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'The body that cannot be contained': Queering mainstream psychology's gay male body dissatisfaction imperative

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Abstract
A sizable body of mainstream social psychological body image research suggests that gay men are more dissatisfied with their bodies than heterosexual men (Morrison et al., 2004). However, much of this research has been criticized for producing explanatory models that pathologize gay men by foregrounding homosexuality, irrespective of broader sociohistorical factors, as the source of gay male body dissatisfaction (Filiault, 2010; Filiault and Drummond, 2009; Kane, 2009, 2010) – what we refer to as psychology's *gay male body dissatisfaction imperative*. Situated within a critical psychology perspective (Teo, 2015), this article relies on the voices of 19 gay/queer participants to problematize psychology's epistemological determinism. Their 'talk' was less interiorized and totalized than the models' conceptualizations of gay male identity and body image, highlighting the need for models that instead explicate how gay men develop individual, embodied understandings of sexual and gender identity while navigating heterosexist, masculinist, and neoliberal discourses. We investigate the corporeal manifestations of discourse and pay specific attention to queer forms of embodied resistance.

Keywords
body image, masculinity, psychology, queer theory, subjectification

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We were preparing a draft of this article during Pride, a time when the display of gay male bodies is under heightened scrutiny. Predictably, that June was met with the publication, posting, and sharing of a glut of paternalistic articles and commentaries about gay men and their bodies. 'We can blame the media for perpetuating stereotypes about gay men, but the reality is the gay community itself is mostly perpetuating these stereotypes themselves', blogged World Human Rights (2014) about body image issues and stereotypes in the 'gay community'. Most of these writings describe gay male body dissatisfaction as if it is an essential feature of some universal and transhistorical gay men's experience. In *our* experience, this reflects certain liberal humanist truisms: gay men are more concerned about how they look than straight men and something about homosexuality – perhaps, gay culture? – causes this disparity. Gay men do it to themselves and the solutions to this totalizing 'problem' of gay male body dissatisfaction are resolutely individualistic (e.g. therapy). Even gay men themselves sometimes hold similar beliefs, calling it 'body fascism'. Before beginning this project, we had noticed these truisms beginning to saturate the public imaginary and wondered: Where are they coming from?

Most support for what we refer to as the *gay male body dissatisfaction imperative* is given by statistics culled from mainstream social psychological body image research, which has almost invariably fashioned the gay male body as a fundamental site of dissatisfaction (Kane, 2009, 2010). As measured by Likert-type rating scales, single-item measures and checklists, and body size drawings, a number of equivocal quantitative comparative studies have 'revealed' gay men to be more dissatisfied with their bodies than straight men. Morrison and colleagues' (2004) methodologically-flawed[1] meta-analysis is routinely cited as definitive proof of the allegedly established fact of gay male body dissatisfaction. However, the results of studies that 'reveal' greater body dissatisfaction among gay men are not always conclusive (e.g. Levesque and Vichesky, 2006; Peplau et al., 2009; Williamson and Hartley, 1998). As one egregious example: Chaney (2008) supported 'the idea that gay and bisexual men may be more susceptible to [muscle dysmorphia] compared to heterosexual men' (2008: 166) based on 'the findings reported [in his study]' (2008: 166). He did not, in fact, conduct such a comparison. Many other examples exist of researchers evaluating gay men against a hetero-norm and 'discovering' dissatisfaction, disorder, or disturbance while discounting or dissembling contradictory evidence, even as some have found no – or, few, often trivial – differences between gay and straight men (see Pope et al., 2000).

We do not assert that gay men are uniformly satisfied with their bodies. Undeniable pressures exist for western males *as a whole* to embody a narrow range of 'desirable' shapes and sizes, typically muscular, lean, and athletic (Barlett et al., 2008). Social hierarchies based on appearance in various gay environments are likewise inculcated by the wider culture's privileging of certain masculinities (see, e.g. Drummond, 2005; Kong, 2004; Padva, 2002). Neither do we delineate all of the quantitative literature's methodological weaknesses, as others have already written comprehensive criticisms (e.g. Filiault, 2010; Filiault and

Drummond, 2009; Kane, 2009, 2010). Instead, we are concerned with the ways in which the theoretical models that have been developed to 'explain' obtained differences between gay and straight men pathologize homosexuality by lodging dissatisfaction *within* individual gay men. Such essentialist understandings position gay men as overdetermined by an inherently body-obsessed, self-harming 'community' whose members strive to emulate a self-imposed, monolithic body image ideal. Homosexuality comes to function here as a discursive construction, demarcating and defining through negation the unmarked term as primarily satisfied (Vasilovsky, 2014).

Sustained by empiricism's scientism, 'conclusive' results (e.g. 'Most research indicates that gay men, compared with heterosexual men, are more dissatisfied with their bodies' (Beren et al., 1996: 136)) and their resulting theories (e.g. 'gay culture places extreme importance on appearance' (1996: 135)) have been 'stretched beyond their initial borders and intents' (Teo, 2015: 246) and come to infuse and characterize knowledge about the gay male body (e.g. 'I think it's time that we stop hurting each other and our community by enforcing impossible standards of beauty' (Tobia, 2012)). This 'psychologization' of persons and identities seems to have produced a 'looping effect' (Hacking, 1995) through which certain gay men understand their body-selves in accordance with the mainstream theoretical models. We understand 'mainstream' psychology to be part of a psy-complex (Rose, 1985, 1998), which is increasingly involved in the formation of contemporary subjectivities. As psychology makes its subject matter (Danziger, 1990), it is our hope that its models of gay male body dissatisfaction might be remade so as to *centralize* the social, cultural, and historical embeddedness of embodied subjectivity. This article re-embeds gay male bodies within a complex psychosocial matrix without recourse to atomized psychological factors or an essential gay men's experience. We explore how gay and queer men's self-understandings and identities are formed through their engagement with the various discourses about gay male bodies, including psychological ones, in cultural circulation.

Reconceptualizing gay male bodies in psychology

In order to problematize the scientific expertise that has established a 'specific tenet that gay men are more dissatisfied with their bodies than heterosexual men' (Kane, 2009: 31), we situate this article within a critical psychology (CP) perspective (see Teo, 2015). CP is an international movement that draws on a motley of intellectual traditions, including the 'masters of suspicion' (i.e. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), second-generation critical social philosophers, and more recent movements (e.g. feminism, postcolonial theory, queer theory). Through its systematic examination of 'how some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged over others, [and of] how dominant accounts of psychology operate ideologically and in the service of power' (Parker, 1999: 13), CP establishes alternative accounts that include 'realms that are not specified as psychological' (Jovanović, 2010: 585).

Our article reflects CP's interdisciplinary origin as well as its 'denaturalization' of psychological 'truths' and analysis of power.

Elsewhere we have highlighted the epistemological assumptions that buttress mainstream psychology's gay male body dissatisfaction imperative (Vasilovsky, 2014). Following minoritizing logic, the models, which include atypical gender-role behaviour, childhood gender non-conformity, gay culture, objectification, and internalized homonegativity, theorize homosexuality as an orientation defined exclusively by same-sex object-choice and identifiable through a range of sex-differentiated traits. The 'problem' of gay male body dissatisfaction is explained in terms of intrapersonal deficits. Power arrangements in society are routinely de-emphasized and victims of oppression sometimes blamed: as 'members of a subculture that objectifies the body and places an inordinate emphasis on physical appearance and attractiveness' (Martins et al., 2007: 644), 'gay men strive to be attractive' (Yelland and Tiggemann, 2003: 108), these models have concluded. This psychologization of gay men's bodies obscures the systematic quality of homosexual marginalization as well as the immense sociohistorical diversity of male homosexuality. The gay male 'hegemonic aesthetic' (Filiault and Drummond, 2007) is always in flux, as are gay male communities and their media, self-understandings, politics, and relations to the majoritarian public sphere. It is difficult to 'understand' gay male body dissatisfaction without figuring how gay masculinities are variably subjugated by the stigma of gay sexual difference (Meyer, 2003). Rigorous theorization of body image among gay men requires rigorous analysis of the 'hierarchical organisation of masculinities and sexuality in modern social life' (Duncan, 2010b: 27).

The broader social sciences literature has better demonstrated how a number of discourses and social institutions shape and condition the gay male body. Gay men who feel dissatisfied with their bodies tend to implicate the ambivalent (re)production of 'normative ideas about heterosexual masculinity' (Duncan, 2010b: 27) within queer subcultures. Certain (able-bodied, 'straight-acting', respectable, white) bodies communicate 'social status, social acceptance, and belonging to a group identity' (2010b: 25–26), and such a complex, vacillating hierarchization of bodies regulates the public display of male homosexuality and hence gay men's 'identity-building enterprise[s]' (2010b: 25). Although there is no single gay habitus (Sender, 2001), the queer bodies in cultural circulation have all 'been marginalized by the straight bourgeoisie but also controlled, commodified, and commercialized by the gay media itself' (Padva, 2002: 282). Regulation, however, is effected not simply by the 'gay community' but rather through the coercive powers of a neoliberal cultural landscape (see Duggan, 2003), which affixes symbolic capital to (gay male) bodies (and identities) that not only look appropriate but also *do* the appropriate amount of work required to secure and maintain 'desirable' body-selves. This article shifts focus from the individual-level 'problem' of gay male body dissatisfaction to the 'meso-level' management of sexual (and other) identities in and through the body.

By insufficiently theorizing gay men's multiple, intersecting positionings within a heteronormative culture with certain ideas about what masculinity is

(and femininity and effeminacy are), mainstream psychology has overlooked the '"doing" of gay identity by way of reflection upon one's body and appearance, in relation to discourses about gay male sexuality, gay identity and masculinity' (Duncan, 2007: 333). A limited focus on dissatisfaction stifles the expressive, communicative (gay male) body: How does it function as an identity-producing device in its own right? In psychology, exploring 'the subjectivities of gay men as they reflect upon, contest and live their bodies/identities' (2007: 334) remains relatively uncharted territory. What could the gay male body 'do' if detached from its discursive coupling with dissatisfaction? How might it operate within the reflexive project of self? We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with 19 gay and/or queer participants and organized their 'talk' into an account of gay male embodiment that foregrounds the participants' ideographic corporeal 'identity negotiations' within heterosexist, masculinist, and neoliberal conditions. Later, we describe their use of two interpretive repertoires and four 'companion' subject positions. Given the gay male body's yoking to dissatisfaction through the prevailing models' homogenizing essentialism, we have attended to the dense, intricate configurations the participants suggested were aimed at resisting socially injurious discourses. We label these configurations *embodied queer resistances*.

Method and analytic approach

With the purpose of articulating a less interiorized and totalized supplement to the models, we approached the interviews through the epistemic frame of *embodied subjectification* (see Papadopoulos, 2008), which elucidates the *reciprocal* tension between the 'technico-political' (Foucault, 1977: 136) management and regulation of populations and the 'anatomico-metaphysical' (1977: 136) techniques of subjective individualization. In other words, how do subjects 'take up' individual-level norms for presentation of the body and for behaviour? In the final books and articles written by Foucault, his interests shifted to the practices through which individuals (re)create and cultivate themselves as subjects. Although the subject remains an effect of power, individuals are thought to determine to, some, extent the practices that constitute them. These 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1994) 'permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves' (1994: 225). As all those material and immaterial tools we can use to make ourselves, technologies of the self comprise a 'radically conditioned form of agency' (Butler, 1997: 15) within the temporalized processes of self-regulation and self-discipline that materialize (i.e. bring into being and legitimize) body-selves.

Our approach is thus 'material-discursive': we connect broader 'top-down' forms of power to their finer 'bottom-up' micro-processes, which are realized through words, facial expressions, gestures, postures, affective configurations, modes of relating, and so on (Hacking, 2004). Much like Green's (2008) 'sexual fields approach', which couples Goffman's social psychological focus on situational negotiation with

Bourdieu's model of routine practice, we elucidate how discursive opportunities and constraints operate through the 'voluntary' acceptance of their various identity-constituting practices. Here the body plays a central role. Particularly informative for us is Bordo's consideration of the body as an expression of power: the 'intelligible body' comprises 'the scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body' (Bordo, 1993: 181) and forms a set of regulations through which the 'living body' becomes a 'socially adapted and "useful body"' (1993: 181). The intelligible gay male body, we argue, bears more than just erotic capital (cf. Green, 2008): financial, social, symbolic, moral, and other capitals regulate the useful gay male body's physical traits, affective presentations, and sociocultural styles. Gay subjectivities are consolidated into socially regulated identities through 'body-reflexive practices' (see Connell, 2005). Like technologies of the self, they are 'onto-formative' and 'involve how a body, and the practices involved in managing, stylizing, and living as an embodied individual call social meaning into play' (Duncan, 2010a: 440). Gay male bodies are not merely receptacles of symbolic dissatisfaction or *tabulae rasae* passively awaiting inscription; gay men can *both* insert themselves into the system of practices, institutions, and technologies within which identities are produced *and* challenge those very categories and their norms.

The 19 participants were recruited through snowball sampling as well as flyer and online advertisements (posted around Toronto and to the Sexuality Hub: Integrating Feminist Theory (SHiFT) Laboratory's Facebook page), which targeted gay and/or queer men or genderqueers, between the ages of 18 and 35, who live in the Greater Toronto Area and speak English fluently. Their names are pseudonyms. Most participants' (94.7%) self-identified gender was 'male'; Skylar (31, queer) was the only 'genderqueer' participant. In terms of sexual identity, one participant identified as 'bisexual', one as 'somewhere between bi and gay', four as 'gay *and* queer', four as 'queer', and almost half (47.4%) as 'gay'. In terms of ethno-cultural background, six participants (31.6%) identified as 'Canadian', four as European, five as of European descent, two as of cross-national descent (Indian-Portuguese, New Zealander-Irish-French), one as Turkish, and one as Chinese. The participants were relatively well educated: the majority were completing or had completed a Bachelor's degree (63.2%); six were completing or had completed a Master's degree, or had received some doctoral training (31.6%); and one had completed high school. Recruitment ended once 'theoretical saturation' was met (i.e. the point at which no new information is observed in the data).

This project originated as a protest: we had hoped participatory action would not only enhance understanding of gay male body image but also add to a growing critique of mainstream psychological assumptions about gay male body dissatisfaction (see Vasilovsky, 2014). We chose open-ended interviews in order to provide prospective participants with an opportunity to speak to and perhaps against the prevailing models, which fit well with our critical, queer epistemological framework and its methodological history of listening to the voices of marginalized persons (see Brown and Nash, 2010). Few standardized theoretically-driven questions about 'embodied subjectivity' (e.g. *Does your body play a part in how you think*

or feel about your sexual identity?) were posed so each interview could follow the narratives generated throughout the research encounters. The interviewer (AV) functioned as an active participant, fostering an atmosphere of collaborative interaction, mutual reflexivity, and friendly debate. Given our interest in the ideological content of talk, the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed using orthographic, not Jeffersonian, convention.

In keeping with other similar CP-informed analyses of how discourse becomes part of our lives through practices that play a central role in identity construction (e.g. Edley and Wetherell, 1997; Gill et al., 2005; Wetherell and Edley, 1999, 2014), we selected Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) as our analytic approach. FDA interprets the meanings and functions of discourse and its links with social relations and the exercise of power (Parker, 2013). Unlike the fine-grain form of discursive psychology influenced by conversation analysis, FDA connects talk with broader patterns of collective sense-making and understanding; embodiment emerges through analysis of these situated constructions. We use the term 'interpretive repertoire' to refer to 'a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes' (Wetherell, 1998: 400), and to 'subject position' to illustrate how individuals 'take up' particular 'roles' within discourse. This 'uptake' is assumed only ambivalently, as subject positions are multiple, shifting, sometimes contradictory, and never self-identical (Papadopoulos, 2008). Unlike phenomenological, psychoanalytic, or cognitivist approaches, we have sought less to grasp foreign 'psychic life' than to explicate the discourses through which gay men in a liberal, democratic, and capitalist society like Toronto might be pulled when understanding, interpreting, *constructing* their experiences of gay/queer embodiment. Given the ubiquity of psychology's gay male body dissatisfaction imperative, we expected the participants to describe their body-selves in individualized and privatized ways. Some did, but as queer qualitative researchers, we chose to 'cast away the mask of [quantitative] impartiality' (Gergen et al., 2015: 4) in order to 'hear' in the transcripts systemic oppressions *and* politicized resistances that were not always 'oriented' to by the participants while still validating their 'realities' (see Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997; Weatherall et al., 2002).

Heteronormativity and body-reflexive practices

In contrast to mainstream psychology's models, the participants focused most on how their sexual identities and attendant embodiments are negotiated within heteronormative strictures. As an apparatus of norms with largely unquestioned prestige, *heteronormativity* organizes sex, gender and sexuality in accordance with conventional beliefs about what is 'natural' and desirable. The reach of its subjectification is well encapsulated by Jian's (25, bisexual/gay) childhood recollection, 'I was sort of straight unless proven otherwise' (or guilty). Growing up, Vito (23, gay) 'was always used to seeing heterosexual examples on TV, so that's where [he] learned all [his] lessons'. And those lessons imparted a 'traumatizing' (Vito) worldview: 'When I would see straight activity on screen, I would feel like "Oh, this is

what I should be doing. This is what I should strive for.'" Television and movie screens were not sites of identification but rather projections of a single, compulsory mode of intimate coupled existence from which Vito felt estranged. As Skylar (31, queer) noted, heteronormativity is 'there, present, active but also clear and explicit enough that anything else that's on the table gets rooted through this very explicit sluice channel'. Many participants described this 'sluice channel' as a nexus through which their body-selves are inevitably fashioned and several stressed the importance of recognizing and learning, even mastering, the 'cultural stuff' (Skylar) – not just the codes of adornment or rules of recognition between gays/queers or within gay/queer subcultures but also how to 'do' gayness/queerness while embedded within milieux that oppress non-normative sexualities. As Ben (30, queer) acknowledged, there are 'consequences' for being 'as queer as [he wants]', so he has had to 'sway back and forth' between 'rejecting the norm [and] assimilation'. These transactions between intelligible and useful gay bodies were presented as ubiquitous and lifelong.

These participants drew on what we have termed the *turning on/off gayness/queerness* interpretive repertoire: one's gayness/queerness, always the marked sexuality, like a peripatetic phantasm, floats in to reanimate one's body but dematerializes when necessary. Jian, for instance, works in a 'small town not as open or forward-thinking as Toronto' where it is difficult to meet other bisexual or gay men, so he has been restricted to clandestine outdoor encounters:

> Jian: If I'm walking in the park and I want to send signals, you sort of lighten your step. It's hard to exactly describe, but sort of less heavy.
> Interviewer: Is it easier or harder in [your town]?
> J: It's about the same, because the people who have an issue with this don't really notice these things, so I don't really feel inhibited by that. It's the more overt things that people notice, like holding hands or whatever.

For Jian, turning on gayness entails an almost imperceptible adjustment of his gait. When Morgan (22, queer) is 'walking by [himself] at night and a group of guys approaches [him] that's a moment where [he's] like, "I shouldn't even seem remotely gay."' He is compelled to 'stand up a bit straighter, throw back [his] shoulders a bit, walk a bit stiffer', not let his 'arms flail all around'. Only in 'the [Church-Wellesley gay] Village or even just walking down the street in Toronto . . . during the day', can he 'let [his body] go and do its thing' and publicize his queerness. Morgan's queer walk may not appear just like Jian's or any of the other participants', but all these styles of bodily comportment are likewise characterized by their differential opposition to heterosexuality: most participants rhetorically linked male heterosexuality with masculinity, so Morgan's stiffened walk approximates 'how "real men" are when they're walking down the street', and Jian's 'straight step' is firmer, heavier.

These body-reflexive practices seemed 'less about muscle and flesh and skin than about [the participants'] own selves located within particular social, cultural and moral universes' (Gill et al., 2005: 57). This interpretive repertoire suggests that

sexualities can be communicated through a wide array of 'aesthetics' (Attwood, 2007), with cultural and stylistic distinctions, which the participants use to navigate symbolic boundaries between gay and straight cultures and persons. As homosexuality has served as a discursive dumping ground for inversion, flamboyance, vanity and degeneracy (see Halperin, 2012), turning off gayness/queerness usually meant camouflaging effeminacy and its opposite, intensification and elaboration. Heteronormativity's strict gender binary has most shaped Gerhard's (24, gay/queer) 'gender identity because it's so related to sexuality and feeling the pressure to act less effeminate because it's something that's being coded as gay'. The stabilization of heterosexuality has been enabled, in part, by defining its 'Other' in prescriptive, often pathologizing ways, like the misogynistic marriage of effeminacy and male homosexuality (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity operates as a variable form of masculinity, dominating or receding depending on available resources (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005); but, despite the construct's many hybridizations or 'inclusive' (e.g. Anderson, 2009), 'softer' permutations (see Bridges, 2014; O'Neill, 2015), firm distinctions between effeminate and 'real' men persisted for these participants. They described their negotiation of masculinity/effeminacy as border control: one assiduously monitors the apparent yet permeable membrane between masculinity and homosexuality/effeminacy. For some, turning on/off gayness/queerness was limited to façade, like cosmetic and somatic effeminacy, which emphasize outward appearance, motion, and anatomy. For others, body-reflexive practices were more insidiously and ineffably felt as 'that sense people know in their bones without being able to articulate' (Phelan, 32, gay/queer).

Shame and masculine 'compensation'

The rarely operationalized construct 'dissatisfaction' inadequately captures how the participants described feeling about their bodies. 'Shame', however, suffused their talk. Much has been written about the shame of sexual difference and its embodied quality (see Sedgwick, 1993). The mechanics of shame can uniquely and disproportionally affect lesbians and gay men and is thought to 'be intrinsic to . . . counternormative desire' (Warner, 2009: 289–290). When one lives in a heteronormative world, one is hailed through some form of the illocutionary performative 'Shame on you' (Crimp, 2002). Indeed, what to do with shame *was* a central question for the participants, many of whom presented the reiterative course of identity consolidation through body-reflexive practices as rooted in either surmounting *or* engaging and assuming shame. Surmounting shame meant turning off gayness/queerness and/or turning on more respectable and less abject forms of male homosexuality. (Engaging and assuming shame is described in the next section.) The *shame/masculine 'compensation'* interpretive repertoire we identified implies that heteronormativity's shaming power can incite a symbolic and material quest to purge oneself of effeminacy, camp, kitsch, the 'lisp' (Jayden, 30, gay), among other stigmatized markers. 'Compensation' involves 'rebuilding the self that shame dismantled' (Halberstam, 2005b: 224) by performing 'normative

masculinities and presenting [oneself] as uncastrated, muscular, whole' (2005b: 228). For many gay participants, shame was positioned as something to work through on their journeys to pride, best accomplished by transforming demoralization into visible privilege (muscularity, masculinity, wealth): 'Oftentimes I may want to kind of tone down my sexual identity to not make . . . the heterosexual community feel uncomfortable by my sexuality, which is affected by self-shaming' (Bruce, 28, gay). The body was located as central to the achievement, maintenance, and/or rupture of compensatory dignity. The participants described and/or occupied four 'companion' subject positions: the *hypertrophic hostage*, the *straight-actor*, the *paragon of pride*, and the *pomo*.

The hypertrophic hostage

This subject position describes those whose 'motivations for getting muscle is because they want to have that dominant appearance' (Antonio, 19, gay). 'A muscular gay man portrays someone who's really bought into those male ideals of muscles' (Bruce, 28, gay), a result of 'broader society [putting] down gay men and [saying] they're the sissies of society'. The hypertrophic hostage finds 'a way of sublimating that [by] building . . . muscles (Luca, 28, queer). Much like the participants in Duncan's (2010a) study of body-reflexive practices among Australian gay men who felt pride in adopting the 'material signifiers of social status including physically idealized physiques' (Duncan, 2007: 339), Antonio 'built [his] muscular arms' and became 'confident', 'successful', no longer 'too gay'. Gay muscles have been said to function as 'exaggerated, arcane, highly defined, elaborately sculpted' (Halperin, 1995: 117) armour against psychic devaluation, but for the two gay participants who occupied this subject position (Antonio, Vito), with muscles came a vague, difficult-to-illustrate sense of 'pride' (Vito, 23, gay). Most participants, however, characterized masculine compensation vis-à-vis muscle-building as a stereotypic reification of hierarchical aesthetics that rewards gay male masculinity for transcending its perceived debasement (e.g. the butch posturing 'beauty' or 'trade' is desirable, the old, campy 'queen' is not; Newton, 1972). Although this subject position tended to be denigrated, which the label reflects, our intention is not to join the chorus of majoritarian disapproval of gay male 'body fascism' but rather to highlight how gay muscles might also be interpreted as 'a paradigmatic example of body resistance to moral norms of sexuality and political oppression and discrimination' (Padva, 2014: 49). The gay male gym body can be a number of things: an instrument of heteronormativity's disciplinary regime, a technique of normalization within gay life, *and* a mode of self-preservation that problematizes the visual norms of straight masculinity by advertising itself as an object of desire for other men.

The straight-actor

But, if it can take on the traditionally feminine role of body as object, then the gay male gym body does not always cite hegemonic masculinity. The straight-actor

subject position 'corrects' this 'oversight'. Self-consciousness, vanity, and body-obsession are 'condemned and guarded against at all costs' (Gill et al., 2005: 50) by heterosexual men, so the breadth of compensation here is not limited to morphological masculinity. 'Straight-acting' 'is a shaming term' (Bruce, 28, gay) for a practice that is animated by ignominy: 'it's trying to pass within the heterosexual community', to 'assimilate within the dominant culture' (Ben, 30, queer), to modulate difference, as if to 'say, "I can kick your ass, straight brother. Don't think I'm a limp-wristed faggot"' (Phelan, 32, gay/queer). Bennett (30, gay/queer) directed us to a Reddit subgroup, called Gaybros, and to a related online community, called G0ys, both of which he thought exemplified this subject position. The Gaybros' 'about us' page identified it as 'A place for gay guys and men to get together and talk about, well, guy stuff. Sports, video games, military issues, grilling, knives, gear, working out, gadgets, tech, tv, movies and more. Plus gay stuff' (Gaybros, 2012). These online communities position 'gay stuff', including 'gender-bending, x-dressing [and] playing the female role' (G0ys, 2013), as 'dirty, degrading & damn-un-masculine' affectations. Only if gender nonconforming artifice is jettisoned will the gaybro's and g0y's 'natural', 'instinctive' maleness/normality be revealed. The straight-actor embodies this 'rejection of previous, abject, supposedly self-hating forms of . . . gay male behavior' (Halperin, 2012: 28). The notion of 'acting' and the appropriation of white masculine archetypes (see Ward, 2008) implies the use of 'straight aesthetics' (Connell, 2005), and indeed the participants characterized straight-acting as the 'covering' of gay/queer aesthetics: 'He covers the lisp or any of those effeminate hand gestures or a swish. He wouldn't worry about plucking his eyebrows or tweezing things or the details of whatever it may be, like manicures and pedicures' (Jayden, 30, gay). The straight-actor's body-reflexive practices turn off cosmetic (tweezed brows), somatic (lisping speech, limp wrist, swishy walk), and moral effeminacy (immoderation, frivolity). Those who occupy this subject position attempt to 'live out a gay life and have [sex with men] without giving up anything about the straight life' (Ben), leaving unquestioned heteronormativity's 'covering' demands.

The paragon of pride

Shame, the participants suggested, is most often managed not by muscles or masculine mimesis: this subject position is distinguished by its widespread 'ideological' mode of sexual aesthetics (Bridges, 2014), which hews to integrationist identity politics by locating pride in the image of normative professional-managerial whiteness (see Sender, 2003). In seeking to cement gay men as a model minority, the paragon of pride considers its entire habitus as integral to the 'reflexive project' of respectable gay male identity: what one does or earns with one's body, wears on one's body, the politics one promulgates through one's body are all involved in staking one's 'successful claim to authority' (Connell, 2005: 77). "'*Sameness*," rather than "equality in difference"' (Richardson, 2004: 391) is emphasized: the paragon of pride professes emancipation from immoderate queerness by espousing

the values of 'ordinary' citizens. Some gay participants endorsed this subject position as a healthy, mature way to surmount stigma:

> Interviewer: What are you seeking to present in the way you dress?
> Reid (26, gay): I guess the look that I don't worry about money, that I'm comfortable, that I've got money that I live a lifestyle that I'm not working very hard that I've got money to spend on clothing and I do care, I guess, about what I look like.

Reid's self-presentation is not limited to adornment: he and his friends are 'not the type who go out and do a bunch of drugs, [they] don't go out a lot. [They're] the ''preppier'' ones, [they've] all been through university, all working on getting careers and building [themselves]'. By 'working hard' and 'being smart', Reid has been able to place himself within a 'more respectable gay community', solidifying his '100% comfort in being gay'. His 'endorsement' recalls Western (Torontonian) gay and lesbian civil rights politics in the new millennium, which has delimited the contours of 'gay equality' through a 'homonormative' (Duggan, 2003) capitulation to the demands of neoliberal governance:

> [Y]ou're the representative of gay people everywhere. All it takes is one bad interaction with someone who's gay to change [a straight person's] perception negatively for the rest of their life. So, to me being a 'good gay' essentially means that you're aware that you're a representative of the entire community. (Antonio, 19, gay)

Being a 'good gay' means publicly disavowing 'negative gay stereotypes' (Reid): Toronto's gay Millennials are 'now truly proud' (Jayden, 30, gay), because '[they're] all becoming a bit more down-to-earth' as a result of having 'earned' certain rights (marriage, adoption, military service):

> Experiences of pain and persecution for being gay – it's something they're channelling into being really professional and making peace with the system, through working for the right kinds of corporations or having a kind of politics that's okay with being gay but also reinforces dominant power structures. (Gerhard, 24, gay/queer)

For Skylar (30, queer), assertions like Jayden's are dubious: what about 'uncontained sexual bodies', 'class-related bodies', 'disabled bodies', and other failing bodies that cannot or wilfully do not 'function' appropriately, engage in capitalism, or fit neoliberal directives of proper discursive practice?

The pomo

In the post-gay equality world that Jayden, Reid, and others described (and Gerhard, Skylar, and others problematized), gay men have been 'liberated' from the need to identify with gay culture and related political projects and are as a result free to be 'genuinely' themselves (i.e. 'post-modern' post-gays).

An increasing number of young gay men, some participants suggested, 'are striving to just fit right in, blend right in . . . They just want to be like everyone else. They don't really want to stand out' (Bennett, 30, gay/queer), because they 'feel every opportunity has become more available to [them] to do what would be available for any heterosexual person or couple' (Jayden). In Toronto, Maks (22, gay) leads 'a great young equal rights lifestyle', which means he '[doesn't] see being gay as the pinnacle of [his] existence'. He '[doesn't] feel like [he has] to wear [his] sexual orientation on [his] sleeve and [he feels] pride about distinguishing [himself] from what people might consider the stereotypical gay'. Brock (24, gay) '[doesn't] want to be defined by [his] sexuality', so he '[doesn't] put out any "indicators."' Antonio (19, gay) is 'secure with [himself]' and refuses to 'change who [he] really [is]', so he '[doesn't] feel the need to push [his] sexuality on people'. Authenticity was a central concern for these participants, and many situated themselves as empowered, freely choosing agents whose homosexuality barely registers in their daily lives. Occupying the pomo subject position means unshackling oneself from 'pigeonholing' labels that 'represent the activist labors of previous generations that brought us to the brink of "liberation" in the first place' (Halberstam, 2005a: 19). As with the straight-actor subject position, body-reflexive practices work to secure homosexuality's erasure, but here not putting 'out any indicators' means making apparent one's individual liberty and autonomous rationality. Queer symbols or icons are occasionally seized but only if emptied of their political significance as a badge of post-gay 'transgressive exceptionalism' (2005a: 24), which works to consolidate oneself as 'hip' and 'unique' while exempting oneself from the social disqualification that initially fuelled those cultural practices. The pomo reflects 'institutionalized individualism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), a characteristic of liberal democratic societies whereby 'becoming an individual' is shaped, sustained, and managed by a 'norm of autonomy' (Rose, 1998: 97) according to which the subject understands itself as the consequence of its own unconstrained construction.

Embodied queer resistances

The prevailing theoretical models rarely consider those gay men who have not '[developed] a negative body image issue as a result of . . . internalized shame' (Kimmel and Mahalik, 2005: 1185). Not all gay men internalize shame nor seek only to surmount it. If power is exercised not always as an asymmetrical, agonistic set of force relations, as Foucault initially offered, but also through various non-dominating techniques and apparatuses, then resistance can be a positive action on its own terms – a modification of action by action that might 'promote new forms of subjectivity' (Foucault, 1982: 785). Although always the effect of a prior power, the subject may 'choose' among a variety of available discursive practices in order to subvert them. This is 'the recalcitrance of the will [of the subject]' (1982: 790) who struggles against the compulsory system of cultural tutelage through which body-reflexive practices are mobilized. Following Butler (1997), we understand

resistance as autonomy through heteronomy. Embodied queer resistances display this recalcitrant will through their engagement and assumption of shame. We have named them 'queer' not to insinuate that only the queer-identified participants spoke about resisting heteronormativity but rather to draw connections to a larger queer project that encourages and celebrates turning on gayness/queerness, especially in its abject forms, so that 'those hegemonic social structures by which certain subjects are rendered ''normal'' and ''natural'' through the production of ''perverse'' and ''pathological'' others' (Eng et al., 2005: 3) might be destabilized. Embodied queer resistances keep gay shame circulating as an 'affective economy' (Ahmed, 2004) that coheres 'collectivities of the shamed' (Crimp, 2002: 66) and adheres the shame-prone to the hetero- and homonormative majority through resilient performances that disturb the social order by bringing 'counterpublics into a kind of public co-presence' (Warner, 2009: 295).

The division between surmounting or engaging and assuming shame was not cut-and-dried. Although those who tended to occupy the paragon of pride and pomo subject positions largely repudiated what they considered to be shameful gay stereotypes, shame's effects did not seem to follow a bifurcated route. The same participant could endorse compensation *and* resistance such that the subject positions detailed in this article might operate as alternative, mutually inclusive modes of 'becoming'. We focus here on the gay and/or queer-identified participants for whom engaging and assuming shame represented a deliberately non-normative, queer way of life. Bennett's (30, gay/queer) 'gay' self-identification connotes less his sexual orientation than '[his] claiming of a gay identity [he] had to elect to be, a culture [he] had to make a conscious step to enter'. This culture, which he later referred to as 'queer culture', has 'shown [him] how to be unapologetic . . . embracing of the quote unquote freak inside [him]'. Throughout his early 20s, he weight-lifted 'like crazy, but . . . for the wrong reasons' (i.e. validation from straight-acting gay men). He decided to 'stop caring' after an illness made it difficult to keep up, and it was around this time when he began 'hanging out with queers that [he] had things in common with', specifically those who 'relished not fitting into any perceived cultural norm'. They 'didn't give a fuck quite frankly', and their irreverence 'moved [him] to find the same thing for [himself]'. Bennett no longer 'makes up for [his] quote unquote gay mannerisms or affectations' and now embraces 'existing outside the norm'. He uses his body to express the queer aspects of his sexual identity through 'aesthetic choices', such as his Harvey Milk tattoo, rainbow bracelet, combat boots, and shaved head. This 'iconography is powerful', because it is 'rooted more in expression and . . . trying to communicate something, like a way of seeing the world that is resistant'. Bennett's talk was suggestive of a process of counter-acculturation whereby one's 'queer way of feeling' (Halperin, 2012: 12) is corporealized through dissident modes of relating to cultural forms, which works to dismantle the subjectifying structures that once dictated how Bennett should appear as gay. He would rather invent new modes of relating and affective virtualities than 'work through' shame in accordance with existing social configurations.

Several participants, including some gay-identified ones, talked about queer bodies as if they do not take well to normalizing subjectification:

> If you're looking at conservative responses to Pride and things like that then [it's] about people who don't control their bodies . . . people who refuse to control their bodies. I think we talked earlier about violently policing masculinity and how people who are most violently policed are those who aren't obeying. (Skylar, 31, queer)

Skylar's queer identification 'has always been about that oblique angle, about refusal of the obligatory – the politicization of sexuality'. For him, 'doing queer' means not monitoring borders but rather confounding established boundaries between feminine and masculine, abnormal and normal:

> I think the unruly body makes people feel uncomfortable. And the body that cannot be contained. And I think that queer sexuality, with its culture of refusal, refuses the containment of the body. And so I think if we treat [sexual identity] as a biological function, like race, then it becomes an agreement to sort of be ruled, and it's going with a neoliberal agenda. And I think that queerness is refusal of that ruling, it means that we're talking more about the body that cannot be controlled.

Through various 'unruly' actions, performed daily in a social landscape simultaneously blind and hostile to difference, embodied queer resistances exact 'counter-hegemonic violence' (Caserio et al., 2006: 824) against the regulatory function of naturalized identity categories and in doing so depathologize 'negative' affects, such as shame, and nurture shifting affinity and solidarity among 'shameful' forms of body styling and ways of dressing, talking, walking, becoming.

Conclusions

Mainstream social psychological body image research's gay male body dissatisfaction imperative should not be treated as irrefutable evidence that dissatisfaction, disorder, or disturbance are essential features of some universal and transhistorical gay men's experience. The interiorized and totalized theoretical models present gay men as proxy women: both are 'naturally' concerned with appearance as well as subject to male sexual interest and therefore inherently susceptible to self-objectification. Intrapersonal deficits are centralized, power arrangements in society downplayed. Can gay men be so easily retrofitted into pre-existing accounts of body image that are marred by the patina of biological essentialism and its laws of heterosexual attraction or else take 'woman' as their ontologically homogenous category of analysis? What of the systematic quality of homosexual marginalization as well as the immense sociohistorical diversity of male homosexuality? Situating this article within a CP perspective, we relied on the voices of 19 gay/queer participants in order to explore the boundaries of psychology's pathologizing

determinism: they expressed beliefs that problematize the models' psychologized formulations of gay male body image, underscoring the need within psychology for models that theorize beyond the internal machinations of an ostensibly body-obsessed, self-harming 'community' and instead foreground how gay men develop individual, embodied understandings of sexual and gender identity *through* myriad 'technologies' or discursive practices.

The materiality of the participants' bodies mattered not as templates for homosexuality but rather as citations of fluid, historically contingent configurations of practices deemed gay and/or queer. Setting aside the mainstream constructs and models opens analysis to the capacious range of knowledges implied by the term 'body image'. All participants were cognizant of the body's communicative and symbolic functions: their talk echoed what some queer theorists have referred to as a kind of 'practical social reflection' (Warner, 1999: 6) that is instilled by 'the ideological weight of normality' (Halperin, 2012: 454). The participants' body-reflexive practices exceeded the bounds of dis/satisfaction, suggesting how the shame and stigma of sexual difference can be variously manoeuvred, conceded, and contested. We found evidence of 'the ''strategies of resistance'' that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals may employ to counter hegemonic messages about the body' (Morrison and McCutcheon, 2011: 219) in the queer and occasionally gay participants' willingness to reject compensation through embodied queer resistances. For these participants, queerness meant engaging in 'coalition-oriented politics' (Gerhard), characterized by a broad-spectrum 'will' to engage and assume shame. They understood these resistances as corporeal assemblages with moral bonds grounded not in a shared 'ethnic' identity but subsumed under an undifferentiated sign and unified by a sensibility that flouts 'normative conventions of ''appropriate'' bodily practices' (Puar, 2007: 221), especially in hetero- and homonormative social life.

Although the participants were of diverse backgrounds and countries of origin, less than one fifth were of colour, so the pluralized account of gay/queer male embodiment we have organized risks some degree of homogenization. Elsewhere we have detailed the participants' talk about the racialization of mainstream gay tastes (Vasilovsky, 2014), yet the prominence for some of normalizing shame by making privilege visible might be an artefact of the whiteness of our sample. The identity politics of white gay men has historically remained inside of the subject, remaking its body-self in the image of pride, while obscuring more radical agendas that have advocated turning rebellious instincts outward, toward straight culture (Halberstam, 2005b). How differently might shame/masculine 'compensation' or embodied queer resistances manifest among participants with differently intersecting identities, if at all? Furthermore, many participants were well educated and able to speak to queer issues: How might less educated and/or rural gays/queers contend with heteronormativity, and might their body-reflexive practices be better examined through more 'naturalistic' methods?

We noticed a tendency among certain gay participants to interpret queer as an apolitical umbrella term for those whose individuality simply cannot be captured by

the more familiar labels. When, then, does queer epistemology become indistinguishable from neoliberal individualism marketed as queer transgression? Many queer participants described how 'the risk of renormalization is persistently there' (Butler, 1997: 93), so embodied queer resistances should not be taken as a simple antidote to heteronormativity. The divergent affective pulls we have described are all inculcated through the body over time and reflect the provisional shape or history of a subject's multiple, shifting, sometimes simultaneous positionings within a psychosocial matrix, which renders their innumerable permutations never just the result of rational choice. Our article clarifies *how* these pulls might inspire conformity or cohere confrontation but not necessarily *why*, in recounting their lived experience, similarly situated individuals adopt subject positions with such opposing political attachments. Why are some bodies monitored where others endure, as Skylar suggested, 'uncontained'? Psychosocial studies (see Frosh, 2003), a recent CP development that attends to both the social and psychodynamic dimensions of subjectivity, may prove useful in explicating 'the agentic struggles of individual subjects' (Frosh et al., 2003: 41) *including* the affective, intersubjectively constituted, multilayered, dynamically inflected mechanisms 'generated by this struggle and generative of its consequences' (2003: 41). These future directions will necessitate reconceiving gay/queer bodies not as objects or containers of essentially dissatisfied 'selves', but as becomings that 'do', produce, and sometimes resist.

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Note

1. The meta-analysis is flawed, in part, because it included studies (14 unpublished) that, in addition to several other statistical violations and/or recruitment biases, adjusted data downward in order to achieve statistical significance (see Kane, 2010).

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