

Imagining a Post-Intentional Phenomenology of Cisnormativity: A Philosophical Inquiry

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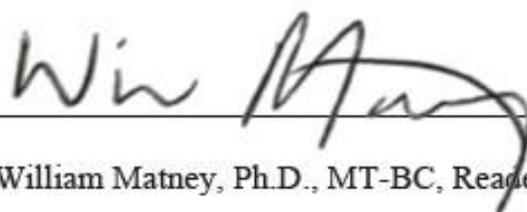
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Abstract

My original plan for this thesis project was to conduct a phenomenological study that focuses on how cisnormativity influences and emerges through a clinician's development of micro-skills, especially those who are transgender, Two Spirit, and Intersex or otherwise non-conforming to the colonial gender paradigm (TTSI+) (Lugones, 2007). However, I struggled to find any phenomenological or clinical consideration of cisnormativity as a phenomenon, and it is rarely articulated as a system immersed in white supremacist bio-essentialism. So, this thesis is a philosophical inquiry that is grounded in Vagle's post-intentional phenomenological (PIP) paradigm (2018). This inquiry details: 1) how the PIP paradigm may nurture more nuanced investigation of bio-essentialist systems of oppression, 2) how critical phenomenological and post-structural concepts in may be utilized to attend to cisnormativity as a phenomenon that is a part of the *imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy* (hooks, 1997; Yancy & hooks, 2015), 3) the productions and provocations of cisnormativity that emerged through my research process, 4) how these findings connect to current music therapy and related care work literature, and 5) what research project ideas have emerged for future study. Overall, I assert cisnormativity affects everyone, not just TTSI+ people. It is urgently important to slow down and open up to ways cisheteropatriarchy emerges through our habits, through text, and through theoretical frameworks, and to ways we may retroactively and proactively shift these dynamics. I hope my work enables all to nurture their reflexivity and resistance to bio-essentialist oppression through attending to relationships and holding consideration for the more-than-visual.

Keywords: cisnormativity, cissexism, cisheteropatriarchy, white supremacy, LGBTQIA+, bio-essentialism, post-intentional phenomenology, music therapy, counseling, internalized oppression, abolition, anti-oppressive practice.

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All of this would not have been possible without the support from, and experience cultivated alongside, my chosen family, which includes a blend of people who are bound to me by biological, communal, and professional ties. So much of my graduate work has focused on closing the chasm that emerged between my personal and professional self. In that journey, I've realized that the most invaluable aspects of my knowledge are fundamentally connected to what I learned through communal relationships in the varied Worlds through which I travel.

Lastly, I acknowledge the indigenous stewards of the Lands I have lived within and currently live within as a settler-colonial occupier: the Coahuiltecan, the Lipan Apache, the Tonkawa, the Comanche, the Wichita, the Caddo, and the Cherokee peoples; the Quinnapiac, the Golden Hill Paugassett, and the Schaghticoke peoples. Land acknowledgements are not an ending but a beginning towards disrupting the false legitimacy of settler-colonial structures and ultimately re-establishing indigenous sovereignty. We are all undoubtedly reliant upon the irrefutable relationship between the Land and their indigenous stewards. My work and future life trajectory is invested in and dependent upon the dissolution of international settler-colonial states and the sovereignty of indigenous people worldwide.

Table of Contents

Abstract..... iii

Acknowledgments..... iv

Table of Contentsv

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: How Did I Get Here?..... 1

 Phenomenological Paradigms.....5

 Husserl’s Transcendental Philosophy (30k)6

 Heidegger Ontological Philosophy (30k) 10

 What is the Difference Between Classical and Critical Phenomenology 12

 Beyond the Husserl and Heidegger Binary..... 15

 Brief Introductions to Philosophers Integral to Foundations of Critical Phenomenology.17

 Emerging Phenomenological Paradigms 18

 Vagle’s Post-Intentional Phenomenology..... 20

 Conclusion: Preparing to Dive into Concepts..... 32

Chapter 1.5: My Working Post–Reflexion Statement35

 My Roles, Assumptions, Beliefs, Perspectives, and Background35

 What Frames my Beliefs & Perceptions, What Shocks Me, and What are my ‘Bottom Lines’?..... 36

 What do I Hope Will Become Through a Post-Phenomenology of Cisnormativity?..... 42

Chapter 2: What Critical Phenomenological Concepts Inform a Phenomenology of Cisnormativity ?.....45

Being-in-Itself, Being-for-Itself, Being-for-Others, and the Zone of Non-Being45

 Immanence & Transcendence..... 46

The Look / The Gaze 49

 Time / Temporality 58

Horizons..... 59

 Racialized Time / *The Historico-Cultural Matrix/Schema* 62

 Imaginaris..... 76

The Social Imaginary..... 76

Controlling Images 77

Epistemic Ignorance/Knowledge 80

Bad Faith 82

Epistemic Resistance..... 90

 Phenomenological Conceptualization of Cisnormativity 93

Running Head: IMAGINING A P-I PHENOMENOLOGY OF CISNORMATIVITY	vi
Chapter 3: What are Some Emerging Productions & Provocations of Cisnormativity?	97
Historico-Cultural Schemas of Cisnormativity	98
Emerging Imagery & Horizons.....	107
<i>Durée</i> , Habits of Oppression, and Violence Upon Intersubjectivity	111
Productions	116
<i>The Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchal Gaze</i>	116
Epistemic Injustice – De-Humanization	122
Colonial <i>Durée</i> – the Mythology of Binary Sex & Gender Socialization	130
Gaps in Care Work Literature – The Momentum of White Supremacist Bio- Essentialism	147
Provocations.....	158
<i>World-Travelling</i> : Epistemic Ignorance/Knowledge/Resistance.....	159
<i>Curdling</i> the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchal Gaze	161
Chapter 4: How Does This Connect to Scholarship Within Care Work, Especially Music Therapy?	163
Becoming <i>Through</i> (Therapeutic) Relationships.....	163
Application of Anti-Oppressive Concepts in Care Work Literature	167
Application of Phenomenological or Post-Structural Concepts in Music Therapy Literature.....	170
Brief overview of Phenomenological Research in Music Therapy	172
Imaging a Post-Intentional Phenomenology (of Cisnormativity) through Care Work Research.....	175
Post-Intentional Phenomenological Literature Reviews.....	179
Participatory Action Post-Intentional Phenomenology Projects.....	181
Peer Supervision Groups for Multicultural Reflexivity Development	188
Projects Illuminating TTSI+ People’s Experiences of the MIC	190
Arts-Based Ways of Gathering, Generating, and Analyzing Material	192
End of a Beginning	194
References.....	196
Appendix A.....	235

Chapter 1: How Did I Get Here?

When I began my graduate studies in 2019, I was on the verge of leaving the music therapy profession. In 2018, I made the decision to leave my work as a music therapist in order to physically transition in a way that would be more sustainable for my well-being. Through my undergraduate experience and into my early professional years, I had learned to create a chasm between my personal life and my “professional” life. In my personal life, I was out as trans & nonbinary, called by my name, in relationship to people who witnessed my wholeness. I was developing my understanding of cisheteropatriarchy through relationships with abolitionists and queer activists, and through reading materialist texts. In work, academic, or peer professional settings, I was misgendered, at best, or met with confusion and hostility, at worst. I was constantly shifting between multiple institutional environments and navigating superficial relationships to hundreds of burnt-out staff members. I found clinical and peer relationships to be lacking adequate space to discuss interpersonal dynamics I was co-forming between clients and clinical peers, and I found it difficult to be truly authentic with colleagues about how I was feeling in the midst of ever-growing cissexist legislation in my home state of so-called Texas (Klibanoff, 2022) and throughout these so-called United States (Trans Legislation Tracker).¹

I had finished my undergraduate degree on the precipice of the Marriage Equality Act. While there was emerging space for enabled non-heterosexual people to be “out,” I found myself being assumed as “just a lesbian who did not know it yet,” and my invitations to use my correct pronouns were often met with skepticism or willful ignorance. I remember being called

¹ I refer to colonial nation-states as “so-called” to unsettle notions that these names are the first and only names for Indigenous lands. For example: “In the present day, these so-called United States house 574 recognized tribes (along with numerous unrecognized tribes), yet many settlers continue to view Native Americans as nonexistent or extinct” (Harper, 2022)

unreasonable by a professor in ethics class for stipulating it is within critical feminist ethics to expand our understanding of gender past the binary opposition of man/woman. The professor's reasoning for disagreeing with the relevance of my argument was based on how the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) had "already" established equity by creating a box for "transgender" under the "gender [read: assigned sex]" category of its professional roster. Another professor refused to call me and other friends by our names until we had legally changed them. I had begun to learn to functionally disassociate from my physical body at work to the point where I felt like a walking consciousness; I was just going through the motions, putting off transitioning because I didn't know how I would be able to continue being a music therapist if I did. After two years of that, I decided to quit my music therapy job and transition within a more "stable" work environment that did not involve developing clinical relationships. When I was honest with my boss about why I was doing so, she talked to me about her assumed-cis gay friends who went through "the same challenges." I just smiled and feigned understanding in order to get through that conversation. I got a para-professional office job. It felt like both a blessing and a curse to only have to drive to an office everyday, only work for 8 hours, and be paid as a full-time employee, when compared to the music therapy "gig" work I had grown accustomed to.

I chose my current graduate program because I haphazardly attended a thesis presentation on microaggressions completed by an SRU graduate. It was the first time I had witnessed an academic program welcoming critical conversations about gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability. I decided to enroll. As I moved through my graduate studies, I felt both too far ahead and too far behind. The literature I was reading was thoroughly challenging my internalized white supremacist assumptions and beliefs, and I slowly began to connect the historical origins of white supremacy with the systems of anti-Blackness, ableism, classism, and cisheteropatriarchy.

However, I was feeling frustrated by the lack of nuance when addressing cissexism and cisnormativity² in clinical, educational, and research settings. Each article and chapter I read was marked up with notes; each discussion board felt like I was writing a textbook of critiques and imagining alternatives. Two years in, I was feeling spread thin by the consistent encounters with cisnormativity that continued to go unacknowledged or directly addressed in literature, which were compounding with the ever-developing political, economic, and environmental crises.

My professor/advisor/mentor encouraged me to pursue phenomenological concepts and research paradigms³ as a way to funnel this frustration into a process that could shift what I was noticing for the better. I began with *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (Weiss et al., 2020). This book opened me up to the philosophical basis as well as the generative foci of critical phenomenological work, and it also was a glaring representation of the phenomenon known (yet not written/known/given space) as cisnormativity. When I opened the table of contents, I saw many

² The Trans Language Primer defines cissexism as “a system of oppression that results in the degradation, isolation, stigmatization, and marginalization of transgender people and the wider trans+ community. It is pervasive in many cultures and includes such things as biological essentialism, [trans-exclusionary ideology], and assuming all people are cisgender and endosex [experience dyadic sex embodiment] until told otherwise” (n.d.). They define cisnormativity as “the normalizing of being cisgender, regarding transgender as an abnormality. This concept applies to behaviors as well as bodies” (n.d.). One can refer to the Trans Language Primer for more definitions throughout this thesis and beyond, as this resource is continuously maintained by transgender people living in varied intersectional contexts. For my thesis, I will focus more so on cisnormativity as this is the normative ideology which catalyzes acts of cissexism. Additionally, I have come to discuss patriarchal dynamics with the term *cishetsexism* (instead of only “sexism”), as it casts a broader light across the varied people who experience varied aspects of cisheteropatriarchy. As I will discuss more in chapter three, I agree with Price (2021) when he argues that it is more accurate to say we *all* are socialized by cishetsexism, though each of us experience it in nuanced ways based on our nuanced context.

³ Broadly, a paradigm is understood to be a grouping of beliefs/values/assumptions in the core of a culture or practice which all individuals in the group are expected to embody. In research, a paradigm encapsulates a thread of research practice that connects specific axiological (ethical), epistemological (ways of identifying what is known), ontological (what is known) and methodological (how we collect material based on what is known & how we know it is what we say it is) together (Horgan, 2012; Matney, 2019, p. 7, 23). While I understand phenomenological research to share an axiological imperative to get Western thought out of what Sokolowski (2000) refers to as it’s *egocentric predicament*, namely Cartesian mind-body dualism, there are many phenomenological research paradigms that seek to address this ethical imperative with divergent ways of knowing phenomena, ways of identifying phenomena, and ways of collecting and analyzing phenomenological material (Vagle, 2018, p. 22; van Manen, 2014).

themes emerging regarding racism, anti-Blackness, and colonialism. I saw a chapter on compulsory ableism, a few chapters about queerness, and one chapter on heteronormativity. Towards the end of the table, the 48th chapter was titled “trans phenomena.” I felt my heart sink, a feeling I have come to know as familiar. As I read the heteronormativity chapter, I gleaned that scholars feel it adequate to discuss gender binary essentialism through the lens of heteronormativity, even when the chapter itself makes cisnormative assumptions and arguments. While I am not expertly versed in the nuanced worlds of phenomenological research, this book offered me a glimpse into those worlds. I felt drawn to concepts that describe how systems of oppression limit one’s intersubjectivity (Ngo, 2015; Yancy, 2020) and attend to epistemological ignorance (Mills, 2020) and resistance (Medina, 2011), habit (Ngo, 2015; Al-Saji, 2014; Fielding, 2020; Sullivan, 2020), temporality (Al-Saji, 2020; Olkowski, 2020), colonization (Lugones, 2007, 2010; Mendieta, 2020), and imaginaries (Gatens, 2020). It also offered an emergence of how widely cisnormativity has been internalized yet rarely addressed, which I will take time to discuss later in more detail.

My experience of research, educational, and supervisory texts within “helping” professions (which I will refer to from here on as “care work”) regarding cisnormativity is similar. Over the past few decades, there have been more attempts to address anti-Blackness and colonization, supported by over a century of scholarship and critical writings by and from colonized people. Many of these works, within the fields of education, counseling, music therapy, and psychotherapy in particular, are still not integrated into “general” literature that informs how these fields are taught, trained, and professionally socialized. Most staples of these professions overtly prioritize colonial and capitalist ways of living/working, and within this is the implicit prioritization of

white-enough⁴ behavioral values. Similarly, there are increasing attempts to shed heteronormative ideas from clinical and/or pedagogical theories. While homosexuality is no longer pathologized by the American Psychological Association (APA), the ideology that instigated this pathologization still informs professional decision making and value judgements. Even worse, both the pathologization of non-heterosexuality *and* many attempts to thwart and flee from it, continue to sediment cisnormative and ableist bio-essentialist logics. All of these patterns were made clearer to me as I became familiar with critical phenomenological concepts and processes, most of which crossed over with abolitionist literature, that uncover the medical industrial complex as a product of classism, capitalism, colonization, and policing (Page et al., 2021). More specific discussion of this will occur in chapters two and three.

Phenomenological Paradigms

After I read most of the chapters in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (Weiss et al., 2020), I wondered *how* these concepts have been studied and explicated with increasing nuance. Before reading, my understanding of phenomenology was fragmented. My primary understanding was of methods of data analysis I had seen utilized in social science research, which typically involved hermeneutics. I knew about the philosophical imperative to bracket one's presuppositions as a way of moving from the natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude (Davis, 2020, pp. 4–5), but I struggled with how this could be implemented when researching a phenomenon that is informed by personal experience. Weiss et al.'s text introduced applications of different threads of phenomenological philosophy. As I read, I began to understand how certain philosophies extended to certain concepts. The concepts to which I was most drawn seemed most influenced by Merleau-Ponty and Fanon, who were both described as transforming/opening up

⁴ As I will discuss in chapter three, most behavioral “norms” are critiqued as white supremacist myths that prioritize gender binary (dis)embodiment, heterosexuality, neurotypicality, and upper-class social cues (see Carter, 2017).

classical and existential phenomenology into a more critical practice. I left those chapters feeling curious as to how each movement in phenomenological philosophy compared to one another in their applications of methodology and methods of data gathering and analysis.

I moved on to reading Vagle's *Crafting Phenomenological Research* (2018). While I have gleaned information about the context of phenomenological philosophy, methodology, and methods from various texts, reading Vagle's work has been instrumental in synthesizing and consolidating my understanding. The remainder of this chapter relies on his work, as well as other sources he has and has not listed. I recognize this is a limitation to arguments I make in this thesis, and I do intend to immerse myself in more phenomenological texts after I complete this work. In his work, Vagle uses a topographic metaphor to describe the relationship between phenomenological philosophy (viewing from "30k feet"), methodologies (viewing from "10k feet"), and methods (viewing from "on the ground") (p. 5). I will utilize this metaphor throughout because it provides a structure that facilitates discussion of both paradigms within phenomenology and critiques of applications of phenomenological concepts in social science literature.

Husserl's Transcendental philosophy (30k)

The beginnings of Western phenomenological philosophy and discipline are credited to Husserl, however, it is argued that phenomenology has technically been practiced for centuries outside of Western knowledge creation without being specifically named as such (Smith, 2016, p. 14).⁵ Husserl's phenomenological philosophy emerged from (a) his studies under Brentano (Jackson, 2016; Morrison, 1970), (b) his critiques of Descartes' writings, and (c) his deep concern with the ways Cartesian ideas had influenced development of Western knowledge (re)creation,

⁵ This is a pattern identified throughout Western knowledge creation that I will continue to discuss throughout.

which heavily influenced cultural norms of the West⁶. Husserl, in direct opposition with the Cartesian ideology of “mind-body/world dualism,” “emphasiz[ed] our consciousness is always ‘of’ something” (Husserl, 1970 [1954], p. 128). He further indicated consciousness is not a thing *outside* of the world but a relationship *with* the world, an intention toward grasping the world/objects around us. He constructed consciousness as a relational practice that he called *intentionality* (p. 128). Vagle clarifies: “He did not want consciousness and intentionality to be synonymous with Cartesian reason. He did not want us to think or cognate our intentional relation with the world, but to slow down and experience our intending” (2018, p. 7). Intentionality is a guiding concept that philosophers continue to complexify. Further, understandings of intentionality seem fundamental to the degrees of difference between specific phenomenological paradigms, each with specific philosophical understandings (30k), methodologies (10k) and ways of utilizing methods for data collection and analysis (on the ground).

Husserl argued that we do not *reason* with phenomena but *live* them. To counter Positivist philosophy, he introduces the concept of a lifeworld: “the world of human experience...where our living and experiencing phenomena take place. [It] changes, and is based on perspective, time, space, relationships, and so on” (as summarized by Vagle, 2018, p. 7). Further, Husserl proposed phenomena could be described by one’s perspective of it in their lifeworld. Vagle identifies this philosophy and subsequent methodologies (developed by varied philosophers) as epistemologically focused. In his [translated] words, a phenomenon is “the ‘thing [in] itself’, in immediate presence, or in memory” (Husserl, 1970 [1954], p. 128). This position sprung out of his contention with the way both natural and human phenomena were being studied in the same,

⁶ Influenced by Cartesian philosophy, Comte initiated positivism and created the field of social science with the broad intention to “discover [and] eliminate moral evils” (Landow & Everett, 2014). This enabled the later study of “criminality,” a process unjustly utilized to substantiate essentialist claims that ‘biological’ factors predisposed people to ‘unhealthy’ and/or ‘criminal’ behavior (Dulisse, 2022).

positivistic way. Human perception, perspective, etc. were being “treated as ‘removed’ from the phenomena they are in relationship with’ in the name of “objectivity”, which positivists associated with “better science, better methodology, and better results” (Vagle, 2018, p. 8). Husserl argued that natural and human phenomena cannot be studied in such a way that removes/ignores the lifeworld within which these phenomena emerge. He insisted that a phenomenon should not be studied subjectively or objectively, but that it should be lived phenomenologically: “Phenomenology tries to put *together* what Descartes had *severed* – the subjective and the objective” (Vagle, 2018, p. 8; my emphasis).

To Husserl, living and experience take place in an intentional relationship of the expansive space between who Husserl constructs as “the subject” (the human) and the “objects” (everything/everyone outside the human subject). Vagle, like others, describes this by associating it with the preposition “of”, as in “consciousness is always *of* something” (Vagle, 2018, p. 38). While phenomenological study focuses on how the phenomena appear in the intentional relationship between a “subject” and other “objects,” Husserl’s design is argued to situate a singular subject (one’s ego) to be the source of the intentional relation with the world: Subject → Object (Vagle, p. 39). Husserl also believed intentionality could be singularly addressed, and he posited that phenomena contain an *essential core*, or an *essence*, which he sought to identify through the process of phenomenological reduction (Vagle, p. 31). In plain, *essence* is framed as the internal structure of the phenomenon which allows us to recognize the phenomenon as it is, not as something else. Giorgi (2009) utilizes the concept of *invariant structures*⁷, instead of *essence*, to convey that researchers “should instead seek to find and describe the invariant

⁷ Guenther (2020) understands phenomenology to be a practice of “reflecting on the *transcendental structures* that make the lived experience of consciousness possible and meaningful” (p. 11). She later uses the term “quasi-transcendental” phenomena to describe systemically oppressive structures, which tend to be foci of critical phenomenologists’ works (p. 15).

structures of the phenomenon...[suggesting] a good phenomenological description should illuminate the structures of the phenomenon that ‘hold,’ that do not vary over time and across contexts” (Vagle, 2018, p. 13).

To uncover a phenomenon’s essence (or invariant structures), Husserl developed a process of moving from one’s *natural attitude* to the *phenomenological attitude* through the process of phenomenological reduction. The most common method of phenomenological reduction is the process known as *bracketing* to create an *epoche* (Davis, 2020, p. 5). Guenther describes these terms in relation to this process in the following:

[The practice of phenomenological reduction occurs] by bracketing the natural attitude, or the naive assumption that the world exists apart from consciousness, and “reducing” an everyday experience of the world to the basic structures that constitute its meaning and coherence. The purpose of this reduction is not to abstract from the complexity of ordinary experience but rather to lead back (*re-ducere*) from an uncritical absorption in the world toward a rigorous understanding of the conditions for the possibility of any world whatsoever [known as the phenomenological attitude]. (2020, p. 11)

Descriptive Phenomenological Methodology (10k). Many philosophers have generated methodologies that extend Husserl’s paradigm. Vagle broadly refers to both Husserl’s philosophy and subsequent methodologies as Descriptive phenomenology. He primarily cites Giorgi (2009) for developing Husserl’s philosophy, creating his *scientific psychological phenomenology*, but he also identifies Moustakas’s *heuristic and psycho-therapeutic phenomenology* (1994) as a descriptive methodology germane to social science research. Generally, descriptive inquiries begin with moving from one’s natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude through bracketing. Next, one collects phenomenological material that centers a subject’s conscious experience of the

phenomena. Then, one processes the material through a phenomenological reduction to generate the essence of a phenomenon (Vagle, 2018, p. 16). Specific methodological structure (10k) as well as guidelines for methods of gathering and analyzing material associated with Descriptive Phenomenology are delineated by Giorgi (2009) and related texts. It is characteristic of phenomenological methodologies to involve whole-part-whole analyses (Vagle, 2018, pp. 109–116); analyses specific to descriptive Phenomenology are designed to search for invariant structures/essences (p. 16).

Heidegger's Ontological Philosophy (30K)

The following is a brief overview of Heidegger's philosophy from Vagle's perspective (2018). Heidegger was a student of Husserl who departed from Husserl's focus on consciousness, which he critiqued as a recreation of Cartesian egocentrism (Smith, 2016, p. 18). Instead, he believed that phenomena show themselves in the world and that we are always being-in-the-world. Heidegger's phenomenology shifted from Husserl's epistemological perspective (what it is to know – i.e., what is consciousness) to an ontological perspective (what it is to *be* – i.e., how phenomena come to *be in* our lifeworld). Perhaps due to his focus on countering Cartesian philosophy, Husserl centered consciousness in his phenomenology and so inadvertently maintained a Cartesian “primacy of the mind over the world” (Vagle, 2018, p. 9). Out of this critique, Heidegger regards the mind and the world as interconnected. He also critiqued how Husserl positioned language secondary to phenomena, arguing “language is not only the manifestation of a thing: it is the thing itself” (Grondin, 2003, p. 727). Importantly, Vagle briefly notes Heidegger is “believed to be at least sympathetic to the Nazi Party” (2018, p. 9), a fascist political organization which suppressed Husserl's ability to publish his works as a Jewish man⁸.

⁸ While Vagle does not cite works regarding this important political context, contributors to Mitchell and Trawny's work (2017) consider this context in relation to Heidegger's philosophical theories.

Like other philosophers, Vagle conceptualizes ontological phenomenology with the conjunction “in”: “humans *find-themselves-in* states of being” (Vagle, 2018, p. 43). With this shift, consciousness and knowing is de-centered, and notions of the subject are de-stabilized. Instead of considering intentionality as singularly coming “from” the “subject,” intentionality is framed as being in a circular relationship between all subjects and/or other-than-human “objects” (Vagle, pp. 41–43). In particular, he posited meanings are “conceived *in* being and language” and are constantly found *in* contextual relations (Vagle, p. 42). So, ontological phenomenological philosophy does not position subjects as the ones who direct phenomena with their conscious mind. Instead, phenomena come *into* being and *in* language as humans intersubjectively interact with one another in the world. Due to the value Heidegger places on language, he “grafted” hermeneutics⁹ to phenomenological methodology, so much so that Vagle argues any craftsperson who decides to not utilize hermeneutic analysis in their research is ultimately limiting themselves to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and related methodologies (Vagle, 2018, p. 42).

Interpretive Phenomenological Methodology (10K). Many have extended Heidegger’s paradigm to generate varied methodologies, all of which Vagle refers to as Interpretive phenomenology (Vagle, 2018, p. 41). Vagle specifically cites van Manen’s *pedagogical phenomenology* (2001) and Gadamer’s *hermeneutic phenomenology* (1975) as developments of Heidegger’s ontological methodology (2002; van Manen, 2014, p. 104). Additionally, he notes Smith et al.’s *interpretive phenomenological analysis* (2009) as a recent development that is germane to social science research. Vagle summarizes that interpretive inquiries would begin with

⁹ Hermeneutics originated as a way of interpreting biblical texts. It developed alongside phenomenology in Europe, expanding into a “theory of understanding,” and Heidegger first applied it to phenomenology. Over time, he is credited with developing the process known as the “hermeneutic circle,” also known as whole-part-whole analysis. This process asserts there is no singular or “true” interpretation, instead that interpretation is a continuous project that needs to consider the context of the text itself. Gadamer developed philosophical hermeneutics and the process of the hermeneutic circle, which influenced the creation of interpretive phenomenologies as well as Reflective Lifeworld Research (Vagle, 2018, p. 15).

moving from one's natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude through bracketing (or through bridling¹⁰). Next, one collects phenomenological material that centers a subject's ontological experience of the phenomenon. Then, one analyzes the material through a double hermeneutic process to generate the layered manifestations/appearances of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018, p. 16). Specific methodological structure (10k) as well as guidelines for methods of gathering and analyzing material associated with interpretive phenomenology are delineated by van Manen (2001) and related texts (Van Manen, 2014). The methods of whole-part-whole analysis specific to interpretive phenomenology are designed to search for manifestations and themes of the phenomenon, not a singular core or essence (Vagle, 2018, pp. 109–116).

What is the Difference Between Classical and Critical Phenomenology?

Guenther remarks that classical phenomenology, which she relates to Husserl's descriptive paradigm, "points us in a critical direction" because it "lights up transcendental structures we rely upon...but routinely fail to acknowledge" (Guenther, 2020, pp. 11–12).¹¹ However, she regards classical phenomenological philosophy as "insufficiently critical" of the ways social and political structures have compounded through time to "permeate, organize, and reproduce the natural attitude" and create *ways* we see or experience not just *what* we see or experience (p. 12). She describes these forces as quasi-transcendental phenomena and aligns them with oppressive structures such as "patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity" (p. 12).¹² While these phenomena are not permanent, congruent across individual or temporal contexts, these forces create norms that can easily go unnoticed but must be bracketed if one is to engage in

¹⁰ Vagle argues there is a "better fit" for the interpretive paradigm than the process of reduction and bracketing (2018, p. 14). He posits that interpreting the meaning of phenomena by attending to our contextual relationships to objects in the world (see Smith, 2016) calls for *reflexivity* and *bridling*, a process created by Dahlberg (2006).

¹¹ Transcendental phenomena are considered absolute (related to emotions like love, fear, etc.) and/or constant forces that exist in the natural world (such as gravity).

¹² I noticed her choice of wording here.

phenomenological research. This is the crux – classical phenomenology¹³ has been operating under the “naive assumption that one could give a rigorous account of consciousness without addressing the contingent social structures that normalize and naturalize power relations” (p. 12). Guenther relates critical phenomenology to Audre Lorde’s understanding of poetry as both “illuminative and transformative” (p. 14–15; Lorde, 2007, pp. 36–37). Critical phenomenology not only attends to what is being illuminated in research but also to how the conditions and quality of light shapes, identifies, and transforms what it is illuminating. In conclusion, Guenther asserts critical phenomenology has to be “both a way of doing philosophy and a way of approaching political activism” (p. 15), whereas classical phenomenology is only the former:

As a philosophical practice, critical phenomenology suspends commonsense accounts of reality in order to map and describe the structures that make these accounts possible, to analyze the way they function, and to open up new possibilities for reimagining and reclaiming the commons. It is a way of pulling up traces of a history that is not quite or no longer there - that has been rubbed out or consigned to invisibility - but still shapes the emergence of meaning.

As a political practice, critical phenomenology is a struggle for liberation from the structures that privilege, naturalize, and normalize certain experiences of the world while marginalizing, pathologizing and discrediting others. These structures exist on many levels: social, political, economic, psychological, epistemological, and even ontological.

They are both “out there” in the world, in the documented patterns and examples of hetero-

¹³ While I consider both Husserl and Heidegger’s philosophies to be classical phenomenology, it seems many consider Husserl’s to be classical, Heidegger’s to be the beginning of existential phenomenology, Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s to be existential and the beginnings of critical phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty’s and Fanon’s to be critical phenomenology (though informed by and emerging from existential phenomenology).

patriarchal racist domination, and they are also intrinsic to subjectivity and intersubjectivity, shaping the way we perceive ourselves, others and the world. In other words, they are both patterns that we see when we study something like incarceration rates, and also the patterns *according to which* we see. As a transformative political practice, critical phenomenology must go beyond a description of oppression, developing concrete, less oppressive, and more liberatory ways of Being-in-the-world. In other words, the ultimate goal of critical phenomenology is not just to interpret the world, but also to change it" (pp. 15-16; her italic emphasis; my underlined emphasis).

Guenther relays a that crucial difference between classical and critical phenomenology is how intentionality is understood (2020, p. 12). Classical phenomenologists will consider intentionality an "orientation," or as a one-way vector, going from the "subject" to the "object," which is attributed to Husserl's philosophy (p. 12). Critical phenomenologists will consider intentionality as a "relation," an intersubjective feedback loop between the subject/objects, which is attributed to Merleau-Ponty's philosophies (p. 12). More will be explained about how Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodiment and intentionality inform critical phenomenological philosophy later. Vagle (2018) describes how his Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students understand intentionality to be similar to their understanding of interconnectedness, which reflects Smith's (2016, p. 14) critique that "phenomenology" was most likely practiced for centuries before Western theorists came up with the term and attempted to practice it. Vagle conveys that it is "curious" how Western philosophy has not given "the same primacy" to interconnectedness as cultures of the Global Majority have, pointing to the influence of the Cartesian myth of individualism (2018, p. 29). I would extend this to Guenther's critique of the "naivety" of classical phenomenologists. Cartesian theory is the basis of the scientific and

industrial revolution, all which occurred at the expense of exploited resources and labor through both extractive and settler colonialism¹⁴. Cartesian theory and positivism also provided the basis of “reducing” beings to parts (Feigl, 2022). Positivism enabled Western “scientists” (i.e., eugenicists, sexologists) to define people as human-enough or less-than-human through means that established bio-essentialist systems of racism, cisheterosexism, ableism, and classism, as well as provided a basis for eugenic practices and genocide (Cogdell, 2016). For classical phenomenologists to not recognize this is not necessarily a fault of their own, but it is an indication of how insulated they were from the material realities of people who were not recognized as cis-men, people of the Global Majority, and people who were Othered¹⁵ by capitalism enough to be institutionalized and/or imprisoned. From my perspective, it is an indication of what Sullivan and Tuana (2007) call “epistemological ignorance/knowledge” (p. 154). Ignorance is not due to our lack of knowledge, but a result of how our knowledge has been constructed by power systems and personal experience (what is taught/what is erased by the way information is (de)contextualized). I will tend to these concepts and histories more in the coming chapters.

Beyond the Husserl and Heidegger Binary

Even though phenomenology is an emphatic argument against dualistic thinking, most phenomenological research communities are polarized between descriptive and interpretive camps (Vagle, 2016, p. 11, 44). From my perspective, this ironically mirrors the dichotomous opposition between “objectivist/quantitative” and “constructivist/qualitative” camps within music therapy

¹⁴ Dr. Keene discusses two types of colonialism (Wilbur & Keene, 2019). From her explanation, what differentiates settler colonialism from extractive colonialism is that settler colonialism entails establishing a “new” nation-state and extractive colonialism does not. She frames the U.S., Canada, and New Zealand as examples of settler colonialism, and she frames the centuries of extraction from countries in Africa by Britain or Belgium as examples of extractive colonialism. Shoemaker (2015) lists settler colonialism and extractive colonialism as two of many types of colonialism.

¹⁵ In chapter two, I will discuss how Othering can be understood through a phenomenological lens. However, this term is used widely across disciplines to identify the power relations that influence prejudiced categorization (Akbulut & Razum, 2022).

and, more generally, throughout social science research communities (Matney, 2019, pp. 7–8). I suspect both divides are perhaps influenced by the continuous, historical, and present struggle to grapple in the “ruins” of positivism, colonial-imperialist politics, and their ever-present (re)creations of bio-essentialist frameworks that bedrock the professions within the Medical Industrial Complex (MIC) (Page & Woodland, 2022; Page et al, 2021).

There are many past and present phenomenologist philosophers and craftspeople who seek to transcend the binary opposition between the epistemological Descriptive focus and the ontological Interpretive focus. Davis (2020) identifies Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, and Sartre as existential phenomenologists, as they expanded intentionality from Husserl’s “knower-known,” epistemologically-focused application to an ontologically-focused application, revealing intentionality is also a “being-in-the-world” (p. 4). More simply, existential phenomenologists opened phenomenology up to “how problems of existence relate to those of consciousness” (p. 17). Vagle lists Merleau-Ponty and Sartre as examples of philosophers who expanded beyond the binary dichotomy formed between Husserl and Heidegger (2018, pp. 9–10). These same philosophers, alongside philosophers like Fanon and du Beauvoir, are understood to be integral catalysts for the emergence of critical phenomenology, although Vagle does not utilize a distinction between classical and critical phenomenological theorists/theories/methods/concepts (nor does he reference Fanon or any other philosophers who are foundational to critical race studies). I will describe a brief history of these philosophers now (in chronological order based on year of birth). In chapter two, I will discuss iterations of their phenomenological concepts, which are developed by contemporary philosophers, as they could connect to a phenomenology of cisnormativity. These descriptions will be incomplete, and I encourage all to read more about these people as they are so inspired.

Brief Introductions to Philosophers Integral to Foundations of Critical Phenomenology

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) worked with and between both Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology frameworks and is also credited with ideas that propelled the existentialist movement. Born into affluence, he received classical education aligned with his family's status in French society. His ideas and philosophical agenda shifted substantially in response to fascism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, and conditions which coalesced into World War II and continued to thrive afterwards (Reynolds & Pierre-Jean, 2022). Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was born into French upper-class society and spent most of her life defying expectations placed upon her as someone assigned to womanhood. She and Sartre were non-monogamous lovers and collaborators through their lives. In her lifetime, she was denied the title of philosopher, even while she played a substantial role in the development of concepts that society credited to Sartre alone (Bergoffen & Burke, 2023). While her role in existential phenomenology is flattened and minimized by the dominating cisheteropatriarchal values of Western philosophy, her work provides a grounding upon which many feminist philosophers develop concepts related to experiences of sexism and [cis]heteronormativity¹⁶ (Burke, 2020). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 - 1961) was born in France and met Simone de Beauvoir during his academic studies. After serving in World War II, he formed a more consistent political and intellectual friendship with Sartre and de Beauvoir (Toadvine, 2019). He was "willing to work across many phenomenological perspectives, instead of getting mired in the arguments about which of the phenomenologies is the 'correct' one" (Vagle, 2016, pp. 9-10), and he worked to weave Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and

¹⁶ Burke summarizes that while Beauvoir did not explicitly name the system of heteronormativity, her works can be read as "a description of the operation of a heteronorm intelligibility" (2020, p. 164). I add [cis] to: 1) indicate that her work can also be read to illuminate the operation of cisheteronormativity in the context of French society; and 2) to provide a visual cue that, while heteronormativity is often assumed to include binary gender essentialism, in my experience, applications of heteronormativity ignore and recreate cisheteronormative logics. I will speak more to this in chapter 2.

Saussurian linguistics into phenomenological philosophy. This vantage point seemed to aid his critique and destabilization of the Cartesian theory preserved in existential phenomenological concepts. He also inspired French post-structuralist philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida (Toadvine, 2019). Franz Fanon (1925-1961) was born in Martinique under French colonial rule. He became a psychiatrist as well as one of the most influential anti-colonial theorists of the recent past and present. He drew from and contributed to a varied and wide breadth of literature to address important issues related to bio-essentialist oppressive forces under colonization, and his participation in liberation movements throughout the African continent continued to shift his analysis of anti-Blackness throughout his life (Drabinski, 2019). His influence inside and outside of phenomenology is extensive¹⁷, and Karera contends he is a “founding figure of critical phenomenology” (2020, p. 289).

Emerging Phenomenological Paradigms

The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to “slow down and open up how things are experienced” in someone’s lifeworld (Vagle, 2018, p. 23). It is the study of “how things are being and becoming – not how individuals construct things nor how the mathematical sciences represent things” (Vagle, p. 23). The intention of phenomenological methods is to move outside of the qualitative/quantitative or subjective/objective binary framework and into a framework where living takes place – “in the intentional relationship between the subjective and objective” (Vagle, p. 8). Because the phenomenon, not peoples’ individual understanding or experience of the phenomenon, is the unit of analysis in phenomenological research, Vagle asserts that one must

¹⁷ For example, Fanon’s name appears 212 times in the book *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* even though his work is primarily grounded in more-than-phenomenological disciplines, whereas Sartre, whose work is primarily based in existential phenomenological philosophy, only appears 166 times.

choose a phenomenological paradigm that best suits the phenomenon one intends to study (or, perhaps, intentionally interact with) (p. 17).

Amongst all paradigms, the primary goal is to study “the obvious...in order to potentially help us see and understand things in new ways. To reveal things that have become so ‘normal’ that we do not even notice what might be at work and what might be assumed” (Vagle, 2018, p. 10). van Manen argues that phenomenology is scientific because it is “a systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of its subject matter, our lived experience” (van Manen, 2001, p. 11). The point of phenomenological research is not to create data that can be broadly generalized or quantified. Akin to Guenther’s metaphor for critical phenomenology, van Menen describes reading phenomenological work as similar to reading poetry: “you cannot summarize the poem without losing the meaning” (Vagle, p. 11).

Because there is a vast array of phenomena which emerge in the world in multiple and varied ways, phenomenological research paradigms are always in “a constant state of becoming” (Vagle, 2018, p. 10). While it may be easy to rely on the two most utilized paradigms (descriptive and interpretive), there are many more recent paradigms which destabilize the pattern of descriptive/interpretive dualism, some of which are established and some are still forming.

Vagle mentions Reflective Lifeworld Research (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020) as a more established approach that works across descriptive, interpretive, and other emerging philosophies, centering concepts of “the lifeworld, openness, and reflection” (p. 11). Karen Dahlberg is the philosopher he credits with the concept of *brideling* as an alternative to *bracketing*. Vagle explains Karin Dahlberg’s understanding of the difference between bracketing and bridling: bracketing is “limited in that it seem[s] like a ‘once and for all’ methodological move” (Vagle, 2018, p. 14) that looks *backwards*, while bridling is an ongoing process of “tightening and loosening” the reins on

one's judgements/natural attitude that looks *forwards* (Vagle, p. 14, 73–74; Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2008). The motive for bridling isn't to suspend one's judgements, but "to become much more familiar with one's judgements so they do not compromise one's openness to the phenomenon" (Vagle, p. 14). Vagle aligns this practice with that of reflexivity, which he defines as a process of "consistently examining how one's positionality, perspectives, backgrounds and insights influence all aspects of a study" (Vagle, p. 14). He asserts that this is rarely explicated in Descriptive or Interpretive methodologies, but Reflective Lifeworld Research exemplifies how "modern" phenomenology is becoming a "dance" between reflexivity and reduction (p. 14). Vagle also describes his own developing phenomenological paradigm that he calls Post-Intentional Phenomenology, and the latter half of his book is dedicated to explicating the particular philosophical influences (30k), the emerging methodology (10k), and potential on the ground practices, comparing and contrasting each with the descriptive and interpretive paradigms.

Vagle's Post-Intentional Phenomenology

While Vagle began crafting research within the interpretive paradigm, over time he came to understand intentionality as something more than what the interpretive paradigm asserts (2018, p. 44). Before I describe this paradigm, it would be helpful to summarize the descriptive and interpretive conceptualization of intentionality in order to facilitate the process of differentiating from those paradigms.

Husserl's transcendental/descriptive paradigm structures intentionality with an epistemological focus, meaning one may study phenomena by understanding *how* we know what we know about the phenomenon in question. This translates to focusing on consciousness as a one-way vector from the subject to "other objects" in the world. Intentionality can be described with the preposition "of," meaning consciousness is always "of" something (Vagle, 2018, p. 39). There

is an essential core to be uncovered through descriptive analysis. Vagle describes this with an image of a circle with concentric rings inside of it, leading ultimately to a small circle filled in with black ink (p. 33).

Heidegger's ontological/interpretive paradigm structures intentionality with an ontological focus, meaning one may study a phenomenon by interpreting when a phenomenon itself manifests within relations between the world and others. Intentionality can be described with the preposition "in," meaning phenomena manifest *in* ways we "find ourselves *in*-the-world - in-love, in-pain, in-hate..." (Vagle, 2018, p. 42). This translates to less of a focus on consciousness and more of a focus on intersubjectivity, with a feedback loop of intentionality cycling between a subject and other subjects/objects (p. 41). An essential core is implausible because interpretations are always shifting and evolving, so this paradigm focuses identifying manifestations and themes of phenomenon instead of on describing *the* essence of it. Vagle describes this as a "hermeneutic circle": a circle with concentric spirals leading to an open small circle, unshaded (p. 33).

Vagle's post-intentional paradigm does not indicate a departure from focusing on intentionality. Instead, it signifies an integration of post-structuralist philosophy (namely theories of Deleuze & Guattari as well as Derrida¹⁸) with phenomenological philosophy (namely theories of Merleau-Ponty). This integration informs us that intentionality is "always moving, is unstable, and is constantly being produced and provoked in and over time – and therefore can be read post-structurally" (Vagle, 2018, p. 32). Referencing St. Pierre, Vagle asserts that the idea of a stable intentionality is a "consolation" (St. Pierre, 1997, 336) that is not possible. He contends that

¹⁸ Vagle (2018) argues Derrida worked in the liminal space between phenomenology and post-structuralism. He summarizes how Sokolowski "lament[s] Derrida's influence on phenomenology – likening him to 'that' family member everyone else has to tolerate" (p. 124). I find this description very fitting, as these family members are often the most 'radical.' This personally resonates with my experience. The family system *can* be punitive to folks to resist past the cisheteropatriarchal "line" the family will tolerate. Similarly, it seems that 'traditional' philosophers are punitive/exclusionary to thinkers who cross a "line" past what is currently acceptable.

researchers must “come to grips with the reality that [they are] always positioned in particular places at particular moments in time...this positioning is only known through intentionality” (2018, p. 32). He aligns with Lather’s critique of embracing subjectivities for the sake of crafting more valid research, quoting “it is not a matter of looking harder or looking more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing” (Lather, 1993, p. 675). Vagle (2018) continues:

...whatever understanding is opened up through investigation will always move with and through the researchers intentional relationships with the phenomenon – not simply in the researcher, in the participants, in the text, or in their power positions, but in the dynamic intentional relationships that tie the participants, the researcher, the context, the broader social issues and matters, the produced text, and their positionalities together...[So] the intentional “findings” of phenomenological research are *de-centered as multiple, produced, provoked, partial, and endlessly deferred*. A post-intentional phenomenological approach resists stable intentionality, yet still embraces intentionality as ways of being that run through human relations with the world and one another (p. 32; my emphasis)

Whereas the descriptive and interpretive phenomenologies assert a more singular, stable, and *hypothetical* (possibility) of an intentional relationship between a person whom they position as subject and other subjects/objects, the post-intentional paradigm seeks to witness things as they are becoming, in the current context that holds many threads of intentionality between subjects and other subjects in the world (Vagle, 2018). He uses the preposition “through” to describe this approach: phenomena emerge *through* our intentional relationships. Phenomena are always shifting, temporary, and partial, according to the ephemeral context in which they emerge. Thus, “intended meanings are always in a process of becoming, production, and provocation” (Vagle, p. 45). This idea of multiplicity enables us to think of intentionality as *intentionalities*, to replace the

linear link or loop between subject and subject/object with “partial, fleeting meanings that circulate, generate, undo and remake themselves” (p. 45). It is described with the image of many amorphous, closed loops overlapping one another, which characterize intentionalities. The overlapping areas are gray and indicate a moment in which phenomena may emerge in a unique blend particular to that overlap. The loops are meant to be ever shifting, which means the gray areas/how phenomena may emerge are always shifting as well (Vagle, p. 34).

I understand post-intentional inquiries to actively shift between ontological and epistemological foci. Grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s concept of intercorporeality, the body schema, and multiplicity,¹⁹ Vagle asserts phenomena emerge in the temporal process of living them out, and as such, belong to the *social* instead of the *individual* (Vagle, 2018). Taking inspiration from Sartre: “[Our] experiences are shot through the world” (p. 46). This shift to the systemic-social allows for the study of how phenomena circulate through society via media. While human participants can also provide material pertaining to how the phenomena emerges through their direct life experience, human participants are not explicitly required in the post-intentional research paradigm (p. 46). So post-intentional phenomenological methodology is a process of navigating through a literal and figurative “dialogue with” phenomenon. This can take shape as literal dialogue with others and/or as interpretations of how phenomena “[move and shift] through questions we post, observations of social aspects...and assertions we proffer” (p. 46). This is a stark de-centering of consciousness that is aligned with phenomenology’s axiological intention, and the redirection to a systemic focus is aligns with critical phenomenological imperatives.

Post-Intentional Phenomenology as a Critical Phenomenological Paradigm. Because phenomenology was created as a resistance to Cartesian theory and Western binary logics,

¹⁹ I will discuss these concepts in chapter two.

phenomenology as a method is uniquely positioned to attend to the inter and intra subjective experiences of systems of oppression, including cisnormativity, which is a phenomenon that is often expressed yet rarely named both inside and outside of phenomenological discourse and clinical/educational care work literature. Critical phenomenological paradigms are particularly germane to the study of all oppressive structures/structures of bio-essentialism that are embedded within care work professions, which are disciplines positioned by the MIC as an extension of Cartesian and positivistic ideology.

Due to the significant historical trajectory of care work professions, a reflexive critique not only of *what* systems emerge but *how* these systems are embedded in our assumptions and habits is imperative. We need ways to identify the part clinicians and educators play in the subversive process of hegemony and ideology preservation (Brookfield, 2004) that continues to re-perpetuate bio-essentialist systems in order to consolidate power, and we need ways of circulating the multiple possibilities of how we may transform these systems. More simply put, this paradigm can facilitate an ongoing reflexive process through which we identify how oppressive systems/quasi-transcendental phenomena circulate through us *and also* how we may thwart and transform these circulations across time. While Vagle does not identify the wave of critical phenomenology, nor does he acknowledge that race phenomenologists have catalyzed this wave, the post-intentional paradigm seems aligned with the critical phenomenological imperative to address power structures and seek to shift the political status quo. The post-intentional paradigm is particularly useful for a social science study of oppressive structures within clinical and educational contexts, especially for creative art clinical contexts that work in mediums that transcend the visual perceptual field, the importance of which I will stress throughout this thesis. To route this paradigm's alignment with the study of bioessentialism, and the study of the phenomenon known as cisnormativity in

particular, I chose to work through the post-intentional paradigm because of how the paradigm positions the phenomena as partial, fleeting, and always shifting/re-emerging.

When I began my study of phenomenology, I found myself perplexed as to how one could identify the *essence* of cisnormativity or any bio-essentialist system without reducing it to an abstract concept that could easily be side-stepped by superficial language shifts in academia and clinical settings.²⁰ There is no one perfect example of cisnormativity to identify; there is no one way to define or contain it. This seems true for all systems of oppression that are rooted in bio-essentialism. I also felt that discussing manifestations of cisnormativity would not be helpful, as there did not seem any initiative to support a change in these manifestations. Throughout Weiss et al.'s book (2020), I continued to see people indicate the *emergence* of oppressive phenomena through analyzing not *what* was studied but *how* things were studied. At the same time, I was continuing to witness cisnormativity emerge through most of these chapters. This left me feeling the effects of what I would call “systemic gaslighting,” though I am sure others have experienced this term in more acute and intense ways. I didn't have language for what I was processing until I read Vagle's paradigm. The concepts of this paradigm reminded me that I did not have to identify *the* essence of cisnormativity, I just needed to continue the conversation from my subjective perspective. It also provided a methodology with which we could identify how oppressive phenomena circulate through us (making an impact on others regardless of our personal intentions) without using neoliberal tactics of labeling the *individual* the problem.²¹ Additionally, because this

²⁰ Actions Page & Woodland (2022) have witnessed over the past decades as movements of social justice have been co-opted by the MIC

²¹ Ahlberg, Hamed, Thapar-Björkert, and Bradby (2019) apply the “neoliberal principle that individuals, rather than wider society, should be responsible for their own welfare” (p. 4) to their discussion of how neoliberalism has made systemic racism in healthcare “invisible” (p. 2). I understand this process to involve blaming systemic issues on individual acts. Meaning, if racism emerges from an individual, then they are labeled the issue, not the system through which they have developed habits of racism. Similarly, this process labels individual identities as “risk factors” to obscure the systemic forces which create the conditions of risk (p. 3).

paradigm is a process through which we can more clearly articulate and identify ways these systems have circulated (and still circulate) through literature and media, this paradigm provides possibilities to focus a phenomenological inquiry into academic texts, and educational and supervision materials such as videos, PowerPoints, etc., as materials, in order to more explicitly discuss emergences of cisnormativity as they emerge/are recreated in care work literature. I hope to continue this discussion of ideas and possibilities throughout my thesis. For now, I will describe the Post-Intentional Phenomenological paradigm in more detail, to frame how and why I will continue to engage with theoretical and experiential material through the rest of this thesis.

Post-Intentional Philosophy (30k). Vagle describes how post-structural philosophies and phenomenological philosophies have been positioned in separate spaces due to differing assumptions and conceptualizations of the subject. He illustrates that post-intentional phenomenology “works on the edge of phenomenology and in the margin of post-structuralism” (2018, p. 124; Vagle, 2015). In this liminal space, he seeks to create a “generative cacophony of philosophies/theories/ideas that accomplishes something that these same individual philosophies/theories/ideas may not be able to do on their own” (2018, p. 124). This process is held by engaging with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of playfulness, instead of dialogue, meaning post-intentional research is to be a container that enables play between ideas/philosophies/theories to see what ideas emerge/what grows from the playfulness (2018, p. 124). Vagle differentiates post-intentional phenomenology from other modern/critical phenomenological crafts by asserting a specific focus on re-conceptualizing and post-structurally utilizing Deluezeoguattarian philosophical ideas (specifically lines of flight and multiplicity, which I will discuss next) and phenomenological concepts (specifically intentionality, which I have discussed at length, and bridling, which I will discuss later) (2018, p. 125). His hope is to reconfigure phenomenological

practice by weaving the commitment to “destabilizing and subverting oppositions, binaries and critiques” (p. 126) into the phenomenological tradition, which he believes will provide new perspectives into phenomena, perhaps “loosen up” ideas that traditional phenomenology has considered “complete”²². The hyphen between “post” and “intentional” symbolizes that the work takes place along that “line”: we enter fluctuating stories in the middle of the plot; there is no beginning or end (p. 126).

Posting Intentionality via Deleuze & Guattari’s Multiplicity and Lines. Deleuze and Guattari open their book *One Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) by introducing their concept of multiplicity and lines within their concept of geophilosophy.²³ Instead of describing systems of power in a vacuum with abstract charts and tables, geophilosophy conceptualizes systems of power as always restructuring and redesigning space in acts of ideology preservation. Our lives become understood on a landscape, and we are connected to everyone and all systems of power through a combination of arborescent and rhizomatic lineages with lines that are constantly shifting (Fouriner, 2014). Lines are understood to be ways individuals and power systems work to restructure space across time.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss types of lines: a) *molar lines* – these lines of movement are rigid, unifiable, and connected to arborescent, linear frameworks. Deleuze and Guattari describe molar lines as ones of “segmentation and territorialization” (1987, p. 3) that can break through space and disrupt current ecological lines of connection. I understand these to be arbitrary, violent, and synonymous with borders. I also understand this line as one which emerges from zero-sum thinking, false confidence, and reductive dualistic Cartesian rhetoric; b) *molecular lines* – these

²² This is another reason why the post-intentional paradigm supports the study of quasi-transcendental phenomena, especially cishnormativity / cissexism.

²³ I am still developing an understanding of this concept and seek to continue my study throughout my future field research. Refer to their text and supplementary texts for a deeper discussion of this metaphor and its implications.

lines of movement are understood to be more fluid, causing “subtle cracks” to occur in molar lines. These lines are always feeling pulled to snap back in line with molar lines of thinking and connecting through space and time (Vagle, 2018, p. 135); and c) *lines of flight* – Deleuze and Guattari describe these as lines which deterritorialize, destratify and rupture molar lines, venturing into territory that molar lines may attempt to block off (1987, p. 24). While rhizomes (sites of resistance to arborescence) in the geopolitical landscape may be segmented by molar lines, lines of flight elude these segmentations to sustain the now-fragmented rhizome as well as multiply further, into new spaces. However, these lines will always eventually connect back to the rhizomes from which they emerged, perhaps influencing another shift in the infrastructure (1987, p. 9). These lines of thinking take off, flee, elude, and thwart molar lines of thinking. Vagle experiences lines of flight as “leaks” in the phenomena (2018, p. 128), and Hofsess (2013) understands lines of flight as “aesthetic swells” experienced through phenomenological material (p. 5). Vagle places particular focus on lines of flight, asserting post-intentional phenomenology should center, follow, and nurture lines of flight that emerge in data generation and research analysis (2018, p. 136). He lists three ways the concept of *lines* enables post-intentional phenomenological inquiry to analyze phenomena through the lens of temporal multiplicity instead of essence or transcendence.

Shifts Focus from What Things Are → How Things Connect. Intentionality is reimagined as emerging through connections. This invites us to shift away from “[Husserl’s] philosophical assumption that a phenomenon has an essence, which is stable enough to be transcendental,” towards the assumption of “destabilized, partial and ever-changing” intentionalit[ies] made manifest in an actively entangled conglomeration of pluralized, elusive lines that connect phenomena in varied, impermanent ways (Vagle, 2018, p. 129). We must accept that we are always entering “deeply entangled contexts, that phenomena are always being written *and* rewritten” (p.

129). This implores us to shift focus away from endings and beginnings or locating causes and effects. Lines of flight do not operate in simple cause/effect relationships. They have no finite beginning or end - “they *and*, they travel, then move, in and through intensities” (p. 129).²⁴

Shifts Away from Ego-Centrism → an Unstable, yet not Dissolved, Subject. Vagle connects the concepts of lines of thinking and movement with Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied intentionality. Merleau-Ponty sought to resolve the ways Husserl repurposed the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy by privileging consciousness. This will be described more in chapter two, but the pertinent information for this conversation is that Merleau-Ponty turned the tides of intentionality by asserting intentionality was an embodied experience and that multiple threads of intentionality were connected to our ever-changing corporeal embodiment. This understanding of *embodied* intentionality structures the subject in an intersubjective loop of being both constructed and engaging in construction of other people, places, and things. So, “an embodied intentionality exists in which the body is lived through and is permeated by the social (Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Idhe, 2003) (Vagle, 2018, p. 130). Vagle connects this with Foucault’s theory that the body is “cultured and gendered,”²⁵ but he disagrees with Foucault’s assertion that the individual body can “fully dissolve into the social” (p. 130). Conclusively, Merleau-Ponty’s image of multiple threads of intentionality connects with Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of lines, and together, this allows for the focus on the threads or *lines* of intentionality themselves, even as they are brought forth through the acts of embodied subjects (Vagle, 2018, p. 130).

²⁴ Vagle’s use of *and* as a verb resonates with Judith Butler’s analyses of the “embarrassed ‘etc.’ that so often occurs at the end of [sentences intended to completely list all identities or identity categories]” (2002, p. 182). Using *and* as a verb or putting et cetera at the end of a sentence signifies “departures” (Butler, p. 183), which invite us to accept the impossibility that language can completely encapsulate “that which multiplies faster than [language] can accommodate” (Matney, personal communication, March 28, 2023). I would argue that the “+” at the end of identity acronyms (e.g. LGBTQIA+) resonates with this pattern.

²⁵ Noticing another iteration of how Vagle side-steps discussion or inclusion of critical race or disability studies.

Shifts from Essentialized Intentional Connection → a Multiplicity of Intentional Connections/Relations. The conceptualization of a temporally shifting web of lines of connection between beings in the world, all of whom are unstable subjects, opens phenomenological study up to the possibilities of focusing on “distances, intensities, and movements within and among things, relations, ideas, theories, and experiences” (Vagle, 2018, pp. 130-1). This is an important aspect that opens up ways we may analyze media, art, and group/relational dynamics without centering *only* one particular subject’s account of their experience. Vagle references Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of wolf multiplicity (1987, pp. 26-38). Each wolf can be understood as navigating complex dynamics within the pack, and one must discuss their position within the pack as the pack moves together. Extending this metaphor to humans or other-than-human beings, a subject is never in a single, linear connection with the world; they experience a multiplicity of threads/relations (between not only other beings but also between ideas, theories, and experiences) that are ever-shifting and (re)emerging (Vagle, 2018, pp. 130-1).

Post-Intentional Methodology (10k). Vagle describes the methodology of post-intentional phenomenology in great detail (2018, pp. 139-161). I will briefly describe the main points to situate the rest of my thesis within the methodology. Post-intentional inquiries begin with, and continuously involve, moving from one’s natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude through bridling (which he frames as “post-reflexion”). Next, one collects phenomenological material that centers on how a phenomenon emerges through multiple, varied contexts in the world. Then one analyzes the material utilizing an adapted whole-part-whole analysis to generate “multiple, produced, provoked, partial and endlessly deferred” findings of the phenomenon (p. 32). The results of this process is not the generation of essences, manifestations, or themes, but the

identification of how the phenomenon was produced and provoked²⁶ in contexts specific to the study materials. Vagle describes the methodology as occurring in five components, to be revisited in a cyclical manner:

- (1) Identify the post-intentional phenomenon in context(s), around a social issue; (2) Devise a clear yet flexible process for gathering phenomenological material appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation; (3) make a post-reflexion plan; (4) explore the post-intentional phenomenon using theory, phenomenological material, and post-reflexions; and (5) craft a text that engages the productions and provocations of the post-intentional phenomenon in context(s), around a social issue. (p. 139)

Within this thesis, there is insufficient space to move through each stage in detail. I hope to discuss this in a future publication by applying it to the study of bio-essentialist phenomena. For now, here is a brief summary of how Vagle's "playful" multi-step, analytic dialogue process (2018, pp. 157-158), between the material, one's reflexive journals, and the theories one is thinking-with, engages with Deleuze and Guattari's lines of thinking. First, be attentive to lines of flight, how they assist us in opening up to complicated, messy interactions (p. 135). Second, resist binary either/or thinking as well as the remnants of binary logics that remain after one rejects binary thinking²⁷ (p. 135). Third, resist the urge to "tie down" lines of flight, to dissect them and determine structures it "*has*." Instead, follow lines of flight as they emerge without imposing on them to see what they might *become* (p. 136). Lastly, while we will spend most of our time within molar lines (following do's/don'ts of a theoretical frame) and molecular lines (engaging in contextual arguments that are still limited or underpinned with specific options determined by outside power

²⁶ Provocations are understood as catalysts, material that "ignites something about the phenomenon"; productions are understood as "ongoing ways the phenomenon is being shaped over time" (Vagle, 2016, p. 160).

²⁷ A phrase to keep close: "Rigid thinking can lead to rigid decision-making, rigid perceptivity, and rigid methodologies" (p. 135)

structures), when a line of flight emerges, be attentive to it enough to follow it into the “unknown” (p. 136). He concludes by normalizing any habit of imposing a structure which may emerge from us, and he encourages us to lean into the tension between the compulsions of this habit and letting go of the compulsions to follow lines of flight (p. 136).

While this philosophical inquiry may emerge in the form of a post-intentional phenomenological study, the points of this thesis are to: (a) elucidate component one of my future studies in the first three chapters, which involves identifying theorists and concepts with whom I have begun to think-with (Youngblood-Jackson & Mazzei, 2011)²⁸; (b) describe ideas for component two and four for future post-intentional phenomenological future studies completed by me and hopefully by others (in chapter 4); c) describe provocations and productions of cisnormativity as they emerge from materials I center (in chapter 3); and d) represent my practice of reflexivity (component three) across the past two years as well as ground ideas for how I will continue to practice component three in future studies (across the entire thesis).

Conclusion: Preparing to Dive into Concepts

When I finished Vagle’s book, I had already begun a journal of my experiences and responses to phenomenological concepts. I had already begun the material generation and gathering processes he recommends as part of a phenomenological study, with my attention mainly focused on my experiences in clinical settings, the anecdotes of friends and loved ones, stories, experiences and analysis circulated by trans, Two Spirit, and intersex folks (TTSI+)²⁹ on social

²⁸ While Vagle invites craftspeople to think-with as many theorists (within and outside of the worlds of phenomenology) as one wishes to, he does urge craftspeople to choose only one to two theorists that articulate and direct their analysis towards social change/disruption of norms (2018, pp. 143-147). Among the many concepts and theorists I have begun to think with, Medina’s *epistemological resistance* (2011, 2013) is concept which both imparts a theory of change and resonates along all aspects of the the post-intentional paradigm.

²⁹ Page and Woodland (2022) use the acronym LGBTQTSI+ to address Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Two Spirit, Intersex, and experiences beyond these identity categories. Because my focus is on cisnormativity, I will shorten this to TTSI+ throughout this thesis to refer to experiences specifically abnormlized by cisnormativity.

media, and my responses to visual and auditory media (including varied forms of film, song, and literature across philosophical and carework fields). I continued to journal multiple times a week, sometimes daily. My mind was swirling with ideas, and all of them much vaster than could plausibly fit into a thesis project.

I realized my research was bigger than me; my hopes involve more than what my subjective positionality can accomplish. This philosophical inquiry has become a way to discuss what lines of flight about gender, cisnormativity, and bio-essentialism have emerged in my studies, what phenomenological concepts I feel are important for care-workers to consider, and my ideas for phenomenological research. I recognized there is an expansive amount of scholarship pertaining to the historico-cultural schema (Alcoff, 2006, p. 188) of bio-essentialism that I need to tarry with (Yancy, 2012, p. 154). I need to become more reflexive about my white ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2020), so I may more sufficiently bridle the ways my habits perpetuate that phenomenon in future studies. I need to be accountable to my community and to the TTSI+ communities adjacent to mine (Moy & Alvarez-Figueroa, 2021, pp. 83–84), which means not rushing through a study in order to graduate on time. I also hope this philosophical inquiry invites fellow creative art therapists who are TTSI+ and/or queer Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) to participate alongside or adjacent to me in this research, because we need multiple threads of knowledge generation in order to counter epistemic erasure (Medina, 2011, 2013).

I know I just discussed a lot of concepts that may be new to readers. In the next chapter, I ask *What critical phenomenological concepts inform a phenomenology of cisnormativity?* I will discuss critical phenomenological concepts and theories I have come to think-with because I find them pertinent to the phenomenology of bio-essentialism. I also communicate these theories because I believe they have been significantly overlooked by care work researchers engaging with

phenomenological methods, and I want to document them in ways that are accessible to researchers inside and outside academia. While I connect these theories and concepts to post-structural and/or abolitionist thinkers I think-with, I do not hold sufficient discussion of those works because many have already applied these theories to care work literature, as I will describe in chapter four. In chapter three, I ask *What are the emerging productions and provocations of cisnormativity?* What follows are some productions and provocations of cisnormativity that have emerged through dialogue between my post-reflexive journals, the theories I introduced in chapter one and two, and materials such as media popularized in the so-called-United States, creations of trans scholars-creators-activists, and care work literature. Part of this will involve summarizing my working understanding the historical context of cisnormativity and bio-essentialism, for which I rely upon the scholarship of queer, trans and/or people of the Global Majority. In chapter four, I ask *How does this connect to critical scholarship within care-work fields, especially music therapy?* I will discuss ways post-intentional phenomenology connects many threads of thought in music therapy (and adjacent fields such as counseling and education), and then I will describe ideas for future post-intentional phenomenological studies of bio-essentialism, namely cisnormativity. Before I begin with chapter two, I will provide my working post-reflexion statement, as advised by Vagle.

Chapter 1.5: My Working Post-Reflexion Statement

I have continued to struggle with how to frame these understandings within the temporal experience of me formulating them, but I have realized I need to lean into the fact that, by reading this, you are dropping into the middle of my on-going process. There is no beginning or end. I cannot unravel time and bring you through a linear progression of how I got to where I am now. As Alok Menon said to podcast hosts when they expressed fear of messing up their pronouns, “we are indoctrinated into a world that teaches us *ideology, not compassion. So it’s not you speaking when you misgender me, it’s everyone that has spoken you...* I was not born with gender literacy... I had to learn, too” (Baldoni, Plank, Heath, 2021; my emphasis).

My Roles, Assumptions, Beliefs, Perspectives, and Background

I am a white queer, transmasculine, nonbinary person, who is neurodivergent and physically disabled in most ways, and who is most likely endosex. I descend from a blend of European settler-colonial and assimilated Jewish immigrant ancestry, and my recent generational family has emerged in the culture of blue-collar, white southern U.S. culture, specifically the culture borne out of the colonization of so-called-Tejas/Texas. I realize myself as neurodivergent both due to hereditary characteristics and personal characteristics which emerged through traumatic experiences (most prominently from medical procedures). I am one of few people on either side of my family to attend undergraduate college, and I believe I am the only member of my mother’s side of the family to attend graduate school. My emergence into my authenticity coincided with the divergence from most of my family of origin. I am a student, a music therapist, a mental health worker who is considering counseling licensure, a romantic partner, and a member of chosen families across Turtle Island. I assume that all of us are immersed in systems which circulate

through our relationships to ourselves and other people, other-than-human beings, things, and places, in imperfect and nuanced productions. I assume one of these interconnected systems is cisnormativity, which informs our relationships to ourselves and to one another, not just trans people.

Through this process, I've come to conceptualize gender as an expansive force that transcends binaries and even spectrums between binary positioned ideas of "man" and "woman." It is a sense of self-knowing, self-sensing which is informed by and informs our knowing and sensing of others. As such, this force is imbued with meaning we have soaked up from others around us, before us, and from stories we have been told. I think this is where gender gets tricky - so many of us have only been told certain stories, ones developed from certain perspectives with the aim to rigidly define binary gender embodiment as a hallmark of humanity. So many of us have begun to believe gender is only the power structure that has been controlling these narratives. I understand these rigid lines of thinking to be emergences of cissexism, a form of white supremacist bio-essentialism. Where gender is a broad and vast topography, cissexism and cisnormativity are the molarizing forces, to think-with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), that circumscribe the borders of what is a "real" gender, of what is a "realistic" "human" (Fouriner, 2014). These lines have molecularized to hold ideas of "gender identity" as separate from gender, as if gender *identity* is only "in our heads" – just a theoretical, abstract "identity label" – where as our ["biological"] *gender* is omnipresent, is fixed, can only be one of two categories, and is the basis of our material existence.

What Frames my Beliefs & Perceptions, What Shocks Me, and What are my 'Bottom Lines'?

My beliefs, perspectives and perceptions are framed by my positionality as: (a) a white person, whose grandparents were all descendants of settler-colonial immigrants, one of which

descends from Slavic and Russian Jewish immigrants, and one person who possibly also descends from people Indigenous to Turtle Island, all of whom took the white bribe to varying degrees³⁰; (b) as a physically enabled person, who could have lost their vision if not for insurance provided through their mother's job; (c) a person emerging from working class, rural socioeconomic experience; (d) as a trans and pangender (non-binary) person; and (e) as a person diverges from the myth of neurotypicality in varied ways.

As a trans, pangender person who has spent many years shedding internalized bio-essentialism, I feel disconnected to discussions about “gender, gender identity and gender expression” because of the many assumptions that underpin this paradigm. I continue to witness so much literature fixating on *defining* gender identity to the point where people argue against it and ultimately collapse gender identity back to the molar line of gender binary thinking (Barnes, 2022; Bettcher, 2014; Gheaus, 2023). Additionally, I am frustrated with the way that people continue to focus on individuals as the problem – “men are trash” has particularly continued to pique my frustration. We live and internalize systems which privilege people in proximity to the image of white, cishet, rich, enabled men. However, are people “biologically” wired to be “trash?” There continues to be an assumption of bio-essentialism that is connected to cissexism even when

³⁰ The only ancestral work conducted by my extended family that I have read has revolved around tracing two of four “direct paternal lines.” Both of lines trace back to Scottish and Northern Irish aristocrats who participated in both the colonization of the Celtic Isles as well as initial wave of colonization of Turtle Island. A third “paternal line”, which has only been communicated to me orally, traces back to Slavic and Russian Jewish people who immigrated in the mid to early 19th century. There are many blanks when it comes to uncovering the specific history of my birth parents, especially any “maternal lines.” I understand this to be a ripple effect of the Euro-settler infrastructure that only sought to document those who were deemed human-enough. Some family, including my late-father, claimed his mother descended from both settlers and people who were indigenous to Turtle Island. However, there is little documentation to verify that any part of my family tree was a part of an indigenous community. I grew up predominantly exposed to and raised in settler-colonial practices of the settler colonial family members who were enabled to survive into their late adulthood. Therefore, until I have information that indicates otherwise, I infer any Indigenous person in my ancestry was most likely a stolen and assimilated Indigenous person whom settlers perceived to be female. I understand this not to be an invitation to claim any Indigenous culture; on the contrary, I understand this to be a glaringly overdue invitation to (1) claim my intergenerational role in the violence of Euro-settler colonial genocide, and (2) consider the ramifications of how this has shaped my family's intergenerational social-emotional habits.

discussing people privileged by cissexism. I recognize that most cis men perhaps have internalized a sort of epistemic ignorance because of their socialization under cissexism. Yet, blaming cis men individually or discarding them does not thwart cissexist bioessentialism, it only solidifies it. Additionally, the concept of “(cis) males” being “biologically wired” to be “trash” also perpetuates narratives that inform transmisogyny and fear-mongering, monolithic myths about testosterone.

Amongst these conversations, the assumption of binary gender socialization (the idea that people are *only* “socialized” as “men” *or* as “women”) moves under the surface and quietly substantiates these bioessentialist arguments that undergird trans-exclusionary ideology. I feel shocked, and also not shocked, when critical thinkers and practitioners talk with sophistication about the nuances of ableism and racism while making sweeping generalizations about gender that bolster the colonial standards of bioessentialism. I feel even more shocked, and also not shocked, when biologists critique the myths of binary biological sex while perpetuating bioessentialism by equating stereotypes of intersex experience to non-binary gender identities and/or to bisexuality. I say “not shocked” because to me, these are emergences of cisnormative bioessentialism. Meaning, these are examples of how intricately internalized this system is within our paradigms of navigating ourselves and others.

My experiences have led me to believe there are a multitude of ways to be a man, a woman, and a person. “Man” and “woman” are not opposites. I believe that when we: 1) refer to “men” and “women” as inherently binary (for both cis and trans people), 2) limit our understanding of “nonbinary” to mean *either* genders which exist “*between* man/woman” *or* “no gender at all”; 3) refer to non-binary-ness as the “expression” of “androgyny”; and/or 4) correlate/create a causation link between nonbinary gender experience and intersex experience, we perpetuate/(re)construct/further solidify the bio-essentialism of the gender binary. This is why I

like to find another word for my gender besides non-binary. Pangender fits my experience of gender. Referring to my gender as a “non-binary” one means that my gender *flees* from the gender binary. This doesn’t *have* to mean that men and women are *not* non-binary as well if they betray the gender binary system.

I am enabled by white supremacy, especially as someone who has more recently become perceived/assumed to be a white man, even if that assumption from some people/strangers is very ephemeral. I live each day intent on betraying white supremacy by both rejecting cisheteropatriarchal masculinity roles and standards and actively working to shed my habituation to white supremacy by monitoring and shifting socialized habits. I betray white supremacy culture by being authentic through my gender and resisting invitations to conform to cisheteropatriarchal gender norms for “women” or “men.” This is not a singular betrayal, but a constant act of betraying that must be maintained. At any moment, I could fall in line enough to allow my whiteness [and, for the past 1-2 years, my perceived masculine-enough-ness] to insulate me and thus “protect” me in social settings. I believe I was “assumed-human-enough-at-birth” because of my whiteness, and I experienced a world catered to whom normative society expected me to be (with the unquestionable understanding that, as someone assigned to white southern womanhood, my role was to bolster and care for assumed-cishet white men). Through my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, I experienced harm at the hands of white cisheteropatriarchy due to my size, my lack of concern for adhering to gender norms, and my disillusionment with either binary role of man/woman. I did not experience gender socialization like ciswomen have described it, and I also did not experience gender socialization like some trans men have described it. I did internalize numerous aspects of white supremacy, including (trans)misogyny and misogynoir, anti-Blackness, and ableism. Because of my experience as a white person and my internalization of perfection,

binary and linear thinking (Okun, 2021), I have experienced a lack of “tolerance” for being dehumanized and want that experience to end *now*. In this way, I can easily contribute to the “boom and bust” activism by participating in formulations of neoliberalism within sociopolitical activism. As such, I have the potential to act in ways to preserve the complicated bio-essentialist systems I very much want to dissolve (Táíwò, 2022).

I have learned to mask and utilize my acute awareness of social dynamics (what has been pathologized as “hypervigilance, hyperawareness”) and my sensory-informed memory as a means to excel in academia and other forms of capitalist extraction. I have come to understand that I frequently engaged in and still engage in forms of “disassociation” as a tool to protect myself from gender-binary suppression or other trauma-related triggers *and* from connecting/understanding my role in perpetuating white supremacist violence via micro-aggressions. I continue to witness ways that boot-strap mythology and the colonial code of relations (Todd & Wade, 1994) emerges through how I treated and still treat myself, and as a result, how I treated and still treat others by seeking to “help” them better function within capitalism. Similarly, my historical and current ability to navigate physical infrastructure with ease (due to access to resources, such as automobiles, and due to how my body moves through space) has continued to be challenged by living and working in relation to people whose access needs differ from mine and whose access to resources is often prevented due to infrastructural neglect. Similarly, my experience as an endosex³¹ person has insulated me from the multiple realities of intersex experience. I continue to make dedicated effort to recognize, challenge, and shift assumptions of internalized bio-essentialism that pertain to the myth binary sex embodiment.

³¹ While many people assume they are endosex until they learn otherwise, I have not learned any information that indicates I am intersex, and my material experience has aligned with experiences of endosex people (and intersex people who intersex embodiment was never “noticed” or pathologized by the medical establishment in their childhood or adolescence).

I nearly left the profession of music therapy due to cisheteronormative and classist systems embedded into my undergraduate experiences and the overall sociopolitical context of the so-called-U.S. I have felt internal pressure to make/be a “textbook” that would assist the “end” of cisnormativity. I have put an unrealistic expectation onto myself (by way of academia) to find the “essence” of cissexism and “make” it understandable, in a linear fashion that caters to white supremacist logics. I find myself wanting to feel a sense of control and peace that this phenomenon is containable, but it isn’t. I continue to challenge this pressure by encouraging myself to recognize all things are incomplete, always emerging, and a combination of many varying “essences,” so that I do not obstruct how the phenomenon is emerging in a particular context. However, I still feel a pressure to make my research “complete”-enough. I want to find every song, read every article or book, and seek out all songs/media about anti-trans oppression. I continue to counter these urges by searching more broadly for material reflecting cissexism/bioessentialism. I am scared I am not going to “find enough.” I feel myself ask, “What if this is all in my head?” – a part of me answers: “it’s not.” I recognize my doubts, my “self-gaslighting,” is an emergence of internalized cisheteropatriarchy.

Lastly, I need to acknowledge the ongoing cognitive dissonance I have experienced and continue to experience through the process of formulating my focus for this thesis. Every day, I am faced with more news of ongoing attempts to legislate, define, and “fix” in place how people can “naturally” embody and perform gender, to make it a criminal offense for trans people of any age to receive health care, and to falsely stipulate that trans affirming care for kids equates to surgeries while simultaneously instituting loopholes that enable coercive surgeries on intersex youth (Trans legislative bill tracker). Since the Marriage Equality Act was passed in the so-called-U.S., there has been a consistent and compounding effort to eradicate TTSI+ people from public

life, and lately neo-fascists have explicitly named those intentions (Goodman & Strangio, 2023). This of course is occurring alongside legislation that continues to both limit one's reproductive bodily autonomy and validate crimes against Black and brown immigrants and asylum seekers, many of whom do not conform to white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy.

While many of these laws target trans-affirming surgeries, drag / "cross-dressing" in public spaces, and seek to explicitly control which perceived bodies should access restrooms, these laws set groundwork for ultimately controlling which gender affirming care is accessible to whom. They are creating more rigid borders around how *all* people can look, act, sound, and move through spaces (Menon's discourse in Baldoni, Plank & Heath, 2021). Openly trans people, intersex people, and people who do not conform-enough to the opaque, performative standards of the gender binary may be targeted now (as they have been throughout Euro-colonial history), but it is crucial to understand that we are all under the influence of cissexism. This system imposes boundaries upon all of us, every day. This system continues to create the "closets" and attempt to force people to stay *in* them. My cognitive dissonance and existential dread have influenced a sense of worry that I need to get all my thoughts down on paper before something happens to me, before my untimely death. There are so many gaps to address, and I continue to feel overwhelmed and frustrated with the task of explaining *why* it is important for clinicians to recognize our role in the continued culture of bio-essentialism, specifically cissexism, that permeates the MIC. I seek to taper this feeling of relentless self-doubt and lean into the fact that I am writing from a breadth of personal experience and scholarship that spans across decades as well as across the lines that separate academia from on-the-ground activism.

What do I Hope Will Become Through a Post-Phenomenology of Cisnormativity?

Meaning is always emerging through images. I hope (re)new(ed) meanings of gender as well as (re)new(ed) understandings of gender embodiment (outside of the rigid binary categories of cis and trans) emerge as people are invited to *actually* consider their gender. As I discuss later, invitation is a powerful provocation of cisnormativity. It seems this is one of the ways the cisheteropatriarchal gaze is being returned that fuels the fire with which authority figures seek to eradicate all forms of gender knowledge that transgresses cissexist molar lines. I've witnessed this as politicians violently respond to invitations to consider student's pronouns in schools by asserting gender affirming care is child abuse (Trans Legislation Tracker). If we all consider how cishetsexism is experienced by everyone, perhaps we can realize the liminal space we all experience between the binary that "cis vs trans" debates have been (mis)used to reduce the temporal experiences we all collectively emerge through to flattened, fixed concepts.

There are so many counter-mythologies and counter-imaginaries (Snorton, 2017, p. 143; Spillers, 2003, p. 163) of gender embodiment that we must illuminate and bolster. There exist other systems of knowing and navigating gender which have fragmented or co-opted or perhaps not documented at all and, instead, actively erased. There are systems which conceptualize a more multiple and expansive sense of embodied personhood, which open up the circumscribed ideas that those in the Western influence superimpose on our shared world. There are so many ways to be a woman, to be a man, and to be a human that is not either of the former two. It is too often that I see genders other than man and woman being discussed as either the "absence" of gender or a gender "between" man and woman. This seems a manifestation of the Western compulsion to consider *gender* as its political role and not as our varied and dynamic understanding of ourself. There are so many ways of embodying personhood, all of which are equitable, none more superior

than the other. Through most³² of these systems, each way of being a human holds important ecological roles in family and community systems. These roles are multiple, based in interconnected-ness, not in exploitation and power usurpation.

I want to attend to not only the ways we perceive gender but also how we make assumptions based on gender, especially if the assumptions limit people or are paternalistic. Each connection between each “identity,” and each manifestation of each identity, is an intentional relationship. So, there are multiple intentions, each of an infinite and multiple potential. Essentialism tries to limit these connections (the number of them as well as which identity is “supposed” to be connected to which perceived anatomy, race or cognitive capacity) and potential roles, relationships and ways of knowing that could emerge from these connections. Essentialism makes singular conceptions a “default,” a norm. Destabilizing an essentialist binary gender system is not to get rid of ideas of man and woman; it is to open up ideas of man and women and take them off a spectrum that polarizes them. This creates space for a multiplicity of intentional connections not only between man and woman but between all gender embodiments, between sex, gender, expression, and sexuality, and between these “intercommunal” manifestations of being and “other” sociocultural identifiers such as class, race, neurotype, etc. If we keep running in circles trying to define each aspect, trying to remediate and justify these ways we “should” think within a Western biomedical system, we will never “get” there. To hyper-focus on identity stifles our attention to the *tethers* attached to identities that create varied material realities. By attending to our intentional relations with ourselves and others, perhaps we can shift away from the compulsion to focus on identity toward recognizing ways in which we relate to ourself and others that recreate oppressive systems.

³² I say “most” to counter the exceptionalism and idealism of systems colonized by white supremacist capitalist Europeans which casts Indigenous ways of being as “uniquely pure” or more “moral,” and I also believe most of these systems to be more ecologically sustainable in most ways - environmentally, personally, socially.

Chapter 2:

What Critical Phenomenological Concepts Inform a Phenomenology of Cisnormativity³³?

The following is a summary of critical phenomenological concepts as I currently understand them. I am listing them here to give context to my analysis moving forward as well as promote an understanding of how relevant and important these concepts are to care workers and to social scientists who utilize phenomenological research methods.

Being-in-Itself, Being-for-Itself, Being-for-Others, and the Zone of Non-Being

Sealey (2020, p. 31) identifies that the foundation of Sartre's phenomenology of the human experience lies in three structures: (1) being-in-itself, (2) being-for-itself, and (3) being-for-others (Sartre, 1956). The first structure illustrates the "void of consciousness" that is associated with "inert objects"³⁴ which are hypothesized to lack full self-awareness (Sealey, 2020, p. 31). "In" is supposed to convey that their being is "in" themselves, thus they "cannot be anything other than what they are" (p. 31). The second structure illustrates the experience of being human, which means to have the "capacity" for self-awareness/self-reflection. Sartre claims this being is never "in" themselves but always outside of themselves - their existence is always coupled with an awareness of their existence. Sealey summarizes this opens humans up to never permanently being *one* thing - *humans* have the *capacity to choose*³⁵ (p. 31; my emphasis). The third structure complicates the

³³ While I focus on cisnormativity, I believe these concepts inform phenomenological study of all bio-essentialist phenomena.

³⁴ Sealey lists examples of "chairs, computers, trees, the ocean" (p. 31). The example of trees and the ocean I take qualms with, as this seems a very insulated, colonizer perspective. Trees, and the mycelia that connect all trees in a forest, are beings who hold, transmute and sustain life (Lagomarsino, 2019; Davies, 2015). Similarly, oceans are scientific "mysteries," they play an active role in tempering and shifting weather patterns, and they are the center of many Indigenous spiritual traditions. More basically, *water is life* (Wills, 2019; Leonard, 2019).

³⁵ When I read Sealey's chapter for the first time, I was immediately aware of the use of "human" vs "object" with the differentiating factor being the "capacity" for self-awareness. To me, these words were hued with the ruins of positivist pseudoscience that sought to disqualify people's humanity on the basis of their "biological capacity" for intelligence, bringing forth ableist standards to enable racism, cisheterosexism, and classism (McWhorter, 2009; Menon, 2022c). As Imani Barbarin [puts it](#), "white Christian nationalism may always be the goal, but ableism is always going to be the toolkit" (2023b). I will discuss this more in chapter 3, as it relates to cissexism.

idea of a human's freedom of choice, as Sartre *assumes* humans are free to choose in a world of other free humans which all humans *collectively* shaped through their choices. Thus, a human's "independent" existence is always bound to what their choices mean for the other (p. 32; my emphasis). In his text *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon stresses that Sartre's structure does not leave room to account for what he describes as "colonial depersonalization" (1954/2008, p. xxxii). He describes a fourth concept for this structure: the zone of non-being. As I discuss aspects of Sartre's and Fanon's structures, I will expand more about these zones.

Immanence & Transcendence

While Husserl originally wove Hegel's dichotomous notion of *immanence* and *transcendence* into phenomenological philosophy, Whitney (2020) summarizes that Sartre's structures of being-in-itself and being-for-itself are "adaptations" of this "tradition of defining human subjectivity" (p. 189-90). Sartre's philosophy is grounded upon the premise that a human's existential goal is to "overcome" immanence (being-in-itself/objectification) in a "struggle" for transcendence (being-for-itself/subjectification). Thus, Sartre asserts that to be a subject *requires* that the *other* be objectified. These are mutually exclusive positions, influenced by Hegel's understanding of the "master-slave dialectic, where the struggle for transcendence is played out as a struggle for mastery over another" (p. 190). While I understand this is Sartre's attempt to call out the ideology of white supremacist imperialist and colonial power, the way he describes this process as *solely* antagonistic perpetuates the very power dynamic he is seeking to critique.³⁶ Moreover, this framing is an ironic recreation of Cartesian mind/body dualism (Dillon, 1998, pp. 127–129).

Both Beauvoir and Fanon problematize Sartre's valuation of the "noble struggle" toward transcendence because it requires and incentivizes the subjugation and marginalization of people.

³⁶ This is a popular critique of Hegel's works and impact on Western philosophy. Notably, this critique emerges through Butler's analysis of the "epistemological inheritance" of Hegelian subject/object discourse (2002, p. 184).

Beauvoir argued “masculine subjects” are encouraged/required to dehumanize “feminine subjects” as Other to acquire transcendence [read: autonomous humanity] (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 17). Fanon utilizes this analysis alongside psychoanalytic theory to describe the process of anti-Blackness: colonizers project “the darkness inherent in every ego” (Fanon, 1954/2008, p. 164) onto Black bodies in order to “quarantine ambiguity and immanence” within their bodies, constructing them as the Other.³⁷ This creates a polarized distance which splits Blackness from whiteness and “expel[s]” Blackness from white spaces (Whitney, 2020, p. 192). Overall, both critiques are important; they also seem to have inspired the continuous, mutually exclusive correlation between pain/suffering/victim-role and the identity categories of BIPOC and women.

Inter-corporeality / The Body Schema. Merleau-Ponty rejected the notion that transcendence occurs when our consciousness raises out of our bodies. Young postulates that Merleau-Ponty located subjectivity/transcendence in one’s body, not in one’s consciousness (2005, p. 36; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 289–291). Vagle summarizes: Merleau-Ponty believed “the body ‘lives in the world’; and sometimes the body lives in the world well before the mind can reason or make sense of what is being lived” (2018, p. 10), an idea he conceptualized as the *body schema* or *corporeal schema*. As people grow situated in a body, they undergo a process of meaning-making in which they *become* flesh-of-the-world and thus realize themselves as both subjects and objects for others (Guilmette, 2020, p. 278). One’s subjectivity is experienced *in-the-flesh, through* embodiment. So, one’s intentionality is both a feeling *and* an action, and it is described as an experience of *ambiguous* transcendence (Whitney, 2020, pp. 190-191; Young, 2005, p. 36). Transcendence and immanence are no longer opposing one another, but instead they are experienced in relation to one another.

³⁷ Toni Morrison describes this using the metaphor of the melting pot: “Black people are not *in* the melting pot, they *are* the pot, the cauldron” (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019).

In summary, Merleau-Ponty asserts that our task toward transcendence is to become oriented in the world with others while embodying our sensorimotor and affective capacities. This experience of embodied intentionality is both sensed by *and* influenced by others. As I will detail later in this chapter, systems of power surely created the conditions that shaped his experience of embodiment. When we consider Merleau-Ponty's context as an assumed-cishet white and enabled man, it is not surprising that his theories do not adequately hold space for how systems of power could dampen or hinder this experience. While the corporeal schema provides a framework for considering intersubjectivity and meaning of ancestral lineage, Merleau-Ponty's assertion that this is more or less "universal" provides a representation of how white colonial descendants have experienced or *expect* to experience society and relationships.

Racial Epidermal Schema / Historico-Racial Schema. Fanon recognized this issue and deepened Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of meaning-making through the lived body. He asserted there is a *historico-racial* or *racial-epidermal schema* manifested by white supremacist racialization that, according to Karera (2020), involuntarily dissolves the coherence of a racialized person's corporeal schema (p. 289). Fanon asserts that people racialized as non-white and/or colonized people experience their bodies as inseparable from the politics and colonial domination that they are born into/out of, and the erasure which emerges from historical and continued suppression ruptures their body from the world (Karera, pp. 289-290; Fanon, 1952/2008). In contrast to the experience Merleau-Ponty assumed to be universal, a racialized and/or colonized person experiences their body through their own intentionality as well as through a superimposed schema that constructs them as *not* themselves but an idea, a projection, a site of non-being (Fanon, p. 91). This description is one iteration of the phenomena of double-consciousness, as this feedback loop between one's corporeal schema and the racial-epidermal

schema cast upon them brings about the awareness of how one is being seen. This counters Sartre's assertion one cannot know how the Other sees them. I will continue discussing this as it relates to the white/racialized gaze, which Fanon describes as the phenomenon that imposes the racial-epidermal schema onto people.

The Look/The Gaze

Summarized by McBride (2020), the primary way that Sartre describes this "struggle" between immanence and transcendence playing out is in *le regard*, or "the look/the gaze." This description is also the origin of the *male gaze* discourse (Murphy, 1989). Simply, the one who is gazing is the subject, and the gaze creates the "other" as an object (i.e., "objectification"). As Sartre exemplifies in the statement, "the Anti-Semite...*makes* the Jew" (Sartre, 1944/1948, p. 69), the object of the gaze is "overdetermined" by the subject.³⁸ Due to Sartre's antagonism between transcendence and immanence, Sartre describes the feeling of the subject's gaze being returned (meaning, how the once-subject feels when they are being seen by the once-"Other") as unconditionally shameful/vulnerable and unilaterally associated with "domination, pain, and violation" (Ngo, 2015, p. 176). This exemplifies how the very notion of a dichotomous struggle between immanence and transcendence is "a product of hierarchical practices of sexism, colonial racism, and ableism, and is implicated in suspect hierarchies of nature and culture, humans and animals, minds and bodies" (Whitney, 2020, p. 192).³⁹ Because this concept is woven with Cartesian dualism, Ngo believes all applications of "the gaze" need close examination to shift away from mutually exclusive notions of subject-self and object-other (p. 165).

³⁸ Ngo (2015) adds that Weiss (2014, p. 221) problematizes both Sartre's and Fanon's use of the concept "overdetermined," which is borrowed from Freud. Ngo conveys this indicates "ontological presuppositions" important to critical race and post-colonial work. The continued utilization of Freud's concepts (a very common habit both inside and outside of phenomenology) is one of the means through which I believe cisheteropatriarchy is maintained.

³⁹ This reminds me of how care work professionals are taught to "avoid" counter transference, to resist the "gaze" being returned by "clients," as if the clinical relationship is supposed to be an objectifying, one-way vector.

The *White Gaze*/The Racializing Gaze. Returning back to the racial-epidermal schema, Fanon argues this schema is imposed via the *white gaze*, which Ngo describes as the *racializing gaze* (2015, p. 196). Fanon describes the white gaze as a sequence of habituated ways of seeing, and these habits compound into other racializing micro-aggressions. Fanon *returns* the gaze by “diagnosing” people who have habituated to enacting racism with “affective ankylosis”: a rigidity that desensitizes one to the pain which they bring others (Al-Saji, 2014, p. 141; Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 92). The racialized gaze violently disfigures one’s subjectivity to the point where one may internalize the messages broadcasted by the racialized gaze. I will discuss the ways in which Ngo further illuminates this phenomenon later; for now, I will summarize the three ways Sartre’s gaze limits Fanon’s analysis of the racializing gaze.

First, Sartre’s gaze is singularly antagonistic as well as probing. While this resonates with how the racializing gaze is one of “non-seeing”⁴⁰, Ngo welcomes the consideration for the *quality* of seeing (Ngo, 2015, p. 174). If Sartre’s gaze is *only* antagonistic, then there is no room to conceptualize how a gaze can impart a “loving regard” or be reclaimed as an act of self/communal worth/acceptance/love (p. 175). Dialoguing with Mazis (1998) and Grosz (1994), Ngo contends it is worth considering how the gaze can touch, caress, and ultimately *close the distance* between the seer and the seen (instead of *impose* a distance through the *gaze*). She ultimately calls for nuanced considerations about how the gaze operates outside of the visual perceptual field (pp. 176-177).⁴¹

Second, Sartre’s gaze cannot account for the experience of double-consciousness because he describes the subject and object as mutually exclusive roles. Ngo summarizes that racialized

⁴⁰ Citing Yancy: “to be ‘seen’ in this way is not to be seen at all” (Yancy, 2017, p. 76)

⁴¹ Toni Morrison, among many other Black authors, describe how the white gaze emerges through the discourse of the narrator’s voice in many “popular” novels (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019). Her work challenges the centrism of the white gaze because she attends to stories that center the worlds of Black people in the so-called-U.S. In this way, the white gaze can be understood in connection with the social imaginary, and we can also begin to understand the gaze as a phenomenon which attends to more than the visual field of perception.

people often report knowing how/when they are being perceived by the white gaze (2015, p. 179).⁴² She further asserts that [assumed-cis] women of color experience a *doubling* of the double consciousness (p. 178).⁴³ She evokes Dillon's critique to assert Sartre's account is contradictory: Sartre describes the gaze being returned as shameful and alienating because of his unmet expectations of inclusion and solidarity (i.e., subjectivity; 1998, pp. 137–138). Thus, Sartre's assertion that one feels shame when they recognize they are the object of another's seeing should indicate that one experiences both dimensions of subject and object at once (Ngo, 2015, p. 181).

Lastly, both Sartre's and Fanon's conceptualization of the gaze do not hold enough consideration for visual ambiguity of racialized bodies (this concept can apply to other ambiguities perceived when only attending to the visual perceptual field) (Ngo, 2015, p. 183). Both Sartre's and Fanon's use of overdetermination creates a zero-sum logic that negates the ways one's situation is not "exclusively external" (Ngo, p. 184) but emerges with one's mutual, relational engagement with the world (Weiss, 2014, pp. 216–227). These conceptualizations of the gaze are "too narrowly focused on a certain economy of visibility, privileging the visibility of the epidermal layer as prior and more significant than other visible aspects of the body" (Ngo, 2015, p. 183).

Confiscated Bodies. George Yancy (2020) constructs the phenomenon of confiscated bodies to illustrate the "disruptive and violative encounters endured...[when] Black bodies are

⁴² Du Bois describes: "this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1903, p. 2)

⁴³ She makes no distinction of cis or trans, intersex or endosex experience. Because of her lack of distinction as well as her continued reference to phenomenological work focused on "female bodied comportment" throughout the dissertation, I assume that she is using "women" to describe cis and endosex women. I would argue the experience of double-consciousness applies to trans people, especially trans women and non-conforming trans people across race. I would also argue Black and/or disabled trans people experience a triple-ing, and Black trans femmes experience a quadrupling effect when accounting for the dimension of cisheterosexism immersed in racializing habits. However, my perceptions of her internalized cisnormativity cannot be attended to by my subjectivity as a white trans masc person. I believe the focus of white trans people, especially trans masc people, should center how ontological expansiveness emerges within our multiple and varied contexts. I iterate what ideas come to mind merely to indicate what I notice from my perspective. Reading her dissertation felt like an emotional push and pull throughout, especially because she makes only one very generalized claim about the difference between racialized and transgender intersubjectivity in her work (Ngo, 2015, p. 145).

‘defined’ or ‘scripted’ through procrustean white gazes that ontologically truncate or racially essentialize them” (p. 69; Yancy, 2017). He describes whiteness as the historical and political project of manifest destiny, an exponentially developed metanarrative that casts white people as the “default,” *the* human race. This continued maintenance of this metanarrative is veiled as an “ahistorical given,” though behind the curtain is the historical and contemporary confiscation of Black bodies, “rendering them as problematized, distorted, and transmogrified *objects*” (2020, pp. 69-70). He aligns the experience of whiteness as an example of bad faith: the ability to see without being seen (Gordon, 2020), to look without the gaze returning to them.

Yancy (2020) uses the term “confiscated” to convey the sense of authority which criminalizes the bodies of Black people. The image of seeing without being seen in the context of authority brings forth thoughts of floodlights/searchlights, Foucault’s panopticon, courtrooms, and media news coverage. Among other examples, he cites Fanon’s depiction of “being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed” (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 116). Yancy’s concept resonates through Snorton’s (2017) work. Among many historiographical accounts in his archive, Snorton details many instances of Black people being targeted and criminalized for “impersonating” the “opposite” sex in public.⁴⁴ His other accounts detail the ways in which Black people were used to forge U.S. physical and institutional infrastructure and subsequently erased or used as the negative space to silhouette the white social imaginary of U.S. history and modern events (pp. 143-144). In the process of torturing Black people as less-than-human objects, doctors often attributed damage caused by enslavement as “evidence” of African diasporic people’s

⁴⁴ In the Antebellum period, stories of enslaved people successfully escaping slavery through ‘disguising’ themselves in ways that impersonated another colonial/binary gender instigated tactics of seizing Black people regardless of their status of freedom (Snorton, 2017, pp. 55-66). In this context, Snorton details accounts of police criminalizing free Black people for “theft” because they were “in illicit possession of themselves,” especially, it seems, when embodying genders which the police did not believe to be “correct” (p. 63). The reminder of Snorton’s work assures this tradition of targeting Black and Indigenous TTSI+ people carried on through to the present day.

“biological inferiority.”⁴⁵ Snorton (p. 8) evokes Roberts’ text to identify the phenomena emerging: a “double movement: an acknowledgement *and* a denial” that “locates an event and then rejects its relevance, knowing full well it occurred” (2015, p. 29).

The lived experience of one’s body being confiscated is described as “a process of emptying, of having something gone missing or having been taken by force - stolen” (Yancy, 2020, p. 73). Yancy describes it as a feeling of being outside of or behind one’s body (p. 73), a-kin to what is pathologized by the medical industrial complex as dissociation, which people have argued is a form of resistance to institutional violence (Wade, 1997). In summary, Yancy notes that the phenomenon of the confiscated body can take multiple forms along the axes of bio-essentialist formations of oppression (disability, cishetnormativity, class) in which one’s body is seen as a problem, a deformity, a deviant which must be confiscated and is ultimately returned as “*disposable*” (Yancy, 2020, p. 74). Yancy’s concept of confiscated bodies illuminates how bio-essentialist dehumanization emerges through varied processes of criminalization *and* pathologization of bodies, *especially* Black and brown bodies. Engaging with this concept in research can illuminate how the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is inseparable from the MIC.⁴⁶

The Male Gaze / Patriarchal Gaze. McBride (2020) identifies Laura Mulvey, Julien Murphy, Adrienne Rich, and Sandra Bartky as feminist philosophers who conceptualized the male gaze as a way of critiquing the often-violent and degrading objectification of assigned and/or assumed women. They continued Sartre’s logic of the gaze being sadistic, hateful, and “desiring to capture the Other’s (i.e., [endosex, cis] women’s) freedom” (p. 213). Many of the feminists

⁴⁵ In the case of Dr. Sims and his experimentation on many enslaved assigned-female people, the enslaved peoples’ experience of vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), most definitely the result of assault and torture, was taken as “proof” of Black assigned-female people’s sexual ambiguity (Snorton, 2016, p. 20).

⁴⁶ Black and brown trans immigrants/asylum seekers are likely to face higher rates of detention and deportation (Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). In some U.S. states, state-employed legal and care work staff are required investigate supportive parents of trans kids (Kilibanoff, 2022) or confiscate trans children from their parents (Camara, 2023). These resonate with centuries of state policies targeting Black, brown and indigenous communities (Lopes, 2022).

associated with the creation of this term have generated trans-exclusionary arguments, which seek to define the experience of womanhood as one requiring specific experiences of pain at the hands of patriarchy as well as “natural” pain of menstruation or child-birth. Ironically, this myth of pain as *essential* to womanhood was first perpetuated by patriarchal sexologists (Snorton, 2017, pp. 25-27)⁴⁷. The implications of this will be discussed in chapter three.

I defer to Black feminists, such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde, who have iterated critique of white feminism’s habit of discussing binary sexism in a vacuum, often enacting bio-essentialist power dynamics which emerge from white supremacist capitalism (as summarized by Collins, 2000; see also, Schuller, 2021). It is useful to consider how the patriarchal gaze still dominates and determines the value of art, of artists, of care-workers, and of people receiving care. While many in biomedical care-work fields may seek to distance themselves from origins of eugenic practices, the culture that manifested in those practices continues to perpetuate false knowledge that influences maleficent care of poor or disabled women and TTSI+ people, especially those who are BIPOC (Morgan, 2004; Menon, 2023b).⁴⁸

Arrogant Perception/Loving Perception. As summarized by Pitts (2020), Marilyn Frye (1983) constructed a similar phenomenon using the phrase “arrogant perception,” which she describes as a way of viewing the world in which one centers their individual needs, beliefs, and desires, which thus suppresses the needs, beliefs, and desires of other beings (1983, p. 67). She describes this occurring between “men and women.” The concept of “arrogant perception” is related to the male gaze because the gaze is understood to be singularly objectifying and

⁴⁷ Sims’ described the painful process of “curing” (VVF) as one which that could “restore” the enslaved people to “normal wom[e]n” (Seale, 1950, p. 88; Snorton, 2017, p. 25). From this understanding of pain, in conjunction with the painful description of childbirth under colonial medicine, doctors created the concept of “suffering womanhood” as the “image of universal femininity” (McGregor, 1998, p. 35; Snorton, p. 27).

⁴⁸ See also Bervell (2023) and the Movement for Black Lives (2023).

subordinating (1983). The concept also seems to include not only the violent imposition of a subject/object dichotomy in micro-interactions, but it also seems to involve the ways in which the subject of the gaze experiences an ego-centrism, imagining the world operates only for their purposes (p. 67). The concept of “arrogant perception,” however, implies there are *other* ways of perceiving. This dissolves the singularity that *the gaze* tends to convey. Frye leans into this, imagining a “loving perception” as the antithesis of the “arrogant perception” (p. 67). Lugones expands this concept, asserting that this phenomenon occurs not only between “men and women” but also between women, as well as between white people of all genders (she phrases “men and women”) and people of color (1987, p. 79). Both in the so-called-U.S. and in so-called-Argentina, she describes how “being taught to be a woman” requires “learning to be both the agent and the object of arrogant perception” (p. 79). As I will discuss in chapter 3, Lugones’ work aligns with the works of Menon, Price, and others who iterate cishetsexism both affects everyone and involves more than white cishet men as actors/perpetrators.

World-Travelling.⁴⁹ As Lugones expanded upon Frye’s concept of arrogant/loving perception to involve dynamics of colonial/racialized cisheteropatriarchy, she described social life is made up of “multiple, intersecting, co-temporaneous, ...[and] permeable” (1987, p. 16) worlds. She conceptualized *‘world’-travelling* to describe the ways in which colonized people must “consult something other than one’s own will and interests” (Lugones, 1987, p. 334) to survive. She described “willful world-traveling” as seeking to lovingly respond to arrogant perceptions, which she describes in the context of her relationship to her mother (Pitts, 2020): “Loving my mother also required that... I witness her own sense of herself from *within* her world...without

⁴⁹ Lugones’ concept is connected to Anzaldúa’s foundational concept of Borderlands (1987). Cisneros (2020) describes the applications and development of this concept by Lugones (2005), Ruíz-Aho (2011), and many others.

this understanding...we are not solid, visible, integrated...So travelling to each other's "worlds" would enable us to *be through* loving each other" (p. 85-86; my emphasis).

In addition to willful world-travelling in relationships, Lugones also describes *unwillful* world-travelling (1987, p. 17). Due to the ways Anglo/colonial arrogant perception has (de/re)constructed many social worlds, many oppressed people (most notably, colonized people) are forced to move in and out of worlds in which they are limited, confined, "not at ease"/"not-at-home" in their bodies (p. 90). Lugones understands "being-at-ease" as feeling self-assured because one "know[s] the norms...all the words...[and] all the moves" (1987, p. 90). To move through the worlds that subjugate them, oppressed people have to take on the perspective of the dominant norm and often find themselves performing in ways that contradict their authenticity. As such, unwilling world travelling can be experienced as "compulsory, alienating, and painful," which Pitts connects to "articulations of racial and gender oppression" (2020, p. 346).

As oppressed people are moving in and out of worlds through which they are known of in varied, and perhaps contradictory, ways, Lugones theorizes it is likely that oppressed people experience a plurality of selves. As such, the ways they experience themselves is not limited to how they perform themselves under the arrogant perception of others (1987, p. 89). Ortega revises this slightly to describe *existential pluralism* as "the lived experience of the self, including the existential sense of understanding myself as an 'I,' a sense of how I am faring in worlds, and the multiplicity of my experience in terms of the ways I understand myself" (Ortega, 2016, p. 102). Pitts argues this can "explain the experience of multiple understandings of oneself, but without the ontological commitment to multiply existent selves" (2020, p. 348). Lugones describes how marginalized people, through acts of resistance, create worlds to sustain marginalized communities

within worlds (1987, pp. 24-25). To expand on this, Ortega conceptualizes the process of home-tactics, which is the process of creating home(s) in social spaces of resistance (2020).

Lugones argues that locating these worlds of resistance hinges on one's ability to world-travel, to "develop an understanding and appreciation for those sites of valuation, belonging and worth that sustain marginalized communities" (Pitts, 2020, p. 345; Lugones, 1987, p. 24). This way of world-travelling can be difficult because of the ways these worlds have been "historically muted or distorted" (Lugones, 1987, p. 25). These also seem fraught with issues related to white world-travelling (Sullivan, 2004), which I will address later. Pitts (2020) describes that one's perspective can open up upon uncovering narratives that were erased/written out of dominant historical stories. For instance, learning how trans activists cultivated community care through and after the Stonewall rebellion can empower and inform current activists seeking to shift the current political state of anti-trans legislation (Gossett, 2011, p. 367). I believe this can broadly apply when uncovering any narratives of TTSI+ resistance or cultural systems of gender pluralism which are shrouded or distorted by colonial, historical timelines.

Bettcher also draws from Lugones' work to illuminate how trans people may experience a "liminal or double self-conception" as they move through various worlds through which they are known-of in multiple ways (2020, p. 332). While she frames this in the context of "identity reconstruction" (p. 332) [read: the initial years of transition/"coming out"], I would argue this experience expands past when one is conscious of their gender as well as past the more initial stages/years of social and/or physiological transition, especially for people of color and/or for people whose gender and/or gender performance "misfits" in contrast to the white cis-heteronormative "fit" (to reference Garland-Thompson's work (2020), which I discuss later). She does end with a powerful question that bears consideration: "More deeply, how might we formulate a

phenomenology of liminality that takes heed of the trans experience of simultaneous ‘realization’ and ‘derealization’ with regard to our appearances to others?” (p. 332).

Time / Temporality

Husserl and his contemporary Henri Bergson challenged Einstein's early view of time as linear as well as the general habit of science to conceptualize time as “a series of static and homogenous nows” (Olkowski, 2020, p. 323). In his early work, Einstein theorized there was only one time that had to be autonomous of human consciousness, and Bergson urged for consideration of both perceived time and measured time (Bergson, 1965/1999, p. 187).⁵⁰ He argued that time’s “pure duration” is when “our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from its present state from its former states,” relating this to when we recall a tune and experience the notes as “melting” together (Bergson, 1889/1959, p. 100). Further, the scientific conceptualization of the time as occurring alongside and behind the present fails to hold how the past is inseparable from our intuition and thus “mingles with and enriches” the present (Olkowski, p. 323; Bergson, 1896/1988, pp. 65–66).

Merleau-Ponty continues this argument, specifically critiquing the Cartesian fixation on determinism as well as the Cartesian belief that any complexity can be deconstructed into simple parts. Both of these egocentric ideas exclude the possibility of “temporal becoming, and Merleau-Ponty counters this by asserting, “the subject is temporal by means of inner necessity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 432). He goes on to claim we perceive aspects of space because we were *first* enveloped by them, constructing time as a field through which we all move (p. 483).⁵¹ As much as I love this line of flight, it is important to note that Merleau-Ponty was not the first to understand

⁵⁰ Later in his work, Einstein clarified that there could be locally divergent time units experienced in different gravitational fields that do not affect the structure of real time (Capek, 1971). Olkowski says this is congruent with Bergson’s critique, as these local, divergent gravitational fields can be interpreted as hallucinations or dream states (Olkowski, 2020, p. 322).

⁵¹ We each continue to emerge through a “temporal wave” (p. 288) or “temporal horizon” (Olkowski, p. 323), “wedged in between the preceding and following one” (Merleau-Ponty, p. 288): “the past we have lived through, our experiences and perceptions, allow us to be the temporal wave that moves through the world” (Olkowski, p. 323).

time/temporality in this way. There is a long-witnessed pattern of Western science coming to terms with notions that were already well-established in Indigenous cultures pre-colonization. An example particular to theories of temporality would be the concept of *seven generations*, an important theory applied through many First Nation traditions. Through this concept, time is “expansive...where the past, present, and future are mutually reinforcing,” people are understood to emerge *through* the preceding seven generations of their ancestral lineage, and multiple dimensions of reality are held in deep consideration (Blackstock, 2011, pp. 6–7).

Horizons

Morris (2020) summarizes the development of the concept of horizons through Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl posits that there is an outer horizon and an inner horizon. The outer horizon (i.e., the horizon we see when we look into the distances of planet Earth; the numbers on a die that we can and cannot see from our perspective) is meant to signify that there will always exist objects and beings outside of our immediate perception. Simply, the outer horizon is always out of our grasp and sensibilities. Even as we move towards the horizon, the outer horizon is always shifting with us (p. 175; Genusias, 2012). Our inner horizon is our internal sense of what *could* be past the outer horizon, our assumptions of what is outside our grasp or perception. Phenomenology was meant to describe *how* this occurs in the world, how our internal horizons of thought and consciousness meet and are informed by the ever-shifting outer horizon (Morris, p. 176; Genusias).

This can illuminate how our thoughts always seem to lead to more thoughts, how ideas can coalesce and dialogue with ideas and hence *become* something more than we could have perceived when we first thought the thought. Similarly, *empathetic horizons* are understood to be when people come together to share perceptions, encounters, and ideas. In this process, these shared

perceptions become more “solid” (Morris, 2020, pp. 175-6). Heidegger plays with this concept using terms other than *horizon*, and Merleau-Ponty revisits this concept to grapple with his understanding of the body-world schema, as described earlier in this chapter (p. 177). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2005) morphs inner horizons into his concept of the habits of the corporeal schema, which is discussed in the next section. He describes that the way our habit body *becomes* in the world with others both occurs *against* the outer horizon and *develops* the outer horizon of possibility (Morris, p. 177). What emerged was the revelation that “being is itself horizontal,” meaning that being can only be made sense of as being intersects with other beings (p. 177).

Morris (2020) frames Merleau-Ponty’s movement toward ontological intersectionality as one which opens consideration for intersectionality of identity. Feminist phenomenologists (Beauvoir, 1970/1996, 1949/2010; Young, 2005) illuminate the way the patriarchal outer-horizon distorts the body-horizon of “women”⁵² as well as informs our understanding of our bodies shifting/aging. Fanon’s work (1961/1963, 1952/2008) describes how the outer colonial-horizon “undermines horizons and complicates liberatory efforts” (p. 178). Ahmed’s work (2006) illuminates how outer-horizons can either “sustain or undermine” one’s sexuality⁵³ (p. 178). While there is no phenomenology of cisnormativity to refer to, Morris makes specific reference to trans people and anti-trans violence in this chapter (p. 178), which is the first time I noticed explicit consideration of trans people’s experiences in this book. The reference was to how “a woman or trans person” may recognize the outer horizon of an unlit street as one in which they do not feel safe to explore. I noticed the ambiguous use of “person” here and how the writer differentiated

⁵² As I discussed with Ngo’s work, there is a thread of phenomenology that focuses on “female-bodily comportment,” which bears a problematic connection to the myth of binary sex and gender socialization. As I will describe in chapter four, I seek to deeply consider how cisnormativity emerges through gaps in these analyses, so to consider ways in which feminist phenomenology can become open to considering cishetsexist socialization.

⁵³ This is another body of work which I plan to attend to in the future. From the interpretations and summaries I have read, there is an explicit focus on applying queer theory to phenomenology to focus on the lived experience of sexuality (with little to no direct reference to cisnormativity).

trans *person* from *woman*. I understand this is an attempt to involve trans people in this conversation, and I also feel this flattens the imagery of trans people as gender-ambiguous.⁵⁴

The Habit Body. Merleau-Ponty did not consider the body an object in a vacuum but an object that interacts with and emerges through the horizon. The body is never neutral: the body holds “sedimented histories” that are the result of habituated actions (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 289; Guilmette, 2020, p. 277). He argues that our actions are usually not first intellectually/consciously decided upon, but instead our motor and perceptual bodies act first, “relieving us” from the process of consciously considering a task that we *already know* how to perform in the world (Fielding, 2020, p. 155). Merleau-Ponty uses our interaction with objects such as type-writing keyboards or musical instruments as examples (1945/2005, pp. 145–146). Connecting this to Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema and understanding of the embodied subject, Feilding clarifies that habit is a *process* of understanding oneself in the world through our corporeal schema. Habits sediment into our bodies to “anchor” us to the world, and, because our corporeal schema unfolds beyond one’s conscious perception, our schema is not easily perceptible (p. 156).

Feilding summarizes arguments which connect habit to cultural and historical horizons: “[When] new ways of perceiving are instituted...these institutions [find] new ways of moving and hence understanding, [which become] part of the background against which things, people and relations appear” (2020, p. 156). Racialization, the broad system of white supremacy, is a cultural habit of perception which is made to appear “natural”/“neutral”: “Whiteness does not in itself appear but nonetheless provides both a background norm and a spotlight that seems to know in advance what it illuminates” (p. 156; Fielding, 2006). To “settle” into the world of whiteness (i.e., internalize white supremacist ideology) is a “bodily operation” in which one carries and (re)creates

⁵⁴ This is not something this writer can personally attend to, and this is not to say I do not appreciate the inclusion. It is just one aspect I noticed amongst thousands of similar noticings across this book and any literature I seem to read.

the world's "fundamental structures" (Fielding 2006, p. 77; 2020, p. 157), without realizing or remembering the historical contexts of the world that are informing one's habitual ways of perceiving, knowing and valuing (Al-Saji, 2009, p. 379). Al-Saji (2009) argues that what makes sedimented habits so difficult to identify and shift is the way they dissolve into the background and out of our conscious thought.⁵⁵

Merleau-Ponty describes that, if someone shifts one aspect of their habit body, one's "equilibrium" of habit can be "reorganized" and allow for increased clarity of their perceptual fields (1945/2005, pp. 154–155). I will soon discuss how Ngo and Al-Saji both lean into this concept to argue for ways in which we may shift, transform, and shed habitual schemas informed by systems of power. While Deleuze and Guattari argue we must relinquish sedimented habits toward a pursuit of being a "Body without Organs" (1987, pp. 159–162), it is important to realize that sedimented habits are not necessarily oppressive or harmful.⁵⁶ In her discussion of aging, Beauvoir posits one's habits can become rigidly entrenched or they can allow for a curious, attentive engagement with the present that opens up a "kind of poetry" (1970/1996, p. 468).

Racialized Time / The Historico-cultural Matrix/Schema

Utilizing concepts from Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, and Sartre, Alia Al-Saji advances an argument for *racialized time* (Al-Saji, 2013). Her conceptualization describes the temporal experience of racism and colonization as a "paradoxical temporal duality" which involves both the oppression and erasure of "past"/"present" colonized people as well as the superimposition of distorted, controlling images⁵⁷ of colonized people that justify the continued

⁵⁵ This phenomenon is connected to conversations of "compulsory-isms", such as ableism and heteronormativity. While I center mis-fit theory, which I will discuss later, the chapter on compulsory ableism (McRuer, 2020) provides important ways of illuminating ableism through phenomenological analysis.

⁵⁶ It also seems like this urge is similar to the pursuit of absolute transcendence.

⁵⁷ Another phenomenon from Patricia Collins I will engage with later in this paper.

colonial project into the present and future (Olkowski, 2020, p. 325). Drawing from Beauvoir's assertion that we are born into a world that has continued to *become* through sedimented meanings made by others, Fanon's concept of the historico-racial schema, and Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body schema, Al-Saji asserts colonial racism creates differentiated experiences of time through which racialized people experience "truncated" possibilities (Olkowski, 2020, p. 325) because dominant institutions have already "fixed" them in place (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 116). Al-Saji's work in temporality, habit (trans)formation, and critiquing of bio-essentialist systems will be integral to the process of my phenomenological work.

Durée. Al-Saji utilizes Bergson's use of *durée* (1896/1988, 1907/1941, p. 298) to discuss "what it is to endure and live time (in both passive and active senses)" (Al-Saji, 2020, p. 99). Al-Saji argues *durée* encompasses not only the temporal flow of consciousness but also the material, social, and spatial implications of lived time. Meaning, *endured time* is not a linear flow *from* the past into a vast, universal future. Endured time *carries* the *weight* of the past in "relational and nonlinear ways," and it has an operative and differential effect on the present and future (p. 99). Al-Saji summarizes how Bergsonian *durée* destabilizes common notions of the term in three ways. First, time does not belong to us, we belong to time. *Durée* is a grounding dimension that "lies before measure," "through or against which things and events appear" (p. 100). Second, *durée* cannot be described as solely the qualitative flow of time. *Durée* comes *before* the quantity/quality distinctions, so it is the source of both quantitative "clock-time" and qualitative "felt time" (p. 100). Third, *durée* "weaves" both the consecutive flow of time with the "invisible...unconscious infrastructure" of "pastness and memory." This understanding of the past as "dynamic and nonrepresentational," means that *durée* holds both continuity and discontinuity (p. 100).

This construction of *durée* calls into deep critique the rhetoric of time as “progress.” The habit of “moving on” and *distancing* from the past dismisses the “intensively accumulating and differentiating force of the past” (Al-Saji, 2020, p. 101). Leaning into Bergson’s description, “Time is...hesitation, or it is nothing at all” (Bergson, 1934/1938, p. 101; Al-Saji’s translation), Al-Saji describes hesitation from three perspectives. First, hesitation is an **interval** of *durée*, indicating an instant in which someone *feels* instead of *reacts*. Meaning, when one hesitates, they “allow memory to flood in and differentially inform the course of action” (p. 101). In terms of Merleau-Ponty’s theories, this is when one’s sensorimotor habit body becomes open to a new configuration in their habitual schema. Second, hesitation is a **rhythm** of *durée*, an embodied pattern of configuring and materializing pastness into one’s habituality through consciously recollecting and unconsciously feeling weighed down or “buoyed” by the past (p. 101). Third, because habits “import” “pastness,” they illuminate the “dissymmetrical” **structure** of *durée* (p. 101). Meaning, endured time is “more a fountain than flow: ever *passing* on the cusp to futurity, the present is sustained by the *coexistence of the past* that it falls into and reconfigures” (p. 101). She concludes that any person’s *durée* is linked to the affective weight of their *collective* past (p. 101). Whether or not we are conscious of the past does not undermine or erase the way the past ripples into our present. In fact, “unconsciousness is part of the power of the past...The past is a multiplicitous whole – as a nonlinear system of relations – it forms the virtual...texture of our lives; it insinuates itself into the present *as past*, without becoming actual” (p. 101; her emphasis).

Al-Saji pulls from Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of absence (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 261) to contend that the unconscious role of the past means *durée* “has the power of *institution*” (p. 102). The normative weight of the past motivates actions instead of directly acting. It can create dimensions through which one creates meaning and perceives the world. To further complicate

matters, Al-Saji describes *durée* as *tendency*. Calling on Bergson's image of the past as a snowball (1907/1941, pp. 2-6), *durée* can be understood as a vector: a force that has an ever-compounding magnitude, continues to shift direction, and (re)develops with each event. This allows for a nonlinear and incomplete consideration of how our current present holds the weight and pressure not only of what tendencies were actualized but of what tendencies were "diverged from but not actualized - [haunted by memories and] traces of what might have been" (p. 102).

Al-Saji thus "re-tools" this term as to promote an understanding of "the *longue durée* of racism and the afterlives of colonialism and slavery whose 'rot remains'" (2020, p. 99).⁵⁸ She describes *durée* of colonialism and racism as a process of enduring precisely because it continues to be rephrased and repurposed to maintain their hold on the present. She argues her formulation of *durée* is an "antidote" to the myth of "linear progress" which touts the bad faith that oppression "loosens" and is "overcome" as we move through time, "away" from the past (p. 102). She aligns her conceptualization with the meaning of coloniality (Quijano, 2000), which illuminates colonialism as "a world system whose effects and affects continue to endure and to structure our present" (Al-Saji, p. 102). Al-Saji's continued choice to describe *durée* in "watery, atmospheric and ghostly metaphors" is because this imagery conveys a) the power of the past as "fluid milieu...[which may] immerse us or offer us buoyancy"; b) the ways memories can "flood in or remain nebulous"; c) the ways our bodies can "anchor [us] in the present"; d) the ways events have the potential to "ripple through time"; and e) how bodies of water not only hold but "pull us into" the past (pp. 102-103). Aligning with Fanon's works, Al-Saji asserts that the ways colonialism occupies bodies, breathing, and the land (Fanon, 1959/2001, p. 49) are both institutional and

⁵⁸ Song association: "Your ignorance leaves a hell of a stench, the aroma lingers on, generations have known" (Diamond, 2018).

atmospheric (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 279; 1964/2006, pp. 48–49), and that the colonial past “*bog[s] down* racialized subjects” (Al-Saji, 2020, p. 103; Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 32, 224).

Harkening back to her concept of racialized time, Al-Saji discusses how white supremacy compounds and “intensifies” through time in a “feedback loop” that both (a) normalizes and substantiates the reason for colonization through the process of scapegoating cultures and peoples and (b) maintains an “active forgetting and disregard in the present” by reimagining alternative forms of colonial processes (2020, p. 103). There becomes a multiplicity of ways to live through and experience time. The racialized and/or colonized subject feels they have arrived “too late, projected back to a perpetual past” (p. 103). This echoes what Snorton refers to as “a Fanonian formulation of Blackness-as-waiting” (2017, p. 182; Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 120),⁵⁹ where the colonial subject experiences and contributes to the “persisting legacies of white supremacy” (Al-Saji, p. 103) through habits of ontological expansiveness and unquestioning acceptance of knowledge systems that inform epistemological ignorance (both concepts will be discussed shortly). Drawing from Fanon’s opposing diagnostic descriptions of colonized subjects and colonial subjects⁶⁰, Al-Saji indicates the compulsory habituation to white supremacy influences colonial subjects to *not* hesitate or think-through their actions, which maintains the trajectory and momentum of the snowball of colonial *durée*. If colonial subjects continue to “move on,” look the other way, or maintain hegemony by saying “it’s just the way it is” or “the past is in the past,” they are not being neutral, they are contributing to the continued momentum of the colonial project (p. 103). This echoes and grounds arguments made in Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

⁵⁹ “Within New World grammars, Blackness was defined as somehow always out of time, out of place, wrong anyplace and anytime. As such, the ‘wrong place’ signifies upon the various ways Blackness is figured by way of a ‘colonial fiction’ that, as Katherine McKittrick (2006) has explained, renders Black geographies ‘ostensible impossibilities’ (p. 5)” (Snorton, 2017, pp. 181-182).

⁶⁰ Colonized subjects: *Tetanzation*, a hyper-sensitivity and bodily awareness; and colonial subjects: *Affective ankylosis*, a hypo-sensitivity, disregard, and/or compulsive compartmentalizing and forgetting (Fanon, 2008, pp. 110, 114).

From Al-Saji's chapter, I found myself understanding the term "slow your roll" in a different way. If hesitating is the act of pausing, of allowing memory and experience to funnel into the present and inform how I may act in a way that is contrary to how I was *about* to act (out of sedimented habit), then could this be described as slowing down the momentum of my habit body? If lived/generational time is a gigantic snowball that gains momentum upon our collective habits, then do our daily shifts of habit and acts of slowing down give way to shifting the course of our collective snowball? More personally, this gave words to the fountain of moments in my life in which I paused, re-examined how I was about to act/speak or how I was perceiving people and assuming things about them based on my sensory fields of sound, vision, smell, etc. Through these moments, my current understanding of what was/is possible in the world was/is expanded upon through intentional relationships with other people, through reading literature that expanded my perspective, through uncovering and reformulating my understanding of myself.

Guilmette (2020) describes how we are forced to consider historical context of our lives "only after coming up against a tear in the fabric of our web of sense-making" (p. 282; informed by Judith Butler). This illuminates how hesitating becomes necessary once we are presented with the gaps in our knowledge systems. My moments of hesitation are often experienced in the "afterglow" of revelations (Hofsess, 2013) experienced through media or social interactions that challenged and opened my perspective. Daily encounters with the world such as walking through a grocery store, going to class, or being at a concert, became moments in which I was meta-analyzing and re-encountering phenomena that had previously gone unacknowledged in my background, in my unconscious *durée*. As I will discuss in chapter three, *durée* provides a way to discuss the nuanced, multiple implications of white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal socialization.

Ontological Expansiveness. Sullivan developed this concept to describe the phenomena of privileged groups “unconscious habit of assuming that all spaces are rightfully available...to enter comfortably” (Sullivan, 2020, p. 249). She describes further that this habit operates in a geographical sense, in which a person is taking up literal/physical space, as well as in the metaphorical space, in which a person is taking up “linguistic, artistic, economic, etc.” space (p. 249). I would argue this includes the liminal arenas of musical space, through which bodies and sound move, as well as academic space, through which bodies hold positions and scholarly research often inserts/probes into the physical and metaphorical. Regardless of the field of space/time/geography, Sullivan describes ontological expansiveness operates as such (p. 249):

...with an assumed right to enter and feel at ease in whatever space a person inhabits. [I]nhabiting a space in this way both shapes and is shaped by a person’s individual habits. Because of the assumed right to psychological comfort, if something about a space makes an ontologically expansive person feel ill at ease, [they tend] to experience the situation as an unjust violation of [their] basic right to be and feel welcomed wherever [they choose].

Sullivan asserts that this phenomenon is regulated and maintained not in any conscious way but via unconscious habit (2020, p. 249). She reminds us that unconscious habits can be drawn to our attention, and with concerted effort we may shift these habits. However, she describes that these habits often resist obstruction and can be socially or personally difficult to acknowledge (p. 250), due to the dominating social order which individualizes systemic issues. She describes ontological expansiveness as a critical “component of traditional (white) masculinity,” bringing up “mans-spreading” on the NYC Subway as an example (pp. 249-250): “being a man means being able to take up as much space as one wants and not to have to justify doing so” (p. 250)⁶¹.

⁶¹ Her footnote #4 describes the complicated reports of how manspreading has been witnessed from Black and brown men. However, “In the case of arrests for manspreading—as in many other cases—law enforcement has

Sullivan discusses one example of how ontological expansiveness emerges through acts of white people: situations in which white people assume that they not only *should* be able to enter any space, neighborhood, or country, but also *feel welcomed*, and then claim reverse racism when they do not feel they have been welcomed (2020, p. 250). She identifies “color-blindness” and the assertion that “all space is objective” as typical defense mechanisms for resisting the identification of white ontological expansiveness, arguing “a white person’s not seeing racism, rather than race, seems to be the unconscious goal of color blindness” (p. 251). She also describes that the “most striking and problematic forms” of this phenomenon are when white antiracists assume their antiracism welcomes them to enter spaces and communities of color because they want to “help” (p. 251). Following a scenario from Ahmed (2012, pp. 36-7), Sullivan describes this as “caring whiteness” and “sorry whiteness” (2020, p. 252). She argues that white fragility bolsters habits of ontological expansiveness in a “vicious cycle”: white people’s minimal “stamina” for considering how to “engage in situations that critically foreground their race” perpetually “requires people of color to manage white people’s emotional lives,” and yet white people consider this management as “their own psychic freedom” (pp. 252-3). She describes how this takes a toll on people of color’s health, which Ngo also discusses (2015). Sullivan concludes that ontological expansiveness can be applied to all axes of social oppression, summarizing its dual affect: “Habits of ontological expansiveness can be thought of as producing micro-aggressions in the lives of subordinated groups *and* micro-kindnesses in the lives of dominant and privileged groups” (p. 253; my emphasis).

twisted (deliberately, it seems) the concerns of women of all races about men’s sexism and male privilege into a racialized weapon to attack [B]lack men and perpetuate antiblack racism” (p. 354).

This concept brings to my mind the ways in which white trans people may flatten the experience of anti-trans discrimination and racism into one monolithic experience by claiming they experience discrimination that is *the same as* racism, and therefore expect to be welcomed into communities and spaces of color. Similarly, white trans and/or disabled people may use their subjugated status as a way to side-step accountability for their ontological expansiveness or other acts of racism. This would be an instance in which one perpetuates their own bio-essentialist oppression and further subjugates racialized people, especially racialized people who are trans and/or disabled. It is important to realize that the “oppression olympics”⁶² of identity politics is a ploy to fragment people who are oppressed by the same bio-essentialist macro-system in different ways at different times (Táíwò, 2022).

Utilizing Sullivan’s concept of ontological expansiveness enables discussion of the similarities and differences between bio-essentialist oppressive systems without flattening and reducing the macro-system into a monolith. It also enables discussion of how overlapping experiences of oppression create immensely different and nuanced experiences that cannot be reduced to discussing a singular axis of oppression. It provides a way to acknowledge that we can both harm and be harmed, be privileged and subjugated, by the same macro-system. In my work, I firmly believe that there are some questions that I cannot sufficiently ask or attend to as a white transmasculine person, and it would be an act of ontological expansiveness to even assume I can do so. I need to continue to monitor my sense of ontological expansiveness and (re)consider: “Does it *need* to be said? Does it need to be said *now*? Does it need to be said by *me*?”

White World-Traveling. Sullivan (2004) has argued that Lugones’ concept of *world-traveling* (1987) needs examination that is critical of how dominant groups attempt to world-travel.

⁶² This phrase was introduced by Elizabeth Martínez (Davis & Martínez, 1993).

I say “attempt” here because I understand world-traveling to involve moving from an arrogant perspective to a loving perspective. It involves de-centering one’s perspective and empathetically considering another’s lifeworld. However, the ontological expansiveness of dominant groups, especially groups that benefit from white supremacy culture, creates a bubble of insulation between the dominating world and the Others’ world that can limit the extent to which one can shed their arrogant perspective. I understand Sullivan’s concept of *white world-traveling* to be the emergence of traveling into all spaces with an arrogant perception. It emerges as the assumption that of manifest destiny, of the doctrine of discovery. It emerges with the saying “the world is your oyster”: Everything and everyone is present for you to examine, touch, observe; They are meant to entertain, comfort, and/or educate you. I also believe this concept is emerging in the frequent iterations of white-washing because these are attempts to naturalize the expansive presence of whiteness *and* minimize the presence of BIPOC in *all* places, spaces, and times.

Habits of Racism and Racialization. Ngo (2015) weaves Sartre’s, Fanon’s, and Merleau-Ponty’s theories to extend the Fanonian account of racialized embodiment in three ways. First, she argues that shifting away from subject-object dualism allows us to consider that, as much as racialized people are gazed at, they world-travel: “*lived* experience of racialization is one of multiple-consciousness and of perennial negotiation” (p. 195). Although the “enduring dimension” of white supremacist hegemony while living in a racialized body is well described by Sartre’s and Fanon’s gaze, that is not the *only* dimension in which racialized people live. The white hegemonic gaze makes BIPOC feel “stuck” in the being-object because it continuously seeks to “crystallize” people of color’s intersubjectivity, that “which *ought to remain fluid*” (p. 196).

Second, Ngo illuminates how the “gravitas” of the racializing gaze makes complete reversibility impossible. Racialized norms and controlling imaginaries can “stick,” or become

internalized, to the point where it is “difficult for one to fluidly shift between or from dominant paradigms” (2015, p. 197). She gives an example of how she always hears herself in an “echo” that “vibrates through her head,” not how other people hear her (p. 197). Similarly, she views her body in ways that the controlling imagination has led her to internalize.⁶³

Third, Ngo holds complex conversation about the consistent focus on the visual perceptual field. She asks if critical race theorists have “succumb[ed] to Western philosophy’s ‘ocularcentrism,’⁶⁴” stating rhetorically, “surely there exist a multitude of registers through which racism and racialization operate” (2015, p. 198). She wonders if the hyperfocus on the visual is an attempt to veil other ways racism manifests. She considers how multiracial people who racially “pass” as white-enough also experience “bodily fragmentation or uncanniness that directly reference the racialised schema” (p. 199). After some consideration, she concludes that the primacy given to the visual perceptual field is most likely influenced by the primacy that the colonial white supremacist system places on the visual perceptual field. Providing examples of how the visual register “muffles” cues from auditory fields (however, these examples were primarily centered around language and accents), she asserts the visual register is “central” – All other sensory registers “take their cue from the visual” (p. 200). She structures her argument as if there is *only one* centered field that others need to be secondary to, and that the visual field is “the structuring force of our bodily encounters” (p. 200)⁶⁵.

Ngo (2015) concludes that “the ontological violence of racism is not a violence against our subjectivity...but rather - and more urgently - a violence against our *intersubjectivity*...against our embodied being-with” (p. 203). If, thinking with Merleau-Ponty, intersubjective being is not a

⁶³ I would contend how she hears herself is also filtered through racialized habits of hearing.

⁶⁴ She pulls this term from Alcoff’s work (2006, p. 198).

⁶⁵ Whenever I read through these arguments, I wonder how the experiences of Blind or visually-impaired folks would (dis)connect from these phenomenological theories.

given experience but is “*forged* through embodied interaction,” then racism and habits of racialization “cut short” one’s intersubjective embodiment, and the embodiment of the person who is acting upon internalized habits of racialization habituates to *relying on the disembodiment of people they racialize* (p. 203). Ngo argues that the dualistic hegemony that permeates through Sartre’s and Fanon’s conceptualizations of the gaze is a symptom of the Western cartesian “attempt to devise a world into (white) subjects and their (racialized) objects...to efface fluidity and ambiguity of embodied being” (p. 203). She summarizes that racism, as violence of intersubjectivity: (a) “freezes”/restricts the motion of racialized people (informed by works of Yancy & Fanon); (b) leaves them with no “shared temporality” with others (informed by works of Al-Saji); (c) “removes the potential encounters with the world” via isolating/confining them [in prisons/solitary confinement] (informed by works of Guenther); (d) denies the ability to be-with (as informed by worlds of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others); and (e) restricts the “motility to actively participate in the world while navigating one’s way through the weight of its historicity (informed by Lugones and Sullivan)” (pp. 203-4).

I decided to focus on Ngo’s work (2015) for a few reasons. First, cisnormativity is immersed in and inseparable from the bioessentialist false logics that created anti-Blackness. I need to attend to how phenomenology has been applied to illuminate the system of anti-Blackness and give important critical race scholars their due respect. Second, both trans and intersex experience has been white-washed. I, as a white, trans-masculine, and endosex person, want to ground myself in ways that attended to both white supremacy and cissexism as integrated phenomena but not as the *same* phenomenon. Third, Ngo’s work offers plenty of points that both white and BIPOC trans people could utilize as points of discussion when articulating the ways in

which trans experience varies widely based on one's experience with racialization and colonization.

As I read both Ngo's dissertation (2015) and Snorton's work (2017) at the same time, and I continued to witness both parallels between their analyses of white supremacy *and* contradicting analysis that illuminate *durée* of "the myth" that trans people and Black people exist as separate "communities" (Cyrus, Scott, and Lee, 2022). Snorton expresses that Du Bois' definition of double consciousness as "'two souls, two thoughts and two unreconciled strivings' (1903, p. 5)" illuminates a potential to "perceive how race and gender are inextricably linked yet irreconcilable and irreducible projects. To feel Black in the diaspora, then, might be a trans experience" (2017, p. 8). Ngo often makes comparisons between "female-body comportment" and racialized embodiment to illuminate the experience of racialization. However, this does not consider how the systemic suppression of TTSI+ people not only compounds experiences of racialization and gender (dis)embodiment but *multiplies* them. Her discussion, as well as any application of "female body comportment" in phenomenology, seems to rely on the flattened and immobile experience of non-cisnormative embodiment as the backdrop to accentuate the "normal" experiences of assumed-cis people. Thankfully, her lines of flight can continue to be extended when brought into dialogue with works such as Snorton's, which I will illuminate in chapter three.

Witnessing. Ngo's conclusion (2015) that racialization restricts the intersubjective fluidity of racialized people aligns with what Oliver (2020) summarizes as the "recognition model," which articulates one's subjectivity *requires* recognition from colonial powers/actors. Oliver rejects the model precisely because it "requires that the oppressed seek recognition from their oppressors, the very people who have been withholding recognition from them in the first place" (p. 339). To hinge one's subjectivity upon recognition from one's oppressors "risks perpetuating rather than

overcoming oppression” because it “undermines one’s sense of self as a subject” (p. 340). Oliver plays with the double meaning of witnessing⁶⁶, leaning into the tension between the singular and universal, in order to generate notions of response ethics informed by politics. Oliver states:

Witnessing...entails a new radical way of approaching ethics as response ethics wherein we are responsible not only for our actions and our beliefs and even for the other’s response but *also for what we do not and cannot know, what we do not and cannot recognize*. In this way, witnessing as response ethics demands that we *remain vigilant to the ways in which even our attempts to be just and fair, to do the right thing, may exclude or silence some others we have not yet considered or recognized as members of our moral community*. Witnessing beyond recognition, then...*requires that we continually investigate our own exclusionary or violent practices and take responsibility*. Our responsibility comes from our response-ability, or our ability to respond. And that is the crux of response ethics based on the double sense of witnessing that brings together the singularity of each with the plurality of those with whom we share a world, and ultimately all of those with whom we share our one and only planetary home, the earth. In this way, witnessing ethics as response ethics *can take us beyond human-centrism and toward consideration of the ways in which all of the creatures of the earth, and the earth itself, respond*. (p. 340; my emphasis)

Oliver argues that attending to our response-ability characterizes subjects not based upon someone’s ability to dominate or recognize others but upon someone’s ability to address and respond to all beings (2020, p. 341). The concept of witnessing offers important values upon which to ground ethical care work considerations, and it also emphasizes the importance of accessibility in all worlds and spaces. Our social bonds are created and maintained through our ability to not

⁶⁶ To both experience something from one’s subjectivity as an *eyewitness* and to *bear witness* to something that is felt but not seen (Oliver, 2020, p. 337).

only respond responsibly but also to be open to any other being's response. To do this requires that we pause – that we hesitate. We must learn to constantly take notice of how our assumptions are limiting or short-changing how beings may respond to us.

Imaginaries

Gatens (2020) summarizes how psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan sought to challenge mind-body dualism and yet they created theories about body image and self-concept that reinscribed the Euro-colonial value systems. Gatens moves one to discuss theorists like Young (2005) have reframed these theories. Many reframes seek to illuminate how the normative imaginary that values Eurocentric white, “male,” enabled, and wealthy bodies thwarts and fragments body images and self-concepts for many people who are marked as “Other.” Still, however, it seems the bio-essentialist notions of gender and sex instigated by psychoanalytic theories still permeate through all reinterpretations Gatens's discusses in their chapter.

The Social Imaginary

Gatens (2020) summarizes Castoriadis' (1987) concept of the *social imaginary* as that which structures a human's reality. So, the imaginary imposed by institutions of power to produce conformity are what shapes an individual's internalized self-imagery. While his conceptualization is immersed in Eurocentrism, this argument bears importance: individuals do have the “capacity to modify and reinterpret the symbols, myths, and legends through which societies are formed...to alter the social realities that [they] inhabit” (p. 183).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ This reminds me of the ways Black and brown queer and trans people have often been the ones to repurpose the imaginary of the white gender binary to create varied ways of performing themselves and thwart the white supremacist binary gender system at every turn. Often, these aesthetics are then co-opted by the white normative imaginary with no credit given to the creators, repurposed as “trending styles,” and modeled by actors who fit racial, gender and ability norms (Livingston, 1990).

Gatens refers to Taylor's (2004) definition of the *social imaginary* as "an 'ensemble of imaginings that enable [certain social] practices by making sense of them' (p. 165) [and] because such imaginings are widely shared, they enjoy 'a sense of legitimacy' (p. 23)" (2020, p. 183). Taylor goes on to center and validate "modernity" as necessitating capitalism, a public sphere, and autonomous citizens, and he argues that public opinion is somehow not dictated by power structures. Both of these arguments are flagrant indications he is not considering material realities of poor people, people of color, or non cis-men.⁶⁸ Further, his *singular* notion of modernity is dominated by a Western epistemological ignorance, indicative of the imaginary through which he emerges. The social imagination provides a background hermeneutic of images, narratives, and scripts, which bolsters the social coordination of concepts and has the potential to "condition our judgments without our awareness" (Gatens, p. 184), even if those judgements counter positions that we cognitively and personally hold (Fricker, 2007, p. 159).

Controlling Images. Collins (2000) introduced the concept of *controlling images* through a discussion of the four interlinked controlling images of Black femininity. These images are (a) the beneficent and subservient *mammy* who 'knows her place' as a domestic worker, (b) the *matriarch* who is destroying the idea of the American nuclear family because she overpowers and thus emasculates Black men, (c) the irresponsible *welfare mother* who represents a burden to state economic system, and (d) the aggressive [read: sexually empowered] *jezebel* who does not relinquish her power to marriage with a man, disrupting the normative social order (Collins, 2020, p. 77). While these images have shifted and been (re)purposed, Collins believes that the use of these images signifies the dominating power of the social imaginary *and* that the knowledge of the

⁶⁸ The dichotomous notions of public and private spheres were created as a means to prevent those were not upper-class, white European, cis men from simply being in public or having any recognized agency (Laqueur, 1990; Menon, 2023k). To claim that the public sphere is necessary and that public opinion is not an act of power indicates a profound lack of awareness of this history.

images can be a medium for inciting collective resistance (p. 77). She asserts the concept of controlling images draws attention to ways in which the social imaginary organizes intersecting power relationships.

Collins describes the six distinguishing features of controlling images. First, the broad purpose of controlling images is to “normalize and naturalize social hierarchies” (2020, p. 78). While the examples she describes are “constellations” of sets of images split between binary categories of man/woman across varied racialized contexts, I would argue that controlling images *also* extend and intersect with sets of disabled experiences, neurodivergent experiences, and experiences outside of the assumed norm of endosex, cisgender embodiment. Second, controlling images and stereotypes are similar but not the same. She explains stereotypes are passive/casual associations made about human behavior based on prejudiced beliefs that are often individualized and not explicitly connected to the power structures as defined by the social imaginary. So, stereotypes offer little to no guidance for how the stereotypes may resist domination other than becoming more “tolerant” and trying to not fulfill nebulous stereotypes at an individual level (p. 78). Meanwhile, controlling images identify the power structures which inform how one views other people, and by identifying that power structure, the person seeing through the controlling image may begin to recognize the lens through which they are looking (p. 79).

Third, a part of the hegemonic structure of the social imaginary, controlling images are not *always/only* negative. Some controlling images, reserved for elite positions in society, are positive and the negative controlling images serve as the “foil,” or the “negative space” (Snorton, 2017, p. 143; Spillers, 2003, p. 174), which defines and bolsters the positivity of elite societal roles. If individuals in more elite roles behave in ways that are “unbecoming,” there are controlling images used to discredit and penalize them (Collins, 2020, p. 79). Fourth, controlling images are

hegemonic, located in the “background” with the social imaginary (p. 79). So, people’s awareness of controlling images varies extensively. Collins describes how some controlling images are so popular that they may not be understood as controlling images, using the image of elite [cis] white men as “intelligent, moral leaders” as an example (p. 79).

Fifth, regardless of one’s awareness of controlling images, the images “shape [one’s] everyday experience” because the controlling images “refer not just to external social scripts but also to internal processes of individual subjectivity” (Collins, 2020, p. 80). Meaning, we have all internalized controlling images and thus they “filter” how we reflect on the world and how we explain social power relations. When/if we become conscious of these controlling images, it is up to us to work through how we have internalized them, which she claims is “the bedrock of individual and collective political awareness and action” (p. 80). Conclusively, both the content of controlling images and their ability to shape power hierarchies are “inherently relational” (p. 80). Changing the status of any set of controlling images has a “ripple effect” on other controlling images, which means various subordinated groups have “a stake” in resisting the status quo of controlling images which may not influence how they are individually understood, valued, or perceived (p. 80).

Collins offers controlling images as a way of analyzing the ways *structural* power and hegemonic acceptance of the status quo emerges in “societal rules which make scant mention of categories of race, class, gender or sexuality, yet nonetheless manage to reproduce longstanding hierarchies” (2020, p. 81).⁶⁹ Similarly, the concept of controlling images provides a way of making sense of our experiences within “web-based networks” of *interactional*/interpersonal power dynamics (p. 81). When structural and interactional dimensions of power coalesce into *disciplinary*

⁶⁹ This bears specific application to the ways in which controlling images emerge as neoliberal tactics to maintain pathological and oppressive assumptions in psychological texts without explicitly using language that is “offensive.”

power, controlling images continuously morph to inform social scripts by which people in positions of authority or peers within an institution mutually police one another's behavior (p. 81). In all these situations, Collins reminds us that controlling images are not as permanent as they may seem - they are always malleable and are always shifting based on various political purposes (p. 82). The transformative power of controlling images is not based solely on critiquing them; we must collectively act to transform them with the purpose of disrupting the political power structures the images have been utilized to veil and normalize (p. 82).

Epistemic Ignorance/Knowledge

Mills' chapter (2020) intricately maneuvers through the history of the "enlightenment" and the transition to egalitarian and democratic political structures, which still inundate current epistemological knowledge frameworks. Echoing arguments which Marxists and other class theorists, feminist theorists, critical race theorists, [critical disability theorists, and trans theorists] have made across the 20th century, he describes the promise of a liberal, democratic, and non-discriminatory epistemology as "illusory" and "illiberal" (p. 109) because the "new" system circumscribed access to agency to assumed-cis, enabled, white men who own property: "Rather than an unqualified egalitarian liberalism, then, what we actually have is a bourgeois, [cishetero]patriarchal, and racial/imperial liberalism" (p. 109).

To substantiate this shift, there was a concerted effort to "*actively deny* 'knowings' that contradict the established order. Knowing thyself, knowing thy society, would mean coming to 'know' one's identity as a victim of an oppressive...sociopolitical order...such truths cannot be known if the system is to preserve itself" (Mills, 2020, p. 109). Thus, modern epistemology is understood as "a set of norms for guiding cognition...away from any openness" (p. 109). He asserts that, especially in states that claim to be liberal, this process requires a "structural opacity

denying its actual identity” and is predicated upon denying credibility to people who “know”⁷⁰ and make “anti-systemic claims” (pp. 109-110). He goes on to describe how epistemological knowledge requires knowledge-avoidance, or epistemological ignorance. Mills calls for “multiple, intersecting oppositional sources, an ‘epistemology of resistance’...to achieve a genuinely Enlightened modernity in which opacity - prescribed non-knowing to obfuscate systemic sociopolitical oppression - will no longer be tolerated” (p. 112).

Sullivan argues “rather than oppose knowledge, ignorance is often formed by it, and vice versa” (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007, p. 154). Because of this, she argues it is best practice to talk about “ignorance/knowledge” to dissolve the myth that with knowledge comes “self-mastery” (p. 154). Conclusively, no one can claim *epistemic innocence* and claims of “culpable ignorance” can be problematized (Medina, 2011, p. 30). Meaning, saying someone “should have known better” alludes to the assumption that knowing *more* would mean someone is *less* ignorant (p. 30). This bolsters the ableist and classist assumption that lack of “cognition” or “intelligence” is the cause of racism or internalized oppressive ideology. It is more accurate to indicate that someone is ignorant *because of what* they know and *how* they know it. Mills (2007) and others argue that what has resulted from generations of epistemic knowledge/ignorance is “a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions [which produces] the ironic outcome that whites [are] in general unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (p. 18). This can be understood as the *durée* of white epistemic ignorance/knowledge. The social imaginary insulates and enables the lack of hesitation/consideration associated with white ignorance/knowledge and

⁷⁰ This alludes to the history described by Feinberg (1992), Federici (2004, 2018), and Hubbs (1988). The words for “witch” most often translate to “woman/person who knows” (Hubbs, p. 40). I would also argue that, in these centuries old contexts, “woman” or “witch” was probably used not to describe a specific gender embodiment or reproductive capacity but to describe people who were “not men”, including intersex, non-binary or trans people.

white ontological expansiveness. As Menon puts it: “Cognitive dissonance is a white performance piece” (2022e).

Epistemic Injustice. Gatens summarizes Fricker’s two identified types of epistemic injustice that emerge in relation to epistemic ignorance/knowledge. *Testimonial epistemic injustice* is when someone who speaks to their experience is given less or no credibility by the social imaginary. *Hermeneutic epistemic injustice* is when a social imaginary and linguistic system lacks the resources to interpret the way marginalized people experience specific actions or types of behaviors (Gatens, p. 184; Fricker, 2007, p. 159). Often, these experiences compound one another.

Bad Faith

Gordon (2020) connects Sartre’s concept of *Bad Faith* to many concepts I have covered. It bears noting that this concept was originally discussed and developed in French: *a mauvaise foi*, which has many nuanced meanings in French such as “bad/false/worthless belief/confidence/pledge/trust/faith” (p. 18). What helps me understand this concept more clearly is “false trust” or “false confidence.” Gordon explains that because consciousness can stretch further than what is given in our material world, we have a responsibility to hold space for error in our consciousness's trajectory (p. 18), which resonates with the concept of *witnessing*. This concept reminds me of George Lee’s phrase “research over me search” (2022). Bad faith, or false trust, occurs when we do not responsibly and critically engage in research and instead place perfect trust in our current beliefs/knowledge (or perhaps seek research that validates our opinion only) (Gordon, 2020, p. 18). Citing Nietzsche (1989), Gordon asserts that bad faith can emerge from seriously holding values that dictate the degree of a human’s subjectivity as well as from simply taking oneself too seriously. The antidote to these predicaments is the process of taking stock of

and responsibility for our values as well as playfully realizing our agency in how we participate in the “rules through which life’s games or values are played” (2020, p. 20).

My initial response to this phenomenological concept of bad faith was a feeling of relief because it provided a way to explicitly frame subliminal bio-essentialist value systems that emerge through most of the philosophical and clinical literature. More broadly, it provides a way to name the on-the-ground *emergences* of epistemological ignorance/knowledge. Before discussing some more-established iterations of bad faith, Gordon applied this concept to describe “bad disciplinary methodological practices” (p. 21) as *disciplinary decadence*.

Disciplinary Decadence. Gordon (2020) asserts that bad faith emerges if one (or a group of people) can lie to (themselves), which hinges upon “disarming” the ability of evidence to appear. (p. 19). So, the maintenance of bad faith (and epistemological ignorance/knowledge) requires the elimination of evidence (p. 19).⁷¹ When a discipline considers itself, its methods, and all of reality as “complete,” which he describes as taking the discipline too seriously, the discipline “takes it[self] out of relations with reality” (p. 21). When this *disciplinary decadence* occurs in the human sciences, it results in the discipline treating people who do not “fit” as “problems” (p. 21). This echoes historical and current critiques of the MIC (Page & Woodland, 2022). Simply put, colonial societies have a deeply sedimented habit of “attempt[ing] to force human beings outside of human relationships” (Gordon, p. 20; Fanon, 1952/2008).

Anti-Blackness and the Power of One’s Double-Consciousness. Gordon (2020) applies societal bad faith to anti-Blackness. Through the works of Richard Wright, who he identifies as a theorist influential to Simone de Beauvoir, W.E.B. DuBois (1898, 1903), Paget Henry (2016), Jane

⁷¹ Following Sullivan and Medina, I assert this also requires the creation of false evidence, as exemplified in the bio-essentialist pseudoscience that sought to legitimize capitalist extraction and elimination of people by constructing them as “not-human-enough,” or even as *objects* (and therefore expendable/need to be confined), and natural resources as “objects” (trees, minerals, water, food).

Anna Gordon (2005), and Franz Fanon (1954/2008), he notes that identifying anti-Blackness as a societal bad faith can instigate the realization of one's double-consciousness: "The spirit of seriousness is manifested in the notion of [B]lack people *being* problems. The moment of realizing they are human beings who face problems is transformative. Instead of being problems, they question the society that treats them as such" (p. 20). This transformative power of realizing one's double-consciousness (Snorton, 2017, p. 143; Spillers, 2003, p. 163) will continue to be of importance in this thesis, particularly because recognizing one's double consciousness hinges upon accessing knowledge that systems of power keep shrouded. Access to knowledge is shrouded precisely because realizing one's double-consciousness has the potential to invite us out of the loop of internalizing systemic oppression and into action and solidarity.

Misfits / *Mis-fitting*. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (Garland-Thompson, 2020) frames *mis-fitting* as a materialist feminist conceptualization of living through time as an unstable, organic being amongst capitalist social structures which are built and arranged for certain ways of being a static-body. She believes "the discrepancy between the body and world, between that which is expected and that which is not, produces fits and misfits" (p. 225). She frames *mis-fitting* as a way to discuss how people are arbitrarily and continuously (re)determined to be fit-enough to access public life based on their *current* ability to fit into the abstract idea of a "generic, autonomous subject" (p. 229), typically characterized in reference to dominant positions of "male, white, heterosexual" (p. 228).⁷² The shape to which humans are expected to fit (under capitalism) unveils a myth of the normative, "healthy" individual that the MIC holds and utilizes in bad faith. She offers an important consideration: there is a "fragility of fitting. Any of us can fit here today and mis-fit here tomorrow" (p. 228).

⁷² I notice their wording here.

This unveils another common bad faith myth that is quite popular, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: we all have the capacity to become disabled (based on the “fit” determined by institutions who seek to enable capitalism), so disabled rights need to be prioritized by us all. This concept of misfitting and subsequent calls for solidarity can extend to other forms of marginalization in relationship to disability, especially when we consider the connections between disability, colonialism, capitalism, anti-Blackness, and cisheterosexism. So, this concept can enable discussion and connection across axes of oppression, and I believe it can be particularly useful when navigating the realities of cisnormative repression.

Heteronormativity. Gordon (2020) describes the following scene as a “famous” iteration of bad faith to involve a dialogue between Sartre and de Beauvoir: An assumed cishet man approaches an assumed cis woman (whom he assumes to be both cis and het), takes her hand and assumes they are on a dinner date. The woman disembodies herself, completes a mental exercise to believe he is only touching her hand, *not her*. The point of the scene is to describe a human’s capacity for disembodiment (for consciousness to no longer be “in” our bodies, but outside of them), which he validates as a necessary “flight” when undergoing intense, violent, and traumatic experiences⁷³ (p. 19). Gordon utilizes this scene to discuss bad faith as it relates to the man’s role, specifically through his response to the other person’s disembodiment. The scene describes him as “outwitted” into thinking he is holding *her* when he is only holding her *hand*. He could have noticed this through her body language, her affect, or way she did or did not respond to his touch. Why/how did he *not* notice these signs? His assumption of holding her and maintaining his insulated perspective by not attending to her social cues is an example of how bad faith is an

⁷³ This discourse around disembodiment / dissociation is echoed in a counseling context (Wade, 1997).

element within social phenomena. He eliminated and ignored any evidence contrary to what he assumed to be occurring; perhaps he even created evidence in his mind to validate his belief.

Utilizing works of feminist (Beauvoir, 1949/2010) and queer (Butler, 2002) theorists Burke describes heteronormativity in the following way:

[H]eteronormativity is used to name a constitutive structure of subjectivity with particular historical conditions that materializes through a constellation of social and interpersonal relations and practices. Such relations and practices include the naturalization of heterosexual desire, the compulsory social character of heterosexuality, the subordination of women through masculinist heterosexuality, the designation and valorization of certain sex acts and forms of pleasure as normal and desirable, and the sexualized stigmatization and violence committed against people of color and individuals who do not conform to dominant norms of gender and/or sexuality. (2020, p. 161)

Beauvoir's well-known argument that "one is not born, but rather becomes [a] woman" (1949/2010, p. 283) identifies the pattern of assumptions of bad faith which link anatomy to destiny (Gordon, 2020, p. 19). Burke identifies Beauvoir's work *Second Sex* as "the first phenomenological investigations of female sex embodiment" (2020, p. 164). Even though de Beauvoir does not explicitly name the system of heteronormativity, Burke frames her work as foundational to the explication of heteronormativity because Beauvoir describes the "constitutive and binding relation between" understanding oneself as a woman and being influenced to accept and play the role of a "passive body-subject" in heterosexual contexts (Burke, p. 164). It can be deduced that this (white/colonial) patriarchal binary gender role system enforces/reinforces both cisnormativity and heteronormativity. As such I use the term *cisheteronormativity* or *cisheteropatriarchy* (as well as *cishetsexism*) to refer to the system more accurately as a microcosm of phenomena.

It is important, however, to differentiate and discuss each phenomenon for clarity. Because of the prolonged and current forms of erasure toward people who are abnormalized by cisnormativity, most discourse frames cisnormativity/cissexism as “transphobia” or misrepresents the experience altogether by confining it to discussion of “homophobia”/heterosexism. While many feminist theorists have continued to explicate the political and social role of the term “woman” by building arguments in connection with Beauvoir and heteronormativity, the focus on the myth of binary gender and sex embodiment and its relationship to the maintenance of heterosexuality does not provide adequate resources to uncover all of the many assumptions that occur in the process of assigning sex and gender. In fact, in many cases it perpetuates and bolsters trans-exclusionary ideology as well as erases and negates realities of intersex people.

Many theorists have seemed to identify important aspects of cisnormativity while using the language of heteronormativity, and yet this process has seemed to influence the erasure of cissexism (I understand this to be a major emergence of cisnormativity). Some examples would be the work of Lugones (2007), Schilt and Westbrook (2009),⁷⁴ and Butler (1993, 2002)⁷⁵. I am not explicating these critiques because I disagree with their works entirely. I make these statements specifically *because* I appreciate and deeply value all of these theorists’ works, especially Butler’s political analysis of “anti-gender ideology” in connection to secularism and neoliberalism (2019). I recognize that the attempts of these theorists (and many others) to explicate cisnormativity is impeded by the norms of colonial linguistic systems (English, French, Spanish, etc.) that create a feedback loop of self-perpetuating, hermeneutic epistemic injustice.

⁷⁴ Despite using the term “cisgender” in their work (p. 441), they use “Gender normal” to describe cisgender, “nontransgender” people (p. 440). This issue is similarly mirrored by Burke’s (2020) and others’ recent use of “heterogender” (p. 166).

⁷⁵ I have read many applications of Butler, but I have not deeply studied their texts myself. I plan to spend time directly interpreting their works. I assume many have perhaps misused their texts with a focus on heteronormativity, even though their work, as expressed through the process of “girling” (Butler, 1993, p. 7), seems to illuminate important aspects of compulsory cis[het]normativity.

That is the crux – this phenomenon emerges through us even if we intend to discuss and transform it. This is not an individual problem, *and* it is recreated in thousands of micro-interactions, artworks, pieces of literature, and so on. I am trying to shift away from my internalization of worship of the written word (Okun, 2021) and lean into reading between the lines of many texts to witness the phenomenon of cisnormativity, especially those texts which were written before “cisnormativity” was an “established” English term. I do believe it is important to shift English habits to involve “cishet-” (normativity, patriarchy, sexism, etc.) when discussing the interplay between cisnormativity and heteronormativity because this may promote friction against the hermeneutic injustice that has come from only explicitly naming heteronormativity.

Trans phenomena. As I discussed in my introduction, there is no chapter on or even any explicit interaction with the concept of cisnormativity throughout *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (2020). In Bettcher’s chapter titled “trans phenomena” (2020), she critiques that there are too few foci on trans phenomena, and that, as a whole, trans phenomena seem grounded in the incongruence model (p. 332).⁷⁶ As I read her synopsis of trans phenomenology, I inferred that the trans theorists who are conducting this research seem to have internalized so much of their own oppression, to the point that they were glossing over countless bio-essentialist assumptions

⁷⁶ The incongruence model is informed by the Western pathologization of trans experience, a narrative that has dictated the ideology and controlling imaginary of trans people throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The incongruence model positions trans people as those people whose gender does not conform to the gender assigned to them based on their perceived sex (as informed by essentialist assumptions). Simply put, the incongruence model posits that the “problem” trans people have is that they were born “in the wrong body” (as discussed by Bettcher in many of her works, including 2020, 2014). Thus, they *need* medical intervention to change the body they are in before they can *actually* feel embodied. This is a way the MIC creates gatekeeping practices for who can access gender affirming care (Sanders, Gill-Peterson, & Kirkley, 2022). Through the decades, trans people have had to demonstrate they met cisheteronormative gender roles by both performing the “opposite” binary gender “well enough” and dating (cishet) people of the opposite gender, before being allowed access to medicalized gender-affirming services (if they could even afford access to these services). This has historically denied queer trans people, trans people of color, and/or poor trans people access to gender affirming care (Bennett & Douglass, 2013, pp. 283–285). In my experience, this informs psychological theory that positions one’s identity as “the problem,” which is part of the political process of individualizing and naturalizing the effects of systemic oppression (Ordovery, 2003, p. 9; Menon, 2023)

they were making in bad faith. They continue to focus on *why* and *how* trans people exist, as if there is an *essence* that *explains* how trans people are “born this way.” Throughout the chapter, certain questions go unasked. She asks the ontological focused question of, “what *is* a woman, and what *is* a man?” (p. 330) but not “what is gender?” She asks the epistemological question of, “are trans people *correct* in their self-identification?” (p. 330) but not, “how is gender identified?” She asks, “what *is* the phenomenology of gender dysphoria?” (p.330) not, “what is the phenomenology of gender *euphoria*?” She asserts, citing Salamon (2010), that “our body and body parts *have* cultural meaning and that they have come to a significance to us” but does not question *how* nor *why* our bodies have come to be inscribed with “cultural” meaning. Instead, there is more a platform to question why and how trans people exist: “how” can a “female body image...arise...when trans women as ‘boys’ are not given opportunities to develop such an image?” (p. 332)⁷⁷ This line of questioning is particularly frustrating because it reinforces the bad faith that people *either* experience male *or* female socialization which bolsters transmisogynistic fear-mongering tactics (Price, 2021b). I will discuss this more in chapter three.

In her conclusion, Bettcher argues for a phenomenology of “trans oppression” (2020, p. 333). To do so would necessitate a phenomenology of compulsory cis[hetero]normativity and cis[hetero]sexism. This takes the conversation past what forces oppress trans people and opens it to a broader conversation that does not necessitate differentiating someone as ‘trans-enough’ before

⁷⁷ This text by Salamon is one which is cited by many but which I have felt a strong aversion to reading. The title was originally *Assuming a body: Transgenderism and the ethics of morality*. More recently it has changed to *Assuming a body: Transgender and the ethics of morality*. I assume that they changed “transgenderism” to “transgender” because the former is (still) used to evoke a negative, pathologizing imagery of trans experience as a (contagious) disease. I assume the shift in language was to avoid aligning with the political value of the former term, however, this superficial language shift to “transgender” as a noun still positions the word to be treated with distance, with probing vision, with a sense of tokenizing curiosity, with a sense that transgender is an entirely different gender in comparison to ideas of man/woman. Because of my experience with this use of the term, and because it seems that this text is an example of cis people writing about trans experience, I have not read this text. I do hope to read it, perhaps as phenomenological material, in future studies.

they experience cis[het]sexism. As I will discuss in chapter three, everyone experiences this system, even cis people, even trans people when or if they think they are cis, when they don't have the access to language to name their experience, or when they communicate in non-linguistic ways.

Epistemic Resistance

Medina (2011) discusses his formulation of a Foucauldian epistemology of resistance, and subsequently published a book (2013) which I have yet to read but plan to study in the years to come. Medina first offers the powerful reframe that people who are oppressed do not simply lack knowledge because they are excluded and oppressed, they are people whose powers and knowledges have and continue to be demeaned, fragmented, obstructed (2011, p. 13). Medina echoes Foucault's arguments for genealogical investigations, which are an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1976/2003, p. 9) through the establishment of multiple counter-histories, to tell the stories that the dominant "official" history left untold or described inaccurately (Medina, pp. 13-15). This requires us to revisit texts considered "foundational" with a developing awareness of "those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences" (Foucault, p. 135).

Medina argues it is crucial that genealogical investigations of counter-histories continue to emerge as plural so as to "resist new hegemonic unifications and hierarchization of knowledges" (2011, p. 20). This resistance is understood as *epistemic friction*, which he defines as "the mutual contestation of differently normatively structured knowledges which interrogates epistemic exclusions, disqualifications, and hegemonies" (p. 21). He offers his concept of *guerrilla pluralism* to frame the type of pluralism that instigates epistemic friction. In contrast to the pluralism that William James⁷⁸ prescribes (one which seeks to re-interpret beliefs and integrate multiple

⁷⁸ Medina does not provide a reference to James' work, but he refers readers to his previous work on James' theories (Medina, 2010).

perspectives into a cohesive whole as part-of normative accepted knowledge), Medina's *guerilla pluralism* does not seek to integrate counter-histories into a unified whole nor does it seek to meliorate conflicts out of which the counter-histories emerged. Instead, *guerilla pluralism* "focuses on the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among perspectives and discursive practices...to resurrect counter-memories, not just for the sake of cooperation but for the sake of reactivating struggles and energizing forms of resistance" (p. 24).

Medina describes the phenomenon of "our" habit to "forget how truths have been established, to block the memories of the multiple experiences and struggles that went into the making of those inherited truths" as *genesis amnesia* (2011, pp. 24-25). Both James and Foucault created their diverging processes to "target oblivion" (p. 25), to attempt to uncover how truths somehow became fixed and detached from our lived experiences. Medina reminds us "fixity is a property that human truths cannot have. Those recalcitrant truths that take the appearance of being permanent and fixed simply hide ossified valuations and rigidified beliefs" (p. 25). Truths lose their truth when they become detached from the subjects for whom they make a meaning. Medina urges us to not take "older truths" for granted - to epistemically examine their origins (p. 26), a call that resonates with Woodland and Page (2022). To do this via genealogy "animated" by *guerilla pluralism* necessitates a process that unveils the past to be "as open as the future," which aligns with Al-Saji's concept of *durée* (2020). He describes this process is one which:

...interrogat[es] and contest[s] any settlement, mak[es] the past come undone at the seams, so that it loses its unity, continuity, and naturalness, so that it does not appear any more as a single past that has already been made, but rather, as a heterogeneous array of converging and diverging struggles that are still ongoing and *only have the appearance* of having been settled. (p. 27; my emphasis)

Medina (2011) warns against instrumentalizing people's past and present struggles for our own values or interests. We need to attend to genealogies not to merely *use* them for our interests but to call critical attention to their stories and witness their genealogies in relation to our own stories (pp. 27-28). We can do this by witnessing and valuing any participant's agency, knowledge, and power. In this process, there is a "double interpellation": we interpolate the past subjects, and we are also interpolated by subjects of the past (p. 28). This is a "*mutual process of estrangement*: we make past lives alien as they also make our own lives strangely unfamiliar" (p. 28).

Medina's concept offers many strategies for cultivating change and transforming systems of power within and outside of care work disciplines. There are many gaps within and between fields of research, which is an emergence of cisnormativity's work within the historico-cultural schema of colonial philosophical and biopsychosocial knowledge frameworks. This provides many entry points for applying the post-intentional phenomenological research paradigm, especially arts-based applications which attend to the more-than-linguistic and the more-than-visual, which I hope to discuss throughout the rest of my thesis.

Counter-imaginaries. As Medina develops his process of epistemic resistance (2011), he asserts guerrilla pluralist counter-imaginaries are necessary for creating epistemic friction against the dominating "just so" narratives and social imaginary (Gatens, 2020, p. 185). He critiques calls to dismantle white supremacist ignorance by simply unilaterally re-inverting systems. He contends that creating multiple points of resistance and continuing to reinvigorate those points is critical to epistemological insurrection (p. 33). He brings forth Bailey (2007), who argues that reinversion strategies "fail to accept duplicates, multiplicities, and...the complexities of our epistemic lives" (p. 34). Bailey's work, inspired by Lugones' concept of world traveling (2003), seeks to offer a process of "curdled resistance," to "reveal the ways in which people of color have strategically

engaged with white folks' ignorance in [advantageous] ways" (Bailey, p. 84). Medina argues that this process resonates with the process of guerilla pluralism, and both together have the potential to create "more complex epistemic subversions" (p. 34). Whereas reversing the white supremacist imaginary still centers that imaginary, *curdling* the white supremacist imaginary entails centering worlds and paradigms that the white supremacist imaginary has sought to invisibilize.

Decolonial Imaginary. Pérez (1999) describes the decolonial imaginary as "the interstitial gap...a time lag...a rupturing space" between the colonial and post-colonial (p. 6). Mendieta (2020) conveys the decolonial imaginary as "not simply a project but the actual projecting" which describes "an impossible and unreal image of who we are not but are commanded to become" (p. 92). As Pérez (1999) contextualizes this within the status of Chicana/x/a/o studies, Mendieta describes how the work of Anzaldúa (1987), Lugones (2007, 2010, 2012), and Ortega (2016) demonstrate how the decolonial imaginary charts both the ways in which the hegemony of colonial imaginary has (dis)possessed colonized subjects and the ways in which this knowing can inform resistance to, un-knowing of, and liberation from such (dis)possession (p. 95). I understand that this is a crucial site of counter-imagination(s) which can continue to incite frictions upon cishegemony and all the colonial, capitalist systems of power it is connected to.

Phenomenological Conceptualization of Cisnormativity

Cisnormativity seems to be a series of rigid lines of thought that create a specific shape that every *human* "should" *fit*-into. The myth of colonial cishegemony asserts that *true humanity* is predicated by an inherently binary and *fixed* endosex anatomy, which determines a *fixed* psychological and physiological impetus towards certain personality characteristics, which determines *fixed* notions of not only *who* someone is "naturally" attracted to but *how* they are attracted to them, which determines specific and rigid socioeconomic and sociocultural roles.

Through this process emerges what I have come to understand as the colonial gender paradigm (as informed by Lugones, 2007).

Misfit theory, as well as Ngo's theories of habituation and Al-Saji's theory of *durée*, can assist with identifying the multiple ways in which people may "mis-fit" these rigid expectations of cisgender normativity as well as hold space for a plurality of temporal experiences of embodiments. Trans experience, non-binary experience, intersex experience, Two Spirit experiences, and experiences which otherwise do not conform to the gender binary are not a singular set of experiences – each term in fact holds a multitude of experiences. I understand that these broad arenas are circles with lots of overlap, though each are multiple and occupy varied material clusters of reality. Transgender experience, in its pathological construction within Western ideology, is to be "non-conforming" in so far as one's gender is not conforming to expectations placed on one's perceived anatomy. To be trans is to be in-alignment with our gender in the face of a system that argues we are out of alignment. Trans and non-binary people living authentically are "*conforming*" to *their* gender, and sometimes they can even conform to binary gender expectations.

The misfits of binary sex are intersex people, and there are multiple ways people's anatomical experiences misfit with the myths of binary sex. The misfits of the gender binary opposition between man/woman are the many varied, vast genders of non-binary people, of Indigenous Two Spirit people, and people who do or do not embody gender in ways which do not *fit* into the colonial gender binary paradigm. The misfits of the colonial fusion between the sex binary and gender binary are transgender people. The misfits of gender binary performativity are people whose gender expression does not align-enough with how someone else perceives them based on the other's sensory perceptive fields (vision, auditory, touch, smell, etc.). All of these "identity categories" are different, and many of these experiences can be embodied in a single

person's experience. I explicate these examples not to set rigid ideas of how people can experience trans-ness, intersex-ness, or colonial gender binary nonconformity, but to explicate the numerous, multiple, and messy gender embodiments that flee from the molar "fit" of cisnormativity.

All these circumscriptions are so limiting. Gender exists way outside/around/throughout the molar lines drawn by white cis-het-supremacist patriarchy. Due to the immense forces of this system at each ecological level, we all experience varied and multiple shades of difference, all of which are connected to a shared world. So many of our experiences have been shrouded with opacity, negated, circumscribed. Because cissexism is continually shifting, emerging through a horizon of experiences and relationships, a fountain of past/present/future, cisnormativity cannot be contained to a single sturdy, essential structure. Cisnormativity, like all forms of bio-essentialism, relationally emerges not only in dialogue with other subjects but also in dialogue with media. It is a *through* experience: cisnormativity emerges, is always shifting and becoming, on the outliers and bedrock of creative works and texts, both those which neglect to witness this experience and those which attempt to illuminate aspects of it via epistemological or ontological frameworks that recreate the white supremacist bio-essentialist gender paradigm. However, I do perceive themes of cisnormativity through to the historico-cultural horizons and social imaginaries I have lived through: bio-essentialism, white supremacy/patriarchy, pathologization, and colonial value systems. This means a post-intentional phenomenology of cisnormativity can be informed by concepts such as controlling images, confiscated bodies, decolonial imaginary, compulsory ableism, habits of racism and racialization, *durée*, ontological expansiveness, and epistemic friction/resistance.

Lastly, these experiences can also not be reduced to discussions of compulsory heteronormativity or "sexism." Doing so (re)creates cissexist bioessentialism because the way the

discourse is framed does not shed enough light on the assumptions made about sex and gender embodiment because of the colonial *durée* which inundates our language, modes of meaning, and gender paradigms. The pervasive form epistemic injustice of cisnormativity drives me to think with an epistemic resistance framework (Medina, 2011, 2013) and be attentive to our bodies and media as a site of habit (Ngo, 2015; Al-Saji, 2014). Each site needs sustained attention from multiple perspectives. We need an understanding of the cisnormativity and bio-essentialism that inundates our reality in this cultural world. Creating an imagination [imaginary] of plurality is necessary for liberation from sex/gender essentialism. The imaginary is both a force to shift our culture and is also the culture which needs to shift (because the Western social imaginary is inundated with hegemonic tendencies). We need to support and nurture the (re)newal of the pluralist gender paradigms that existed before white supremacist hegemonic influence distorted them and have resisted through ongoing colonial gendercide (Miranda, 2010). We need to nurture multiple sites of epistemic friction that *curdles* colonial gender paradigm, through which we have been taught to value, know, understand, and determine gender.

Chapter 3:

What Are Some Emerging Productions & Provocations of Cisnormativity?

Chapters three and four will involve diving into the following materials: Media such as movies, poetry, song association (which I include in footnotes), some personal anecdotal journal entries, and some care-work literature. There are countless more examples I could write about, and I hope to be blessed with the time and resources to continue writing and working with others after the completion of this thesis. Post-intentional phenomenological methodology suggests discussing prominent productions and provocations of the phenomenon. Through my studies, the most prominent production of cisnormativity that has emerged is dehumanization, which is a major production of all bio-essentialist systems of oppression. The key goal of bio-essentialism is to determine *who* and *how* someone is human-enough [read: intellectual-enough, logical-enough, white-enough, wealthy-enough, able-enough]. Productions related to dehumanization are the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze^{79 80}, epistemic injustice, and the *durée* of habit that rides on the momentum of epistemic ignorance/knowledge and bad faith. Along the way, I noticed cisnormativity seemed provoked through (a) epistemic friction that becomes through world-travelling through gaps in colonial history, and (b) returning, if not “curdling” (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007), the gaze through acts of epistemic resistance to the colonial gender paradigm. I identified these as provocations because they seem to provoke both more vehement arguments and acts of violence against the existence of TTSI+ people, *and* they seem to

⁷⁹ bell hooks conceptualized the phrase “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (1997) which she later shifted to “*imperialist* white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” to challenge the way many movements address only one axis of this macro-system. In an interview with Yancy, she reminds us, “we can’t begin to understand the nature of domination if we don’t understand how these systems connect with one another” (2015). Her understanding of the multiple axes of white supremacist domination is pivotal to my analysis, and I hope she would approve of my adaptation to involve the dynamics of cisheterosexism and the dominating gravity of the normative gaze.

⁸⁰ When I utilize “white supremacist capitalist,” I understand this to automatically involve phenomena of classism and ableism, as both of these phenomena emerged in relationship to racial capitalism. I understand that this is not perfect, and I feel the need to pragmatically center phrasing particular to the phenomenon I am focusing on.

encourage us to hesitate, to feel an imperative to shed internalized bioessentialist habits of interactions toward habits of seeing, hearing, and touching that are loving and *witnessing*. Again, phenomena emerge in impartial ways, especially phenomena which are quasi-transcendental systems of oppression. While much of my analysis may be hermeneutic and focused on language, I want to invite readers to consider how analysis may occur via arts-based modalities. I will begin with discussing my working understanding of the history of cisnormativity, then I will move on to discussing some emerging productions and provocations of cisnormativity.

Historico-Cultural Schemas of Cisnormativity

Many of the artists–academics I have gravitated towards through my life are/have been developing epistemic friction by illuminating counter-narratives and counter-imaginaries to promote the hesitation of colonial, cisnormative *durée*. Snorton’s work (2017) is a response to the thick and multiple iterations of opacity that emerge as an amalgamation of gaps in archives of “accepted” history, as it relates to Black *and* trans experience. Informed by Stalling’s query, “what has been omitted as a result of the conditions of illiteracy, criminalization, or poverty[?]” (2015, p. 224), Snorton develops multiple and partial collateral genealogies (Brand, 2002; Glissant, 1989)⁸¹ in the form of a historiographical project, where he attends to both linear and transversal time (Guattari, 1995). Snorton’s work “tarries” within the tears of time instigated by the atrocities and aftermaths of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which extend in multiple directions, crossing

⁸¹ Snorton understands a collateral genealogy is one “in which encounters with the past necessarily contend with myriad forms of collateral damage produced in the Middle Passage and lived in the present in the ‘afterlives of slavery’ (Hartman, 2007) ... the narratives in this study do not occur as if they properly belong in the past. Tarrying with the unfixed, submerged, and frequently disavowed connections within blackness and transness requires that both author and reader suspend a demand for transparency, which is also, as Glissant suggests, to forgo a methodological operation that seeks to bring the submerged to the surface. As he maintains, one must agree ‘not merely to the right to difference, but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity’ (1989, p. 190) ... A transversal approach to history, then, becomes a way to perceive how difference can take transitive form, expressed in shifting modalities of time and meaning from within the abyss. Transversality also describes this study’s treatment of submerged thought, naming its propensity to linger in the depths of discarded theories for what they can and cannot say about their temporalities of emergence” (p. 10).

indefinite paths in the abyss of undocumented time (2017, p. 11). His work seeks to express the written word's "double gesture" (informed by thinkers such as Glissant, Spillers, and Derrida), through the process of "writ[ing] in and about... 'historical moment[s] when language ceases to speak... at which hierarchies of power... simply run out of terms' (Spillers, 2003, p. 156)" (Snorton, pp. 10-11).

Alok Vaid Menon has dedicated much time and energy to reading peer-reviewed literature across the disciplines of history, sociology, biology, neurology, and more, creating summaries of the work that are accessible to people outside of the ivory tower. Moreover, through their artwork emerges their analysis that the construction and maintenance of the mythology of cishetnormativity is connected to racism, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, classism, and ableism, woven together as threads of the web of white supremacy, colonization and capitalism.⁸² As I discuss my understanding of history, notice I cite their labor when referring to works to which they introduced me.⁸³ Les Feinberg also took the time to elucidate and publish a pamphlet that details the ways in which cishetsexism emerged as a strategy to fragment indigenous communal practices across Eurasia as well as to create the beginnings of the cishetpatriarchal class system, which eventually developed into the capitalist class system, which instigated white supremacist ideology to "validate" the enslavement and genocide of indigenous people across the world (1992). Zie takes an explicit focus on the development of society in Europe because: "the blame for anti-transgender laws and attitudes rests squarely on the shoulders of the ruling classes on that continent" (1992, p. 16). Hir passages do not provide explicit citations, but hir summary aligns

⁸² While much of their analysis utilizes terms like *heteronormativity*, *homophobia*, *transphobia*, *the gender binary* or *bioessentialism* but rarely the terms *cisnormativity* or *cissexism*, I believe their work addresses and refers to the bioessentialist threads that emerge from and (re)create cishetnormativity.

⁸³ Alok Menon consistently updates their book reports and reposts book reports with new links. So, links I offer in my references section will become outdated. However, their book reports are re-posted with the same titles, so one may find these book reports on their social media platforms by searching for the titles listed in my references.

with my developing understanding of Eurasian history, as informed by Federici (2004, 2018), Hubbs (1988) and Page et al. (2021; 2023). Every time I read hir pamphlet, I feel deeply validated by hir struggle against epistemic erasure of anti-trans and anti-intersex oppression, of cisheterosexism and cisheteronormativity. Zie calls for solidarity across the working class has been essential to my continued analysis of systems of power.

In the first half of hir pamphlet, Feinberg describes how most societies across the world, including societies in Europe and Asia, were matriarchal and communal (1992, pp. 1–16). Gender and sexual multiplicity were revered in people and often depicted in important spiritual deities as well as spiritual leaders. Over time, these communities were fragmented by patriarchal leadership who sought to consolidate power and rulership over extensive amounts of land and resources. One of the tools of fragmentation was the manipulation of spiritual practices to validate the construction of rigid, mutually exclusive gender categories situated in a binary opposition. This tactic coalesced in the formulation of class status through the Roman system of enslavement and into Christian feudalism. Pagan (which comes from the Latin word for “peasant/land-dweller”) people were targeted by Christians, and one aspect they demonized was the pagans’ reverence for gender embodiments and relationship structures which expanded past the confines of the cisheteropatriarchal binary. While the peasantry continued to find ways to maintain their spiritual and communal practices, the colonization process that mis-appropriated Christian ideology continued to wage war upon these societies, seeking to control their lands, their lives, and their histories by ensuring that Christians were the ones writing and dictating these societies’ histories. One of the ways they did so was by persecuting them as “deviating” from the “natural,” ordained ways of life, which was illustrated as one in which “women” were subservient to “men.”

Over the centuries, the Catholic church became *the* institution of both political *and* economic power in Western Europe (Feinberg, 1992). The life, persecution and death sentence of Joan of Arc marked a historic moment in anti-Trans violence that set the stage for various Inquisitions which targeted peasants who “followed the customs of the Gentiles and Heathens” (p. 14). For centuries, people who did not conform to the ruling class’s definitions of subservient “woman” and/or dominating “man,” and/or people who did not abide by the elite’s interpretation of Christian doctrines, were executed. In this process of militaristic domination and extermination, by the time capitalism began to rise, transgender people had already been driven into the forest and into the “underground,” taking roles on the fringes of society which often led them to be criminalized (p. 16). As capitalism “unchained the peasants from the land - but chained them to machinery...or sent them off in armies” (p. 17), it became easier for transgender people to take on working roles, “passing” as a binary gender. However, when they were revealed to be trans, they would face violent repression and persecution, a pattern that has continued to the present day.

Capitalism particularly came to rise through the process of colonization and enslavement of people indigenous to Africa, Turtle Island, Abya Yala, and Asia. The European ruling class continued to weaponize Christianity and mythologize their superiority,⁸⁴ despite that their unsustainable, unhygienic, and cruel socioeconomic infrastructure had driven them to seek out other lands for resources and labor. Part of their mythology was that Europeans had “developed”

⁸⁴ J Mase III continues to promote epistemic friction against the white supremacist frameworks of religion by playing in the “gaps” they’ve noticed between Black spirituality and Black trans folks. Amongst their poetry and other written works, they have collaborated with Dane Figueroa Edidi to create the *Black Trans Prayer Book* (2021), so that we all can “have a theology that makes room for Black trans people” (2021). In their [video](#), created for Erika Hart’s series of “Black People Talking About Black History,” they tell a powerful counter-narrative of the story of Yusef, framing Yusef as a Black, trans, nonbinary prophet and asserting their story is not one of forgiveness but one of *accountability*. They ask, “When we think about the damage that was done when white supremacy was married with Christianity...what would it mean for religious institutions to be accountable for the harm that they have caused and continue to perpetuate against Black trans, non-binary, intersex, gender non-conforming people? What would it look like and feel like for that accountability to actually come into fruition? And what would it mean for Black folks *as a whole* for us to return to a spirituality, an understanding, and an ancestral knowing about the role of Black trans people in our liberation?” (2021).

enough to *become* humans, as defined by the ability of the “race” to maintain discretely dichotomous “biological sexes” (Lugones, 2007, pp. 194–196). While developing “evidence” to substantiate enslaving and exterminating Indigenous people, European elites were also becoming “enlightened” in the first waves of positivism and [pseudo-]scientific discovery. Scientists shifted from the unisex model to the binary sex model to politically substantiate why “women”/“females” were “naturally” *unable* to take part in the *public* sphere (government, industry, independently hold wealth) and *had* to remain in the *private* sphere (in the home, tending to domestic roles) (Laqueur, 1990; Menon, 2023k). This was another iteration of weaponizing binary gender rhetoric to consolidate power of the ruling class to solely white/European assumed-cis men.

Simultaneously, as European elites colonized other lands, they witnessed many societies in which people were in sustainable relationships to the Earth and in which there were varied and vast roles of corporeal embodiment outside what European colonizers understood as [cis]heterosexual “men” and “women” (i.e. Najmabadi, 2005; Menon, 2022a; Oyěwùmí, 1997; Menon, 2022d; Lugones, 2007)⁸⁵. Pulling from the practices that had been developed over centuries against non-Christian and otherwise non-conforming groups across Europe, Europeans constructed these Indigenous peoples as “non-human,” “less evolved.” One of the primary “reasons” they fabricated to substantiate these claims was their perception of Indigenous peoples’ as not “evolved” enough to *be* “men” or “women.” Lugones (2007), Thomas (2007; Menon, 2023m) and Oyěwùmí (1997) explicitly identify the ways in which the colonial gender system shifted to create additional, lower classes for colonized BIPOC, differentiating “men” and “women” as classes only accessible to *some white* assigned-male and assigned-female people.

⁸⁵ Menon (2023m) describes: “There were never merely men and women, without race and class. Instead, there were a ‘*legion of genders and sexualities*’ (Thomas, 2007, p. 29) that cannot be reduced to anatomy” (their emphasis).

While colonizers imposed the colonial gender binary system to promote fragmentation amongst indigenous communities via [cis]heteropatriarchal class systems that established “males” as dominant and “females” as “subservient,”⁸⁶ BIPOC were not distinguished as “men” and “women.” They were depicted as “sexually ambiguous,” a code-word used to describe intersex experience,⁸⁷ and thus “incapable” of embodying gender roles of Euro-colonial people. Lugones (2007) describes this system with the imagery of “light/dark” sides of the colonial gender system. She asserts that sexual dimorphism is an “important characteristic” of the light side that is *not* characteristic of the dark side (p. 195). She and others argue this system is a racist and classist tactic of dehumanization: the Victorian lifestyle of white women’s domesticity was enabled by the extracted labor of enslaved BIPOC people (Thomas, 2007; Lugones, 2007). Menon (2023m) summarizes Thomas’s work, emphasizing that liberation from the legacy of enslavement necessitates a “critical rejection of all European discourses of sex and gender *and all the alien tongues in which they have been violently imposed*” (Thomas, p. 30; their emphasis). Similarly, Lugones argues that any liberatory works focusing on the light side, and not the hidden dark side, of the system “affirm rather than reject an oppressive organization of life” (p. 187).

In 1865, after the so-called-emancipation of enslaved Africans in the so-called-U.S, Western science needed to shift white supremacist logics in order to preserve the racial caste system (Stein, 2015, p. 15; Menon, 2023a). The primary way they sought to do this was by policing and further surveilling white people’s anatomy, gender (dis)embodiment, and their sexuality, arguing, “the best biological and social asset to society are the complete she-women and the complete he-men, not their substituted opposites” (Stein, p. 201). The field of “sexology” emerged,

⁸⁶ Any people/groups who embodied “other” genders, anatomies, or sexualities which “do not fit” were violently disappeared (Hinchy, 2020; Miranda, 2010).

⁸⁷ I interpret this term was bio-essentially used by colonial powers to describe any anatomical embodiments, gender embodiments, or sexualities that did not fit the white cisheteropatriarchal system.

and the first “sexologists” in these so-called United States were the leading “racial”/eugenic scientists (p. 214). They described homosexuality as “race suicide” (p. 174) because they were not supporting the reproduction of white people. They constructed mental conditions that they believed “caused” homosexuality (p. 179), asserted that white queer people were as such because of “anatomical abnormalities” (p. 182), and further blamed their “conditions” on the intermingling of white people with gender non-conforming and queer Black people, upon whom Western medical (pseudo)science had already projected blame for intersex anatomy (p.197-200). Boag continues this narrative, connecting ableism, racism, and cisheteropatriarchy as mechanisms of colonization that were enacted through the MIC’s pathologizing processes (2011, p. 174; Menon, 2023n).

Hyperfocusing on sexual acts, perhaps because of their eugenic purpose of controlling who can reproduce and with whom (which still continues; see Lowik, 2018), sexologists typically only labeled white assumed-men as “homosexual,” and they described their bodies as similar to “lower races.” They disregarded white queer assumed-women, aligning their assumed anatomy to the assumed anatomy of Black people, which made them “overly masculine and dangerously hypersexual” (p. 194). As I discussed in chapter two through Snorton’s (2017) work, this period also marks the emergence of criminalizing Black people’s non-conformity to the colonial gender binary. The messages of these and the many other pieces of peer-reviewed literature,⁸⁸ inform Menon’s argument that racial justice as a necessary part-of “LGBTQ freedom” (Menon, 2023a).

This trend of mis-using the idea of science to connect “biology” as a determining factor for one’s social and class conditions continues to be a pattern throughout colonial imperialist ideology. This pattern is what I understand as *bio-essentialism* - the rigid tethering of bodily functions (in truth, these are just *myths* or *ideas* about the body) to fragmented, “fixed” identities, to material

⁸⁸ To name a few: (to name a few: Bederman, 1995; Cogdell, 2016; McWhorter, 2009; Meyerowitz, 2002; Roughgarden, 2013; Schuller, 2018, 2021)

realities. Menon has specifically critiqued and illuminated the role of eugenic science and bioessentialism in U.S. and Euro colonial history. The myths of bioessentialism continue to focus on creating “evidence” to substantiate and (re)create racism, cishetsexism, ableism, and classism (Ordovery, 2003, p. 9; 2023i). They continue to draw parallels to the ways in which whiteness is a norm that encompasses rigid myths of gender binary (dis)embodiment, heterosexuality, neurotypicality, and upper-class status (Carter, 2007; Menon, 2023j). While this thesis provides insufficient space to discuss the modern-present history of U.S. eugenics in connection to the Nazi party, it is critical to name that the eugenics institutions, funded by wealthy millionaires who were losing their monopolies in the early twentieth century, and other forms of colonial genocide and racism in the so-called U.S., were fundamental to the scientific experiments of the Nazi Party and the phases of their political domination.⁸⁹ Meaning, the Nazi party took inspiration from the genocidal tactics to enslave, segregate, control, exterminate, and erase “unfit” people, mainly targeting people Indigenous to Turtle Island and Africa (Black, 2003). While this is illuminated by some,⁹⁰ the role of the colonial gender binary system in these processes is typically obfuscated, if discussed at all.

Menon connects this idea of “normal” to conditions Alexander (2010) describes as the *white bribe*. Carter conveys immigrants “align[ed] with normal [cis]heteronormativity [which had] the effect of performing one’s alignment with ideal whiteness” (2007, p. 98). Menon

⁸⁹ In the early 1900s, the Carnegie and Rockefeller families funded the first eugenics laboratory, which performed thousands of forced sterilizations from 1907 to 1966 (Anonymous, 2008), and the Flexner Report (1910), which barred BIPOC people and non-cis men from being and becoming medical “professionals” in the so-called U.S. Eventually, the Rockefeller foundation, among other eugenic institutions across the so-called U.S., funded the Keiser Wilhelm Institute and the German Institute for Psychiatric Research in Germany, providing means for Nazis to adapt American eugenics to meet their political aims (Turner, 2012; Black, 2003). After WWII, many prominent Nazi War criminals were given positions in U.S. medical education and research institutions, and the various eugenics institutions merely shifted their names (Anonymous; Turner; Black).

⁹⁰ Raoul Peck (2021) curated a docuseries that chronicles this history in detail, as informed by Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), Lindqvist (1996), and Trouillot (1995).

continues this line of thought by reasoning, because the imaginary of “normal” is so “elusive,” that “racialized people might respond to loss of status from racism by reinforcing traditional [read: white colonial] gender norms” (Menon, 2023j). This phenomenon emerges through Snorton’s work (2017). Utilizing Lugones’ imagery of light/dark, he illuminates how Black trans people in the so-called U.S. were cast as the negative space that defined the silhouette of the (rare) white “transexual” experience, as the MIC constructed it. They have been written out of history, gazed upon by the white cishet social imaginary as well as the cishetnormative Black gaze (e.g., p. 148–149), fixed on paper as jokes, discussed as perpetually in the wrong place and in the wrong time, and rarely held in consideration in the mainstream Black Lives Matter movement (pp. 194–198). However, many of the people he centers hold powerful counter narratives of social and relational acceptance in their communities. They continuously “return the gaze,” casting shadows upon the silhouette of the social imaginary, and through this, they maintain resistant fluidity in the face of white colonial authorities and media policing, abusing, and degrading them (pp. 141–145).⁹¹

These historical contexts of cishnormativity continue to inform my analysis and ways of considering how cishnormativity emerges in texts which do not explicitly discuss cishnormativity. Furthermore, I feel drawn to two arguments Alok (re)conveys through their work. First, bio-essentialism (encompassing racism, ableism, cishetsexism, classism, etc.) is an ideology through which we all are influenced to “clip our wings” in order to attempt to be “normal” (2022b). Meaning, we internalize messages of indoctrination to the point where we are doing the work to maintain oppressive systems, first on ourselves, then onto others⁹². Specific to cishetsexism, Alok describes in multiple ways how people who are the most violent to them seem to expect them to

⁹¹ [Song association](#): “There's an outcast in everybody's life and I am her / There's a shadow in everybody's front door and I am her / There's a dark cloud in everybody's sunlight and I am her...” (Diamond, 2018).

⁹² [Song association](#): “Don’t do me what you did to America (Don’t do to me what you do to yourself)” (Stevens, 2020)

adhere to norms that they had to circumscribe themselves to fit into. Specific to cishetnormativity, they convey that this system is a compulsive system, meaning people assume this is the norm and thus assume themselves and others to be cishet as a “neutral” and “natural” “default” form of *humanhood*. Second, and more simply, the issue of cisheterosexism is not due to a lack of resources or knowledge; it is due to a lack of empathy: “Why do you need to understand me...to say that I shouldn’t be experiencing violence?...‘I don’t get it’ becomes a shield for saying ‘I’m okay with you being exposed to violence’...It’s never been about comprehension; it’s been about compassion” (Menon’s words from Baldoni, Plank, & Heath, 2021).

Emerging Imagery & Horizons

I have begun to conceptualize horizons, temporality, *durée*, and lines of thought with the metaphor of tapestry(s) and the process of weaving. Meaning, if there are grand horizons (the emergent combination of peoples “inner horizons” with “outer horizons”), I can conceptualize these as grand tapestries that span across time through cultures, as a representation of cultural practices and habits which have emerged from people and relationships formed in these cultures. Each person, and each relationship, is a continuation of these tapestries. Each thought, action, or feeling that emerges through us is another line that adds to our tapestry and connects to others’ lines. Our lines of flight can only go so far before we have to bring it back to the tapestry as it is now. I feel like both my transition to my more authentic gender as well as my practice of shedding white supremacist delusions of anti-Blackness, ableism, classism has continued to develop because of multiple lines of flight that, over time, seem to be slowly closing the gaps, tears, and ruptures of my inner horizon. This seems to have replicated and manifested in my grand tapestry as well. Meaning, the closing of my gaps seems to emerge in contribution to the closing of gaps in my grand tapestries (i.e., “breaking generational curses”). I witness how each form of resistance to

white cisheteronormativity, while most are still connected to internalized notions of bioessentialism, continues to flee from these notions and work to heal the many gaps, tears, and ruptures in people's grand cultural narratives. Lines of flight seem like emergences of epistemic resistance. Medina's call for guerilla pluralism makes sense because one individual line of flight is just a single thread fleeing the tapestries they are enmeshed in. We need multiple locations of lines of flight, and we need lines of flight to nurture and carry further lines of flight.

The ongoing process of colonization has unfurled, burned, torn pieces of the weavings/tapestries of social orders that thrived before capitalist colonialism (and many cultures still have found ways to survive for the past 300-500 years and resist colonial influence to whatever degree is possible). I am not talking about just a single tear or rupture - there are thousands, millions, across the Earth and through time. What colonialism cannot accept is that these tapestries are transversal, extending across time and place, and bigger, wider than colonialism can imagine. The white colonial gaze probed these tapestries, discarded the process of how they have been made, the ancestral knowledge and wisdom that these tapestries hold, and simultaneously implanted white cishetpatriarchal potentials ("patches") within each colonized culture.

The point of a tapestry, of weaving, is that it is a communal process. Each tapestry is created in their own ways and imbued with their own meanings, in a process that shifts organically with the people creating it. The colonist/eugenic "probing" of "the horizon(s)" to find "essences" can be conceptualized as a separating of the threads that have been purposely woven.⁹³ To do this is to undo the existential "point" of this tapestry, and any "data" generated is not applicable to any other tapestry. As a result of colonial violence and fragmentation of indigenous societal structures, these tapestries will never be made in the *exact* same way again (hence the concept of post-

⁹³ More literally, the colonial fixation on horizons emerges in concepts such as manifest destiny and the doctrine of discovery. For more about these concepts, see Miller (2011).

colonialism). Genocide is more than the number of “human deaths.” European colonization, imperialism, and fascism have created many ruptures, tears, burns in the varied and vast tapestries of cultures which have existed/grown for millenia, even in Europe’s own tapestries. The generational weight of these scars, tears, and ruptures has created a cartography of immense gaps. These gaps grow in space and depth as time continues. The weight of how our world(s) *could have been* lives on and echoes in the depths. Similarly, in our pieces of our cultural tapestries, there are scars, tears, gaps relationally imposed on us based on the habits passed down through time. Alok Menon describes the connection between these generational and relational ruptures in the context of the colonial gender system, asking “isn’t diaspora its own form of dysphoria? Asking for gender is another way of asking ‘where did you come from?’” (2021a, p. 21; see Appendix A2).

The European colonial project has contrived and maintained a blueprint of “the tapestry” of life, creating and maintaining white, cishet, ableist, and classist systems (re: through enlightenment, through the creation of “modern” science). Now, they have simulated one order for *the only legitimate way* of living as a *human*, charting the paths for each strand of thought. This is where bio-essentialism comes in - the linear linking of (myths of) biology to identity to material reality, in order to violently establish hierarchical dominance.⁹⁴ While it may be easy for us to conceptualize colonial ideology as monolithic and singular, we must realize the rhizomatic nature of colonization and fascism. Neoliberal tactics to maintain the essentialist blueprint has offered us a “solution”: remake essentialist connections, offer “multiple paths”/multiple ways to which identities, biologies, and material realities can be tethered (e.g., you can be a Black person in public if you embody cisheteronormative gender standards and engage in capitalism; you can be a gay

⁹⁴ [Song association](#) (7:20-13:00): “We are constructing a whole new edifice of boxes to put people in...Very concerned about giving names, giving names, giving names, giving names...I truly believe that people who define you, control you” (Sumney, 2021).

person in public if you adhere to white supremacist, cisnormative standards of gender embodiment). This only allows the MIC to re-purpose essentialism, to fragment and promote infighting amongst oppressed communities, and to find new ways to co-opt liberation movements (see Woodland & Page, 2022).

What if we stopped valuing the need for paths? Maybe we can just stop tethering identities, biologies, and material realities for the sake of “order” and “understanding.” Following Al-Saji’s discussion (2010) of McWhorter’s text (2009), Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality (1991) has been mis-used to replicate the bio-essentialist separation of each individual thread of “humanness.” When intersectionality is employed to conceptualize identities as separate individual threads in the blueprint, it obfuscates how racialization is a fractal through which all axes of oppression multiply. Currently, it seems the way we deviate from the blueprint (and thus, the way we experience pain because of how we deviate) becomes our “identity.” It seems some approaches to this problem seek to reverse bioessentialist ideology by creating variations of the “blueprint” (predetermined tethers) to “validate” “alternative” blueprints (TIY - tether it yourself). In my work, I want to focus more on how we may *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) the bioessentialist ideology of “blueprints” entirely. What would our identities become without the blueprint? Without these rigid, molar tethers? Without pain?

In a journal entry,⁹⁵ I write about this: “I am eager for a world in which gender is so multiple, so fractal, so elusive & yet so distinctive, so expansive, that the words “man/woman” and “male/female” are mentioned less than 50% of the time when discussing gender” (Appendix A1). I move through varied examples of if/then metaphors, ending with: “If there are thousands of

⁹⁵ This was inspired by Menon’s assertion that shifting from the gender binary does not mean getting rid of “man” and “woman,” it means understanding “man” and “woman” as two of infinite gender possibilities (on Baldoni, Plank, & Heath, 2021).

cultures that exist through time...then there are thousands of ways of embodying, performing, and representing gender...If there are billions of people on this Earth, then there are potentially billions of genders” (Appendix A1). I conclude we must proactively prepare for “the potential reality in which we repurpose, restructure, and reorganize under indigenous leadership.” We need to “(re)learn how to move through relationships with one another that transform these systems of oppression which we have all internalized (not only through our habits of cognitively knowing but through our habits of being, seeing, hearing, speaking, and loving)” (Appendix A1).

Durée, habits of oppression and violence upon intersubjectivity

Ngo’s work (2015) details the ways that racialized people habituate to racism as well as how phenomenological theories can provide a way of describing how racism is a violence upon one’s intersubjectivity. She conveys there is a lot of work to be done in the form of acknowledging and shifting the ways in which white people habituate to racism and anti-Blackness. The theory she cites with the most to offer the study of whiteness is Sullivan’s theory of white ontological expansiveness, which Sullivan also applies to white patriarchal power dynamics (as well as other oppressive systems). I have come to understand white ontological expansiveness as a symptom of the generationally compounded habits I spoke to earlier. White people have become so distant from our histories as a result of the white bribe that we believe we are the center (even though we never actually were). We believe the only history that is true is what is/was taught to us. We violently impose false standards of legitimacy onto ourselves and others, especially people of color and/or people who have chosen to shift into habits of self-acceptance and love. I believe white ontological expansiveness is the experience of our inner horizon being bolstered and projected onto external horizons with the momentum of colonial “blueprint” tapestry. So, instead of hesitating and noticing there is more than one tapestry in the world, white people can be more

inclined to bear our inner horizon (our expectations) down upon beings outside of themselves. Our mirror often weighs too heavily and goes too far into other people's psychic space.⁹⁶ Our mirror broadcasts how we initially perceive people based on our sensory perceptual fields, which is often very distorted by internalized, indoctrinated bio-essentialism. When these perceptions emerge through habit, they rip into other tapestries. The sense of entitlement that emerges through the process ontological expansiveness moves with the momentum of colonial hubris, which initiated colonial extraction in the first place (and has long since maintained it).

Ngo's (2016) synthesis of theories about habit and habituation brings her to frame habituation as active processes that are also deeply sedimented. This resonates with Al-Saji's imagery of the fountain of the past emerging into the present (2020). After reading Ngo's work, I have continued to notice how the *durée* of each person's lived experience is inseparable from the relationships one is immersed within. I have come to understand myself as someone who was "assigned-human-enough" because of my whiteness. As I came to understand and embrace my gender and my authentic way of moving through relationships, I found myself being seen with the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze as less-than-human. I continue to notice how white ontological expansiveness emerges from white queer and/or trans people, as they white world-travel (Sullivan, 2004) through history, cherry picking historical events without recognizing how those events are enmeshed in colonialism and genocide of BIPOC people. In a recent post, Uriel Metzger, a white trans-masc musician, described how he realized his whiteness was emerging in the ways in which he was centering his fearful and angry responses to recent anti-trans legislation (2023). He reminds himself and other white trans people: "it has taken watching

⁹⁶ [Song association](#): "It always takes me, such a curse to be so hard / You shatter easily and can't pick up all those shards. It's the curse of losing yourself, when the mirror takes you too far... You see the reflection, and you want it more than the truth. You yearn to be that dream you could never get to, 'cause the person on the other side has always just been you" (Mering, 2022).

my rights being taken away to be a reminder of how privileged I have been in this country...my friends were born into this situation because of the color of their skin... I am late to the game!” They assert BIPOC trans people have been cultivating healing, resistive communities which white trans people *need* to center to “get to the root of the f***ing problem” (2023).⁹⁷

Durée (Al-Saji, 2020) can be applied to describe many deep, thick experiences of time from a TTSI+ person’s perspective. We live in a system that is actively creating more and more barriers to gender affirming care for trans people, while simultaneously asserting forcible surgeries and gender assignments onto intersex kids and adolescents. While not all adolescent and adult people want access to medicalized gender affirming processes, to prevent someone access to these services literally creates the reality in which trans and intersex people are more likely to “stick out,” to “mis-fit” across the sensory perceptual fields that police cishetnormative standards. To *both* force someone to wait *and* force someone into surgical interventions literally compounds the weight of grief for what *could have been* - it tears into the fabric of our lives, increasing the gaps and ruptures we may already feel throughout the worlds we travel through. This is especially the case for adolescents: Affording adolescents the hormonal puberty they feel affirmed by greatly reduces the likelihood that they will seek out gender affirming surgeries. Even for those who do not want access to biomedical-based transition support, the lived experience of moving through life cultivating the habits of performing a gender they think they *should* be (while also perhaps cultivating habits of disassociating from themselves in the process), of disregarding and muffling their inner knowing in order to feel love from their parents/families, to access work underneath

⁹⁷ He also critiques the many cis white people he has witnessed repeatedly ask how these anti-trans bills could be happening in “2023” (notice the ways people have internalized the myth that time passing means inherent progress). This lack of awareness indicates how insulated cis (white) people are from the realities of TTSI+ people. He reminds cis white people that anti-trans bills “double down on racist foundations that this country was based on” (Metzger, 2023).

racial capitalism, or to maintain friendships and social status, means that they are also habituating to many processes which they then find they need to shift once they begin any forms of transition.

TTSI+ also develop countless habits and strategies of “passing” and/or of tolerating and buffering the ways people may seek to infringe upon and “fix” our existence (thus limit our intersubjectivity). In my experience, and in the experience I have gleaned living alongside trans and intersex people, it is very common for these habits of passing to bolster other systems of white supremacist social policing along the lines of performing whiteness, of performing sanity, and of performing neurotypicality. This is not to say that TTSI+ people are victims or that their identities are the *problem* that needs to be *solved*.⁹⁸ I believe that the experience of shifting through cis-hetero sensory perceptual fields allows for us to better articulate the mechanisms and false logics of cis-heterosexism. I believe this is precisely why TTSI+ people pose such an incredible threat to the social order, an order that was originally organized with the intention of keeping people fixed in a role that isolated them, allowing power and capital to be hoarded by the few. In a conversation with Lundy-Paine, Menon creates friction against the concept of passing as a binary gender, saying it “presumes that there’s a particular way to look cis, which is a myth...when we say ‘passing,’ we reinscribe the idea that what we associate with cisness belongs to just cisness — not that trans people have always looked like that” (Sanders, Menon, & Lundy-Paine, 2022). They challenge us to “unlearn this idea that cisness is the prototype or default, or that cisness owns masculinity or owns femininity—which is not true.” They argue, “so many of the aesthetics that we associate with ‘normative masculinity and femininity’ were actually templated by trans and gender non-conforming people historically... trans and gender non-conforming people were part of that story of creation” (2022).

⁹⁸ Talburt (2010) and Talburt & Rasmussen (2010) conceptualize *after-queer* to address how this emerges in educational pedagogy. Scrine (2019) applies this to music therapy in school settings.

As I discussed in chapter two, *durée* can provide ways to discuss how people can move through the world with such a momentum that they begin to see what/who they think they are seeing and not what/who they are *actually* seeing. They can begin to assume an entire person after a few seconds of visual input, to project their inner horizon onto others while leaving little space for someone to respond. This form of arrogant perception emerges especially when the lenses of the social imaginary can become so thick that people perhaps do not actually *see* or *hear* other people. They see what they want to see; even more so, they see what they *fear*. This is no surprise to people who “stick out” of the valued “fit” of the social imaginary, well described in Ngo’s habit of racism and racialization work (2015). I agree with her conclusion that the visual field plays a major role in determining other sensory fields of perception under the influence of the dominating imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social imaginary.

Remarking upon the song “Is she is or is she ain’t?” (Farrakhan, 1953), which discusses Christine Jorgenson, Snorton describes: “it riffed on the crisis of visibility that Jorgenson’s deviant body evoked, as it signified upon a set of *sedimented* ideas about where one locates the *truth* of a body (on it’s surface? As an *essence*?) and the degree to which ‘reality’ is *sutured* to the privileging of sight” (p. 140; my emphasis). There is a primacy given to the visual field that seems connected to positivism’s obsession with determinism and *fixing* bodies into their place in the capitalist social order, and this cannot be ignored when discussing white supremacist cisheterosexism. At this point, I want to extend consideration to the ways in which we have habituated to assuming things about people based on other sensory fields, primarily the auditory field, *alongside* the visual.

Perhaps we can become open to how the sensory fields play into one another. I am drawn to this in particular because of my context as a trans masculine singer, musician, and music therapist who has engaged in the development of gender affirming voicework method alongside

Maevon Gumble and kay schachner. Looking back in my life, the first “joke” I heard that demonized Black and/or trans women was a joke that hinged upon describing a Black sex worker who looked “sexy” but spoke in a “low, grumbly voice.” It is her voice that made her “stick out.” These jokes are common to the point that people tend to gloss over them, roll right past them with the momentum of the past. In describing phenomenological materialism in relationship to Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema, Slatman (2020) iterates that meaning is “embodied difference;” “true” perception is based on *felt* sensations. This can help shed light on the absurdity of fixating on visual cues to perceive one’s gender. If I am read as a cis man due to someone’s sight, as they interact with me, a *felt* difference emerges because I am not a man, *and* I do embody masculinity (along with energies that would be considered femininity and/or something else entirely). I feel this way with many non-binary people I come to know. There is a salient difference in our energies that goes unnamed by dominant discourse that is fixated on biological essentialism and sight.⁹⁹

Productions

Throughout my description of these productions, I will center perspectives which seek to *curdle* them; in doing so, I will also be discussing provocations of cisnormativity. After discussing productions, then I will conclude with some final thoughts about those provocations.

The Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchal Gaze

While she is not the first to describe this term, McKenzie Wark discusses how the cis gaze constructs transgender people in media, specifically Black trans women.¹⁰⁰ She explains: “I want to focus not so much on the male gaze, but on the *cis gaze*—a looking that harbors anxiety about the slippages and transformations between genders, but which also harbors desires for those

⁹⁹ In Journal entry (see Appendix A3), I reflect on my personal experiences of this, especially as they have shifted in relation to the physical changes brought upon through hormone replacement therapy.

¹⁰⁰ The cis gaze also targets anyone who is otherwise deviant from the standards of white cishet norms.

transitions as well” (2021). She asserts it is “no longer possible” to consider “the gender of the gaze” without considering race. As her work continues, she *curdles* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) the gaze by dismissing invitations to think from or even critique the cis gaze, but instead “think, feel, and imagine from outside of it” (2021). Taking inspiration from the work of Shola von Reinhold, she seeks to consider the point-of-view of the people who appear as the “bad object,” who are “dismissed” in the “derisive” tone Reinhold calls the “International Cishet” (2020, p. 388; Wark, 2021). From the perspective of people constructed as “the bad object, the unilateral pronouncements of International Cishet appear as less than universal: ‘The tectonic mascness of it all; that would have you think it’s neutral’ (Reinhold, 2020, p. 389)” (Wark, 2021). Wark concludes there is no “essence of style or unity” to trans femme aesthetics, but a “disparate set of tactics for being in the world – as a being, and as a world...in ways that can cast a refrain that can echo...be felt and heard, [so] that our cultures might...endure” (2021). From these echoes may emerge “a situation from which the Transfixions to come would be more than shadows” (2021).

Wark’s writing powerfully connects the pathologizing negative projections pushed onto trans people to the mechanisms that also instigate and inform racialization. Both she and Reinhold describe imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy in ways that help us imagine it as a force which occurs *underneath* the surface of the ground upon which dominating power systems consider natural or “neutral.” Going back to my metaphor of tears, ruptures, and rips, the tectonic movement of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy can create ruptures, divides, and shifts which can both distance us from parts of ourselves and create distance between worlds we move through, which keeps TTSI+ people on the fringes. Wark’s discussion also illuminates how the resistant, pluralist persistence of trans people’s existence in artforms can

“echo” and close the distance between what these tectonic shifts may seek to separate: trans people from their trancestors; TTSI+ people from one another.

Wark’s work illuminates the ways in which anti-trans sentiment is often coming from a place of longing to do the same (to unapologetically express and embody one’s authentic gender). This is something Alok Vaid Menon speaks to often. In their poem “street tax #3,” they describe their response to two men pointing to them in the street and saying “that’s a man in a dress! hey everyone that’s a man in a dress!” (2021a, p. 5; Appendix A4). They considered pointing back and yelling, “hey everyone, that’s an insecure man!” but they realized that would be a “redundant” statement (p. 5). They ask, “what is a man but a private repression made public made prophet made policy?” (p. 6). They go on to describe how “man begins when I end...when I am ended,” concluding, “it is hard to have your abundance mistaken as absence” (p. 6).

Menon’s experience of and response to the experience of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy emerges through their work. What is missing here on paper is the sound of their voice creating these words and developing the emotion behind them. For now, their words echo sentiments Fanon describes in his racial-epidermal schema *and* more. The more authentic Alok is in public, the more they are invisibilized and the more people seek to erase and rupture their presence by imposing violent, persistent verbal and physical assaults that bring forth Alok’s feelings of disembodiment. They continue to describe the zero-sum logic that arises when TTSI+ people merely *exist* in public as well as how this has compounded through time. Similar to Fanon and Beauvoir’s arguments that men and/or white people need an *Other* to objectify in order to frame themselves as *subject*, people who persistently engage in compulsory cishetnormativity

need TTSI+ people to simply *not* exist. This is not something that only white assumed-cis men do; all people can internalize this system and perpetuate this violence.¹⁰¹

In their poem “street tax #2,” Menon describes how this system can emerge from assumed cis women: “when cis women tell me to shave ‘if you want to look like a *real* woman,’ I remember that men are so *lazy they make the women do the work of patriarchy for them*” (2021a, p. 4; my emphasis;). Pinar Ateş Sinopoulos-Lloyd’s [work](#) both illuminates ways cisnormativity can emerge from colonized Indigenous people and affirms radical resistance to colonization through embracing gender pluralism: “As Trans Natives, we are often perceived by the (Native and non-Native) *colonized eye* as deviating from Tradition. Yet Tradition can never be removed from our blood, from our Genders, from our lands, from our waters” (2022). Working from Leanne Betasamosoke Simpson’s lines of thought (2017), they assert that to deny Indigenous traditions of “gender-expansion” is to “speak about [themselves] in the past tense,” is to engage in “an unintentional autogenocide” (2022).¹⁰² They co-relate the colonial expectation to remain static with the absurdity of asking rivers, clouds, tides, and galaxies to remain *fixed*. From both Menon’s and Sinopoulos-Lloyd’s work emerges (a) how the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze attempts to restrict the fluidity of people, (b) how the internalized gaze is an on-the-ground means of enacting colonial power through relationships without the presence of a colonial authority, and (c) how resisting and *curdling* the gaze necessitates illuminating the absurdity and false confidences of the gaze and embracing the plurality of nature.

¹⁰¹ While compulsory cisheteronormativity can emerge from anyone/everyone, I personally experience intense emergences of it from people who are assumed to be cisgender but are actually people who have developed walls around their authentic gender to the point of expecting others do to the same.

¹⁰² [Song association](#): “I’m not your experiment, like some new worlds to explore / nothing’s new to us ‘cause we were here before... Transphobia isn’t native to First Nations / homophobia’s white supremacist invasion... Indigenous people, we had a different arrangement / and now we hate ourselves like some self-discrimination” (Sanchez, 2022).

Dissociation – Doubled, Tripled, or Quadrupled consciousness. As I discussed in chapter two, Ngo (2015) describes how feelings of disassociation emerge as racialized people experience when their intersubjectivity impeded upon by the racializing gaze. She summarizes that these feelings are often “uncanny” sensations of being both behind and in-front of one’s body (both ahead and behind), and these can be experienced as ruptures that render one to experience themselves as fragmented. Through these experiences, one develops a double consciousness, through which people may anticipate what the dominating gaze may perceive, in order to attempt to survive as they navigate worlds. Ngo describes [assumed endosex and cis] women of color experience a “doubling” of the double consciousness (p. 178), and I argue for more complex consideration of doubled, tripled, and quadrupled consciousness that involves cisheteropatriarchy and ableism. There are countless works of art, film, and song from trans people, especially those who are BIPOC, from which this phenomenon emerges in the context of the relational violence brought upon by the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze. In Menon’s most recent book (2021b), there are three poems listed in a row: “on dissociation,” “grammar lessons,” and “on pronouns.” All three convey the forms of quadrupled consciousness that emerge through their experience as a trans-femme person of color.

In [“on disassociation,”](#) through which they discuss their childhood, they describe how they habitually disassociated during cishetsexist, interpersonal acts of violence: “at some point I began to vanish. It’s like I was watching my life from the sky as an omniscient narrator...Nothing that happened to “me” happened to me. *I became the apostrophes themselves, floating above, always at a distance*” (2021b, p. 15; my emphasis; Appendix A5). Fanon’s *zone of non-being* emerges through their work, as they illuminate the powerful experience of being denied authenticity as well as being denied a social imaginary that resembled them (they often speak to how they found no

queer & trans representation due to the prevalence of white, thin, and assumed-cis queer images in media). They go on: “*I learned how to exist in two places at once. Time travel was a Thursday afternoon. Because the present didn’t belong to me, I lived in the future*” (p. 15; my emphasis). Later, they frame of disassociation as a form of resistance and incite friction upon pathological constructions of it: “In one story we disassociate because we’re broken. In another, we do so precisely because we want to heal. *My body fought for me before I could. It...creat[ed] the space for me to daydream myself into existence*” (p. 16). They assert that dissociation saved their life: their body *fought* for them before they consciously could do so, which resonates with critical feminist discourse of resistance to institutional violence (Wade, 1997). As a white trans person who experienced severe medical trauma in my adolescence that brought me to habituate to dissociation quite often, this imagery is powerful and resonating. They end their poem discussing ways they have come back *into* their body, reclaimed their body by “plant[ing] gratitude everywhere in [themselves] they felt shame. Filled lack with love” (p. 16). In this way, their work conveys how they have come to consciously navigate their double-consciousness so as to shed, *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007), and resist both internal and external forms of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze. This seems to be an emergence of what Ortega (2020) calls “home-tactics,” which Ngo (2017) interacts with in chapter three of her dissertation. Racialized people, and people whose bodies are “otherwise outside the mainstream” (Lugones, 1987, p. 11), find ways of creating a home in their bodies to resist fragmentation.

Taking inspiration from James Baldwin and Imara Jones, Menon’s work continues to focus on the incredible power of love and vulnerability in the face of hate and dehumanization, which seems another way TTSI+ *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) the imperialist white

supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. While expecting everyone to be resilient and benefit from painful experiences is not sustainable, it seems living/navigating life on the fringes of society can inform one's sense of empathy and one's process of holding multiple perspectives. In my experience, I have felt as if I am making a "home" in the "traveling" between social worlds as a neurodivergent, trans, and non-binary person. However, my whiteness, my emergence from a mostly-generational habit of being *too* at home, has complicated and "impoverished" (Ngo, 2015, p. 133) my ability to care-fully world travel. This means I must constantly monitor how my whiteness impacts my relationships with everyone and everything *and* support and contribute to abolition of white supremacy in any way, shape, or form.

Epistemic Injustice – De-humanization

Feinberg wrote: "We need help in creating new words that say who we are, not who we aren't" (1998, p. 27). In hir pamphlet, which I drew from at the beginning of this chapter, Feinberg (1992; Appendix A6) illuminates what the plight of erasure and hermeneutic epistemic injustice brings forth for people who do not conform to cisnormativity: "This pamphlet is an attempt to trace the historic rise of oppression that, *as yet, has no commonly agreed name*. We are talking about people who defy the "man"-made boundaries of gender" (p. 5). Zie illuminates how difficult it is to "fight an oppression without a name connotating pride, a language that honors us" (p. 5). This plight emerges through hir work, as zie attempts to illuminate cisnormativity and cissexism while being immersed in a social imaginary and gender paradigm that seeks to only "cut and sear" TTSI+ people. Zie reflexively states: "The language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes - a wonderful problem" (p. 6).¹⁰³ Hir

¹⁰³ As they explain in hir introduction, Feinberg uses language that zie had access to at the time. As I study hir works, especially *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (1998), hir internalized notions of bioessentialism emerge as it pertains to anatomy. Zie often refers to people as "male- or female-bodied" and conflates the experiences of being 'transgender,' "intersex," and non-conformity to gender binary norms. I believe this may be because hir focus

introduction goes on to illuminate the hermeneutic epistemic injustice that emerges when using the discourse of heteronormativity to explicate cissexist essentialism. Zie problematizes the positioning of TTSI+ people on the “cusp,” on the fringes, of the lesbian and gay of this discourse. Zie describes the TTSI+ community has been “struggling” to win “the same understanding” from cis gay and lesbian people that cis & gender-conforming gay and lesbian people received from “progressives” in government (p. 6), which is an important reminder of how the cis gay and lesbian movement distanced themselves from TTSI+ people in order to gain that acceptance in the 1970s. This echoes the frustration Sylvia Rivera conveyed twenty years prior in her “Y’all better quiet down” speech, in which Rivera addressed a mostly white, middle class cis gay and lesbian crowd (ATstudent, 2019). Twenty years after Feinberg’s pamphlet was published, many issues zie describes are still emerging in media across the globe.

Feinberg ends hir introduction by asserting “gender phobia [i.e., transphobia, cissexism] - like racism, sexism and bigotry against lesbians and gay men [i.e., homophobia, heterosexism] - is meant to keep us divided” (p. 6). Zie calls for unity, offering a history of Euro-colonial capitalist cisheteropatriarchy to promote epistemic friction against the epistemic ignorance/knowledge that has sought to erase and invisibilize TTSI+ people. This history is important because “solidarity is built on understanding how and why oppression exists and who profits from it” (p. 6).

Mis-fitting Against the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchal Social imaginary. Price (2021b) discusses the feeling of being “socialized” as “gender-weird” as one of being “pushed aside and viewed as [a] freak,” which illuminates the ways that people being

was on explicating the material realities experienced by the people who visibly-enough defied the rigid expectations set by cishetnormativity. Hir work still holds incredible value to me, especially as zie calls for solidarity across class, gender, anatomical, sexual, disabled, and racialized experiences. I bracket some terms zie used to indicate what I interpret zie was intending to discuss. Zie regularly uses the term “transgendered,” which I will shift to “transgender,” as adding an -ed to the end of the term creates the false image of “trans” or “cis” being something that *happens* to us. I believe zie would approve. Refer to hir works for further study.

In this “world” there are a variety of characters who are imagined with basically-human corporeal embodiments with a few exceptions (Austen, 2018-2020). For all intents and purposes, it is assumed (based on the [lack] of attention drawn to the main characters’ genders) that they are cis girls and boys¹⁰⁵. There is *one* openly non-binary character named Double Trouble who is voiced by a white non-binary trans femme person, Jacob Tobia. Tobia’s character is introduced later in the series as a being who shape shifts to mirror the identities and forms of others, in order to be deceptive, and whose “normal” form is reptilian-esque. They use they/them pronouns. The character is a static one who is a “lone wolf” and duplicitously plays along the lines of “good” and “bad” sides. They ultimately are brought to an end. Kapesa concludes their review of the show by side-stepping these blatant indications of queer villain coding through pandering to respectability politics. They appreciate how the character “was never misgendered or targeted simply due to their identity,” and they argue that way the character was socially held in the show “is a reminder...that even if one does not agree with the actions of another, their identity may still be respected” (2022). For the rest of the article, the writer mostly spends time applauding how the show does not play into tropes about “LGBT+ [read LGB] relationships” (2022).

What emerges for me is the blatant neglect of consideration for the ways in which this plays into harmful controlling images of trans people, especially gender fluid people: ‘they are playing pretend; they are out to deceive.’ The series embodies these traits within a character who is visibly coded to be not-quite-human. I do not think this is an individual fault of the show writers or the reviewer. I think this is indicative of how the social imaginary has played into this image of

¹⁰⁵ I have recently learned that, in 2020, a lead character creator, Rae Geiger, tweeted she designed the character Perfuma (Austen, 2018-2020) to be “read as” a transgender girl, but they never shared this intention with any of the design crew because they “didn’t think it would go through” ([@exaulted_speed](#), 2020). Sadly, Geiger’s original post as since been removed. There is not enough space in this thesis to reflexively process this, but I intend to write about this and work through my assumptions as well as what assumptions seemed to be carrying this series of creative decisions.

trans and non-binary embodiment, *and* it is indicative of how the social discourse is widely fixated on sexuality and relationships while putting cissexist norms on the fringes of the conversation (and thus freely operating in the background). This is just one of many examples of the less-than-human [typically alien or animal-esque humanoid creature] imagery placed onto TTSI+ people, and I believe it is time we named this as a controlling image.

Importantly, this controlling image is also wrapped up in anti-Black and racist sentiment. For instance, the main villain in *She-Ra* (Austen, 2018-2020), named Horde Prime, is bi-pedal with reptilian/alien qualities, voiced Keston John, and leads a “horde” that multiplies through asexual cloning. There are no “women” in this “horde,” and all the “horde” multiples are coded as masculine, violent, and needing to be controlled by an authoritative leader. This is a common theme I have witnessed emerging as a controlling image of Blackness that subsumes the centuries old controlling image of Black people being less than human, hyper masculine, and sexually ambiguous.¹⁰⁶ This brings me to another example, *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) (Jackson, 2001).

Orcs, goblins and Uruk-hai are the Black negative space to silhouette “*men*, elves, dwarves, hobbits, wizards...” – so many ways to be (and be played by actors who are) white cis-het coded men, with a few ways to be and be played by white cishet-coded women (Jackson, 2001). Orcs, goblins and Uruk-hai are the only “race” that perhaps gets to be played by Black actors (though I suspect there were moments reminiscent of Black-face when non-Black people were acting as these “races”). They “breed” Uruk-hai, but it is never explained *how*. They just come out of the earth, as if magically or scientifically planted by Saruman, the white wizard/scientist, or as if “earthen,” “dirty,” and able to double without sex (“asexual”). They are depicted in only one form

¹⁰⁶ This is connected to anti-Black themes I notice emerging from most sci-fi and fantasy, especially in sci-fi universes which seek to metaphorically represent the atrocities of racism and genocide. They use the term “race” as a way of speaking of other *species* that are sometimes depicted as humanesque but not *actually human*. This subversively plays into bio-essentialist beliefs about “races” within the human race.

of embodiment that is masculine coded (according to cissexist standards), yet they are not “men.” Meaning, they are not part of the “race” of “men” in the LOTR universe [and, whether consciously or unconsciously aligning with sexologist pseudo-science, the race of “men” is *only* made up of white assumed-cis actors]. I never once witness in the film or read in the books about “female” orcs, goblins, and Uruk-hai. They are all coded as inherently violent, unhygienic, masculine, and sub-human beings.

South West Asian/North African (SWANA) coded “races” and “wild men” are also a part of the negative space, and I rarely see any femme coded people in these roles either. This emerged to me when I was watching the trilogy with my partner, in the midst of my ongoing study of both Ngo’s and Snorton’s texts. I understood many aspects of the film as ways in which racial and gender essentialism internalized in the crew, the author, the actors, and the viewers emerged and coalesced. As my partner and I were watching the Uruk-hai “birthing” scene in the first movie (Jackson, 2001), I said something like, “This really illuminates how gender ambiguity and Blackness are interwoven in a controlling imagery.” They, a LOTR fan-queer who is also very critical of systems of oppression in film and media, said that they were familiar with arguments that the orcs, goblins and Uruk-hai were anti-Black, but they had never thought about “the gender aspect.” This seemed an emergence of how subversive the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal imaginary is. Of course, this involves ableism and classism. Many of the orcs, goblins, and Uruk-hai are physically disabled somehow. They live in cramped quarters with little access to resources, but they are expected to build infrastructure and fight wars. Additionally, Smeagol is coded with traits of dissociative identity disorder, which is framed as a symptom of fascist deceit, and his character arc co-relates distorted physical features and animal-like behaviors with the decline of his mental status.

As seems to be the white norm, all of these dynamic parts in LOTR (Jackson, 2001) are played by white people and the character groups of the story represent North-west Euro countries. In dialogue with my partner, I described: “Sauron feels more like an idea than a person.” They/he are/is an antithesis of all we think is good. They/he are/is a hypothetical mirror, the shadow space that defines the silhouette of the “good [read: white] guys.” Sauron is literally a disembodied eye in a tower, who used to be a nebulous being covered in Black armor. Sauron is so “inherently” evil that he creates all this turbulence out of thin air. Like the orc, goblin, Uruk-hai, and “wild men,” Sauron has a static character arc. All these characters are flattened, shadow space, disembodied, limited to objects. This makes me think of the Fanoninan analysis both Snorton and Ngo apply to racialized and gendered Others: They are “fixed,” the shadow to form the silhouette. Perhaps these concepts are not inherently racially coded; however, the creation of this film has embedded these concepts because of the social imaginary that informed the author of the book, subsequent director, producers, and designers, and of those for whom they were creating this film. It is very ironic considering the film is about the violence of fascism and industrialization, and the story is meant to argue fascism cannot be “tolerated” and needs to be completely destroyed. Both *She-Ra* (Austen, 2018-2020) and LOTR (Jackson, 2001) were made with anti-fascist intentions, and yet... imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy emerged.

The imagery people invoke for Menon *in the place of* their name and their pronouns, (“degenerate creature,” “hairy animal”; 2021b, p. 22) is very similar to the imagery used to illustrate the “villains” I just described. This is not individual to Menon nor is it specific to sci-fi or fantasy media. I witness this emerge through most media I interact with, especially media depicting trans people, most notably non-binary people.¹⁰⁷ This aspect of the dominating social

¹⁰⁷ Puar and Rai (2002) discuss the mobilization of the monster imagery as a tactic of both islamophobia and homophobia. Lopez (2023a) utilizes this text in their work. They ask, “Who and/or what is a docile patriot? What

imaginary is not only visual but brings forth a tactile “grotesque” quality that permeates the senses. It emerges when trans people are described with the pronoun “it.”¹⁰⁸ It emerges for me even when people describe “transgender” as a noun, as a disease, or as a singular “gender” that is “different from” man/woman. This cisnormative social imaginary seems to be lurking underneath, as an indication that it is not possible for transgender people to *be* men or women [read: to be human]. Ironically but not-so-ironically, it is invoked through many people’s accounts from a variety of oppressed and privileged contexts.

As discussed in chapter 2, Collins (2020) describes that naming a controlling image provides a way to recognize the intentions of the controlling image. If gone unnamed, it can merely float around as a nebulous stereotype that influences people to adhere to the ever-narrowing standards that the stereotype enforces. In this context, this means for me that by naming this as a controlling image, we can understand the power play that the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze is trying to enforce. The power play seems connected to the continued rejection of gender non-conformity that emerged as the gay rights movement distanced from trans people in the 1970s. “If you want to be accepted as gay, you need to adhere to [cis]gender normative performance,” morphed into, “If you want to be accepted as trans, you need to adhere to [cishetero]normative standards of gender performance.” This imaginary that relates gender fluidity and non-binary gender embodiment to alien-ness and animal-ness seems a way for queer and trans people to police one another’s “gender play” (Sanders, Menon, Lundy-Pain, 2022). It becomes a way of saying, “if you don’t want to get harassed, look normal - look *human*.” It

does queer sexuality have to do with terrorist studies? Why must we analyze the colonial epistemology of the west to better understand compulsory patriotism, theories of the psyche and recent anti-trans legislation + rising Islamophobia?” (s. 4).

¹⁰⁸ In more recent generations, people have reclaimed the pronouns “it” as well as the imagery of being monsters, hybrid fantasy creatures, and cyborgs. I want to clarify that folks are welcome to identify with whatever they choose - doing so for oneself is not the same as broadly imposing these images onto trans people in order to delegitimize and dehumanize them.

becomes a way of telling people who reclaim the pronoun “it”, or who identify with other-than-human-kin ([Sinopoulos-Lloyd, 2021](#)), with cyborgs ([Concordia, 2022](#)), or with mythical monsters, that they are “ruining it for the rest of the queer and trans community.” It becomes a way of blaming and fragmenting trans people instead of acknowledging the power play that the capitalist imperialist white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal gaze is imposing. If we name this as a controlling image, we can not only return but *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) this normative imaginary by destabilizing its power and influence over our intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

I also find it important to name there are certainly other controlling images and narratives which need to be illuminated. Snorton addresses how the mainstream Black Lives Matter movement tends to avoid including Black trans people in the name lists. In fact, he cites that the only Black trans person Sexton names, Cece MacDonald, is also the only Black person who is still living (2017, p. 196). NiiLee Cyrus speaks about how Black communities often blame Black trans people for their own deaths when it is revealed the murdered person is trans. She describes a sign she brings to rallies in the wake of yet another Black person’s murder: “Front of the sign: ‘I hope white people don’t notice I am Black.’ On back of the sign: ‘I hope the Black people don’t notice I’m Trans’” (Cyrus, Scott, & Lee, 2022).

Colonial Durée – The Mythology of Binary Sex Socialization

Devon Price problematizes how people seek superficial linguistic changes (which are easier, individualistic tasks) instead of seeking to shift the paradigms through which they navigate the world (which requires challenging internalized systems of power) (2022a). As an [example](#), he brings up the ways people seem focused on maintaining the idea of binary male/female socialization. When people say to him “if you were assigned at birth, then you have this male

socialization thing,” Price argues that this is not true and harms trans femme people (2022b). People often respond to him by asking, “oh what word should I say instead?...people who were assumed to be male, or people with male-privilege?” (2022b). He critiques this as an emergence of how people “come up with terms that are getting at the same idea, [but] the problem is not the term, it’s the idea...There’s just this fixation with making superficial changes to language rather than changing how we think” (2022b).¹⁰⁹

In an written article on this topic, Price further explicates his contentions with the myth of binary gender socialization in greater detail (Price, 2021b). First, gender socialization does not begin and end in childhood; it continues through life. In fact, he argues the more accurate predictor of one’s actions is based on their *current context*, meaning how one is currently regarded socially. In his examples, he discusses how trans masculine people suddenly are more revered, treated with more respect and/or fear from the general public, especially based on one’s racialized context^{110,111}. Similarly, trans femme people are suddenly regarded as weak, soft, unintelligent. While trans people may experience memories of poor experiences when expected to be a gender that does not “fit” them, “[their] minds are not locked in amber, unchanged by the power and position we now possess” (2021b). Second, gender socialization is relational and interactive; “[we] are exposed to it, and [we] respond to it. People in turn react to [our] response” (n.p.). He goes on to describe socialization as a highly nuanced “dance” that never ends. He argues that conformity to cis het standards manifests in patterns of socialization which reward children/people for being “easy to

¹⁰⁹ He discusses this in connection to ableism in this [video](#) (2022a).

¹¹⁰ This resonates with my experience, especially in “professional” spaces. I have never been so complimented for the way I do my job as I have when being assumed as a white cis man by co-workers and clients. I do believe more nuance needs to be held for people who are not men or women, who receive varied social experiences throughout life. I believe non-binary folks experience socialization as a “gender freak” more so than as a man or woman.

¹¹¹ [Song association](#): “Nobody interrupts me / Nobody second guesses my opinions / Nobody tells me that I can't do it/ But I got so used to pulling the short stick / And I don't know what to do with all this privilege / 'Cause I got a voice now / I got power / But I can't stand it...I'm tired of people trying to erase me” (Christopherson, 2022).

understand” (referencing Chapman, 2015) and “punish, exclude, and ignore” children/people who “flout gendered expectations...whose lives ‘do not compute’.” In summary, “gender socialization is an interplay of what is expected of us, *and* how we respond” ¹¹² (2021b, n.p.; my emphasis).

Third, gender systems are phenomena we observe. Regardless of how we are embodying gender in any given moment, we are always taking in information based on how patterns of cissexist socialization reward and punish people (Price, 2021b). He argues, “it’s more accurate to say that each and every one of us is cissexism socialized, *trained to see ourselves and others in a binary, biologically determined way*” (2021b, n.p.; his emphasis). Fourth, the experience of being closeted is an experience of “traumatic socialization” (n.p.). It is illogical and unrealistic to argue that people experience the same gender socialization process regardless of their adherence to the binary gender standards they are required to “fit” into (2021b). He relates this to transmisogyny:

If a ‘boy’ is abused and berated for loving dolls, is ostracized by the other boys for being too girly, and only feels safe around their sister and female teachers, can we really say in good faith that kid had a “male socialization” experience? Could we really describe a kid who has been beaten for being feminine as someone who doesn’t understand gendered violence?¹¹³ Their whole life has been gendered violence! In fact, they have gone through a particularly pernicious, statistically hyper-dangerous form of gendered violence: transmisogyny, a hatred of trans women that goes beyond, and intersects with, the misogyny cis women experience. People who experience transmisogyny are not only subject to gendered violence at exceedingly high rates, they are also portrayed in media as

¹¹² [Song association](#): “Gender never really meant that much to me / ‘Til people started telling me how it was supposed to be / ‘Til the people that I loved started to say: “Bo~o~oys don’t act that way...” (She/her/hers, 2018)

¹¹³ While Price’s argument centers trans femme people who perform themselves in feminine ways, not all trans femme people are femme as kids or adults. This does not mean they experience socialization the same way cis-men do. Many non-conforming trans-femme people feel doubted about their gender because they are not “feminine enough”, which reveals another double standard trans people across the gender spectrum experience: the essentialist obligation to perform gender in ways cisnormativity deems acceptable.

the source of violence rather than the victim. They're on the receiving end of misogyny, but when they name that misogyny, they're accused of being dangerous pretenders who are appropriating womanhood. Transmisogyny renders a vulnerable group of women at once hyper-visible and hyper-excluded. Throughout their lives they are othered, yet denied the language and agency to name that othering. (Price, 2021b, n.p.)

Finally, socialization occurs in a cluster of racialized, classed, cultured, and cissexist/gendered contexts. For Price, to claim that all assigned and assumed women are "tender," fragile, and soft, plays into the white supremacist myth that was used to legitimize violence against men of color, and it also assumes *every* child grew up in a household in which women were idle and subservient (which automatically excludes many working-class households and/or Black and brown families) (2021b). Additionally, the assumption of a single "feminine mold" reinscribes the controlling images of Black women, demonizing them as hyper-masculine, too strong, too brazen, etc. He iterates this "doubles down" on Black trans women, who experience the hostility directed toward Black men, the brutalization that is directed to Black femmes who disavow white cisnormativity, and the belittlement directed towards Black women. Price concludes that people need to view their oppression as connected to "the larger web of cissexism, transmisogyny, and racism" instead of locating their oppression to the sex they were assigned at birth (2021b).

Menon's art frequently illustrates the interplay between hermeneutic and testimonial epistemic injustice that emerges to bolster transmisogyny. In their poem "[grammar lessons](#)" they illuminate the irony of growing up trans-femme, of being bullied and harmed because they mis-fit the cissexist mythology of "man," but, when they grew up, they were denied their femininity because they misfit the cissexist mythology of "woman." Throughout, they illuminate how cisnormativity emerges as hermeneutic injustice, creating a way of discounting, degrading, and

ignoring the relevance of trans testimony, especially the testimony of Black and brown trans femme people: “These are grammar lessons: *some of us are only allowed to be thought, never to think...* It’s not just about who *can* speak, but who *gets* to speak. *He who controls the word controls the world*” (2021b, p 17; Appendix A7; my emphasis). As they discuss in many poems, performances, and interviews, they describe how they sought to be “exceptional,” that if they “crafted the perfect argument, then people would believe me, and then I would be safe” (2023h). However, they continue to conclude the problem is not about understanding, it is “what they feel about what [they] look like” (2021b, p. 18): “it doesn’t matter if you have all the right words when they think you have the wrong body” (p. 17). They end describing “what it feels like to be brown, trans, femme – and alive” (p. 18): “If you were to scream in outer space no one would hear you. Sound waves can’t travel through *an empty vacuum*. Only you would be able to hear yourself because the sound waves would still travel through your body” (p.18; my emphasis).

Upon studying their words and use of space, the imperialist, white-supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, and its ripples of epistemic erasure, emerge as a cluster of on-going forces to objectify, *fix* in place, and de-legitimize. The empty vacuum of space, which would theoretically crush and suffocate a human, represents not only the spatial distance that the gaze imposes but also the weight of its *durée*, the restriction it bears upon a person’s *sound* and *voice - silencing* not their voice but the presence their voice *should* have in relationship to others. Through this imagery emerges the relational and auditory aspects of intersubjective disembodiment.

Identity politics: pain = womanhood / pain = “valid” oppression / pain = identity. Price (2022c) asserts “violence actually has very little to do with the *identity* a person holds, and everything to do with their *power*” (n.p.; my emphasis). He describes his history of experiences through spaces made by cis-women which seek to exclude “all men” (including trans femme

people), and he goes on to describe the various ways he has experienced violence, objectification, and harassment from cis women across race. He describes, “I’m a gay, transgender man, and an awkward, Autistic one at that, so cis women have frequently recognized they hold social power over me. And they’ve used that power to put me in my place all my life” (n.p.).

Drawing from various accounts of women of color and trans people across contextual experiences, Price (2022c) describes the way (especially white) cis women and cis queer people wield the power of the white cis het gaze to objectify people who are lower on the social ladder than them. He understands this phenomenon of experiencing violence from cis women and cis queer people across racialized experiences to be related to the insecurity felt by people in the “middle tier” of privilege (n.p.). He explains that, especially in work environments, it seems common for cis het men to be in very secure positions of power in institutions, whereas cis women and queer cis men tend to experience less secure positions of power that can bring about “power grabs” when someone comes out as trans at work and/or when there are job cuts. He brings forth many stories of trans people feeling that their space was invaded and their personhood belittled by cis women and queer cis people when they came out at work. From his perspective, he thinks “cisgender women are desperate to assert power for many sensible reasons, and that sadly, they often do so in the very same ways that men have leveraged power over them” (n.p.).

In a broader critique, he posits oppressed people have been influenced to “desire to behave more like a privileged white cisgender man” which “keeps those of us who are marginalized at each other’s throats” (2022c, n.p.). He describes how our “misplaced fears” fragment us from one another, which “render[s] us more vulnerable to abuse” (n.p.). He argues that, instead of “aspiring to wield the privilege we imagine white, cisgender men have,” oppressed people need to “recognize” and “join forces” to resist the “shared sources of our pain” (n.p.). He clarifies these

sources that “threaten us” are “the patriarchy, the police state, the gender binary, and whiteness...*not* the awkward unfamiliarity of a fellow oppressed person” (n.p., my emphasis). When I consider how Ngo’s (2015) argument (how people’s habituated, internalized systems of oppression emerge through relationships as restricting one another’s intersubjectivity) intersects with Price’s argument, I experience glimpses of how restricting one another’s intersubjectivity can influence fragmentation, intercommunal hostility, and isolation, which only enables systems of power to further sediment into our habit bodies.

This also emerges from NiiLee Cyrus and Cory Scott in their [discussion](#) with George Lee (2022). Cyrus, in particular, critiques communal fragmentation, social policing within and outside of LGBTQ+ communities, and performative allyship. Through her analysis emerges ways in which she has habituated to navigating a world in which people are increasingly fixated on “saying the right thing” without interrogating internalized bio-essentialism:

I need to see *deliberate change* of you truly understanding gender identity...People say ‘trans women are women,’ but they still won’t date them...show them love...[give them] affection, or protection, or sincerity, or employment. So, when I hear people say ‘trans women are women’ – I go ‘y’all are just learning the language, I don’t think y’all actually have a gender politic, nor do you understand genitalia, because it always goes back to that’¹¹⁴... It’s a horrible way to live...*but it is how I survive.*” (2022, her emphasis)

¹¹⁴ Deniz Çakır critiques dynamics of [“penis phobia” and transmisogyny](#) within and outside of trans communities (2021c). Many of his videos hold complex critique of how racialized power is mobilized and obfuscated within and between TTSI+ people, from his perspective. Notably, he calls in [white people who have non-Black poc parents and grandparents](#), asserting that bringing their relatives into conversations to side-step accountability for their racism *is* racist and unjustly wrongs our relatives (2021a). He encourages these folks to engage with their ancestors outside of situations in which they are being called in for perpetuating racism, which I value and seek to do in relationship to my ancestors who were indigenous or Jewish. In another video, he calls in [privileged trans people](#) (trans masculine people and white trans people in particular), inviting them to check how they take up space in conversations about trans experience and violence against trans people (2021b).

Later, she critiques trans people who use pathologizing rhetoric to gate-keep transness (who are often described as aligning with white supremacist cisheterosexist ideology):

When people are saying ‘I don’t like people just naming themselves as trans when they are not medically transitioning’ - What do you do when you are also gatekeeping transness the same way that cis women gatekeep womanhood? *We’ve been socialized in the same ways...* When you’re gatekeeping womanhood, and you’re gatekeeping transness, and you got white people gatekeeping humanity - *who is the new oppressor, and who is the new white man?* (2022, her emphasis)

This quote resonates with Menon’s response to the ways in which trans-exclusionary reactionaries who call themselves “feminists” enact transmisogyny: “‘Are you fighting for *freedom* or are you fighting for *privilege*?’ Because *privilege* is the ability to *monopolize*, is the ability to do what is done to you to other people” (on Baldoni, Plank, & Heath, 2021; my emphasis). They offer important clarification as to how we must collectively heal from pain:

The way that we heal pain is not by transmitting it, it’s by transforming it. *So what I’m saying is your pain is valid, but your use of that pain, your weaponization of that pain to harm people, that’s not valid...* To interrupt the cycle of trauma, we actually have to say that hurt people hurt people, and we are constantly trying to do what has been done to us to other people. *That is what it means to be trans - is to inherit the byproduct of sexism, that cis women experience from cis men – they take it out on us.* *laughs* It’s a game of an elaborate strategy of hot-potato. I say, let’s say there are no potatoes, let’s just get a table and start over. *I’m not interested in naming who is the most oppressed...in ranking oppression...in those metrics of trying to say “your experience is not as great as mine.”*

What I’m trying to say is when you experience trauma, not being seen is the biggest pain

that there ever was...All pain is valid, and the way we transform through that pain is actually being kind, generous, and interdependent. (2021; my emphasis)

When I hear these folks and others analyze the ways in which trans-exclusionary reactionists have internalized the misogynist myths and used them against trans people to deny their gender embodiment, I witness the patriarchal connection of pain to womanhood, as illuminated by Snorton (2017; discussed in chapter two), emerging. Not only does the system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy consider the pain of menstruation and childbirth to be important experiences of womanhood, it requires these experiences to be *essential* to womanhood. By merely reversing and transmitting the myths of cisheteropatriarchy, these so-called feminists are literally recasting the harmful impositions of the male gaze used to subjugate “women” to subjugate TTSI+ people. Additionally, this idea of pain being equated to gender also brings forth parallels between how identity politics seems to be an *argument over pain*. Harkening back to my introduction, it seems “identity” categories are based on how people mis-fit the white supremacist blueprint. Meaning, identity categories are associated with *how much* and *what kind* of pain someone may experience for deviating from the “fit.” In order to *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) and transform these myths and end this “strategy of hot potato” as Menon puts it (Baldoni, Plank, and Heath, 2021), we must shed and subvert the value system of white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy.

The fragmentation loop of comparing one another’s pain in a zero-sum game leaves people who misfit “at one another's throats” (Price, 2022c) while the few who fit reap the benefits. What if our identities didn’t have to *necessitate* pain? What if we consider that there is room for all of us to experience complex issues because imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy has ensnared us all in different ways? What if we realized that by centering the

most marginalized, the Black, migrant, trans, and/or disabled femmes, we would *all* be free? In my journals, I continue to process experiences with “two doctors and a landlord” across a year-long time span. The two experiences which were more blatantly negative occurred in so-called Connecticut. While my processing of both doctor appointments is important, I want to focus what has emerged for me as I process my first and (currently) only experience of housing discrimination:

The discrimination I experience seems to occur in the ‘splash zone’ of anti-Blackness, classism, ableism/sanism, and transmisogyny. Most of the time, when I stand up for myself, my resistance is tolerated, at minimum. My whiteness has always insulated me from retaliatory institutional harm – I am never caught in the under-toe...My liberation is inseparable from the abolition of these white supremacist systems (see Appendix A9).

Alán Pelaez Lopez, an Afroindigenous, queer & trans, immigrant, poet-artist-scholar, recently pleaded to colonially recognized “citizens”: *“I need y’all to leave your f*ckin’ identity politics and realize identities can only go do so much. Empires are killing so many of us. We need coalition, and...an ethical approach to being in relation and to holding one another”* (2023b).¹¹⁵ Menon has argued for a similar ethic of relationship, which *curdles* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) oppressive relational dynamics, in a different context, calling for a humanizing response to people who seek to dehumanize them (2021b). They recently engaged on a #CreatingChange conference panel they shared with Imara Jones, who expresses the following wisdom (2023; her emphasis):

¹¹⁵ Lopez’s total conclusion of their [video](#), a response to the political excuse made for the recent deaths of over thirty detained migrants Juarez, MX, was the following: “I need y’all to realize that we [Black and Brown ‘undocumented’ people] deserve so much better than this. I need y’all to develop a politic where you ask, ‘What is my ethical relationship to displaced peoples...to migrants, to refugees, to political exiles, to asylum seekers?’ And ask yourself, ‘How can I betray my privilege as a citizen, or as a legal resident, to show up, not only for migrants, but for local Indigenous peoples, for local poor people?’ *I need y’all to leave your f*ckin’ identity politics and realize identities can only do so much. Empires are killing so many of us. We need coalition, and we need an ethical approach to being in relation and to holding one another”* (2023b).

In some ways the people that are most *opposed* to us in ways are the most *proximate* to us. They're seeing themselves...They're seeing the hard choices that they didn't make. They're seeing the shackles before them that they chose not to unlock. Even as we stand up and fight for ourselves, we have to do so in a way which preserves our humanity, which fundamentally means recognizing they are human, too. The *same* hurt that could have prevented you from being yourself is what prevented them from being themselves.

Privileging of consciousness and ability. Looping back the de-humanizing tendencies of cissexism alongside the trend of ranking pain and equating pain to gender embodiment, I want to return to Sartre's being-in-itself/object-role. Considering how the *capacity* for consciousness is what differentiates "humans" from "objects," it seems blatantly obvious how (a) ableism emerges in relationship to how racism and anti-Blackness *objectifies* BIPOC, (b) ableism and ageism emerges in relationship to how white cishetsexism *objectifies* children and older adults *and* negates the humanhood of people who do not conform to the rigid fit of white supremacist cisheterosexism, (c) it is often the case that disabled people and children, especially those who are considered developmentally or intellectually disabled, are not afforded autonomy or consideration as "men or women" [read: humans], and (d) how disabled people and children are especially not afforded *capacity* to assert and embody their gender or sexuality.¹¹⁶

Barnes (2022) asserts that the ideological debates about gender identity and the attempts to "define" it within legal and biomedical contexts has left out considerations for disabled people who are understood to be [read: objectified as] unable to cognitively recognize their gender. This

¹¹⁶ Imani Barbarin has expressed many critiques and experiences of bioessentialism, both on her social media platforms and on her [blog](#). She [recently shared](#) how she relates her struggle as a Black, disabled cis woman to the struggles of trans people, writing "I'll never be 'woman enough' to people who don't think I should exist" (2023a).

is based on the assessment of their verbal expression¹¹⁷ and subsequent determined *capacity* to both *understand* gender as a construct and *communicate* their gender identity. Barnes continues to refer to “gender” as the political and oppressive gender binary system as well as a term synonymous with sex, and they refer to “gender identity” as an extremely intellectual/theoretical concept. They call out how most of the attempts to define gender identity have resonated with ableist (white supremacist) feminist goals of independence/autonomy (p. 18) as well as have made verbal/explicit self-identification a necessary part of “having” a gender identity (pp. 1–11).

Throughout, Barnes (2022) constantly refers to gender identity as separate from one’s gender, and she also asserts that identity may counter someone’s binary gender categorization, typically only referring to the gender binary categories man/woman in most cases. She then makes the case that this leaves disabled people out of the consideration because these definitions assert that one cannot have a gender identity, or be categorized within the gender binary at all, unless they can *intellectually* consider/explore their gender and then verbalize their identity (p. 11). I agree that this epistemology of gender identity privileges “intellectual capacity” and verbal expression, and I appreciate her argument in this regard. This leaves disabled people within the category of sub-human, likening the application of gender identity to these folks as similar to how a non-human animal’s gender cannot be “determined” due to their inability to self-determine (p. 11). They still assert that identification is *sufficient* enough - they are only arguing against the way intellectual identification is treated as a *necessity* (p. 5, 11).

Barnes (2022) continues on to claim that, for disabled people to be considered human/to be humanized, their “social” experience of the gender binary should inform their gender and

¹¹⁷ When working with any disabled person, I have always had qualms with the privilege of verbal communication. I do not believe we can truly know or assess someone’s cognitive abilities with the assessments currently being utilized because those put so much stock in verbal expression.

inform how they are gendered by others (pp. 13–18). Meaning, assigned female cognitively disabled people should be gendered as women and assigned male people should be gendered as men. It is interesting that, despite this person’s nuanced take on gender, they do not consider the reality of intersex disabled people. They cite concerns with how disabled people are left out of feminist discussion of sexual assault; they indicate that “both sexes” experience assault but continue to focus on the assaults that “females” experience (pp. 12–15). In their opening statement, they discuss how one’s *relationship* to gender categories and gender norms varies based on their gender identity, and this aligns with Price’s arguments (2021b). I appreciate Barnes’ attempt to acknowledge the ecological feedback loop between one’s gender and cisheteronormativity. However, she continues to assert that people assigned and/or assumed as “female” would be treated in *similar* ways and that the person’s *reaction* to that treatment is what varies (p. 1). I would argue that one’s gender (meaning their “gender identity”) informs how they are socialized throughout their life. Meaning, the material realities of how they are socialized within cisnormativity occur in varied, differing ways, not in two (male/female) ways. There are a variety of quotes that I respond to with a mix of agreement, concern, and hesitation. I will provide one for now and try to grapple with my conclusions based on her whole analysis.

If gender is the social significance of sex, then cognitively disabled people need to be a part of what we talk about when we talk about gender. Any theory that denies they have genders has...an impoverished understanding of the social significances of sex...I’m appealing to things - oppression based on female sex...which plenty of non-women also face. You might worry... I am being implicitly cisnormative. But I don’t think that I am [provides two reasons]...the basic gist is this: *in the absence of compelling reason otherwise*, the broad pattern of social oppression that is evidence for (i) disabled females

have gender - and (ii) there is good reason to say disabled females are women... it makes sense to default to the social significance of their female sex. That is, I am assuming that if someone is female and is oppressed as a woman, this gives reason to categorize them as a woman [which can be] outweighed by someone's differentiation as another gender. In the case of people who do not seem to experience gender identity, we lack such outweighing reasons, and so we can appeal to a social role categorization. (2022, p. 16)

To justify ascribing a gender based on social conditions is an interesting argument. I understand this, *and* I also feel resistance to it because it maintains those social conditions as *constants*. Perhaps compulsory cisheterosexism will be a constant force, considering the extent to which imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy is normalized and how it is legitimized by the state. Perhaps utilizing this, as they recommend, alongside honoring self-differentiation would transform social conditions over time, alongside general transformative political shifts which involve and honor TTSI+ people and/or disabled people. To say we should default to the social role categorization unless they are able to self-differentiate otherwise is concerning. I want to believe that people can make choices about what they want or like if given the option and space to do so. Maybe they do not intellectualize it or express it verbally; maybe they only can express it through gesture or through a pattern of habits which emerge to caregivers over time. What I am saying is that gender is a nuanced experience that is informed by our relationships, and it can be observed, known, and felt *through* relationships. We unfortunately are socialized with very limited affective maps (to borrow Al-Saji's term, 2014, p. 160) of gender which systematically labels people who are not "men or women" as "outliers" who "do not have gender." For disabled people, I can see how asserting they "do not have a gender" only invites more dehumanization and violence that goes unnoticed.

Barnes also asserts intellectually disabled people cannot be considered cis because they “cannot self-determine” their gender (2022, p. 17). I want to open this up more because people shouldn't be assumed to be cisgender at all. Through our habitation to imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy, we *assume* people to be a binary gender based on their *assumed* binary sex. This could mean all people are assumed to be cis; however, as informed through the epistemic friction shared through this thesis, I assert this is not the state's perspective of people.

States that are informed and structured through imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy view *humans* as either *women* or *men*, but these states understand *all people* to be *either male* or *female*. Meaning, these states don't *view* all people as men or women. Meaning, they do not view all people as human-enough. These states assume each person has a potential “biological” role, and these states plan for some people to not be intellectually/biologically-enough to *fit into* that role. They issue “help” to “make them fit in.” These states and their sociopolitical institutions do not recognize someone's actual gender. These institutions are not built to recognize the multiplicity within each human. These states and institutions do not prompt people to consider their gender, nor do they provide infrastructure for anyone who seeks to be in their community as the gender they are if their gender and their subsequent sexuality do not “fit in.” To say people are cis as a default is not correct because most people probably have not actually considered their gender. To be trans is a political label imposed upon a cluster of realities. Trans people would exist even if not politicized as trans, and the growing number of openly trans and non-binary people can inform this conversation.

As people come to an awareness of gender as a separate concept that is not inherent to our body's anatomy, the more people may realize that their assigned binary gender (and thus their assumption about themselves as “cis”) is actually not true to their authentic self. What I am trying

to say is that these states do not recognize cis-ness because they do not recognize gender to be separate from sex. To discuss gender framed as the “social significance of sex” bears witness to this. Barnes’ argument (2022) opens us up to considering how most people should not be assumed as cis, that cisness (and all assumptions based in biological determinism) should not be assumed for all people. She opens consideration to people who are disabled and seem to not be “able” to intellectually interact with abstract concepts such as gender identity, gender roles, gender categories, and yet in fact *do* embody a gender (at least this is what I believe).

We need to hesitate this continued collapsing of being assigned-female to being women. The concept of being female was separate from being "woman" for a long time, due to racialization (as discussed in the beginning of this chapter). Black assigned female people were not considered women by European imperialists, they were used as objects in experimentation and differentiated as “female” only to further increase the number of humans who could be enslaved. This historical context informs the experience of disabled assigned female people that Barnes discusses (and I would add disabled people racialized as non-white experience more acts of systemic harm). They perhaps are more assaulted, objectified, delegitimized precisely because they are not viewed as gendered, only *sexed* – meaning they are seen as *only females*, not *women*. I also want to push back against this focus on comparing rates of assault on assigned-female versus assigned-male people. I have witnessed the ways that sexual assault of disabled assigned men is glossed over due to professional’s assumptions that the assaulted person was “assenting” to the assault, which I relate to the assumption that assigned men are considered “hypersexual.” Perhaps assigned men are sexually assaulted in ways that are *not even recorded* due to cisheteropatriarchy. This does not meant to deflate Barnes’ arguments against the ways in which disabled people are harmed. This is

an attempt to navigate through the murky myth that (cishetero)sexism primarily/only targets assigned/assumed female people.

All in all, Barnes asserts that we need to consider intellectually disabled people as the binary gender that is assigned to them via their assigned sex because this is how we can consider them as *human* and more explicitly involve them in data reporting pertaining to assault (2022, p. 19–22). This leaves no room to consider how intersex disabled people move through this system. Barnes continues to hold gender identity, and thus the capacity for someone to experience gender outside of cissexist conceptions of man/woman, as inaccessible to intellectually disabled people. This frames gender identity as just some abstract concept that doesn't show up materially in how people are in relationship to others. This here is the crux, the assumption that needs careful examination.

In so-called Texas, I worked in a “community-based” group home in which an Autistic and intellectually disabled older adult lived with three other disabled assumed women. This was an “all-female” group home, as required by the state for “safety.” This person did not go by their government name, they went by the name “Frank.”¹¹⁸ Frank would not answer to their government name. When they moved into this home, this is the name that their parents were calling them. They were often pretty nervous around new people and rarely talked to or interacted with others. They liked to wear band T-shirts, jeans, and they liked to keep their hair short. They listened to 70s dad rock, and they tended to not engage in group activities with the three other women in their home. People used she/her pronouns for them, but I tended to use neutral ones just to see how they would respond to it.¹¹⁹ I was working in this home when I was still being misgendered as a “girl” quite

¹¹⁸ This name has been changed for their anonymity.

¹¹⁹ I want to clarify that I used they/them not because I assumed they were non-binary (as opposed to a boy or a gender non-conforming girl), but because I did not want to get reprimanded by staff for “pushing ideology” onto people. They/them pronouns tend to move under the surface of people’s auditory perception, unless people are

often. My hair was short, and I often wore band t-shirts. Staff used to remark how surprised they were that Frank would smile at me, respond to my questions, and listen to music with me. I was not surprised by this, as I inferred that perhaps Frank had not interacted with an openly trans and non-binary person before. Did we use any of this language? No. Did Frank assert their “gender identity?” No. Was Frank being socialized and regarded in similar ways to their “female” roommates? No. So, how did people know to call them by this name, or come to understand their personality and preferences? Because *gender is relational*.

We come to experience one another’s gender in highly nuanced and specific ways, and this nuanced perception can grow in momentum as more people come to an awareness of the expansive and playful force that gender *becomes through* relationships. I suspect they avoided speaking to many people perhaps because their gender non-conformity, not their “socialized female-ness,” has made them vulnerable to abuse. So, when I read Barnes’ work (2022), I feel the urge to reiterate that gender is not an intellectual concept. Being treated as a human should not have to necessitate being regarded as “a man” or “a woman.” Being abused or experiencing pain is not an overwhelmingly “female” experience, and asserting that pain or oppression is a defining feature of gender only reifies the cissexist issues that Barnes’ seems determined to dissolve.

Gaps in Care Work Literature – The Momentum of White Supremacist Bio-Essentialism

Particular to bioessentialism, I find *durée* (Al-Saji, 2020) helpful when conceptualizing both the phenomenon of institutional-level epistemic ignorance/knowledge and the process of re-learning how to socialize in ways that are inclusive and intentionally anti-oppressive (at the individual, social, and institutional levels). This includes (a) ways of shedding habits related to

attending to them more acutely. I think I did, on some level, assume they were non-binary because I didn’t want to just assume that their non-conformity to femininity meant they were a *man*. At any rate, non-binary is an expansive term that holds complexity and space for many gender embodiments, and I felt using they/them pronouns felt most affirming of their complexity in that moment.

compulsively assuming people are cis and assuming a pronoun based on our perceptual fields; (b) ways of re-understanding people through more-than binaries of white supremacist, cishet, ableist and classist narratives of “normal” development; and (c) ways of shedding habits related to how I linguistically assign “bad” feelings/thoughts/morals with imagery that is ableist, racist, and cishetsexist. In a broader sense, this made me consider how the “rush” of capitalistic productivity culture, the mechanisms that keep us “busy” and working toward a goal that keeps shifting, incentivizes us to not think (to not hesitate) and instead to go through the motions of a routine because it is “efficient.”

This momentum, this capitalistic “rush,” is particularly relevant to clinical work, as most care work professions get weighed down with high caseloads and are expected to spend more time on paperwork than on actually interacting with the people for whom we are supposed to care. This enables us to rely so much on our assumptions and on blueprints that are inherently pathologizing to “fill the gaps” with predetermined information that may or may not actually reflect the reality of the people for whom we are supposed to care. These blueprints are a fundamental aspect of colonial *durée* - to adhere to the blueprints of the DSM or other “fundamental” texts that are informed by post-positivism and deterministic paradigms continues the momentum of prioritizing the bad faith assumptions that these blueprints are immersed in and continue to repurpose through neoliberal tactics of co-optation. Page and Woodland (2022) urge care workers to be critical of the history and foundations of interventions and care-work paradigms, as many of these are aspects of indigenous healing systems that have been up-rooted from their origins and re-purposed to be a universally applicable tool for colonial health. Meanwhile, the indigenous people from whom these aspects were taken are often abused and imprisoned for practicing their healing rituals in their original contexts (2022, pp. 252 – 253). This advice to stay critical and consider the historical

context is advice to *hesitate*, reflect, and *then* act. Next, I will attend to some examples of bad faith related to cisnormativity that I continue to witness emerging through literature and clinical practice (both as a clinician and as a client).

Examples of Bad Faith Specific to Anatomical Sex. Many scientists have continued to debunk and *curdle* the notion that there are only two distinct human sexes. I will describe an assorted listing of some works, most of which have come into my perspective because of Menon's work.

Debunking Binary Sex Embodiment. Anne Fausto-Starling has generated two books about the myths of binary, "biological" sex and gender. In her first book (1992; Menon, 2023c), she asserts there are actually approximately five broad categories of anatomical sex embodiment. She asserts biological essentialism is a "false understanding of biology" (p. 8), concluding there are "very few absolute sex differences and that without complete social equality we cannot know for sure what they are" (p. 269).¹²⁰ As a disclaimer, this text is wrought with language that is steeped in essentialist ideas about intersex people, claiming that intersex experience "naturally" means one cannot embody a binary gender identity and that they would "naturally" be bisexual (1992, p. 240).¹²¹ In her recent work (2020; Menon, 2023g), she more specifically envisions an "ethic of medical treatment" which "permits ambiguity to thrive...placed at the service of gender variability" (p. 110). Menon phrases her argument: "We could understand [sex], 'like nitrogen, oxygen, or carbon dioxide,' as one of the 'predominant atmospheric elements' that 'shape's body

¹²⁰ Notably, she remarks that it is more likely for there to be a greater anatomical difference between two people who were assigned female at birth than between people assigned male and female at birth (1992, p. 218). To me, this illuminates how doctors' biases about sex seem less focused on dividing between "male/female" and more about deciding which bodies are not "capable" of being "man-enough."

¹²¹ From my perspective, she makes an essentialist "other" track. I believe this example of bad faith continues to inform a faulty understanding of nonbinary gender identities, which link intersex experience to non-binary genders to bisexuality.

and consciousness' (p. 309) The idea that [anatomy] is an ongoing process of materialization embraces spectrum and complexity" (2023g).

Uncovering Pseudoscientific Origins of "Sex Chromosomes." Instead of "male genome" or "female genome," Dr. Richardson iterates it is more precise to discuss chromosomal differences across humans as "sex differences in the human genome" (2015, p. 200; Menon, 2023e). In the turn of the 20th century, the early theories constructed a sex determination model that was "non determinate" (p. 40), describing X and Y chromosomes as "odd chromosomes" (p. 35) or "accessory chromosomes" (p. 41), and some researchers even recognized sex as a spectrum that was influenced by a vast array of factors unrelated to genes. However, political pressure in the early and mid-20th century stifled these theories and pressured scientists to "anchor a conception of sex as a biologically fixed and unalterable binary" (p. 2), utilizing "woefully little empirical evidence" to stipulate the presence of a Y chromosome was an irrefutable indicator of binary, biological sex (p. 201). Menon summarizes Dr. Richardson's argument: "[I]t was cultural pressure, not biological evidence, that led to the binary gendering of chromosomes. Amidst the destabilization of gender norms and roles, patriarchal society needed an *essence* to re-entrench its political division of society into the binary" (2023e, s. 9).

Up-Rooting Brain Organization Theory. Brain organization theory falsely asserts that the brains of "males" and "females" are "wired differently" due to drastically different hormone levels. In particular to neurochemistry and brain development, many scientists have tried to not only *prove* a difference between the brains of assumed-endosex-and-cis- women and men, but also *validate* the existence of queer people, trans people, and non-binary people. Rebecca Jordan-Young (2011; Menon, 2023f) investigates the validity of these research attempts, concluding "brain organization theory is little more than an elaboration of longstanding folk tales about antagonistic male and

female essences” (p. 291).¹²² They assert there is “too much overlap” between the characteristics, skills, and traits of the participants in studies. They convey that the cultural stereotypes presumed in the literature “ignore the diversity of experiences” among the participants (p. 52, p. 203). Menon advises “we should be *skeptical* of narratives that attribute gender/sex/sexuality exclusively to the brain, neglecting how socially constructed ideas and institutions shape the way we perceive ourselves and others” (2023f, s. 6). They powerfully assert, “*no one - including LGBTQ people - should have to base their legitimacy in biological determinism to be accepted*. It is a reductive, scientifically incorrect framework. Human behavior is far more complicated (and *that’s ok*)” (s. 7; their emphasis).

De-Villainizing Androgens. Drs. Karkazis and Jordan-Young (2019; Menon, 2023d) assert that referring to testosterone as a “male sex hormone” is a “zombie fact” (p. 54). They explain the dichotomous consideration of testosterone as “masculinizing” and estrogen as “feminizing” was a decision by sexologists to frame heterosexuality as “natural,” even though testosterone is involved in “feminizing” processes and estrogen is involved in “masculinizing” processes (p. 10, p. 41). They continue their focus on debunking myths particularly associated with testosterone, and Menon summarizes three points. First, testosterone is not a singular hormone. To claim that “testosterone increases aggression,” the Drs. ask, “which testosterone increases which aggression, in what context?” (2019, p. 15). Second, testosterone is *not* the primary or most important indicator of athleticism, and, in fact, there are studies illuminating a negative correlation between testosterone levels and athleticism (pp. 159-161). Third, there is only “elusive, partial, and contextual” (p. 176) evidence that testosterone makes one stronger and more competitive. Menon concludes that the sports rules which discriminate unfairly upon Black and brown

¹²² Ironically, her harkening to the past signals faulty logic about the past being “backwards.” I believe ancient folk tales actually would disagree with the binary, essentialist logic of current accepted “truths.”

assigned/assumed-women (and trans women in general) due to their testosterone levels are “part of an ongoing strategy of attempting to legitimize racism using the guise of science” (2023d, s. 8). It is also pertinent to connect this use of mythological hormonal norms to discriminate against assigned-women of the Global Majority with the legacy of considering women of the Global South to be “sexually ambiguous”.

Witnessing These Examples Emerging Through Care Work Literature. I have noticed all these examples bad faith emerging throughout clinical and biomedical literature. I will bring forth two examples that emerged for me through counseling/mental health literature that in my recent past. First, I will focus on Broaderick and Blewitt’s (2020) navigation of marginalized groups in the context of “normative” developmental theories [read: the idyllic standards that best fit the demands of racial capitalism (Price, 2021a)].

Broaderick and Blewitt’s book (2020) continuously conveys that there are minimal “biological” differences between “males and females,” but they do not explicitly consider the historical momentum of the pseudo-science that undergirds the assumptions of “biological sex.” They repeatedly convey that socialization and “gender segregation” influences most behavioral differences between “males and females” as children and adolescents (p. 221), and they even indicate that children of “both genders” experience “voice suppression” based on gender socialization (p. 260). It seems that the developmental psychologists perform a “process of erasure that resembles and marks systemic erasure” (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6; Snorton, 2017, p. 7) of how gender expansiveness complicates experiences of gender socialization. Research focused on assigned sex fails to identify children’s nuanced experiences of cissexist socialization because it does not provide the structure to consider more complex gender dynamics that expand past rigid notions of “male/female” socialization. From the text, emerges a “double movement: an acknowledgement

and a denial...that locates an event and then rejects its relevance, knowing full well it occurred” (Roberts, 2015, p. 29; Snorton, p. 8). In this case, the events are continuous, compounding moments of cissexist socialization which manifests as internalized cisheteronormativity. The process of ignoring these on-the-ground experiences erases and disregards non-normative embodiments of sex, gender, expression, which thus erases and disregards the ways relationships and social roles *could* and *do* develop amongst people. Relatedly, it ignores how cisheterosexist socialization affects the psychosocial development and experiences of children, adolescents, and adults.

Broderick and Blewitt’s book (2020) is layered with this kind of “double denial.” Another occurs when the authors discuss their analysis that Black children have “advantages” in development (p. 262–3). They later discuss how “adverse environmental influences” like poverty, violence, and frequent moves can affect development (p. 290) without connecting slavery, racial segregation, and the police state’s involvement in these factors. When they do not connect these contexts, they cannot consider how Black peoples’ “advantages” are perhaps connected to generations of *resilience* and *resistance* to these systems of oppression. Similarly, they discuss how Black women have “appearance standards [which] are somewhat different than in the [w]hite majority culture, and they may be easier to reach” (p. 262). This negates and perpetuates the history of how Black people are considered “less sexually developed” and how Black assigned or assumed women have been/are still held to white/Eurocentric beauty standards. As such, the “advantage” of having “easier” beauty standards is not connected to the radical movement of loving and embracing Black aesthetics (i.e., the Black is Beautiful movement). Also, discussing these as “easier” seems to be a back-handed way of positioning Black women as lesser than white women.

More specifically regarding intersex, transgender, and queer youth, Broaderick and Blewitt (2020) seem to *attempt* to be affirming, though the impact of their text is not aligned with their intentions. They define intersex experience as it relates only to genitals, which reduces and limits the current understanding of intersex experience.¹²³ They seem to take a neutral stance on early “gender assignment” operations upon intersex kids (p. 304). In the section titled “the role of biology in gender identity,” the authors seem to try to correlate non-binary gender identity with intersex experience, saying “socialization may not be as powerful as once thought in the development of gender identity...for many people, gender identity simply does not conform to the dichotomous model of gender as either male or female”¹²⁴ (p. 306). They call for “models and theories that account for continuous variation in gender identity and gender differences [to] better describe the broader picture of gender development” (p. 306). This raised my hopes, which quickly deflated upon reading the next section.

Broaderick and Blewitt (2020) move on to define “transgendered” kids as those who demonstrate “insistent, consistent, and persistent” “belief” that their “gender identity” is the “opposite” of their “biological sex” (2020, pp. 306-307). They characterize trans kids as ones who are *proven* to be trans only if they demonstrate adherence to the norms and performance of the “opposite gender,” citing studies that could not differentiate trans girls from cis girls or trans boys from cis boys. They indicate that “gender non-conformity” is typically a sign that they will have

¹²³ The Trans Language Primer defines intersex (adj) as such: “A person born with any manner of supposed “ambiguity” in terms of gendered physical characteristics. This can include reproductive organs, genitals, hormones, chromosomes, or any combination thereof. Many intersex people are medically coerced as infants and children to better fit into a cisgender role and make their bodies cisnormative through infant genital mutilation. Intersex people may or may not transition physically, legally, or socially. Many other folks are assumed endosex at birth due to a lack of visible apparent intersexuality and therefore don’t know their status until later, if ever. This is based on their understanding of their relationship with gender and their access to transitioning within their culture. Generally, intersex people are not immediately considered transgender, and may or may not identify as transgender and/or non-binary, despite there being significant overlap between the two communities” (2023).

¹²⁴ From my perspective, it is interesting that they are challenging the gender binary of man/woman, but it is difficult to read how they continue to perpetuate essentialism by linking non-binary genders to intersex experience.

“homosexual or bisexual orientations” (p. 307). In four paragraphs, they define non-binary genders out of the conversation. Their rigid definition of trans experience aligns with the pathologizing “incongruence model.” They minimize the presence of trans experience, citing that transgender people *only* make up 0.3% of the U.S. population. If researchers use a paradigm that is full of gaps to assess people's gender experience, how can they accurately report this statistic? In the last paragraph, Broderick and Blewitt describe the mental health statistics of trans kids, and directly after, they use “social transition” in quotes [read: “this is not proven to be valid”] (2020, p. 307). They conclude that more research needs to be done to determine if social acceptance and access to gender affirming care is best for their “healthy development” (p. 307).

In the next pages, Broaderick and Blewitt (2020) talk about intersex kids without naming them as such. Instead, they discuss the prevalence of “tomboyism” in “girls” who experience “too much” pre- and post-natal androgens (p. 312). They go on to relay inconsistent and extremely assumptive trials that surveilled for the presence of “masculine behaviors” in intersex assigned-girls, all the while casually dropping in how “concerns for their daughters’ sexual identity could...[mean that parents condone] genital surgeries or on-going treatments” (p. 312). Ironically, there is no concern for the surgeries and hormonal interventions *these* intersex kids are put through, while, a few pages beforehand, the authors were indicating cautious approval of affording trans youth puberty blockers and social acceptance. All of this was only in their middle-childhood chapter. While the authors continue to discuss “gender differences” through a binary framework across other chapters, they never again explicitly include or discuss trans or intersex people in other chapters of this text. Their summary section at the end of the chapter (pp. 337–339) is layered with examples of bad faith I detailed earlier, and their generalizations about gender and anatomy were overwhelming.

While they do not discuss intersex or trans experience in the context of adolescent development, Broaderick and Blewitt apply examples of bio-essentialist bad faith about binary sex to *pin down a reason for why* people are queer. They begin: “If heterosexuality is by far the most typical pattern for adolescents and adults, and one that clearly benefits the survival of the species, what causes homosexuality or bisexuality?” (p. 357). This line of reasoning offers another glaring emergence of their epistemic ignorance/knowledge as influenced by white supremacist cisheteronormative logics sedimented into care work roles in the 1940s-1950s (Stern, 2015; Menon, 2023i). In the next pages, while they attempt to debunk heterosexist theories of homosexuality that were popularized by Freud (‘queer sexuality is the result of growing up with “weak fathers” and “dominant mothers”’) and earlier versions of the DSM (‘queer sexuality is the result of having queer parents and/or the result of childhood sexual abuse’), they continue to perpetuate the idea that queer sexuality is caused by hormonal levels that are connected in bad faith to the “opposite sex” (p. 355). They summarize more recent and “well supported” *causes* of queer sexuality are (a) queer adults were gender non-conforming in childhood, which they define as “showing a strong and persistent tendency to behave like the other sex” (p. 358), and (b) children who were born as their parent’s second, third, fourth, etc. child are more likely to be queer because they are more likely to be “exposed” to hormones that “affect sexual behavior” (p. 358). They essentially “validate” and “affirm” queer people were “born this way” using bio-essentialist concepts (testosterone = man/masculinizing = naturally attracted to “women”; estrogen = woman/feminizing = naturally attracted to men) that reify the rigid erasure of trans, non-binary, and intersex experience. The status of queer sexuality’s acceptance into the fold of dominating ideology always seems to require the reinforcement of bio-essentialism that erases validity of trans

and intersex people. This ripples through the modern history of sexuality's material focus at the expense of trans and intersex people's continued suppression (France, 2017).

Throughout the text, Broaderick and Blewitt "twiddle their thumbs" at emergences of the effects of cisheteropatriarchy: "In early adolescence, especially for girls, even typical romantic behaviors, such as flirting and kissing, are associated with increased depressive symptoms (Steinberg & Davila, 2008). *Why this is so is not yet understood*" (p. 352; my emphasis). Comments like this, alongside subject matter I continue to reference, offer glaring examples of why counseling and care work literature needs to radically open up to transforming their gender paradigms by integrating critical lenses and/or critical phenomenological concepts.

My second example emerged for me during my counseling assessment class in 2022. The book (Sheperis et al., 2020) used seemed to attempt to include transgender people throughout, but across chapters, this seemed to be a superficial attempt at "inclusion" by merely changing the language of some sections without considering structural shifts throughout their framework. This is a pattern I witness across all forms of care work literature; it is as if merely changing the pronouns or inserting "gender identity" is 'all that needs to be done.' As an example, I will focus on chapter five, in which they cover statistical concepts. The authors described gender as "nominal data" that "can only be one" (p. 89). They continued to describe gender terms/categories as mutually exclusive/exhaustive, and they also assumed gender can be categorized as a "visible variable," meaning it can be identified by merely *looking* at someone (p. 89). The gender categories provided for someone to select one of were: "male, female, nonbinary, agender, bigender, cisgender, transgender" (p. 89-90).

I just laughed out loud. It seemed the textbook (Sheperis et al., 2020) just added the extra identifiers to be "inclusive" without registering that terms like *transgender* or *cisgender* are not

nouns that represent a gender. These terms are *adjectives* that describe the context of one's gender in relation to the gender they were assigned based on their hypothetical assigned sex. Technically, someone could select more than one of these boxes to accurately describe their experience in the social world(s). Furthermore, the assertion that one could merely *look* at someone to determine their gender is a striking example of how the Cartesian focus on the visual field prevails in care work philosophy. Not only does it impede someone who is visually impaired from documenting this category, but it considers gender to merely be what someone looks like. Considering they offer trans or cis as a category exclusive to the other "gender identity" terms, this also means that these authors are reifying the false assumption that 'transgender' is not only a gender distanced from man/woman, but it is also an identity that is 'clock-able.' This harkens back to the discussion between Menon and Lundy-Paine, in which the focus on "passing" continues to center that cis-ness is the default, the norm, and that trans people inherently do not "look" like the genders that they embody because they are trans.

Later in the chapter, the authors described using the phi coefficient by offering an example using gender as a "nominal scale variable with *two categories: male and female*" (p. 105-6). It became clear to me that the authors most likely added the other "gender identity" categories earlier in the chapter as a superficial attempt to be "politically correct," but they did not parse through their text as a whole to consider how cisnormativity and bio-essentialism permeates the chapter/text. Perhaps this is an emergence of how *minimal* they consider these changes to be, or how minimally *important* these changes are to the "general population." What remains is the internalized notion that, at the end of the day, there are only two "real" genders.

Provocations

Through this chapter, I have prioritized perspectives that seek to promote epistemic friction and resistance to the colonial gender paradigm and *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social imaginary. I identify these as provocations of cisnormativity because they seem to both incite vehement responses against those who defy the colonial gender paradigm and invite people to slow down and consider more closely how they may have internalized that system. I hope that, as we become aware of how these internalizations emerge through us, we grow towards action that seeks to be in empathetic relationship to one another and build coalitions of solidarity.

(White) World Travelling – Epistemic Ignorance/Knowledge/Resistance

Throughout this chapter, I have world-travelled through various emotional, intellectual, historical, and material worlds to discuss the productions of cisnormativity. I have attempted to illuminate counter-narratives and potential sites which need more counter-storytelling to further provoke cisnormativity. The following is a more acute example of how world-travelling through *can* be a means to open perspectives and provoke the assumptions that go unnoticed in people's habit body; however, according to Sullivan's concept of *white* world-travelling (2004), travelling through ontological expansiveness and epistemological ignorance/knowledge can backfire.

Currently, people are circulating the history of the Hirschfeld Institute through social media platforms to provide a historical reminder of cissexist bigotry in connection to the rise of the Nazi fascist state (Magnus Hirschfeld Society, n.d.). While I was already aware of this Institute's history, I had only learned about this history a few years ago. In summary, by 1919, the Institute had created ways to provide gender affirming care to both trans and intersex people as well as holistic sexual health care and education to the public. This institute was targeted by the developing

Nazi party. While the photos of the book burning event at the Berlin Square are popular, it has *not* been clear that the books being burned *were Hirschfeld's works* (Magnus Hirschfeld Society)¹²⁵.

Last year, I shared information that argued teens should have access to puberty blockers and/or the hormones they need. A white trans-masc person messaged me in response, saying he didn't support the use of puberty blockers because there "hasn't been enough research" to document the long-term effects. First, I conveyed there probably is research about this in the context of medical "interventions" for intersex teens *and* trans teens, but it has not been well documented or circulated (purposefully). Second, I asked if he had heard about the Hirschfeld Institute. He hadn't. I shared the information with him, and I asked, "What would this world be like if this institute hadn't been destroyed? The fact there is 'not enough longitudinal research' is not because there *hasn't* been attempt to maintain research across decades – the attempts have been actively demolished." What I also wanted to say was, "Now, here you are agreeing (with fascists) that teens should not have access to medical care they need because there is 'not enough research.' Can you sense the irony?" Why didn't I say this to him? Was I placating his ego in that moment? Was I avoiding conflict?

Lately, there is an influx of white trans people who are using the information about the Hirschfeld institute to substantiate claims of trans genocide. What many people are ignoring is the fact that the Nazi party was inspired by U.S. genocide of indigenous people, particularly the genocide of indigenous tribes' gender paradigms, by U.S. 20th century Jim Crow laws, and the emerging eugenics-based biomedical system. So, trans genocide was connected to BIPOC genocide on Turtle Island. Some Black trans creators have critiqued how these folks are quick to

¹²⁵ As Nazis developed the death camps, they targeted Jewish people, queer and trans people, Rome people, and dissenters of the Nazi party. Queer and trans people were marked with an upside-down pink triangle, a symbol repurposed for the HIV/AIDS resistance movement. After WWII, queer and trans people were still held as prisoners, and Allied forces continued to detain people for "homosexuality" (Newsome, 2022; Working Class History, 2023).

claim the experience of genocide when many of these folks have not vehemently identified the genocide that the U.S. has been waging against BIPOC people for centuries ([St. Laurent, 2023](#)).

¹²⁶ As I take this information in, it seems an emergence of white world-travelling.

Curdling the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Cisheteropatriarchal Gaze

Through this chapter, I have nurtured discussion of many points of resistance to the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, which need continued attention and contributions. Many of these discussion threads seek to first, illuminate how reversing cisheteropatriarchal value systems can easily reify them and, second, glimpse how we may curdle the gaze through acts, ideas, and reframes which de-center and bear friction upon that gaze's value system. Across the chapter, epistemic friction against the gaze has emerged by seeking relations of solidarity and empathy, resisting and embodying life outside the lines of the white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal fit, and inviting people to consider their relationship to their gender. Menon does this often, as is exemplified in the ways they gently and powerfully respond to degrading comments on their social media pages by asking, "who hurt you?" or "Is this how you see yourself?" In their poem, "your wound / my garden," they say: "i see behind the mask. beneath every supremacy lives insecurity....it is not my responsibility to rescue you from your self-imposed quarantine from humanity. you don't know who you are without me. i know who i am without you" (2021b, p. 48; Appendix A10).

There are many ways in which people, regardless of how they fit or misfit along the borders of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal culture, can *curdle* (Medina, 2011, p. 34; Bailey, 2007) the gaze in a way that brings into question the probing curiosity and fixation

¹²⁶ Rose (2023) [responds](#) to hate speech addressed at them that harkens to lynching by referencing St. Laurent's post (2023). They then go into a lovely summary of the history I briefly described. Grendel (2023) also re-shares Rose's & St. Laurent's dialogue with the caption saying: "[this history is] something that not only wyatt folks need to hear but also POC who don't understand what current anti-lgbtq rhetoric has to do with us."

on people's genitals and/or their gender. When people, in reference to a friend's or family member's baby, ask, "what is *it* going to be?" My favorite response is, "*They're* going to be a *baby!!!!*"¹²⁷ Similarly, Blair Peters, a leading plastic surgeon, opens their trainings on gender affirming care by reminding surgeons that "so much of what [plastic surgeons do] is gender affirming: breast augmentation, gynecomastia reduction, breast reconstruction, etc. Our specialty has roots in gender affirming care" (Peters, 2023). In the next chapter, I will share connections that have emerged through my philosophical inquiry process in relationship to the music therapy and other related care work practices.

¹²⁷ This is something I found myself doing long before I read Butler's works, but I want to express that, decades ago, Butler already discussed the philosophical implications of the way babies shift from being referred to as "it" to either "boy/girl" (Butler, 1993, p. 7).

Chapter 4:

How Does This Connect to Scholarship within Care Work, Especially Music Therapy?

In this final chapter, I will offer ideas for how we may attend the productions and provocations of cisnormativity in care work research, practice, supervision, and education. I will discuss some of the many gaps in current literature into which I plan to focus my research as well as the many gaps which I believe need to be focused on from subjectivities that do not align with my context. This will not be an exhaustive or complete list of ideas or gaps in current literature.

***Becoming Through* (Therapeutic) Relationships:**

Phenomena and subjects/objects shift as we view, relate to, or attend to them. So, our intentional relationships as well as our analysis of the intentional relationship become vectors through which phenomena may shift. Over my years of study, I have come to understand the therapeutic relationship as an emergence of intentionality. There are many threads of intentional relations that we co-create with participants through the therapeutic relationship, and these threads are vehicles through which phenomena emerge as well as through which we may respond to, recreate, and reimagine phenomena. Both the phenomenon of cisnormativity and the phenomenon of gender emerge in the relationship (amongst and a-part-of many varied phenomena). The way these phenomena emerge through the therapeutic relationship is informed by each person's intentional relations to themselves, as they are made manifest through body-habits, of which each person may be in varied stages of conscious or unconscious awareness.

To conceptualize this, return to the “through” image I introduced in chapter 1. There are many overlapping bodies/figures that constantly move, and the overlapping points are partial, fleeting precipitates of the phenomenon. If these figures were colors, as they move and overlap, they would create colors with varying degrees/shades of difference. This comes up in relation to

gender in Scrine's work (2019): teens reflect that navigating gender is "like mixing paint," as if each gender were metaphorically a unique blend of certain overlapping colors/influences. This continues to focus on the visual, which we have established is influenced by the West's fixation on the visual perceptual field. However, I feel attracted to the idea of thinking of people as an ever-shifting blend of colors. Gender is relational. As people meet in relationship to one another, their colors blend together, morph and perhaps shift due to what *becomes* through the relationship.

To go beyond the visual field, I wondered how the *through* image could apply in the context of sound and music, in which experiences which are ineffable, temporal, and fleeting yet resonating through time and memory. Different instrument parts in the same song overlap to create something more than the individual part is its own. This resonates with how we may hold the complex gestalt of a human becoming through time. When considering relationships as vivid intentionalities, I thought of layering samples, improvising, polyphony, genre bending, mash ups. When I hear a mash up, I recognize the "parts" of each once-separate song, and I also hear each song in a way that is different from how it sounds in its original instantiation. Sometimes mashing-up songs means varying the chord progression of each song or shifting the rhythm of the melodies. The mash-up creates a different ecological context for the music to organize within. When I listen to a polyphony, in which two or more "melodies" occur, I can hear each melody individually, but when they overlap, they create something more than each does on their own. When I engage in or listen to improvisation, each variance is a manifestation of the dynamics occurring in the group as well as the musical skills and particular musical interests of each person engaging.

What if we understood gender past the physical aesthetics? What if we became open to gender as a temporal experience/improvisation, an experiment which continues to create increasingly varied understandings of our personhood, each of them real *and* complex *and* fluid.

More broadly, what if we understood the intentionality of the therapeutic relationship in this way? As many songs emerge together, they are always *becoming* something *more in relationship* to one another.

Developing the relationship requires checking assumptions, witnessing, and being present. As we move into and through a groove, an internalized system of power may suddenly emerge and ripple through the relationship, and we may need to *pause*, shift our approaches, and adapt. This helps me conceptualize how sociocultural subjectivities emerge through relationships, how we can be more hospitable and sympathetic to some sociocultural subjectivities than others. Meaning, sometimes the songs of people with whom we form a therapeutic relationship are very similar to ours, to the point where we may not be as attentive as we need to be and perhaps assume similarity when there are shades of difference. Sometimes their songs are very different from ours, and if we neglect, minimize, or problematize their differences in ways that prioritize *our* songs, this would be an example of how our subjectivity seeks to fix, flatten, and limit the subjectivity of the folks to whom we are supposed to provide support. The shades of similarity and difference between our songs need to be celebrated, accentuated, and transparently addressed. If our songs are too different or too similar, perhaps they would best be supported by someone with different songs, and that is why we need to work to maintain conditions that support the development of care workers across the vast topographies of cultural horizons. To do this, we need to find ways to recognize how internalized systems of oppression move through us and enact borders between who is understood to be *able* to embody the role of therapist and who is understood to *only* be a “client” (Fansler et al, 2019).

The imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal paradigm attempts to define and control our gender experience, continually enforcing rigid lines of thinking about,

knowing, and identifying our gender and the gender of others. TTSI+ people experience multiple avenues in which cisheteropatriarchy operates and imposes upon our gender embodiment and expression, and this is experienced regardless of whether one is yet conscious of their gendered experience or “out.” From this experience emerges an epistemic perspective which needs to be attended to. However, merely attending to TTSI+ people’s conscious thoughts, feelings, and observations about cisnormativity and/or gender adequately attends to neither the ways in which internalized cisnormativity emerges nor the ways in which people may flee from, thwart, challenge, or provoke cisnormativity. This is especially relevant because of the ways in which generational epistemic injustice has compounded to the point that we do not have adequate English (or otherwise colonial) words for our experiences. Meaning, people may speak to their experiences using language that centers the myth of binary sexism or heteronormativity, which can further impede the power of our double-consciousness through our experiences as transgressors of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal ideology. Additionally, many assumed-cis people are misgendered or confined by this cisheteropatriarchy, and many people who have not been given space to self-realize their gender (e.g., people who assume they are cis) experience unique relationships to cishetsexist socialization that often go unacknowledged.

When I first began my thesis process, I wanted to attend to the ways in which TTSI+ music therapists (and therapists in general) develop micro-skills and navigate therapeutic relationships. Over time, I began to ask myself: do I need to focus *only* on the conscious experience of “non-cis” people, or is my truer interest directed towards how cissexism emerges through *all* therapeutic and peer professional relationships? Even then, I do not want to continue to center the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, as if it is omnipresent and unable to be dissolved. At this present time, I believe that in order to *curdle* and transform the conditions imposed by the

imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, we need to attend to how we have internalized the system, which means focusing on not only what we are conscious of but on what unconsciously emerges through us in relationship to other beings.

We need to attend to the folks who work within the many gaps of clinical practice, to attend to the ways in which TTSI+ people, especially those who are BIPOC, have navigated therapeutic relationships both as clinicians and as people seeking clinical services, both as students and as educators, both as supervisors and supervisees. This also means holding more broad space for people's temporality as human beings. How can we attend to the temporal realities of the clinician who may have been calling themselves cis years ago but more recently have realized they are trans? How can we consider the temporal realities of people who were assumed cis in undergraduate or graduate studies, learned micro-skills according to the social scripts that often impose the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, and then self-realized their gender when in clinical practice? When initially learning clinical skills as a pangender person (who was not out as such) in skilled nursing, hospice, and habilitation settings, I had to habituate to people projecting southern white cishet-womanhood onto me. After returning to clinical work in similar settings in the north-east region of the so-called-U.S., I had to re-learn how to work in clinical relationships in which people were now projecting southern or north-eastern white cishet-manhood onto me. I have found little to no support in supervision or clinical literature that attends to the nuances of navigating these dynamics as complicated beings in clinical relationship to complicated beings. We need to develop this literature, and it will take more than just my research to do so.

Application of Anti-Oppressive Concepts in Care Work Literature

Thankfully, there are already TTSI+ people who have been moving through the world both as clinicians and clients for generations, they have just not been identified as such until more recently. Presently, I have witnessed TTSI+ music therapists begin to cultivate research and clinical approaches directed towards more liberatory practices with gender expansive people (Gumble, 2019; Hardy & Monypenny, 2019; Scrine, 2019). Over the decades, there has been increasingly more attention to identifying power dynamics through a feminist and/or (after-)queer lens in creative art clinical contexts (Bain et al., 2016; Besse, 2021; Biedka, 2022; Hadley, 2006; Sajnani, 2011; Scrine, 2019, 2021; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012). Recently, cisgenderism has been introduced and applied to the context of creative arts therapy practice (Hadley & Gumble, 2019). Across the decades, many have promoted epistemic friction by (a) challenging racialized and colonial power dynamics as well as dominant narratives in music therapy (CAMTI Collective, 2022; Gilman, 2022; Gombert, 2022; Hadley, 2013a; Kenny, 1994, 2006, 2015; Miyake, 2014; Rolvsjord, 2014), (b) attending to the experiences of anti-Blackness and/or ableism in the context of music and music therapy clinical practice and peer professional spaces (Bruce, 2022; Gipson et al., 2021; Gross, 2023; Hadley, 2013b; Hadley & Yancy, 2011; LaCom & Reed, 2014.; Leza, 2020; Moonga, 2022; Norris, 2020a, 2020b; Shaw et al., 2022; N. Thomas, 2020; Yehuda, 2002), (c) engaging in personal reflexivity (Hadley, 2021; Moy & Alvarez-Figueroa, 2021), (d) applying multicultural competencies and/or the anti-oppressive practice model to music therapy (Baines, 2013; Belgrave & Kim, 2020; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Kenny, 1985; Pickard, 2022; Scrine, 2018; J. Smith, 2012; Vaillancourt, 2012; Yehuda, 2002), and attending to marginalization through music therapy pedagogy in education and supervision settings (Baines et al., 2019; Fansler et al., 2019; Gombert, 2022; Imeri & Jones, 2022; Myerscough & Wong, 2022).

In the fields of counseling and psychotherapy, there are mirroring trajectories towards cultivating a liberatory practice of supporting TTSI+ people across interlocking sociocultural experiences (J. L. Bennett & Douglass, 2013; K. Bennett & Clark, 2021; Clark, 2017; dickey & Singh, 2017; Singh, 2016). Clinicians are formulating ways to attend to internalized white supremacy and colonialism through the clinical relationship (Grzanka et al., 2019; Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015; Moane, 2003; Sajnani, 2011; Tummala-Narra, 2007, 2015; Linklater, 2021). Additionally, counselors have developed literature to attend to the nuanced contexts that emerge depending on the racialization of *both* the therapist and the client (Aponte & Carlsen, 2009; Aponte & Kissil, 2016; Jun, 2018). This is a critical challenge to the unilateral, racializing gaze that literature casts toward the client, and it calls into criticism the tendency for counseling literature to assume the clinician is white and is emerging from and through white colonial *durée*. Jun (2018) attempts to incorporate cissexism into the second edition of her text by adding a chapter about it. However, the rest of her book continues to discuss gendered experiences through a cisnormative paradigm.¹²⁸

Due to the prevalence of literature which assumed TTSI+ people to be *clients*, I argue we need to continue to develop both counseling and creative arts therapy literature to account for the nuanced contexts which may emerge depending on the temporal gender embodiment of *both* the clinician and client. This argument needs to be expanded to the temporal experiences of (dis)ability, class, neurotype, gender, and age. Woodland, the founder of the *Black, Trans & Queer Therapists of Color Network*, has developed powerful literature alongside other abolitionists who seek to nurture and preserve de-centralized, local lineages of care work (primarily organized by generations of BIPOC to survive through generations of genocide and capitalist extraction) that

¹²⁸ I experience intense responses of frustration and hope to her text, which I hope to address in future research.

resists violent criminalization *and* co-optation of indigenous healing practices. In future years, I hope to deepen my understanding and practice of this value system, so that I may contribute to this process of cultivating care systems in resistance to the medical industrial complex.

Application of Phenomenological or Post-Structural Concepts in Music Therapy Literature

Within the world of music therapy, clinicians have already introduced phenomenological concepts and post-structural concepts to music therapy literature and/or broader creative arts therapy literature. Marisol Norris has demonstrated the power of Collin's concept of the four controlling images of Black women when applying it to her experience of racialization as a Black woman in music therapy clinical, professional, and educational experiences (Norris, 2021). Gipson, Norris, Amaral, Tesfaye, and Hiscox (2021) have stressed the importance of de-centering the white gaze in creative arts therapies, calling for critical Black genealogies of creative arts therapies to create friction with the monolithic canon of arts therapies (in which mostly white clinicians write *about* Black people while co-opting indigenous healing practices). Utilizing her skills as a mental health practitioner and music therapist, Natalia Alvarez-Figueroa has developed a course for aspiring white allies in which she provides tools for recognizing and addressing the nuances of internalized white supremacy as they emerge *through* us in relationships (2021).

Carolyn Kenny (1989) developed her Field of Play theory by integrating phenomenological methodology and philosophy, varied indigenous developmental philosophies and music therapy methods. In many respects, I would argue Kenny was the first music therapist to engage in the process that resembles Vagle's post-intentional phenomenology process.¹²⁹ Kenny's work (2003) discusses intersubjectivity, inner/outer horizons ("spaces" and "worlds"), representation, and the importance of the therapeutic relationship. Throughout, she describes how individualism emerges

¹²⁹ She wrote this before post-intentional phenomenology had emerged from Vagle's work; she cites Idhe (1986), who informs Vagle (2018).

through actions which seek to “objectify and interpret” from a detached perspective, illuminating this as an act of removing ourselves from the intersubjective loop of the therapeutic relationship (2003). She reasons that phenomenological approaches can enable therapists to find an “overlap” between qualitative and quantitative methods, so that we may generate theories of music therapy that are informed by intersubjective experiences emerging through therapeutic relationship. She stipulates that doing so requires acknowledging and directly incorporating our subjectivities into clinical work and research (2003). She urges music therapy discourse to “include imaginative discovery, a commitment to the gathering of feedback from music therapy colleagues who are underrepresented, a serious component of futures studies,” and she describes the importance of interdisciplinary feedback. Fansler, Reed, bautista, Arnett, Perkins, and Hadley (2019) put phenomenological concepts of Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987), World-Travelling (Lugones, 1987), and wonder (Irigaray, 1993) in dialogue both with Kenny’s Field of Play (2006; 1989) and critical pedagogies (hooks, 1994), to challenge and disrupt ways in which music therapy education limits who can access music therapy education and thus limits who may become music therapists.

Smith (2012) utilizes Deleuze & Guattari’s concepts of arborescence, lines of flight, and the rhizome to describe ways in which music therapists may enact or thwart the colonial code of relations (Todd & Wade, 1994). Matney (2021) enacts Deleuze’s (and, to some degree, co-author Guattari’s) concept of multiplicity (along with work of other philosophers and music therapists) to conceptualize music-therapy-as-multiplicity, depicting music therapy as a process which emerges through “dynamic interactions between science, art, and human relationship” (p. 11). Gilman’s recent research (2022) engages with indigenous methods of critical discourse analysis called Actor-Network Theory (Law, 2008), which seeks to identify how colonial power dynamics *emerge* in localized contexts. In this way, Gilman’s thesis aligns with the post-intentional

phenomenological imperative to recognize that systems of power are always emerging on-the-ground through relations and cannot be confined to a unified, generalizable description. To disrupt the controlling image of queer and trans youth as vulnerable *because* of their identity, Scrine (2018, 2019, 2021) has applied many post-structural concepts, namely after-queer theory (informed by Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010), to music therapy practice.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, especially from a global perspective; I iterate this incomplete list to convey that I do not believe phenomenological and/or post-structural concepts are new to music therapy. Post-intentional phenomenology is a methodology based on the potentials of *becoming* when one introduces critical, post-structural concepts with (critical) phenomenological concepts and methodology. Music therapy is already a terrain of multiple becomings (Matney, 2021), and I want to invite clinicians and researchers to consider the post-intentional phenomenological paradigm as one which may further benefit critical transformation within music therapy.

Brief overview of Phenomenological research in Music Therapy

When reviewing the utilization of phenomenology in music therapy literature, I notice a tendency to refer to phenomenology as a monolith.¹³⁰ I also notice it is often separated from its philosophical roots and framed as simply a method of data collection and analysis. Among my many interests, I feel inclined to conduct a literature review of phenomenological research in music therapy to identify any patterns which may guide researchers to utilize the multiple phenomenological paradigms in more nuanced ways. This seems connected to the frustration I feel when reading clinical phenomenological research, especially those which focus on “gender” and/or trans people (Besse, 2021; Biedka, 2022; Lipson, 2013), in which the researcher does not

¹³⁰ Aspects of the Interpretive paradigm are often conflated or combined with the Descriptive paradigm. For example, some studies seek to analyze material for both themes (interpretive) and essences (descriptive).

adequately attend to the bracketing or bridling process, nor do they utilize phenomenological concepts. I need to attend to my responses through a post-intentional phenomenological process, in the hopes I may cultivate an atmosphere of calling in researchers who seek to address systems of power through phenomenological research, instead of one which disparages and expects perfection. I will briefly summarize the few phenomenological studies conducted by music therapists to attend to clinical work with “gender minorities” and/or the experience of trans people, so that I may frame my future work through the horizons from which these studies have emerged.

Lipson’s work (2013) attempts to describe the conscious experience of vocal expression (epistemological: descriptive) as it manifests in a trans’ person’s embodiment (ontological: interpretive). In many ways, their work caters to the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze, utilizing pathologically focused literature *about* trans people that centers white supremacist and colonial understandings of trans (dis)embodiment.¹³¹ Besse’s work (2021) sought to “explore the influence of gender on music therapy practice through the experiences and perceptions of gender aware music therapists (GAMTs)” (p. 152). While she uses an interpretive (ontological) model, the material she gathered was based on music therapists’ conscious experience and understandings (which denotes an epistemological, descriptive focus). The results of the study indicated future studies should hold more liminal space in discussion of gender, as she indicated she was focused on creating a “clear line between feminine and masculine gender expression instead of underlining the varying gender expressions of gender diverse individuals” (p. 159). She also challenged researchers to intentionally consider racializing systems in the context of gender. I would also argue that one needs to consider not only gender but the systemic

¹³¹ To be clear, this as an individual fault or issue. Lipson’s work emerged as a line of flight amongst molar lines of rigid, pathological objectification of TTSI+ people, and their work has been crucial to Gumble’s (2019) development of gender affirming voicework (gav). In turn, Gumble’s work is what invited me to try to re-make a home in music therapy. So, Lipson’s line of flight plays an important role in my work.

threads that both influence gender *and* connect gendering to racialization, disability, and class. I also advise therapists to exercise caution when describing themselves as “gender aware,” as this could create an unnecessary binary between therapists when, in my experience, gender awareness most likely manifests when one feels more *curious* and less *confident/assured*. She urges (a) educators and supervisors to create conditions which promote personal reflexivity and interaction with more “diverse” music genres, (b) researchers to utilize anti-oppressive theory in their analysis, and (c) clinicians to “continuously [question] their own therapeutic choices and [analyze] their clients’ engagement through a gendered lens” (p. 159).

Biedka’s work (2022) focuses on music therapists’ perceptions of “music therapy relationships (MTRs) with people with marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations” (p. 152). They utilize a methodology that seeks to address both themes and essences, even though they only attend to the music therapist’s perceptions (which conveys an epistemological, descriptive focus). Importantly, Biedka attends to imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal power dynamics in LGB[T] representation, and they attend to the importance of working from a clinical model grounded in “intersectional, non-heterosexist, non-genderist, and radically inclusive approaches” (Robinson & Oswanski, 2020, p. 84)¹³² that resists pathologizing identities and works to proactively repair ruptures in the relationship which result from micro-aggressions (p. 154). While their intention was not to find participants who also experience cisheterosexist marginalization, some participants experienced varied marginalization based on either sexuality or gender. Yet, other experiences of participant marginalization or privilege were not explicitly

¹³² I have yet to read this work, but I am assuming they are using “genderism” language as it has been introduced to educational fields by Bilodeau & Renn (2005). I understand genderism to be a term popularized before “cisgenderism” terminology was more widely recognized, and as such, genderism is synonymous with cissexism/cisgenderism (Jourian, 2017). However, I do believe it is important to involve “cis-” to more explicitly refer to the system of cisnormativity and cissexism/cisgenderism. I believe this curdles the white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal gaze because, without the use of “cis-” as a prefix, the term “genderism” seems to convey that gender only manifests through the cisheteropatriarchal gaze, when gender is much more expansive than that.

attended to (p. 155). From the material collected, connections between white supremacy, ableism, and classism emerged. Some participants discussed complicated experiences when navigating educational systems due to their gender and/or sexuality, and some participants seemed to demonstrate ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2020) when receiving critique from clients (2022). However, there was limited analysis in connection to each participant's context because Biedka intentionally anonymized and separated each participant from their socio-historico-cultural schemas. They later expressed this was a limitation of their study (p. 160). They express powerful reflexivity regarding how their white savior complex emerged in their overall research creation and analysis process. This study is important because it opened us up to considering the therapeutic relationship in the context of gender and sexuality; however, the phenomenological methodology chosen and perhaps the lack of bracketing/bridling *before* conducting the study seemed to limit what *could have* emerged from the phenomenological material.

Imaging a Post-Intentional Phenomenology (of Cisnormativity) through Care Work Research

The phenomenon a study focuses on *must determine the phenomenological paradigm* (Vagle, 2018). When studying any system of power connected to white supremacist colonization, what critical phenomenologists describe as quasi-transcendental phenomena, it is important that the focus is on the *phenomenon*, not on the *person* experiencing it. So, while I value research that studies the lived experience of specific¹³³ trans people or clinicians who have worked with “gender minorities,” I am not interested in understanding how or why trans, non-binary, intersex and/or gnc people *exist*, nor am I interested in attending to only the clinician's conscious perspective.

It seems that the many clinical and philosophical phenomenological studies *about* trans people are considering trans-ness as the phenomenon in focus. I understand that focusing on the

¹³³ I articulate this to note that there are multitudes of trans people who have multiple lived experiences.

conscious perspectives of clinicians can be generative, especially if analyzing the data to consider unconscious assumptions and beliefs; however, continuing to attend to only the clinician's perspective of a relationship is one-sided and easily self-fulfilling, especially when studies are seeking clinician participants in a process that utilizes little to no purposive or precise sampling parameters (an important component of phenomenological studies; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). I am interested in the systems which bear down upon and through people in such varied, partial, and multiple ways that *shape* TTSI+ people's lived experiences in connection to their co-existing, socio-cultural contexts. Thus, the phenomenon (the emergence of a system of power) *has to be* considered in connection to its acute, interpersonal, and historic-cultural context, not separated and considered in a vacuum that is disconnected from the context(s) through which it emerged.

Lastly, it is critical that researchers move away from the lure of determining the essence of phenomena, especially those linked to oppressive systems. As I was watching a documentary about black holes in astronomy (Galison, 2020), the parallels between the colonial infrastructure of astrophysical research and that of clinical research struck me: "Getting to the core" of a black hole means the person entering it may experience the essence of the black hole, but they can never come back to relay the information. More materially, sacred sites are being demolished for these telescopes, displacing and poisoning indigenous communities (Jacobson-Galán, n.d.; de los Reyes, 2019). Similarly, "getting to the core" of a clinical "issue" means *fixing* a client or a situation in place. Speaking in terms of a literal object, perhaps a snow globe: if someone wants to get to the core of it, they would have to break it, and it would not be a snow globe anymore. More metaphorically, my *probing* will have changed what I am probing at to the point that it becomes something different from how it "was" *before* I probed. The "core" would be "useless." I would have brought something to a death for "information" that was no longer applicable. It's become

clear to me how this idea of “getting to the core,” of “defining,” of “fixing in place,” has laid the philosophical grounding for eugenics and bio-essentialist, scientific traditions. This connection is sadly ironic considering Husserl was trying to resist Cartesian philosophy when constructing his descriptive process.

We need to move away from this essentializing premise.¹³⁴ We need to be living alongside, witnessing, being-with, “tarrying” as Yancy puts it (2012, p. 154) – not probing. We need to focus on relationships, not on the *beings* in the relationship. As music therapists, we have so many processes through which we can attend to and reflect on relationships. Music and sound *becomes* as a ritual to accompany us. Music is a manifestation of our relationship to others as well as our relationship to time and temporal processes. Music is a way to *witness ourselves witnessing* as well as a way to experience the perspectives and meta-perspectives of other people. Bradt (2012) critiques how randomized control trials in music therapy have generally focused on music (a detached object) as *the* agent of change in music therapy. She argues “the interaction *through* the music [is what] makes therapeutic change happen; it is this musical interaction that is the ‘active ingredient.’ Therefore, the person of the music therapist cannot be separated from the music” (p. 139; my emphasis). I believe the post-intentional phenomenological methodology could support the reflexive study of therapeutic *relationships*¹³⁵.

My future post-intentional phenomenological research will tend to the perspectives of TTSI+ people across sociocultural contexts not because we are the phenomenon but because I

¹³⁴ I am not arguing that different phenomenological paradigms have no use or importance in social science research. From my perspective, searching for essence needs to be de-centered in phenomenology. The impetus to find the essence of systems of oppression only seems to provide more tools with which to obfuscate the system of oppression studied. I think descriptive paradigms can be beautiful when the paradigm is utilized for more “universal” emotions and experiences such as love. But concretely associating phenomenology with the search for essence limits what phenomenology can afford us, especially in care-work-focused social science research.

¹³⁵ While I situate my post-intentional phenomenological practice in the context of addressing bio-essentialism as it emerges in therapeutic relationships (as well as educational, supervisory, peer, and institutional relationships), this paradigm can be applied to a variety of phenomenological foci.

believe we have employed tactics of resistance and transformation which can promote multiple sites of epistemic friction upon the monolithic, pathological myth of cisheterosexism that bears down and through all who have lived through colonial contexts (in different ways, in different times). Because many of us traverse on the fringes or borderlands of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal systems (again, in varied ways), we experience forms of double-consciousness which need to be honored. With this noted, these varied research projects should not exclusively center openly “out” folks. It is critical that we realize this system bears down upon us all, and as clinicians we need to recognize that we have internalized all forms of bio-essentialism because this is the bedrock of clinical education underneath the MIC.

As the therapeutic relationship is a connection and vector for supporting change, growth, and wellness, it is important to consider how cisheteropatriarchy influences/impacts/emerges through the therapeutic relationship – for many reasons. First, therapists must work to transform their epistemological ignorance/knowledge as it emerges through unconscious bias. Second, we need to frame the internalization of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy as an emergence of sociocultural context – we are all sociocultural beings. Third, cultural shifts must occur in therapy care-work at large (Cara & Page, 2022), and this requires (re)new(ed) paradigms to (re)emerge about gender. If we continue to assume gender based on internalized bio-essentialism, then any shifts within biopsychosocial fields will be re-molarized (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to maintain imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. The on-the-ground method of attending to internalized biases and exploring ways to thwart them *is* the therapeutic relationship. Lastly, the wellbeing of TTSI+ people requires that our consideration of the nuanced, incomplete, ever shifting aspects of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy be reflected in supervisory literature and in general clinical approaches. This

means we need more than inconsistent, superficial language changes in *some* revised editions of textbooks. We need to slow down and open up to how imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy emerges through current text and theoretical frameworks, and we must then be open to ways we may retroactively *and* proactively shift these dynamics.

Below I will list varied ideas for how the post-intentional phenomenological paradigm can be applied to research in both clinical care work studies and philosophical literature. These ideas are sometimes broad, sometimes specific, and not complete. Some or all ideas can be applied to connected forms of white supremacist bio-essentialism, and the PIP paradigm could be utilized to attend to any oppressive phenomenon emerging from colonial and white supremacist systems, including neoliberalism (Táíwò, 2022). I encourage all to be open to ideas of their own.

Post-Intentional Phenomenological Literature Reviews

Matney (2018) details the need for reviews in research so that social scientists can more accurately utilize and reflect on past research. Review of past literature is especially important when we recognize the need for social scientists to *hesitate* and consider the epistemic knowledge/ignorance that flows through the bedrock of foundational literature what fuels current and future studies. While narrow literature reviews are a part of research studies, broad literature reviews are studies in themselves. Matney discusses the different types of broad literature reviews in relation to the intended outcome(s) (p. 101), asserting a researcher's particular research question should determine which specific type of broad literature review model is utilized. My guiding questions for the following literature review ideas are *how might ways of thwarting cisnormativity emerge through these works*, and *how might cisnormativity emerge as (re)created through the assumptions internalized by researchers?* This may mean attending to ways in which the researchers' gender paradigm emerges through their processes of study design, implementation,

and analysis. It may mean attending to how maintenance of and resistance to cisnormativity emerge through data generation, participant responses, data analysis software, and so on.

To narrow the list of literature review types which could be applicable to a post-intentional phenomenological review of literature, I identified outcomes that seemed salient to the broad intentions of future studies: *Impact/meaning; concept/theme; theory/development/analysis; gaps in literature; theoretical critique/problematizing; and effect critique/bias reduction* (Matney, 2018, pp. 103-4). The two types of broad literature review which seemed particularly relevant to the studies I would like to initiate in the future are Integrative Reviews and Critical Interpretive Synthesis. Informed by Broome (2000) and Hanson-Abromeit and Sena Moore (2014), Matney summarizes that Integrative Reviews weave findings from both theoretical/philosophical and empirical/evidence-based research to introduce concepts to a particular field by accentuating gaps in literature that illuminate emerging issues (2018, p. 109). Critical Interpretive Syntheses involve “detailed critical study of the theoretical contribution of the evidence” (Gough et al., 2012, p. 285) that allows for the researcher to guide the critique from their subjective position. Further, the sampling process for this type of review is not based on the methodology that studies utilized but rather the theoretical basis of studies (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Matney, p. 112).

From my perspective, there are vast and multiple contexts through which to conduct literature reviews. I envision reviews of (a) phenomenological studies (philosophical, pedagogical, and/or clinical) which attend to gender and embodiment, even if studies do not explicitly refer to participants with more-than the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal ideology, (b) phenomenological studies (whether philosophical, clinical, educational) explicitly focused on trans, non-binary, intersex, or Two Spirit embodiment, or “trans phenomena”; (c) philosophical applications of concepts such as gender, gender identity, gender norms, gender

socialization, colonial gender systems, cisgenderism (or “genderism”), cisheteronormativity, and so on, *across* phenomenological, pedagogical, and clinical fields; (d) clinical research across care work fields which outline ideas or applications of anti-oppressive practice; (e) any method of clinical research (across care work fields) which explicitly attends to TTSI+ people. Important questions to this thread of research would be: *Are they attending to identities as they connect to therapeutic concern? Are they pathologizing non-conformity to the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy as the “the problem” and in some way making their identity the focus of care work?* As stated previously, there is a need to conduct literature reviews of phenomenological research conducted by music therapists to analyze how we have historically utilized the phenomenological paradigm. I hope this will open the music therapy research community to ways in which the phenomenological paradigm could be more integrated into music therapy phenomenological studies.

Reviews for these categories could be conducted across multiple studies (each corresponding to a specific field or concept). Each study could then be meta-analyzed as a group. What could fields of academic study and care work learn from one another? To better avoid centering one person’s consciousness through these studies, it is pertinent that these studies involve a research group, made up of varied specialties (arts-based clinicians, care workers and/or philosophers) *and* sociocultural contexts. Analysis could occur through arts-based processes, which could be particularly useful when reviewing arts-based research (Viega, 2016).

Participatory Action Post-Intentional Phenomenology Projects

To both avoid centering one person’s consciousness and involve the analysis and feedback of therapy participants, it is critical that research participants *and* more than one practitioner are involved as collaborators throughout the clinical research processes. As such, it seems fitting to

incorporate the following project ideas within a participatory-action framework (Vaillancourt, 2012, p. 177).

Attending to Habits of Listening / Habits of Voicing in Media. In her dissertation, Ngo (2015) attends to not only habits of racialization but also the habits racialized people adopt when world-travelling through worlds dominated by the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze. While she focuses on habits which maintain someone's visual appearance and perception, she indicates there are "various gestural, postural, and behavioral strategies" (Ngo, p. 71). This would mean that there are habits which attend to the more-than-visual, and she does discuss one emergence of them: Steele's "whistling Vivaldi" and other music from "high white culture" (Steele, 2010, p. 7) in order to be "innocuous" and put white people more at-ease (p. 6). I imagine there are more emergences of sound-based "code switching" which could be understood as a racialized person's habituation *and* resistance to white supremacy.

After reading this, I watched Boots Riley's *Sorry to Bother You* (2018), and I was struck with his depiction of racialized disembodiment through the phenomena of "using your white voice." Donald Glover's character introduces this to the main character, played by LaKeith Stanfield, during his character's first day as a telemarketer. Stanfield's character says, 'well, I already sound white,' and Glover asserts, "that's not white, that's just *proper*" (2018). He goes on to equate the voice to *class paradise*, to "not having a care" [read: ontological expansiveness]: it's "how white people *believe* they *need* to sound, how white people *want* to sound" (2018). When he demonstrates, Glover's lips begin to move, but Ryan Coursey is who the viewer hears. When Stanfield's character uses his white voice, David Cross is who the viewer hears. Using their "white voice" is *literal* vocal disembodiment. Riley's intention of the film is to consider how performing whiteness means aligning with one's oppressor (Harris, 2018). As the film progresses, Stanfield's

character is shown to unconsciously use his white voice when not at work, illuminating the power of the habit body. In a similar thread, this film involved a static character playing a friend of Stanfield's girlfriend. While his girlfriend, played by Tessa Thompson, was given some character complexity and many lines, her friend, played by Safiya Fredricks, has no name and only has one line, "Hey, girl!" Racialized and gendered vocal disembodiment emerges in varied ways, whether through conscious or unconscious depictions.¹³⁶

I continue to notice varied ways in which the social imaginary influences the momentum of dominant habits of listening that are both racialized and gendered. I will briefly go through two examples. In response to the media feedback on Disney's casting of Halle Bailey as Ariel, Solomon Brown created [a tiktok video](#), to call out how white people, exhibiting their racist habits, were assuming Ariel would sound like the "Black (women's) gospel aesthetic" stereotype. Perhaps this is a controlling imaginary of Black women's vocal embodiment?¹³⁷ I assume Solomon to be a Black cis man. Through the comments, many people rhetorically asked if this is "Jennifer Hudson" or "Whitney Houston." I appreciate how he intended to call out the racist assumptions of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze as it pertains to vocal embodiment. I also wonder at what point this becomes a joke at the expense of Black women, especially Black non-binary trans femmes. I have also noticed habits of the vocal imaginary outside of singing, towards accents and modes of speaking and vocally expressing that are not linguistic. In media, this could take the form of attending to which characters embody which accents, which characters have what lines, which characters have which arcs. This will have to be witnessed through the ways in which sound is paired with the other sensory fields. For instance, I often notice portrayals of mal-intended "transphobes" in film or music videos are typically white,

¹³⁶ Saccoh's work (e.g. 2021) has shaped my perception of how colorism emerges through news, film, music, etc.

¹³⁷ Powel & Oshiro dives into this through their series *Race and #Real Talk: Sharing Spaces* (2023).

enabled, assumed cis men performing with a southern accent and adorned in southern stereotyped aesthetics.¹³⁸

More broadly, I'm thinking of how we vocally express and perform ourselves in the world, the habits that people might have to intentionally form to "pass," in order to feel safe-er. I want to consider this not only through contexts of white and enabled TTSI+ people or BIPOC performing whiteness but as the complex, multiple experiences involving all bio-essentialist axes of privilege/oppression. To perform whiteness means to perform cisness, to perform neurotypicality, to perform class. What does that mean for our ever-shifting experience of vocal (dis/re)embodiment? I am thinking of the vast aesthetic and vocal associations which are understood as racialized, gendered, (dis)abled, neurodivergent, and classed/educated. How may we become open to the ways in which these habits are maintained and resisted? This could be one thread within music therapy research, from which could emerge a nuanced post-intentional philosophy, methodology, and methods of collecting and analyzing data. This has so many implications for connecting and complexifying focus on cisheteronormativity as it emerges with systems of (dis)ability, racialization, and class.

I have often wondered what analysis would emerge if I were experiencing media with others, whether it be audio-visual media such as film, documentaries, shows, plays, or musicals, or either audio or visual media such as song, visual art, audiobooks, or script readings. Through conversation with TTSI+ peers, I have found myself moving through dialogue about what we notice emerging from media, and I have wondered what it would be like for a team of varied

¹³⁸ For example, see Kevin Bacon's role in *They/Them* (Logan, 2022).

creative arts therapists to analyze audio-visual media through a group dialogue. Group discourse can also emerge through community music settings and participatory therapy or peer spaces.¹³⁹

Attending to Habits of Listening / Habits of Voicing in *gender affirming voicework* (*gav*). In my personal, theoretical, and clinical experience pertaining to *gav*, I continue to witness how habituation to cissexism emerges through one's emotional and spiritual relationship with their voice, through one's internalized (de)valuation of their voice and body, and through desires to resist vocal conformity to imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. Through the clinical relationship I develop with participants, I have witnessed ways in which I and the participants have developed a double consciousness specific to our contexts. This consciousness informs us of how we may move through spaces that make us "stick out," navigate boundaries in interpersonal relationships, and navigate social systems and infrastructure. In a recent journal entry, I discuss my response to a *gav* participant's description of their experience moving through relational spaces with people who still "know them as a man," through which they felt themselves default to old habits of gesturing, voicing, and holding their body. "I asked them how they felt when moving through those spaces. They described it as feeling '*dampened, pinned down...*just not good'" (Appendix A11). This reminded me of "how hegemony feels like tons of hands over my body, 'fixing' what is sticking out, 'smoothing' down edges or parts that 'do not fit'" (Appendix A11).¹⁴⁰ I move on to relate these to Deleuze and Guattari's molarizing forces (1987) and to Ngo's (2015), Yancy's (2017), and Fanon's (1952/2008) description of how white

¹³⁹ These are not new ideas. Music therapists have already created podcasts to analyze themes in media and interview music therapists (e.g. Banzon et al., 2023). Trans actors, filmmakers and creatives have collectively developed media that illuminates the controlling imaginary of trans people through staging interviews and interviewing trans actors and entertainers (e.g., Joynt, 2023; Fender, Scholder, & Cox, 2020). In relation to illuminating how systems emerge through us and how we may respond to them, all of these endeavors offer invaluable material and nuanced analysis stemming from people's subjectivities.

¹⁴⁰ This description of hegemony emerged through my practicum journals, which I hope to involve as material in future studies.

supremacist racialization attempts to restrict one's intersubjectivity. "While this participant was white and not experiencing racialization as a person of color, their description bears considering how different people may habituate to the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal gaze for different reasons and yet in similar ways" (Appendix A11).

Gav is highly influenced by concepts of transformative learning. I continue to witness participants becoming conscious of internalized notions through navigating vocal (dis/re)embodiment, and as they transform aspects of these habits, these shifts seem to ripple through and support more authentic re-integration as well as increased internal loci of control in relationship to the hegemonic cishet social imaginary. Gav also incorporates concepts of queer listening, as articulated by Bonenfant (2010). Recently, Gumble, Inmon and Schachner (forthcoming) have identified aspects of queer listening as they relate to interpersonal dynamics, intersectional identity, and listening/perceiving which seeks to *close distance & caress* instead of create distance & neglect. Connor (2000) illustrates that our voice becomes a "vocalic body" once sound waves move from us into space (p. 35–43). The vocalic body is shared between people, "an ongoing co-construction between the voicer and the listener" (Gumble et al., forthcoming, np). As such, phenomenologically, the vocalic body can be understood as another thread of intentionality shaped *through relationships* to others and the social imaginaries through which people create meaning. While the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social imaginary may bear down upon vocalic bodies, gav seeks to destabilize it by nurturing multiple, diverging social imaginaries of gender embodiment and euphoria that challenge the dominating imaginary (*and* we also support the consciousness of the dominant imaginary for the purpose of surviving *and resisting* it).

While Bonenfant (2010) connects how the white supremacist, colonial gaze delegitimizes and devalues BIPOC vocal aesthetics to how expressions of sexuality are coded and valued, Gumble, Inmon, and Schachner (forthcoming) assert that we need to consider ways in which the colonality of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social imaginary emerges in connection to the valuation of gendered vocal (dis/re)embodiment. Gumble inquires “How might we lean into voices that disrupt norms with appreciation instead of recoiling out of a fear of these voices touching us?” (n.p.). In a composite case study, Gumble (forthcoming) applies Internal Family Systems theory to navigate the participant’s relationship to and internalization of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy:

I supported Jamie in naming this internal voice as a part of her that was “desperately” clinging to cishetnormative ideas about embodiment as her “Vigilant Protector” and that it was trying to help her tune in to potential influences of her own ongoing misgendering, particularly at work. As we built relationship with this part, we began to understand that it held onto the burden of cissexism in the ways it was trying to keep Jamie from experiencing systemic violence from others through misgendering or worse (e.g., physical harm). The byproduct of this was that that violence became self-inflicted by the Vigilant Protector. In naming this part and beginning to understand what it was trying to do for her, Jamie was able to begin to have a different relationship with it and to support it with letting go of harmful messaging while also still coming in with important cues around Jamie’s own personal safety and when “passing” felt important. Further, it allowed us to recognize that Jamie can also have a different kind of relationship with their voice.

From this emerges the powerful shift to recognizing one’s double consciousness through a process of intrapersonal relationship development. Instead of self-policing and self-inflicting the

judgements they have experienced through the imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social imaginary upon themselves, the participant reshaped the role these internalized messages play in their intrapersonal schema. This emerged through being in interpersonal relationships which honored their intersubjectivity, which includes the therapeutic relationship between them and Gumble.

These are but some examples, particular to specific, temporal contexts, of how gav may inform a post-intentional phenomenology of cisnormativity, which can become a phenomenology of epistemic resistance to cisnormativity. Soon, I intend to invite gav participants as well as Gumble and other practitioners as collaborators to design and implement these research project(s) in a way that best fits the participant's context(s).

Peer Supervision Groups for Multicultural Reflexivity Development

A variety of ideas have emerged which focus on attending to ways internalized bioessentialism emerges within therapeutic relationships, within educational or supervisory relationships, and within peer professional groups. Most of these ideas hinge upon connecting across peer groups and/or in varied affinity spaces. Particularly, I hope that from these projects emerge ways of developing clinical relationship rapport with and between therapists and therapy participants of varied and multiple contexts which integrate contexts of gender embodiment that resist imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. These could introduce ways of addressing internalized bio-essentialist power systems as they emerge in therapeutic relationship to supervision and educational literature. I will list a few group ideas, but this is not an exhaustive

list by any means.¹⁴¹ There are truly multiple ways people may configure these groups across axes of bioessentialist oppressions.

- Peer supervision with TTSI+ (music) therapists and/or students across race, class, and ability (to become open to issues specific to white supremacist cisgender normativity as they emerge through our clinical, professional and personal relationships).
- Peer supervision with Black and brown TTSI+ (music) therapists and/or students only, across class and ability (to become open to issues specific to racialized gender (dis/re)embodiment as they emerge through to clinical, supervisory, and educational relationships).
- Peer supervision with Indigenous music therapists and/or students whose gender embodiment has emerged from their indigenous de-colonial/post-colonial gender system.
- Peer supervision with disabled and/or neurodivergent TTSI+ (music) therapists and/or students only, across race and class (to become open to issues specific to ableist and/or neurotypical gender (dis/re)embodiment as they emerge in clinical, professional and personal relationships).
- Peer supervision with white, colonial-descendant TI+¹⁴² (music) therapists and/or students across disability and class (to become open to issues specific to internalized white supremacy and white ontological expansiveness as they emerge through clinical, supervision, and educational relationships).

Each group could discuss clinical relationships, educational experiences, or supervision experiences (past or present). Perhaps groups could involve experientials in which we go into

¹⁴¹ Each of these group ideas can also take the form of community meetings through which music therapists/students hold space with local healing practitioners who are not recognized as “music therapists,” people who left music therapy, and/or people who were not allowed to officially become music therapists.

¹⁴² I modified this acronym to identify transgender, intersex, and white people who otherwise do not conform to imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisgender heteropatriarchy. While Indigenous people can be assigned white and experience white or colonial privilege to varying extents, this point is specifically referring to white people of settler-colonial descent.

spaces through story-telling and retelling, song writing, improvisation, and/or song discussion. Members can discuss and analyze instances in which cisnormativity and/or related forms of bio-essentialism emerged through and/or towards them in clinical, professional, and educational relationships, how they responded to it, and how they may have sought to repair the relationship.

These peer groups can be recorded and analyzed again by the members later, with a focus on what may emerge “between the lines” via gestures, vocal performative shifts, and what was *not* said by *whom*. Groups can also involve journaling shares so that members can discuss and tarry with anecdotes across group meetings. As an example, I attached a journal entry to my Appendix (A12), through which I discuss and reflexively respond to a cisnormative micro-aggression I perpetuated while facilitating a monthly community music group with local trans folks. I journaled with the intention of discussing how cisnormativity emerged through me, and the next morning I realized that both during the group itself and in my initial journaling of it, I was still enacting cisnormativity, namely transmisogyny, because I was continuing to assume the gender of the person based on how they looked. When I noticed this, I did not erase my misgendering. I put more accurate pronouns next to each instance I misgendered them, to guide myself through the extent of my assumptions. I continue to reflect and dialogue with my past-self, a process that continuously illuminates material shifts I can implement as a way of proactively living as a form of amends.

During group analysis and in post-group analysis, it is important to attend to lines of flight through which people flee from/thwart/provoke imperialist white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy as well as lines which attempt to molarize or impede these provocations (as they emerge through overt spoken or conveyed thoughts or through intrapersonal feelings, urges, or post-group considerations). While it seems alluring to me to organize groups with the researchers being instituted as moderators who are leading conversations, I feel caution towards

this idea, not only because of the hierarchy it imposes on the group, but because it focuses on both the researchers and participants' consciousness and may rigidly define the intent of the group to the point where ideas are regulated by the researchers' molar and molecular lines of thinking. Analyzing my own journals has been fraught with triple/quadruple readings and meta-analyzing which I believe would be more fruitful if I were able to engage in a group reflection process.

Projects Illuminating TTSI+ People's Experiences of the MIC

A friend recently expressed a desire to interview TTSI+ people, in a "mock-umentary style," across the U.S. and Canada so that they can share their experiences of microaggressions and *macroaggressions* in clinical settings. He recognizes that there tends to be a fixation upon trans medical horror stories in which trans people are talked *about* after their death, and it is also our experience that TTSI+ people, especially folks who are BIPOC, often experience cisheterosexist harm with little to no way of speaking out about it. He wants to subvert these patterns by giving trans people a platform to demonstrate the irony and absurdity of these clinicians' decisions.

As we talked through ideas, I named that this could easily become an arts-based process. People can share songs they have written about their experiences, or they can write out a script for people to act out in a dramatized re-creation. The stories can also be analyzed through arts-based means with the intention of accentuating how cisnormativity emerges from clinicians and how trans and intersex people subvert or resist these systems while accessing medical care. This concept could be applied across a variety of experiences that TTSI+ people experience in and beyond clinical worlds. In fact, Lowik has already contributed to the counter-narratives and counter-choreography trans people practice when navigating reproductive care (2018).

Interviewing TTSI+ (ex) Music Therapists and/or (ex) Students. When I began this process, I was originally curious about how trans and non-binary people experience the process of

(re)developing clinical micro-skills, especially folks who may transition after becoming certified or licensed. This question could and truly should be broadened to include intersex people and gender non-conforming people because it is not realistic to assume that only trans and nonbinary people experience varied and shifting cisheteronormative gender socialization in relationships through their life. Even more so, because cisheteronormativity is part of a white supremacist system that exacts ableism, classism, and neurotypical norms, it is important to consider how bio-essentialist systems emerge through the process of socialization and as such how these systems emerge through the process of learning micro-skills in Westernized contexts.

Thankfully, no research project is all encompassing, especially one which follows a post-intentional phenomenological paradigm. So, I do believe it is important to interview people across experiences of gender embodiment to inquire: *How does cisnormativity and resistance to cisnormativity emerge in the development of clinical micro-skills?* TTSI+ people will be prioritized, but I hope to interview many people across experiences of bio-essentialist privilege/oppression. Additionally, I believe it is crucial I conduct this research alongside (music) therapists and/or social scientists who are emerging from historico-cultural contexts that vary in difference when compared to my own. This is crucial not only for the process of de-centering consciousness and challenging unconscious habits of internalized systems but also for the process of gathering participants and involving participants in data analysis. Similarly, it is important that more than one research project tends to this question. We need a plurality of projects tending to the plurality of resistances that I believe are emerging across the world in the context of institutionalized care work. I do not need to be a part of them all. In fact, it is important that I am *not* involved in all of them.

Arts-Based Ways of Gathering, Generating, and Analyzing Material

Most employments of phenomenological research in music therapy involve the study of hermeneutic analysis/are focused on words and language. As I stated earlier, music accompanies us and allows a way for us to witness ours and other's witnessing. If post-intentional phenomenology opens us up to utilizing media as phenomenological material, what are arts-based methods of data collection, data analysis, and data presentation that we can incorporate to a music therapy informed post-intentional phenomenological process? These could allow us to de-center the researchers' and participants conscious analysis and instead focus on how variables coalesced in a specific moment to support perspective taking, hesitation, and re-integration of more affirming and socially just practices. I have a few ideas, but I am also someone who, as of yet, has minimal experience engaging with arts-based methodologies.

As I discussed earlier, song writing, song discussion/association, and improvisation may be incorporated into the group experience. Regardless of if and how music emerges in the group, upon viewing recordings of the group/varied interviews, one may analyze musical/vocal aspects using Bruscia's Improvisational Assessment Profiles (Bruscia, 1987, pp. 401–496) or other methods of psychotherapeutic music therapy analysis specific to the researchers' scope of practice. It may even be meaningful to put the discussion to music accompaniment, following the relative pitches of people's voices in conversation with one another. Similarly, projects which analyze media, or song discussion or association in peer groups, can incorporate the analysis of songs *past* lyric analyses (Markulin, 2023).

Harkening back to the song lyrics I incorporated into the chapters, each song contains multiple aspects which deserve intimate and interconnected attention. For example, from Shea Diamond's song, "I am Her" (2018) emerges important lyrical content which depends on her musical design and delivery. Additionally, the history and role of this song in her life is profound

and imbues the song with important meaning that cannot be ignored: she wrote this song while in solitary confinement in an assigned-male prison. This song is a site of her resistance against the social death of incarceration (Sexton, 2011, pp. 23, 28–29; Snorton, 2017, pp. 196–197; Zurn, 2020, pp. 311–312), and this song needs to be held in consideration of this temporal context. Each work of art needs to be held with the transversal links of time that emerge before and after the artwork. This requires considering the contexts and relationships of the artists involved. For film, this could mean asking questions not only of the script/who is scripted but also of the experiences of the actors playing the role they are asked to play, of the choices of music and accents, of the narratives' historical (in)accuracy and how/who those (in)accuracies serve.

End of a Beginning

Over the course of this thesis, I have articulated a grounding for future research I hope to conduct alongside many people of varying backgrounds and experiences. Every line of flight needs a context from which to stretch. In my search through clinical and philosophical literature for the past two years, I have found very few lines of flight with which I could ground a phenomenology of cisnormativity. I believe this is due to the extensive epistemic injustice emerging from colonial language and knowledge systems. I felt I had to write this thesis so that I could have literature to cite for future projects which both illuminates cisnormativity as a phenomenon integral to white supremacist ideology that has been ignored, misnamed, and yet often evoked in philosophical and clinical literature.

In chapter one, I discussed the history of phenomenology and classical phenomenological paradigms as well as the emergence of critical phenomenological philosophy. I then identified and described how the post-intentional phenomenological paradigm is uniquely positioned to open us up to the various gaps in literature focused on oppressive systems and dynamics. In chapter two, I

summarized my current understanding of phenomenological concepts for two intentions. First, to provide context for readers so that readers could hopefully follow how thinking-with these concepts has opened up ways of discussing cisnormativity (alongside other, connected forms of bio-essentialism). Second, I may have mis-interpreted some concepts, or there may be applications of these concepts that emerge for readers which I do not discuss. I invite people to read more about theories which pique their interest and write about what emerges for them. In chapter three, I illuminated productions and provocations of cisnormativity which have emerged through my studies over the past two years, and through this process, I identified artist-theorists whose lines of flight I have grown to think-with. In chapter four, I discuss ways in which (music) therapy theorists and researchers are already transforming (music) therapy practice through engagement with post-structural and critical phenomenological concepts. I go on to discuss how I envision practicing a post-intentional phenomenology of cisnormativity (and white supremacist bio-essentialisms in general) in future projects.

Through this process I have made a case, a plea, a call for the consideration of cisnormativity in philosophical, clinical, educative, and supervisory research, in solidarity and connection with all forms of white supremacist bio-essentialism. I invite music therapists and other creative arts therapist researchers to engage in phenomenological research that nurtures reflexivity and resistance to all forms of bio-essentialism through attending to *relationships* and focusing on the more-than-visual (or linguistic). Through this, I hope we contribute to a shift in clinical practice away from white supremacist fragmentation and towards a community health system which can transcend and transform the current confines of the global, colonial health care enterprise.

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Appendix A – Materials in Order of Discussion

A1: Journal entry – “Imaginings”

I am eager for a world in which gender is so multiple, so fractal, so illusive & yet so distinctive, so expansive, that the words “man/woman” and “male/female” are mentioned less than 50% of the time when discussing gender.

If we can have a multitude of car makers, each with various models and versions of those models, and millions of varied attempts at those models (which are never perfect to the theoretical model due to human-error), we can have discussions that hold space for the multiplicity of biology, physiology, psychology, for the ways bodies exist in disruption of those mythological concepts of binary, fixed “biological sex.” If people think that there is both a physical car and a person who drives the car, then we can get past the difference between sex and gender.

If there are hundreds of names for colors and thousands of names for various styles and temporal iterations of style themes, we can have hundreds and thousands of names for gender, for aesthetics of gender embodiments, for sexes, for sexualities, for partnerships. Like colors, they all overlap with one another on a wheel (a non linear landscape/horizon) and are, thus, all relative to one another with no one of them being centered.

If the Western music paradigm recognizes 12 different notes on a tempered scale, with each note sounding at varied octaves, then we can understand there are more than two genders as well as understand there are varied shades of masculinity, femininity, etc. If we recognize that the same Hz soundwaves can be reorganized by other tonality systems, resulting in more than 12 recognized notes, we can understand how cultural frames of reference create the conditions through which we not only know the known but also how

we know what we know. Meaning, if we enter a cultural context with the binary gender paradigm, we will only see the binary gender, regardless of the actual gender embodiments of whom we are seeing. As Oyewumi puts it, “researchers will find gender if they look for it” (1997, p. 31).

If there are thousands of cultures that exist through time, each with thousands of genres and movements of music & movement & art that shift through time and space, then there are thousands of ways of embodying, performing, and representing gender. There are thousands of ways of being in relationship/performance with other people’s embodiments, and thousands/millions of community structures.

If there are billions of people on this Earth, then there are potentially billions of genders.

The only thing stopping us from moving past the polarizing dichotomy of male/female & man/woman is the group white/colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, capitalist imperialists who need us to remain subservient, to remain exploited, to remain in fragmentation in order for them to hold power. In the potential reality in which we become able to repurpose and restructure and reorganize under indigenous leadership, we will still need to (re)learn how to move through relationships with one another that transform these systems of oppression which we have all internalized (not only our habits of cognitively knowing but in our habits of being, seeing, hearing, speaking, loving). How will we move through care work roles in ways that disrupt and dissolve the threads of white, capitalist/imperialist cishetsexism on our understandings of ourselves, of one another, of all sentient and/or organic beings? Neoliberal, individualist “solutions” cannot answer this; “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112).

A2: IDENTITY BLUES (Menon, 2021a, p. 22)

“today i realized how similar “diaspora”
and “dysphoria” look on a page:

we have always been made to feel
foreign in our own bodies —
a guest overstaying welcome,
a resident of a place we are
constantly reminded we don’t
belong to

isn’t diaspora its own form of dysphoria?

asking for gender is another
way of asking:
where did you come from?

sometimes when i answer
water

comes out.”

A3: Journal Entry: The Absurdity of Rigid Gender Norms

Many people do not really see others when they look at them - they see what they want to see, they go off of some visual, auditory, relational cues but “fill in” the rest. For instance: medical charts/records. People see my F and continue to use she/her for me in conversation, even now, as someone who has “physically” transitioned. Some people simply see my long hair and immediately use she/her for me, even with my beard apparent, even when I put in extra effort to perform my voice in a way to try to fit into the expectations of masculinity. None of these things make me a man or a woman, in my perspective. What I am saying is that the conditions that the legal and medical institutions say I must meet to be accepted as one binary-ed gender over the other actually don’t do that at all. It is absurd all the way around. So I have stopped policing myself, to a certain degree. I believe that, as a non-binary person who seeks to be my authentic self instead of structuring my self-performance based on what other’s say is for “women” or for “men”, I confuse people, at least those people who are more perceptive and who have habituated to gender binary essentialism (I experience this a lot in relationships with people experiencing dementia who have lived nearly a century habituating to cishetnormative standards, yet now, they rely more on in-the-moment sensory cues to socially perform themselves). I have found that being “mis gendered” as she or he is “funny”/“uncanny” in many ways. Being called “ma’am-sir” by a 90+ year old assumed-cis woman who is experiencing neuro-degeneration is actually affirming of my gender and brings some relief to my relationship with them. I am not trying to make light of this. I just find these moments to be indicative of how people’s affective maps (see Al-Saji, 2014, p. 160) have a lot of gaps, of how they struggle to fit me in somewhere in their limited topography. Being misgendered and “revealed” often has very violent consequences for trans people, esp femme people, esp BIPOC trans people. I know that there is a possibility of violence against me, and I also recognize I have a lot more of a buffer against that due to my social capital. My status as someone who would usually now be defaulted to a white man (at least by people who I have met socially/superficially who do not see my legal records; politically, the state still views me as a woman, at best, and as a sub-human, in general) means most of the time, when folks realize they were “wrong” by she/her-ing me, they apologize. They seem to cower physically, and overall seem to anticipate the need to placate what they expect to be the very sensitive ego of a “(white cis) man”. I have also witnessed white women come to my defense unnecessarily. This is a protection I’m afforded based on the racial & gender hierarchy of cishetnormativity that people habituate to, and I constantly work to call in this response order to shift the narrative that masculine people are inherently reactionary.

A4: STREET TAX #3 (Menon, 2021a, p. 5-6; my emphasis):

“to the two men who yelled: “that’s a man in a dress! hey everyone that’s a man in a dress!” while pointing at me on sixth avenue:

i wanted to turn around and point back, shout:

*but then i realized how redundant it sounded
like describing a color as “blueish blue”
or a fight as a “violent conflict.”*

*what is a man but a private repression made public
made prophet made policy?*

i have spent the past 25 years trying to figure out where
man begins and where man ends and what i have
discovered is that man begins only where i end.

let me be more explicit: man begins when i end.
or rather: man begins because i am ended.

which goes to say in order for man to exist i cannot.
which goes to say one day i got so confident in myself i
was no longer a man.

which goes to say i have people come out to me as men
every day by leaving me behind.

it is hard to have your abundance mistaken as absence”

A5: ON DISASSOCIATION (Menon, 2021b, pp. 15–16).

“People often ask me what it was like to grow up in small town Texas. Truthfully, I don’t remember.

When I look at childhood photos it’s like I’m looking at someone else. The only evidence that I have that I was real is other people’s stories. I scour through every stray diary entry like a private investigator trying to find myself there. But no amount of home videos, yearbooks, newspaper clippings bring me back to life.

I spend a lot of time thinking about what it means to be alive. In the mechanical sense, yes my lungs, they were breathing. My heart, it was beating. *But it’s up for debate if I was living.*

I can’t tell when it happened but at some point I began to vanish. It’s like I was watching my life from the sky as an omniscient narrator. It wasn’t “I am hurting” it was “look, they hurt this person.” Nothing that happened to “me” happened to me. *I became the apostrophes themselves, floating above, always at a distance. I learned how to exist in two places at once. Time travel was a Thursday afternoon. Because the present didn’t belong to me, I lived in the future.*

Disassociation both saved my life and made me lose it. What a strange sensation: the grief of being alive to mourn your own death.

My Saturn return lassoed me back to my home town last year. It was the longest I had been back since I was a child. Morning after morning I would wake up and look at the same godforsaken ceiling. Sometimes I would take long walks hoping that it would all come back to me. That I would come back to me. A sudden flash, like in the movies.

It never came.

But I can tell you what did: I didn't find me, I forgave me.

In one story we disassociate because we're broken. In another, we do precisely because we want to heal. *My body fought for me before I could. It innovated and insulated me: creating the space for me to daydream myself into existence.*

I can't pinpoint when it happened, but I began to plant gratitude everywhere in myself I felt shame. Filled lack with love. I may not know what I lost, but I am here to feel it. For the first time I (not "I") experience this pain.

Thank God: my beautiful child—they gifted me the ability to feel.”

A6: Opening to Les Feinberg's Pamphlet (1992, pp. 5 – 6, my emphasis)

“This pamphlet is an attempt to trace *the historic rise of oppression that, as yet, has no commonly agreed name. We are talking about people who defy the “man”-made boundaries of gender.*

Gender: self-expression, not anatomy...

All our lives we've been taught that sex and gender are synonymous - men are “masculine” and women are “feminine.” Pink for girls and blue for boys. It's just “natural,” we've been told. But at the turn of the century, blue was considered a girl's color and pink was a boy's. Simplistic and rigid gender codes are neither eternal nor natural. They are changing social concepts.

Nevertheless, there's nothing wrong with men who are considered “masculine” and women whose self-expression falls into the range of what is considered “feminine.” *The problem is that the many people who don't fit these narrow social constraints run a gamut of harassment and violence.*

This raises the question: Who decided what the “norm” should be? Why are some people punished for their self-expression?

Many people today would be surprised to learn that ancient communal societies held [transgender and/or intersex]¹⁴³ people in high self-esteem. It took a bloody campaign by

¹⁴³ As they explain in his introduction, Feinberg uses language that she had access to at the time. As I study his works, especially *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, it emerges to me that she had internalized notions of bioessentialism as it pertains to anatomy, often referring to people as male- or female-bodied, often conflating the

the emerging ruling classes to declare what had been considered natural to be its opposite. That prejudice, foisted on society by it's ruling elite, endures today.

Yet even in a society where there are harsh social penalties for **not fitting**, a large part of the population can't or won't change their nature. It is apparent that there are many ways for women and men to be; everything in nature is a continuum.

Many of the terms used to describe us are words that cut and sear.

When I first worked in the factories of Buffalo as a teenager, women like me were called "he-shes". Although "he-shes" in the plants were most frequently lesbians, *we were recognized not by our sexual preference but by the way we expressed our gender.*

There are other words used to express the wide range of "gender outlaws": transvestites, transexuals, drag kings, cross-dressers, bull-daggers, stone butches, androgynes, diesel dykes or berdache - a European colonialist term [used to describe some iterations of two spirit identity within tribes indigenous to Turtle Island].

We don't choose these words. They don't fit all of us. *It's hard to fight an oppression without a name connoting pride, a language that honors us...*

In recent years, a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways. [Transgender, intersex and non-conforming]¹⁴⁴ people are demanding the right to choose our own self-definitions. *The language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes - a wonderful problem..*

Great social movements forge a common language - tools to reach out and win broader understanding. But we've been largely shut out of the progressive movement.

terms transgender, intersex and nonbinary together, perhaps because their focus was on explicating the material realities experienced by the people who visibly-enough defied the rigid expectations set by cishetnormativity. Zir work still holds incredible value to me, especially as zie called for solidarity across class, gender, anatomical, sexuality and racialized experiences. Throughout you may notice that I bracket some terms zie use to indicate what I interpret they were intending to discuss. Often they use the term "transgendered" which I will shift to "transgender" as adding an -ed to the end of the term creates the false image of "trans" being something that *happens* to us. I believe zie would approve. Refer to hir works for further study.

¹⁴⁴ As they explain in hir introduction, Feinberg uses language that zie had access to at the time. As I study hir works, especially *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (1998), it emerges to me that zie had internalized notions of bioessentialism as it pertains to anatomy, often referring to people as male- or female-bodied, often conflating the terms transgender, intersex and nonbinary together, perhaps because their focus was on explicating the material realities experienced by the people who visibly-enough defied the rigid expectations set by cishetnormativity. Zir work still holds incredible value to me, especially as zie called for solidarity across class, gender, anatomical, sexuality and racialized experiences. Throughout you may notice that I bracket some terms zie use to indicate what I interpret they were intending to discuss. Often they use the term "transgendered" which I will shift to "transgender" as adding an -ed to the end of the term creates the false image of "trans" being something that *happens* to us. I believe zie would approve. Refer to hir works for further study.

It was [transgender and non-conforming queer people] who led the 1969 battle at Stonewall in New York City that gave birth to the modern gay movement.

But just as the lesbian and gay movement had to win over the progressive movement to the understanding that struggling shoulder to shoulder together would create a more powerful force for change, *the [transgender] community is struggling to win the same understanding from the lesbian and gay movement.*

Many people think that all “masculine” women are lesbians and all “feminine” men are gay. That is a misunderstanding. Not all lesbians and gay men are “cross”-gendered. Not all [transgender] women and men are lesbian and gay. *[Transgender] people are mistakenly viewed as the cusp of the lesbian and gay community. In reality the two huge communities are like circles that only partially overlap.*

While the oppressions within these two powerful communities are not the same, we face a common enemy. *Gender phobia [i.e. transphobia, cissexism] - like racism, sexism and bigotry against lesbians and gay men [i.e. homophobia, heterosexism] - is meant to keep us divided. Unity can only increase our strength.*

Solidarity is built on understanding how and why oppression exists and who profits from it. It is our view that the revolutionary changes in human society can do away with inequality, bigotry, and intolerance.

In the spirit of building that fighting movement, we offer this view of the sweeping patterns in history, the commonality of [people] who have walked the path of the [transgender experience] - walked that road whether we were held in high esteem or revealed.

Look at us. We are battling for survival. Listen. We are struggling to be heard”

A7: GRAMMAR LESSONS (Menon, 2021b, pp 17-18; my emphasis)

“My first word was irony. Growing up a boy, they called me too feminine. When I finally claimed femininity as my own, they called me a man. These are grammar lessons: **some of us are only allowed to be thought, never to think.**

When they insist that our pronouns violate grammar to some degree they are right. Grammar is less about the mechanics of language, more about the monopoly of it. It’s not just about who can speak, but who gets to speak. **He who controls the word controls the world.**

What they mean is: don’t object to remaining object. **You are not a subject (unless you subject yourself to me).**

In school we were taught that basic sentence structure includes a subject and a predicate. How naïve I was to believe that if you just found the right words and put them in the appropriate order it would necessarily lead to understanding.

How devastating: meaning is not an equal opportunity employer.

I studied so hard. I choreographed my tongue to sculpt the inchoate sounds of my soul into language. **What a tragedy to learn on the other side: it doesn't matter if you have all the right words when they think you have the wrong body.**

Subject. Predicate. Power.

In order to be understood you must have power. What this means is that we could both launch the same words and they would still land in different places. What this means is that so often their words are prioritized more than our lives. What this means is that in order to understand us you must...wait. I don't think I can express that here. Meet me somewhere else.

The body is three-dimensional language. Beauty is the harshest editor. I could spend the rest of my life articulating every detail, every grain, every follicle. And still they would not understand. Because of what I look like. No. **Because of what they feel about what I look like.**

A grammar lesson: if you were to scream in outer space no one would hear you. Sound waves can't travel through **an empty vacuum**. Only you would be able to hear yourself because the sound waves would still travel through your body.

This is what it feels like to be brown, trans, femme,

and alive"

A8: ON PRONOUNS (Menon, 2021b, pp. 21-22; my emphasis; mirroring their syntax).

"We categorize English words into nine parts of speech. Many words can be more than one. "Present" can be both a noun and a verb. "But" can be a conjunction and a preposition. "I" can be a pronoun, an apology, a threat.

The premise of speech is the promise of it. But what about those of us for whom there are no words? Being trans means existing in the underbelly of language. It's not that we don't exist, it's that we have been written out of language.

Pronouns, then, aren't just about the ability to use a word like "she." They are ultimately about our ability to be. This has never just been about who gets to speak. This has always been about who gets to live.

This year alone there have been over one hundred pieces of anti-trans legislation in the US. I spent some time reviewing the bills. Watching the arguments. Reading the news. What quickly becomes evident is that the struggle over pronouns isn't about diction, it's about dehumanization.

my prescription. When I tried them on, one lens felt “off”, my vision was still blurry in one eye. My mind went back to that day, and I wondered if perhaps, in his nervousness or his preoccupation with our conversation, he mis-wrote the numbers he was supposed to write. Even as someone who was well intentioned, polite, affirming, perhaps he was still “waylaid”- in reference to Yancy - by cisnormativity enough that he went “off his game.” His momentum was thwarted because he has not had these conversations with clients. He was not able to habituate enough to our interaction to function in his intended role.

*A few days later, I was attempting to apply for an apartment in Connecticut while still living in Texas. The apartment was owned by a family, and I had mostly interacted with the property manager, who I read as a cis white man in his mid 30s. The manager seemed to talk to me as if I was “in the boys club.” When he asked me to complete a background check, I sent him an email detailing I was trans because my past name would come up on my credit report. He never responded to me, and I wanted to assume things were fine. A few days later, the manager told me I needed a co-signer. After I submitted those documents, the leasing manager of this complex, the property manager’s mother, called me. She said she liked to interview people to ‘ensure that who she allows to live here would fit into her “quiet, nice” community.’ I understood these as immediate red flags that denoted white supremacy, ableism and sanism. She then asked me to “describe myself personally.” I felt uneasy by this question and didn’t provide much detail about my life. She then went on to questioning ‘why I wanted to move to CT for a job that *only* paid \$25/hr’ (this was the highest paying job I had ever accessed), then she went on to say she doubted I would be able to afford living there, paying for bills, utilities, and food on top of rent. She said this despite my income meeting their requirements. She seemed to be trying to talk me out of living there without saying anything quite direct about my gender or my trans status. Towards the end, I asked her if, because this community was so “close knit,” there were community events or things I would be encouraged to attend. She said no. I then asked her what she meant by a “nice person” (a phrase she repeatedly used to qualify acceptable tenants), and then she said, “someone without a personality disorder or who was not a nasty person.” I gray-rocked from there. She told me she wanted to speak to my mother, who would be my co-signer. I felt myself just shut down, and I gave her my mother’s phone number. The next day, Karen called my mother, my cosigner. Their conversation was very different, more blatantly violating CT’s laws against discriminating based on gender identity and gender expression. She asked my mother the following invasive questions, while misgendering me (using she/her pronouns for me throughout the conversation): “Does she look like a male or female?” “What surgeries has she had?” “Does she have male or female breasts?” “How long is her hair?”. My mom was taken aback with these questions, and she couldn’t clearly tell me how she answered them. She did tell my mother she was asking these questions “in case the pesky neighbors get curious.” Once this liaising manager became involved, no communications have been sent over email. None of these probing questions have been directly asked to me, nor have they been asked in a way that would hold up in court (i.e. in mail or email format). I understand this to be intentional. They know what they are asking about is invasive, unreasonable, and against CT’s fair housing laws. I cannot imagine they ask every tenant they interview about the status of their genitals and body.*

The property manager, her son, called me the day after, and he offered to send me a lease over text. He would not do so over email. I told him I was no longer interested in leasing the apartment, and he asked why. I told him I would tell him over email, which made him frustrated. I emailed him to have some written documentation of what occurred over the past few days. He responded back with a very overt apology “for his mother.” He seemed to attempt to distance himself from her, his own mother, and used ageist and ableist logics to excuse her “backwards” behavior. He offered to reduce the leasing fee and rent, etc. I still denied it. Not only did I not trust the tenets that passed his mother’s interviews, I did not want any of my friends of color going anywhere near that place. Over a year later, I still think about this experience. The discrimination I experience seems to occur in the “splash zone” of anti-Blackness, classism, ableism/sanism, and transmisogyny. Most of the time, when I stand up for myself, my resistance is tolerated. My whiteness has always insulated me from extensive institutional harm. As I grow more masculine-coded, people have begun to coddle me in anticipation of me getting upset (even if I am nowhere near that point). My liberation is inseparable from the abolition of these systems.

In Sept 2022, I had a very difficult day at my first gastrointest. appt. I read the doctor as a cis Black man who I guessed to be a boomer (maybe late gen X). He seemed to delight in making his political choices known, which I was happy to witness. He had an article about white supremacist protestors framed near the door to his office. I hoped that perhaps when he found out I was trans that he would be thrown off. It took me saying it a few times for him to understand that I was trans, then he asked very directly to verify I was “a transgender.” He asked me a few times “when did you decide to change your sex?”. He said at one point “I guess TX isn’t the most liberal of states to live in.” I replied, “Idk, I mean I didn’t experience housing discrimination until I moved here”. He quickly asked, “how would you experience discrimination?” I started to say why, and he said “You walk into a room, and you’re a white male” with his hands in an open “so what” gesture. I said “my whiteness definitely gets me places and...” then he interrupted and asked me to do something with my body (to lay down, unbutton my shirt, my pants, so he could feel my belly). My ears started ringing; I began to feel like I was both in front of and behind my body. I said that they could see my old name in my credit report, and then he asked me what my old name was. I said I didn’t feel comfortable telling him that, and he said “well maybe once we get to know one another more, you will feel comfortable telling me.” This is all occurring as he is examining my breath/heart beat, laying me down to feel my belly. I told him how the landlord treated me, and he said “some ppl are just ignorant... well, welcome to the world of discrimination, it’s not fun”.

It all happened so fast. It was so reductive, as if my transness was both a quick choice/change AND that my experience of the world has always been as a “white male” – while though, even now, I rarely “experience” that white male privilege in ways I imagine cismen do (and I do not seek that privilege either). I felt the snowball of his habit rolling down the hill so fast, kicking up as my little “bump” of a difference to him didn’t slow him down but made him swerve and quickly correct back to his conception of the world/possible experiences. I didn’t submit a complaint or anything. I wanted to give him my feedback so that he could perhaps do better with future service seekers who are trans. However, I was afraid that my feedback would be weaponized against him as a Black doctor.

In the whole 45 min appt, we probably talked about my gastro symptoms for 10-15 min. The bulk of the conversation after he registered that I was “a transgender” was about my trans-ness. I wasn’t sure why he was asking the questions, perhaps out of curiosity or perhaps he thought it an appropriate subject for small talk. Regardless, I had been waiting to get access to an appointment like this for over 5 years because of my difficulty accessing insurance as a working-class trans person in Texas. And it felt eclipsed by my doctor’s preoccupation with my transness. He didn’t ask me thorough questions about my symptoms, but he did he ask me multiple times when I decided to change my sex. It felt so ironic, and it felt so familiar. I constantly feel the need to be my own case manager because I feel so much gets overlooked by our medical system, especially as a person who most professionals “do not have experience treating.” Perhaps they are distracted or caught off guard and it causes them to miss a note, to not think of a question? This occurs with me when I get nervous about navigating subjects with POC, something I try to be conscious of, work through, and mitigate to ensure I am providing quality care. How do my doctors work through their preoccupations with me at the end of the day? Do they ever?

A10: YOUR WOUND / MY GARDEN (Menon, (2021b, pp. 47-48).

“i am not interested in legitimacy.
legitimacy is a circus that requires me to convince others
of what already is.

i have more important things to do with my time.

does the ground have to authenticate itself to the feet?
does water have to substantiate itself to the tongue?

i have nothing to prove.
my dignity is not up for debate.

i accept myself.
and that is not only enough,
it is everything.

contrary to popular belief,
i am not a character in your novel.
i am not an actor in your tv show.
i am not a statue in your courtyard.
i belong firmly and irrevocably to myself.

the only opinion about my appearance that matters is my
own.

i used to think that if i “toned it down” i would be taken

more seriously.
but then i realized:
you will always find a way to discredit me.

we both know:
this was never about what i looked like,
it was always about what you felt like.

you cannot bear to see it:
how i have made home here in your shame.

i regret to inform you that the house of mirrors you have
erected is not a home.

you sculpt the world in your image because you need
proof that what you see in the mirror is real.
you could not accept yourself so you made up history,
science, identity
to disguise your own self-doubt.

i see behind the mask.
beneath every supremacy lives insecurity.
each insult is an invitation to quicksand and
i refuse to take the bite.

it is not my responsibility to rescue you from your self-
imposed quarantine from humanity.

you don't know who you are without me.
i know who i am without you.

(this is why you hate me.)
(this is why i love you.)

your wound is my garden,
i have found life here in the places you have left for dead.

watch me bloom”

A11: gav Session Reflection

Recently, in a gav session, I asked someone what they have noticed about their vocal embodiment as they move through different social worlds at work, at home, and in social public spaces. They said they had become more aware of how they perform themselves when at work, around people who “know them” as “a man” and to whom they are not yet out. They said that their mannerisms and the way they posture their body is more restricted. They feel their voice “drop” in their resonance and pitch. They said that

their vocal embodiment is not the only thing that changes, but they recognized their vocal habits were “a part of it” because they shifted “back” to habits they had defaulted to before they realized their gender. I asked them how they felt when moving through those spaces. They described it as feeling “dampened...pinned down...just not good”.

This makes me think of how hegemony feels like tons of hands over my body, “fixing” what is sticking out, “smoothing” down edges or parts that “do not fit”. In terms of D&G’s philosophies, this seems like a description of molarizing forces. I am also thinking of Ngo, Yancy and Fanon’s descriptions of how the white supremacist gaze enforces violent restriction of one’s intersubjectivity - they describe it as feeling “fixed”, their fluidity restricted. While this participant was white and not experiencing racialization as a person of color, their description bears considering how different people may habituate to the white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal gaze for different reasons and yet in similar ways.

A12: Processing How Cisnormativity Emerged Through Me

There was someone who came in after introductions, who I assumed to be a white cis man. All I saw was his[their] blue eyes, his[their] white skin, and his[their] beard. He[they] said he[they] was “there to watch”, which also made me think he[they] was cis, was there to “observe”. I told him[them] “as an FYI” this place isn’t meant to be a performance with an audience. Until this point, I have been unsure of how to create boundaries for “curious” cis ppl w/o gatekeeping, so I have not directly asked people if they are trans when I am unsure. He[they] seemed unsure of how to respond, but he[they] stayed. I didn’t ask him[them] his[their] name [or their pronouns!]. There was another trans person who brought their cis partner (who was a poc and classically trained musician), and she was actively participating in the space. I said nothing to her about her participation being out of place as a cis person... [I spent the first half of the group facilitating music making and not giving the person I assumed to be a cis man much direct time, attention, or energy].

Later, the man[person] came up to me and asked if he[they] should be here. He[they] said he[they] felt like the space wasn’t meant for him[them] as ‘a person of the trans community’. I felt my eyes get wide and my heart race. I recognized in the process of being protective of the space, I harmed someone – I assumed he[they] was cis because he[they] wasn’t “openly gender non-conforming” from my perspective. I did what I hate seeing people do – I did something that has happened to me and to people I care about. I hate when strangers assume I am cis because I am “passing as man/woman-enough” for them; I thought of my close people who are trans men who often get erased from conversations involving transness and/or reproductive justice.

I was accountable, explained my error - how my intention to protect the space did not line up with my impact. I named I was being cisnormative [by assuming they were a cis man. However, in the moment, I automatically jumped to the assumption that they were a “binary” trans man – another emergence of cisnormative momentum that I processed the morning after]. He[they] appreciated that and then told me his[their] name. We had done all that without me asking his[their] name! [I still feel intense regret for not asking their name and pronouns when we first interacted; and I am frustrated I did not ask their

pronouns when they told me their name]. I realize that my internalized identity politics about race were also emerging in this experience: I said nothing contradictory to the cis woman who came with her partner - more like I engaged with her as a human – whilst I barely engaged/mostly ignored a white trans man [again, my cisnormative assumption - this could have been an agender or trans femme person] who was already nervous about playing music and only wanted to observe.

*Added the morning after: This makes me consider how to discuss and name boundaries without gender policing. My initial considerations were: when someone asks about the space I say “as long as you’re in the trans community, you are welcome here” – like as an open phrase that doesn’t seek to individually discern if people are “trans enough”. I quickly decided against this because it seems like gate-keeping, it also seems like a habit of whiteness to fix someone in place, and it seems to be coming from a paternalistic desire to “protect” the affinity space. I settled on just f**king asking their name and pronouns [Incredible insight !!! face palm moment]. I want the space to be open enough for people who are not out or who are still in the process of shedding as a habits of internalized cisnormativity. Honestly, I just need to focus on my awareness of and responsiveness to power dynamics as they emerge within the space. For instance, in the same session, the cis classically trained musician quickly detoured into a song while a trans femme gender fluid person was preparing to show the group a song she wanted to share. This transfemme person had been attending for a few months, and in this session it seemed she had become comfortable-enough to share something with the group, so I was excited to nurture that moment. Everyone cascaded into singing what the cis woman brought up, leaving the transfemme person “hanging”. When that was done, I veered right back to the trans femme person and prompted the group to give her space and attention. It seemed to me as an emergence of how people who move through the world comfortably as cis seem to exude a sort of confidence, a sort of ontological-expansiveness, that trans and gnc people perhaps do not exude in the same ways.*

Weeks later: I have continued to think back to this night. It was the busiest group yet; there were over 20 people there. I remember just going, not necessarily giving myself time to be present. I feel as though my habit body was taking control of how I moved through the session; I was rolling with the momentum and not allowing myself to hesitate. When I do this, I revert to imposing my version of reality into our shared reality. What if I sought to be in this group by moving slower, by pausing and leaning into silence, by asking questions instead of deferring to my assumptions? These are not new considerations, and I know that this journey of shedding oppressive systems is life-long.