility, public health initiatives that mobilize populations into prevention efforts such as the “Stop Playing Games with Childhood Obesity” campaign (2009) launched by the City of Hamilton in Canada or Atlanta, Georgia’s more direct “Stop Childhood Obesity” (2011) campaign puts the onus squarely on kids and parents to stop childhood obesity. Effectively, overweight and obese children, who are seen as prime candidates for future disease, have the right to receive prevention interventions for their physical bodies, but not the right to play or study in environments accepting of their bodily differences; the right to have their health taken seriously but not the right to be seen as fit or healthy if they cannot conform to body norms; the responsibility to discipline themselves and find happiness and self-esteem by embodying a normative size, but not the right or the responsibility to be angry at pervasive weightism or find happiness *in* fatness. Similarly, those with disabilities in the sick role have the right to be excluded from work, but not the right to an accessible workplace; the right to receive minimum charity donations, but not the right to a livable wage; the right to receive help (in exchange for appearing, always and forever a helpless victim), but not the right to be inter-dependent (Mingus, 2010); the responsibility to be grateful for what they receive and happy in spite of their disability or size, but not the right or the responsibility to be angry at pervasive ableism/sizism or happy *in* disability or bodily difference.

We are taught, through representation, that disabled and differently-sized people are happy in spite of their embodied difference. These representations do not teach us anything about the many experiences of living with disability and embodied difference, corporeal experiences that often include encounters with ableism and sizism. Rather, these images teach us that disabled and differently sized people can and should be happy, not only in spite of their disability and different size, but also despite ableism and weightism. This marginal, fleeting, attention to disabled and differently-sized people’s happiness reminds us that the sick role is still firmly in place in our westernized culture producing certain kinds (white, young, physically impaired, seemingly compliant) of disabled people and of fat people (also young, overweight, and seemingly compliant) who are culturally recognized as victims of their own or familial circumstances and therefore possessing the right to be cared for or cured in exchange for the social responsibility to be compliant. Because happiness is recognized as a desired state-of-being (Ahmed, 2010), the image of the happy disabled or fat person teaches us, normative culture, that we have fulfilled our responsibility of taking care of and, therefore, the disabled person must fulfill their responsibility to be compliant. Such a “happiness gloss” produces the hapless, passive, disabled or fat subject who has a role within neoliberalism at the same time as it teaches normative culture that we do not need to actively work to dismantle systemic oppression because disabled and fat people are, assuredly, happy despite “it all.” In this way our happiness individually manages and compensates for discrimination against people who embody difference by relinquishing the social responsibility to confront ableism and sizism, and to interrogate the power that healthism holds over our lives.

In this section, we outlined how we are taught that disabled and fat people are happy despite our differences and/or to compensate for our differences through particular representations and how these representations work to manage and control us within neoliberalism. In the next section, we frame our conceptualization of an alterity of happiness, wherein disabled, mad, and fat people create spaces, ways of being together, and even new impressions of disability and embodied difference wherein we can be and become happy in disability and difference rather than in spite of it while holding onto dull rage and pain, an effect of living in an ableist and sizist culture. There are many ways that we create these spaces of alterity and the mode of cultural production that we focus on is disability and fat

activist performance and video art. We follow the question posed by Sara Ahmed in her *Promise of Happiness* (2010), wherein she asks not what happiness *is* but rather what happiness can *do* (emphasis ours, 2010, p. 2). Ahmed quotes Frey and Stutzer as they assert, “Everyone wants to be happy. There is probably no other goal in life that commands such a high degree of consensus” (2002, quoted in Ahmed, 2010, p. 1). Of this claim, Ahmed asks, “Do we consent to happiness? And what are we consenting to, if or when we consent to happiness?” (2010, p. 1). Having explored what disabled and fat people’s happiness can do in neoliberal, normative culture, we think through what happiness can do in spaces of alterity.

III. Arts and Alterity

In many ways, we are taught that disabled and fat bodies are problems in need of solutions (Snyder & Mitchell, 2000, p. 47): medicine represents us as problems of healthism; body mass indexes represent us as problems of fitness and incapacity; rehabilitation represents us as problem of function; mental institutions represent us as problems of sanity and social obedience; prisons represent us as problems of civil compliance; special education classrooms represent us as problems of education; neoliberalism represents us as problems of productivity; popular culture represents us as problems disruptive to beauty. All of these dominant representations of disabled and fat people are reflective of normative culture’s understandings of and expectations for us. These images also represent how our culture treats, manages, and values disabled and fat people. We are taught that, in various ways, non-normative bodies are threats to normative life. We know that as much as non-normative bodies threaten, normative life needs these bodies to be abnormal in order to give us a sense of what a normal body is and can do. Although dominant representations are powerful, disability and fatness are also represented differently in spaces of alterity. Disability and fat artistic and activist communities of disabled people, Mad-identified people, fat people, friends and allies, artists, poets, musicians, dancers, playwrights, directors, performers, writers, scholars, theorists, and activists represent disability, madness, and fatness as desirable, a welcomed presence, a source of creative inspiration, and an expression of the diversity of embodiments. As we will demonstrate by using disability and fat art and activism, these spaces of alterity allow disabled, mad, and fat people to express happiness in difference rather than in spite of it; find beauty, pleasure, and satiation in non-normality; a happiness that does not pacify but may, in fact, incite rage and dull pain which comes with living in an inhospitable, violent, ableist, saneist, and fat-phobic culture.

“Happiness” has captured the social imagination of westernized cultures for the past decade or so. Born out of the recognition that “money does not buy happiness”—a conclusion haphazardly reached through the observation that middle and upper class people are not necessarily happier than the working class or the working poor, as well as through movements such as the popular positive psychology movement began to define happiness beyond traditional markers of success (S. DiMartino, July 23, 2013, personal correspondence). For example, the so-called “father” of positive psychology Martin Seligman suggests that, “while 60 percent of happiness is determined by our genetics and our environment, the remaining 40 percent is up to us” (2004). In this popularized “up to us” version of happiness, we hold the responsibility to be happy. If we are not happy, then it is us, our attitude, our perspectives, our goals, our desires that must change. Social oppression remains unquestioned, and therefore, unchallenged. For example, if a mad person is unhappy, it is because of a problem in our psyche and not because we live in a saneist culture, or that a large majority of mad people are homeless or under-housed (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013); if disabled people are unhappy, it is because we are mourning our unfortunate circumstances and not because we live in an ableist culture or that a majority of disabled people live under the poverty line (Council of Canadians with Disabilities, 2013); if fat/differently sized people are unhappy, it is because we are fat and not because we are more likely to live in poverty and are less likely to have life partners or receive appropriate medical

care than thin people living in a fatphobic, fat-shaming culture (Lupton, 2013).

In our work, we de-individualize the locus of happiness/unhappiness. When we speak of the happiness disabled and fat people experience in spaces of alterity, we are not making any universal claims about what happiness is, what makes disabled and fat people happy, or how happiness can improve one's overall health and wellbeing. We take happiness as loosely referring to "the assessment one has over their life" (S. DiMartino, July 23, 2013, personal correspondence). In this way, following Ahmed, we are not interested in, "what happiness *is*, but what happiness can *do*" (our emphasis, 2010, p. 2). One thing that happiness can *do* is resist and disrupt, especially when experienced and expressed by people who are living lives that are assumed not to be worth living, such as disabled people and fat people. Happiness can resist the understanding that our lives are not communal, creative, joyful, or pleasurable and can disrupt the assumption that if and when we do experience happiness, it is always and only despite, and not because of, our difference. We might also experience resistance to our happiness-as-resistance based upon the moral distinction between who is worthy and who is capable of being happy "in the right way" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 13). Ahmed writes that when we notice the wrong people becoming happy this is often coupled with "a desire for happiness to be returned to the right people" and, in this way, happiness teaches us what we value rather than simply what is of value (2010, p. 13). There is neoliberal investment in the smiling disabled girl or the jolly fat man or woman—images of people happy in spite of their difference—because such representations assure normative culture that it need not worry about the systemic and pervasive ways that we are oppressed. There is, however, risk associated with recognizing that disabled and fat people are happy *in* difference because this would suggest that there is value in these bodies of difference. As Ahmed suggests, "when happiness is assumed to be a self-evident good, then it becomes evidence of the good" (2010, p. 13). Therefore, following Ahmed, when we are thinking about happiness, we need to consider not only what makes happiness good, but also how happiness *participates* in making things good (emphasis in the original, 2010, p. 13).

There are clues as to how we might begin to think about how happiness *in* difference is experienced and expressed when we attend to artistic and performative examples of how happiness exists on the margins, in counter-cultures and arts communities. For example, since the 1980s, the disability arts and culture movement has been an integral part of the Disability Rights Movement (DRM) across North America and in the UK (Abbas, et al, 2004; Roman, 2009a, 2009b). The DRM, which emerged in the 1970s alongside other rights-based social movements such as the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the queer liberation movement, was initially concerned with, and quite successful at, securing legal and civil rights for disabled people by engaging in policy reform and creating accessibility legislation (Oliver, 1991, 1996; Shakespeare, 2006). However, the DRM was also critiqued for ignoring the corporeal, and thus, operationalizing a particular kind, a "normal" kind, of disabled body—the white, straight, middle class, wheelchair-using, mentally and emotionally normative man with full and recognized citizenship (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Mingus, 2010, 2011; Wendell, 1996). In response to such critique, the disability arts and culture movement posited that that if justice was to be achieved for all disabled people, we must focus on how disability is represented and thus, who we imagine disabled people to be and what we could imagine "full inclusion" in crip communities to become. In this way, the emergence of disability arts and culture movement marked a shift from rights-based initiatives to a focus on more aesthetic and representational concerns in the fight for disability justice (Gorman, 2007; Mingus, 2010).

In the disability arts and culture movement, folks like the San Francisco-based performance troupe Sins Invalid use art to revision imperfect bodies as aesthetically interesting, exciting, and vital. Sins Invalid develops cutting-edge performances that challenge medical and cultural paradigms of able, normal, and sexy, "offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all individuals and communities" (Sins Invalid, "Our mission," n.d., para. 1). In Canada, disability artists such as Persimmon Blackbridge, Jes Sachse, Lindsay Fisher, Jan Derbyshire, Janna Brown, and Geoff McMurchy, work across a variety of mediums, including photography, dance, poetry, digital art, installation, sculpture, video, painting, and digital storytelling in order to refigure the corporal in

our social imagination and thus, re-signify the meaning of disability, mad identity, and other forms of embodied difference.



Figure 1.1 Derbyshire, J. (2013). (Artist).
Still from *Value Village* (2013) ©Jan
Derbyshire. Courtesy of the artist.

Situated within this movement, Jan Derbyshire is a Canadian disability artist, actor, director, comic, and filmmaker working in Vancouver and Toronto. Derbyshire identifies as having lived experience with hearing voices. In her recent work, a digital story entitled *Value Village* (2013) Derbyshire tells the story of Mrs. Green, relating a narrative told to her by found objects, old pill bottles labeled with a prescription for “Mrs. Green” that Derbyshire finds

at Value Village. The digital story features Derbyshire tapping and shaking the pill bottles, playing them as musical instruments to accompany her as she sings, “You put the lime in the coconut and stir it all up, you put the lime in the coconut and call the doctor and woke him up and said, ‘Doctor, is there nothing I can take,’ I said, ‘Doctor, to relieve this belly ache [...]’” After singing, Derbyshire holds up two of the pill bottles and spins them around to the audience revealing that these bottles hold sparkles and sequins instead of pills (figures 1.1 and 1.2). Derbyshire ends the video by looking at the audience and saying, “I can’t help wondering if Mrs. Green was onto something. If the world would be a more beautiful place if we were prescribed sequins instead of pills.” The video closes with the following credit, “By Mrs. Green. As told to Jan Derbyshire.”



Figure 2.1 Derbyshire, J. (2013). (Artist).
Still from *Value Village* (2013) ©Jan
Derbyshire. Courtesy of the artist.

Derbyshire’s digital story offers an expression of happiness *in* difference, a happiness that does not elide what we could characterize as dull rage. The video *is* happy: Derbyshire appears to be joyfully tapping and shaking the pill bottles to create an up-tempo beat. She is singing a light and fun song. Glitters, sparkles, and sequins appear. This

delightful video shares a promising story about how the world could be “a more beautiful place”, a story that is told to Derbyshire by objects. The story in this video is told from a space of alterity, offering an alternative pedagogy from a non-normative knowledge source (hearing voices). Mrs. Green’s story is put on offer *because of* difference, the experience of being able to hear stories from objects. Derbyshire’s embodied difference is productive in the most creative sense. Joyfully presented, this story is political in a way that is in line with disability and mad politics. Through telling Mrs. Green’s story, which was told to her by prescription pill bottles filled with sequins, Derbyshire is presenting us with another way of experiencing, and orienting to, hearing voices. In this space of alterity, hearing voices and experiencing mental difference are not responded to with the need for cure, treatment, containment, or

control. In this space, Derbyshire is suggesting that when we allow ourselves to live with difference and attend to what this life with difference teaches, we might arrive at a “more beautiful place” (2013). For the open-ended, non-didactic possibilities for a new way of life, this video could be considered as a body-becoming pedagogy (Rice, 2014).



Figure 2.1 Big Trubs: By Allyson Mitchell,
Big Trubs, 2004, Fun Fur, 10.5 x 7.5 feet ©
Allyson Mitchell. Courtesy of the artist.

The vibrant disability arts movement that has developed in recent years as a new genre in Europe and North America gives expression to disability experience and challenges imposed marginalization by reimagining mental and physical difference (Allan, 2005; Gorman, 2007; Roman, 2009a, 2009b). Although (as yet) no parallel self-proclaimed fat arts movement has emerged to revision fat bodies in similar ways, artists like popular American 'zine writer, illustrator, and cartoonist Nomy Lamm, British portrait painter Jenny Saville (2005, 2011), and Canadian self-described maximalist sculpture and installation artist Allyson Mitchell have, over the past twenty years, worked to resignify the fat female form. In her monumental paintings depicting the intimate surfaces of fleshy bodies, for example, Saville captures the solid yet ephemeral quality of embodiment as well as women's relationship with their fat flesh in a fat-phobic world. Through her sexy ten-foot tall *Big Trubs* sculpture crafted out of 1970s fake fun fur (see figure 2.1), Mitchell takes a more tongue-in-cheek approach to fat representation that both exposes and mocks patriarchal fears of fat hairy (lesbian) women. In the *Ladies Sasquatch*, she foregrounds six ferociously soft mythical sasquatch figures (see figures 2.2 and 2.3) that mock a history of western thought in which the female body is associated with the chaotic, animalistic, and uncontrollable and the fat hairy form, with the sexually deviant lesbian (Garnet, 2009).

Mitchell's work draws on the terrifying and the comforting, the serious and the humorous, the revengeful and the playful to create an alternative universe of repulsive/approachable creatures. Though the ferocious faces of these hairy monsters might initially frighten onlookers, their teddy-bearlike softness entices more than it repels, inviting us into a playful cuddle, a sensuous embrace. Here Mitchell finds happiness in difference by representing through her wild sasquatches, the rage and pain that comes with being othered while still joyfully laughing (through monsters that resemble stuffed animals) at the fear that dread that threaten to cast her out in this alterity of happiness. In this utopic/distopic space, Mitchell teaches us that when we allow ourselves to touch and be touched by difference, we might find ways of living with/in the ambiguity of human embodiment.



Figure 2.2 *The Ladies Sasquatch*: and 2.3 *The Ladies Sasquatch*, 2009, Fun Fur, 11 x 15 feet

©Allyson Mitchell. Courtesy of the artist

IV. Conclusion

In insidious everyday ways and in pervasive, representational ways, our culture is taught that disabled, mad, fat, and differently-sized people live unlivable lives. At the same time, biopedagogies that tell us that people who live in and with different embodiments, should be happy, or at least compliant, in spite of that fact that we live in uninhabitable embodiment. We are also taught, through various incarnations and off-shoots of positive psychology, that being happy is a matter of attitude and, thus that it is our responsibility to be happy (Seligman, 2009). If we are unhappy, it is us, and not the social world, that must change. There is much investment in happiness, particularly the neoliberal version of happiness that strictly locates the responsibility to be happy in the individual. A happy citizen is a compliant one, a productive one, and independent one, one whom the state need not care for or make (costly) accommodations for. So when an unhappy person appears, we respond to them with the same individualizing logic that is integral to neoliberalism, ableism, and healthism: we locate the problem and the site of intervention in the individual. When a fat or differently-sized person appears unhappy, we associate their unhappiness with their size and require them to diet or otherwise become fit. When a mad person appears unhappy, we locate their unhappiness in their disrupted brain and require them to take psychotropic medication. When a disabled person appears unhappy, we require them to seek rehabilitation and cures and, if this fails, pity them and/or blame them for their unlivable life. In such a framework, the possibility of being happy in difference while expressing rage in an unjust, oppressive world appears impossible. It is in resistance to these normalizing, surveilling, and controlling forces of contemporary life that our paper explores the possibility of alterity in/of happiness.

Ahmed asks, “Can we write the history of happiness from the point of view [sic] of the wretched [...] one that is sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, and poverty, [...] the stranger, exile, or banished person?” (2010, p. 17). She continues, “The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar” (2010, p. 17). In this paper, we follow Ahmed and offer not a history, but some possibilities for how happiness can be conceived, experienced, and perpetuated from and within places of alterity. We also follow Ahmed as we ask not what happiness *is* but what it can *do* (2010, p. 2). In this way, we do not end our paper with a proclamation of how happiness in alterity and in embodied difference is, or should be, experienced. Rather, we end with the suggestion of being open to the possibilities – the creative, communal, and artistic possibilities – of how happiness in alterity might productively disrupt the normative and normalizing biopedagogical instructions for how to live in our bodies, minds, senses, and emotions, and with each other. In this alterity, yet not fully formed as it will always likely be a becoming, happiness in difference can allow us to appreciate, value, and desire each other in ways that resist how we are made to matter in neoliberal times. Attending to the ways that we experience happiness in difference while still hanging onto the dull rage needed for necessary resistances can offer new, flexible, open-ended, non-prescriptive, non-normalizing pedagogies and possibilities of and for living in, with, and alongside difference. We may look to art, and the body-becoming, open-ended, non-didactic pedagogies they offer (Rice, 2014), for direction.

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