

Mythical Creatures or *Lusus Naturae*
Differences in Discourse on Intersex People in 19th Century
America.

by

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The work of this thesis took place on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the W'SANEC and Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt nations) peoples; the Skwxwú7mesh, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam nations; and Treaty 7 territory of the Nakoda (Stoney) and Tsuut'ina nations and the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Confederacy. I am an uninvited settler on this land. I was raised in a German-Canadian family and am a first generation Canadian citizen on my mother's side. She moved to Vancouver from Hamburg, Germany in the 1970's. My father is a first generation Canadian citizen, born in Prince Rupert on the territories of the Tsimshian, Haida, Gitksan, and Nisga'a territories, and his parents moved from Europe in the 1940's and 1950's. I moved to Victoria in 2017 from the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tseil-Waututh nations. I self-locate to encourage others to do the same and to acknowledge those who came before me. By acknowledging our ancestors and our relationship to the land, we situate ourselves and honour our personal histories.

The land I grew up on and the land on which I reside, work, and study now were gained through a genocide of various nations and peoples. I do not belong to these lands. I am grateful for all the beauty and wonder these territories contain. I acknowledge my place as an uninvited settler as part of going work towards decolonization.

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In the late summer of 1882, a toddler passed away. This child was well loved. A family in rural Massachusetts took them in after their mother abandoned them two years before their death. The family grieved for their foster child and “buried the corpse in their own lot.”¹ Days later two men disturbed the child’s remains. Dr. E. F. Cummings and Mr. Walter Carl, a graduate of Harvard Medical School, exhumed the remains for medical examination and to make a cast of the child’s genitalia.²

Dr. Cummings was involved in the child’s healthcare since they were found on the streets of Boston and taken into temporary care. Initially his only purpose was to perform a check up on the infant, however, when he was unable to determine the baby’s sex his interest piqued. In his write-up for the *Boston Medical Journal*, Cummings referred to the genitals as “malformed to the extent that it was impossible to accurately determine its sex, although [his] own opinion was that it was a case of hypospadias.”³ The “malformation”, as he termed it, had no bearing on the child’s health or passing, save for some issues urinating at a young age leading to an acute case of cystitis, yet it led Cummings to become involved in the child’s life.⁴

Once the child died, Cummings made casts of their genitals and Mr. Benjamin made some drawings which they showed to other doctors in their company. The doctors concurred with Dr. Cummings’ diagnosis of hypospadias. During the autopsy of the corpse, Dr. Cummings

¹ E. F. Cummings, *A Case of Congenital Malformation of the Genitals*, Case Report (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), From Boston Medical Journal, *Boston Medical Journal* 108, 195.

² Cummings, 195.

³ Ibid.

Hypospadias is an intersex condition or difference of sexual development in which the urethra is located below the penis, akin to how a urethral opening would be below the clitoris. As such, doctors, such as Dr. Cummings, consider that the penis might be an enlarged clitoris.

⁴ Ibid., 195-96.

found that the toddler had a well-developed uterus with fallopian tubes and ovaries. This, coupled with a penis or enlarged clitoris and a scrotal sack, led Dr. Cummings to conclude the child could be grouped with “the so-called hermaphrodites.”⁵

Dr. Cummings had no explanation as to why this child’s body developed the way that it did. He turned to an officer who discovered the child to solicit the opinion of a “non-medical man.” The article closed with his comment that the child’s ambiguous body was of no surprise as the child was likely conceived in a house that sat on the border lines of Maine and New Hampshire.⁶

Dr. Cummings’ entry in the *Boston Medical Journal* is an example of just some of the articles about intersex individuals which appeared in medical journals and newspapers throughout the nineteenth century in the United States of America. Its contents speak to the time it was written. By the latter half of the century, discourse about hermaphrodites among doctors was shifting. Scientific language and terms like “congenital malformation” began to pepper medical write ups, replacing previous terms for hermaphrodites like “monsters.” His more medical approach led to him never using gendered pronouns for the child but instead he used “it” when referring to the infant. Though he did not refer to the child as a monster, his language dehumanized and othered the child while operating within accepted discourse at the time.

This project will pay attention to aspects of speech and writing like Dr. Cummings’ uses of pronouns and medical terminology. My thesis investigates the divergences and developments in texts about intersex individuals in the 19th century, to uncover historical attitudes and

⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁶ Ibid.

approaches. As such, this thesis has a narrative hole at its centre.⁷ My work is shaped around intersex people, but lacks their words or thoughts. This project is not a history of intersex people but instead it is a history about approaches towards intersex people. That leads to many complications, such as the risk of reproducing harmful discourse and giving people access to intimate details about the bodies of people who cannot consent to those details being known. I do hope that by avoiding the use of images and medical figures and by employing critical discursive analysis I can mitigate the possible harm of making violence against intersex people accessible and providing private details about intersex bodies.

The various discourses in the 19th century about intersex people provide a historical lineage. Intersex histories invalidate claims that nonbinary sexgenders are new phenomena.⁸ We know from sources like the Talmud that humans have been aware of intersex existence for thousands of years.⁹ However, it is through more recent histories that one can see how that existence was denied, suppressed, and marginalized. Histories provide knowledge which is a technology linked to power. Hegemonic control of knowledge is a state tool for power over others. The way information is disseminated, such as through dehumanizing means, produces

⁷ This is a paraphrase of Toni Morrison who refers to her protagonist Pecola as a narrative hole in her introduction. *The Bluest Eye* is a novel shaped around violence, chiefly dealing with the people around Pecola rather than the protagonist herself. Toni Morrison, "Introduction," *The Bluest Eye*, (New York: Vintage International, 2007), xi.

⁸ I use "sexgender" rather than sex/gender to suggest that the two are linked and that we must address the concepts of sex and gender together as one whole. I believe that fighting the collapse of sex and gender is futile as sex terms like "female" and "male" lead to an automatic and incidental (mis)gendering. I use this term instead to show that sex and gender produce each other. See: Maria Stern and Marysia Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s): Reflections on Feminism and Familiar Fables of Militarisation," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 611–30.

⁹ C Fonrobert, "Gender Identity In Halakhic Discourse," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, 2009.

knowledge that can be used for violence against intersex people.¹⁰ “Power produces knowledge” which is why the knowledge of intersex existence has been limited.¹¹ To challenge the current power structures, historians must betray the hegemony by creating a historiography of intersex existence.

The historiography on intersex people is limited but rich. Alice Dreger’s pioneering work on nineteenth and early twentieth-century medical history and hermaphroditism in France and England coined the term “Age of the Gonads” to refer to the practice in 1871-1915 of prioritizing gonads chiefly in the search for the prevailing or “true sex.” Elizabeth Reis’s book, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* built on Dreger’s work, looking at intersex history from Early America to the Modern Era. She responded to Dreger’s “Age of the Gonads” thesis by writing the history of the two-sex model in America.¹² Geertje Mak entered the conversation with both of these authors in her 2012 work on French and German histories of intersex. She specifically addressed Reis’ argument, arguing that Reis misunderstood “Age of the Gonads” and how it related to the two-sex model as Reis suggest that the two-sex model was an example of the “Age of Gonads.” Mak argued that the two-sex model is distinct from the “Age of the Gonads” and the two are not synonymous with one another.¹³ However, her work chiefly dealt

¹⁰ Richard Coopey & Alan McKinlay, “Power without knowledge? Foucault and Fordism, c.1900–50,” *Labor History* 51, no. 1 (2010), 108-09.

¹¹ Day Wong, “Foucault Contra Habermas: Knowledge and Power,” *Philosophy Today* 51, no. 1 (2007), 3.

¹² The two-sex model was the model of sex which predominated after the Enlightenment in contrast to the prior one-sex model which theorized that genitals were homologous and developed due to the warmth of the womb. It positioned men and women as sociological categories rather than ontological categories. Thomas Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud*, e-book, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1992), 6-7. Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: an American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 53-4.

¹³ Geertje Mak, *Doubting Sex: Inscriptions, Bodies and Selves in Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite Case Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 111.

with the way those with doubtful sex conceived of themselves and the body of biographical literature which can give us insight into nineteenth and twentieth century self-understandings of hermaphroditism and intersexness. Siobhan Somerville similarly critiques other historian's work, though not as pointedly as Mak's critique of Reis. Her work came before Reis or Mak but can be used as a tool in response to their histories. Somerville addressed the problems of seeing sex(uality) and race as independent parallels which can serve as analogies for each other. Her work, *Queering the Color Line*, presented histories of sexuality, the body, and race intersecting in a colour-line divided United States. Her work is of chief importance to my own work looking at intersex history in which I look at how racialization shaped discourse and attitudes towards "hermaphrodites." The challenging methodology she prescribed, in which historians "recognize the instability of multiple categories of difference simultaneously" rather than contrasting an unstable category against a presumed fixed one, informed my project greatly.¹⁴ I enter the conversation with this historiography with my own work. Though Dreger is foundational, her work and theories apply to a time after my own. My project looks at nineteenth century American history in which surgery does not play as much of a role in intersex assignment nor is the "Age of the Gonads" as paramount. Contrary to Reis' approach of drawing parallels between sex and race, I prioritized sources that give us insight into the intersection between sex and race.¹⁵ I also incorporate sources from outside of the medical and legal institutions. My use of newspapers in the latter half of the nineteenth century contrasts with other historians who have

¹⁴ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁵ *Bodies in Doubt*, 36-40.

stressed the importance of medical history and relied on this form of discourse as opposed to others.

As George Chauncey discussed in his introduction to *Gay New York*, historians must incorporate non-medical and legal sources to ensure that vernacular histories do not disappear. Diverse sources also challenge historical narratives, introducing new information.¹⁶ By employing newspapers I can get an idea of non-medical or “expert” opinion and the knowledge or opinion a lay person may encounter when reading the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. It is with these sources that I argue that discourses of monstrosity and mythicism were applied throughout the century, up until 1890s. The attitudes and language authors employed were contingent on the details of the case, the race and physicality of the individual, as well as their sexuality. Newspapers contain information that shift the narrative of history of discourses about intersex people.

My first chapter looks at medical attitudes prior to the Civil War, seeking the nuance of who was referred to as a monster. In medical texts at this time, we see the use of “monstrosity” wane with regard to white subjects. However, aggressive dehumanization continues in the case of a slave, Ned of Virginia. My second chapter continues past the Civil War and focuses on medical discourse during and after the postbellum era. I again look at the rendering of intersex people as inhuman and the peculiarities of the cases at hand. Historically contextualized racialization as well as sexualization shaped the case write-ups at this time. The third and final chapter looks at some of the newspaper articles and entries about those thought or discovered to

¹⁶ George Chauncey, *Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 10.

be hermaphrodites. I group the articles by type and look at the way authors dehumanize intersex people to assuage popular anxiety about unstable categories.

My thesis ultimately looks at discursive approaches, developments, and differences throughout nineteenth century. Special attention is paid to the ways in which gender, race, and sexuality inform these discourses. I am employing the scholarship of Julian Gill-Peterson, Siobhan Somerville, and C. Riley Snorton in particular to approach the work with an analytical lens informed by trans studies and critical race theory. The emerging field of trans studies offers new approaches to intersex histories as trans and intersex history are deeply intertwined. I want to understand the ways racialization affected who was considered a hermaphrodite or monster. How did scientific racism and antiblack medical attitudes affect the discourse we are reading? How does that, in turn, affect the histories of intersex people we have?¹⁷

Siobhan Somerville's work is a critical approach to queer theory which presumes stability of race. She moves away from working with parallels and looks at the intersections between blackness, racialization, and sexuality. As the nineteenth century treated the body as a legible text, much of her focus is on the juxtaposition between "white" and "black" bodies.¹⁸ C. Riley Snorton's 2017 book, *Black on Both Sides*, is a racial history of trans identity which argues black gender was treated as fungible prior to the emergence of white trans identity, and was eclipsed by both whiteness and blackness once white trans individuals gain visibility. Julian Gill-Peterson's work directly builds on Snorton's work in *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Her

¹⁷ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 52; Somerville; Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 2.

¹⁸ Somerville, 9; Michael Foucault, "Introduction," *Herculine Barbin* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), viii.

project traces the history of transgender children to give modern children a lineage.¹⁹ Central to her history is the concept of “plasticity” which affected which transgender children were taken seriously and were able to access medico-social transition. The division between those whose “trans-ness” eclipsed others is racialized, with black genders seen as a lost cause by medical authorities. Though this may contrast with Snorton’s concept of fungibility, it does follow his central conceit of blackness on “both sides” in which concepts of gender (including trans-ness) formed around white gender and black gender was essentially void. All of these works centre the instability of racialization and blackness and intersect it with sexuality and sexgender. Though I rely on Somerville and Snorton more, as their work looks at similar period of time, the way in which white sexgender has eclipsed black experiences is central to intersex historiography where white, and chiefly European, narratives have dominated. Ultimately, my project considers the complexity of discourse and how variables like authorship (medical or non-medical), race, and gender performance played out. Monstrosity and language of mythic impossibility existed throughout discourse in the nineteenth century and recurred later in the nineteenth century, albeit in a different locale than in medical discourse.

Medical Discourse in the Antebellum Period

In the nineteenth century, America was undergoing massive shifts with the reorganization of space spurred by modernity, urbanism, and industrialization; these shifts had implications for race and gender such as segregation and the division of public and private spaces. Shifts and changes within discourse reflect the way discourse is used to regulate social membership in these new

¹⁹ I use the name under which the book was published, however, Gill-Peterson now uses the name “Jules” and she/her pronouns. While writing the book, she went by they/them pronouns.

categories.²⁰ Discourse, is by nature, discontinuous, one must approach it with the sense that there will be differences and contradictions.²¹ When doing discursive analysis, trends do appear. There are unifying factors which crop up. This chapter explores those disunifying and unifying characteristics in the medical discourse in the antebellum era. The label of monstrosity appears poignantly when those with knowledge are attempting to dehumanize intersex people who threatened white supremacy and divisions of society. Monstrosity was as a tool to maintain a binary opposition of monsters and non-monsters.

Monsters?

In the late spring of 1823, Dr. William S. Fife wrote to Dr. James Carmichael of Virginia detailing the “extraordinary” case of a deceased lady in Gloucester County. Dr. Fife visited her in her house earlier in the week as she complained of a cough and chest pain. The lady was seventy years old and had never married at the time of the doctor’s visits. Dr. Fife did not provide Dr. Carmichael with the name of the lady. Upon his second visit to her home, he discovered that she was on her deathbed. Her room smelled foul. Dr. Fife inquired as to the cause of the smell. The lady’s servant told him that no one was to remove or touch her mistress as she was “half man half woman” and did not want this to be “discovered.”²² Her fear of discovery and the real or

²⁰ Emily Skidmore, “Ralph Kerwineo’s Queer Body: Narrating the Scales of Social Membership in the Early Twentieth Century,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 1, 158.

²¹ Michaela Koch, *Discursive Intersexions: Daring Bodies between Myth Medicine and Memoir* (Oldenburg: Verlag, Bielefeld, 2017), 18.

²² William S. Fife, “Letter from William S. Fife, April 26, 1823,” letter, Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2019, from University of Virginia: Historical Collections at the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, *Patients Voices in Early 19th Century Virginia: Letters to Doctor James Carmichael & Son*.

imagined gaze of her community kept her from disclosing her sex to others until her death.²³ The lady was able to live relatively undiscovered and undisturbed by medical and legal authorities.

The lady died the next day. Dr. Fife promptly examined her, despite the fact that this was against her wishes. He found a scrotum, a long clitoris, and observed that her “canal or Vagina was very much contracted from the natural size in females.” He wanted to dissect “the parts” but the lady’s friends objected. He lamented the lack of a “full account” of the case and then proceeded to ask the well-read Dr. James Carmichael for assistance with the case.²⁴

Dr. Fife’s letter to Dr. Carmichael is the only direct and private communication between two individuals in the scope of this project. Though it falls under the umbrella of expert medical discourse, it is not in the same (relatively) public sphere as the other sources. The letter provides an example of a doctor writing on the subject of an intersex person with relatively little to no knowledge. Dr. Fife does not call the lady a hermaphrodite or a monster.²⁵ The only descriptive label (“half man half woman”) for her comes from her servant. Dr. Fife describes himself as “astonished” by the discovery of the lady’s nonbinary genitalia. It is possible that Dr. Fife never knew about the existence of so-called hermaphrodites or the possibility of ambiguous/nonbinary

²³ Geertje Mak wrote that prior to the professionalization of medicine and expanded medical purview, communities monitored intersex individuals/those of doubtful sex. This surveillance contained and isolated these individuals, keeping them from “contaminating” others with their condition. Geertje Mak, *Doubting Sex*, 27-31.

²⁴ William S. Fife.

²⁵ “Whether a body was called a hermaphrodite or not, at times, seemed to be depend less on the body that was studied and more on the person who studied the body.” Though language begets flesh, in as much as once a physician announces a sex, it becomes actual, that does not mean that the person announcing it is truthful or accurate. From Koch, 27-28. See also Snorton, 52.

genitalia.²⁶ This shaped his letter. Unlike doctors who were writing case reports for journals, Dr. Fife did not misgender the lady nor did he use his power as a doctor to inscribe sex on her. He did not interpret her body beyond likening her genitalia to a male's for comparative reasons. This comparison could be because he was unfamiliar with the case or because the lady was dead.

The lady was able to escape medical attention due to local surveillance. As such, the unnamed lady stayed in a singular role her entire life, that of a respectable woman of the upper-class. She did not trouble categories. As Geertje Mak wrote, prior to the increased medical purview of the nineteenth century, cases of nonbinary were hidden as "usual."²⁷ This hiding prevented any troubling of existing and emerging sex and race categories. Similarly, in death there was no question over which spheres she belonged in. Her death and Dr. Fife's relative lack of knowledge about the situation kept him from labelling her as a monster or seeing her as a troublesome or impossible hermaphrodite.

Two instances in which hermaphroditism was seen as "monstrous" were two different births in 1836 and 1839. Both infants were born with other phenotypical qualities such as growths on the stomach or no fingers. The attending doctors in both situations considered the births as cases of monstrosities and dehumanized the babies by referring to them as "it." The doctor's write-up about the earlier birth in 1836 was entitled "Hermaphroditism, or Monstrosity." The baby born in 1839 was a stillbirth and referred to singularly as a "case of monstrosity."

²⁶ One must keep in mind that beliefs about sexgender dictate what sort of knowledge scientists, anthropologists, and historians produce. Ignorance was a real and unsurprisingly possibility. See: Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3.

²⁷ Mak's *Doubting Sex* includes a quote from a midwife who stated that a case of doubtful sex was handled with secrecy "as usual". This reveals that these cases were not that few and far between and there was a standard practice. Though Mak's research centred on Germany and France, the concept that shame regulated decisions around disclosure is quite logical. Mak, 24.

Though the doctor did not identify the 1839 child as a hermaphrodite, the description of the child makes it clear that they had a case of hypospadias. The doctor also details that they had a “rudimentary scrotum.” The mother informed the attending physician that she expected the child to have physical differences as she felt “*very disagreeable*” during the pregnancy.^{28 29} Metcalf noted that many mothers attempted to predict “monstrous births.” In *Bodies in Doubt*, Reis discussed how mothers received the onus of their children’s bodies. Mothers whose children had physical anomalies were often blamed; perhaps they thought evil thoughts during their pregnancy or committed sins.³⁰ As Samuel Chew noted in a case study about an adult woman lacking a uterus, concerns about “monstrous births” were steeped in superstition. Though neither doctors ascribed any blame onto the parents in their discussion of the cases, one can see how the superstitions surrounding monstrous births persisted into the nineteenth century.

Monstrosity was not equally or evenly applied to all individuals who would then be considered hermaphrodites. Monstrosity in these aforementioned cases applied to babies who also had various other physical differences. One can see how the terms “monstrosity” and “hermaphrodite” were not synonymous at this time. The use of both hermaphrodite and monstrosity to refer to the earlier birth in 1836 demonstrates this divergence of terms. However, to argue that the diagnosis of monstrosity was contingent on disability or phenotypical bodies

²⁸ I use terms like “differences” here rather than “malformation” or “deformity”. Though the latter words were what the doctors used, some writes on disability have discussed the gravity of words such as “deformity” when describing them. Especially when intersex conditions are present, referring to the child’s body as “deformed” only confirms essentialist notions of what a body should look like.

²⁹ J. W. Palmer, *Hermaphroditism, or Monstrosity*, Case Report (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), From Boston Medical Journal, *Boston Medical Journal 15* (1836), 377-78. John. Geo Metcalf, *Case of Monstrosity*, Case Report (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), From Boston Medical Journal, *Boston Medical Journal 20* (1839), 341-43.

³⁰ Reis, 5.

ignores the racialized history which appears in medical journals into the mid-nineteenth century. We can assume the babies in these cases were white due to the lack of visibility of their race in the medical documents. Whiteness in the archive is communicated through a lack of race in documents. This is important as the labelling of them as monsters marks them as outliers, rather than accepted parts of white society. Racial pseudoscience was contingent on the idea that white people were more advanced, physically and mentally. Sexual ambiguity was linked to primitivism and imagined division between racialized and non-racialized bodies.³¹ A judgement on discourses of monstrosity would be incomplete without considering the intersections of race and sex.

Beyond the Parallel

In the nineteenth century, the categorization of sex was linked to the categorization of race. Both C. Riley Snorton and Siobhan Somerville's work on black sex(uality) and gender in the nineteenth century touch on it in their inclusion of a quote by Havelock Ellis, one of the forefathers of sexology, "the question of sex—with the racial questions that rest on it."³²

Sexologists saw sex as a key to further understanding and developing racial categories. The two were intertwined, yet many historians, such as Elizabeth Reis in her work *Bodies in Doubt*, still focus on parallels between sex and race rather than looking at their intersections. To do so separates sex and race in a false manner and perpetuates ideas that racialized peoples cannot also

³¹ Somerville, 1, 29.

³² Both Snorton and Somerville have quoted Ellis in their work on queer and trans black American history. The quote could imply that sex has implications for the human race. However, the field of sexology and the ways in which sexologists constructed sex development around racialization suggests that sex and race are linked. Havelock Ellis quoted in Somerville, 15; Snorton, 4.

be queer, trans, or intersex.³³ When constructing a history of a period during which slavery and the colour line are two prominent issues, one must address how discourses about intersex people varied depending on racialization (or lack thereof). A history which ignores race and which relies on whiteness as a default or “blank slate” on which to construct theses, is an incomplete history.

In the 1847 volume of *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, two cases were published together about two individuals with similar sexual make-up. The first case written by Dr S. H. Harris was about Ned, an eighteen year old slave in Virginia. The report opened with Dr. Harris denying the existence of hermaphrodites, “or those creatures which were at one time supposed to unite in the same individual the distinctive organs of the two sexes.”³⁴ He then went on to discuss how doctors have noticed the existence of “creatures” with “equivocal appearances in their sexual apparatus as to render it exceedingly doubtful as to their sexuality” His use of “creatures” presents as a dehumanizing and hostile term for people with ambiguous or nonbinary bodies. He continues by referring to Ned as a “monster.” He described Ned’s body, referring to certain parts as more feminine or masculine. The only thing “typical” about Ned is his feet “which resemble very much the males of the African race.” He is relatively unconcerned about Ned having a small penis, though he is shocked to discover that Ned regularly menstruates through the penis. He notes that Ned has a scrotum without testicles. He finishes his report by stating that “the female organs predominate” and that Ned’s gonadal make up is likely female. In this we can see the beginnings of the Age of the Gonads. Dr. Harris denies Ned’s self-conception as a man and posits that Ned’s attraction to women is likely an error of sexual assignment and

³³ Somerville, 2-3.

³⁴ S. H. Harris, MD, *A Case of Doubtful Sex*, Case Report (Ann Arbor: HathiTrust, 2008), From University of California, *The American Journal of Medical Sciences ser. 2 vol. 14* (1847), 121.

that as Ned cannot ejaculate, he cannot be a man attracted to women (otherwise, Ned would be part of a “new order of beings.”) His report is notable for his aggressive dehumanization of Ned and declaration of Ned being female despite using “the masculine pronoun.” Dr. Harris’ treatment of Ned is almost schizophrenic in nature, simultaneously confirming and denying Ned’s masculinity and personhood in such a manner that renders Ned into an impossible subject.³⁵

Dr. Harris’ attitude, however, is in line with contemporary beliefs about black women’s bodies. Black women at the time were considered to have an “excess” of the genitals, as were lesbians, and were de facto sexually ambiguous.³⁶ Black women’s clitorises were considered “free” (meaning: large) which perpetuated a “cultural fiction” in which black women were sexually accessible.³⁷ This is all a part of what C. Riley Snorton has referred to as “black genital exceptionalism.”³⁸ Dr. Harris’ dismissal of Ned’s penis, evident through his referral to Ned’s scrotum as the only one “male organ” he possesses, demonstrated a specific form of (pseudo)scientific racism. Not only did (pseudo)scientific discourse spread ideas of black women as sexual available, it also was imbued with notions of primitivism. At the time, hermaphroditism was seen as an early evolutionary form of humanity. The theory went that the more sexually dimorphic a species was, the more advanced they were.³⁹ Scientists and academics could maintain racist theories of black primitivism by associating the development of sexual

³⁵ Harris, 121-23.

³⁶ Somerville, 27.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Snorton, 20.

³⁹ Somerville, 29.

dimorphism with racialized bodies. This fed into white supremacist theories. Racial theories of sexual difference created outliers within the white race as it marked white hermaphrodites as random occurrences of “persistence” or “reversion”, rather than a commonplace occurrence.⁴⁰ It is vital to understand this with regard to the history of intersex people in America, otherwise we perpetuate archival violence and allow white narratives of intersex experience to eclipse other experiences.⁴¹

The racialized treatment of Ned is clear through a second case report in the same volume of *the American Journal of Medical Sciences*. Dr. William James Barry’s report on Lev Suydam, a slightly older white man in Connecticut, was absent of language of “monstrosity.” Dr. Barry also did not employ the term creature as Dr. Harris had done throughout his write-up. Instead, Dr. Barry focussed primarily on the facts of Suydam’s case. He was a young man in New England who desired to vote for the Whigs in Salisbury. When voting, he was challenged as to his status as a free man due to allegations he was “more a female than a male” and that he “partook” in activities of “both sexes.”⁴² Dr. Barry proceeded to state the facts of his examination of Lev. He then mentioned that he testified to Lev being a man, which allowed Lev to vote in the election. His chosen party, the Whigs, won by a single vote. The case became increasingly complicated when Dr. Barry discovered that Lev menstruated, however that is not relevant to the overall

⁴⁰ Patrick Geddes quoted in Somerville, 29.

⁴¹ Though of course American society othered intersex people, the stories which are most visible in the archive and in historiography are those of white ones. This is an act of archival violence. For more, see Marisa J. Fuentes, “Power and Historical Figuring: Rachael Pringle Polgreen’s Troubled Archive”, *Gender & History* 22 no. 3 (2010), 43.

⁴² Wm. James Barry, M.D., “In connection with the above very curious case...”, *A Case of Doubtful Sex*, Case Report (Ann Arbour: HathiTrust, 2008), From University of California, *The American Journal of Medical Sciences* ser. 2 vol. 14 (1847), 123-24; Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* 33, no. 2 (1993), 20.

comparison between the cases of Ned and Lev. There is clearly a difference between the writing on the two men, the former, Ned, being the subject of dehumanization and mythicization, whereas Lev's case was not reported on in the same manner.

In the nineteenth century, the body was seen as a legible text from which interpretations about the character of a person could be made.⁴³ Scholars derived theories about race and sex from these practices. To separate the two—to render the two as parallel to each other—limits the scope of understanding that we can have about these topics in that period. Sex and racialization were and are linked. Though diagnoses of monstrosity may become few and far between for white individuals, dehumanizing language and discourses of monstrosity still circulated in medical discourse when black individuals were the topic of the case study. Monstrosity may have moved to the periphery but doctors still kept it in their medical bag.

Medical Discourse During and After the Civil War

The medical sphere in the late nineteenth century moved away from discourses of monstrosity. Instead, doctors employed language of dehumanization, suspicion, and impossibility in most cases. The case write-ups discussed in the upcoming chapter feature individuals that were othered through both subtle and explicit linguistic choices. Rather than being dehumanized by referring to a monster, medical authorities rendered these individuals into case studies and passive subjects to be read. This was another form of dehumanization. Rather than being considered another species or “freaks”, doctors saw the following individuals as laboratory specimens.

⁴³ Somerville, 9.

In the first few months of the Civil War, in November 1861, doctors on the U.S. Ship Ohio in the Boston Harbour examined a young man for naval service. This young man was from Ireland and had been “following the sea” for the past decade.⁴⁴ Dr. Bragg, the assistant Surgeon for the U.S. Navy, soon realized during the process of his examination that this young man had a nonbinary genital make-up. As such, he wrote an outline of his examination and sent it in to the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* “[h]oping that [his] brief communication may be of interest to some of [their] readers.”⁴⁵ His report both sexualized and othered the man before him. The report rendered the young man inhuman with language like “specimen” and operates under an approach that render the man both male and female and yet also neither.

Dr. Bragg’s approach to describing the young Irish man is rather peculiar. His description of the unnamed man is rife with sexual imagery such as, “[h]is breasts are full, round, soft, and beautiful, with well-developed nipples and areolae, and identical with the breast of a virgin.”⁴⁶ Though this may make sense as he considered the young man female, historical context may complicate that logic. White women of the time were often subjected to a requirement of modesty during examinations. For example, doctors often had to act through mediators such as midwives if they wanted to touch women during examinations.⁴⁷ Anesthesia was used for white women in gynaecological settings or for women suspected to be hermaphrodites, to ease anxiety and maintain women’s modesty.⁴⁸ However, the doctor’s sexual gaze makes sense with the

⁴⁴ J.W. Bragg, *A Case of Hermaphroditism*, Case Report (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), From Boston Medical Journal, *Boston Medical Journal* 65 (1861-62), 349.

⁴⁵ “A Case of Hermaphroditism”, 350.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mak 97-98.

⁴⁸ Koch, 149.

understanding that Irish/Celtic people were not necessarily considered white at the time.⁴⁹ Race and racialized interpretations of bodies at the time were not solely derived from skin colours but also from phrenology, specifically Irish male skulls.⁵⁰ The mentioning of the young man's origins when he went to enlist demonstrates the visibility of his ethnicity. Paired with the doctor's sexualization of him, one can see how he was an other with regard to American society. The doctor was not examining him as a white male or even white female (though Dr. Bragg's report states that he concluded that this man was female), but rather as an Irish, ergo racialized, body. The anonymous man's heritage is also linked to Dr. Bragg's word choice.

Throughout the report, Dr. Bragg uses seemingly mutually exclusive language to refer to the young man. He begins his article in the *New England Journal* by stating that the man is a "perfect female", yet continually uses the pronouns "he" and "his" throughout. He never refers to the man as a man, but instead calls him an "individual" and a "specimen."⁵¹ The latter word is exceptionally dehumanizing and evokes comparison to a subject in a lab. The man's Irish background may have influenced Dr. Bragg's rhetorical decisions. There were consistent references to Irish femininity throughout scholarly literature in the nineteenth century.⁵² Even if Dr. Bragg declared the anonymous man's true sex to be female, there was precedent for some sexual ambiguity regarding Irish men. It is possible he employed contradictory language because of the racialization of Irish people at the time. As such, Dr. Bragg's employment of traditionally

⁴⁹ Zine Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus'," *Gender & Society* 15 no. 6 (2001), 824.

⁵⁰ "Which Bodies Matter?", 830.

⁵¹ Bragg, "A Case of Hermaphroditism," 349.

⁵² "Which Bodies Matter?", 831.

masculine pronouns can be seen as a way to further dehumanize the man he was examining. When he employed the language that the man was used to while also referring to him as a “female”, he linked Irish masculinity with femaleness as well as instilled readers, fellow doctors, with the sense that this individual was impossible and his sense of self was contradictory. Dr. Bragg’s language was dehumanizing in multiple ways. The juxtaposition of “female” and “he”, purposefully disconnected readers from viewing the man as a complete human.

Another visitor from the British Isles came to Boston about sixteen years later. Her name was Sarah Jane B., a thirty-two year English woman and weaver who arrived in America in July 1877. She soon entered the States Almshouse, as an inmate, where she met Dr. Lathrop of Tewksbury, Massachusetts. He published a report on her in the ninety-seventh volume of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*.⁵³ He too, like Dr. Bragg, used juxtaposing language to other Sarah Jane. However, unlike Dr. Bragg, he employed masculine pronouns which Sarah Jane did not use. His medical authority prevailed throughout his article. Though he referred to her as a patient, his language and actions demonstrate how he, like Dr. Bragg, treated her as either suspect or specimen.

Dr. Lathrop introduced Sarah Jane B. in his case-report in the following manner,

He entered the institution in a women’s dress, and gave the name of Sarah Jane B. [...]

Suspicion was at once directed to the sex by the voice and general appearance. He also, almost immediately, requested that facilities for shaving the beard might be provided.⁵⁴

⁵³ W. H. Lathrop, M.D., *Hypospadias Feining Hermaphroditism*, Case Report (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), From Boston Medical Journal, *Boston Medical Journal* 97 (1877), 577.

⁵⁴ Lathrop, 577.

The above quote contains language that would immediately flag readers that something about was “wrong” about Sarah Jane B. The employment of “women’s dress” also gives the sense that this was an article of clothing Sarah Jane B. should not have been wearing. By contrasting “women’s dress” with “he”, Dr. Lathrop made Sarah Jane sound like a cross-dresser, which was a crime at the time. It also makes Sarah Jane sound like she was deliberately misleading people and that she was willfully disregarding what Dr. Lathrop decided was her “true sex.” Sarah Jane later tells the doctor that various doctors examined her as a child and told her parents to “dress her in girl’s clothes” (i.e. raise her as a girl.)⁵⁵ She lived her entire life with a self-conception as a girl, and later, as a woman. This was simply her life. Dr. Lathrop, however, did not agree.

After examining her and finding that she had two testicles and no uterus, Dr. Lathrop came to the conclusion that she was a male with “spurious hermaphroditism” due to “hypospadiac fissure of the urethra.”⁵⁶ Towards the end of the article he used “alleged” to refer to Sarah’s account of her past and why she had been unable to find work in the United States. Before summarizing the article, he attributed her “mental obliquity” to “ungratified lust” and her “lasciviousness.”⁵⁷ Criminality and degeneration was associated with sexuality at the time; authors used sexual deviancy as a tool of demonization.⁵⁸ Dr. Lathrop was suspicious of her and treated her as if she was withholding information or somehow deceiving him. This is in line with Reis’ supposition that, during the mid to late nineteenth century, doctors viewed those diagnosed

⁵⁵ Ibid., 578.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 578-79.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Skidmore, 142, 149.

with hermaphroditism as deceivers and questioned their morality.⁵⁹ According to Foucault, sex was, and perhaps is, the truth at the bottom of everything. In other words, to have doubtful sex was to have doubtful character.⁶⁰ To Dr. Lathrop, Sarah Jane's character was doubtful. As such, Sarah Jane could only exist as a deceiver or a fascinating case study.

Though the doctor did not respect or trust Sarah Jane, she was of great interest to him. He sent the case out to the Massachusetts General Hospital to share the details with other doctors and surgeons. Another doctor took plaster casts of her genitalia. They were soon on display in the Harvard Medical School. Sarah Jane B. shortly returned to England to the Board of State of Charities.⁶¹ Her legacy in America was a case study for many doctors and medical students and many people would know her genitals and their make-up without knowing her. By rendering her into a medical subject and case study, no more than her genitals, he dehumanized her. Someone becoming a mere representation is not uncommon in art or the archive, however, the casts of her genitals, what was then seen as the absolute truth of someone, and his language in the article were acts of violence against her.⁶² Sarah Jane B., unfortunately, was one of many people whom doctors dehumanized like this.

Medical discourse during and after the war was characterized by dehumanization and othering of intersex individuals in medical case studies. The case studies called into question their character. By dehumanizing intersex people and representing them as deceitful or impossible, doctors could ensure that the ubiquitous existence of so-called hermaphrodites did

⁵⁹ Reis, 30.

⁶⁰ Foucault, xi.

⁶¹ Lathrop, 578.

⁶² This is a paraphrase of Koch's quote about discourse as "violence we do to things". Koch, 18.

not destabilize cultural values and beliefs about race and sex. The language doctors used was not merely individual choice by medical professionals, but represented a conscious or unconscious bias to protect sex and race hierarchies. Discourses about intersex people employed a variety of dehumanization to do maintain hegemony.

Discourses in Newspapers in the late Nineteenth Century

Late into the nineteenth century, articles about “hermaphrodites” and “monsters” appear with more frequency. These newspaper articles and entries are important to gain a broader scope of discourse about intersex people in American history. The newspapers give us insight into what the public might have read or understood about intersex people. The writings in newspapers did not replicate medical discourse, however it contained many of the same elements. The articles and entries, mostly without bylines, exposed the public to discourses of monstrosity and mythicism, occasionally employing racialized rhetoric. They are also a relatively unexplored archival source in intersex history due to the recent nature of digitization and access of the archive.

As a newer field, intersex history has chiefly revolved around medical and legal texts, as historians tend to turn to the accessible. Though this practice gives us a scope of expert discourse, it limits our understanding of how popular culture and the public understood intersex people. Prioritizing expert discourse causes history to “disappear” and furthers the violence of the archive as the accessible archive eclipses that which we may not immediately consider.⁶³ The accessible or “visible” archives are a product of “white colonial patriarchal and capitalist

⁶³ Chauncey, 10; Fuentes, 39.

functions” which we reproduce when we overemphasize them in our work.⁶⁴ What is visible or invisible derived from colonial (il)logic which prioritized the preservation and accessibility of some sources over others. To prevent further unnecessary reproduction of that (il)logic, historians must incorporate newspapers and other marginalized sources. Through this incorporation, historians can also gain further understanding of the depth of various histories. There are worlds to uncover here.

Till Death Do Us Part

In the American midwest, two entries appeared in the *Inter Ocean* (Chicago) and *St. Paul's Daily News* newspapers about couples where one of the partners was, allegedly, intersex. The first article, from 1876, discussed a local woman who wanted to earn money by putting her husband on display. The second, published in 1891, revolved around a Professor from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who the police wanted for bigamy after he left his wife who he implied duped him into marriage at a young age. Both articles either imply or include dehumanizing rhetoric.

An anonymous woman in Chicago attempted to make a living by displaying her husband out of their apartment in the winter of 1876. She sent in an application to make money from the exhibition to the comptroller of the city, a Mr. Hayes, who referred her to the mayor. The Chicago *Inter Ocean* caught wind of this matter during the process of her appeal to the mayor. The writer of the entry in the “City Hall” section of the newspaper referred to her as a “woman who has not a very high idea of decency” and to her husband as a “one of those *lusus naturae*

⁶⁴ Fuentes, 43.

called a hermaphrodite”.⁶⁵ The writer hoped that the mayor would reject this woman’s appeal to the mayor, “for the sake of humanity and decency.”⁶⁶ The whole situation was wildly inappropriate in his perspective as it offended sensibilities derived from the existing sex and race hierarchies as well as offered public access to a person’s body.

The writer’s opinions of both the woman and her husband were made very clear. Not only was the husband victim of his judgement, but the wife was as well. Though I personally find the wife’s actions exploitative, I have no knowledge of any of the personal details. She was however, suspect due to her association with her husband. What is paramount here is the author’s reference to the husband as “*lusus naturae*” or “freak of nature.”⁶⁷ Though doctors by that time ceased explicitly referring to hermaphrodites as monsters, the language was alive and well in newspapers. In an 1885 article from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, another anonymous author refers to the birth of a baby, pronounced a hermaphrodite at birth by a physician, as a “strange freak of nature.”⁶⁸ The legacy of hermaphrodites as monsters or, more specifically, “freaks”, continued past the supposed end in medical discourse. Newspapers maintained that legacy while also staying concurrent with the contemporary flavour of discourse in the medical sphere, which painted hermaphrodites as deceivers.

Carrie, a Canadian, married her American husband, Professor A. E. Foster, when he was sixteen years old. Years later, he left her and proceeded to marry two other women. The

⁶⁵ *Inter Ocean*, “City Hall,” Feb. 24, 1876, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

⁶⁶ “City Hall.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, “Strange Freak of Nature,” Aug. 09, 1885, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

authorities of Kentucky found this out and placed a warrant for his arrest under the charge of bigamy. Though his second wife, Florence, desired his arrest, his third wife, Minnie, of Kentucky, was faithfully devoted to him. It was her father who reported to the authorities that his daughter's lover's first wife was a hermaphrodite. This was in effort to secure Dr. Foster's arrest. The complicated case finished with a note that a judge was hearing arguments from the professor on receiving a writ of habeas corpus so that officers from Kentucky could not take him to the state to be arrested.⁶⁹

The mention of Carrie in the article is brief. The author mentions she "was" a hermaphrodite and that the professor "married it" when he was sixteen years old.⁷⁰ The use of "it", is subtle enough to slip by a reader skimming the passage. In the sources I looked at, it was the first time I had seen an adult being referred to as an "it". The use of "it" is one of the most pointed ways to dehumanize a person. Though the author's discussion of Carrie was not exhaustive, the brief statement ensured that readers did not, for a moment, consider her as anything but a creature. This, paired with the mentioning of Professor Foster's age at the time of marriage, presented her as someone who had deceived a naive young man. She was not only a creature, but a trickster as well, one who had to dupe someone to be in a relationship with her. Like others in medical literature, such as Sarah Jane B., authors associated her with deceit. Carrie's body was not only at fault but also her character.

⁶⁹ *St. Paul's Daily News*, "They're After Him," Apr. 11, 1891, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

⁷⁰ "They're After Him."

Crossing Borders

Down south, in San Antonio, Texas, a young individual was arrested for cross-dressing in Texas. An article about the case was published in the *San Antonio Express* and then copied and included in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1876. The article was entitled, “A Colored Man Dresses in Women's Clothes and Goes Foraging through Texas.” The detained person’s name was George Taylor and they went by the name of “Hermaphrodite Dick.” The author described them as a as an “ugly”, “masculine” “creature.” The author also accused them of luring men to have sex with them in disguise in both Houston and Dallas. They were supposedly known across the South to be a “bad and dangerous person.” Throughout the article the author used the pronouns “she” and “her” in quotes, not only to mock Taylor’s womanhood but also to cast suspicion on their character. They were doubly marked as both a monster (“creature”) and a deceiver.⁷¹

The characterization of Taylor can be attributed to a variety of aspects. They were a black person in the South just after the Civil War. In the late nineteenth century, cross-dressing became illegal and highly policed as it was associated with newness and sex work.⁷² As a black person read as a man, Taylor’s ability to cross gender lines threatened the stability of the gendered colour line. The author painted them as a sexual coercer and possible rapist in the article. That language capitalized on the fear of the mythical black rapist. This language also relied on the unambiguous portrayal of Taylor as a man. As Hannah Rosen discussed in her own writing on the case of a black person thought to be a hermaphrodite, there is power in removing ambiguity

⁷¹ *The San Antonio Express in St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, “A Colored Man Dresses in Women's Clothes and Goes Foraging through Texas,” Sep. 29, 1876, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

⁷² Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of the North Carolina Press, 2009) 236.

when discussing these cases. This power allowed those constructing the narratives to cast suspicion and mistrust on the individual of “doubtful sex.”⁷³ The newspaper article’s author emphasized the darkness of Taylor’s skin, their wide jaw and large lips (“sufficient to do a dozen men”). By constructing a racialized caricature of Taylor, in addition to earlier descriptions of them as “infamously ugly”, they evoked readers antiblackness and further stirred reactionary feelings within the audience. The last image of Taylor would be one shaped by the dehumanizing and antiblack language of the author.⁷⁴

Further out on the coast, in Galveston, Texas, Florida-born forty-year-old Titie Young, also known as Titie Lucy, passed away with no known cause in 1887. The author begins the article by, similarly to Taylor, placing quotes around the word “she.” The author did not mention the fact that Titie was thought to be a hermaphrodite among the townspeople until later in the article. However, the author’s choice of punctuation gave readers a clue that there was something “wrong” with the deceased. After the author presented the details of the death, the author further focussed on how Titie was “generally regarded” as a hermaphrodite among the townspeople. They continued to construct suspicion around Titie’s choice of dress and framed it as if people were misled by a cross-dressing man. The mere virtue of having doubtful sex was grounds for suspicion.⁷⁵

The author attributed any use of “she” to reference to Titie as a result of people being misled by her dress. The author said that she “assumed” dress to “create the impression that [her

⁷³ Rosen, 238-39.

⁷⁴ “A Colored Man Dresses in Women's Clothes and Goes Foraging through Texas.”

⁷⁵ *The Galveston Daily News*, “A Rather Queer Case,” Feb. 06, 1887, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

clothes] clothed a women.”⁷⁶ The author did not report any specific actions of Titie’s that might have caused suspicion or painted her as nefarious, rather, they extrapolated to call her character into question. After the physicians involved discussed the details of her death at an inquest, they examined her body. A physician involved then pronounced that she was an “imperfectly developed man.”⁷⁷ This diagnosis as a black male, similar to Taylor, evoked the white fear of cross-dressing black men. The author’s questioning of Titie’s character validated that fear. Titie Young moved from recently deceased in the article to a potential, and now neutralized, threat. The author, like many, also thought that Titie was of a “singular” nature, and others like her would not appear.⁷⁸

Mythical Language

A small city, Central, in Colorado reported on a case of a rather notable nature in winter of 1890. One of their past residents, Annie Gibbons, who had left Central for the city of Leadville in the mountains, was the victim of attempted murder. Annie had lived in Leadville for the past few years and occupied her time as a “female detective.” After a fight, “her solid man” attacked Annie with an axe. A nearby woman and her daughter who happened upon her bloody body thought she was dead. However, this attempted murder was not the chief concern of the article in the Colorado paper. Rather the murder gave visibility to the fact that Annie was “reported to be one of those mythical creatures—hermaphrodites.” The author validated that accusation by mentioning her “coarse” voice” and “heavy” features. They referred to her as a

⁷⁶ “A Queer Case.”

⁷⁷ Ibid. This language draws on the concept of women as “imperfectly development men” from the one-sex model. Laquer, 28.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

“terrifying” and “confusing” creature. This is also in part due to her sexuality, as Annie was with a woman romantically before she partnered with her “solid man”, who she was living with at the time. In this article, the conjoining of discourses of mythicism and monstrosity appear.⁷⁹

Like the author of the article on Titie Young, this author seeded doubt in readers by referring to Annie, before any details of the case or her person were mentioned, as “she, or he, or it.” They also similarly presented Annie as a singular and improbable individual. They referred to Annie as a “mythical creature”, referring to the origins of the term hermaphrodite, from Greek myth. As if this was not perplexing enough for readers, the author also mentioned how Annie had previously been with a woman with whom she “would fight like a tiger” if her “mistress” was seen talking to any men. Her transition from being with a woman to being with a man, supposedly terrified and confused Leadville neighbours.⁸⁰ According to Christina Matta, hermaphrodites with ambiguous sexualities were especially troubling. Some authorities prioritized ensuring heterosexuality over gonads when pronouncing one’s “true sex.” When an individual had an ambiguous or “deviant” sexuality, the sexuality problematized reassignment.⁸¹ Ambiguity was antithetical to the bordered and divided nature of the nineteenth century, for people like Annie Gibbons, further ambiguity prevented authorities from asserting their power and retrofitting them into the societal norms. Annie Gibbons was doubly ambiguous, not only was she a “hermaphrodite”, but a “psychic hermaphrodite” as well. This also rendered her doubly impossible and ever more troubling. Despite Gibbons being a victim of domestic

⁷⁹ *The Daily Register-Call*, “Annie Gibbons,” Dec. 01, 1880, From Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

⁸⁰ “Annie Gibbons.”

⁸¹ Christina Matta, “Ambiguous Bodies and Deviant Sexualities: hermaphrodites, homosexuality, and surgery in the United States, 1850-1904,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 48 no. 1 (2005), 76.

violence, the author finishes the discussion of her case by saying that no one “cares” to find out the details of the case or “who she is now.”⁸² Her being a so-called mythical creature, ensured that others wanted her existence would be minimized. A crime like attempted murder was, allegedly, dismissed because of her ambiguity. One can see the parallels between this case and modern ones, where violence against queer, trans, and intersex people is minimized, under-reported, and wilfully ignored. However, the author and townspeople of Leadville were not the only ones complicit in violence against intersex people in 19th century America.

Conclusion

The people in the above articles and reports were victims of a variety of violence. From the violence of medical experimentation, to the violence of the archive, to police violence, and interpartner violence. Authorities and authors dehumanized and othered them. Discourse as discontinuous production of language created variations in the ways people were discussed, but this discourse was also shaped by racialization, scientific beliefs, and a century of structures and borders. Violence was a current throughout the discourse.

Discourse can be understood as the violence we do to things.⁸³ The violence done onto intersex (or suspected intersex) individuals in nineteenth century America appears through the language used by doctors and reporters. There are discursive differences based on time and race. These differences render characterizing one period as chiefly an example of one form of linguistic dehumanization over another incorrect. The variations that appear with regard to racialization reveal a greater (il)logic behind authors’ discursive decisions.

⁸² “Annie Gibbons.”

⁸³ Koch, 18.

My first chapter looked at the waning use of monstrosity in medical reports with regard to white people in nineteenth century America. Where white people like the late Lady Dr. Fife met or Lev Suydam escaped a discourse of monstrosity, individuals like Ned did not. My second chapter demonstrated how medical journals continued to other intersex people through dehumanizing language and actions. My final and third chapter introduced newspaper discourse which greatly differed from medical discourse. Similar to medical journals, this more archaic form of discourse was a form social management; however, the lack of medical standards introduced greater variation within the discourse. The scale of newspapers as well as their public nature affected reporting in considerable ways.

Discursive properties rely on a number of elements including scale, audience, subject and author. The chief commonality within the various discourses is the continuing trend of dehumanization and othering. This is a form of linguistic violence against intersex people and their embodiment. Violence is used as a form of social management to maintain and stabilize categories. It is a reaction which emerges from fear. Fear of the unknown and fear of what is known and challenging to hegemonic categories.

This history is important to establish a lineage of nonbinary sex and create an understanding that there is an intersex past, one that extends beyond the Age of the Gonads. This history is important as it makes us face the violence against intersex people within our society. As Fausto-Sterling says, “[w]e protest the practices of genital mutilation in other cultures but tolerate them at home.”⁸⁴ The history of intersex people is a history of violence, as mentioned before. When we do not recognize it we become complicit in its violence.

⁸⁴ This is referring the practice of surgery on intersex people without their consent. Fausto-Sterling, 79.

We must continue to write this history and understand the violence of the past to prevent and undo the violence of the future. My project is a piece within a new and growing field of intersex history. As it develops, may there be a movement away from the “toleration” of violence towards intersex people. “Nature delights in diversity”, we should as well.⁸⁵

Word Count: 8,555

⁸⁵ Lola Cola quoted in Director: Kate Davis, *Southern Comfort* (2001, New York: HBO Documentary, 2001), Video Stream.

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