

FINDING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE RAW/BOLD BEAUTY PROJECT
ARTWORKS, AND DEFYING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE ARTWORKS OF “JE
T'AIME MOI AUSSI” AND “ALISON LAPPER PREGNANT.”

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving husband Bryan, my supportive parents Roger and Barbara King, my super awesome girls, and every feminist that has gone before me.

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I would like to thank my chairs: Professor Lewis, Jorgenson, and Hattery, as well as all of the other professors through the years that have added to my knowledge. Professor Lewis helped me indelibly by sparking my interests in the many classes I had with her as well as being my sounding board for this thesis. I must also acknowledge all of the artists, models, and researchers that submitted their work for the world to see, thus allowing someone like myself to critique it. Without their works this paper would not be possible and I encourage everyone to look through my references and see their works for themselves.

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ABSTRACT

FINDING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE RAW/BOLD BEAUTY PROJECT ARTWORKS, AND DEFYING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE ARTWORKS OF “JE T'AIME MOI AUSSI” AND “ALISON LAPPER PREGNANT.”

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Herein lies a critique of various artworks by the Raw and Bold Beauty Projects NYC (2006 & 2015), Olivier Fermiello's “Je t'aime moi aussi” (2014) photographs, and Marc Quinn's *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2000) statue, created by using various feminist and feminist disability studies ideals and outlooks in regards to pointing out ableist and heteronormative ideals and ideology in Western, patriarchal society media and the artworks that defy the typical heteronormative ideals concerning women with disabilities. The critiques will separate out what I deem as the positive and negative “markers” that depict women with disabilities as unique and sexual (unless they identify as asexual). The more positive images will show the subject using her own agency, subverting the oppressive male gaze in her own way because they will not be trying to fit into the patriarchal mold since the subjects would never be accepted by typical patriarchal norms. More negative images will depict the subjects as sexual women with disabilities, but will also reproduce typical, Western, patriarchal norms that all women under the male gaze

are forced into. By comparing the two, the normalness of sexuality and disability will become apparent by showing the subjects through their own lens on their own terms (although all of the photographs are mediated by the photographer's gaze) – not by trying to fit into a mold that will never accept them. The subjects of the artworks will plainly be making their own impact on their artworks by creating their own sexual spaces within the artworks; excessive use of Photoshop, unnatural poses, and being the center of their own artworks are just some of the ways that the women shown will positively use their artworks to display and show their own unique agency and sexuality with a disability.

INTRODUCTION

Societal issues such as equality of the sexes and greater equality in job opportunities for men and women in the United States during the years of 2015-2016 on the surface look relatively even. The United States has had their first African-American president, the first woman Presidential nominee, equal rights in the law books, etc.... But, scratching the surface of American society, would quickly release a hemophiliac torrent of unsolved issues that happens to have American society in a vice grip. One of these issues concerns the exclusion of disability in American society, such as how people with disabilities are often overlooked for jobs, have trouble finding, keeping, and paying for long-term assisted care, or still having problems with access to public buildings concerning ramps and doors. A more specific issue is the problem that some women with disabilities have when it comes to acknowledging and publicly showing that they too have sexual natures. Women with disabilities can be seen to be excluded from having a sexual nature completely and are labeled as asexual or, if the woman has a mental disability, she is seen as sexually out-of-control and deranged. Men with disabilities are also affected, but it is women who bear the brunt of most of the societal exclusion (Garland-Thomson, 2002).

For a person that is naïve, or to the individual that takes American society at face value, knowing that America has a fashion model with Down Syndrome and that the

Paralympics are gaining in popularity, may be enough to convince them that society has become more all-inclusive and welcoming. Society has become more welcoming to people with disabilities, but not so much that the names of Madeline Stuart (the model with Down syndrome), and a few of the Paralympians such as the swimmer Jessica Long and Hollie Arnold, the javelin thrower are instantly recognized.

The world does indeed have a fashion model that also happens to have Down syndrome, but if you read, have looked through any current fashion magazines, or seen a fashion runway show you most likely would not see her. The reason why is because, “often fashion’s arguments for not using models with disabilities are the same as those it cites for not using anyone over a size 10. Designers claim that models are not meant to reflect society but to be walking clothes-hangers – and clothes-hangers do not have breasts or wheelchairs” (Marriott, 2015, 2). Whereas the names Kate Moss, Cindy Crawford, and Gisele Bündchen are instantly identified, the name of Madeline Stuart will earn you a blank look.



A. (Gisele Bündchen, 2015)



B. (Barnes, Madeline Stuart, 2015)

The Paralympics *are* more popular now, thanks in part to people realizing that the competitors do actually have talent. One reason for more societal awareness concerning disabled athletes can be explained by Garland-Thomson. As Garland-Thomson (2002) argues, “a feminist disability theory introduces the ability/disability system as a category of analysis... It aims to extend current notions of cultural diversity and to more fully integrate the academy and the larger world it helps shape” (p. 15). The more obvious reason as to why athletes with disabilities are more popular now is because of two reasons:

1. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have created many veterans that no longer have all of their original limbs, so prosthetics and seeing them in public is more common now. In “The Color of Violence: *Reflecting on Gender, Race, and Disability in Wartime*” Nirmala Erevelles (2011) writes that, “war is one

of the largest producers of disability in a world still inhospitable to disabled people and their predominantly female caregivers (Erevelles et al., p. 117).

2. The runner, Oscar Pistorius. Oscar Pistorius shot and killed his girlfriend because he thought that she was a robber who just happened to be using his second story bathroom in the middle of the night. With her murder, disability - and the ability of people with a disability to have a relationship - was brought out into the forefront of the news, at least for a short time.



C. (Male Amputee, 2015)

Take a look through a fashion magazine, and more than likely you will see at least one advertisement that features an amputee and their prosthetic, as well as the rarified fashion show featuring models with disabilities. Both of these things are memorable, but the reason they are memorable is because disability has never been celebrated, which does not force people to confront their own preconceptions about disability like the fashion shows, Paralympics, and Madeline Stuart do. The Paralympics, Madeline Stuart,

and fashion shows featuring models with disability are memorable because our society does not accept that disability is a part of public life.



D. (Chung, Runway, 2015).

Madeline Stuart, the fashion shows featuring models with disabilities, and the Paralympics become unique events or news stories because they are still rarely seen. The reason people remember them, is because disability is rarely seen or celebrated in our Western, American society. Societal events featuring disability in a sexual and celebrated way are becoming more numerous, but still have a long way to go until they would be considered “mainstream.”

Sexuality in Society

For a woman with a disability to be sexually liberated and represented in the mainstream, our societal structure would have to welcome her, imperfections and all, and with the over use of auto-tune for singers and Photoshop for models, that is a highly unlikely scenario. Men with disabilities do not have it “easier” with a disability, but *they*

do have it easier from a societal standpoint (Garland-Thomson, 2002). As men age, they are called a “silver fox:” a smart and handsome animal, while as a woman ages she becomes a “cougar:” a large feline that connotes violent catfights. Women with disabilities are not only fighting against a society that is already against them because of their sex, but is also against them because they do not fit into any gendered mold that is valued as “normal.”

Western society willingly excludes large groups of people simply because disability naturally happens to the body as it ages, there is an accident, or if the person with a disability was born that way. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip* by Alison Kafer (2013), she explains these moments of acquiring a disability as happening in or out of time, and as causing a break in the ablest lifetime that Western society “naturally” assumes for everyone. These exclusions are an unfortunate reality, and yet Western society has always seen disability as something that needs to be medically fixed and as a problem. To understand Western societal constructs about disability we must understand feminist disability studies as a theory. Garland-Thomson (2005) explains feminist disability studies as something that, “questions our assumptions that disability is a flaw, lack, or excess. To do so, [feminist disability studies] defines disability broadly from a social rather than a medical perspective. Disability, it argues, is a cultural interpretation of human variation rather than an inherent inferiority, a pathology to cure, or an undesirable trait to eliminate” (p. 557).

In addition, critiquing artwork has always been fraught with uncertainties and unpleasantness; the fact is that not everyone will appreciate the artwork, and some people

can convey that in a cruel fashion. These facts are doubly true when considering people with disabilities in artwork, or more specifically, looking at *women* with disabilities in artwork - both in mainstream media and through photographic pieces. Throughout our western society, women have been forced to undergo close scrutiny - of their bodies, minds, and actions. It is no secret that women are constantly trying to successfully traverse the maze that is western societal constructs concerning every part of themselves, causing self-questions such as these to arise: Can I wear this or will I look like a “slut?” Should I assert my opinion and authority at risk of being called a “bitch?” Am I still sexy even if I am not a size 2?” These are common questions that can confront women every day; questions that flourish in a society that is constructed around a heteronormative, patriarchal “gaze.” The “gaze” is even harsher for women with seen and unseen disabilities.

The Male Gaze

It is important for this study to tease out the basics of what the male gaze is and how it affects all women. Laura Mulvey (1975) best explains the male gaze through her use of cinema. Mulvey (1975) explains the male gaze as an anonymous person sitting in a darkened theater, a spectator that is encouraged to consume the female subject on the screen. This consummation can be done piece by piece using close-ups of the female’s body or all at once by using camera angles within the film to mimic a spectator or to put the spectator in the role of the lead male figure (Mulvey, 1975, p. 841). Previous research has focused primarily on how the male gaze, is drawn to, “[that] aspect of femininity [that] is attractive... to the male gaze,” (Wilkerson, 2011, p. 206), or the parts

of femininity that are considered beguiling and sexy to many males (i.e. large breasts, skinny, long hair, etc....). The previous research has focused on what is supposed to constitute a “feminine” woman, those parts that keep women working, scrutinizing, and picking themselves apart, desperately trying to keep up with what is considered beautiful and sexy in Western society. The male gaze has affected the viewer concerning artworks, films, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) films and artworks; not a lot has been researched concerning the gaze and women with disabilities in *their* artwork and various types of media. There have been a few investigations into disability and sexuality: mainly in the forms of personal narratives explaining how the subject has been affected concerning their sexuality and how they think they are viewed after obtaining their disability, most notably: “Go Figure” by Katie Rodriguez Banister, Garland-Thomson’s work, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” and “Alison Lapper Pregnant,” a larger than life sculpture of a limbless, pregnant woman. Shildrick (2007) however, explains that:

The social model of disability – which is the most widely utilized framework among disability activists and theorists – is largely directed to more material socio-political concerns that are susceptible to rights discourse. The model has little or nothing to say on the subject of sexuality and has no place for the question of desire in particular. And where sexuality is deemed to be of high significance, it is often read through a broadly Foucauldian model that gives little credence to psychic factors (p. 228).

This thesis is an exploration and critique of American mainstream representations of sexuality by women with physical disabilities. The critiques are of photographic, mainstream art works to compare and contrast them: not only with each other, but also artwork that is seen in Western, mainstream society; artwork that is typically ablest and patriarchal. It is important when working within a feminist disabilities framework, to look and see if the heteronormative, patriarchal gaze that is so influential within our Western society is evident in the artworks and to explore what that gaze *does* to the viewer, and then to the artwork itself. A further exploration of compulsory able-bodiedness, or how able-bodiedness is made into a Western societal ideal and yet is not seen as a political or social construct but as a medical one (Kafer, 2003), will then help to detangle the gaze. The gaze works with compulsory able-bodiedness throughout Western societal constructs and it is important to take that outlook into account. In Western society we are taught to see disability through this gaze: disability is *wrong*, it is something that must be *fixed* (Garland-Thomson, 2002); there is nothing wrong with us, *they* (people with disabilities) are the ones who are overstepping the invisible bonds of societal constructs of normality.

What is Normal?

Disability can be a difficult idea to define. The idea and definition of disability is shaped by sociological ideals and personal background. Therefore, in order to be as clear as possible, it is necessary to explain what disability is defined as concerning disability and feminist disability studies. Where disability is concerned in our Western societal construct, society defines disability by using the individual, or the medical model of

disability. Disability is, “associated with individual pathologies, where emphasis is placed on cure or on the individual psychologically, physically and socially adjusting to their impairment” (Fawcett, 2000, pp. 20-21). This idea of disability believes that an individual with a disability must be “fixed” and that they are not “normal.” In contrast, feminist disability theorists conceptualize disability through a socio-political construct, meaning that disability is a, “social construction of the problem of disability as being an outcome of the evolution of contemporary society [and]...regards disability and dependence as the social creation of industrial capitalism” (Fawcett, 2000, p. 21). People who have a disability are not abnormal because “normal” and “abnormal” are societal constructs. People who have disabilities are just regular people who do not need to be cured or forced into a preconceived societal role. Western society should be remolding itself around people with disabilities because they are a valid part of society that have specific needs, nothing more. Unfortunately, with the highly prevalent medical model at work, research into how women with disabilities can be seen and can take back how they are seen, is needed to help balance out the negative societal constructs surrounding women with disabilities and their sexuality.

Overview of Concepts

Appreciating some of the feminist/political/social concepts that will be stated throughout this research, the position that these statements are coming from must be understood. This research is being conducted under the tutelage of a feminist perspective, so we begin there.

Feminist theory has sought to broaden and understand societal horizons concerning the de-stigmatization of the woman and her place in society, whereas disability theory studies the disabled identity in order to, “[integrate] people with disabilities more fully into our society.... The goal of feminist disability studies...is to augment the terms and confront the limits of how we understand human diversity, the materiality of the body, multiculturalism, and the social formations that interpret bodily differences” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 14-15). Hannabach (2007) focuses on the visibly disabled body when explaining how our perceptions of our bodies are not of our own making, but are in fact socially built. She explains that it is this cultural imagery that shapes how we perceive a disabled and nondisabled body, and that this perception can be disrupted by facing the hyper visible and differently abled body (Hannabach, 2007).

Additionally, Western societies’ definition of disability is based on the social model; the social model of disability claims that, “disability is the outcome of social arrangements which work to restrict the activities of people with impairments by placing *social barriers* in their way.... [In this way the social model of disability] recast[s] disability as a form of social oppression” (Thomas, 1999, pp. 14-15). Two major pitfalls of that oppression is the issue of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality. Compulsory able-bodiedness is the act of everyone presuming that everyone else is able-bodied unless they have a visible disability or declare that they are not able-bodied, where compulsory heterosexuality is the assumption that any other sexual leaning - other than heterosexual - is abnormal, which in turn can lead to people

with disabilities feeling that they need to hide their sexuality under a heterosexual guise (Kafer, 2003). Considering and combining all of these theories leaves us with a highly politicized and gendered view of Western societal constructs and a clearer understanding of the positive and negative views of disability that we get when looking through the lens of feminist disability theory.

Situating My Research Question

The Raw Beauty Project [i]s a collaboration between 10 photographers and 22 women with disabilities...[T]he photographers worked closely with [the women] to convey a perception of them that is not predictable when one thinks of a “disability”. We invite you to look past what you perceive as “disabled” and see them as the powerful, beautiful and extremely extraordinary women that they are (<http://therawbeautyproject.com/about.html>, 2008).

The aim of this thesis is to address the reason why women with disabilities feel they have to take pictures of themselves in order to 1) fit into society, 2) feel that they are worthy to feel loved and pretty, and 3) to show society that they are regular human beings. In reality, the majority of thinking about disability is negative. Carol Thomas (1999) claims that, “disableism joins sexism, racism, homophobia and ageism in the catalogue of social oppressions (p. 15). In the average day, the average person more than likely will run into quite a bit of ablest narratives such as: “This weather is so bipolar.” Inspiration porn is also quite typical, “even though Sarah has no legs, she can

still move around.” In Western mainstream patriarchal culture, it is not unusual to find either form in everyday life; both of which display disability negatively.

Examining the heteronormative male gaze through a feminist disability perspective will reveal a new understanding and a broader scope of how societal constructs affect our thinking and viewing; mainly, with regards to societal thinking concerning gender and sexuality for people with disabilities. A prominent idea of feminist disability studies - as Garland-Thomson (2002) explains - is that disability and sexuality is, “more fluid, although sexual mutability is imagined as elective, where disability is seldom conceived of as a choice. *Disability* is an identity category that anyone can enter into at any time, and we will all join it if we live long enough” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 33). One of the main tenants of feminist disability studies is that if you live long enough, you too will end up with a disability of some sort. When conceptualized this way, acquiring a disability does not mean that one no longer has any sexuality or, even worse, that one is not supposed to, yet mainstream patriarchal, Western, societal ideologies propagate exactly that belief. Alison Kafer (2003) explains how, “many disabled women, queer and straight alike, have critiqued the pervasive assumption that people with disabilities are either asexual... or hypersexual... The sexuality of people with disabilities is understood as always already deviant” (p. 82). How have these societal constructs effected women with disabilities, and women in general? Research that confronts this societal thinking and brings it out into the open is incredibly important: it uncovers the dark, hidden truth of how Western society ends up treating people with disabilities and affecting their/our daily lives.

In chapter 1 – Patriarchal Ableism All Around, I discuss the perception that everyone is able bodied unless they identify themselves as otherwise, and how this assumption is harmful for everyone. “The stare” is then evaluated, and how staring can be positive and negative for the starrer and the staree. After which I present my critiques of some photographic artworks from the Raw and Bold Beauty Projects NYC (2006 - 2015 respectively). I examine each selected photograph and demonstrate how they represent heteronormative, paternalistic, ableist rhetoric in the artworks and are reflected in Western society. Chapter 2 – Creating Positive Spaces in Disability & Sexuality Photographic Artworks, will be dedicated to the artworks that I found to represent women with disabilities in a more positive light thus creating a unique space for the artwork to be seen, instead of in the mainstream, paternalistic light that is the norm. Many of these artworks are from Olivier Fermariello (2014) and the Bold Beauty Project NYC (2014), and every artwork is meant to positively display the sensual and sexual natures of the women who modeled.. These artworks reimagine the body with a disability into something beautiful, something sexual in nature, while the major statement piece, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* by sculptor Marc Quinn (2000), challenges societal thinking about disability and sexuality, productivity, and artistic contributions of women with disabilities.

1 - PATRIARCHAL ABLEISM ON DISPLAY IN PHOTOGRAPHIC

ARTWORKS

In American society, sometimes it can be difficult to discern if the photo or artwork you are seeing either was taken, or made, in the paternalistic, made-for-male pleasure-gaze. In general, if what you are looking at is American mainstream (especially marketing) photographs or advertisements, then you more than likely are viewing something paternalistic or geared toward a male audience. Examples of highly paternalistic images include: confusion about what the advertisement is selling, if the female model's lips/eyes/legs, etc.... are slightly parted, and/or if there is an ambiguous head tilt and/or jaunty hip thrust. As Garland-Thomson argues, "in the language of contemporary cosmetic surgery, the unreconstructed female body is persistently cast as having abnormalities that can be corrected by surgical procedures that supposedly improve one's appearance by producing ostensibly natural-looking noses, thighs, breasts, chins, and so on. Thus our unmodified bodies are presented as unnatural and abnormal, whereas the surgically altered bodies are portrayed as normal and natural" (2002, p. 24). Images that include female models displaying perfect bodily parts can be characterized as developed in response to the male gaze.



E. (Kennedy, Advertisement, 2015).

The advertisements on the left are an extreme example of the male gaze in advertising: If you use this: (insert product here) then you will 1) get the girl, and 2) have sex with her. The viewer of this advertisement is not only getting treated to various airbrushed landscapes of the model's body, but is also left wondering if the cologne is perhaps also supposed to work for *personal* freshness as well. The viewer has no idea if the cologne smells like gasoline, but the viewer is definitely supposed to conclude that women very much enjoy it. As the viewer, we can see that the advertisement turns the female body into an object to be used – for whatever purposes, anonymously since her face is not shown.

Now compare the second piece, a still shot from a film that has been specially shot to *not* be male-centric (Boslaugh, 2014). There is quite the difference; in the still shot, the viewer gets a view looking up at the heroine, and yet there is no nudity even though we are viewing her intimate areas. In paternalistic, Western society culture, one can suppose that some of the images we are exposed to are sexual in nature and/or had a sexual connotation. Additionally, and central to the argument here is that rarely if ever



F. (Boslaugh, *Feminine Gaze*, 2014).

do these (sexualized) images include or feature a person with a visible disability. After all:

When one is visibly confronted with a body that doesn't match what the hegemonic cultural imaginary has constructed as a human body, is a sensory disruption both of the body image that we have projected onto others (with its assumptions about what a body is supposed to look like), and a disruption in our own body schema. Because we have assumed that bodily wholeness looks a certain way, and because a given body does not conform to this image of the human body, we both assume its inhumanity and began to worry about our own claim to coherence (Hannabach , 2007, pp. 258-259).

I am not proposing that advertisements, films, or any other form of media start using women with disabilities in these sexist forms because I do not think *anyone* should be used in these ways. What I *am* proposing however is that if people without disabilities are regularly seen as having sexuality and sexual relationships, then so should people *with* disabilities. This should be a regular societal occurrence: our societal structure

would not deem people with disabilities as outsiders if they were considered a normal sight in public instead of something that should be hidden away.

To be clear, the male gaze turns everyday women's bodies into a sexual spectacle, while the stare -which is associated with people with disabilities- (Garland-Thomson, 2006) can turn the body with a disability into something grotesque (Fox and Lipkin, 2011). It is women with disabilities instead of the men with disabilities (at least disabilities that are visible) that are the most effected. Women with visible disabilities or women who have claimed a disability, are usually seen as, "asexual, undesirable, and undesiring" (Fox and Lipkin, 2011, p. 296). An interesting fact is that women with disabilities (just like their nondisabled sisters) are allotted the larger percentage of household chores, child care, and unpaid nursing that falls to the women in individual households (Thomas, 1999).

Examining the Idea of "The Stare"

Concerning the visual stares that happen if someone has a visual disability, there are three different types of staring, the first being arrested staring. Arrested staring can be described as gawking; something astonishes the starrer into staring (Garland-Thomson, 2006). The second type is separated staring, or the type of stare from the person who is fleeing the stared at; the backward look of the fearful (Garland-Thomson, 2006). The third type is the most malignant: hostile spectatorship. Hostile spectatorship is the starrer that often will say something rude - very often young children (Garland-Thomson, 2006). There is a positive stare however, and that is the stare with intent, or engaged looking. Garland-Thomson (2006), describes this type of stare as one that is

used to understand or learn something from the stared at: often this stare can give the staree some control over the situation, maybe to enable a conversation and facilitate learning. What a person can get out of the stare usually comes from the starrer, and yet, it is the staree that is the one most able to manage a staring encounter (Garland-Thomson, 2006). Staring is often thought of as socially unacceptable, yet as Garland-Thomson demonstrates there are many different types of stares and some can be understood as positive, invoked for the betterment of both individuals involved. The staree may be able to often create a positive encounter out of something that could otherwise be seen as demeaning and objectifying, if because the staree has more experience with stares and how to change their meaning. How she effects the starrer's thinking is obviously what model/activist with disabilities Jillian Mercado imagined when she stated that, "having my makeup look on point, it's a longer stare and I kind of enjoy that" (Mercado, 2016). Mercado's argument makes sense: since she is in a wheelchair she already will be getting stares, so she is literally hoping to send a positive message by looking pulled together to the starers.

There still is negativity in many stares. The negativity that comes with the gaze/stare is not new. Garland-Thomson (1998) explains that the gaze was in play concerning freak shows and then subsequently, beauty pageants. She claims that the spectacle is the body itself for both of these events: one shows the generic, perfect female form, and the other aims to show the deviant body. Garland-Thomson (1998) continues by explaining that, "the shows and pageants produce figures that are novel scenery for the arousal or gratification of their onlookers. Through hyperbolized sexual role

performances, the figure of the beauty offers to make her viewers into men. By parading exaggerated bodily lack or excess, corporeal freaks invite their viewers to imagine themselves whole” (p. 8). Both of these events aim to show the body, which is in keeping with the masculine gaze as the ultimate authority that also keeps up traditional gender relations. This is problematic for women with disabilities who may not identify with a heterosexual sexuality or any sexuality at all. Wilkerson (2011) states that since people with disabilities are most likely seen through the lens of medical discourse, those people with disabilities that identify as LGBTIQ may have to hide or even abandon their sexuality from family and/or caregivers in order to allow their *family member/caregiver* to feel comfortable in continuing to assist them in their everyday life. In those cases, the gaze can be - and is - used for sexual shaming, which in turn interrupts the person with disabilities’ sexual agency.

The social constructs and stigma that is attached to sexuality and ultimately the gaze when confronted by blind women can be read in Hammer’s Israeli study. Hammer (2016) explains that on one hand, the blind participants are ultra-feminized because the women’s blindness can make them more dependent on someone else to help them to navigate in everyday situations. On the other hand, the participants are opened to the male gaze, which in turn finds them wanting/undesirable (Hammer, 2016). The women’s blindness immediately made them invisible to the opposite sex in this study because they were seen as having a flaw (blindness) so they would need extra help navigating making them be read as more feminine and yet being read as more feminine (e.g. sexually available) would still not be enough to overcome their major flaw: blindness. In the book

chapter, “Invisible Disability *Georgina Kleege’s* Sight Unseen” by Susannah Mintz (2002), the question asked by Georgina Kleege is if, “incompetent, dependent, potentially unruly, sexually deviant – is this really how the sighted see the blind?” (1999, 57), Kleege might also be speaking of how patriarchal culture views women” (Mintz et al., 2002, p. 71). Truly, this is a vicious cycle.

Women who have an intellectual or mental disability however may not have to deal with the problem of the gaze/stare all the time because their disability may not be visible, but they *do* have their own unique problems. Firstly, women with an unseen disability have the issue of identifying themselves as something other than able-bodied, which goes against the societal grain of what Kafer (2003) declares is compulsory able-bodiedness – the assumption throughout Western society that everyone is able-bodied. By identifying themselves as anything other than able-bodied, women with unseen disabilities are therefore labeling themselves as “lacking” or not up to societal standards concerning women’s bodies and their usage. These women are then invisible, as Ellen Samuels (2003) states, that:

The experiences of many people with nonvisible disabilities, who face not only uneasy inclusion in the disability community but a daily struggle for accommodation and benefits that reflects the dominant culture’s insistence on visible signs to legitimate impairment. The very diversity of nonvisible disabilities, which include a wide range of impairments... [and] a reading of numerous narratives across impairments suggests a common experience structured by the disbelieving gaze of the normate (much as theorists such as

Garland-Thomson and Lennard J. Davis argue that disability is constructed via the normate's stare confronted by people with visible disability) (p. 245).

Secondly, women with an intellectual disability or mental disability are very often seen as hypersexual, or unable to control their own sexuality (Garland-Thomson, 1997), which, in turn, can set those women up for possible sexual assault or other sexual abuses.

Sexual shaming can also be used against a person with intellectual or mental disabilities by trying to use societal control of the “out-of-control” body. Concerning the sexuality of people with seen and unseen disabilities, much of the literature focuses on masturbation in socially acceptable places, and sexuality that is, “non-reproductive, solitary, yet oriented toward the opposite sex” (Gill, 2012, p. 473). As Gill (2012) carefully explains, teaching individuals with intellectual/mental disabilities masturbation practices centers around controlling that person's sexuality, and replacing sexual experiences with others or groups with self-satisfaction only. Urging people with disabilities into masturbatory practices while the rest of Western society is free to choose their sexual practices is hardly fair for the people with disabilities.

Raw & Bold Beauty Artworks

Every single thing that people with disabilities do to promote themselves and their sexuality (again, as long as they do not identify as asexual, which is incidentally the way mainstream society has labeled people with disabilities (Kim, 2011), cannot possibly “fit” into the Western, patriarchal, heteronormative, mainstream society - as it is. There is no place for the woman with a disability to see another like herself in regular advertisements

being looked upon as a sexual being. Unfortunately, that is the same problem when looking at artworks that were trying to display the person with a disabilities' sexuality: the artworks were taken with a patriarchal, heteronormative, Western societal slant. Any photographs taken using that slant will then not be a positive representation of disability and sexuality, since Western society sees disability as a "bad" thing. The lack of representation of the sexuality of women who have disabilities leads to the conclusion that clear biases in Western culture remain and that women must still conform to traditional patriarchal, heteronormative, able-bodied standards.

The pictures shown on the next page are taken from The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014), which, "is a collaboration between the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation and mobileWOMEN.org and features twenty women with a variety of disabilities photographed by one of ten photographers for an exhibit to showcase their sensuality and empowerment. The ladies share their stories in both word and images and their beauty and strength shine through" (Orofino, 2014, pp.1). The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014) seems to be liberatory, and yet the end result falls far short of giving these women with disabilities their own voices; instead it would seem that what should be a powerful image proclaiming the woman with disabilities' unique voice and sexuality becomes just another photo that looks as though the women (and/or the photographers) are almost trying too hard to make the women "fit" into the mainstream standard of society.

Through the following art critiques, I will be pulling out of the photographs what I see as the inherent heteronormativity that has been applied in the Raw/Bold Beauty

Project NYC (2006 & 2015) artistic photographs. Heteronormativity in the media in Western culture is very common and constant:

Heteronormativity is strongly perpetuated by media; from television shows to commercials and advertisements to lyrics and music videos, the concept of binary, complementary genders assumes heterosexuality as the singular sexual orientation and norm. The media plays a pivotal role in socialization and a lack of representation coupled with the representation of heterosexuality as "natural" reflects as well as reinforces society's oppression of those who are not represented in the media and are oppressed in real life (Femination, 2017).



G.(Red Tape, Femination, 2017)

A life lived in Western culture inundates every person with a constant barrage of advertisements and innuendo. The heteronormativity is easy to see in the "Red Tape" advertisement above: the women are literally put on a pedestal (table), their hair is

flowing, they are bent in seemingly seductive poses, eyes half closed, with pouting mouths. The model's skin has been airbrushed and a man is even in the advertisement to show that the women are there for his pleasure. The Raw/Bold Beauty Projects NYC (2006 & 2015) are not advertisements, but many of them have the same heteronormative viewpoints. Seeing the heteronormativity in the Raw/Bold Beauty Project NYC (2006 & 2015) photographs and pointing them out will help to show why the artistic works by Fermiello (2015), Quinn (2000), and some by The Raw Beauty Project (2015) are better examples of the breaking of a heteronormative mold.

In figure A., Daryl Henderson the photographer posed the model with disabilities Katherine Crawford in a very stereotypical way: the model is looking down, which invites the viewer to look down, thus “presenting” her disability – putting it up for consumption - to the viewer. After absorbing the model's amputated leg, the viewer's eye travels down her body, taking in the standard, “female” symbols sexuality – black, thigh-high nylons, which in turn lead to black panties and a black bra. The way this model is posed is a very typical, patriarchal, mainstream way to be posed for fashion. Her eyes are down and not making any contact with the viewer - she is not challenging the viewer. Without that challenge to the viewer, the model's body is an item up for consumption; everything is opened-up for easier viewer consumption concerning her body language and her clothing. Her shoulders are straight cross, no folding in on herself or “hiding” in this stance. Even though nothing in this photo challenges the viewer and is perfectly patriarchal and mainstream, the fact that she has an amputation will always put her in the realm of “abnormal” when it comes to mainstream viewing of sexuality. She

simply does not “fit” the role for a mainstream society model so this photo is less empowering than the photos I argue for in Chapter Two, by the photographer Olivier Fermariello (2015), The Raw Beauty Project (2015), and sculptor Quinn’s (2000) colossal masterpiece *Alison Lapper Pregnant*. Even though this picture is supposed to be empowering her like The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014) states, instead it seems as though the photo is trying to squeeze her into the patriarchal mold that will not accept



H.(Orofino, Henderson –Lingerie, 2014)

her; why is she being photographed as if she is a part of mainstream society? Although, it can be argued that assimilation into mainstream society, as opposed to a separatist

agenda concerning disability, could also be potentially positive. Ann Millett offers a kind of counter argument, if we use her work concerning the photographs of Joel-Peter Witkin. Millett uses Witkin's work to argue that his:

Controversial and excessive photographs disrupt medical models for disability by presenting disabled and disfigured bodies as objects of art, design, and aesthetic magnificence, particularly because of their curious and spectacular, abnormal bodies. His camera both references and enacts images of objectification by displaying the body as an object. However, Witkin's amputee and other disfigured subjects elect and even request to be photographed; they therefore collaborate with Witkin in their production as photographic spectacles (Millett, 2008, pp. 8).

Even though Witkin's works are much more visceral and his subjects *purposely* objectified, there are some striking similarities between Witkin's works and The Bold/Raw Beauty Projects (2006 – 2015), Olivier Fermiello's photographs (2015), and Quinn's (2000) *Alison Lapper Pregnant*. Witkin's 2007 *Bad Student* (below) is a great example of the similarities between all the mentioned artworks. We see a woman with a disability, consenting to be used in an artistic photograph, with varying degrees of fantasy or reality used to make a point about the artwork. That however, is the end of the similarities. The difference between Witkin's artworks and the rest mentioned is that Witkin is deliberately objectifying the women with disabilities; his photographs are supposed to shock or discomfort the viewer, whereas the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 – 2014) are trying to show the model's inherent beauty, which they *do* manage

with varying degrees of success, the majority of which are within the heteronormative/patriarchal – mainstream - mold. Heteronormativity and the model's own collusion to the artwork are what I am using to dissect the artworks, measuring - as it



I. (Witkin, *Bad Student*, 2007).

were – the varying degree of success of the model and the artist to frame their models in a less Western, less compulsory heteronormativity/compulsory sexuality (typical) outlook. In Robert McRuer's book, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006), McRuer tackles the idea of socially accepted (domesticated) examples of gay and

lesbian couples in order for them to be more palatable to the public. He looks at this through a queer and disability framework, coming up with the “perfect” poster child:

The images presented reassure the viewer that the figure in question is not as abject as one might have assumed, or at least that he or she is trying valiantly not to be so abject...As with the poster child in disability contexts, one dominant effect of the image is to shut down other possibilities of thinking about identity, community, democracy, and justice (McRuer, 2006, pp. 82).

McRuer (2006) may be combining queer and disability studies theories in order to critique queer, disability, and queer disability rights, but his theories are still quite apt for the dissemination of the heteronormative artworks of the Raw/Bold Beauty projects (2006 – 2015). The models in the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 - 2015) give no hint or sign as to where their sexuality leans, but the framing of their pictures is almost always very heteronormative, continuing to keep lesbian sexuality in the background of heteronormativity. Regardless of the arguments, the model needs her own unique space in order to proclaim her sexuality because regular society does not accept her as she is as of yet. People with disabilities are a part of our everyday lives and a reality, yet Western mainstream media/society *still* treat people with disabilities as outsiders. Everything about this photo has the stamp of mainstream society on it, so nothing in the photo can be seen as unique to the model or to her sexuality/sensuality.

This does not mean that the artwork in question is “bad” or “wrong,” or that the “right” way to showcase each woman’s unique sexuality and their particular position of

showing their sexuality while also having a disability is done in a certain way. For example, if we go back to the above Henderson (2014) piece from the Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014), I do say that the photograph has her body language opened up to the viewer, enabling her body to be up for consumption while simultaneously serving up her amputation while she keeps her face down and does not challenge the viewer, so the artwork is too paternalistic *for me*. Not one piece of the artworks could ever be said to be wrong: everyone has their own way to show their sexuality and unless you are hurting someone or it is illegal, no one should say that you are “wrong.” If the models portrayed in the artworks feel content with the pictures here, that is what counts for *them*. Every person sees and absorbs art in a different way, so no one way can ever be the only correct way. What is being argued here is the separation of the pieces that are deemed too mainstream and paternalistic and those that have created their own sexual spaces that counter the heteronormative ableist gaze, such as Quinn’s (2000) sculpture *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and Fermariello’s (2015) photography entitled, “Je t’aimemoi aussi” (I Love You Too). These are examples of artworks that are more *unique*, and/or even classical: that seem to better give the subject a space of their own without any societal expectations being thrust upon them. Yes, some pieces *will* be too heteronormative, patriarchal, paternalistic, for me but that does not make them wrong. There is no “right” or “wrong” here, just art spaces created (or not) by different techniques in order to showcase the unique subject and their sexuality/sensuality.

The next photo of Andrea Dalzell is by the photographer Paula Vasone, and I believe this photo has many of the same problems as the Henderson photograph before

this. Once again, this is another photo from The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014), and once again the image is awash with mainstream standards of beauty. The model – while gorgeous – is still in a traditional mainstream, feminine gender role, with her upturned mouth and hand running through her hair in a way that is supposed to be free-flowing and enticing. Her wheelchair, at once a needed item and yet the reason for the photographs, is barely noted – a good thing – and yet, there are too many mainstream checkpoints for the photo to be seen in any other light than trying to be mainstream and “normal.” The photograph is lovely and the model is on point, but this photo feels as though it is an advertisement for shampoo. Dalzell’s position of her hand in her hair causes the eye to focus on this point and then rush down her brilliant locks, ending in the notion that there should be a logo. Western media has so conditioned the mind to be looking for the shampoo advertisement, logo, and slogan, that when the logo is missing, the mind notices. This photo has completely failed to showcase this woman’s unique sensuality, although it did accentuate her hair very well, so possibly that was the goal.

Maybe this could be the point of the artwork. Maybe Dalzell deliberately wanted her hair showcased because that makes her feel sensual/sexual, as in Witkin’s work where the models deliberately wanted their bodies used in a certain artistic way. There is



J. (Orofino, Vasone – Shampoo, 2014)

only one way to find out – which would be to ask her– and a woman feeling that her hair is a sensual and/or sexualized thing would certainly not be amiss in Western culture. Alas, unless Ms. Dalzell tells the world we cannot state anything as a fact. This picture could also be just another, “woman running her hands through her hair” photograph; unless we know for certain, perhaps that is part of the mystique.

The heteronormativity of Western culture is continued in our next picture from The Raw Beauty Project, The Bold Beauty Projects and from their Miami 2006 art exhibition. This picture tends to need a close look because what the model, Sabrina Cohen, is wearing is not a swimsuit but body paint. This model is paralyzed from the

neck down which explains the netting underneath her; and yet the use of the netting seems uncomfortable. Usually nets are seen in use with fish, not a woman. The net, and also the setting of the angle of the woman, make this photograph feel uncomfortable; not only does the viewer have an angle of height and power over the subject, but also the “use” of the net in order to drag Ms. Cohen back to us.

The sexuality and sensuality displayed in this photograph are very self-evident: the warm sun on her skin, using body *paints* instead of a clingy suit, the glittering pool of water beneath her, and yet, the camera angle, the angle of her head/or her look back at us the viewer, and the net make this picture – somewhat menacing. The way this picture is



K. (Bold, Dixon - Netting, 2006).

angled, the use of dark colors on her “suit,” and the use of the net make this an awkward picture at best and a menacing picture at worst. The Dolce & Gabbana advertisement below is a good heteronormative example of the same looming and menacing angle that

we see in Ms. Cohen's picture. They are menacing because they make it seem like the viewer is allowed (or encouraged) to "pull" her in or reel her in like a prize catch: to



L. (Dolce & Gabbana, Femination, 2017).

dominate. Ms. Cohen's picture is also awkward, because what else could it be called when Ms. Cohen has to look sideways *and* backward toward the camera? Finally, yes, both photos are patriarchal because of the power stance that is at play, conferring all the power to the viewer or the starrer. The sensuality of Ms. Cohen, however, is without a doubt shown in a subtle, yet undeniably lovely way. In fact, even the use of the net could be excused if we could get rid of that looming camera angle.

The next photo from the Bold Beauty Project (2006) that I want to critique is a study of subtle contrasts and shading. The first thing that strikes the viewer is how much like a flower the model seems to be. What I see, is a woman who is basking in the sun's

rays, feeling it on her skin, leaning towards the light and the sun's warmth. Ms. Joy Nabors could be part of a lovely flower, only opening her petals to the light, which is emanating in the upper right hand corner - the corner that immediately grabs all of my attention, the corner that makes me call into question exactly what was supposed to be celebrated in this photo, the corner that takes up half of the picture. The viewer has no main object; maybe the object is the power chair or Ms. Nabors's gorgeous skin. This photo leaves the viewer visually torn; this artwork has almost two separate subject matters: the lovely Ms. Nabors and the light in the upper right corner. The light also takes up so much room in the photo, Ms. Nabors could almost look cramped at a quick glance. The viewer's eyes bounce from appreciating the look of the chair, to the different gradient colors of black and gray throughout the photograph. The highlight in this photo is hard to define, which leaves the viewer confused.

Ms. Nabors is not front and center of her own photo: this photograph is lopsided. The right hemisphere is white light gradient down to black background and floor, nothing else. The entire (viewer's) right side! The darker side, and looking almost like a lovely flower about to bloom, is a cramped looking Ms. Nabors leaning over to the light, almost willing herself to take up more of the picture space. Depending on what website you see this photograph on, the lighting degrees of darkness in the photo can make it very



M.(Bold, Tillinghast - Light, 2006).

difficult indeed to see her legs in the bottom left corner. What the subject and photographer are trying to say here are unknown and quite ill defined. Perhaps, Ms. Nabors and the photographer Tillinghast are trying to convey what the photographer Emily Goldstein proclaims in a video on the Bold Beauty Project's (2006 - 2015) main page. Goldstein claims that in the case of the Bold Beauty Project (2006), the inclusion of the wheelchairs and other assistant devices in the photographs are turning traditional beauty on its head because by their inclusion they are beautiful too (LaFrance, 2006). Although, that statement does not seem to be true either: just because one thing is beautiful does not mean that something using the other thing is beautiful too. (The inclusion and/or exclusion of the women's helping devices has never been instrumental to how I critique any of the artworks in this paper. The chairs and other devices are a helping device, something that may be needed but not something inherently beautiful

because they are needed or because of their shape. The devices are secondary to the personality of the subject matter. Unless their device is specifically unique and customized in a very specific way, the assisting devices are not seen as being a part of what that person wants to portray about themselves (otherwise they are just a needed accessory that should fade into the background.)

The viewer may notice that the camera angle here looks somewhat familiar. This is almost the exact same looming angle of Ms. Cohen's awkward, sideways, backwards pool pose, although Ms. Nabors can enjoy tilting her head at a normal angle, although both of them are positioned beneath the viewer. In figure C. (Bold – Dixon, 2006), and again here, the viewer or the starrer is in a position of power over the subject matter, the staree. The difference is that when you have a position of power in a portrait, the staree cannot use the opportunity as a learning experience for both the starrer and staree like Garland-Thomson (2006) explains they can do in real life. In a portrait, the position is permanent, so you have to wonder what type of conscious or unconscious signal the photographers and/or subjects were trying to put out there. The viewer will always feel taller or in control when looking at these particular women. What was the reason for the high overhead shots? If the angle was because the model and photographer wanted to include the entire subject matter's body into the frame, there are myriad ways of achieving that goal without having to succumb to the looming, overhead angle.

Unraveling Critiques

My analysis of these images is shaped by the framework of feminist disability studies and heteronormativity in Western media culture. The images in the Raw Beauty

(2006) and Bold Beauty Project NYC (2014) pictures – though they may seem controversial or progressive at first glance - are in fact simply continuations of the male gaze simply applied to women with disabilities. And, it is not just the images, many articles focused on both the Raw (2006) and Bold Beauty Projects NYC (2014), included language that did not engender a positive picture of the models with disabilities. In one article, when talking about wheelchair bound model Katherine Crawford, this is what was written: “Crawford, her colleagues, and a team of photographers created an exhibit of sensual, powerful, and confident portraits of 20 disabled women – including themselves – paired with their biographies” (Orofino, 2014, p. 2). Another example is this article talking about The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014), and states, “‘I am standing out and it feels beautiful’: ‘Raw Beauty Project empowers disabled women” (Serico, 2014, p. 1). The issue appears when the women with disabilities are written off as “disabled women.” A “disabled woman” is a completely different type of woman than a *woman with disabilities*.

These articles, which claim a progressive stance continue to employ the ableism rhetoric inherent in US society – the idea that everyone is able-bodied unless they identify themselves as something other than able-bodied (Kafer, 2003). Ableism rhetoric allows mainstream society to call people with disabilities “disabled people.” To call someone a “disabled person” means that they are not a fully functioning and/or normal *human being*. They are being called *less-than* fully operational which is *not* what disability is. In fact, when we conceptualize disability through a feminist lens we offer an alternative framing: having a disability means that a person may have to do things in a

different way than many people, but they are just as much an operational human being as the next person. A “differently abled” or a “woman with a disability” label gives the power (and dignity) back to the subject and takes away the constricting and duplicitous ableism rhetoric. The articles talking about the Raw (2006) and/or Bold Beauty Projects NYC (2014) themselves are laced with ableism rhetoric; one can suppose that to expect the photographs to be anything other than a well-intentioned misstep, would be folly.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the images featured in the Raw/Bold Beauty NYC (2006 - 2015) photographs were still posed with attention to the male gaze because the photographers themselves participated in creating this gaze in the professional work. In order:

To capture the photographs, The Raw Beauty Project enlisted photographers whose resumes include *Vanity Fair*, *Allure*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Glamour*, *GQ*, *Nylon Magazine*, as well as work with Mercedes, Tommy Hilfiger, Club Monaco, Target, Old Navy and Tresemme (Christopher & Dana, 2014, p. 1).

These photographs were taken by photographers who could be credited with filling every consumer’s wandering eye with advertisements that daily inundated Western society with patriarchal, societal constructs and outlooks! The photographers assigned to setting these women with disabilities’ sexuality free, were in fact the very ones that helped to make the patriarchal, ableist construct that they were trying to overcome. From 2006 when the Raw Beauty Project started to now, one can wonder why no one

questioned or caught on to the duality of using advertising photographers for what would seem to be such a deeply personal and special photographic journey for the women involved. The photographers are touted in this press release as a good thing for this project - as if they are bringing something really special to the project - when **THE WOMEN** were supposed to be the special part of the project!

The photographers could be perfect for the project, but one would think that if a photographer professionally does a lot of work in the advertising industry, the type of photography that the photographer is creating would be influenced, perhaps subconsciously, through the lens of commodification that dominates all other media portrayals in the fashion world. The famous photographers involved in the project became a great marketing tool for the Raw Beauty Project (2006). Big names – famous names – would help with the advertising of the project, as well as give the Raw/Bold Beauty projects a higher status of supporters. In this case, the choice of photographers may very well be the reason why I connect so many of the above photographs with modern, heteronormative clothing advertisements – many of the poses and looks of the models can be seen in current Western fashion magazines. The models and the photographers have to work together in order to get shots that they think are good; if the photographers are mainly working for big, name-brand product companies creating the patriarchal, mainstream, ableist advertisements that we usually see, it is no wonder why I would expect a fashion label on the pictures. The majority of the Bold/Raw Beauty Project (2006 - 2015) pictures continue to perpetuate the male gaze, they are rooted in a patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist, and sexist frame via traditional poses that include

“hands flowing through hair,” threatening camera angles, and half-lidded, parted lips of the models. Instead of sensuously and sexually free to be posed and seen as women, more of the same of patriarchal advertisement culture is what is seen in these representations of disabilities.

2 - CREATING POSITIVE SPACES FOR FEMALE SEXUALITY IN DISABILITY & SEXUALITY PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTWORKS

What the Bold/Raw Beauty Projects (2014 & 2006) were aiming to do, was to reimagine the disabled body and its sexuality – as long as the person is not asexual. The resulting pictures highlighted above were thusly taken under the familiar ideals of mainstream ableism and perfectionism, which results in the photographs failing at their stated mission, to create and disseminate images of the disabled body - not as a site of impairment or pity, but as an inherently sensual and sexual body. These are individuals with unique and valuable perspectives; the public must see people with disabilities within their own representations (Phillips, 2001). In terms of uniqueness, sexuality, etc.... the Bold/Raw Beauty Projects (2006 - 2015) hesitantly begin to do this, and they start to do it in a way that Phillips (2001) explains that instead of seeing people with disabilities as having their own agency, instead, the idea that people with disabilities are actually seen as being helpless. The idea that people with disabilities are helpless is reinforced through television and/or advertising, and because very often the issues the people with disability may be having (because of improper care or government mechanisms that may be making their lives harder), is simply not brought to light on television and/or advertising, thus locking people with disabilities into a “helpless” role. Phillips (2001) states that, “disability imagery, whether photographs, television advertisements, pamphlets or

posters, along with related text, are generally associated with charity or medical advertising” (p. 196), which is what was seen in many of the Raw/Bold Beauty Project’s (2006 - 2015) accompanying texts. The texts were not asking for help for the women, but they did not make the women seem “normal” either.

What the people with disabilities are stating through these photographic artworks is not at all a reflection of whether or not they are receiving proper care or other institutional, political statements. The artworks featured do not have an institutional or political statement, but they do show that the idea of “helpless” people with disabilities concerning their sexuality is obviously incorrect: people with disabilities are not inherently helpless and do not need nondisabled people’s assistance to live a fulfilling life. While these ideals cannot apply to every person with disabilities, for the women shown here, they are very much in control of themselves and of their sexuality – actively defying an ableist, heteronormative rhetoric of “out-of-control” bodies and “hyper-sexuality.” The women are strong and definitely have their own mind concerning themselves and what they want their bodies to be doing; that much can be said for *all* of the artworks shown.

Reimagining the Disabled Body

To begin to reimagine the disabled body and what that means, these photographs are ultimately trying to dissipate what Phillips (2001) explains as the repeated notion that people with disabilities are useless. This repeated idea of uselessness very often starts to compel people with disabilities to believe that they really *are* useless. When people with disabilities believe that “useless” is an accurate term for themselves, their contributions to

society as employees, spouses, partners, and/or parents cease. Phillips (2006) provides a counter to this negativity by stating that:

In order to create acceptable images of persons with disabilities, we need to move away from the disabled body as the site of impairment, because the victim position this affords undermines the development of a positive subject position necessary to overcome the otherness that persons with disabilities struggle against. More than anything else, we need to consider the unique and valuable perspective that persons with disabilities bring to their own representation (p. 196).

In order to do this, the next collection of artworks that represents and gives the subject their own unique agency is by the Italian photographer Olivier Fermariello (2014) in his photographic artwork series, “Je t’aime moi aussi” (I Love You Too). Fermariello alone photographed his volunteer models, whom he found by placing ads online and elsewhere and after carefully corresponding with them to create a friendly relationship. Compared to the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 & 2014) of which photographers were chosen for their pedigree concerning the mainstream media advertisements they previously represented, in comparison to that, “Fermariello explains that *his* choice to create the work in Italy was a response to the closed-mindedness he perceived there surrounding issues of sex and disability” (Kail, 2014, p. 1). Compared to the photographers in the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 – 2014) of which they were intrinsically combined with the mainstream media depiction of rampant

heteronormativity, the photographer Fermariello (2014) appears to be cut from an entirely different cloth. In fact, Priscilla Frank from *The Huffington Post* (2014) reveals that:

Fermariello's striking staged photographs enact the private lives and sensual fantasies of disabled individuals, providing the subjects with long overdue visibility. The individuals boldly perform their sexual needs and desires, challenging mainstream culture's tendency to silence these elements of one's identity....As Ellyn Ruddick-Sunstein explained in *Feature Shoot*: "Under his gaze, the human body is neither ignored nor fetishized, existing on a nuanced continuum of individual desire. [In conclusion,] the nude body becomes a means of defiance, a courageous assertion of the amorous self in a culture that denies it (pp. 1-2).

Not only are these artworks being taken in a less-ableist light, they are also being explained within editorials in a much more disability positive way. Here is the title of Franks (2014) article: "Revealing portraits unveil the beautifully sexual lives of people living with disabilities." And Kail's (2014) title, "Intimate photos take us into the bedrooms of people with disabilities." Immediately, the positive difference is apparent! No more is the nagging "disabled people" hanging over the article, instead it is replaced with the phrases of, "people living with disabilities" (Frank, 2014, p. 1) and "people with disabilities" (Kail, 2014, p. 1). In addition, the word "beautiful" is included in the title of Frank's (2014) article, and the word is well used and earned. Fermariello's artworks are at once wonderfully "real" and yet surreal, embodying fantasy but set firmly in reality.

The results are astoundingly lovely, fantastic, sexually highly charged, and yet “ordinary” in the best sense of the word.

The photograph on the next page, is a nice example of the fantastical reality Fermariello was trying to create. The model stands facing the viewer, not challenging, just briefly looking at you, and making sure you understand that she is in the middle of an important interlude. Her hair, stockings, garters, shoes, and surrounding room hints to the viewer that maybe she is an important courtesan in Versailles, and we have caught her in the act of flitting gracefully through those historic halls. This photo comes across as a rare, captured moment from across time, and yet that obviously can not be. There is no focusing here on something other than the woman and her desires as was the case with the majority of the Raw/Bold Beauty Project (2006 - 2015) pictures. The viewer of this photo imagines they have interrupted her in the midst of her sensual playing. There is no focusing on an assistant device, or any other disability, just the woman and what happens to be in her inner mind right now – what her deepest desire is. We see the woman, we see the desire or fantasy - and that is all. She is us, she is like us: disability or not we are the same, just two humans having a quiet and intimate interaction in the palaces of her mind.



N.(Fermariello, Stockings, 2014)

The artwork is not “missing” a logo, and the use of Photoshop – if used – is slight, which is important not only for the viewer to relate to the subject, but for the model in order to feel positive about themselves. What does a photo say if when you receive it any imperfections are erased? The use of little if any Photoshop by the photographer, tells the viewer _ and the model - that this is humanity, and humanity as-is, is perfect. Ultimately, this work states that she has desires and fantasies and that is just fine.

The next two photos by Fermariello have very strong classical painting positions. The woman sitting in the red room and chair is a reclining nude, who also uses flowers to either cover-up or enhance an area which she may not feel comfortable showing the world. The type of traditional, classic wooden furniture used, the deep, velvety, color

reds with the contrast of pure white, innocently blooming flowers - is a very typical, classical setting that has been seen in many other reclining nudes throughout the ages.

This photo is deceptively camouflaged, in that unless the viewer knew or looked very closely, one would never know that the model had a disability which could very well be the point. Maybe she wanted to look like the reclining nudes throughout art history: to be just another beautiful study in relaxation yet careful artistry, or, maybe she just felt the most comfortable posing in this way. Compared to Chapter One's photos concerning the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 – 2015), the eye does not feel like it is being forced to look at certain spaces within this photo. With Fermariello's photographs, the viewer's eye is allowed to take its time taking in all of the photograph, viewing the details, appreciating the artistry, whereas in the Raw/Bold Beauty Project (2006 & 2015) photographs, the eye very often felt forced and pulled in certain directions because of the lighting, placing of the model, or contrasting colors of the background of the photo. In contrast, Fermariello's artworks feel almost soft; they are intimate in a way that allows the viewer to see the model's innermost desires or sensual fantasies, which is exactly what he was planning to do. In this reclining nude, there is nothing of mainstream, patriarchal culture. The model is looking at the viewer, but not with puffed out lips, chest thrusts, or strategic use of hair. She is at once a woman at ease with herself and at ease with the viewer taking her in. In this photo, the photographer is not framing the model in a sexy, heteronormative type of pose, which is what the male gaze, patriarchal viewpoint does with most other mainstream photographs of sexuality/sensuality.



O.(Fermariello, Reclining Nude, 2014)

Artworks that Show Positive & Negative Societal Aspects of Sexuality

Other images from the collection have potential, but do not completely reimagine the body with a disability in a new sexual space. The photos have so much positivity, yet the artworks are not completely without mainstream, heteronormative, or confusing, ideals that restrain the artworks from creating a sexual space for women with disabilities.

The first photo is by Fermariello of a woman sitting on the edge of her bed. At first glance, all the viewer sees is a quick snapshot of what could be anybody getting up from sleeping: someone who just awoke and swung her legs over the edge of the bed to get up. Only after looking a little longer does the viewer realize that they are in a slightly

elevated position from the girl. There is also at a seconds glance a child's teddy bear on the pillow. The striking thing about this photo however, is the similarity between



P. (Fermariello, *Bed*, 2014)



Q. (Munch, *Puberty*, 1895)

Fermariello's work and Edvard Munch's *Puberty* (1895). No background was found on this photo, but either the model or the photographer either wanted the similarity or it was a huge coincidence. The only main difference is that Fermariello's model has her arm straight down on the bed in order to show her hip. It would seem that the model or photographer went out of their way to "make" this photograph more "pubescent" or childlike by adding the teddy bear, the slightly above angle of the shot (like an adult), and the close similarity to Munch's classic work, with the title of *Puberty* (1895).

This similarity is confusing because one is not sure what the model and/or the photographer is trying to say. Maybe the model realized her sexual self-worth during her puberty years. Did she attain her disability during those years, does she often feel childlike, or does she wish she were still a child in some way? The conjecture could go on forever, so I am not completely comfortable with this artwork. To be sure, the combination of puberty and sexuality themes is a typical one in artworks because they grow together, but without the proper background for this photo, the infantilizing effects of this photo overwhelm the model's sexuality and/or sensuality, and yet, that may also be the point.

The final photograph that teeters between a positive outlook of people with disabilities' sexuality or undermines people with disabilities sexuality is from the Bold Beauty Project NYC, by the photographer Tillinghast (2015). There are so many things that are beautiful in this work, and yet I felt I had to include it for various reasons. To begin, even though this is an overhead shot, there is nothing overtly "threatening" about this photo, just two people loving on each other. Her eyes are closed and she has a slight smile on her lips, so the viewer sees this embrace as something consensual and something that obviously relaxes and pleases her. The viewer does not see much of the man because he comes from behind her, gently cradling her breasts in his hands while resting his head on her right shoulder. We can see enough of the man's face to see that he too has a slight smile on his lips, and from the viewer's angle his eyes look shut, so they are mimicking each other in relaxation. The point is that they look comfortable together, and even if they did not meet until that moment for the picture, the viewer can see that there was no

hesitancy on either partner's part to pose in each other's embrace: the woman's "embrace" being her facial expression and relaxed body language since she has no limbs.



R.(Bold, Tillinghast, Cradling, 2015)

For Tillinghast's (2015) photo, the viewer can "feel" the sensuality and sexuality in the air permeating this photograph. The viewer is privy to these feelings by being invited into what looks to be an extremely private and lovely moment between two partners: the feeling is of the model being embraced and loved, completely. And yet, the viewer is left wondering why there has to be a man in the picture when this is about the model with disabilities showing her own sexuality? The man could be included because

she is limbless and he shows that she is cared for in his embrace, but if that is the only reason why there is another person in the picture, then could it not have been a female model with her? The mutual exchanging of love between the models is at once lovely yet problematic. We are left wondering if someone behind the photos may think she is incapable of displaying her own sensuality - maybe that is why the man is included? There are no other models in the pictures with the other females through the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 - 2015), so why this one?

Many of these questions most likely have simple answers: the man is in the picture because the model with disabilities wanted him there, and/or he is her boyfriend/close friend/or caregiver - those are common enough reasons. How do we remedy her picture with the rest of the Raw/Bold Beauty Project's (2006 - 2015) artworks? Every other photograph has only had one model. Then again, every other photograph through the Raw/Bold Beauty Project (2006 - 2015) also had a model that had limbs. Possibly the two are connected, and maybe someone thought that the model needed another in the photo with her to help show her sensuality. This could of course be wrong, but what is a fact is that even though someone may not have limbs, they can portray their own sexuality anyway. Even though the man in the picture is shown in a positive way, he takes a little away from the model with disabilities, simply by unconsciously alluding to the fact that maybe the model is not capable of portraying herself accurately. What's more, the fact that it is a man cradling her in the picture, despite if they have a relationship or not, the fact that it is a man – a patriarchal figure –

calls to mind a reminder that possibly this photo needed the extra “stamp” of patriarchal approval.

Sexual Agency Statement Artworks of Disability & Sexuality

In this final section, I will demonstrate, using illustrations such as a limbless woman posed sitting naturally and yet so erotically, that women with disabilities can make their own impactful statements about social ideals, all the while using their own unique, nonpatriarchal defined spaces through their artworks.

Beginning this final, most body positive analysis, I use one of the organizations that have been critiqued by me the most, The Raw Beauty Project NYC (2014). The woman I choose is Danielle Sheypuk and her photographer was George Whiteside. As you can clearly see from the photo on the following page, this is a non-combative pose with her gaze closed to us and her head pointed slightly down. Even with her gaze closed off however, the viewer does not get the idea that she is inviting you to stare. Judging strictly from her clothing choices, we can see that she is a woman not to be messed with.

Ms. Sheypuk looks like she is briefly glancing down, taking a break as it were from this photographer that keeps snapping away. One question about this photo is whether she has her cell phone in her hand. Looking at the photo there is no way to tell, but that would seem to match her facial expression and hand gestures. As our eyes move down, we come across her long, gazelle - like legs and are abruptly stopped by her gorgeous, red-soled shoes. The red-soled shoe is always recognized as Christian Louboutin, and for these Louboutin's – black patent, platform, stilettos – since these are a more basic shoe, they would probably cost her about \$900 to \$1,000 a pair. The fact that

they are juxtapositioned against a wheelchair is a combination of perfectly subtle – while simultaneously screeching out - against rampant social mores concerning people with disabilities: in this case, the idea that people with disabilities do not economically



S.(Raw, Whiteside - Louboutin's, 2014).

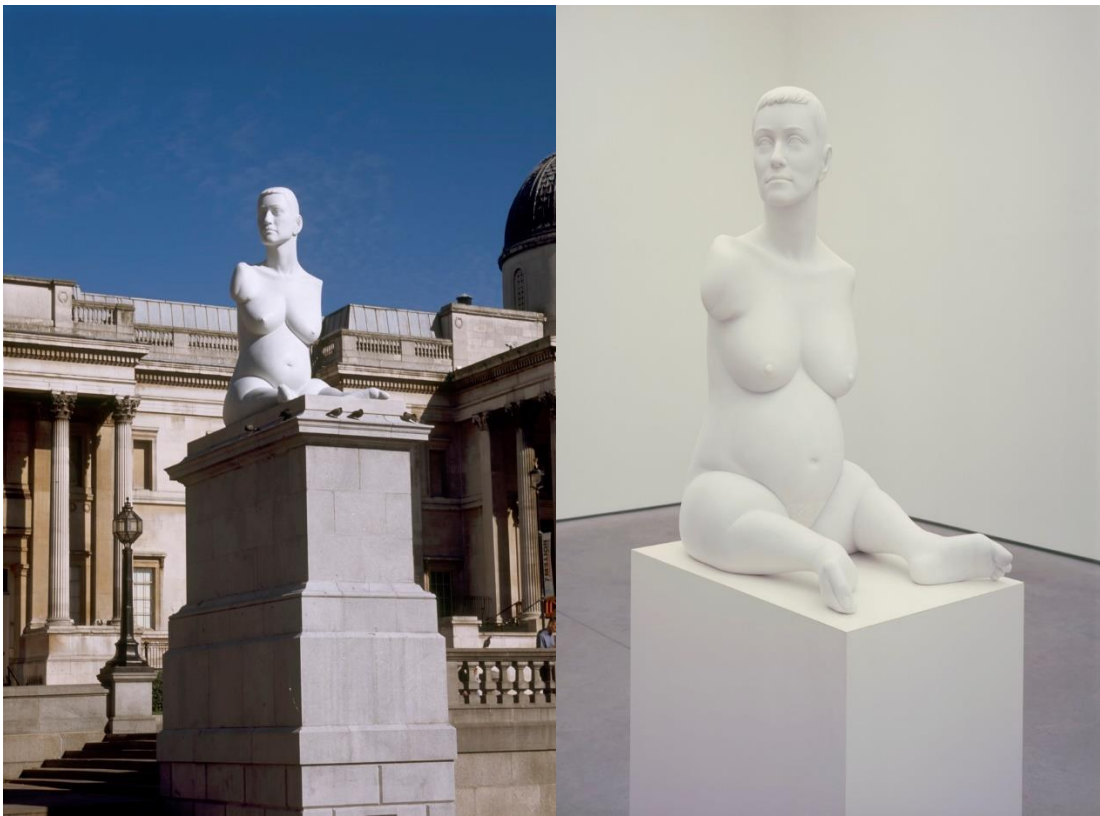
contribute to society but use up social program and/or health care money. That type of generalized thinking is wrong, and her Louboutin's leaning against the black wheelchair can prove it. On the whole, this woman looks to me to be too busy to deal with anyone's ridiculous ideas and rich enough to not care. In fact, this model constantly wears Louboutin's and she has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Ms. Sheypuk is everywhere

talking about sexuality and disability and she made an understated photo, yet still managed to pack a quite a punch.

Another body positive disability and sexuality artwork is *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2000) by the sculptor Marc Quinn. This pure white marble, “11.5 foot tall, 13 ton sculptural portrait, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, was unveiled on the fourth plinth of Trafalgar Square” (Millet-Gallant, 2008, p. 398) in London. Needless to say, the reaction and response was at once confused, angry, thrilled, and any other emotion a human could possibly have. Imagine: Trafalgar Square – the repository of three other, hulking male military heroes – now had to share its space (a male space filled with male statues) with a gigantic statue of an armless, shorten-legged, pregnant, woman! In 2012 for the Paralympic games, a true-to-size inflatable copy statue was created and used for the opening ceremonies of the Paralympic games.

This statue was so monumental in part because, “public art raises issues of social and artistic representation and the visibility of certain members of society. Public space has been gendered male and raced white traditionally, and public space is largely ableist in attitude, not to mention accessibility (or lack thereof) (Millet-Gallant, 2008, p. 399). *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2000) is definitely a statue that is able to stand on its own in comparison to other statues or monuments, and the interesting thing is that this would be true no matter what country or place you put her in. This is no shrinking violet, but a massive in-your-face statue that has been challenging how people think about disability and sexuality ever since it debuted. *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2000) is a triple threat:

she is female, she is disabled, and she is pregnant. Just showing a nude, pregnant woman with disabilities is saying a lot to everyone who sees her. The statue is saying - without words - that this woman is an active member and contributor to society. She is an active member because people know her as an artist. This statue has the power to force the public to question their own limits of acceptability of social constructs and her pregnancy



T.(Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2000)

has the ability to connote that she is/could be loved – and lovable – a worthwhile member of society – because the proof is in her pregnancy. She is an active contributor to society because she will be adding a child to her culture and people. It is rather sad

that society and societal structures think in this way: after all, she would be worth it without the child as well, but Western patriarchal culture places a premium on motherhood. A colossal statue that is a pregnant woman with disabilities also makes a powerful statement against, “infanticide, selective abortion, eugenic programs...mercy killing, assisted suicide, ...coercive rehabilitation, genocide, normalizing surgical procedures, ... and neglect” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, pp. 21). Bodies with disabilities are often targeted for elimination practices, so the artwork of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2000) addresses those issues by pointing out what many people in society think and feel:

For many, the work assertively provokes the fear that the disabled body will reproduce another “damaged” child – from a “broken” body and a “broken” home [Alison Lapper was not married]. The work advocates controversial reproductive rights for disabled women and for single women more broadly. Further, any attempt on Lapper’s part to fulfill her role to reproduce the next generation may produce a disabled one, which remains a horror rather than a triumph, according to mainstream values and exclusive social standards for quality of life (Millet-Gallant, 2008, p. 401).

A woman with disabilities that is pregnant is fighting against the current of eugenics and eugenics type thinking. Eugenics thinking is the type of thinking that people with disabilities will propagate and produce more people with disabilities, so they must be stopped (Garland-Thomson, 1998). In the end, this statue helped bring larger awareness to everyone who saw it, not only concerning disability and sexuality, but also

to how the individual dealt with their own thought processes when confronted with the sculpture. She is very enlightening, very empowering.

The final artwork instantly makes the viewer understand the point trying to be made: that women with disabilities are sexual. This woman is featured quite a bit (along with a friend or partner) in Olivier Fermariello's (2014) "*Je t'aime moi aussi*" (*I Love You Too*). With this model, you can see how fearless yet human that she is in her eyes in every picture.

When you first view this photo, the first thing you focus on is her face, and in that face what is seen is strength, attitude, life, vitality, and yes, beauty. Despite there being a totally nude woman's body in the shot, her face comes first and that could be because of two reasons. The first is that she is wearing a fluorescent pink, bobbed, wig. If you have seen her other photos, the viewer knows that she has long brown hair, so we know – or can tell – that the pink wig is an add-on, prop, or something that she wanted to use as a statement maker. Pink hair is bright and fantastical, so obviously she has a playful side.

The second reason is what probably is the correct reason: her face. Looking into her eyes, you can see her strength; she is openly challenging the viewer. One can almost hear her saying, "I love myself. I don't care what you think!" Other than her gaze at the viewer, her smile - although I suppose her "smile" is more of a smirk or grin – steals the show. Her facial expression and the authority the viewer can feel emanating from her are why the viewer is immediately focused on her head instead of the rest of her body.

Her body is however definitely making statements of its own. Her arms are bent, hands planted firmly on her hips, shoulders thrust back, chest boldly out, legs shoulder

width apart: this is a supremely confident and bold pose. This is her, “sexual super-hero pose” because the viewer can practically see a cape flying from her shoulders in pride. This pose also allows her to be positively open to examination – she is allowing the exam on her terms. In fact, she is so confident that the viewer is even privy to her past surgical scars on every limb of her body. They are faded enough that you do not see them



U.(Fermariello, Superhero, 2014)

immediately, but nevertheless, no Photoshop was used to erase them either, and that says a lot. It claims loud and clear that she is not ashamed: this is her body. She does not care

what you think, this project was something she did for herself, to raise awareness, and challenge public perceptions. Every artwork has negative reactions, and the reason why this photo can be reacted to badly is because her physical presence is so strong. The model has put herself out into the world: nude, with all of her surgery scars showing, and some people can find this threatening. Negative reactions to any of the artworks happen, and many of the reasons why are simple ones such as color or lighting. Stronger negative reactions however are because of ableist, heteronormative, masculinity at work in our mainstream, Western, patriarchal society. Western society has strong heteronormative spectators: women (and men but to a lesser extent) do adhere to ableist thinking: if you have a disability, there is something wrong with you and you should not be seen, and you should not be sexual. Women with disabilities are often thought to be asexual and are seen as something of an oddity. Women with disabilities are briefly considered and then brushed away from our societal thinking. For many people inculcated by mainstream compulsory heteronormativity, Gisele Bündchen is the norm, not the exception.

Conclusion

We have seen mainstream, ableist, and patriarchal photography in which the ideal of women is a monochrome, photo shopped, perfectly proportioned, made-for-male-consumption feminine ideal – heteronormativity, which is the idea that women are up for visual consumption by men. This visual consumption is the male gaze, a heteronormative viewpoint that is seen very strongly in the advertisements used as examples throughout this paper and to a lesser extent in many of the Raw/Bold Beauty Project (2006 – 2015) photographs. Heteronormativity contributes to Western societal

constructs that see disability as something that needs to be fixed, instead of something that naturally happens to the body or mind. The overarching heteronormative, societal viewpoint that states that people with disabilities cannot be sexy/sexual or are too sexual - as with the ideas concerning mental disability – thusly corner women with disabilities as beings that need to be changed in order to fit the societal conception of “normal.” Western society sees “normal” and “abnormal” in terms of who fits the mold of modern womanhood, which excludes disability in all its forms. Until this mold of normativity/heteronormativity is changed, people with disabilities will never be able to be seen as normal and sexual/sensual beings. Western patriarchal, heteronormative viewpoints are truly vicious taskmasters in Western society.

The photographs of advertisements and the Raw/Bold beauty Projects (2006 – 2015) featured in Chapter One did have heteronormative, patriarchal leanings and they were laden with ableist ideals. Many of the models in the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2006 – 2015) were positioned and photographed in such a way as to leave the viewer in an often uncomfortable position of looming and/or aggressive superiority over the model, or leaving the viewer in confusion as to what exactly the artwork was trying to prove or point out about the model. These artworks did not highlight the models in a non-mainstream, heteronormative way. Some of the models photographs were taken in such a way that made the models and their art look unnatural, especially with body positioning. Any and all of these issues viewed in the Raw/Bold Beauty Projects (2005 – 2015) can be/are symptoms of patriarchal heteronormativity seen every day in Western society. We have also seen photographs that land somewhere in the middle of trying to create a

unique environment for the woman with disabilities sexuality, but then ends up falling back under a heteronormative framework. These photos started productively with new ideas and positions, but still ended-up under a framework where the women with disabilities are seen as “other.”

Chapter Two however shows artworks that have managed to break through the heteronormative boundaries of Western society and show women with disabilities and their sexuality/sensuality in a new way that are truly unique in their ability to claim their own space in order to showcase disability and sexuality in women in a wonderfully creative, sexy, and positive way. No more parted lips or shampoo hair, we see the women in their own space, in their own unique ways with none of the compulsive, heteronormative, and patriarchal signs weighing them down. The models with the less mainstream and heteronormative artworks were taken in a new light, in a way that highlighted the model’s unique sensuality. The non-heteronormative leaning model’s sexuality was shown in a way that was at once ordinary yet surreal, which Fermariello (2015) and Quinn (2000) managed to do with their works. The artworks critiqued in Chapter Two created each of the models’ unique sexual space, acknowledged their uniqueness to each other and others, and created an artwork that was unique to each individual model and their sexuality.

Trying to find artworks that display women with disabilities in their own unique light is important because when the normally heteronormative society sees these artworks, they are seeing something new and different, something apart of the mass-produced, heteronormative works promoted everywhere in Western culture. By seeing

something new, the viewer can begin to notice the discrepancies between how women with disabilities are portrayed in mainstream culture and begin to want to see a more positive outlook when it comes to people with disabilities. Looking for and finding the heteronormativity in Western media makes the viewer more aware of themselves and of how women in particular are generally seen, which is in a highly male centered way. By pointing out the differences in these artworks, the possibility that the photographers involved in producing the mass-produced, patriarchal, heteronormative photography may begin to change the way they frame and see the subjects as well.

Something that was not examined in this paper was how disability is framed in different cultures around the world. Every culture has their own unique viewpoints when it comes to women with disabilities and women in general, and it would be interesting to see how women and women with disabilities are framed around the world. Also, something that I came across in my research is the relative lack of women of color with disabilities in artworks. Most of the women with disabilities that were seen in most of the photography that I saw were white women. It would be very interesting to see how or why women of color were not featured as often in the disability artworks. What comes to mind is that women of color with a disability may simply not have the same opportunities as white women. Figuring out why that may be would be another extremely important piece of information that Western society should know, and one that I hope will be addressed.

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BIOGRAPHY

Kami J. King graduated from Shawano High School, Shawano, Wisconsin, in 1998. She then received her Associate Degree from Pierce College, Steilacoom, WA in 2002, and finally went on to complete her Bachelor of Arts & Sciences from the University of Washington – Tacoma in 2007. She was employed in a variety of jobs while traveling the world with her husband, and received her Master of Arts & Sciences in Women and Gender Studies from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA in 2016.