

Fat politics as a constituent of intersecting intimacies

Aphramor, L. & Dark, K.

Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Aphramor, L & Dark, K 2022, 'Fat politics as a constituent of intersecting intimacies', Fat Studies Journal, vol. (In-press), pp. (In-press).

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2022.2045789>

DOI 10.1080/21604851.2022.2045789

ISSN 2160-4851

ESSN 2160-486X

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.



Fat Studies

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ufts20>

Fat politics as a constituent of intersecting intimacies

Kimberly Dark & Lucy Aphramor

To cite this article: Kimberly Dark & Lucy Aphramor (2022): Fat politics as a constituent of intersecting intimacies, *Fat Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/21604851.2022.2045789](https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2022.2045789)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2022.2045789>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 25 Mar 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 413



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Fat politics as a constituent of intersecting intimacies

Kimberly Dark and Lucy Aphramor

ABSTRACT

In this paper we explore the ways in which fat politics shapes (our) fat-thin intimacies as friends, colleagues and occasional lovers. We are queer writers who are actively engaged in fat politics; one of us is fat and the other is thin. We are both poets, scholars, and performers, privileged by whiteness, and contingently read as non-disabled. This paper takes the form of alternating reflections where we explore the nuances of our thoughts and feelings about friendship, romantic involvement, and engagement in learning communities. Specifically, we surface the ways that the various realms of our relationship are co-constituted by fatness, gender, and trauma histories. While we have both had fat and thin lovers before, Kimberly is the first fat, fat-affirming lover Lucy had, and Lucy is the first thin lover Kimberly had who was pre-educated and pre-experienced regarding fat stigma, fat shame, and social bias. We investigate what this shared political grounding made possible through the trust and vulnerability thus enabled. We also consider the erotic as an influence on scholarship which leads to praxis.

KEYWORDS

Eros; kinship; liberatory praxis; queerness; madness

Part one: Attractions

Kimberly takes on . . .

1.

I was pleased that I'd be meeting a new colleague – one who also uses creative writing and live performance to forward our mutual interests, including body sovereignty, social justice, and specifically, fat studies.

As soon as I saw her walk into the venue, my first thought was, “well, a woman in a suit. Game on.”

Perhaps that's unflattering to admit that my femme dyke identity took the lead, but it's the truth. Additionally, “woman in a suit” could have been a wrong assessment. We hadn't yet met.

I assumed gender. I assumed that clothing and gender presentation would mean something to me. I might be romantically attracted, rather than scholastically cordial, intellectually interested, artistically aroused . . . I might be up for a more corporeal adventure. Who knows? I certainly didn't. Game on:

(A) Our conversations were thrilling.

CONTACT Kimberly Dark  kimberly@kimberlydark.com  RR2, Box 4570, Paho, HI 96778

© 2022 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

- (B) She'd booked a room at the hotel where I was staying for this event that was outside of our home cities. She asked ahead and booked at my hotel intentionally.
- (C) A week later, I went to visit her home and found her inept at taking the traditional male role in flirtation. No matter. We embarked upon a variety of discussions regarding gender, sexuality, corporeality. These served as exploration and also flirtation. Entertainment on various levels. No matter her/their ineptitude at making a move. Her/their gender was slippery. I finagled a kiss; we consented a canoodle.
- (D) Three months later, on a longer visit to my home, friendship and intellectual connection firmly established, we became lovers for the first time. Not the last time. Definitely not full time.

2.

Usually, when I ask, "so, am I the fattest person you've ever been sexual with?" The answer is yes. It was this time as well. I only realized later that when I ask this question, the positive answer has always meant that I'm the *only* fat person my lover has experienced. This time, that wasn't the case. She'd been with other fat lovers and already had contributed to and researched perspectives on fatness in culture, the burden of stigma, and the withholding of healthcare. Curious. What might this make of my interactions with her/them? Our research and learning should influence us at the practical level – not just politically, but personally. I think it should. If the personal is political, then the reverse is true, but perhaps we don't usually consider feeling the texture of a lover's politics in the sex itself.

The first thing I noticed was that I talked more openly about challenges I was experiencing with health care professionals. I am absolutely certain that I never would've discussed my damnably fat-hating doctor with a new lover had we not already established her ability to listen with a baseline knowledge and outrage at bias against fat bodies in healthcare. I shared my body with her/ them sexually in powerful ways. I discussed my body's dismissal in medical settings in vulnerable ways.

The effortless audacity of this was definitive.

3.

"Am I the fattest person . . ."

This is an important question that I've become accustomed to asking at the outset of a new dalliance. I've been fat my whole life, but as I first became sexually active in my teens, and then through my twenties, I didn't ask. At first, I couldn't talk about my own fatness. But then, it didn't seem like I should. As I have previously discussed, "I've been "the first" for quite a few lovers. They're thin and I'm fat, and that's new to them. When I was younger, we didn't talk about it. It's a taboo topic in modern culture. Fat is

the antithesis of hot, of smart. Okay, fat can be funny, but that's not sexy. We don't go there. Besides, one tries to be gentle with a new lover's feelings, so I always wonder, when is it appropriate for me to come out as fat?" (Dark 2019, 68).

See, if I didn't "come out as fat," they might not notice that fat is a social problem (Sedgewick 1994). My discussion renegotiates my "representational contract" with the world. Thin people in particular believe that fat is a personal problem that should be managed by losing weight. They've never experienced not fitting into their physical surroundings. They don't consider the width of chairs in the restaurant, on the airplane, in the classroom, or in the conference room. They don't consider the derision a fat person might feel in public – from strangers, or colleagues, or bosses, or teachers, or landlords, or doctors. Or. Or. Or.

Even our closest friends can behave as though these struggles are personal, not social.

"Why mess it up by talking about something that makes people uncomfortable? Making someone overtly uncomfortable is not the road to mutual understanding. And that's really what I want – a lover who understands and respects my experiences. I want to be honored as both fat and beautiful, for instance, much as W. E. B. Du Bois described wanting to be honored as both African and American as a form of 'double consciousness.' (Du Bois, 1903) There's dissonance in knowing that each of one's identities has something important to offer to one's community and to oneself, but one or more of these identities are rejected or derided. In a romantic relationship, I want to be known." (Dark 2019, 73)

Lovers are not/like friends. Stigma travels.

"This is what we need to talk about: What does it mean to live with oppression? What does it mean to fetishize thinness (to be so attached to a certain attribute that without it no turn-on can occur)? What does it mean that we allow privilege and oppression to occur in our culture and to let it remain so profoundly invisible that we'll even collude with one another to reject reality?" (Dark 2019, 75)

4.

Twice, I've had lovers who prefer fatter women. They find smaller women attractive sometimes, but they prefer larger, rounder, softer bodies. It's a counter-cultural preference that is often relegated to the realm of fetish. Sexual fetish, however, implies that a person cannot be turned on in the absence of the fetishized object, trait, or behavior. Ironically, thinness is far more often fetishized than is fatness. I've never been with a lover who experiences my body as a fetish (that I'm aware of). I'd find that unsavory and incongruent with my own desires.

I wish to be seen as beautiful. I wish for lovers and close companions to experience me as interesting and intelligent. I want the thrill of our differences and the comfort of our similarities. That's true for everyone with whom I interact. But back to lovers.

I tend to be attracted to those who are assigned female at birth and yet live non-feminine lives. Some embrace masculine traits and identities, some become men. Some reinvent entirely. Of course, my lovers need to be attracted to a femme-dyke identity. They need to enjoy my fat body. I've had a few long-term relationships in my life, lasting years, but now, at 53, I realize that I have quite an interesting research sample from which to conduct this sort of autoethnographic dialogue about lovers and friends with my colleague – and sometimes lover – Lucy Aphramor.

Lucy calls up . . .

1.

Yes. I remember it like this too.

“I felt the 9am train was an untimely catch in the act of us reaching a reliable conclusion on the good-ideanness, or otherwise, of whatever it was that we'd just done between us. Especially when we'd only just met for a few hours before this, begun to connect through the breaking of stories in the cold night we drank in after the show when our barbed timelines brought us to places immense with unsaids and you were the first person I'd heard to fit damage into a metaphor that held onto its wholeness without needing to nod at pejorative I could go on suffice it to say that I too, am keen on the understanding of not letting “anything weird” imperil the playful or fix the ambivalences or pit itself against the heartwooded core for however long of whatever it is that's begun”

The fact that, as colleagues, our work overlaps in fat studies is important. I was educated as a dietitian, and dietetics normalizes fat phobia and body shame. The hallmarks of dietetics can be plotted to the hallmarks of white supremacy (Jones and Okun 2001). This means purity is revered too. We are explicitly warned off and implicitly discouraged from breaking the mold of coloniality by dilly-dallying with anything that has not been validated by positivism. It's not a promising forum for building liberatory knowledge or experiencing meaningful interconnections. I am glad for fat studies and critical dietetics as spaces to publish work that seeks to reject the terms of white supremacy. Of course, it's still complicated. White supremacy shapes knowledge creation in critical communities too. I've heard from people in both fat studies and critical dietetics who felt unable to support my work publicly for fear of consequences.

The fact that my romantic ineptness is part of the story rather than being more conventionally excised relays something of what can be known differently in and through lover-critical colleague scholarship.

2.

I am late to becoming body. Later, anyway, than the trajectory laid down for the non- traumatized. Late moving from unknowing to questioning to knowing. Exploring affinity, finding, identifying, naming and Identifying. I let go again and again. Unbelonging from one version of who (I thought) I was – personally, professionally, politically, sexually, spiritually, etc. – not to another Truer version, but into the space for uncovering. It takes as long as it takes. Its messiness and clarities and sense of fit are contained within this same rubric of measurement. And then, I can name the current version. The intellect is pretty swift, the visceral knitting of the sense of entitlement that’s central to claiming takes longer.

The storytelling on stage let me know she could be trusted with woundedness.

I think we traveled fast to deep connection – i.e., the intimately emotional, the excruciatingly vulnerable story beneath the readily repeated story, the parlay of intellectual intricacies that had/s us skirting with/flirting – for several reasons and feelings. One, if we have truly personally explored our attitudes to fatness, then we have explored shame, fat shame, and other body shame. All ill manners of shame. This expands what it is possible to know. Virginia Woolf said “If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people” (Woolf 2013, 3151). Building on this, I learnt that once I was no longer ashamed of myself, I showed up differently, and this meant I could know things it had previously been impossible to know. The body locked down in shame cannot receive everything it is offered. In the literal carnal use of the word, I couldn’t make sense of things until I could.

3.

The thing that makes the difference in scholarship and practice among educated peers doesn’t boil down to innate cleverness; instead, it’s about what we’ve committed to (not) risk and (not) know, the choice we make around the cost of un/belonging.

I want friend-colleague connection because I want to be in learning spaces where “mistake” and “perfection” are redundant concepts. I want us to support each other in the threading together, the trying out, the sifting through. To “seek to know one another in the things which are eternal’ and ‘bear the burden of one another’s failings” (Quakers 2013, no. 18).

Risk permits a deeper kind of relational awareness: it gatekeeps the portal into another realm of knowing.

Learning is always a letting go. Healing and learning are bedmates.

Also, there is something innately erotic about being moved by live performance, don’t you find? The audacity of the artist perhaps? Relying on her audience’s submission to a co- constituted energy field that she choreographs, the rippling through, the promise of witness, risking resonance.

Game On.

Part two: Discussions

Lucy holds on . . .

1.

“First we must feel/ Even though there is fissure rupture fracture/ That was a git of a year and a bit macabre sequined shrapnel-spangled with my gartered guts in it and beautiful too, in fact the best yet, for I was party to love and witnessed hard which stays feeling true despite seeing red/ That was a bloody memorable year the year of buttons and blades and breasts” (Aphramor 2018,)

When I turned fifty, I realized that I had believed that by the time I was fifty I’d be cured. Fixed.

Over it all. Through everything. But I wasn’t.

I mean it was sort of tongue in cheek, and also, I believed it.

I had never organized a birthday party for myself, but I did for my fiftieth. I don’t want to sound melodramatic, but for a long stretch of my life, I never thought I’d make it.

The button jar gets emptied and sorted into categories when I’m dissociating. This gets the higher-executive brain back in flow because sorting requires us to think logically.

The breasts have been handled to some extent already.

Ah yes, the blades.

There have been several ruptures, chosen breaks between the old and the unknown. Often, these come with an unraveling, sometimes quite spectacularly.

I finally understood that learning is always a letting go.

Learn On.

Healing and learning – I mean real, deep, spiritually-adjusting learning, are co-constituted. I am more able to contribute to useful scholarship when I am honest with myself and when my brain is not choking on shame.

Share On.

2.

The public health system that I know runs on neoliberal norms and values and is designed to perpetuate itself by ensuring people in the system adhere to these norms. Kindnesses and early-on or superficial attempts to be trauma-informed or “inclusive” are no match for this systemic toxicity. They’re not intended to be.

Aside from connection and hope, what my story offers colleagues with experience of self-harm is an expanded script. I don’t appear to be damaged and I’m articulate, and this synergistically interacts with thin, white, class privilege to trouble the usual typecasting.

“Break a stereotype,” as Kimberly says. I couldn’t know how she would respond to the telling, but I was confident she wouldn’t pity me or be shocked or try and fix me. That she wouldn’t make me into a case study or triumph. That she’d meet me there, same as before. And I was right: Respect. Or honorable relationship, as Adrienne Rich says:

“It isn’t that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you. It means that most of the time I am eager, longing for the possibility of telling you. That these possibilities may seem frightening, but not destructive to me. That I feel strong enough to hear your tentative and groping words. That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.” (Rich 1995)

3.

As a system of thought and practice built along the storylines of neoliberalism, the public health system is not designed to accommodate the embodied realities of love, suffering, and oppression. In its discourse, literature, and service provision, and hence also in collegial conversations, the wounded practitioner is inevitably gas-lit. It’s hard to speak both of and from the traumatized self in any place that denies your existence. There are many ways in which the public health system isn’t trauma-safe. It’s hard to speak our wholeness into being against the ableism that presumes we are all non-disabled unless we have had the good manners to out ourselves. Queerness is received as an aberration. Showing up as genderqueer is taken as a personal affront by people protecting the canonical authority of straightness. You have to be feeling well-resourced to hold the emotional fizz-bomb lit as you insist on difference. If we have been coached to respect Eurocentric norms, respect for right relationship can be in short supply. It didn’t occur to me that writing about kinship would reconnect me with these feelings of isolation and alienation. It’s been lonely.

A third professional space, that of spoken word performance, has offered a place for healing not found in health care through respectful witness and connection. Actually, it’s been fucking incredible. I can know so much more deeply when I show up.

Heal on.

When I stayed with Kimberly in September, I could barely say the term self-harm, at least in relation to myself. Much easier to talk about when I didn’t let on that I had skin in the game- that-isn’t-a-game. I’ve worked in mental health advocacy and have been cochair of a large council of disabled people. I’ve spoken of trauma in performance before. I haven’t built a life to hide disability, but stereotypes of ableism mean I pass unless I decide not to. I get to know what colleagues think of People Like Me. I am eavesdropping, because people don’t talk like this when they think the Other is in the room. The comments are usually clueless, not malicious. But

cluelessness perpetuates stigma, stereotype, pain, and suffering, and so although clueless might not be callous, it is careless, and it is dangerous and therefore ultimately unkind. I hear what people think of those of us with lived experience of Madness and I am constantly reminded of my privileges.

When I visited Kimberly in September, I could barely say the term self-harm, and next thing you know, I'm writing a show starring self-harm that I intend to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival the following August, which means I need to be ready for rehearsals from April.

Revelation.

"*Siri, where can I buy a dildo in Hilo?*" has such a great rhythm it's surprising it didn't make it into the poem.

How do we know? Cognitively, erotically, viscerally, verbally, poetically, indeterminately, certainly, rarely, spiritually, in the tears we shed, in the pain that screams us, in our injury and pleasures in our heartache and broken sleep in our bones.

Not-knowing can be a state that we maintain deliberately, and it can be a result of a more mundane unintentional double-think in the storylines we live by.

It was months until I realized that it was my system that was quieted in rural Hawaii. I'd put my marked lack of jumpiness down to external quiet, but actually the canopy was busy with sound. So, this is what safe feels like: a startling revelation.

Kimberly holds forth . . .

This is my job: I tell relatable stories. I theorize connections and model change. We become what we practice. I expound and I listen, hopefully in equal amounts. I have held so many silences, so many softly spoken truths, so many sobs and stillnesses.

It's different with a lover. It's not work, though the skills still apply. The time we spend together in the sheets, in the quiet acceptance of ecstasy. This prompts revelations.

I've always hated it when people say that my work is "confessional." It's a word meant to diminish, isn't it? It's meant to frame a piece of art or scholarship as self-indulgent, even if well-crafted. It's meant to say that I need the telling more than the audience needs to receive it, because there is something shameful in the stories I tell. They are confessions, like to a priest. Or to a judge. I want them off my chest.

What's on my chest is comfort, clarity, communion. It is not crime or shame.

The better word also has religious connotations. Revelation. On stage and in print I am revealing things that may not have previously been seen, particularly in their connections. We are creating culture and responding to it and offering others meaning in how we hold ourselves, breathe, tell, and conceal. It's easier to see acceptance on some people than it is on others. I am a practiced vessel. It's also possible, I'm sure, to fear or dismiss me, to withhold words and wonder why I've not heard.

I practice listening in different ways.

In bed. I am not as inhibited in this venue, not as constructed for public viewing. Or perhaps I am simply performatively oriented for private viewing. There is nothing simple about this. I bring all of me into touch. I bring scholarship and critical thinking; I bring sorrow and patience and friendship. I bring the practice of justice and listening.

Femme-dyke sexual identity has not been adequately examined. Here is not the place for a full examination, but I want to plant that banner of partiality and offer a few words, since we can't ignore gender as we traverse the terrain of fat studies. In times when doctors tell trans men to lose weight before they can receive gender confirmation surgeries, our fat bodies are gendered. In fashion, when hourglass shapes are offered as acceptably curvy, our fat bodies are gendered. In every corporeal sense, we are navigating definitions of gender, whether we choose to abandon the cultural scripts we were handed at birth or read from them diligently in many accents. Fat and gender are kin.

Joan Nestle (now in her 80th year) spoke recently about her work and life and I felt seen.

When Cheryl Clarke asked her, "Does femme hunger drive your passion for lesbian history?" She said, "Femme hunger has driven or inspired almost everything I do, and I want to spend a moment on the word penetration because that's not a word lesbians are supposed to talk about. For me, as a femme, the act of penetration is both physically so reaching into deep places – but the more I live, that opening up, the spreading of the legs, the taking in, has become almost the esthetic of my work and life" (Nestle 2020).

I am accustomed to, but even more, I enjoy the "taking in" that comes with being fucked or receiving and responding to a keen interlocutor. I enjoy the pull-back as well as the thrust that leads to depth revealed. Not everyone can do that, nor does everyone want to.

Of course, she spoke to me of cutting and concealing when in my bed. And then in daylight, sitting upright, too. This is where I spoke of medical trauma, of fatness, anger, respect denied. The main thing that her politics and practices offered me was witness-without-pity and co-outrage. We practiced respecting each other and ourselves as human beings, thinking, caring, healing while on a multi-faceted corporeal adventure.

Part three: Politics

Lucy comes about . . .

Before we can set knowing to words, there is a space where we know and then we don't know through our experience of non-verbalized tantalizing and/or terrifying fleeting feelings. There are some things we can only know when we are in a particular state. So knowing requires preparation. We need to get ready, to prepare our bodies to be receptive, to let go of whatever tethers us to not-knowing.

There was a span of several years when I let myself believe that I was done with self-harm. It turned out I wasn't. Trying to outwit the impulse is tiring, tedious, debilitating, distressing. Shame as lingering affect and reflex sensation courses through me. Despite this, I would choose to be struggling like this rather than living in the shut-down that let me believe I was done with it. In shut-down, I lose access to bodyhood as a source of knowledge, which stymies emotional processing and skews my moral compass. I want what imbricated knowing offers, even if it means living with the scream.

UK dietetics upholds compulsory cis-heterosexuality, and the first few times I went to fat studies events I was struck by the comfort of being in a queer-safe space. It makes a difference that we can talk about queerness as colleagues/friends/lovers. (I know of four queer dietitians in the UK; I don't know them, I know *of* them.) The friends/lovers threshold means we get to follow queerness as it meanders into our current circumstances, poetry, and explorations

Biologists Maturana and Varela (1998) say "Biology also shows us that we can expand our cognitive domain. This arises through a novel experience brought forth through reasoning, through the encounter with a stranger, or, more directly, through the expression of a biological interpersonal congruence that lets us *see* the other person and open up for [them] room for existence beside us. This act is called *love*, or, if we prefer a milder expression, the acceptance of the other person beside us in our daily living" (246). Put simply, we bring forth new knowing through love.

The same goes for wellbeing and living well together ("the commonswell"): as healthcare practitioners, we need to make the radical choice and train ourselves out from using coloniality as our reference point. Aaron Antonovsky (1987), an epidemiologist whose work with women survivors of the Holocaust who were thriving caused him to ask "what makes people well?" urges us to "move beyond post-Cartesian dualism and look to imagination, love, play, meaning, will, and the social structures that foster them." (9)

Meanwhile, even in critical spaces, whiteness sets the bar for discussions of power: Foucault is more likely to be invoked as an authority than Audre Lorde (1978) (think *Power of the Erotic and Uses of Anger*) or Walter Dignolo (Coloniality isn't over, it's all over (López-Calvo 2016)).

Kimberly takes in . . .

Have I told too much, dear reader? It may seem so, but only because my ways of knowing and building praxis include my sexuality, my erotic power, which Audre Lorde (1978) asked us not to forsake in *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*.

“The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos and power of our deepest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. Once having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognize its power in honor and self-respect, we can require no less of ourselves . . . The function of the erotic is to encourage excellence and to give us the strength to pursue it” (Lorde 1978, locator).

I didn’t know at first that I was queer because I wasn’t attracted to woman-like women. But when I first experienced attraction and “taking in” as Nestle referenced with a not-feminine woman, I knew the “chaos and power” of my erotic urge. (Lorde 1978, locator) My fat body was also an ecstatic body, a powerful body. I now require no less of myself than the self-respect that Lorde referenced. This is an important threshold for the fat body, and one that must be crossed in different ways as one crosses a national border, driving through checkpoints and showing credentials. I live in self-respect, but I must leave my home to buy food, to work, and to access forests and family in fat-hating culture. I know now that the crossing is so much more meaningful, and sometimes easier, with an erotic companion who understands the necessity of honoring the too-often maligned body. I honor my lovers’ culture-ravaged bodies as well.

Building knowledge for liberation comes from solidarity, from pity-free co-outrage, from practice across trauma and marginalized embodiment. For me, this is a foundation of transformative politics. As fat studies scholars, we give attention to bodies and connection. In the body, fat stores energy, nutrients. We are handling, with pleasure and curiosity, the stuff of transformation and sustenance.

This is how we find the tenderness and tenacity for praxis: as colleagues and lovers and friends. It is paramount that you, dear reader, also learn to love my body. You cannot see it here, and perhaps you don’t know me, but I am asking you to love my body. You know already that it is a fat body. It is marked favorably (though not consistently) by “white body supremacy” (Menakem 2017). It is more than half a century old and sometimes painful to inhabit. I invite you – I will allow you – to love my body in the service our collective liberation.

That is also how I love Lucy’s body and mind and experiences and yearning: in service of our collective liberation. I want to love each of you, dear readers. Each of you, ad infinitum.

Love is a practice of well-wishing, a practice of respect and a yearning toward justice. As Cornel West (2011) reminds us, “justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private”

(locator). Lucy and I have practiced a loving relationship in the pursuit of a just world, and this fact has nothing to do with romance. That has simply not been as interesting to us, nor will it likely be.

Lucy brings forth . . .

I am grateful that Kimberly and I share an ethics of care and repair. The “tenderness and tenacity of praxis” means we can robustly disagree, and moreover, mend. In order to overturn neoliberal regimes of governmentality, we need to theorize beyond the organizing principles of supremacy, out of the cage of reductionist science to embrace sensate selves in dynamic metabolic connection. And this requires love as a “concrete revolutionary practice that sponsors an affective politics, creating new political communities that open us to futures of democratic possibility” (Day 2016, 129).

*what was different was just how much I landed full strut unclothed a time-lagged curious
dyke firmly expecting good stuff to come from yielding to the following of a body late
claiming butchness with a lover who knew enough about how to fuck and feel and still
listening as if this connection could be trusted
as if shame had never percolated every single inner whorl of brain and clay and sex and
senses as if I had not so recently betrayed myself with silence and its management
when something akin to this wasn't congruent
colluded then for what I lacked and craved and wanted deceitfully ripe
as if you hadn't come in interested to meet me when I lifted up the hatch
showed you round the wreckage
naming the possessions that possess me that I never label real
uncloaked the throat-choke of my precious leaden treasures
as if the barbed body contained a verdant life force
and the lock that blocked its opening got broken in a good way
and what was found there was salty slick glimmering
and it had something of the ocean about it
something roiling eternal dangerous buoyant something to thirst for
cut. Reframe.
Here begins the story of my body. Uncut version. (Aphramor 2018)*

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Kimberly Dark teaches in Sociology at California State University, San Marcos; her work focuses on appearance, identity hierarchy, and how individuals create culture.

Lucy Aphramor is a radical dietitian and spoken word poet. They are Associate Professor of Gender, Power and the Right to Food in the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University, England.

References

- Antonovsky, Aaron. 1987. *Unraveling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Aphramor, Lucy. 2018. *Enough. Performance*. Directed by Tian Glasgow. Venue 40. Edinburgh Fringe, August 11th - 24th.
- Dark, K. (2019). *Coming Out Fat*. In *Fat, pretty, and soon to be old: A makeover for self and society*. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- Day, Keri. 2016. *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903) 1968. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. Chicago: A. G. McClurg.
- Jones, K., and T. Okun. 2001. "White Supremacy Culture: Characteristics." Accessed November 3, 2020. <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>.
- López-Calvo, I. 2016. "coloniality Is Not Over, It Is All Over: Interview with Dr. Walter Mignolo." *Transmodernity* 6 (1):175–84.
- Lorde, A. 1978. *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. USA: Out & Out Books.
- Menakem, R. 2017. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press.
- Quakers (Religious Society of Friends). 2013. *Book of Discipline*. 5th ed. Accessed November 30, 2020. <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/1/>.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1995. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Sedgwick, Eve. 1994. *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sinister Wisdom. 2020. "Joan Nestle Tribute." Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFyY5-brVHQ&feature=youtu.be>.
- West, C. 2011. *Justice Is What Love Looks like in Public*. Speech presented at Howard University.
- Woolf, V. 2013. *Delphi Complete Works of Virginia Woolf (Illustrated)*. UK: Delphi Classics.