Silvia Bonacchi (ed.)

Vulnerability

Real, Imagined, and Displayed Fragility in Language and Society

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In collaboration with Hanna Acke, Carsten Junker, Charlotta Seiler Brylla and Ingo H. Warnke

With 8 figures

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Silvia Bonacchi

Vulnerability and Resilience in Contradictory Discourses – A Challenge for Contemporary Societies

In the last decades, the world has gone through societal repercussions of environmental changes, the explosion of epidemiological emergencies, conflicts and wars, migrations and profound changes in human ecologies. Structural inequalities have exposed different demographic groups and subjects in varying degrees to phenomena resulting from powerlessness. Feelings of an increasing weakness and fragility, directly experienced in daily life, not least among those occupying privileged positions in society, forcefully raise the issue of vulnerability in its discursive and performative representations as a matter of urgent relevance to the humanities, particularly to those fields of inquiry that address issues of social communication.

Taking up this broad challenge, this collection[1] builds on scholarship that has long addressed what Wendy Brown calls "wounded attachments" (Brown, 1993, p. 391), scholarship that has focused primarily on subjects and groups which have been historically and structurally powerless and thus exposed to injury (for a foundational study of the cultural meaning of pain in cultural studies and social and political philosophy, see also Scarry, 1985), by problematizing the notions we use to speak about it. Even the use of the word 'crisis' no longer indicates a turning point, as its etymology suggests, but rather the possible revision, to the point of overturning and reversion, of positions of need and privilege, both displayed above all in discursive arenas. The condition of vulnerability thus does not remain linked to a paradigm of universal moral reasoning but rather to

1 The papers in this collection are a selection of contributions presented at the conference *Real, Imagined, and Displayed Fragility: Vulnerable Positions and Positioning in Society*, which was organized from 25th to 27th March 2021 at the University of Warsaw by the DeMarg research group (https://demarg.eu/), a discourse-analytically oriented international network of five European universities – the University of Warsaw in Poland (Silvia Bonacchi), the University of Bremen (Ingo H. Warnke) and the TUD Dresden University of Technology (Carsten Junker) in Germany, the Stockholm University in Sweden (Charlotta Seiler Brylla) and the Åbo Akademi University in Finland (Hanna Acke). Our collaborative work and the valuable support of the network's members made this volume possible.

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mechanisms of reversible self-positioning as care-givers and care-recipients (for an example see the discussion by Gregory, 2000, on Gilligan, 1986).

This collection presents studies on a wide range of discursive positions marked by vulnerability and investigates the functions of (self-)positioning actors as vulnerable in contemporary social discourses. As a phenomenon that manifests itself in different social arenas, vulnerable positions and instances of (self-)positioning indicate various crisis situations on a broad spectrum of phenomena, of manifestations and implications, among them victimization, fragility, weakness, disadvantage, neglect, infantilization, ignorance, exclusion and marginalization. Starting from the assumption that vulnerable (self-)positioning and stance-taking are manifested at the level of discursive practices, performative processes and material achievements, the contributors to this volume describe a series of mechanisms of staging vulnerability in a wide range of manifestations: among them physical vulnerability, psychological vulnerability, social vulnerability, sexual and gender vulnerability, linguistic vulnerability, institutional vulnerability.

With that being said, the real, assumed or staged social position and self-positioning of the vulnerable result in a number of phenomena that, for many reasons, pose a challenge to our "supportive societies", as at the same time it seems to be the great challenge of the 21st century to create and develop viable resilience devices. This is a process based on a generative dynamic characterized by contradiction and ambiguity: On the one hand, our societies are called upon to protect vulnerable individuals or groups by creating mechanisms of care and aimed at developing resilience and empowerment in situations of crisis. We cite the following as an example: The epidemiological situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to serious constraints on social, economic, and political life in several countries around the world, exposed not only the fragility of health systems, but also the vulnerability of institutions, citizens and groups which had to be 'protected'. It led to extreme patronizing political attitudes, even to an apparent paternalistic authoritarianism that went as far as to suspend individuals' right to self-determination – as in the case of mandatory vaccination, the requirement of wearing protective masks in public places, and the limitations of social contacts. The idea that vulnerable subjects have to be 'protected' implies that 'weakness' puts subjects 'beyond' the rules of society that are normally valid and hinders their treatment as subjects capable of self-determination. On the other hand, ascribing vulnerable subjects a kind of "special status" can go so far as to exacerbate social dialectics within permissible legal frameworks, even to the point of denying them. The categorization of people with disabilities as vulnerable, for example, has rather led to an increase in paternalistic measures to protect them instead of extending their possibilities of participation and thus their societal integration and equality (Clough, 2017, p. 469). This tension be-

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tween patronization (matronization) and exemption from social dialectics has repercussions at the level of allocation of social power. People perceived as 'weak' or socially vulnerable (among them, children, women, the elderly, marginalized groups, the socially or physically disadvantaged) are denied the opportunity to have full rights, express themselves, are even silenced and ignored, or subject to forced categorization or nominalization (Willson in this volume). At the same time, this behavior can be reversed in an aggressive empowerment, possibly leading to the staging of assaults and attacks by vulnerable individuals who violently claim extraordinary rights for themselves.

These fundamental contradictions find multiple manifestations in the discursive arena. At the level of conversational strategies, these manifestations include, among other things, displaying one's fragility ("I know, I'm weak, but…", "I know, no one cares what I say, but…") and even remaining silent, and silence can be both reactive and proactive behavior that can give rise to forms of aggression and offense (Bonacchi, 2021a, p. 53f.). In the political arena, claiming positions of marginality can mask ambitions of hegemony, the accusation of being disavowed can disguise ambitions of power (Warnke, Bonacchi, & Seiler Brylla, 2024 forthcoming).

One focus in this collection is on the relationship between the feeling of vulnerability, identitarian processes and belonging to groups. An individual sense of being strong or being weak is widely dependent on the opportunity and willingness to join groups which offer possibilities of identification and feelings of belonging. In every situation in which individuals feel socially isolated (and specifically when they are not structurally disadvantaged but for example perform non-normative behavior or identification), positions of fragility and vulnerability can open up. Such portals of vulnerability do not necessarily relate to objectively measurable injury, sometimes they are 'staged' in a self-presentation which we have defined as a "mimicry of marginality" (Warnke, Bonacchi, & Seiler Brylla, 2022), that is to say as a strategic and staged appropriation of a position of marginality in society and discourse not so much as a mask, but as a socially motivated strategy for gaining power. This 'weaponization' of vulnerability leads to a reversal of the relationship between the strong and weak, between oppressors and the oppressed, the victims and the perpetrators, between the privileged and the disadvantaged and can lead to disrupting devices, subversion and agonality (Mattfeldt, 2020, p. 75f.).

This contradictory dynamics and the constant possibility of reversing positions become salient in many phenomena we observe in our societies and which have been investigated in the contributions of this book. An example is what is defined as "white fragility" in the USA (Knewitz in this book). Against the background of the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, "white fragility" is an assumption which permits white people to position themselves as

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vulnerable when not only their real privileges, but even their racial comfort is being challenged. In this sense, "white tears", motivated by "privilege shame" do not show weakness, but they are a powerful means of manifesting a "white voice" in crucial questions and so of racial control in order to protect white privileges.

In many cases, real and staged positions and self-positioning of vulnerability are connected with identitarian aspects of inclusion and exclusion and with processes of 'othering'. It is the othering of individuals or groups that 'makes' them vulnerable – as in the case of children with immigrant background who are constructed by institutions (for example in schools) as "foreign children" (Sitter, 2016). As Fien de Malsche shows in her chapter, the claim "I'm not that Chinese" shows the critical character of the formation of identity in third culture individuals. Institutions, that is to say an "invisible anonymity", create the 'norm' and the 'normal', allocating subjects to otherness and having the function of gatekeepers for chances and possibilities. Also, body shame and body pride (Pędzisz in this collection) are connected with the resilience devices people can develop when exposed to shame or refusal. In the same way that vulnerability is constructed, resilience and the notions of strong and weak are also the product of a discursive construction (Nicklas in this volume) which can generate narratives of vulnerability and resilience (Ridder & Patzold, 2020; for illness narratives see Bonacchi & Warnke, 2021).

In the investigation of these phenomena, the theoretical approaches that are adopted determine to a great extent the way these are to be interpreted. Classical theories about vulnerability, which attempt to explain the sense of precarity and inequality that individuals feel in relation to mainstream groups and institutions, can be divided in 'universal' and 'situated' approaches (for an overview cf. Gillespie, 2008; Fekete & Hufschmidt, 2016; Travis in this collection). Earlier ones (mainly religious, philosophical and legal studies) define vulnerability as an intrinsic human condition related to our existence and being in the world, i. e. they are based on the idea of a human being as ontologically weak, fallacious, and basically indifferently embodied but socially differently embedded. According to Martha Fineman (2008 and 2017), the universal precarity of the body has to be considered in its material and social contexts. So, if vulnerability is understood to be a universal trait experienced by all humans at all stages in the course of life, in a socially 'embedded' manner (Fineman, 2017, p. 143), it is therefore a task of institutions and political power to produce resilience devices as a response to this fundamental precariousness of human beings. Consider, for instance, Judith Butler's work on how subjects are vulnerable to the wounding power of language (Butler, 1997), as well as her subsequent interest in how the powerful (the US nation state in particular), respond to their vulnerability to violence and injury (9/11) with

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> a tactical distribution of precarity, more often than not articulated through an unequal distribution of precarity, one that depends on dominant norms regarding whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable, or marginally or episodically grievable and so, in that sense, already lost in part or in whole, and thus less worthy of protection and sustenance (Butler, 2012, p. 148).

So, while vulnerability can be considered universal, the resilience human beings develop – how subjects and groups make sense and respond to injury – depends on many factors: the quality of being firmly and deeply ingrained or fixed in society determine attitudes and mentalities, and ultimately also the frames for the development of resilience devices. For instance, in times of persecution and organized marginalization, resilience can take on the traits of apathy and indifference, the only strategy that allows survival (Olszewska in this volume), or traits of clear agonality.

Situated theoretical approaches highlight that institutions of power (for example health care or social institutions) and groups we belong to shape our understanding of vulnerability and of resilience, and that even vulnerability and resilience are not given, but are the result of social constructions. In fact, the way in which vulnerability is socially perceived and displayed depends on the ways in which institutions and groups define the concept of 'norm(al)', and consequently 'weak' and 'strong'. The way in which institutions create the frames for the construction of vulnerability and resilience (for an overview see Greene, 2002, Travis, 2019) are always linked to political, social, and cultural frames (Holzschuh in this volume). The issue of individual or group resilience can thus be linked to issues of social equality (Acke & Heikkola in this volume) and the allocation of power. The concept of vulnerability is contextualized in relation to the regulations to which individuals and groups are subjected, thus taking account of this being 'othered' in an "embodied diversity". In situated approaches, positions and the positioning of vulnerability depend on their environment, which may be defined alternatively in institutional, social, cognitive or cultural terms, as well as on the way the state, institutions, and groups lower or enhance resilience. At the level of medical and social intervention, psychological and even neurobiological constructions of vulnerability determine what and how therapeutic interventions are allowed and conducted (Buchholz and Muhr in this volume).

Starting from these observations, the studies in this volume present theoretical approaches and empirical research from an interdisciplinary perspective that analyses contradictory discourses (for the epistemiological valence see Warnke & Acke, 2018) based on vulnerable positions and positioning, in particular in relationship to (a) agendas, (b) arenas and (c) agencies. Specifically, they aim to investigate the following issues: a) when claims of vulnerable positions and positioning are used strategically by individuals and groups for themselves or for others to gain rights, power, status or resources; b) in which forums and through

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which media individuals and groups negotiate their and others' belonging and stance as fragile individuals claiming special rights; c) which possible options for actions arising from real, imagined, and displayed/staged positions of vulnerability open up and which are the apparatuses ('dispositives') and narratives of vulnerability.

This collection is divided in three parts, each of which focuses on aspects of vulnerability theories and on case studies. The first part of the book titled Social Vulnerability and Marginalization: Legal, Social and Cultural Aspects is opened by Mitchell Travis' contribution *Universal Vulnerability – Shaping Resilience Through Law and Policy.* Travis explores the ways in which vulnerability has been foregrounded in law and legal theory. The question of what vulnerability is and how it directs our thinking about law and health is positioned alongside a wider question about how institutions such as law and the health care system shape our understanding of vulnerability and resilience. Travis applies the principles of vulnerability theory to a case study about the contemporary issue of 'race' and COVID-19.

In her contribution *White Fragility and White Shame – Liberal Performances of Anti-Racism and the Politics of Vulnerability in the U.S.*, Simone Knewitz examines how the political language of vulnerability enters the contemporary liberal-progressive discourse on whiteness in the U.S. She presents two case studies: the first engages with Robin DiAngelo's bestselling book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (2018), which, during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, emerged as a primary go-to resource for white liberals striving to be anti-racist allies. The second case study focuses on white shaming in contemporary social media culture: the so-called 'Karen' memes – which show white women who assert their racial privilege by calling the police on people of color – serve as an opportunity to project racism onto others. These examples show that antiracism can function as a self-improvement project for white liberals and progressives: they create their own white identity by distinguishing themselves intraracially from other whites and thereby morally vindicate themselves, while preserving their own class and race privileges.

In their paper *Vulnerability and Educational Equity – PISA 2018 in Finnish and German Media Discourses*, Hanna Acke and Leena Maria Heikkola use the concept of vulnerability to take a comparative look at how the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) are reported in the national media in Germany and Finland. In the context of student assessment, different groups of students are positioned as vulnerable in the two countries. Interestingly, the media reports and the main results of the study differ significantly in this respect. PISA clearly points to the socio-economic background of pupils as the highest risk factor in both countries. Within the OECD, both Finland's and Germany's immigrant population has a comparatively low edu-

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cation level and thus immigrant background often overlaps with a low socio-economic background. While German media reports focus mostly on immigrant background and thus single out certain pupils as vulnerable, Finnish reports do not mention it at all. Acke and Heikkola thus conclude that discursive traditions related to how education and schools are discussed in these two national contexts dominate the media reports, while the actual results and the scientifically grounded explanations for the results in the actual PISA publications are hardly communicated.

In her contribution *"I'm not that Chinese" – (Co-)constructing National Identity in Interaction with a Third Culture Individual*, Fien De Malsche focuses on the ways in which a third culture woman makes sense of and constructs her national identity in the field of tension between Chinese and Canadian identity. By a research interview conducted from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective, she examines how and when this third cultural individual refers to her national identity categories and how she positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, the chapter aims to highlight how these national identity categories are co-constructed within the interactional context of the research interview and how these processes of categorization function as! manifestations of vulnerability in interaction, thereby underlining the importance of a discursive approach to categorization.

The second part of the book is dedicated to Psychophysical vulnerability and resilience devices. It is opened by Pascal Nicklas' essay *Vulnerability and Resilience in Reading Fiction*, in which popular conceptions of resilience are presented and subjected to critical evaluation on psychological, biological, social, and cultural levels. In a second step, a research program into resilience which de-ontologizes resilience as a trait is presented. This alternative conception of resilience as a process is introduced as a construction which acknowledges its internal contradictions. On the basis of this theorizing, Nicklas presents an overview of how the reading of literary texts can be researched as a double-edged activity – increasing vulnerability and resilience at the same time.

In his chapter *Vulnerability and Courage in Psychoanalytic Treatment Rooms – from "Insight" to "the Conversational Turn in Sight"*, Michael B. Buchholz focuses on 'talk-in-interactions' in psychoanalytic treatment rooms. The chapter aims to expose the danger of dangerous reifications of words used in conversational exchanges ("mental disorders", "diagnoses", "social disorders", "splitting", etc.) in the delicate relationship between patients and psychotherapists. Calling attention to the importance of the conversation-based relationship with the patient on the basis of Typical Problematic Situations, Buchholz clarifies fundamental moments in the success of psychotherapeutic intervention, based on empathy and participation: Sacks' principles 'My-mind-is-with-you' and 'doing-together-to-do-together', participatory sense-making, mutual ob-

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servation, embodied comfort by sharing emotions. He also argues the importance of nonverbal signals and silence in the conversational exchange in therapy settings.

In her chapter *The Biologically Vulnerable Brain – Emerging Neuroimaging Research on the Roles of Early-Life Trauma, Genetics, and Epigenetics in Functional Neurological Disorder*, Paula Muhr presents the latest insights of neurosciences into the so called "neurobiological vulnerability", a concept which originates in the nineteenth-century hysteria research. After an overview of the current neuroimaging research into heterogeneous somatic symptoms of functional neurological disorder (FND), historically referred to as hysteria, she presents the new shift, which was introduced by three recent studies that started to empirically explore potential aetiological links between FND patients' aberrant patterns of brain functions and structure on the one hand, and patients' adverse life experiences and genetic and epigenetic factors on the other. Through a close reading of these studies, she argues that their authors have productively expanded and refashioned the concept of neurobiological vulnerability. She analyses how different tailor-made experimental set-ups are used in each of the three studies to explore complex aetiological mechanisms through which genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and epigenetic molecular processes interact. In doing so, she shows that the concept of neurobiological vulnerability to FND is reframed in these studies as multifactorial, dynamic, and processual.

The third part of this collection is dedicated to Narratives of Vulnerability and Resilience. It is opened by Izabela Olszewska's chapter *Emotional Indifference in Extreme Situations on the Example of Texts from the Ringelblum Archive*. She analyses the way of verbalizing emotional indifference of the Polish Jewish community during the Second World War and occupation on the basis of selected Holocaust texts from the Ringelblum Archive. She assumes that the emotional indifference of Warsaw Ghetto Jews to constant threats to their health and life, to suffering, as well as to inhumane situations and the enormity of the war's tragedy, served as an antidote to the tragic reality surrounding the Jewish community.

Joanna Pędzisz' chapter *On the Perception of Vulnerability in Aesthetic Dance Discourse* deals with the body as a conversational object often tabooed, sometimes covered by shame and reluctance, in that the author analyses the instructions given by a dance master to dancers. The performativity of the presented utterance in the case study is understood as the act of saying, which includes linguistic resources, i. e. realized speech acts in single- and multi-word units. The aim of the considerations is to show the relationship between the performativity of the analyzed utterance and the dimension of vulnerability of the dancing body.

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Natalie Rauscher's chapter *In the Face of Disaster – Narratives of Community Vulnerability and Resilience in Media Coverage of Natural Catastrophes in the USA* shows the role that media discourses play in the cycle of failed disaster risk reduction in the U.S. By analyzing the portrayal of vulnerable communities in media discourses on natural disasters in the U.S., Rauscher finds that the media focuses heavily on 'resilience' as well as 're-occurrence' narratives that display local sacrifice in the face of disaster. This leads to a focus on resilience of communities, which are heroized, rather than a reflection of underlying causes for high vulnerability among certain societal groups. This contributes to the lack of awareness of why some communities are hit by disaster repeatedly and could reinforce the widespread unwillingness to support more effective mitigation policies on all government levels. This seems to be consistent with the findings from risk studies that suggest that the perception of risks is crucially influenced by underlying cultural ideals, which can lead to overoptimistic views in the face of complex situations and underlying uncertainty that natural hazards and disasters represent.

In her chapter *Appeals to Vulnerability in Icelandic Personal Name Law Discourse,* Kendra Willson shows that the notion of vulnerability is a recurring theme in the discourse surrounding personal name law in Iceland. On the one hand, the Icelandic language has been perceived as fragile and at risk from foreign influences and changes. On the other hand, the individuals who wish to give or take names that do not fulfill the legal criteria are often presented as helpless in the face of capricious legislation and bureaucracy. They may be in vulnerable positions relative to the population as a whole – for instance, having immigrant background or representing sexual and gender minorities. Many cases involve children, who do not usually choose their own names.

Nina Holzschuh examines in her chapter *Gender and Vulnerability in the Courtship Plot of the Middle High German Nibelungenlied* the connection between gender and vulnerability. Starting from the cultural frames of the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied B*, she opens up a diachronic perspective on vulnerability, focusing on the female/male contraposition of the 'strong' Brunhild and the 'weak' Gunter, who resorts to deception to win the warrior bride. The analysis reveals complicated interdependencies between power, violence, vulnerability, strength, woundedness, pain, and knowledge in Medieval poetry which reflects contradictions in society.

Concluding this volume, we find the dialogue between Carsten Junker and Tomasz Basiuk *Conceptualizing Vulnerability in Cultural Historiography – A Conversation.* This exchange between two scholars of cultural history with backgrounds in (American) Literary and Cultural Studies aims to project the studies in this volume into a defined but open epistemic horizon. The authors open up to the multifaceted meanings that vulnerability acquires in their re-

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spective research areas. Engaging in dialogue, they address how vulnerability becomes relevant in their research and where it serves to frame and even constitute their objects of study, asking what insights vulnerability affords that might not be gained without it. Considering the epistemological potential and theoretical implications of this concept in their respective projects and beyond, Basiuk and Junker reflect on how conceptualizations of vulnerability relate to the question raised in the purview of work on sociopolitical struggles for recognition ("identity politics") and categorization ('intersectionality'), as well as other concepts such as shame and victimization. The authors address universalizing and particularizing claims to vulnerability and dynamics of appropriation as well as the ethical implications of such dynamics. Not least, they consider how discursive articulations of vulnerability are formalized and how these formalizations shape their work in cultural historiography.

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Part I – Social Vulnerability and Marginalization: Legal, Social and Cultural Aspects

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Universal Vulnerability – Shaping Resilience through Law and Policy

Introduction

This chapter discusses the ways in which vulnerability has been foregrounded in law and legal theory in order to highlight the important insights that vulnerability theory can contribute to this area. It begins by noting that legal theory's approach to vulnerability has been, for the most part, impoverished and that there is much to gain by paying attention to the particularities and needs generated by embodiment and vulnerability. Within law, vulnerabilities have not always been considered as seriously as they might have been. Rather than being front and centre in the minds of legal scholars and practitioners, vulnerability has tended to be obscured in various ways. Where vulnerability has been discussed it tends to be framed in a manner which fails to address the complexity of embeddedness, and the ways in which the state and institutions lower resilience. Within this chapter, the question of what vulnerability is and how it directs our thinking about law and health is positioned alongside a wider question about how institutions such as law and the health care system shape our understanding of vulnerability. In this chapter, I first outline liberal framings of the legal subject which inevitably underplay both the embodied and embedded nature of the human significantly effecting the directions of law and policy. In the second section, I outline the basic tenets of vulnerability theory which has been largely shaped by Martha Fineman. In the final section I apply the principles of vulnerability theory to the contemporary issue of 'race' and COVID-19 in order to illustrate that whilst we are all vulnerable, structural differences can and do reduce the resilience of particular groups, in particular contexts at particular times. Such an approach highlights the need for the state to constantly monitor and respond to inequalities.

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The Liberal Legal Subject

The lack of emphasis on vulnerability has given rise to the liberal conception that bodies are largely interchangeable in their interactions with societal institutions, including law and the health care system. Liberal framings, such as human rights discourse, have become the dominant language for thinking about law and the body. These tend to be premised upon the supposed universality of the human body. John Rawls, who's *Theory of Justice* (2020) remains a cornerstone of liberal thought, outlines that the ideal attributes of the political citizen are freedom, equality, reasonableness and rationality. Using the thought experiment of the "original position", Rawls continues to strip the subject of its embodied particularities even as he attempts to grapple with some of the inequalities that arise from these issues. Such an approach privileges a certain type of body and relationship with the world. As Naffine (2003) writes:

> the rational and therefore responsible human legal agent or subject: the classic contractor, the individual who is held personally accountable for his civil and criminal actions. This is the individual who possesses the plenitude of legal rights and responsibilities, the ideal legal actor… he who asserts his will, who grasps and asserts his legal rights. Now there is a discrete possessor of rights. (Naffine, 2003, p. 362)

Principles of liberty, equality, and freedom operate to allow individuals the same opportunities for flourishing within Western states. Liberal understandings of meritocracy suggest that anyone can achieve anything – even good health – provided they work hard enough for it. This shifts understandings of the body from abstracted bodiless containers to a particular type of (assumedly interchangeable) body. The 'he' so often used in legislation can be applied to women, while race and disability are not important aspects for the purposes of general (non-specific) legislation. In turn, anti-discrimination law has become prominent in order to prevent people from being unfairly discriminated against on the basis of the particularities of their bodies. Anti-discrimination law, however, individualises instances of discrimination rather than focussing on systemic injustices or holistic change. As a result, indicators such as race, class, and disability all have an important effect on outcomes in terms of wealth distribution, educational attainment, criminalisation and health. The interchangeable 'anybody' assumed by liberalism has been shown to privilege a particular type of body. Whiteness, maleness, being able-bodied, and inheriting wealth are all advantaged by institutions that assume a lack of dependency on the state (Fineman, 2004; Brown, 2015). Again, as Naffine notes:

> […] the rational subject must be a fully individuated and integrated physical being before he can begin to assert his will against all other subjects. An explicit biological assumption is therefore that this individual is a rational adult human; a tacit as-

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> sumption is that this rights-asserting competent legal actor is individuated and therefore sexed (at least in the sense of never pregnant, because this compromises individuation). Individuation and self-containment are essential if the rational subject is to be free to act in ways which affect only his self: if he is to be fully capable of confining and containing the effects of his actions to himself and to no other. (Naffine, 2003, p. 364)

Some individuals are able to 'fit' into society precisely because of their ability to navigate the everyday topography of existence. This liberal legal subject is afforded material anonymity that is only available to individuals who share characteristics of masculinity, whiteness, and able-bodiedness. 'Others' are rendered culturally exposed (Travis, 2014, p. 536). This abstraction has led to a focus on rationality, and a denial of the importance of the masculine body. As a result, "[…] many feminists have criticised how women, but not men, are defined in corporeal terms" (Fletcher, Fox & McCandless, 2008, p. 331).

The exclusionary effects of this definition can be understood through engaging with Garland-Thomson's (2011) work on the 'misfit'. Garland-Thomson (2011) attempts to explain disability in terms of fitting or mis-fitting within a given societal context; "A good enough fit", she explains, "produces material anonymity […]." (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 596). Further, she argues that for white, heterosexual, and abled bodies, "fitting is a comfortable and unremarkable majority experience of material anonymity" (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 597). This 'material anonymity' – or 'invisibility' (Whitehead, 2001) – allows for the white, heterosexual, able-bodied male experience to become standardized and normative. At the same time this normativity allows for this particular group of bodies to remain relatively anonymous. Moira Gatens (1996) elaborates on this point, noting that the origins of our political system prevent full engagement from those whose bodies are excluded:

> Since the political body admitted only very specific types of persons to active membership, to abstract from their specific qualities certain minimal common features is to abstract from an abstraction. In other words, the abstract individual, under these lights, appears as a very specific kind of person […]. The laws and ethical systems that are likely to develop in this sociopolitical context are going to amount to the encoding of the values and judgments of very specific kinds of person with very specific kinds of interest. There is nothing neutral or disembodied about the abstract liberal individual when viewed from this perspective. (Gatens, 1996, p. 99)

Part of the appeal of accounts of the body which are grounded in theories of vulnerability are that they are both able and willing to consider diversity. Grosz (1994) writes about 'alterity', which concerns the articulation of difference in the multiplicity of bodies (Grosz, 1994, p. 209). These differences include race, sex, sexuality, disability, and class, as well as cultural specificities. An examination of bodies reveals the diversity of experience, function and identity. Any theorisation

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of the body which fails to take this into account, therefore, borders on the reductionist.

Vulnerability Theory

As well as highlighting various contexts which help situate bodies, and thus move away from generalisations about 'the' body, a nascent strand of legal research has sought to re-emphasise the importance of universalism in the regulation of the body. Notably among these is the vulnerability approach pioneered within legal scholarship of Martha Fineman (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2017; Fineman, 2020). In Fineman's (2017, p. 143) work, vulnerability is understood to be a universal trait experienced by all humans at all stages in the life course, in both an 'embodied' and socially 'embedded' manner. The vulnerability of the body gives Fineman's theory its normative under-pinning and radical potential. Instead of ignoring embodied and embedded vulnerability and leaving individuals to take responsibility for their own health and well-being, interdisciplinary scholars and society more generally – must do more to build political structures and institutions centred upon providing care for ourselves and other humans.

The starting point of Fineman's approach is shared by Garland-Thomson, who uses the temporality of vulnerability to note that individual bodies are subject to changes in resilience over the course of a lifetime. The human embodied experience is variable and dependent on context. Vulnerability is implicit, therefore, to understanding embodiment, not only between bodies, but also over time (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 596). Vulnerability thus becomes a perfect starting point for ethical debate; it is through our bodies

> […] that our finitude and uniqueness are signified to others […]. Embodiment and ethics are inseparable insofar as we understand human existence in terms of dwelling or spatio-temporal being-in-the-world. (Diprose, 2005, pp. 237–238)

It is through our embodied individuality that ethics can come to be conceived, and that ethical structures and institutions can then be built and maintained. Importantly for this theory, vulnerability is universal and constant. Vulnerability theorists do not talk in terms of more or less vulnerable. There is no state of invulnerability. Vulnerability theory offers the insight that we are all vulnerable to expose the fallacy that certain groups are "more vulnerable" and thus naturally differentiated from wider society as a "special class" of people in need of help (which they may or may not be constructed as deserving). As I will go on to discuss Black and ethnic minority people are not "more vulnerable" to COVID-19. Instead, state and institutional failures have reduced their resilience.

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Martha Fineman's pioneering work on vulnerability has considered the precarity of the body in its material and social contexts (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2010). Vulnerability theory gives us a unique vantage point from which to conduct this analysis, as it acknowledges a vast range of human variation across both a physical and temporal scale over the life-course (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2010; Fineman, 2012). Vulnerability theory offers the idea that we are all dependent through various relations of care and need, starting from childhood and stretching into our elderly years. This analysis is capable of covering not only dependence on the family (so often constructed as 'natural' and 'inevitable', cf. Fineman, 2004) but also other relationships with institutions and the state that mostly fail to be seen as dependence – for example: reliance on a fair and functioning police force; a just legal system; or accessibility to clean water.

Whilst all bodies are universally vulnerable, these vulnerabilities are felt in particular ways and can be ameliorated or exacerbated by relationships with institutions, the state and other circumstances. For example, all bodies are vulnerable to illness, however, individuals may have a range of differing resources in order to mitigate the effects of illness. These resources may also be governed, allocated and distributed by institutions at the behest of the state. Thus, illness and its effects are mitigated by laws on the cost, patenting and distribution of drugs, the circumstances that the state will pay for healthcare provision, private healthcare afforded through agreement with employers, care provided through private family arrangements, the way these roles are recognised by the state, and so on and so forth (Travis, 2019). As Fineman (2015) writes,

> Unlike vulnerability, which is basic to the human condition, resilience is produced within society. We are not born resilient: it is produced over time and within state-created institutions and in social, political, and economic relationships. (Fineman, 2015, p. 2090)

So, whilst we don't talk about vulnerability in terms of more or less we can talk about the ways in which resilience is produced, reduced, created etc. Therefore, all subjects are vulnerable and both institutions and the state play a role in the mitigation or perpetuation of the subject's resilience. Resilience then is the ability to bounce back from misfortune or harm, not only in the body's capacity to recover from illness, but also socially and economically. Thus resilience "is largely dependent on the quality and quantity of resources or assets that he or she has at their disposal or command" (Fineman, 2013, p. 320). This insight highlights the unequal distributions of dependency, privilege, and resilience within our society and the ways in which they are constructed as natural. One of the key components of vulnerability theory, therefore, is to challenge the naturalness of these inequalities. Medical insurance could be a good example of an institution that ensures resilience. It also highlights, however, disparities and inequalities

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where people are either too poor to buy insurance, not rich enough to buy the best (or adequate) insurance, or rich enough to buy the best insurance. In these examples resilience will be distributed on the basis of wealth through the institution of the insurance industry. For those who do not have access to adequate health insurance, large excess fees may leave them with severe debts – lowering their resilience further (despite being an institution *prima facie* set up to enhance resilience). Those who are already in the best position (rich enough to afford good quality insurance) have the resources and means to stay in such a position. In all of these cases the state could ensure a degree of substantive equality through the monitoring of the insurance industry or through the creation of a National Health Service. For these reasons individual failures of resilience should not be seen solely as the fault of the individual, but against a backdrop of state failures and omissions (including the effective monitoring of institutions) in which the individual is embedded (Travis, 2019; Fineman, 2013, p. 321).

In contrast to traditional liberal theories of the non-interfering state, vulnerability theory allows for a greater examination of institutional embeddedness and the relationship between individuals and the state. These decisions as to resources are not natural or inevitable. If the state chooses not to interfere in a particular area, this is still a choice and it will impact upon the resilience of individuals (Garland & Travis, 2018). From a vulnerability theory perspective, however, our inherent vulnerability gives these decisions a normative dimension and places a moral imperative on the state to ensure its subjects' resilience. This normative dimension then changes the nature of state interference from responsiveness (which can be either positive or negative) to responsibility (which allows for a sense of justice to be built into the decision-making process). By repositioning responsibility at the state level, vulnerability theory offers a vital intervention into the abrogation of responsibility often seen in the liberal state.

Recently, Fineman (2017) has abandoned the notion of equality as a central part of vulnerability theory, instead positing the idea that inequalities may be inevitable and, in some cases, even desirable. As she notes,

> […] vulnerability theory goes beyond the normative claim for equality, be it formal or substantive in nature, to suggest that we interrogate what may be just and appropriate mechanisms to structure the terms and practices of inequality. (Fineman, 2017, p. 134)

Fineman sees the parent/child relationship and the employer/employee relationship as examples of inevitable inequality. Another contemporary example might be the relationship between police officer and citizen. These relationships are inherently unequal but that does not mean that they should not be monitored. Indeed, it might give more motivation to strictly regulate such relationships (if indeed they are fit for purpose at all). The facilitation of and responsibility for justice, therefore, is not achieved through measuring equality but

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through attentiveness to vulnerability and the constant monitoring of inequalities. As Fineman notes, through engagement with the universality of vulnerability,

> I develop a normative, or theoretical, perspective on the just allocation of responsibility for individual and societal well-being. Such responsibility must be shared between the individual and the state and its institutions. (Fineman, 2017, p. 141).

The ways in which the state ought to respond are not proscribed by the theory, allowing law and policymakers to adopt differing solutions in response to their own political and legal contexts. For vulnerability theorists, though, the state ought to be compelled by a "responsibility to establish and monitor social institutions and relationships that facilitate the acquisition of individual and social resilience" (Fineman, 2017, p. 134).

As a summary then for vulnerability theorists the four key tenets are:

1. Vulnerability is universal and constant.
2. Resilience is variable and produced through institutions and the state.
3. State responsibility is demanded as a response to vulnerability.
4. Inequality must be constantly monitored by the state.

To finish, I want to briefly apply vulnerability theory to a contemporary example of 'race' and COVID-19.

'Race' and COVID-19

In May 2020 the UK Office for National Statistics noted that

> When taking into account age in the analysis, Black males are 4.2 times more likely to die from a COVID-19-related death and Black females are 4.3 times more likely than White ethnicity males and females. (Office for National Statistics, 2020a)

Taking this as a 'category' of analysis might assume that black people are "more vulnerable" to the effects of COVID-19.

However, using a vulnerability analysis we can tease out the ways in which institutions and the state have "lowered the resilience" of many Black people. Shifting the focus away from "categories of vulnerable populations" allows for a much more effective response to these issues. When considering the increased death rate for Black people there are a number of factors to take into account; Firstly, occupational exposure. Are Black people more likely to be defined as key workers and so unable to self-isolate? Or are they more likely to be part of the gig-economy or on zero-hours contracts and so more likely to be exploited by unscrupulous employers? Or, are they, less able to afford time off to recover from

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illness perhaps due to these working environments? Or are they more likely to be placed in COVID risky environments? For example, as hospital staff directly working with COVID? These questions of occupational exposure are entwined with other socio-economic factors with poverty also playing a role in increased likelihood of dying from COVID-19 (thus highlighting the difficulties of disentangling questions of race from broader questions of poverty). Poverty might also see more people occupying places of residence with multi-generational households, less able to have access to outdoor space as part of their households and more likely to be in community's or neighbourhoods that have high rates of infection and transmission. These findings have been echoed by a number of organisations including the Office for National Statistics[1], Public Health England[2] and in the US the Centre for Disease Control who notes that:

> Race and ethnicity are risk markers for other underlying conditions that affect health including socioeconomic status, access to health care, and exposure to the virus related to occupation, e. g., frontline, essential, and critical infrastructure workers. (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

Resilience is lowered for these groups from the states' failure to safeguard people's incomes, housing and livelihoods as a response to the crisis. The effects of these are highlighted by Public Health England's report where they wrote that:

> The mortality rates from COVID-19 in the most deprived areas were more than double the least deprived areas, for both males and females. This is greater than the ratio for all cause mortality between 2014 to 2018 indicating greater inequality in death rates from COVID-19 than all causes. Survival among confirmed cases, after adjusting for sex, age group, ethnicity and region was lower in the most deprived areas, particularly among those of working age where the risk of death was almost double the least deprived areas. In summary, people in deprived areas are more likely to be diagnosed and to have poor outcomes following diagnosis than those in less deprived areas. High diagnosis rates may be due to geographic proximity to infections or a high proportion of workers in occupations that are more likely to be exposed. Poor outcomes remain after adjusting for ethnicity, but the role of underlying health conditions requires further investigation. (Public Health England, 2020, p. 32)

These findings echo broader studies on health inequalities globally (World Health Organisation, 2020, Annex 2) and nationally (Marmot et al., 2020, pp. 14–

1 "These findings show that ethnic differences in mortality involving COVID-19 are most strongly associated with demographic and socio-economic factors, such as place of residence and occupational exposures, and cannot be explained by pre-existing health conditions using hospital data or self-reported health status." (Office for National Statistics, 2020b).

2 "These analyses were not able to include the effect of occupation. This is an important shortcoming because occupation is associated with risk of being exposed to COVID-19 and we know some key occupations have a high proportion of workers from BAME groups." (Public Health England, 2020, p. 39).

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15). The state's failure to act here is not neutral but actively lowers the resilience of certain groups. What instead might we do differently? One possibility is that universal basic income would have alleviated the suffering of many people and reduced the risk created by the pressure to return to work. This would not have been targeted solely at Black people but would have had a disproportionate effect on them based on the markers of inequality identified by Public Health England.

Responding to these issues (and also motivated by the Black Lives Matter protests) the UK Government

> announced that it would form an independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. Munira Mirza, the current head of the No. 10 policy unit, led the commission's formation. This sparked concern in light of the fact Mirza had previously cast doubt on the existence of institutional racism and condemned previous inquiries for fostering a "culture of grievance". (White, 2020)

The commission was chaired by Dr Tony Sewell, an international education consultant. Sewell, who worked with the then prime minister in 2013 when he was mayor of London, had previously described any evidence of institutional racism as 'flimsy'. Subsequently, the committee found no evidence of institutional racism in the UK.

A vulnerability analysis would highlight that the states are responsible for monitoring the inequities that have arisen due to COVID-19 and are under an obligation to respond to this in an equitable and responsible manner. This would require going far beyond the creation of a committee. The greater likelihood of death for black people from COVID-19 is not the result of their racial categorisation but an interlocking set of issues around job security, poverty and geography that meant that they were more likely to be exposed to the virus. Again, universal solutions such as universal basic income would have had a disproportionate effect on Black people. But such approaches were not engaged with instead focussing on disastrous schemes such as "eat out to help out" and furlough schemes distributed through employers rather than targeting the recipients of wealth distribution directly. Thus, whilst COVID-19 highlighted that all humans are indeed vulnerable, it also exposed the ways that resilience (particularly to exposure) are attenuated and heightened by state response.

Conclusion

In conclusion I aimed to show some of the benefits of engaging with vulnerability theory in law if not more broadly. I also hope I have addressed some common misconceptions about vulnerability theory in its legal context. By reconceptualising vulnerability as the core element of the human condition we are better

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able to deal with the challenges that we face at a societal and international level, particularly in the case of law and policy development.

The real significance of vulnerability theory lies in its examination of embedded vulnerability played out through our relationships with institutions such as health care and law. These institutional relationships are capable of heightening or attenuating our resilience. Vulnerability theory highlights the institutional and generational ways in which resilience is created rightly dismissing political and policy-led notions of "vulnerable groups" that fail to situate individual bodies in their social contexts. As a consequence, the theory pushes for a more responsive state that is capable of monitoring the ways in which institutions respond to vulnerability and effect resilience (Fineman, 2008, p. 19).

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Simone Knewitz

White Fragility and White Shame – Liberal Performances of Anti-Racism and the Politics of Vulnerability in the U.S.

In the face of the brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, the summer of 2020 saw unprecedented protests against police violence in many U.S. cities. These uprisings also built on the decade-long effort of the Black Lives Matter movement to bring the problem of systemic racism in the U.S. to the forefront of public discourse. The turnout was particularly remarkable in terms of its interracial bent, as significant numbers of white people took to the streets alongside people of color, leading observers to make comparisons to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Clemons, 2022, p. 1). According to the Pew Research Center, 60 percent of white adults backed the movement in June 2020. Support differed significantly along partisan lines: while 37 percent of Republicans shared the movement's grievances, white liberal advocacy reached 92 percent (Thomas & Menasce Horowitz, 2020). Photographs of the protests frequently showed white people with signs that called upon other whites to "check their privilege" or to "end white supremacy" – suggesting that many white liberals had come to see their own whiteness as a problem.

The George Floyd protests illustrate Black Lives Matter's success in highlighting the bodily harm produced by white supremacist logics. Drawing on an affective register of indignation that makes the precariousness of Black lives the center of political struggle, the movement organizes its social justice claims around the idea of a specific racial vulnerability rather than more abstract notions of equality (Koivunen et al., 2018, p. 2). As Katie Oliviero has argued, this strategy provides a certain "emotional clarity" (Oliviero, 2018, p. 4) because it makes efforts to minimize the precarity of groups deemed vulnerable appear as common sense. Yet, as she also demonstrates, "vulnerability has an ambivalent political life" (ibid., p. 15). On the one hand, vulnerability is ambivalent, because the concept is often associated with states of weakness or dependency (Gilson, 2016, p. 71; Butler et al., 2016, pp. 2–4). Subjects deemed vulnerable might find themselves locked in the position of victim rather than be afforded a position of agency. Thus, the ubiquity of images of violated Black bodies have a tendency to "spectacularize Black death" (Raiford, 2020, p. 77). On the other hand, the re-

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course to contested claims of vulnerability not only gives progressive political actors the means to address systemic injustices, but has also provided conservative and antidemocratic forces with a vocabulary of precariousness, weakness, and risk (Oliviero, 2018, p. 6). As a political language, feelings of vulnerability may also "gather affective charge around and for the privileged" (Koivunen et al., 2018, p. 3), invoked for instance by white nationalists and supremacists who see the white nation as under threat. Vulnerability is thus a concept that can both point to systemic precarity and be tactically invoked within affective forms of communication by a variety of actors of both dominant and marginalized groups (Chouliaraki, 2021, p. 12).

Drawing on the insights produced by scholars who have scrutinized the concept of vulnerability in a cultural studies perspective, this essay seeks to problematize the political affects that accompany the discourse on whiteness among white liberals and progressives in the U.S. It raises the question in which ways notions of vulnerability are being brought into play by those who consider themselves as allies in the social justice movement organized by people of color but simultaneously have to negotiate their own implication within the structures of whiteness. As I will show, liberal negotiations of whiteness often invoke shame as a political affect. Framed in terms of individualistic attitudes and behavioral patterns, liberal public discourses often privilege white shame as the emotion through which white people are encouraged to think about their whiteness. However, this ultimately has the effect of recentering the white subject while producing narratives that deepen social divides.

The following investigation will focus on two case studies, both of which frame race relations as delicate and determined by vulnerabilities – people of color's positioning as the victims of racial violence and discrimination and white people's 'fragility' (DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018) that results from their historically established racial privilege. The first case study will engage with Robin DiAngelo's bestselling book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (2018), which, during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, emerged as a primary go-to resource for white liberals striving to be anti-racist allies. DiAngelo's book approaches the problem of whiteness in a deeply moralizing way, and ultimately prescribes white shame as a prerequisite for becoming a "good white person." This moralizing attitude is mirrored in my second case study of the so-called 'Karen' memes which have circulated on social media since the summer of 2020: these memes show white women who display white rage and assert their privilege by calling the police on people of color. I read these memes as instances of white shaming, as a form of scapegoating that allows "good white people" to distance themselves from "bad white people" and to project the problem of racism onto others. In conclusion, I will suggest that we

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need alternative, more productive narratives that stress overcoming social divides to create large-scale social transformations of racist structures.

"White Fragility": Liberal Performances of Anti-Racism

Over the past three decades, the field of critical whiteness studies has interrogated how whiteness operates as a hierarchical system of domination and has sought to unmask the ways in which systemic racism perpetuates itself in the U.S. and other western societies, even as these societies have committed themselves officially to antidiscrimination, multiculturalism and diversity. Scholars have pointed out that white power sustains itself because whiteness has historically been largely invisible in society, as white people appeared racially unmarked, as "just people" or individuals – a privilege unavailable to people of color whose subjectivity is always mediated through their racial positioning (see, e.g., Dyer, 2017 [1997], pp. 1–4; McIntosh, 2017). If the successes of the Civil Rights Movement gave rise to the idea of 'colorblindness,' in practice this shift has, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues, produced "colorblind racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 2). Colorblindness posits that racism will end if all people are treated as individuals rather than be judged by their skin color; yet, it disregards that these individuals are from the outset positioned unequally on account of society's racialized structures. Colorblind policies and practices therefore run the risk of reinscribing racial inequality. For Bonilla, the official dictum of colorblindness itself has become an ideology that serves to reproduce and reinforce the status quo of white privilege, because structural inequalities are being rationalized as non-racist patterns.

While the structural power of whiteness has thus been investigated intensively within academic debates, these findings have only recently been mainstreamed into a larger public discourse. Not least due to the efforts of social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, whiteness has become profoundly visible as a structure of domination at least within liberal circles. White people are increasingly less able to claim a position of racial innocence and have to reckon with their own implication in oppressive social structures. This has in particular been a challenge for liberals who have considered themselves to be racially progressive, who believe in racial equality and reject racial hierarchies.

It is this particular group that DiAngelo's *New York Times* bestseller *White Fragility* targets. DiAngelo approaches the topic of whiteness from the vantage point of her career as an education professor and diversity consultant, who has had decades of experience in conducting antiracism trainings. She already coined the term "white fragility" in an earlier article to describe the defensiveness with which white people tend to react when they are confronted with their own internal racial biases or racist patterns of behavior, when they experience what

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DiAngelo calls "racial stress" (DiAngelo 2011, p. 57). By that she means a disruption of the racial comfort that white people have come to take for granted, i. e. being treated as individuals rather than as representatives of a racial group with specific biases. DiAngelo starts out from the premise that, because of the structures of white supremacist society that we are all socialized in, those of us who identify as white are accustomed to living in racial innocence whereas people of color routinely have to deal with the burden of racial stress.

By speaking of "white fragility," DiAngelo makes use of the vocabulary of vulnerability to criticize how white people position themselves – for instance by starting to cry – when their racial comfort is being challenged. By shedding "white tears," DiAngelo argues, whites however do not show 'weakness,' but in fact exert "a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of white advantage" (DiAngelo 2018, p. 2). By reacting emotionally to being charged with racism, they refocus attention onto themselves and hence reclaim the centrality of their own subject position. Drawing on incidents that occurred during her own diversity trainings, DiAngelo gives plenty of examples of white participants reacting affectively to being challenged in their racial comfort in the context of her workshops, e. g., by storming out in tears or exploding in rage. Yet white fragility, she argues, is not a problem of some white people merely, but of all white people, herself included – we are programmed to react emotionally due to our innate desire to be racially innocent.

If all white people thus display vulnerability because they have been socially conditioned to do so, people of color are positioned as vulnerable because of the systemic oppression they have had to endure. Because of these different vulnerabilities, in DiAngelo's telling, all relationships between whites and people of color appear as extremely delicate. White people may inadvertently cause racial harm through microaggressions, whereas people of color may refrain from challenging their white friend for fear of triggering white fragility. Because people of color are presumed to be sensitive due to their experience with systemic oppression, DiAngelo suggests that it would add unfairly to their burden if white people relied on them to help them work through their internalized racism (2018, p. 64). Instead, she recommends that white people inform themselves via books and other resources. In case one inflicts any emotional injury on a person of color by accident – which, DiAngelo suggests, will invariably happen – she recommends white people to process their own emotions first with the help of other white people and then seek to make amends with the person affected. DiAngelo models this on an example of her own experience, when she had unwittingly upset an African American co-worker, Angela, by making a joke about another Black woman's hair. DiAngelo writes:

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> […] once I was aware that I had behaved problematically, I took the time to process my reaction with another white person. It was not Angela's duty to take care of my feelings or feel pressure to reassure me. […] After I vented my feelings (embarrassment, guilt, shame, and regret), we did our best to identify how I had reinforced racism. I was then ready to return to Angela. […] When Angela and I met, I owned my racism. (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 145)

While DiAngelo's willingness to take responsibility for the emotional harm that she has caused contributes to a more trustful relationship with Angela, as she claims, she uses this episode in a normative, didactic way to teach white people the multi-step process which they should apply to their own missteps. In their relationships to people of color, whites need to be constantly vigilant for instances in which they unintentionally reinforce racism and then seek to repair it. This prescription comes accompanied by catalogues of internalized assumptions any white person should question, phrases that should be avoided, and acceptable ways in which to respond when being criticized for racist behavior (DiAngelo, 2018, pp. 141–143). An untroubled or unburdened relationship between a white person and a person of color hardly seems possible in the framework of this book.

Without minimizing the emotional harm created through microaggressions and unreflected racialized behavior and not belittling the sincere efforts many liberals undertake to question their own privileges, DiAngelo's didactic approach seems to potentially make the problem worse rather than better. DiAngelo prompts white people to turn the critical lens inward and back onto themselves. Focusing intensely on people's emotional fragilities, the gulf between whites and people of color seems to widen. Instead of creating deeper cross-racial relationships, DiAngelo's prescriptions may prompt white people to avoid such contacts altogether, for fear of doing anything wrong or of the discomfort of being confronted with their own racism. And despite their anti-racist aims, these strategies may end up reproducing racism. In his scathing critique of the book, African American linguist John McWhorter (2020) argues that *White Fragility*, in the way it attributes people of color with racial delicacy, "entails an elaborate and pitilessly dehumanizing condensation toward Black people." (McWhorter, 2020)

The tenets of progressive anti-racism invoke affects of shame and humiliation. Donovan Schaefer explains that "shame is a necessary component of pedagogy" in general and that we should understand the progressive political agenda as aiming at a form of education which centers "around a retraining and a reteaching of bodies" (Schaefer, 2020, p. 6). In this sense, books like DiAngelo's "use shame to challenge not only the politics of others, but also themselves, grinding away their own sense of comfort in a relentless project to become more sensitive, more thoughtful, more moral" (Schaefer, 2020, p. 6). DiAngelo does not explicitly suggest that white people should be ashamed of their whiteness, but she

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advocates for whites to become what John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev have called "race traitors" (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107): to break white solidarity by refusing to partake in the rewards of whiteness. There is no positive white identity, DiAngelo claims. "White identity," she writes, "is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 149). As a white person, I can only "strive to be 'less white'" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 150). Though DiAngelo makes it one of her premises that one should not distinguish between good white people and bad white people – since we are all socialized in a racist system (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 72) – her moralistic approach ultimately reinscribes the good/bad distinction: as a white person, I can never fully transcend my own racism, I can only own it and strive to be "less white" – that is, I can at least feel ashamed for this part of my identity. Through shame I can thus redeem myself as morally good.

This individual performance of white shame, however, has larger political implications. As Shannon Sullivan has noted, "[w]hite shame and guilt are not socially or politically neutral emotions" but in fact become "cultural capital" that is specifically a property of the white middle-class (Sullivan, 2014, p. 137); working-class people are not similarly encouraged to feel ashamed of their whiteness in their communities, and thus white shame holds little symbolic capital for them. Sullivan writes:

> Encouraging white people to feel ashamed of their whiteness as a response to racial injustice implicitly caters to the hegemonic and narcissistic interests of middle-class white people. It encourages middle-class white people to experience a raced emotion that buttresses their class/race supremacy, and it keeps lower-class white people "in their place" by promoting an emotion that is unavailable to them. (Sullivan, 2014, p. 138)

White shame thus ultimately helps to protect social and economic status.

White shame as promoted in DiAngelo's *White Fragility* recenters white middle-class subjects who are encouraged to work on their moral goodness as a kind of self-improvement project. It is not clear how this work on the self is connected to a transformation of social structures that continue to systemically disadvantage people of color. Rather, it entails a "privatization of racial responsibility" (Clemons, 2022, p. 3). As Marzia Milazzo writes,

> [t]he emphasis on emotionality and morality can make us forget that desegregating neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces are crucial steps in the fight against white supremacy and that de-racialisation must have a financial cost for white people (Milazzo, 2017, p. 569).

At the same time, the individualized and moralized approach also encourages white liberals to distinguish themselves from those white people who allegedly fail at questioning their privilege. I therefore turn to instances of white shaming next.

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#Karen: Shaming the Enraged White Woman

Simultaneously to the Black Lives Matter protests, the summer of 2020 also saw the proliferation of the so-called 'Karen' memes in the broader media landscape: images and videos of white women calling the police on people of color. Having presumably originated on Black Twitter (Negra & Leyda, 2021, p. 350), the 'Karen' trope emerged as a term that "encapsulates, within Black culture, a body of cultural criticism rooted in a fundamental critique of white women behaving badly" (Maurantonio, 2021, p. 1162). As a shorthand expression, 'Karen' stands for a middle-aged white woman who shamelessly displays a sense of entitlement, privilege or rage.

In a cultural climate that was highly sensitized to racism and racialized policing, these memes hit a nerve. Thus, in one video that went viral a white woman later known as "San Francisco Karen", Lisa Alexander, and her boyfriend encounter a man stenciling "Black Lives Matter" on the wall of his own home. Disbelieving that James Juanillo, who identifies as Filipino, was the actual homeowner, Alexander alerted the police and accused Juanillo of defacing another person's property. According to Juanillo's own account of the event, Alexander went on to lie to the police saying that she knew the person actually living in the home. The police however recognized Juanillo as the rightful owner. Alexander, the CEO of a skincare company, who was identified by name on the internet and later apologized publicly to Juanillo, found that her business was being boycotted by beauty care distributors. Her partner, identified as Robert Larkin, was fired from his job at Raymond James, a wealth management company (San Francisco Karen, 2020). Another highly viral video was the one of "Central Park Karen." This video showed Amy Cooper, who falsely called the police on Christian Cooper, a Black birdwatcher in New York's Central Park, saying that she was being harassed by him. Cooper had actually only asked her to leash her dog. For Amy Cooper, who also apologized for her behavior, the situation resulted in the loss of her job as well (Voytko, 2020).

The figure of 'Karen' – similar to previously popular monikers, such as "BBQ Becky," "Permit Patty" or "Miss Ann" (Goldblatt, 2020) – signifies "an American archetype: the white woman who weaponizes her vulnerability to exact violence upon a Black man" (Wong, 2020). The 'Karen' meme calls up a long history of whites trying to regulate the behavior of Black people in public spaces and the complicity of allegedly innocent white women in acts of brutal violence against Black men. Situations like the ones in Central Park or in San Francisco echo with historical incidences such as that of the white woman Carolyn Bryant, whose complaint about a 14-year-old boy, Emmett Till, in 1955 led to the latter's murder by a white mob (Wong, 2020).

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It is due to this historical invocation of white womanhood as vulnerable and in need of protection, as well as the resulting precarity and lack of agency experienced by Black men unduly accused of violence that the 'Karen' memes have been read as a cultural critique of white surveillance and racial dominance. Some commenters see them as an instrument for the restoration of at least some agency to Black communities, allowing victims of racism to exert a form of justice on perpetrators. Along these lines, Apryl Williams has suggested that these memes serve the aims of the Black Lives Matter movement, because they "disrupt White supremacist logics and performative racial ignorance" by explicitly framing Karens "as racist – not just disgruntled or entitled." She also suggests that these "memes engender discussions of legal and social consequences (job loss for example) for White individuals who harass Black people" (Williams, 2020, p. 11). For Williams, social media serve to hold people accountable in an unprecedented way as they direct the public gaze onto those who exercise racial privilege and violence.

Yet, as the virality of the memes attests, the Karen trope has a cultural power that goes beyond these individual cases and positions the women in the videos as projection screens at which moral outrage is being directed. A Karen thereby becomes an icon of white rage: she embodies the negative stereotype against which white liberals and progressives position themselves by performing white shame. As Ligaya Mishan suggests,

> the Karen video offers a kind of wish-fulfilment fantasy in which racism is actually punished, not only for people of color but for white people, too, who are among the most vociferous in their denunciations of Karen, perhaps seeking to distance themselves from any suggestion that they might be complicit in her actions or capable of them. (Mishan, 2021)

Memes need to be considered not merely as individual texts, but as a communicative practice (Milner, 2016, p. 2); they assume a crucial function in the building of digital communities, but are often also polarizing and help create polarized, divided publics (Woods & Hahner, 2019, p. 52). In this vein, the 'Karen' memes seem to help cement the polarization between 'woke' liberals and those deemed deplorable, and they individualize racist behavior. Reinforcing social divisions between an educated elite and those that seem less enlightened from a progressive perspective, such cultural representation may ultimately prove less helpful for the goals of social justice movements than it appears at first glance.

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Beyond White Shame, Toward Cross-Racial Solidarity

In order to transform the U.S. – and other western countries – into more racially just societies, it is necessary that whiteness becomes visible as a racialized position. Yet, it is problematic to reduce whiteness to white privilege and white supremacy, and project white shame as the only viable aspect of white identity. A moralizing discourse which revolves around vulnerable positions and positioning, and which draws distinctions between people of color as victims of oppression and whites as oppressors, creates a gulf between different identities and subject positions that ultimately stands in the way of cross-racial alliances and solidarity.

As this contribution has shown, current liberal discourses on whiteness harness the political language of vulnerability for an affective form of communication that ultimately recenters the white subject. Privatizing racial responsibility, these discourses, as shaped by positions such as DiAngelo's, serve the interests of a white middle-class that relies on white shame as a form of cultural capital. White liberals and progressives today create their white identity by distinguishing themselves intraracially from other whites: from those who have little to gain by rejecting their whiteness. With antiracism as a self-improvement project, they morally vindicate themselves while preserving their class and race privileges.

In lieu of anti-racism in the form of self-improvement projects, we may be better served by alternative narratives that do not center social divisions, but on the conditions we share. Black and Brown people in the U.S. today are particularly vulnerable to the effects of structural racism: police violence, lack of equitable access to education and health care, effects of environmental pollution, voter disenfranchisement and other problems. Yet, as Heather McGhee demonstrates in her book, *The Sum of Us* (2021), racism hurts white people as well. McGhee argues that social groups in the U.S. for centuries have been pitted against each other through what she calls the zero-sum story: they have been told that one group's benefit is another group's loss. In fact, the opposite is true, as powerful economic and political interests profit from social divisions, to the detriment of not only of people of color, but ultimately of all, if to varying degrees. Thus, as white people were taught to see government services primarily as welfare for people of color, public institutions such as state colleges and public pools were abandoned, privatized, or have become severely underfunded, making these services now unavailable or pricey for everybody. McGhee's narrative makes a strong case that as white people we need to fight for a transformation of social structures that benefits everybody. Rather than withdrawing in white shame, we should strive to forge true bonds of cross-racial as well as cross-class solidarity.

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Hanna Acke / Leena Maria Heikkola

Vulnerability and Educational Equity – PISA 2018 in Finnish and German Media Discourses

Introduction

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was launched in 1997, and the first testing was done in 2000. The aim was to globally compare what students learn and can do. In 2000, 32 countries participated. In 2018, the number of participating education systems[1] had more than doubled to 78. Compared to the other OECD countries, performance of students both in Germany and in Finland was clearly above average in all three areas (mathematics, natural sciences, reading) in 2018. In Germany, the long-term trends did not look as bright. After Germany performed quite poorly in the first PISA survey in 2000, the country managed to achieve much better results during the following rounds, both in comparison to other countries and in overall results. In 2018, for the first time, the average performance of students was going down again. Finland has ranked higher than Germany in all areas, being in the top group among the OECD countries. However, the average performance has been going down since the especially high score in the first study in 2000.

The long-standing focus of PISA has been educational equity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 also advocates for: "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). Equity does not mean that all students should have equal outcomes, but that students' outcomes should not be related to their background (OECD, 2019c). PISA 2018 results have shown that certain groups of students, for example students with lower socioeconomic status, students with an immigrant background and boys, perform at a lower level compared to the average student (Leino et al., 2019; Weis, Doroganova et al., 2019; Weis, Müller et al., 2019). These groups can thus be considered as vulnerable groups in the context of educational systems. The overall goal of this paper is to

1 PISA uses the terminology "countries and economies", as Chinese municipalities and provinces take part separately (OECD, 2019d).

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analyze how different groups were positioned as vulnerable in media reports on the PISA results and what consequences this positioning has for the students. By using the PISA 2018 results as a reference point, we investigate how the national media discourses differ in Finland and Germany.

A look at both Finland and Germany offers opportunities to compare because the performance of students is rather similar: it is above OECD average but has been declining in recent years. The first PISA survey in 2000 made the Finnish education system globally famous and it has since then been present in the media discourse regarding PISA in the German media. There is also a historical reason for the comparison between Finland and Germany: The first Finnish public school (Fin. 'kansakoulu', Eng. "people's school")[2] – before the school reform in the 1970s – was partly based on the German school system, namely the parallel school system (peda.net, 2023). First grades were aimed at everyone, after which the students continued to a more academic grammar school (Fin. 'oppikoulu') or continued at the public school. After the school reform in the 1970s, the basic education is currently the same for all students in Finland, leaving students with more possibilities compared to the earlier public school system in Finland. Thus, the differences between the Finnish and German school systems create an interesting comparison regarding the PISA 2018 results, as the school systems have been similar in the past but gone into different directions since the 1970s.

In this paper, we focus on how different student groups are presented in the media. The data consists of newspaper articles reporting the PISA results in the two countries. We have chosen newspapers before other kinds of media because they tend to give the most in-depth reporting and undergo the most thorough editorial processes. Compared to TV or radio broadcasts they are more easily available also in the aftermath of events. We analyze reactions in national online and print newspapers, as well as the news website of the National broadcasting companies, in the days following the presentation of the results of PISA 2018 on December 3rd 2019. The data is analyzed using discourse analytic methods.

The contexts of the study: Finland and Germany

In Finland, children start school at the age of seven, later than in many other OECD countries. Most children also attend preschool at the age of six, although it is not mandatory. At the time of the analysis, however, it was mandatory to take basic education. From 2021 onwards, also two years of studies in secondary education have been mandatory in Finland. Basic education includes primary school (classes 1–6) and middle school (classes 7–9). Secondary education typ-

2 We use the following abbreviations: Fin. = Finnish; Ger. = German; Eng. = English.

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ically includes 3 years of full-time studies. There are two options for students: High school focuses more on theoretical subjects and vocational training on learning an occupation. Both prepare for studies in higher education, be it university or university of applied sciences. Finnish primary school teachers are required to have a master's degree in education which includes practice periods in a teacher training school. Subject teachers teach in middle school and secondary school, and they are required to have master's degrees in their major subjects, e. g. mathematics, Finnish, biology, as well as a year-long teacher program, to be qualified to teach their respective subjects in middle school, as well as secondary education.

The German school system is varied, as the responsibility for education rests with the federal states. Here, some general facts are mentioned that make it possible to compare it with the Finnish system. In most states, primary education lasts from year 1 to 4 and children start school when they are six years old. General schooling is mandatory for 9 or 10 years. Several different kinds of secondary schools exist, which results in educational decisions being made at a comparatively early age by parents and/or teachers. The most usual secondary schools are 'Hauptschule', 'Realschule', 'Gymnasium' and 'Gesamtschule'. The 'Hauptschule' (or general school) lasts from year 5 to 9 or 10 and provides students who get lower grades in elementary school with a general education. After finishing school, they can continue with a dual vocational training. The 'Gymnasium' emphasizes academic learning, leads to a general university entrance certificate and lasts from year 5 to 12 or 13. It can only be attended by students with high grades already in elementary school. The 'Realschule' is located between these two and ends after grade 10. From there on students can continue to the final years at Gymnasium, attend a specialized higher secondary school that allows them to enter a university of applied sciences or start a dual vocational training. The 'Gesamtschule' or comprehensive school combines these school types in one way or another and is thus comparable to Finnish schools. Like in Finland, the German primary and secondary school teachers are required to have master's degrees including pedagogical training. Depending on the school type the study programmes' emphasis on subject education or pedagogical education vary.

A theoretical approach to vulnerability in educational systems

During recent years, vulnerability has gained renewed attention as an academic concept for the analysis of questions of equality (see for example Brown, Ecclestone & Emmel, 2017; Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay, 2016a; Fineman & Grear, 2016). Many scholars have argued for a shift in the understanding and use of the

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concept. While it had for a longer time been used to label groups of people who are in need of special attention and protection in certain contexts, newer approaches are trying to broaden the scope of our understanding of vulnerability as a universal human condition (Fineman, 2008; Wallbank & Herring, 2013). One reason for the need for a shift was the paradoxical consequences that followed when certain groups of people were described as vulnerable both in research and by political decision makers (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay, 2016b, pp. 1–2; Fineman, 2016, p. 16). The categorisation of people with disabilities as vulnerable, has for example rather led to an increase of paternalistic measures to protect them instead of extending their possibilities of participation and thus their societal integration and equality (Clough, 2017, p. 469).

Sitter (2016) has described a similar paradox for the context of the German PISA survey. In her dissertation she analyzed different kinds of reactions to the PISA surveys 2000 and 2009 and found out that children with an immigrant background are recurrently constructed as others, as "foreign children". Thereby, the responsibility for inequality in education is relocated from structural conditions in the educational system and in society towards linguistic competencies (or in this view: incompetencies) of children and their families. Without using the term, Sitter points to the dilemma of constructing certain groups as vulnerable, which for example Fineman discusses for other contexts:

> This [dilemma] is that in naming the migration background within educational policy efforts – including this study – one is always exposed to the danger of falling prey to deficit-focused perspectives and patterns of interpretation and classification, even though the aim is to design offers and support that should open up successful educational biographies for all children and 'especially' migrant children. Whichever way you look at it, the term "children with a migration background" always draws attention to a special target group and suggests a special need for action. (Sitter, 2016, p. 324)[3]

According to newer approaches in vulnerability studies, these paradoxes arise when certain individuals are constructed as in need of help and others – by contrast – re-established as independent and capable. Fineman and Grear (2016, p. 2) and Diduck (2013, p. 101), for example, criticize the idea of a liberal, self-sufficient, independent subject that forms the basis of our understanding of

3 All quotes from German have been translated by H. A., all quotes from Finnish by L. M. H. "Dieses [Dilemma] besteht darin, dass man mit der Benennung des Migrationshintergrunds innerhalb bildungspolitischer Bemühungen – einschließlich dieser Studie – stets der Gefahr ausgeliefert ist, defizitkonzentrierten Blickweisen und Deutungs- sowie Klassifikationsmustern zu verfallen; und das, obwohl es doch darum geht, Angebote und Förderungen zu gestalten, die allen Kindern und 'insbesondere' Migrantenkindern erfolgreiche Bildungsbiografien eröffnen sollen. Wie man es auch drehen und wenden mag, der Begriff "Kinder mit Migrationshintergrund" lenkt den Blick stets auf eine besondere Zielgruppe und suggeriert speziellen Handlungsbedarf." (Translation: H. A.)

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society as an equal playing field, especially from a legal perspective. They argue that this presupposes an ideal as a standard that does not actually exist because all humans are vulnerable. Vulnerability is universal, whereas the resilience human beings develop because of assets varies. Examining lists of possibly vulnerable groups shows that there are "few people who do not fall into one category or another" (Herring, 2018, p. 29).

Few studies in the area of vulnerability research have so far focused on the educational system. Some studies mention educational contexts among other areas or concentrate on young people or people with disabilities at schools. Fineman, for example, mentions education in passing in her chapter *Equality, Autonomy, and the Vulnerable Subject in Law and Politics* from 2016. While she mainly describes the US-American context, her findings seem generalizable. Like other areas of society, she views the educational system as a just, fair and equal system. Thus, discrimination is not interpreted as a failure of the system, but as a correctable exception. The focus lies on certain groups formed by individuals with certain identity characteristics (Fineman, 2016, pp. 15–16). Fineman also describes the educational system as an asset-conferring institution, which contributes to the accumulation of human capital or 'capabilities' (2016, p. 23). A failure of the educational system will therefore affect a person's future prospects in life: "Someone who misses out on education typically will have fewer options and opportunities in the workplace, which will make for a more precarious retirement and fewer savings." (2016, p. 23).

Because of the long term effects a failure of the educational system will have, failure in it should be avoided so as to equip individuals with assets they will need throughout their lives. Our study is part of an effort to investigate where discrimination might occur when the educational system of a society is under scrutiny. Looking at the example of the public representation of national educational systems in the media reporting on the internationally comparative PISA survey, we want to find out who is represented as vulnerable in the context of educational systems and what effects this might have.

Data and methodology

For this purpose, we compared two national contexts and analyzed the media reporting following the latest publication of a PISA survey in Finland and Germany. Our data consists of the media coverage in the days following the presentation of the results of PISA 2018 on December 3rd 2019. We included reactions in national quality newspapers (online or print) with a wide circulation and the news websites of a national broadcasting company. In Germany we have used articles from *ZEIT*, *FAZ*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* as well as *tagesschau.de*.

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tagesschau.de is the website of the main news program of the joint organization of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters and has been included because it is comparable to the website of the Finnish national broadcasting company YLE, which functions as an important provider of news in Finland. In Finland, we focus on examples from *Turun Sanomat*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, *YLE Uutiset*, *Education and Culture Ministry News* and *Huvfudstadsbladet.*

For analyzing the data, we used qualitative content analysis and combined it with discourse analytic methods. First, we searched for articles related to the PISA 2018 results in the news outlets listed above. Second, we read through the articles for content and listed the topics discussed. Third, we discussed similarities and differences in the Finnish and German media reports. Finally, we adapted approaches from Critical Discourse Analysis (Boréus & Seiler Brylla, 2018) and Discourse Linguistics (Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2010) to analyze the language of the media reports. To find out how the media reports about the PISA survey constructed certain groups of people as vulnerable in the educational context, we focused on the lexical level and especially on appellations and categorizations of individuals and groups (Boréus & Seiler Brylla, 2018, pp. 320–321; Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2010, pp. 141–142) which we analyzed comparatively. We then studied how these groups were described and whether and how agency was attributed to them in the material, for example through the use of active or passive voice. Our approach is critical in the sense that we want to raise awareness for how the choice of words in the media reports has (intended or unintended) social consequences which should be reflected by journalists.[4]

Vulnerable groups according to the media reporting

Our analysis of the media reporting in Germany and Finland shows both similarities and differences in the construction of certain students or student groups as vulnerable. In Germany, students with an immigrant background (Ger. "die Einwandererkinder", "die Migrantenkinder", "die Migrantenschüler", "die Zuwandererkinder", "Kinder mit Migrationshintergrund" etc.), socio-economically disadvantaged students (Ger. "die Arbeiterkinder", "Kinder aus sozial schwachen Familien", "die sozial schwächsten Schülerinnen und Schüler" etc.), as well as boys (Ger. "die Jungen") are put forward as vulnerable in one way or the other. In Finland, students with an immigrant background are not specified in any of the articles investigated, and schools are often what is compared (Fin. "suomalaiskoulut", Finnish schools; "lähikoulu", neighborhood school). Socio-

4 It thus includes aspects of text and discourse internal, ideological and prospective critique (Seiler Brylla, Westberg & Wojahn, 2018, p. 18).

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economic status is also referred to in neutral terms (Fin. "perhetausta", family background; "vanhempien sosioekonominen tausta", parent's socio-economic background; "alin sosioekonominen neljännes", lowest socio-economic quartile). In the Finnish media coverage, boys (Fin. "pojat") are presented as a vulnerable group.

Students with an immigrant background

When contrasted with both the Finnish reporting as well as with the presentation of results in the official PISA materials, it is especially obvious that the immigrant background of students is addressed in almost all German articles. Sometimes it is the main focus of the article, sometimes it is mentioned in passing. "PISA's foreign children" (Sitter, 2016) still dominates the German narrative on the results of the survey. Students with an immigrant background are constructed as a clearly identifiable group. Some examples include:

(1) […] the current Pisa results show that above all young people whose parents were both born abroad usually perform considerably worse than children of German origin. (*SZ Online*, 04. 12. 2019)[5]

(2) In Germany, many students with a migrant background belong to the disadvantaged. (*ZEIT Online*, 03. 12. 2019a)[6]

(3) Those who cannot read properly at the age of 15 – more than half of the new migrants – will not find a qualified profession and will find it difficult to find happiness in life. (*ZEIT Online*, 04. 12. 2019a)[7]

While all three examples contribute to the construction of students with an immigrant background as a separate group, the journalists used a variety of different labels for these children, "young people whose parents were both born abroad", "students with a migrant background" and "the new migrants". Further labels from the material include "children with different roots"[8] (*ZEIT Online*, 03. 12. 2019a), "migrant children"[9] (*ZEIT Online*, 04. 12. 2019a) "migrant students", "immigrant children", "Ali and Samira"[10] (*ZEIT Online*, 03. 12. 2019b), to

5 "[…] die aktuellen Pisa-Ergebnisse zeigen, dass vor allem Jugendliche, deren beide Eltern im Ausland geboren wurden, meist erheblich schlechtere Leistungen als Kinder deutscher Herkunft erbringen."
6 "Zu den Benachteiligten gehören in Deutschland viele Schülerinnen und Schüler mit Migrationshintergrund."
7 "Wer mit 15 nicht richtig lesen kann – bei den neuen Einwanderern ist das mehr als die Hälfte –, der findet keinen qualifizierten Beruf und nur schwer sein Lebensglück."
8 "Kinder mit anderen Wurzeln".
9 "Einwandererkinder".
10 "Zuwandererkinder", "Migrantenschüler", "Ali und Samira".

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differentiate within the group, even more similar labels are used – partly interchangeably: "refugees", "migrant families", "adolescents with a Turkish background", "children of migrants who completed their schooling in Germany, the so-called second generation"[11] (*ZEIT Online*, 03.12.2019b). The variation of labels seems to express a discomfort in naming this group explicitly. In contrast, the PISA survey itself consistently refers to them as "adolescents with migrant background"[12].

The examples also show how students with an immigrant background are singled out as vulnerable, although this word, which is only now in reports on COVID becoming more usual in the German context, is not used. They "usually perform considerably worse", "belong to the disadvantaged". The author of quote (3) goes so far as to predict that they will have problems on the job market and will not find happiness. In presenting them as vulnerable, the articles use negative vocabulary to describe the students and their actions. Thus, the abovementioned dilemma is overtly present in the German media coverage when it comes to the question of immigrant background: The articles alternate between presenting these students as vulnerable or problematic often in one and the same article. In an interview with *ZEIT Online*, Kristina Reiss, national project manager for PISA, professor of didactics of mathematics, sets the tone for the interpretation of PISA 2018, drawing a link between comparatively or allegedly week PISA results and the proportion of students with an immigrant background in German schools. Reacting to her colleague, Olaf Köller, who raises the concern that student performance is once again declining after having risen since the first survey in 2000, she says:

(4) I don't see this so negatively. In 2000, German 15-year-olds were below the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science, now they are above the average in all areas for the second time. If you take into account that the proportion of pupils with an immigrant background has grown significantly, from 22 percent in 2000 to 36 percent now, then the result can be considered a success.[13] (*ZEIT Online*, 03.12.2019b)

The implicature of the last sentence is that a growing proportion of students with an immigrant background leads to a decline in overall performance. The same

11 "Flüchtlinge", "Zuwandererfamilien", "türkischstämmige Jugendliche", "Kinder von Migranten, die ihre Schullaufbahn in Deutschland absolviert haben, die sogenannte zweite Generation".

12 "Jugendliche mit Zuwanderungshintergrund".

13 "Ich sehe das nicht so negativ. Im Jahr 2000 lagen die deutschen 15-Jährigen im Lesen, in der Mathematik und in den Naturwissenschaften unter dem OECD-Durchschnitt, jetzt liegen sie zum wiederholten Mal in allen Bereichen über dem Durchschnitt. Wenn man bedenkt, dass der Anteil der Schüler mit Zuwanderungshintergrund deutlich gewachsen ist, von 22 Prozent im Jahr 2000 auf nun 36 Prozent, dann ist das Ergebnis als Erfolg zu werten."

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implicature is also present in an article in the daily paper *SZ*. Also here, Reiss is quoted:

(5) Three times above average, that is a remarkable achievement, Reiss says. Especially when one takes into account how school classes have changed during recent years. For example because of many refugees who came to Germany since 2015, among them many children. 36 percent of the 15-year-olds in the most recent PISA sample have an immigrant background, i. e. at least one parent from abroad. In 2009, the figure was still 26 percent. And unlike countries such as Australia or Canada, which largely choose their immigrants, Germany has to integrate many low-skilled newcomers – even in the classrooms. "Under these circumstances", Reiss says, "schools have done a good job."[14]

When compared with the actual survey results, this is surprising. Neither students with an immigrant background nor the immigrant background are presented as the problem. In Vol. 2 of the survey results the authors write:

> Long-standing research finds that the most reliable predictor of a child's future success at school – and, in many cases, of access to well-paid and high-status occupations – is his or her family. Children from low-income and low-educated families usually face many barriers to learning. (OECD, 2019e, p. 50)

Also, the summary in the country note on Germany, mentions that the score point difference between students with and without an immigrant background shrinks from 63 to 17 when the students' and the schools' socio-economic profile are accounted for (OECD, 2019a, p. 6). All of this suggests that the main cause for lower performance lies in the unequal distribution of societal resources both when it comes to people as well as when it comes to schools. That immigrant background in itself does not account for lower performance also becomes clear from the fact that many students belong to the top group: 16% of students with an immigrant background in Germany (and 17% in OECD average) perform very well, as they reach the top quarter in their reading skills (OECD, 2019a, p. 7).

Why is immigrant background dominating the media reporting and the German debates on the PISA survey? One reason, we argue, is tradition. Its relevance for school success has for a long time been seen as a matter of fact in Germany (Sitter, 2016). This is of course connected to the fact also mentioned by

14 "Dreimal über dem Schnitt, das sei eine beachtliche Leistung, sagt Reiss. Vor allem wenn man bedenke, wie sich die Schulklassen in den letzten Jahren verändert hätten. Zum Beispiel durch viele Flüchtlinge, die seit 2015 nach Deutschland kamen, unter ihnen viele Kinder. 36 Prozent der 15-Jährigen in der jüngsten Pisa-Stichprobe haben einen Migrationshintergrund, also mindestens einen Elternteil aus dem Ausland. 2009 waren es noch 26 Prozent gewesen. Und anders als etwa Australien oder Kanada, die sich ihre Zuwanderer weitgehend aussuchen, muss Deutschland viele gering qualifizierte Neuankömmlinge integrieren – auch in den Klassenzimmern. 'Unter diesen Umständen', sagt Reiss, 'haben die Schulen gute Arbeit geleistet.'"

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Reiss in quote (5) that compared to other OECD countries, Germany's immigrant population on average has a lower educational level and a lower socio-economic status. Because of their overlap, the significance of these categorizations is not kept separately in the media reports. A second reason for the popularity of the category in the articles might be that it is much easier to distinguish and grasp than socio-economic background. Migrant background is a variable that is easier to measure than socio-economic background as the definitions in the survey show. While the survey uses three longer definitions to come to the distinction of three groups of students in the area of socio-economic background (OECD, 2019e, pp. 52–55), the definition of migrant background is explained in one sentence as "students whose mother and father were born in a country/economy other than that where the student sat the PISA test" (OECD, 2019e, p. 179).

One factor that has been put forward as a difference between students with and without an immigrant background that might explain differences in school success is the students' home language (OECD, 2019e, p. 184). The differentiation that the migrant background only indirectly (and even in that case not necessarily) influences student performance because the home language in many migrant families is not the same as the educational language is not mentioned in the media reporting. Instead, in the German articles, the home language of students not being German is discussed as problematic:

(6) One piece of information in the new study is particularly worrying: the young people concerned speak German less often at home today than they did in 2009; this has a clear impact on their performance. (*ZEIT Online*, 04. 12. 2019b)[15]

Actually, there is new research that suggests that the idea that a different home language will have a negative influence on school performance is too simple (Schnoor, 2019). For example, educational researcher Gogolin says, "the educational proximity of the linguistic input that children receive is relevant – regardless of the language in which it is given." (2019, p. 87). She also points out that in Germany, language skills are often equated with German skills (2019, p. 77). There are many studies pointing to the fact that a strong first language supports the learning of the language of instruction, as well as all learning (Cummins, 2001; Agirdag & Vanlaar, 2018).

In the Finnish media coverage, the migrant background is not mentioned at all. This is interesting, as there is a large gap in reading performance between non-immigrant and immigrant students (-74, OECD average -25, OECD Finland 2019), which would thus warrant a discussion in the media. The reasons for the

15 "Eine Information in der neuen Studie ist besonders besorgniserregend: Die betroffenen Jugendlichen sprechen heute zu Hause seltener deutsch, als dies noch 2009 der Fall war; das wirkt sich deutlich auf ihre Leistungen aus."

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absence of discussion may be due to the fact that immigration is a fairly new phenomenon in Finland. The first larger groups of immigrants arrived in the 1990s, and the world-wide immigration in 2015 also reached Finland (Statistics Finland, 2022). Another reason for not including coverage on the students with an immigrant background in the immediate reactions to the PISA 2018 results may be that in Finland, especially within the school system, labeling different groups is generally frowned upon. Some Finnish school teachers (Alisaari et al., 2022) often report not wanting to emphasize the immigrant background of their students in order not to single them out. However, in the more in-depth coverage of the PISA results 2018 weeks after the publication of the results, the students with migrant background were discussed (e. g. SU, 2019). However, the PISA 2018 results regarding the immigrant background students' weaker reading performance have awakened school researchers in Finland, and the next PISA study in 2022 will focus especially on immigrant background students, by the request of the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM, 2022).

In conclusion, in the German media coverage there is a strong focus on problematizing the weaker performance of the students with an immigrant background, although the performance in this group is comparatively little problematized in the PISA 2018 results. On the contrary, in Finland, the students with an immigrant background are not covered in the immediate reactions, although this would be warranted based on the PISA results.

Socio-economically disadvantaged students

Compared to the immigrant background, the socio-economic background of students plays a much more subtle role in the media reporting in the German context. As indicated above, this is surprising as the PISA survey itself stresses the family's low-income and low-educational level as the most important obstacle for students (OECD 2019e, p. 50). The authors describe socio-economic status as "a broad concept that aims to reflect the financial, social, cultural and human-capital resources available to students" (OECDe, 2019, p. 52) and use a specific and complex index to measure it. The PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) is "a composite measure that combines into a single score the financial, social, cultural and human-capital resources available to students" (OECDe, 2019, p. 52). Both students as well as schools are classified according to this index into socio-economically advantaged (the top 25% in their respective country), having average socio-economic status (the middle 50%) and as socio-economically disadvantaged (the bottom 25%) (OECD, 2019e, p. 55).

In Germany, this factor is especially strong, as the following figure from the summarizing country note on Germany shows. The score point difference in

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reading performance between advantaged and disadvantaged students is not only larger than all other measured differences, but it has increased by nine score points since 2009 and the gap is also clearly wider than the OECD average (OECD, 2019a, p. 1).

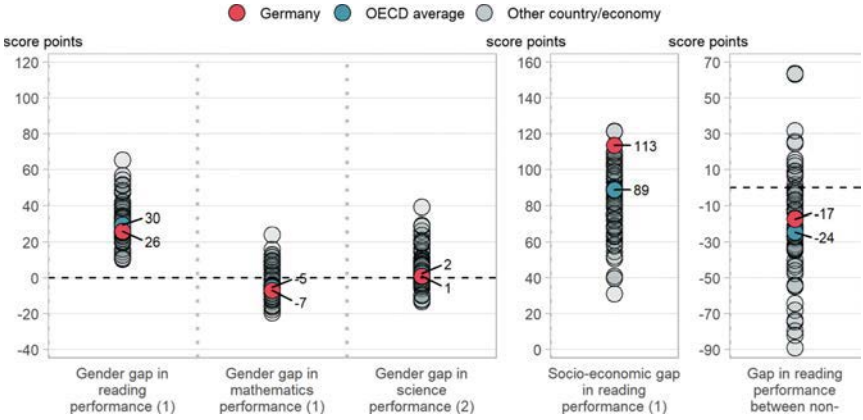

Figure 1: Differences in performance and expectations related to personal characteristics (OECD, 2019a, p. 4). "Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. (1) Girls' minus boys' performance; (2) Advantaged minus disadvantaged students' performance; (3) Immigrants' minus non-immigrants' performance in reading; after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Tables II.B1.2.3, II.B1.7.1, II.B1.7.3, II.B1.7.5, II.B1.9.3."

Only one fourth of the German articles mention the socio-economic background of students as a specific problematic result of the survey and thus emphasize socio-economically disadvantaged students (more or less explicitly) as a vulnerable group. Some examples include:

(7) Children from socially deprived families perform significantly worse [in reading] than children who come from affluent households where education is valued. (*ZEIT Online*, 03.12.2019a)[16]

(8) The current Pisa survey once again showed that there is a particularly strong connection between social background and success at school in Germany. (*SZ Online*, 03.12.2019a)[17]

Whether the phrase "social background" used for example in (8) refers to and is understood by readers as the socio-economic background as defined by PISA remains unclear. In several articles, socio-economic background and immigrant

16 "Kinder aus sozial schwachen Familien schneiden hier deutlich schlechter ab als Kinder, die aus einem wohlhabenden Haushalt kommen, in dem auf Bildung Wert gelegt wird."

17 "Deutlich wurde im aktuellen Pisa-Test erneut, dass es in Deutschland einen besonders starken Zusammenhang zwischen sozialer Herkunft und Erfolg in der Schule gibt."

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background are not kept separate or are even used interchangeably, as this example shows:

(9) […] the current Pisa results show that above all young people whose parents were both born abroad usually perform considerably worse than children of German origin. It should not be the case that educational success depends on the social background of the pupils […], criticized Ilka Hoffmann, GEW board member for schools. (*SZ Online*, 04.12.2019)[18]

In Finland, the socio-economic gap in reading performance is smaller than the OECD average but is still large (OECD 89, Finland 79) (Figure 2). The differences in reading performance were larger than ever in the 2018 study, which was often emphasized in the Finnish media coverage. In the media coverage, it was often underlined that the regional variation was the smallest of the participating countries, although the results on average were higher in the capital region. See the examples below:

(10) In Finland, the difference between the highest and lowest socio-economic quartile in reading performance was 79 points. Computationally this corresponds to up to two years of studying at school. The result is due to the fact that the results of the lowest socio-economic quartile have worsened from 2009 to 2018. The highest quartile's results have remained the same. (*YLE Online*, 3.12.2019)[19]

(11) The equality between students is cracking also in other ways in addition to between genders, although the differences between schools are still the smallest in the participating countries. – – There were also no significant changes in regional variation. Although the results on average were better in the capital region compared to the rest of the country, these differences are substantially smaller than in the last PISA study. Also the variation in performance varies more greatly in the capital region compared to the rest of the country. – – The differences in reading performance in Finland are now bigger than ever before. (*HS*, 4.12.2019a)[20]

18 "[…] die aktuellen Pisa-Ergebnisse zeigen, dass vor allem Jugendliche, deren beide Eltern im Ausland geboren wurden, meist erheblich schlechtere Leistungen als Kinder deutscher Herkunft erbringen. Es dürfe nicht sein, dass der Bildungserfolg von der sozialen Herkunft der Schülerinnen und Schüler abhänge, kritisierte Ilka Hoffmann, GEW-Vorstandsmitglied für den Bereich Schule."

19 "Suomessa ylimmän ja alimman sosioekonomisen neljänneksen keskimääräinen ero lukutaidon pisteissä oli 79 pistettä. Laskennallisesti tämä vastaa jopa kahden kouluvuoden opintoja. Tulos johtuu siitä, että alimman sosioekonomisen neljänneksen tulokset ovat huonontuneet vuodesta 2009 vuoteen 2018. Ylimmän neljänneksen tulokset ovat pysyneet ennallaan."

20 "OPPILAIDEN tasa-arvo rakoilee muutenkin kuin sukupuolten välillä, vaikka koulujen välinen ero lukutaidossa oli Suomessa yhä osallistujamaiden pienin. Myöskään alueellisessa vaihtelussa ei ollut Suomessa merkittäviä muutoksia. Tosin pääkaupunkiseudun oppilaiden keskimääräiset tulokset olivat yhä parempia kuin muualla maassa, mutta nämä erot ovat olennaisesti pienempiä kuin edellisellä Pisa-kierroksella. Myös osaamisen vaihtelu oli pää-

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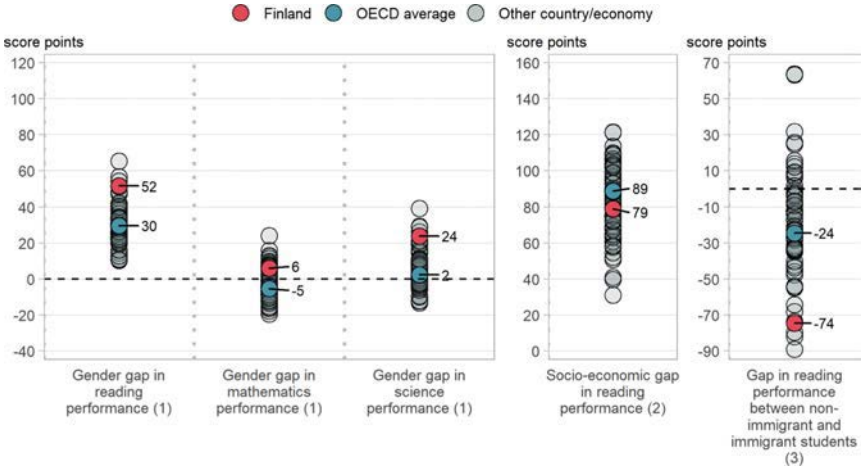

Figure 2: Differences in performance and expectations related to personal characteristics (OECD, 2019b, p. 4). "Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. (1) Girls' minus boys' performance; (2) Advantaged minus disadvantaged students' performance; (3) Immigrants' minus non-immigrants' performance in reading; after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Tables II.B1.2.3, II.B1.7.1, II.B1.9.3."

Very rarely in the Finnish news coverage the socio-economic status of the students' parents is mentioned explicitly, as in the following example:

(12) Equality is also cracking in that reading performance in Finland is even more connected to the parents' socio-economic background, that is their education, occupation and wealth. (*HS*, 4. 12. 2019b)[21]

In the news coverage, it seems that the difference between students based on their background is often presented as an issue of 'equality' (Fin. 'tasa-arvo') (see the examples above). This is very relevant for the Finnish education system, as the current system introduced in the 1970s is based on the values of equality. It has been shown that the current education system has decreased how much parents' income was passed on to children, meaning that the current education increased equality (Pekkarinen, Uusitalo & Kerr, 2009). The PISA 2018 results now show an opposite trend, which has raised concerns in the media, public, schools and among researchers alike.

kaupunkiseudulla suurempaa kuin muussa maassa. – – Yksittäisten oppilaiden väliset lukutaitoerot olivat nyt Suomessa suuremmat kuin kertaakaan aiemmin."

21 "TASA-ARVO rakoilee myös niin, että lukutaito on Suomessakin entistä enemmän yhteydessä vanhempien sosioekonomiseen taustaan eli koulutukseen, ammattiin ja varallisuuteen."

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In the Finnish news media, the word 'background' (Fin. 'tausta') is used extensively. The word can be used to refer to a person's (Kielitoimiston sanakirja, 2022) social background, cultural background and home background (see examples 13 and 14). Thus, even though the Finnish media does not explicitly emphasize the performance of students with an immigrant background when reporting the PISA 2018 results, by using the word background, it may be alluding to it also when reporting results depending on the students' socio-economic background.

(13) Nowadays the students' background strongly predicts their academic success in Finland, which is highly worrisome for equality and the stability of the society, says the chief of development Jaakko Salo. (*YLE Online*, 4.12.2019)[22]

(14) It has long been believed that the strength of the Finnish basic education is that it guarantees everyone equal possibilities regardless of their background. Now it seems that the effect of background is getting stronger also in Finland. (*YLE Online*, 4.12.2019)[23]

Although socio-economic background is the most important variable which influences students' performance according to the PISA study in both countries, it is not treated extensively and comprehensively in the media coverage.

Boys

Also boys are mentioned as a vulnerable group in the German media coverage in about one fourth of the articles. There is one article with a special focus on boys whose performance in reading is significantly lower than girls' performance in Germany with 26 score points. While their performance in natural sciences is on the same level as girls' and 7 score points higher than girls' in mathematics, the performance of boys in these two latter areas has declined since 2015. The fact that is emphasized in the article is that more boys than girls belong to the group of low-performing students (*SZ Online*, 03.12.2019b). "We must look after the boys" (*SZ Online*, 03.12.2019b)[24] Kristina Reiss is quoted, but there are no measures suggested how this could be done. Boys thus get attention as a new vulnerable group although compared to Finland their performance is very good

22 "Nykyisin myös Suomessa oppilaiden tausta ennustaa vahvasti heidän koulumenestystään, mikä on erittäin huolestuttavaa tasa-arvon ja yhteiskunnan vakauden kannalta, sanoo OAJ:n kehittämispäällikkö Jaakko Salo."

23 "Suomalaisen peruskoulun vahvuutena on pitkään pidetty sitä, että se takaa kaikille tasavertaiset mahdollisuudet taustasta huolimatta. Nyt taustan vaikutus lukutaitoon näyttää voimistuvan meilläkin."

24 "Wir müssen auf die Jungen aufpassen".

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(in reading, it is 26 score points lower than girls' in Germany and 52 score points lower in Finland).

In the Finnish news coverage of the PISA 2018 results, most emphasis was placed on the growing differences between boys and girls. Special focus lies in reading performance, where girls outperformed boys with 52 score points (OECD average 30 score points). Girls also outperformed boys in mathematics (6 score points, OECD average 5 score points) and in science (24 score points, OECD average 2 score points) (OECD, 2019). Many of the Finnish newspaper articles refer to the actual PISA 2018 results, as well as the Minister of Education Li Andersson's comments on the results, when discussing the differences between boys and girls, see the examples below:

(15) Also, the difference in performance between girls and boys has shot up the most in the OECD countries. The deterioration of boys' results was strongly related to a reduction in reading as a hobby and a reduced interest in reading. (*Ministry of Education and Culture News*, 4. 12. 2019)[25]

(16) In particular, the differences between genders and the socio-economic background are stressed here, minister of education worries. (*YLE Online*, 3. 12. 2019)[26]

(17) Two-thirds of boys read only if they have to. (*YLE Online English*, 3. 12. 2019)

Most often, the focus in the Finnish news coverage is on the poor performance of boys (see examples above), but there are also some mentions of girls doing well (see examples below). Here, especially in the Swedish speaking news coverage, it is emphasized that especially girls with Swedish as their first language do very well in mathematics in the PISA 2018 study.

(18) Finnish girls were listed second best in science when compared to students in other OECD countries. (*YLE Online English*, 6. 12. 2019)

(19) Finnish girls' reading skills outpaced boys' more than in any other country in the survey of educational proficiency. (*YLE Online English*, 3. 12. 2019)

(20) […] the Finland Swedish girls are in a class of their own in mathematics. (*HBL*, 3. 12. 2019)[27]

To summarize, in both the German and Finnish media coverage, boys are discussed as a vulnerable group.

25 "Myös tyttöjen ja poikien osaamiserot ovat venähtäneet OECD-maiden suurimmiksi. Poikien tulosten heikkeneminen liittyi voimakkaasti vähentyneeseen lukuharrastukseen, sekä kiinnostukseen lukemista kohtaan."

26 "Erityisesti tässä painottuvat sukupuolten väliset ja sosioekonomisen taustan vaikutuksen erot, opetusministeri Li Andersson murehti."

27 "de finlandssvenska flickorna är i en klass för sig i matte"

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Conclusions and implications

After comparing the national reporting in these two contexts, we can conclude that what is put forward in the media when it comes to vulnerable groups is not consistent with what the respective survey presented as the main results – neither in the full reports nor in the summaries or country notes. Within the OECD, both Finland's and Germany's immigrant population has a comparatively low education level and thus immigrant background often overlaps with a low socio-economic background. The PISA results in reading performance for the groups of students with an immigrant and a low socio-economic background are in both countries clearly below average, in Finland they are alarming. However, although the PISA survey points to socio-economic background as the most important factor influencing student performance, immigrant background is discussed as the main educational problem according to PISA in the German media, almost completely overriding the challenge that the socio-economic background of students and schools poses. In the Finnish media, the immigrant background is not mentioned at all, although compared to Germany this factor does play a significant role.

Discursive traditions related to how education and schools are discussed in these two national contexts dominate what the media reports while the actual results and the scientifically grounded explanations for the results in the actual PISA publications are hardly communicated. In Germany, there is a long tradition also in pedagogical discourse of equating the speaking of languages other than standard German with deficits (Müller, 2022, pp. 90–91). In Finland, as shown above, equality – especially with respect to socio-economic background – is an idea that has dominated pedagogical debate and reform.

Possibly, a reluctance to label certain groups is a reason for immigrant background not being made explicit in the Finnish reporting. This may be due to the fact that since the introduction of basic education for all students and also within the current core curriculum (EDUFI, 2014), there has been a strong emphasis on equality, meaning that all students should have the same educational possibilities. However, in Finland, this has resulted in teachers not wanting to single out students with different backgrounds, even when differentiation would be useful for the student. Unfortunately, this can lead to ignoring the different needs and vulnerabilities students may have, which can actually lead to the education system failing many students and making the school unequal for them.[28]

A similar reluctance to label groups might also be responsible for the fact that the socio-economic background is hardly illuminated in the German media.

28 In some ways this can be compared to what has been described as color-blind racism in the US-American context (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

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This reluctance may not be unfounded as the above discussed core dilemma presented in vulnerability theory, i. e., pointing out individuals as vulnerable, shows. Pointing out certain individuals and groups as vulnerable can have the effect of increasing paternalistic measures directed at them instead of enabling participation. Nevertheless, in our view reluctance needs to be put aside to allow for differentiated reports on problems and challenges in the school system and how they relate to wider circumstances in society.

If the media take up the PISA survey as a topic, they have a responsibility to report its main findings to the general public as most newspaper readers will not read the original publications. Furthermore, depending on the genre the media can and should take a critical stance to the survey – after having reported its main results. What our analysis shows for this round of reports in both Germany and Finland is that the recurring PISA survey was presented as some kind of international competition of educational systems through the use of metaphors like 'competition' (Fin. 'kilpailu') or phrases like "Can Germany keep up?" (Ger. "Kann Deutschland mithalten?"). In the case of some articles in the German media, students with an immigrant background were then constructed as the problem of the educational system and blamed for overall lower comparative performance of German students in this international competition.

Instead of letting this happen and thus making individuals who possibly are vulnerable even more vulnerable by blaming them, journalists should reflect on their responsibility and consider how they label groups, individuals and name problems. The authors of the original PISA publications have found many ways of doing this without a victimization of individuals. Although students are categorized into different groups for statistical purposes, the main language of the PISA publications stresses students' individuality and capabilities, for example through headlines like "What students know and can do in reading" or "Where all students can succeed".

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Fien De Malsche

"I'm not that Chinese" – (Co-)constructing National Identity in Interaction with a Third Culture Individual

Introduction

Processes of globalization have resulted in the increased mobility of goods, services, and people across the world (Appadurai, 1996), and as a result, "globalization is not only a descriptor of an era, but also the dominant logic of many people's lives" (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553). This includes third culture individuals, commonly defined as "a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 13; Moore & Barker, 2012). Previous research on such individuals has shown that the development of their sense of identity is often a difficult process (Fail et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), including the development of their sense of national identity, as they mostly grow up in a country other than their "passport country" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, there is limited qualitative research on the experiences and sense making processes of third culture individuals as told from their own perspectives (Purnell & Hoban, 2014).

In this contribution, I illustrate the construction of the sense of (national) identity of a third culture individual in the form of a case study on Laura (pseudonym), a married mother of one who was born in Hong Kong in the 1960s and raised in Alberta, Canada. On the basis of a semi-structured interview that I conducted with Laura as part of a broader research project, I examine how Laura makes sense of and constructs her identity from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective. More specifically, I focus on the national identity categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' to examine how and when they are used, which characteristics are ascribed to them, and how she positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, I aim to highlight how these national identity categories are co-constructed within the interactional context of the research interview and how these processes of categorization function as manifestations of vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2010) in interaction,

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thereby underlining the importance of a discursive approach to categorization (Edwards, 1991).

Third culture individuals and the categorization of national identity

Previous research on third culture individuals has argued that the mobile nature of their lives can lead to difficulties with regards to their sense of belonging and sense of identity (Fail et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). As such, establishing a sense of identity is a crucial and potentially difficult process for third culture individuals "because the identity of the TCK (third culture kid) is challenged with every move" (Fail et al., 2004, p. 324). This is also the case for their national identity, as third culture individuals often have a passport from a country that is different from the one they live in and which they potentially have never lived in themselves, often referred to as their "passport country" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Moreover, the ways in which people identify themselves within the third culture context have been found to be highly individual (Fail et al., 2004); some people may identify completely with the culture of their "passport country", some distance themselves entirely from it, and others might feel a "sense of ownership of both, without total ownership of either" (Gilbert, 2008, p. 94). As such, an in-depth analysis of the construction of national identity throughout an extended interview can provide further insights into the different ways in which a third culture individual makes sense of their own identity.

The construction of identity in interaction can be understood by examining how an individual ascribes meaning to and positions themselves with regard to certain membership categories, in this case national identities. Categorization is the cognitive process of placing events, objects or people into a general category or group and it involves the simplification of complex realities (Billig, 1985) through which "the world is rendered objectively available and is maintained as such" (Heritage, 1984, p. 220). Categorization is based on the identification of a category's crucial characteristics or attributes, and whether or not a person is categorized a certain way thus depends on whether and to what extent they embody (either as perceived by others or as felt by themselves) a category's attributes (Billig, 1985). As such, examining how categories and their attributes are talked into being and discursively used in interaction can reveal much about how people organize their thoughts and how they make sense of the world (Edwards, 1991).

These processes of categorization are not defined a priori, but rather locally produced on the basis of the social interaction in which they are used. In other words, categories are embedded in discursive contexts and therefore perspec-

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tival, contestable and open to negotiation (Mäkitalo, 2003), and from such a social constructionist perspective, identities are thus "conjointly constructed, enacted and negotiated among interlocutors as an interaction unfolds" (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017, p. 89). Such processes of constructing identity categories in interaction can be better understood in light of vulnerability theory, which posits that vulnerability is not a synonym for weakness or fragility, but rather an inherent aspect of the human condition which manifests itself in different ways at the individual level (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2010). Given the general difficulties third culture individuals can experience in establishing their sense of identity, the ways in which they construct specific identity categories can shed light on how their particular vulnerability manifests itself in interaction.

Methodology

In this contribution, I conduct an in-depth examination of the national identity categories used by a third culture individual during a research interview, focusing specifically on how and when they are used, which characteristics are ascribed to them, and how the participant positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, I aim to examine the ways in which this third culture individual makes sense of her national identity within the specific interactional context of a research interview, thereby also shedding light on how vulnerability manifests itself as part of categorization in interaction.

The participant at the center of this study is pseudonymized as Laura. She was born in Hong Kong in the 1960s and moved to Canada with her parents when she was a baby. As such, Hong Kong is her "passport country", but she was raised in the Canadian region of Alberta. Additionally, she has not lived in either Hong Kong or Alberta during her adult life, instead living in the Canadian region of British Columbia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Belgium for prolonged periods of time. Because of her physical appearance as Asian, she can be considered part of a visible minority in each of these locations. Throughout her career and across these different locations, she works as a physiotherapist, and her mobile trajectory has rendered her highly multilingual, with native proficiency in English, high proficiency in Cantonese, and basic professional proficiency in French, Dutch, Punjabi, Arabic and Spanish. At the time of the interview in June 2020, she was in her fifties and living in Brussels, Belgium with her husband and their son.

The semi-structured interview with Laura lasted for 68 minutes and was conducted through telecommunications software. The interview is part of a larger sociolinguistic research project on the role and importance of language in the lives of individuals who pursue "boundaryless careers", i. e. people who live

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highly mobile lives to further their professional careers (De Malsche & Vandenbroucke, forthcoming for a detailed overview of the setup and purposes of the broader study). Although the explicit focus of the interview was thus not to discuss her (national) identity, many of the stories and information she shared dealt with or mentioned her identity implicitly or explicitly due to the intricate ties between language, culture, and (national) identity.

To achieve the research objectives as outlined above, the audio recording was transcribed and pseudonymized and subsequently analyzed from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). This entails that I first used the qualitative coding software NVivo to code both implicit and explicit references to her national identity. In the second stage, the analysis then zoomed in on the characteristics and attributes that are assigned to the identity categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' throughout the interaction. Rather than conceptualizing identity categories as static entities, the discursive approach to categorization that is adopted in this analysis helps us to understand and analyze categories in use within a specific context (Edwards, 1991), thereby allowing for

> an understanding of and engagement with the life world through a commonsense organisation of categories and associated attributes that are made concrete *only in any particular location of their use.* (Fitzgerald et al., 2009, p. 48, emphasis in original)

Analysis and discussion

By examining a number of sequences from the interview when Laura implicitly or explicitly refers to her national identity, the analysis explores the ways in which Laura makes sense of the two main identity categories 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' during the research interview. The first part of the analysis zooms in on how and when these categories are used, which characteristics Laura ascribes to them, and how she positions herself as both an outsider and an insider with regard to both categories throughout the interview. The second section then provides insight into how these processes of sense-making are embedded in and influenced by the specific interactional context of the research interview.

It should be noted that the Chinese identity or general 'Chineseness' can refer to different groups of people, including Mainland Chinese, Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese (Shi, 2005), and that the Canadian identity or general 'Canadianness' can also refer to a number of groups, including immigrant groups, indigenous peoples, and the Québécois (Kymlicka, 2003). However, I use and refer to the general national identity terms 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' throughout the analysis because they are the two main categories Laura herself uses during the interview.

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Constructing Laura's national identity in interaction

The construction of Laura's national identity starts at the very beginning of the interview when I ask her to introduce herself, and she replies:

> **Excerpt 1 (00:00:19–00:01:59):** I'm Canadian (laughs). I grew up in Canada, but my parents immigrated to Canada when I was a baby from Hong Kong. So, in terms of language right off the bat, my mother tongue is English, but I grew up in a dual national, dual cultural household. My parents spoke Chinese at home, specifically Cantonese, and of course, tried to instill in me the Chinese values. But of course, being a rebellious Canadian kid, there was this whole constant sort of back and forth […] They did try to get me to learn Chinese, I went to Chinese school and everything, hated it (laughs), really hated it […] I grew up actually in Alberta, and I don't know if you know Canada very well, but Alberta's, like, very, like… I'm [age], so back then, I was like the only Asian kid, like the only non, you know, Caucasian child in the entire school. And so of course, that was part of the reason why I didn't want to learn Chinese, because I really wanted to fit in.

Laura starts with identifying herself as Canadian. She then adds that she was raised in a "dual national, dual cultural household", but continues to explain that when she was a child, she distanced herself from her Chinese identity, which is in line with her initial self-identification as solely Canadian. As a child, she explains that she did this because she was the only "non […] Caucasian child in the entire school" and wanted to "fit in" with the majority, explaining that this is also why she hated Chinese school and did not want to learn Cantonese, thereby accounting for her distancing behavior. As such, she explicitly details why and how she distanced herself from her Chinese identity as a child, and her initial introduction as Canadian implicitly reflects this distancing effort at the time of the interview as well.

Later on in the interview, she reflects on another moment when she introduced herself as Canadian. When talking about her experiences as a physiotherapist working in Saudi Arabia, she shares:

> **Excerpt 2 (01:01:06–01:01:51):** I was asked to treat the king. He had a bad back. And so, yea, so I went to go to the palace and I went in there and even I could tell, you know, they were introducing me […] and he still looked at me and said and went 'Huh?', and then I could then hear them explaining that she's Chinese Canadian [laughs], yea because they refer to you as your nationality, so even at the hospital where I used to work, when they book the appointment […] that's who I was known as, the Canadian […] So yes, that happened to me a lot.

In this anecdote, Laura introduced herself as Canadian, but the king reacts confusedly, presumably because he had not categorized her as such. It is implied that this is due to her physical appearance as Asian, which is not in line with the commonsensical characteristics that the king ascribes to the category 'Canadian'.

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When someone else clarifies that she is Chinese Canadian, she explains that the confusion is cleared up, presumably because her physical appearance is in line with the commonsensical attributes he ascribes to the category 'Chinese'. She follows up this story by explaining that she often made herself known as 'the Canadian', and that in many other cases, others categorized her that way as well. She then closes the anecdote by adding that "it happened to me a lot", underlining that she has often experienced being categorized as a certain nationality by others to make sense of her identity. However, when this categorization by others is not in line with how she identifies herself, she is forced to account for herself by explaining the discrepancy between her identity and what people commonsensically associate with the category 'Canadian', highlighting that the "identity of the TCK (third culture kid) is challenged with every move" (Fail et al., 2004, p. 324).

In addition to her identification as Canadian, she also shares what she considers to be commonsensically Chinese. When talking about her time in Saudi Arabia, she shares a story of visiting the Chinese embassy, where she was made fun of by the embassy staff for not being able to speak Mandarin. While telling this story, she adds:

> **Excerpt 3 (00:25:33–00:25:55):** It's quite embarrassing, I actually had gone into the Chinese embassy to renew my… I have a, it's called a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Passport, because I was born there, but I've actually never been to Mainland China in my life actually, and I've only been to Hong Kong three times in my life. I know, of all this traveling all over the world, I just for whatever reason haven't done it. So I went to the Chinese embassy in Saudi Arabia…

When sharing that she was at the Chinese embassy, Laura immediately adds that she only has a Hong Kong passport because she was born there. Although this could be interpreted as another distancing effort, she also says that she experienced not being able to speak Mandarin as 'embarrassing', implying that although she distances herself from her Chinese identity, it is not necessarily because she does not want to be associated with being Chinese, but rather because she might be embarrassed by her lack of attributes that are typically associated with the category 'Chinese'. In this excerpt, she highlights never having been to Mainland China, only having been to Hong Kong three times, and not being able to speak Mandarin as reasons why she cannot be considered Chinese, implying that the commonsensical attributes ascribed to being Chinese include visits to or living in Mainland China, more than three visits to Hong Kong, and/or being able to speak Mandarin.

Her lack of identification as Chinese becomes apparent in another anecdote she shares about how she got to know one of her long-time Chinese friends while she was living in Saudi Arabia:

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> **Excerpt 4 (00:14:39–00:14:59):** So it's Chinese New Year […] and my friend said, "I know this Chinese woman […] you should meet her!" And I'm like okay, so I called her, I didn't even know her, I called her up and I'm like "Hey, I'm Chinese, I'm making some Chinese food, I'm not that Chinese, but would you like to come over for lunch?" She said yes.

In this anecdote, she recounts introducing herself as Chinese to another Chinese person, thereby leaving out her Canadian identity entirely. However, immediately after saying that she is Chinese, she mitigates her own statement by adding "I'm not that Chinese", which arguably functions as an indication to the listener not to expect the commonsensical characteristics that are typically associated with being Chinese.

The reasons why she feels the need to mitigate saying that she is Chinese become apparent towards the end of the interview, when she discusses her general struggle to connect with Chinese people in Belgium and across her international trajectory:

> **Excerpt 5 (01:03:47–01:04:36):** There are about 5 students in my son's school that are all from China, so they're all embassy workers. They… sadly actually, I'm always a little disappointed, none of them want anything to do with me, because they don't see me as being Chinese, yea, that I'm a little sad about. And that has happened right across the board, wherever I am. In Saudi Arabia, near the end of my time there […] there were a lot more Chinese families in some of the compounds, and a girlfriend of mine, she was from Hong Kong, so she grew up 20-something years in Hong Kong, and then left to go to the US, so she's American, but she obviously was much more Chinese than me. And we tried to break into (laughs) their little… you know, their little circles, and we couldn't do it, we just couldn't do it.

Laura explains that she has experienced rejection from multiple Chinese people because she feels that they do not consider her Chinese enough, and she relates this rejection to the fact that she does not meet the commonsensical characteristics that other (Chinese) people associate with Chineseness. She expresses sadness and disappointment over this rejection, and her phrasing of trying to "break into […] their little circles" metaphorically emphasizes the strength of the efforts she has tried to make in the past. She adds that her friend, who is "much more Chinese than me", was also rejected despite having lived in Hong Kong for 20 years, underlining once more that the duration of stay is a core attribute of her categorization of Chineseness, but that the minimum length or precise location of this stay remains unclear to her. When comparing this story from the end of the interview with Excerpt 1 at the very beginning of the interview, it becomes clear that when she was young, Laura recalls distancing herself from being Chinese so as to fit in as the majority identity of Canadian, but that others frequently questioned her self-identification as Canadian. Later, as an adult, many Chinese people also reject her, which she connects to her not being Chinese

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enough. This lack of sense of identity and belonging is a common experience for third culture individuals (Gilbert, 2008).

Through the narration of her lived experiences, Laura associates the identity category 'Canadian' with growing up in Canada and having a distinct physical appearance which she never explicitly defines. This is in line with previous findings on the conceptualization of being Canadian, which has been argued to be rooted in British colonial history that has strong ties with whiteness (Kymlicka, 2003). Laura then links Chineseness to proficiency in the language, which confirms findings from previous research which underline the importance of knowing Chinese in the construction of "traditional Chineseness", particularly in diasporic communities (Wei & Hua, 2010; Wei, 2015). However, she does not reflect further on the hierarchies between the different varieties of Chinese in establishing Chineseness (Wei & Hua, 2010), with the exception of a brief mention in Excerpt 3 when she was embarrassed at the embassy for not knowing Mandarin, a language she also shared she would have liked to know better. Additionally, Laura associates being Chinese with having lived in China or having visited it a number of times, although for both of these characteristics, it remains unclear throughout the interview what the minimum amount of time or number of visits should be. As such, Laura embodies certain characteristics of her conceptualization of both of these identities, yet at the same time, she also considers herself a relative outsider with regard to both categories, which is reinforced by the fact that others treat her as an outsider in certain contexts.

Because of the ambiguity of her sense of identity, she thus calls upon the one that she considers most appropriate in the interactional context she is in. Within the span of a little over an hour, the categorization of Laura's national identity shifts between Canadian, Chinese, and Chinese Canadian, thereby underlining the flexible, fluctuating and negotiable nature of both categories and identities in interaction. Additionally, these shifts can also be considered manifestations of the vulnerability of her sense of national identity, as being part of both categories while simultaneously not embodying all of the characteristics that are commonsensically ascribed to them leads to frequent situations where Laura has to account for herself and her own identity, either because others question her identity explicitly, or because she feels the need to explain herself in anticipation of other people's reactions on the basis of experiences when her identity has been questioned before.

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Co-constructing Laura's national identity in interaction

The processes of categorization that are analyzed in the previous section are rooted in and negotiated as part of the specific context of the research interview. From a social constructionist perspective, context is key in order to reach a deeper understanding of why and how people use or define certain categories the way they do, and to recognize how all categories used in interaction are thus not merely constructed, but rather co-constructed by the interlocutors and the particular context in which they are used (Jenkins, 2000). As such, the research interview context can be considered 'omnirelevant' to the interaction (Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

Revisiting Excerpt 1 at the beginning of the interview in light of the omnirelevant nature of the interactional context, Laura's immediate identification as Canadian when she is asked to introduce herself highlights the importance of her national identity in her construction of selfhood. However, her self-identification as Canadian is immediately followed by a laugh, which is then followed by an explanation that she was actually born in Hong Kong and moved to Canada as a baby. This laughter arguably marks incongruity of what she just said rather than actual humor (Mazzocconi et al., 2022), as Laura seems to be aware that her identification as Canadian might be questioned by the interviewer because her physical appearance is not what is typically associated with the identity category 'Canadian'. After marking the incongruity, she solves it by explaining that she was raised in a "dual national, dual cultural household." Without being prompted to do so, Laura thus anticipates the interviewer's potential reaction to her categorization as Canadian and further clarifies it before the interviewer has the chance to ask her about it first, thereby showcasing the vulnerability of her sense of national identity.

Taking the identity of the interviewer into account as a white woman who did not experience a third culture upbringing, it is possible that Laura presents herself this way on the basis of previous interactions with other people who do not share a background similar to hers and who have questioned her identity in the past. A number of researchers who have previously conducted research interviews with third culture individuals report that they are third culture individuals themselves, and that they believe this helped them to establish rapport with their research participants (see for example Moore & Barker, 2012; Purnell & Hoban, 2014). Similarly, a lack of the lived experiences that are tied to a third culture upbringing as well as not being a person of color can result in a lack of understanding from the interviewer and can thus also evoke different responses from the interviewee to the interviewer's questions. As such, Laura's identity does not exist in a vacuum, but is rather co-constructed in interaction with the

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interviewer, whose own identity arguably influences the way in which Laura chooses to present herself throughout the interview.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored how Laura, a third culture individual who was born in Hong Kong and raised in the Canadian region of Alberta, makes sense of and interactionally constructs the national identity categories 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' within the discursive context of a research interview. In the first section of the analysis, a micro-level discourse analysis of both implicit and explicit mentions of Laura's national identity throughout the interview uncovered how she navigates the complex sense of identity that third culture individuals deal with throughout their lives (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) in interaction, thereby highlighting the vulnerability of her national identity as its ambiguity frequently forces her to account for herself. Additionally, the analysis underlined the ways in which "senses of 'national' identity are local configurations of social organization" (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 78) rather than static, clear or bounded entities, and how the subjective complexity of identity construction manifests itself in interaction. The second section of the analysis emphasized the co-constructed nature of these categories and identities throughout the interaction by closely examining Laura's first invocation of her national identity, thereby highlighting the different ways in which talk is embedded in its interactional context.

In conclusion, the discursive approach to categorization (Edwards, 1991) adopted in this contribution has foregrounded the complexity and particularity of categorization processes in interaction from a globalized perspective, and thereby also the particularity of the vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; Fineman, 2010) and complexity that is involved in establishing a sense of identity as a third culture individual. As a third culture individual, the research interview context allows Laura to reflect on how she sees herself and chooses to present herself, which is shown to be influenced by an intricate interplay of self-identification and other-categorization, as well as by rejecting and being rejected. By examining her invocations of the categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian', the ways she makes sense of them and how she positions herself in relation to them, this contribution has thus illustrated the complexity of carefully constructing identity from a third culture perspective and the intricacies and vulnerability of doing so in interaction with others.

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Part II – Psychophysical Vulnerability and Resilience Devices

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Pascal Nicklas

Vulnerability and Resilience in Reading Fiction

Introduction

Research into the effects of reading is often an interdisciplinary enterprise. The creation and the use of letters is a cultural practice starting around 6.000 year ago in different places (Manguel, 2014, p. 177f.) – which is a short time in terms of biological evolution, but learning to read changes the functionality of the brain and has important effects on cognition. Reading as a cultural and social activity is embedded in a neurological, cognitive and psychological framework – especially when reading and resilience/vulnerability are looked at. This article comes from a perspective interested in empirical reading research and book-studies connecting itself to psychology and the cognitive neurosciences. In order to look at the effects of reading on resilience/vulnerability, it is important to devise a methodological and intellectual framework using insights particularly from medical and psychological research into resilience and clearing up some popular (mis-) conceptions of resilience in order to – in a next step – do empirical research into the effects of reading fiction.

The terminology and ideas of vulnerability and resilience have, in the past fifty years, trickled down from academic discourse into general and popular use. It would, however, be too facile to speak of misconceptions which have evolved through this popularisation. As Ludwig Wittgenstein's language philosophy in his *Philosophical Investigations* has it, "The meaning of a word is its use in the language." (Wittgenstein, 1995, §43) This is not entirely precluding hegemonic definitions, but it opens the door to a more liberal and pluralistic point of view on meaning making. It is a starting point for respecting diversity. The recent and continuing battles for emancipation of minorities through language policing may well be a hegemonic strive on all sides where everybody involved is fighting for establishing their own identity as a hegemonic position, but it can also be seen as a pathway to greater tolerance and acceptance. So, looking at the terminology and ideas of vulnerability and resilience in their academic and popular ubiquity can appear as a highly charged political field of contention or as a highly irritating

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and unsatisfactory terminological and ideological mess. Neither in the discourses on vulnerability nor the research into resilience, there is a uniformity or unanimity of terminological definition. (Aburn et al., 2016) The use of the terminology requires a close look at the context and the ideological and political uses the terminology is being put to.

While Paul Feyerabend's "Anything Goes" (1976; 1979) originally refers to a historical perspective on the development of science, it also has two important implications for research into vulnerability and resilience: on the one hand, it shows that there is no single and universal method of scientific research, on the other hand, it acknowledges the necessity for methodology as the key tool in scientific practice. This reflects the grounding of scientific development (if not progress) in a methodological pluralism which for a long time now has become the standard in the humanities and the sciences where interdisciplinary research is the standard leading to more and more interdisciplinary research centres. Keeping Wittgenstein and Feyerabend in mind, one may develop more patience with the terminological and ideological mess one faces when dealing with vulnerability and resilience.

In a way, speaking of the vulnerability of the human race in the Anthropocene, may appear as either ludicrous or dialectical. The Anthropocene is the first geological age in which human activities are seen to impact geology and ecosystems in a relevant and harmful way. The starting point of the age is still a cause of contention: suggestions range from 12,000–15,000 BC to the 1960s. In terms of vulnerability the Anthropocene means that the species has evolved to being the dominant and most destructive species on earth which might eventually effect the destruction of the planet that will only flourish again after humanity's self-destruction. This dystopian scenario reveals the dialectics of vulnerability by showing the human species being vulnerable to its own self-destructive activities. So, humanity as such does not seem to be – in the context of geology and ecosystems – particularly vulnerable, except to the effects of its own destructive way of life. Within the political and social sphere, things look differently. Here, vulnerability of the individual, a group, state or nation is a completely different matter. Power relations play an important role: Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (2016) point out in their introduction to the volume *Vulnerability in Resistance* that the terminology of vulnerability is politically a blank slate:

> By itself, the discourse on vulnerability can support any version of politics and has no special claim to supporting a politics on the Left, or a politics for feminism. It can describe the vulnerability of those in power against the forces of resistance by those who are seeking a new political order. Moreover, the discourse on vulnerability can lead to objectionable ontological claims about the constitutive vulnerability of women's bodies,

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> claims we would doubtless want to reject in favor of a social and political account how vulnerability is produced and distributed. (Butler et al., 2016, p. 2)

Vulnerability, and this is the important lesson to learn here, is not an ontological category. Taking it as such, one can easily make it another tool of oppression, increasing and further inscribing systemic or ideological vulnerability. And even more importantly for our purposes here, vulnerability as an ontological category is not making it any clearer, what 'vulnerability' is supposed to mean. Vulnerability is a relative thing. Humanity as such is far from being vulnerable – except to its own destructive activities. The individual is very prone to be vulnerable. The powerful are vulnerable to the weak and the weak are vulnerable to the powerful. In Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's terms (1986, p. 152), it is the master-slave dialectic, making the master dependent on the recognition of the slave in order to be master and thus being vulnerable to the slave.

"Vulnerable but invincible" – Vulnerability and Resilience

Vulnerability and resilience often come as a team. Resilience is usually understood as the ability to cope with adverse circumstances in a way which returns the organism to a normal or balanced state. (Babic et al., 2020) In order to experience a situation as adverse, the organism has to be vulnerable to the effects exerted on it. So, vulnerability is the normal in that all organisms of a class are vulnerable. But resilience is also the normal because the majority of individuals are resilient or after an adverse event recovering: this makes immediate evolutionary sense but it is also supported by recent research. Bonnano (2004) finds in his review of resilience research that while almost every individual is threatened by post-traumatic events (PTE) (Ogle et al., 2013) 65.7% prove resilient while 20.8% succumb but recover (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2018). The task of resilience research is to find the mechanisms that would help both those recovering and most of all those who become chronically afflicted.

Resilience research in a social and psychological sense started much earlier than the popular use of the word. In their classic book, *Vulnerable but Invincible. A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth* (1982), Emmy Werner and Ruth S. Smith (1982) report a longitudinal study involving a team of "pediatricians, psychologists, and public health workers" (Werner & Smith, 1982) following a cohort of 698 children for more than twenty years. Large amounts of detailed data were collected in those decades. The focus of the preceding books, *The Children of Kauai* (Werner et al., 1971) and *Kauai's Children Come of Age* (Werner & Smith, n.d.), were aspects of vulnerability like fetal and perinatal

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casualties, perinatal stress, poverty, a disordered caretaking environment coming from the data collected (Werner & Smith, 1982) and then the

> mental health problems and anti-social behavior in childhood and adolescence, and the likelihood of their persistence into young adulthood. We documented the biological and temperamental underpinnings of these problems, the relationship between social class and vulnerability, the pervasive effects of caretaker-child interaction, and cultural differences in socialization. (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 2)

Out of the cohort of 698 children born in 1955, 204 developed serious problems in the first twenty years of their lives – at least at some point. Their vulnerability led to biological, economic and social – particularly on the family level – shortcomings preventing a relatively problem free development like the majority of the cohort and integration. They succumbed to their vulnerability. But there were also others suffering under the same averse conditions but could cope: they "remained 'invincible' and developed into competent and autonomous young adults who 'worked well, played well, loved well and expected well'" (Garmezy, 1976). (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 3). Werner's and Smith's research into resilience takes its cue from this observation and poses the question what factors made the difference between those who succumbed and those who remained 'invincible'.

This switch in point of view from disease orientation to health orientation is a methodological turning point still shaping current approaches in resilience research. The most important finding in Werner's and Smith's study correlates to findings in earlier studies: the key to resilience is the ability to find social and spiritual support:

> The resilient poor on Kauai were able to draw on all of these supports: advice and counsel by older siblings, cousins, relatives, and refuge in strong faith. (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 105)

Religion provided spiritual help but equally important was the personal support offered by individuals in religious communities. So, either having less problems to cope with in the family or being able to find support from people outside the family if the family did not offer support, seems to be the most important difference between resilient and non-resilient children and youths.

Character trait vs social and acquired skills

The seminal study by Werner and Smith is obviously dated in many aspects of its method and ideological foundations. But some of its lasting insights appear to be the orientation towards health, the focus on sociological aspects and the implication that individuals are not simply born resilient, but that resilience de-

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velops under certain circumstances. Here, obviously the individual constitution, the character of a child also plays a role:

> These strong social bonds were absent among families whose children had difficulties coping under duress. The lack of this emotional support was most devastating to children with a constitutional tendency toward withdrawal and passivity, with low activity levels, irregular sleeping and feeding habits, a genetic background (i. e., parental psychoses, especially maternal schizophrenia) that made them more vulnerable to the influences of an adverse environment. (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 156)

Werner and Smith have a rather balanced view in the nature-nurture debate, seeing both the genetic and social factors at work in the development of resilient individuals. Equally, vulnerability is a mixed bag of individual risk-factors and social and economic circumstances. Like there is no innate resilience *per se*, there is no ontological vulnerability in their concept.

> A young child maintains a relatively small number of relationships that give feedback and shape a sense of coherence. We have seen that even under adverse circumstances, change is possible if the older child or adolescent encounters new experiences and people who give meaning to one's life, and a reason for commitment and caring. (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 163)

Resilience appears in this light as a dynamic concept of being a process and a product at the same time. (Kalisch et al., 2015) More recent research focuses very much on this dynamic nature of resilience by looking at the positive effects of adverse events in making individuals, who have successfully coped with stress, more stress resilient (Bonanno, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004). Also, the way the individual looks at adverse events, how the individual appraises a situation changes the degree of vulnerability and heightens the resulting resilience. (Kalisch et al., 2015)

Popular views on resilience, however, give more prominence to concepts of resilience as a trait though they make a point of the individual's ability to change. This is characteristic for the discourse of self-help in which much of the popular literature on resilience and the kits for self-testing one's resilience on the internet or in popular publications have their origin. These tests usually assume an individual level of resilience which can be found out by asking questions about one's attitude to certain statements.

Testing resilience

In popular understanding of individual resilience, the idea that resilience is a character trait which can be trained is widespread. On the website of *PsychTests*, for example, there is a special test for resiliency which is announced as testing

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your personality by going through a number of statements which actually rather test what you think about specific situations than really test how you do react. The question, if "[…] you bounce back from life's trials and tribulations, or do they throw you for a serious loop?", is creating a binary setting. Either you are or you are not resilient. The following definition is introducing the terminology of survival: "Resilience is the quality that allows us to 'survive', and even gain strength from hardship." The latter part of the definition echoes Friedrich Nietzsche saying that what does not kill me, makes me stronger (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 60). "The function of this test", it says, "is to see where you can improve." This contextualizes the test in the world of self-help: "Take this resilience test to assess whether you should work on improving your coping skills." All of this is obviously not completely wrong, but it does not reflect the state of current research and it feeds into the idea that you can test resilience like the strength of a muscle which is there if you are applying it or not (which is not even true of a muscle – because you lose it if you do not use it). The test that follows asks you to look at a number of statements which you are asked to assess with respect to the level to which these statements apply to you. The top-score of the test is described very much in line of the introduction to the test but it also adds a list of characteristics of a survivor:

> Your score indicates that you are a very resilient individual. You are able to bounce back easily from a variety of trying situations and get on with your life. Essentially, you possess the characteristics of a 'survivor', such as flexibility, self-confidence, optimism and a feeling of control over what happens in your life. You avoid taking things personally and are able to put troubles in perspective, which prevents you from sinking into despair when the going gets rough. Keep it up! (Score 91/100: https://testyourself.psychtests.com/testid/2121)

The dichotomy of survivor and victim is applied in order to characterize the degree to which one possesses resilience. A test like this is obviously flawed in many ways. There are at least three most fundamental problems: firstly, the test sets out to check resilience in the absence of adversity, secondly, it describes resilience as a trait, and thirdly, it classes survivors and victims according to the views the test-subject holds irrespective of the individual life situation. In this way, this test subscribes to an ideology of self-help which might indeed be put into the context of a neo-liberal agenda (Rimke, 2000).[1]

1 "In self-help texts personal power is generally viewed as an inherent property of being which is assumed to constitute the site of all self-control and movement (Beattie, 1989; Covey, 1987; Jeffers, 1996; Moore, 1992; Peck, 1978). Beattie informs us that when 'we find our personal power [we] come to do the possible – live our lives' (Beattie, 1989, p. 28). Discussions such as these assume that 'power' is an independent 'thing' internally located and available for possession. This asocial and zero-sum conceptualization of power means, for the self-help experts, that the more power we have, the more strength we possess. Conversely, to compromise one's

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Kalisch and colleagues have repeatedly outlined the challenges of contemporary resilience research (Kalisch et al., 2017). They are mainly identifying three problematic points:

1. The heterogeneity of terminology, operationalization, measurement and study design.
2. The weakness of predictors of resilience outcomes.
3. The gap between resilience theory and empirical testing.

Key to the operational definition of resilience providing a firm basis for future research is the dynamic concept of resilience which has been widely accepted in recent theoretical developments. To keep up mental health or to quickly recover requires a dynamic adaptation to the adverse circumstances. Evidence for the process nature of resilience comes from a multitude of observations showing that individuals change while they successfully cope with stressors – whether this manifests at the level of altered perspectives on life (Johnson & Boals, 2015; Joseph & Linley, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), as emergence of new strengths or competences (Luthar et al., n.d.), as partial immunization against the effects of future stressors (Seery et al., 2010, 2013), or even as epigenetic alterations and modified gene expression patterns (Boks et al., 2015; Breen et al., 2015) […] To summarize, most resilience theorists currently agree that resilience is not simply inertia or insensitivity to stressors, or merely a passive response to adversity, but the result of active, dynamic adaptation. (Russo et al., 2012)

Resilience is a form or process of adaptation which occurs in confrontation with the stressors. So, resilience is exclusively measurable in times of adversity or in a longitudinal study which accounts for many moments before, during and after crisis. This adaptation takes place, depending on the stressor, on different levels leading even to epigenetic effects. For our context, it is interesting to look at the cognitive-affective level of adapting attitudes and the "emergence of new strengths or competences" (Luthar et al., n.d.).

In an earlier study, Kalisch and colleagues developed a mechanistic theory which causally connects factors, mechanisms and outcome. Resilience research has described many factors such as, e.g. "social support, social status, personality, life history, coping style, genetic background, brain function" (Kalisch et al., 2015, p. 8) These factors are, obviously, not easily isolated: they may conceptually have blurred borders or even be identical, they might mediate or moderate each other or overlap. They all lead to mechanisms which then produce resilience as an outcome. There might be a number of mechanisms or – as Kalisch

personal power is to lose one's force, to become weak and to permit others to have power over one's self. Moore asserts that if 'we do not claim the soul's power on our own behalf, we become its victims.'" (Rimke, 2000, p. 64)

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and colleagues argue in 2015 – just a single overriding mechanism which leads to resilience. Kalisch and colleagues hypothesize in their conceptual framework that this key resilience mechanism is a "positive appraisal style […] we refer to it as positive appraisal style of resilience, or PASTOR." (Kalisch et al., 2015, p. 9)

Appraisal theory goes back a long way having early precursors like Epictetus whose saying that it is not the things themselves which are disturbing, but what we think of them is quoted by Laurence Stern as a motto to his *Tristram Shandy*. In psychology it has been the work of Magda B. Arnold, particularly her book on *Emotion and Personality* (1960), which has brought the appraisal process forward as a key aspect of the formation of emotion. This appraisal theory claims that there is no simple stimulus-response relationship between an event and the emotional reaction but that the stimulus is processed differently depending on the context by first creating a mental representation which then is appraised: "Stimulus/Situation > Mental representation > appraisal > emotional response" (Kalisch et al., 2015) Depending on many individual and situational factors this appraisal will lead to very different outcomes. At one time for one person a situation might feel threatening while for the same person at a different time the same situation might have been a welcome challenge:

> To achieve the contextually appropriate outcome, the appraisal process integrates different types of internal and external information, or stimulus and situation dimensions. These appraisal dimensions range from basic ones such as stimulus intensity, novelty, or intrinsic (un)pleasantness; to more computationally demanding ones such as outcome probability, (un)predictability, or compatibility with one's goals and needs; up to complex dimensions such as causation (e. g. agency), relation to coping potential (resources, power, control), or norm compatibility (Scherer). As a result, one and the same stimulus may evoke different emotional reactions in different circumstances or individuals (e. g. because goals or coping potential differ). (Kalisch et al., 2015, p. 9)

This theoretical framework can help to explain the question psychological resilience research has been grappling with from its inception in Emmy Werner's work: Why are individuals in the same cohort from very similar backgrounds coping more or less successfully with the same stressors? If appraisal is the one key mechanism which works towards a resilient outcome, one has to look at the factors which work on the appraisal process making it more or less successful in coping with adverse situations. – Reading fiction can be a source of strong factors influencing and shaping the appraisal process, in both ways: making the individual more or less resilient.

Appraisal is not only one cognitive operation but has different forms: It can be led by instinct, conditioning or routine, making it an unconscious process in animals and humans alike. It can also be a very slow process of deliberation and conscious judgement. Between these poles of fast unconscious and slow deliberating there is a spectrum of styles which all can be described as appraisal: "in

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addition to being multidimensional, context-dependent, and subjective, appraisal is procedurally heterogeneous and dynamic. And, of course, appraisal processes are thought to have a biological basis" (Kalisch et al., 2015, p. 9) within the theoretical framework of Kalisch and colleagues.

Reading fiction: vulnerability and resilience

The dynamic and heterogenous mechanism of appraisal is influenced by the effects of reading as a factor on a number of different levels: Reading as a culturally learnt ability is modulating the brain and creating by neuronal recycling its own networks (Dehaene, 2009). It actually changes the brain. This enables the brain to do a lot of operations of embodied mnemonic techniques increasing accessibility of knowledge and training combinatorial skills. By enlarging memory functions, reading provides an amazing store of knowledge and opens vistas of tradition conveying wisdom and experience which modulate appraisal processes on the one hand and also change other factors contributing to the moulding of the appraisal process eventually leading to resilience adaptation. Reading fiction (but also history and other literature) provides support in appraisal processes by offering alternative views and also by reflecting phases of adversity and coping in resilience narratives. With a view to vulnerability and resilience reading fiction can be a double-edged sword as it cuts both ways. It makes readers more aware, more understanding and more sensitive to the reader's own needs (Bloom, 2000) and those of others (Djikic et al., 2013; Mar et al., 2009; Oatley, 2016). It can provide an avenue of escapism in providing a space of easy pleasures which have been criticized in a Platonist vein from antiquity onwards leading to a "fear of fiction" (Starker, 1990) or habitual onslaughts on any kind of new media from the movies to TV, internet and social media. Reading can be a form of daydreaming fulfilling unsatisfied wishes as Sigmund Freud would have it (Freud, 1999, p. 216). Reading addiction as a literary paradigm has historically been embedded in novels like *Don Quixote*, *Anton Reiser* or *Madame Bovary* as a nefarious disease but there is virtually no empirical medical, psychosomatic or psychological research into this "social construction" (Aselmeyer, 2016).

Sedentary activities like reading are generally a health risk but the little research there is into reading as such an activity have mixed results. Some studies show a reduced mortality in readers, others show that it makes no difference (Bavishi et al., 2016). When looking at reading fiction as compared to reading newspapers and magazines, however, Bavishi and colleagues can show that reading books, which is usually reading books of fiction, contributes to longevity. Reading books tends to involve two cognitive processes that could create a sur-

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vival advantage. First, it promotes "deep reading," which is a slow, immersive process; this cognitive engagement occurs as the reader draws connections to other parts of the material, finds applications to the outside world, and asks questions about the content presented (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009). Cognitive engagement may explain why vocabulary, reasoning, concentration, and critical thinking skills are improved by exposure to books (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Stanovich et al., 1995; Wolf & Barzillai, 2009). Second, books can promote empathy, social perception, and emotional intelligence, which are cognitive processes that can lead to greater survival (Bassuk et al., 2000; Djikic et al., 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Olsen et al., 1991; Shipley et al., 2008). Better health behaviors and reduced stress may explain this process (Bassuk et al., 2000).

In terms of mental health, there is some indication that reading fiction can help with depression and other mental health issues (Billington, 2019), particularly when it is done in company like in the reading environments provided by Shared Reading (https://www.thereader.org.uk/). Empirical research into this field of strengthening resilience by reading fiction is scarce and requires more of a theoretical foundation. Using the PASTOR approach developed by Kalisch and colleagues might be an avenue to longitudinal studies looking at effects of reading in times of adversity. Vulnerability, in this context, plays a double role which is partly in line with ideas put forth in Brené Brown's popular books – that vulnerability is a strength because it gives the space to the courage of being fully seen, to open up the authentic self. (Brown, 2017) This is resounding Harold Bloom's position on "How to Read and Why": "You need not fear that the freedom of your development as a reader is selfish, because if you become an authentic reader, then the response to your labours will confirm you as an illumination to others." (Bloom, 2000, p. 24)

> Aber es tut gut, wenn das Gewissen breite Wunden bekommt, denn dadurch wird es empfindlicher für jeden Biß. Ich glaube, man sollte überhaupt nur solche Bücher lesen, die einen beißen und stechen. Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch? Damit es uns glücklich macht, wie Du schreibst? Mein Gott, glücklich wären wir eben auch, wenn wir keine Bücher hätten, und solche Bücher, die uns glücklich machen, könnten wir zur Not selber schreiben. Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord, ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns. Das glaube ich. (Kafka, 1960, p. 28)[2]

2 "But it is good when the conscience receives wide wounds, because through this it becomes more sensitive to every bite. I believe, one should generally only read such books which bite and sting. If the book we read does not wake us up with hitting us with a fist on our skull, for what else do we read the book then? That it makes us happy how you write? My God, happy we would also be if we had no books, and those books that make us happy we could, if need be, write

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Kafka's famous demand that a book needs to be an axe for the frozen sea inside us points to how reading fiction will make us more vulnerable, more sensitive by being adverse life events – from which we come out more resilient.

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ourselves. We, however, need those books, that affect us like a catastrophe, that hurt us very much, like the death of one we loved more than ourselves, like if we would be outcast into the woods, away from all humans, like a suicide, a book must be the axe for the frozen sea in us. That is what I believe." (Kafka, 1960, Letter to Oskar Pollak, 27th January 1904) (Translation: P. N.)

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Michael B. Buchholz

Vulnerability and Courage in Psychoanalytic Treatment Rooms – from "Insight" to "the Conversational Turn in Sight"

Introduction

Nearly everything that happens in the psychotherapeutic treatment room is an element of conversation – psychiatric diagnoses are determined by posing interrogative questions; psychoanalytic interpretations are delivered by using the rich panorama of symbols or metaphors, all embedded in words; patients tell their state-of-mind and their feelings by narrative, comparisons, everyday phrases and one could add more: nearly every element I just mentioned here is accompanied by resources of cooperation like using your body (face, gaze, posture, movements) or the other's body (face, gaze, posture, movements), your voice, ears and attention and your ways to attract the other's attention; rhythm and flow of the interaction, institutionalized norms, rules and roles and further cultural material around you and, finally, the implicit but not predetermined rules of ending the session (or the cooperation) – anyhow, you know that! But, to paraphrase Freud, you do not know that you know, you simply use it. And you do not know wherefrom.

Everything I mentioned here could be summarized as 'talk-in-interaction'. The little miracle remains: after the session professional therapists extract concepts which are not ascribed to the sphere of interaction but become considered real things like "mental disorders", "diagnoses", "social disorders", "splitting", etc. These "real things" then, are used as explanation for what happened before in the conversation. The distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' has a strong (cultural and political) history (Scheer, 2014) in emotion theory to which I can only refer the reader's attention. This practice is considered so self-evident, so commonplace, so normal that it is hard to be surprised enough, considering that the patient's voice is silenced. However, contrasting this practice with other views, slowly evolving in relational and conversational conceptions of what happens in therapies, there is a chance to arrive at "Hearing Silencing", as we named it (Buchholz & Dimitrijevic, 2024). And this holds even in moments of strong

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silence where to take up speaking risks vulnerabilities (Dimitrijevic & Buchholz, 2021). What both do together can best be termed as "doing We" (Buchholz 2023).

Conversation or talk-in-interaction, however, is the most real thing we encounter in treatment rooms (and in many other places, too). In an interview Peter Fonagy (2002) warned:

> If you don't have a good theory of the interaction process, you are at the mercy of it. This doesn't mean you need the 'right' theory, but you need to have a firm and good theory to hold on to. Otherwise, the interpersonal encounter with the patient is so powerful that it simply washes you away. (Fonagy, 2002)

My first conclusion is: psychotherapists are well advised to dive into the intricacies of the interaction process more deeply. But will they come up with a new theory? Would theory suffice? Edgar Levenson, a relational psychoanalyst, warned:

> Theoretical clarity does not necessarily aid in therapy; it may be harmful. Clinical practice does not appear to derive from theory in any straightforward fashion. (Levenson, 1983, p. 7)

What is required? Theory or no theory? I would name it: a passing through. As a therapist, you go through a lot of theories in order to develop other qualities, like hunches and sensibilities for the unspoken, for human vulnerabilities, including your own. You develop courage to address topics and practices going beyond the usual social withdrawal behaviour. You know that you do not deal with texts, but with people living in a life world of which you become a part for a certain time. A conversation analyst framed this insight in the words:

> What one is dealing with is not a linguistic text, but cognitively sophisticated actors using language to build the consequential events that make up their life world. (Goodwin, 2015, p. 208)

You develop skills to find entries into a person's life world, but you do not fully enter. You are inside and outside, a shaky position exposing yourself to pulls and forces in one or the other direction. It is, as Donna Orange et al. (2015) once said, that we are never in the other's mind, but always within conversation. You know, if you follow invitations to enter you will violate the artful relationship with a patient as well as when you withdraw. The aim is Participatory Sense Making (Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007) resulting from something that cannot be better named than by the metaphor of a dance:

> Imagine a couple dance: one cannot lead unless the other assumes the role of follower, and if one participant does not contribute to the moves, it would be like carrying a doll across the dance floor. Thus, not only is the interaction process autonomous in terms of its internal organization, it also depends, crucially, on the autonomy of the individuals

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> participating in it. In this way, for enaction, interactional organization requires both interactional and individual autonomy. (Jaegher, Peräkylä, & Stevanovic, 2016, p. 6)

This is I want to deal here with. Both autonomies are deeply vulnerable. There is more about vulnerability in the conclusion.

Realizing the Real – the Construction of Depth

Harvey Sacks, a founder of conversation analysis (CA), introduced a term which is relevant here; he described it as 'My-mind-is-with-you' (MMWY), a silent prerequisite for talk-in-interaction:

> Now, in the middle of a conversation, we know well, in some ways, who it is we're talking to. And there are enormously elaborated ways in which we bring off that "my mind is with you" – I use that rather loose sounding phrase and you might figure that it could get shot down, but we'll see in due course that people really can achieve showing that "my mind is with you." (Sacks & Jefferson, 1992/1995, p. 166ff.)

A second principle was named by Sacks as 'doing-together-to-do-together':

> The fact that there is a job that any person could clearly do by themselves (sic), provides a resource for members for permitting them to show each other that whatever it is they're doing together, they're just doing together to do together. That is to say, if one wants to find a way of showing somebody that what you want is to be with them, the best way to do it is to find some way of dividing a task which is not easily dividable, and which clearly can be done by either one alone. (Sacks & Jefferson, 1992/1995, p. 147)

As many people believe that CA and psychoanalysis are so different approaches that they cannot be reconciled I want to make an attempt here to convince those sceptics by an early remark from Ferenczi:

> He introduces it with these words (Diary, pp. 147–148): "The hallucinatory period, therefore, is preceded by a purely mimetic period", which is nothing but a re-assessment of the notion of primary identification: "identification as a stage preceding object relation", in one "psychic process the importance of which has perhaps been insufficiently appreciated, even by Freud himself." (Avello, 2018, p. 124)

Psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi once proposes that babies do not deal with 'objects'; they treat them by 'identification', this thing is "like me" one might phrase this in words and others are not. Or, "do I know that what this is?" – or not? I add that there are sometimes experiences which are similar to what adults realize when they meet situations presented in the picture here (Figure 1). Adults who are exposed to such a situation doubt: is this a carpet on the floor? Or is there really a whole I could fall in? Danger or deception?

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Figure 1: "What would you think entering such a room? Dangerous or not?" (Photo: M. B. B.)

What can adults do? They test. How? By using not only perception-with-eyes but by introducing a second source of information, another sense. They approach carefully, knee down and touch what they see. Two senses in cooperation produce depth in perception. Such depth is not a property of the world, it's a property of the person doing the double sensing.

From infant research (Meltzoff & Moore, 1983) we know that very young babies solve the problem of a hanging ball in front of them in a very similar fashion. They 'see' the dangling ball and they try to 'touch' it – then, it is real. More than an imagination: a real thing! The schema of this experience can be reproduced in the following way:

One sense plus another sense – both confirm the same and thus integration is achieved. I name it a bifocal triad (Figure 2).

The principle shall be named as "realizing the real", in short: RR-principle.

Now, let's try to describe the same experience the next day. Something new emerges which is more than just a repetition. The situation is as follows (Figure 3). At first, everything looks like the first time, the picture above poses this memory-experience in the background. Both senses (viewing and touching) achieve an integration. But now the baby is happy because it already knows this, memory comes into play. Behind each element of the triad, yesterday's experience is revealed, today's integration is modelled on that of yesterday. Inevitably, the baby must unavoidably 'conclude' that s/he her- or himself was already there yesterday and that it is itself that has already had this experience of yesterday. For a moment, this experience gives rise to what infant researchers (Braten & Trevarthen, 2007) call the 'proto-self'. It arises in the triad of self-reference. A new distinction between object- and self-reference is established.

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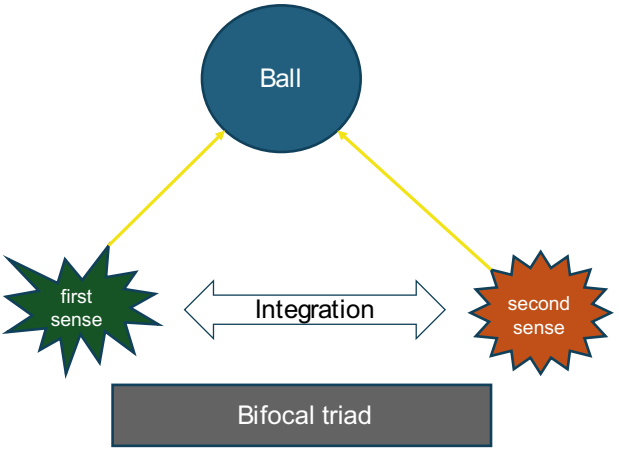

Figure 2: The bifocal triad and the origin of the RR-principle (Author: M. B. B.)

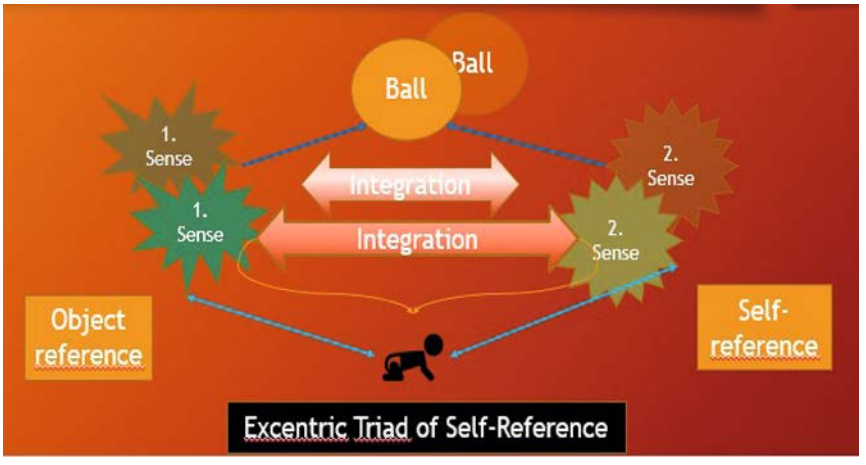

Figure 3: Increasing complexities – The excentric triad of self-reference (Author: M. B. B.)

Of course, this does not imply that this distinction is stable once it is experienced. In developmental psychology it is well known that processes show up and vanish before they are established in a stable manner.

Jumping in the world of adults the same RR-principle holds when two people who have never met before are introduced by a third person to each other – what to say now? What to say next? Let's imagine you host a guest for the first time whom you don't know yet; the spouse of a work colleague or the like (Figure 4).

You see this person, you shake hands, greet each other, glances go back and forth – and then? What happens next?

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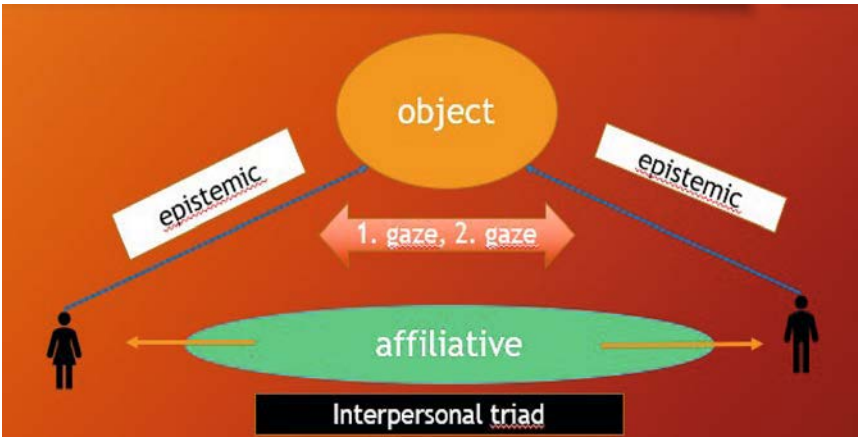

Figure 4: Interpersonal triad and the genesis of differentiations (Author: M. B. B.)

The guest points to something: "What a beautiful painting there is on the wall!" (and points to it) and you look at it too. Immediately, you are in a common world of perception – you see the picture and the pointing, you hear the words spoken and you confirm: "Yes, it is." Then, you can link with words: "Oh yes, I bought it in the so-and-so gallery, I'm sure you know it too" and very fast you are together to do together. (Harvey Sacks, 1992/1995, p. 166). The pointing gesture is elementary here: it's me pointing to something (sometimes to a mental object, so only with words) and the other recognises it. This is what Goodwin called the use of public signs. But more happens. The interpersonal triad generates a distinction between epistemic and affiliative dimensions. Because while you are talking to each other like this, many glances go back and forth and you start to feel comfortable with each other. The interpersonal triad stabilises. Both persons form the possibility of seeing, speaking and acting binocularly with each other. Object-reference forms the epistemic dimension of knowledge, self-reference develops into the affiliative dimension of being related. And both have established and share a common ground.

Realizing reality by using double sensing leads to establishing a shared sense of affiliation *and* of being in a shared world, a process beginning by a pointing gesture and confirming what is pointed at. This process realizes participatory sense making. While the baby used two senses the adults make distributed use of the same principle and establish affiliation as connection between the senses. Each pair of eyes corresponds to one or the other sense of touch or optical sense respectively. Affiliation takes the role of connectedness, or MMWY (Sacks) or what infant researcher Ed Tronick (2007) named a "dyadic state of consciousness" (Tronick, 2007, p. 407) or what social neuro-scientists (Dimitrijevic, 2022; Fuchs, 2020) name the "brain as relational organ".

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Establishing Common Ground – Recursion of Participatory Sense-Making

I will show you an example. Horst Kächele, the therapist here, was professor of psychotherapy research in Ulm, wrote a three-volume textbook of psychoanalysis together with Helmuth Thomä, which has been translated into more than 30 languages (Thomä & Kächele, 1985/2021). Above all, together with Thomä he built up the so-called "Ulmer Textbank", which contains a treasure trove of completely audiorecorded therapeutic analyses. Here is the beginning of a 7th therapy session with a somewhat compulsive student:

1 ((Rustling of fabrics))
2 P: so, it's not you beginning; ((snorting with laughter))
3 (1,2)
4 P:.h
5 T: °hm.°
6 (2,8)
7 P: °mhm,°
8 (2,5)
9 T: °is this important for you, or; (1,2) °if I would [begin°,
10 P: [.h no:] no:, (-)
11 P: I was just thinking today, I'm not going to say anything today. ((grin in his voice)) at the beginning ((laughingly)) (-) and look what happens, .h=
12 T: =mhm;
13 (1,9)
14 P: ((clearing his throat))
15 (3,1)
16 T: so it's more kind of a [TEST
17 P: [yeah;, (--) °really°
18 T: a: little bit (1,8) little bit of a wrestling match
19 (2,0)
20 P: °hm ne;°
21 (2,2)

The patient starts with a characteristic German 'so' which is used to indicate a pre-beginning in order to close down a former topic or starter for the main sequence (Barske & Golato, 2010); it is a particle indicating transition, here from non-speaking (and, one may assume, cognitive-emotional engagement preparing his utterance) to informing the therapist that he, the patient, will not speak.

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The following turn observes that it is not the therapist who will begin. This is quite unusual for two reasons:

a) In the sessions before (except the first interview) it was the therapist's activity to *wait* for the patient to begin.
b) The patient starts with the statement not to begin, which is somewhat paradoxically or, at least, somewhat humorous, the turn is closed with some laughter.

This is the first step of a "pointing activity", pointing to an element of the interaction, naming his own beginning a not-beginning.

The second step is a "conversational activity" of participatory sense-making; lines 3–8 showing some embodied exchanges – breaks, breathing, small 'hms' with silent voices with the effect of mutual confirming each other's presence. Both observe how 'not-beginning' begins including some memory of further sessions, thinking and other cognitive activities. The "hole in the carpet" – is it real or a simulation? This is the analogy here.

A third step of conversationally linking what happened up to now with other experiences that come to mind; the therapist (line 9) asks if "this is important" for his patient, conversationally acknowledging the relevance of this paradoxical beginning for the patient packed in the form of a question. 'This' takes up the pointing to the paradoxical interaction and 'important' links a value to 'this'. This ascription of a value is denied by the patient who responds with a down-grading the reasons of his contribution ("just thinking today") adding a continuation of this paradox ("I'm not going to say anything today") which comes as an up-grading of his efforts to "look what happens". The affiliative dimension between the two participants is slightly burdened with a tension by the patient who claims to be the 'observer' of what the therapist will make 'happen'. The "emotional load" can be heard in clearing the throat (line 14) (Ogden, 2021) embedded between two silences. Proposing that the patient's action is a test, softly embedded in "a kind of", the patient quickly overlaps with 'yeah' and a first confirmation of 'really' – the RR-principle "in action". However, the tension is not yet solved. This is a task the therapist approaches now by proposing to change the patient's proposal of his 'test'-metaphor to the metaphor-for-their-interaction as a "wrestling-match". The metaphor of the 'test' included a joint activity with distributed hierarchical roles; the metaphor of the wrestling match interprets, as it were, the patient's claiming of the experimenter role as a kind of challenge to fight, to which the therapist now responds humorously by leveling the role hierarchy: both fight. The patient acknowledges this metaphor with the German 'ne' (Jefferson, 2012; Jefferson, 2017).

This acknowledgement is practically important. Here, we can see it's theoretical relevance: The metaphor of the wrestling match cannot be denied as both

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are embodied participants in it; although we do not know, we might conclude that there is some emotional resonance in both, that this metaphor for their interaction in this moment is a sufficiently accurate realization of reality.

Common ground and recursion

The RR-principle is to be met in all levels of establishing a common ground. These levels are summarized in the following table:

Common-ground level	Object	Conversational operations	Cognitive-emotional Sources of both interactants
1 Perceptual	Objects in perceptual environment	Transformation into a conversational object	Joint attention
2 Conversational	Objects in conversation	Reference to conversational objects	Some fusion of perception, memory and cognitive inference
3 Linking	Linked objects, values, comments	Linking of the type A:B=A:C (where A, B, C, D are conversational objects)	Analogical reasoning
4 Metaphorical-creational	Creating a new metaphorical object	Creating a new metaphor for the common relational activity	Creativity

Table 1: The levels of establishing a common ground (Author: M. B. B.)

The process steps from level 1 to 4: Speaker A realizes something and points to it; if speaker B responds with some indication to have noticed the external object, too, then, unavoidably it becomes a conversational object. As *conversational* object it can be linked to a wide set of other conversational objects. Conversational objects, linked with other dimensions and qualities can be altered by a metaphorical-creational new object. This recursive process requires the same competencies: on level one joint attention, on level two some fusion of perception, memory and cognitive inferences, on level three some analogical reasoning and on level 4 a step into creativity where sometimes new metaphors are born. If these metaphors are mutually acknowledged by the participants one can observe this 'doing-together-to-do-together' (Harvey Sacks) as endowed with some pleasure; this corresponds to what Ed Tronick had named a "dyadic state of consciousness". One is the CA-term, the other the term from (developmental) psychology. In therapy to achieve a "dyadic state" is considered to be an opportunity to change a "now moment" into a "moment of meeting". (Bruschweiler-Stern et al., 2010; Buchholz, 2016; Buchholz, 2018)

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What if a conversation is not enriched imaginatively?

This model of common ground has been worked out in former publications together with analyses of further transcripts from therapy sessions (Buchholz, Ehmer, Mahlstedt, Pfänder, & Schumann, 2021). Here, I want to contribute with some analyses[1] on bodily movements between therapist and a young female student as patient. I want to resume shortly some well-known discoveries from former research: In a conversation between two participants, the speaker often directs his gaze at the listener at the beginning, withdraws it then during the telling, and directs it again at the listener shortly before the telling comes to an end. The listener now knows that he can take over the turn ('turn-taking') (Kendon, 1967). For questions reaction time is shorter when gaze accompanies the question (Stivers et al., 2009). In narratives, a 'continuer' comes from the listener when gaze is directed toward the listener (Gerwing & Bavelas, 2013). When listeners withdraw gaze at a near endpoint, the sequence of the narrative is expanded or repeated (Rossano, 2013).

Gaze exchange is of strong influence for turn-taking processes. We could observe this in a video analysis of a third interview. A male therapist interviews a young woman in the middle of her twenties. She speaks about the 'unbelievable' experience she had as young girl attending boarding school. Agitated she complains about the rules and illustrates this with the following narrative:

1 P: That was quite extreme with us .Hh (-) If you made any statements once or twice that didn't suit the teachers, then you had the stamp of being a ricochet or whatever. And then they treated you accordingly. Well, girls were also expelled from school among us, THAT WAS JUST UNBELIEVABLE! ((Strong indignation)) (---) So just because of smaller remarks, or because they just did something or so and so. So, in part it was just TOO CONSERVATIVE for me. Only in the upper class, where I then slowly became aware of it, where you then think more about such things, I just wanted to leave then also no longer. Gell, so it starts with things that we had to wear skirts, yes, they had to go up to there ((showing hand below knee)), otherwise you wouldn't have been allowed to wear them at all, and short-sleeved bodices were forbidden in the

1 The technique was developed by Florian Dreyer, my co-worker at IPU. Florian has described the technical details in his dissertation (Dreyer 2022) using other material. I want to thank him for this really creative innovation. The essential is that you can set a point on every place of a video-screen, say, the tip of a nose to observe head movements. This point delivers precise information of every video-frame (parts of seconds) which can then be transformed into time series. Data from time series can become easily calculated with the statistical package R. Therefrom are my curves presented below.

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summer and all that kind of thing! They sent you home when you went to school like that, so you weren't allowed to go.
2 T: Now, this occurred in your case?=
3 P: =What? ((sharp))
4 T: Well, that you have been [sent home for
5 P: [No, I stuck to it more or less, I didn't really want to… I mean, I'm not necessarily the type that has to go to school with such a short skirt ((gesture pointing above knees)) and what do I know

The overall emotional arousal during telling these details is indignation about the strict rules at her boarding school. Her evaluations (like e. g. "just unbelievable", "too conservative for me") or summaries (like "all that kind of thing") indicate a tendency to close the telling if only the therapist would enter and "share the emotional load" as was studied in detail (Peräkylä et al., 2015). A teller's strong emotional indignation requires a 'change-of-state-token' by the listener, which would indicate that the listener shares the teller's point-of-view. Peräkylä et al. (2015) showed that the emotional arousal – measured physiologically – 'jumps' to the listener just in the moment when a 'change-of-state-token' is delivered and the listener's arousal increases, while the teller calms down.

Surprisingly, this is what does *not* happen here. The therapist does not deliver a 'change-of-state-token' which would indicate his positioning at the side of the patient. One might assume that the therapist clings to the idea of 'neutrality' as a technical tool; however, to keep silent provokes the teller to inforce efforts to gain the listener sharing one's own position and adds further aspects or starts retelling the same story – as if the listener, without his 'change-of-state-token' had not understood. However, viewed in this interactional perspective the therapist's 'neutrality' is not neutral, it is unresponsive in a moment of vulnerability as the patient exposes herself during an attempt to share her experience. She wants to share, but the therapist does not respond. The impression while viewing the video was so strong that we measured the patient's head movement (by using Florian Dreyer's method) and the head movement of the therapist. The result is shown in the graph of the patient's high-speed head-movement (up and down, left and right) while the therapist is without any motion of his head except when he poses his question.

While the patient agitatedly moves her head up and down and from the left to the right, the therapist is completely calm except the moment of his posing a question and then he returns to calmness.

The therapist's neutrality-display could be observed during the first 14 minutes of the interview for 13 times. No therapeutic stance-taking, instead the therapist posing questions. In the example selected here there is a strong response (line 3) by the patient. No interval between therapist's question and the

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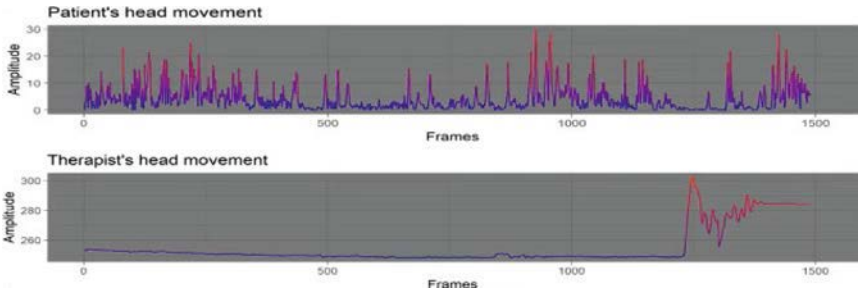

Figure 5: The patient's and the therapist's head movements (Author: M. B. B.)

patient's agitative counter-question. Such responses to therapist's questions indicate (Sicoli, Stivers, & Enfield, 2015; Stivers & Rossano, 2013) a problem: the person asked did not understand, denies the questioner's deontic right to ask such a question, or the moment. Such dismissive utterance of patients clearly indicates a kind of negative 'outcome' in the way or the moment one is asked.

What happened after 13 times being asked by the therapist? The patient does not respond any more to the therapist's question, both remain silent for a minute and a half. But you can see on the video that both breathe intensely. In this 15th minute of the session something has gone completely wrong. After a time in silence the patient turns her head and gives the therapist a short glance, which we understood as if she were asking: "how to proceed now?" But the therapist remains silent.

Again, we measured inhalation and exhalation frequency of both and found an interesting phenomenon:

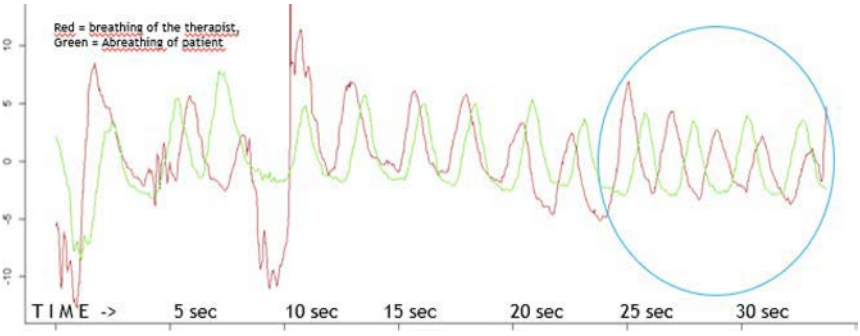

Figure 6: The patient's breathing rates and the therapist's breathing rates (Author: M. B. B.)

The conversation comes to a halt, both are silent, their breathing moves in sync. The interruption in second 8–9 is due to a body movement of the therapist; this cannot be interpreted.

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One can see the wavy lines here, which strongly resemble a sinus curve, until a syncope becomes visible after 24 seconds. Up to this point, the patient's breathing rhythm, the green line, seems to follow that of the therapist, but then the rhythm 'stumbles' briefly, the therapist's inhalation crosses the patient's exhalation, something changes – and this is exactly the point where the patient looks at the therapist. The patient's glance to the therapist makes him inhale strongly (sec 25) and the synchrony of breathing is irritated. We assume that the therapist must have felt this irritation and that he ignored his body's response. After this session the patient dropped out and left therapy. There is a bon-mot by psychoanalyst Merton Gill that the best definition of counter-transference is when the therapist gets nervous; I assume that he might have thought of situations such as this one.

Concluding remarks

While I have presented two cases of therapeutic interaction here and analysed the transcripts and measures using conversation analysis, I do now feel the pressure to turn to my other profession as a clinically working psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. I feel urged to draw some conclusions from a therapeutic point-of-view. CA-studies of therapies should not be reduced to linguistic and interactional interests only; they are of value for the professional everyday therapist.

In this paper I presented two examples of TPS (Typical Problematic Situations, Buchholz, 2016). The first one was that of a patient who announces not to begin the session and thus created a paradox which was easily solved by the skilful therapist by responding with a creation of metaphors like test and wrestling match. To overcome the TPS proved to be a valuable therapeutic action.

Conclusion 1: Patients and therapists mutually observe each other and sometimes enjoy to develop their relationship as one where mutual observations can be shared. The second example confirms this principle again; the patient is observed and observes the therapist, she tries to elicit a confirmatory response from him, but her efforts *fail.* When asked, her marked initial pitch in her response tells the result of her observation of the therapist's activities; however, the therapist does overhear it, too. He seems to follow a theoretical principle of "technical neutrality", which deteriorates the therapeutic contact.

Conclusion 2: Patients do not only talk about emotions, they try to share experience by narration. In her telling about the boarding school the patient tells with indignation about her experiences. It is not required that the therapist takes the same stance; but what is required is that the patient receives a change-of-state-token which informs the patient that the therapist listens and understands her point of view.

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Conclusion 3: "Sharing experience" can be delivered by a change-of-state-token or by stance-taking, however, to ignore the patient's strong demand violates the relationship. The way how therapists pose questions lets the patient know about the therapist's participation. The immediate initial pitch after a question informs the therapist of appropriateness, relevance, timing and justification of his question. Both parties in a therapeutic endeavour are vulnerable, but therapists can be expected to have courage to admit failures, having posed wrong questions or failed otherwise. Therapists, then, could learn how non-vulnerable, how strong patients sometimes are; they forgive if they can observe that therapists admit.

Conclusion 4: Embodied discomfort can inform the therapist that there might be a disturbance. To make sense of such discomfort might be a case for proper training. Why? Principle 1 must be restored! The therapist's discomfort is one way or the other observed by a patient, but the therapist in moments of discomfort does not observe-being-observed. Then, therapy cannot proceed to a higher level of mutually observing each other. In therapy, Harvey Sacks' formula of 'doing-together-to-do-together' is a good guide, although it is not necessary to observe this rule in every moment. A certain amount of it will suffice.

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Paula Muhr

The Biologically Vulnerable Brain – Emerging Neuroimaging Research on the Roles of Early-Life Trauma, Genetics, and Epigenetics in Functional Neurological Disorder

Historical Views on Hysteria Patients' Vulnerability

Characterised by a baffling array of heterogeneous somatic symptoms, such as paralysis, seizures, tremors, blindness, muteness, and loss of sensation, hysteria has since antiquity been considered a medical mystery. Because no undisputed organic cause had ever been established for its diverse symptoms, over the centuries, hysteria patients were often dismissed as simulators (Charcot, 1889, p. 14). The early medical theories that gave the disorder its name causally linked hysteria to the wandering womb (Micale, 1995, p. 19). These theories were influentially opposed by the late-nineteenth-century neurologist J.-M. Charcot. Using photography and other visualisation methods to investigate hysterical symptoms, Charcot conjectured that hysteria was caused by a localised brain dysfunction (Charcot, 1889; Muhr, 2022, chap. 1). He argued that this brain dysfunction, which he termed functional lesion, was triggered by adverse external events, such as physical injuries (i. e., traumas),[1] negative emotions, and various organic diseases. Charcot thereby insisted that external events could trigger the functional lesion, thus causing the onset of hysterical symptoms, only in vulnerable individuals who had inherited a latent neurophysiological defect from their ancestors (Charcot, 1889, p. 85). And whereas Charcot posited a distinct neurological mechanism through which external events led to the formation of a functional brain lesion in those vulnerable to hysteria, he did not specify the nature of this innate neuropathic vulnerability (Muhr, 2022, sec. 1.3.2). According to Charcot, hysterical symptoms were potentially curable, but the inherited neurobiological vulnerability to hysteria was not, leaving the patients prone to recurring symptoms.

Charcot's views on hysteria were later challenged by his former pupil Sigmund Freud. Freud claimed that not some hereditary neurobiological vulnerability but

1 Regarding Charcot's physical understanding of trauma, see Muhr (2022, p. 163). For a detailed history of the concept of trauma, see Leys (2000).

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instead psychologically challenging external events (i.e., traumas) solely "determine the pathology of hysteria" (Breuer & Freud, 2001, p. 4). He thus transformed hysteria from an inherited brain disease – as Charcot had defined it – into a purely psychogenic disorder caused by emotionally charged memories of past events. In the process, Freud redefined trauma as a psychological concept whose content was highly subjective (Muhr, 2022, p. 213). Trauma thus came to denote emotionally distressing impressions of any, even a seemingly trivial event, whose psychologically damaging effect was specific to the individual and the context in which it occurred. Freud further hypothesised that the psychological process he termed conversion facilitated the transformation of traumatic memories into somatic hysterical symptoms that served as symbols of those memories. This psychogenic definition of hysteria, which was officially renamed conversion disorder, dominated medicine in the twentieth century (Micale, 1995, p. 28). But by the end of the twentieth century, Freud's theories fell out of favour. As a result, hysteria patients once again came to be seen as malingerers (Muhr, 2022, sec. 2.2.3). Hysteria was thus increasingly avoided as a diagnosis, leading to its apparent disappearance as a medical phenomenon. In fact, the current view in the humanities is that hysteria no longer exists (Micale, 1995, p. 29; Scull, 2009).

Yet, recent epidemiological studies have shown that hysterical symptoms are common in present-day neurological clinics (Stone et al., 2008, p. 13). Moreover, since the late 1990s, hysteria has gradually re-emerged as the object of systematic medical research into the neurophysiological basis of its varied symptoms. This research uses state-of-the-art neuroimaging techniques. These include functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) – which enables non-invasive mapping of brain activity (Muhr, 2022) – and lately also quantitative structural neuroimaging methods, such as voxel-based morphometry (VBM), which characterise microstructural changes in brain anatomy through statistical analyses of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans (Bègue et al., 2019). These imaging techniques enable researchers to experimentally link hysterical symptoms, which were until recently viewed as symbolic manifestations of psychological traumas, to anatomically localisable disturbances of brain function and/or structure.

As I have argued elsewhere (Muhr, 2022, chap. 2), fMRI-based research has been instrumental in the medical reframing of hysteria, now renamed functional neurological disorder (FND), from a purely psychological disorder into one that arises from a still not fully understood brain dysfunction. In the past two decades, the neuroimaging research into hysteria/FND has focused on searching for the disorder's underlying neurophysiological mechanisms while largely avoiding posing questions about the symptoms' potential aetiological factors and proc-

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esses (Muhr, 2022, chap. 4).[2] However, since 2020, this situation has started to shift with the publication of three pioneering neuroimaging studies that have attempted to experimentally link FND patients' aberrant functional or structural brain patterns to genetic or epigenetic factors, on the one hand, and to early-life adverse experiences, on the other hand (Spagnolo et al., 2020; Diez et al., 2021; Jungilligens et al., 2022). In doing so, these studies have re-introduced the aetiologically intoned concept of neurobiological vulnerability into the current neuroimaging research on FND.

Approaching these pioneering studies from the perspective of science and technology studies and, more specifically, drawing on Bruno Latour, this chapter discusses the studies' epistemic import "by paying close attention to the details of scientific practice" (Latour, 1999, p. 24). I will thereby argue that the studies' authors are refashioning and expanding the concept of neurobiological vulnerability to FND in potentially productive ways. Through a close reading of the three studies, I hope to show that their authors operate with the concept of neurobiological vulnerability that is neither fixed and deterministic (Pitts-Taylor, 2019) nor simplistic and implicitly pathologising (Filipe et al., 2021). Although by its very definition, it is primarily expected to be localisable in the brain, neurobiological vulnerability, understood here as the pathological susceptibility to developing FND symptoms under the influence of environmental challenges, is experimentally framed in these studies as multifactorial, dynamic, and processual. As we will see, the studies discussed here neither search for fixed (epi)genetic biomarkers of FND nor do they aim to identify single risk factors or probabilistically assess risk scores (Filipe et al., 2021). Instead, they deploy tailor-made experimental setups to explore complex aetiological mechanisms and "biosocial loops" (Chiapperino & Paneni, 2022) through which genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and epigenetic processes interact to give rise to neurobiological vulnerability to FND.[3] But before I turn to the individual studies to make this point, we first need to examine how these studies both build upon and expand the current medical research into FND.

2 For the analysis of two earlier fMRI studies on the role of adverse memories in FND, see Muhr (2022, sec. 4.3.2).

3 In epigenetic research into disease aetiologies, biosocial loops designate "the looping effects between (material and social) environments and biology, past experiences and future predispositions, as well as nature and nurture in the production of disease" (Chiapperino & Paneni, 2022, p. 2).

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Stress, Trauma-Induced Neuroplasticity and Vulnerability to Developing FND

Since, historically, adverse life events were thought to either trigger or directly cause hysteria, it may seem surprising that, at first, neuroimaging research avoided explicitly addressing their potential role in this disorder (Muhr, 2022, p. 457). But such choices become more comprehensible if we consider that, in the early 2000s, as this research started to consolidate, hysteria was regarded as a contentious disorder and often equated with malingering. Against this backdrop, it seems logical that, initially, the fMRI research focused on showing that hysterical symptoms are underpinned by distinctly different neural activity than malingering and on generating neuroimaging evidence that patients had no voluntary control over their symptoms (Muhr, 2022, chap. 4). Moreover, the research-based focus on hysterical symptoms' underlying neurophysiological mechanisms was aligned with the broader medical and diagnostic reframing of hysteria as a neurological disease. In the earlier versions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the dominant classification system in psychiatry, the presence of antecedent stressors was necessary for diagnosing hysteria/conversion disorder (APA, 1994, p. 457). Yet, after several influential medical studies revealed that a significant proportion of hysteria patients lack identifiable precipitating stressors (Stone & Edwards, 2011), the current version of the manual, the DSM-5, dispensed with this diagnostic requirement (APA, 2013, p. 320). In doing so, the DSM-5 effectively decoupled FND from a presumed psychogenic aetiology.

But despite this diagnostic excision, the potential aetiological relevance of stressors has once again started to gain ground in the research context in the late 2010s. On the one hand, a systematic review of multiple recent studies has shown that, while not all patients report precipitating psychological stressors, the frequency of adverse events experienced during childhood and adulthood is significantly higher among FND patients than in healthy subjects or patients with other psychiatric disorders (Ludwig et al., 2018). Although it does not prove causality, the statistically significant association between stressful events and FND indicates that these events might be aetiologically relevant in some patients. Moreover, in line with Charcot's views, one recent study found an association between the onset of FND and a preceding adverse physical event, such as a minor injury or illness, thus expanding the concept of precipitating stressors to include not just psychological but also physical factors (Pareés et al., 2014). Taken together, these findings raise the question of why some individuals develop FND symptoms without exposure to any apparent distal or proximal traumas, some in

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response to seemingly minor difficulties or physical injuries, whereas others experience multiple adverse events without falling ill.

On the other hand, a growing number of fMRI studies have demonstrated that FND patients exhibit a dysregulation in the neural circuitries that are involved in the physiological response to acute stress (Muhr, 2023, pp. 285–288). Because they were conducted on patients with diverse symptoms and used a variety of experimental paradigms for stress induction, each study implicated different neural regions and posited disparate neurophysiological mechanisms. But despite such inconsistencies, all studies found that FND patients have impaired neurophysiological processing of negative emotions, which makes them susceptible to adverse effects of psychologically threatening situations. In short, FND patients appear to be neurophysiologically vulnerable to various forms of stress, which perpetuate and aggravate their symptoms.

Concurrently, at a more general level, an important conceptual impulse for the neuroimaging research on vulnerability to stress in FND was delivered by the intensifying medical investigation of other stress-related disorders (e. g., anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder) over the past two decades. In the latter context, heterogeneous patients' clinically determined impaired stress reactions have been increasingly aetiologically explained in terms of the stress-diathesis model. According to this model, exposure to severe early-life stressors produces "a cascade of physiological and neurohumoral reactions that alter brain-development trajectories, setting the stage for the (later) emergence of psychiatric symptoms in genetically susceptible individuals" (Teicher et al., 2016, p. 652). The implication is that, in individuals with a genetic predisposition, different types of childhood traumas, ranging from physical abuse to emotional neglect, first lead to aberrant epigenetic changes – e. g., over-expression of stress-related genes.[4] Next, through not yet understood complex neuromolecular mechanisms, the over-expressed genes then induce pathological neuroplastic modifications in the individuals' brain structures and functions. The resulting neuroplastic modifications, in turn, make these individuals neurobiologically vulnerable to even mild stressors, which can trigger the onset of illness.[5] In this model, stress refers to any environmental challenge an individual can cope with at the neurophysiological and behavioural levels. By contrast, trauma designates the stressors that induce pathological neuroplastic changes, thus effectively damaging the brain (Richter-Levin & Sandi, 2021).

4 In current medical research, genetic predisposition is defined as the presence of gene variants in an individual's DNA sequence. Conversely, epigenetic changes refer to processes, such as DNA methylation and histone modifications, that, without modifying the DNA sequence, control which genes are expressed and which are not (Deichmann, 2016).

5 For a detailed account of neural plasticity, see von Bernhardi et al. (2017).

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Drawing on such a broadly defined stress-diathesis model, the authors of three recent neuroimaging studies developed the 'proposition' (Latour, 1999, p. 141) that a dynamic combination of mutually interacting genetic, epigenetic, neuromolecular, neuroplastic, and environmental factors underpins the production of neurobiological vulnerability to developing FND in some patients. According to Latour, propositions are not fixed, declarative statements about "mute (research) objects" but "occasions for interaction" (1999, p. 141). Propositions allow scientists to bring different phenomena of interest into novel relations to one another in order "to modify their definitions over the course of an event," e. g., a neuroimaging experiment. In the following three sections, I will examine how the authors of the three neuroimaging studies articulated their initial proposition about the FND patients' neurobiological vulnerability through their specific experimental setups. As defined by Latour (1999, p. 142), the articulation of propositions is understood here to comprise all experimental interventions that jointly enable the emergence of new scientific insights. Having traced the experimental emergence of the new insights into neurobiological vulnerability to FND, I will conclude the chapter by discussing the broader implications of these insights for patients.

Since my focus here is on the articulation of neurobiological vulnerability in neuroimaging research into FND, I will address psychosocial aspects of FND only to the extent that will allow me to examine their experimental operationalisation in the case studies at the centre of my analysis. My approach here is aligned with Chiapperino and Paneni (2022), who argue for developing more sophisticated methods for dissecting the environmental and social factors in epigenetically informed research while, at the same time, they acknowledge that some level of reduction of complex biosocial phenomena is unavoidable in experimental sciences.[6]

Relating Aberrant Brain Connectivity to Early-Life Trauma and Genetic Polymorphism

In a study published in 2020, Spagnolo et al. set out to examine if, as suggested by the stress-diathesis model, genetic factors, both directly and in interaction with childhood trauma, modulate the vulnerability to developing motor symptoms in FND patients. To this end, they recruited 69 patients with motor symptoms that ranged from tremor over gait problems to paralysis. Because of the symptoms'

6 For the humanities-based criticism of different aspects of reductionism in epigenetic research, see Pickersgill et al. (2013), Meloni (2014), Pitts-Taylor (2019), Filipe et al. (2021), and Dupras (2023).

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heterogeneity and the fact that the ongoing research into other stress-related disorders has failed to causally link these disorders to single dysfunctional gene variants, Spagnolo et al. posited that FND was likely a polygenic disorder "modulated by multiple genes of small effect" (2020, p. 814). However, due to the small sample size, they could not conduct an exploratory genome-wide association study of the entire DNA sequence needed to identify all potentially contributing gene variants. Instead, they used a hypothesis-driven candidate gene approach to narrow their search to a set of a priori specified genes.

In choosing their candidate genes, Spagnolo et al. focused on articulating their proposition about the role of genetics in FND patients' neurobiological vulnerability to stress. Their choice was informed by the earlier fMRI studies that revealed multiple stress response dysfunctions in FND patients at the neural level. Arguing that the FND-related neural dysfunctions underpinning aberrant stress responses were comparable to those of other stress-related disorders, Spagnolo et al. selected 14 genes which previous studies had linked to other stress-related disorders (2020, p. 815). These genes, e. g. TPH2, control the biosynthesis of particular neurotransmitters, such as serotonin (5-HT), which, in turn, coordinate the brain's response to acute and chronic stress. Drawing on previous research into the activity of these genes, Spagnolo et al. further limited their analysis to 18 specific locations at which functionally relevant genetic variations, so-called single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP), are known to occur on the preselected genes.

Apart from genotyping the DNA samples extracted from the patients' blood to identify the type and location of gene variants, the researchers also assessed the patients' salient clinical features. These included the age of FND onset, symptom severity, and the intensity of comorbid depression and anxiety symptoms. To identify the patients' exposure to childhood trauma, Spagnolo et al. applied the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), which is widely used in psychological research. This standardised retrospective self-report screening tool quantifies five subtypes of childhood trauma: emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and emotional and physical neglect (Bernstein et al., 1994). The CTQ measures the frequency of childhood exposure to traumatic events without registering any information about the context in which these events occurred or the affected individual's subjective evaluation of the experienced trauma. It results in separate scores for each trauma subtype, which range from no exposure to extreme exposure. Using the CTQ total scores, calculated by adding up the five subtype scores, Spagnolo et al. (2020, p. 816) established that 53% of their patients had experienced some level of childhood trauma.

Next, to examine how the gene variants influenced the aberrant neural patterns underpinning the patients' symptoms, Spagnolo et al. collected resting-state fMRI data for a subgroup of 38 patients. Resting-state fMRI is a neuro-

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imaging method for evaluating the patterns of intrinsic synchronous activity across widely distributed brain areas – called functional connectivity networks – while subjects are not engaged in any external cognitive tasks but merely rest as their brain activity is measured (Bijsterbosch et al., 2017; Muhr, 2022, sec. 4.4.1). Once collected, resting-state fMRI data can be submitted to different types of statistical connectivity analyses. Aiming to articulate the FND patients' vulnerability to stress, Spagnolo et al. focused on examining alterations in the neural circuitry connecting the amygdala and the frontal cortex since its dysfunction had previously been "associated with hyperarousal and impaired emotion regulation" (2020, p. 816). Hence, they additionally recruited 38 healthy control subjects and performed a so-called seed-based analysis of fMRI data (Muhr, 2022, pp. 500–501) to determine how the amygdala-frontal cortex functional connectivity differed between patients and healthy controls.

Having thus obtained fMRI connectivity maps, Spagnolo et al. conducted multiple statistical analyses that allowed them to explore possible associations across the genetic, clinical, and fMRI measurements. First, they established that from the 14 candidate genes, only a particular polymorphism of the TPH2 gene correlated with a clinical feature of FND symptoms – the presence of this gene variant was associated with an earlier age of the symptom onset (Spagnolo et al., 2020, p. 817). Moreover, the concurrent presence of this genetic variant and early-life trauma correlated with the patients' increased symptom severity. Further, Spagnolo et al. found that patients with the TPH2 variant exhibited significantly decreased amygdala-frontal cortex resting-state connectivity compared to either patients without the mutation or healthy subjects (2020, p. 819). This difference in the connectivity pattern was independent of the cumulative childhood trauma exposure and thus directly associated with the TPH2 variant. Drawing their findings together, Spagnolo et al. conjectured that the TPH2 gene variant possibly resulted in dysfunctional serotonergic neurotransmission, thus making the carriers of this genetic variant innately vulnerable to stress (2020, p. 819). Both directly and in interaction with early-life trauma, the TPH2 gene variant seems to alter serotonin levels and thus facilitate the pathological neuroplastic alterations in the brain circuitries that coordinate the stress response.

Crucially, Spagnolo et al. provided a preliminary empirical indication that apart from functioning as a predisposing risk factor for developing FND symptoms, the TPH2 gene variant might also amplify the neurophysiological damage caused by childhood trauma through a particular neuromolecular mechanism. Admittedly, their findings were limited to identifying the potential role of a single genetic polymorphism in a disorder that would probably "manifest only when the net effect of possibly hundreds of gene variants causes a system-level failure" (Spagnolo et al., 2020, p. 820). Furthermore, their experimental embedding of patients' early-life traumatic experiences was reduced to the total scores of ex-

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posure frequencies. Yet despite these limitations, the methodologically innovative aspect of their study was that Spagnolo et al. went beyond the mere risk prediction in genetic terms. Instead, they attempted to experimentally articulate FND patients' vulnerability to stress as a product of specific non-linear interactions across genetic (TPH2 polymorphism), neurochemical (serotonin), neurofunctional (aberrant amygdala connectivity), and environmental (childhood trauma) factors. It was the first study of this kind in FND research, laying the ground for others that followed.

Linking Trauma-Related Changes in Functional Brain Architecture to Gene Expression Profiles

In their 2021 study, Diez et al. developed a different approach to experimentally articulating the potential interplay of genetic and environmental factors in the aetiology of FDN patients' neurobiological vulnerability. They, too, collected resting-state fMRI data for 30 FND patients with mixed motor symptoms and for 21 control subjects. Moreover, they also used the CTQ to identify the exposure frequency to five subtypes of childhood trauma in their study participants. However, the control subjects in this study were not healthy subjects but patients with clinical depression. And compared to Spagnolo et al., Diez et al. used a different method to analyse the fMRI data and a different way to integrate the neuroimaging and genetic data.

Unlike Spagnolo et al., who deployed the seed-based analysis to assess functional connectivity between the predefined brain regions of interest, Diez et al. opted for two types of computationally more sophisticated graph-theoretical analyses. These statistical analyses allowed them to characterise their patients' brain-wide resting-state network architectures. First, Diez et al. computed the weight-degree connectivity maps that measure the level of influence of each region on the rest of the brain. Additionally, they performed a link-level connectivity analysis that quantifies "connectivity strength relationships across brain areas" (Diez et al., 2021, p. 3818).

For each patient group separately, Diez et al. correlated the thus obtained connectivity maps to the CTQ scores to examine how each of the five subtypes of childhood trauma modulated the FND patients' functional brain architectures. The decision to separately analyse each subtype was motivated by the recent research finding that different trauma subtypes "may have specific biological consequences" (Diez et al., 2021, p. 3818). The analysis showed that in the FND patients, the physical abuse and, to a lesser extent, physical neglect scores correlated with increased weight-degree connectivity in the limbic (amygdala, hip-

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pocampus), paralimbic and cognitive control areas, as well as the sensorimotor and visual cortices (Diez et al., 2021, p. 3822). In other words, early-life exposure to physical abuse and neglect appeared to produce a widespread topological reorganisation of the functional brain architecture in these subjects, thus making them vulnerable to developing FND symptoms at a later age. Other subtypes of childhood trauma – sexual and emotional abuse or emotional neglect – did not have statistically significant correlations with either type of connectivity map, although, as pointed out by Diez et al. (2021, p. 3826), these negative findings could have been due to the modest sample size. Moreover, the link-level maps revealed that in the FND patients, the physical abuse scores correlated with the strength of the amygdala and insula coupling to the motor cortices, suggesting that this subtype of trauma "may predispose the central nervous system in some individuals for the development of functional motor symptoms" (Diez et al., 2021, p. 3824). Importantly, none of these trauma-related neuroplastic changes in functional connectivity was seen in the depression patients with a comparable level of childhood physical abuse or neglect.

In the next step, Diez et al. combined their fMRI maps with genetic data to explore "molecular mechanisms underlying individual differences in network connectivity" between FND and depression patients (2021, p. 3818). But unlike Spagnolo et al., Diez et al. did not search for structural variations in patients' genomes. Instead, they used a novel epigenetic approach to integrate their fMRI maps with brain-wide gene expression profiles. Such profiles provide a more direct measure of gene function than genotyping as they "quantify the transcriptional activity of thousands of genes across many different anatomical locations" (Fornito et al., 2019, p. 25). Whereas, until recently, gene expression variations across brain regions could only be quantified post-mortem, this changed in 2019 with the publication of the Allen Human Brain Atlas (AHBA). The AHBA is a publicly available database comprising genome-wide expression values "for over 20,000 genes quantified across 3702 different anatomical locations and in six different brains" (Fornito et al., 2019, p. 35). Using this atlas, Diez et al. could relate their patients' fMRI connectivity maps to spatial variations in expressions of over 20,000 genes.

To achieve this, Diez et al. compared the FND patients' physical abuse weighted-degree connectivity maps to the maps of regional gene expression profiles from the AHBA and computationally assessed their spatial similarity.[7] Genes with sufficiently similar spatial distribution to the patients' connectivity

7 It is important to note that assessing spatial similarity between the study-specific brain maps and the maps of regional gene expression profiles from the AHBA is far from straightforward, since there are different ways in which expression profiles can be processed. For details of this highly complex multistage computational process, which is currently not standardised, see Arnatkeviciute et al. (2019) and Diez et al. (2021, p. 3819).

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patterns were deemed functionally relevant and submitted to a gene-set enrichment analysis (Subramanian et al., 2005). This statistical analysis allowed Diez et al. to divide the overrepresented genes into three functional clusters that, based on the previously published research, are associated with specific biological processes. Diez et al. thus conjectured that genes known to be implicated in neuronal morphogenesis were overexpressed in the FND patients' limbic and paralimbic areas, whereas genes associated with neural development and locomotory behaviour were overrepresented in the sensorimotor regions (2021, p. 3824). Finally, Diez et al. used the AHBA to perform an additional hypothesis-driven analysis by testing if the five preselected candidate genes, which had been aetiologically implicated in other stress-related disorders, were also overexpressed in the FND patients. The analysis disclosed that the BDNF gene, which is "important for neuronal development, neurogenesis, and memory functions" (Diez et al., 2021, p. 3824), was overexpressed in the FND patients' limbic and paralimbic brain areas, which play crucial roles in emotion processing.

In sum, the combined use of different gene expression analyses allowed Diez et al. to attempt to explain trauma-related reorganisation of functional brain networks in FND patients in terms of distinct epigenetically-driven neuromolecular processes, thus shifting the focus from the search for gene variants to gene activity. By deploying the newly developed gene expression brain atlas, Diez et al. could also go a step further than Spagnolo et al. and, instead of focusing on aberrant connectivity between predefined neural regions, explore how the brain-wide changes in functional architecture relate to regionally different expression profiles of thousands of gene with varied functions. Moreover, as we have seen, the complexity of their experimental articulation of FND patients' vulnerability to stress was further enhanced by their decision to separately examine potentially distinct neurophysiological effects of different subtypes of childhood traumas. Yet, similarly to Spagnolo et al., in this study, the experimental operationalisation of early-life trauma remained limited to reductive proxy measures of the frequency scores.

Associating Trauma-Related Changes in Regional Brain Volumes to Diachronic Gene Expressions

In a study published in 2022, Jungilligens et al. devised yet another way of experimentally articulating the aetiology of neurobiological vulnerability to adverse life experiences in FND patients. Unlike the authors of the two previous studies, Jungilligens et al. focused on a single symptom, recruiting 20 FND patients diagnosed with functional seizures but no control subjects. Moreover,

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instead of screening the patients only for childhood traumas, the researchers aimed to identify potentially traumatic experiences across the patients' lifespans. For this purpose, they used a standardised self-report questionnaire called the Traumatic Experiences Checklist (TEC). The TEC categorises traumatic experiences into six subtypes: emotional neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, threat to life, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment (Nijenhuis et al., 2002). Unlike the CTQ, the TEC assesses the age of the trauma onset and relation to the perpetrator, and it quantifies the affected individual's perceived trauma severity on a scale from none to extreme. Using additional questionnaires, the researchers also quantified the duration and self-reported severity of functional seizures in their patients.

Similarly to the Diez et al. study, Jungilligens et al. relied on the AHBA to explore the role of genetic influences on the aberrant neuroplastic changes in their patients. But, unlike the previous two studies, instead of collecting functional MRI data, Jungilligens et al. opted for a quantitative structural MRI method called voxel-based morphometry (VBM). Using this method, they generated statistical maps that characterised regional microanatomical differences in grey matter volumes across the patients' brains (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 3). Having computed these maps, the researchers correlated them to the patients' symptom severity scores and the reported magnitudes of different trauma subtypes to explore potential relations across these measures. The analyses showed that the symptom severity was associated with reduced volumes of the brain regions comprising the salience network, which is "implicated in affective experiences and attention" (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 7). Moreover, emotional neglect and sexual trauma scores correlated with lower grey matter volumes of the amygdala and insula, respectively.[8]

Lastly, the researchers turned to "identifying genetic pathways dually implicated in the association of volumetric grey matter variations with symptom severity and trauma burden" (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 2). To do so, they first computed the spatial similarity between the patients' statistical brain maps – derived by correlating grey matter volumes to symptom severity and different trauma subtypes – and the gene expression profiles from the AHBA. But instead of analysing over 20,000 genes mapped in the AHBA, Jungilligens et al. focused only on 2382 genes known to have significantly higher expression in the brain than in other organs. Like Diez et al., they also performed a gene-enrichment analysis that allowed them to make inferences about the function of the thus identified gene sets. The analysis revealed that the grey matter maps which were dually related to sexual trauma and symptom severity had a statistically significant overexpression

8 Jungilligens et al. merged TEC's subtypes of sexual abuse and sexual harassment into a single subtype they termed 'sexual trauma' (2022, p. 3).

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of 22 genes associated with "serotonin, oxytocin, (nor)epinephrine (e.g., noradrenalin), and opioid receptor signaling" (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 7). As emphasised by the researchers, these overrepresented genes are involved in the stress-related signalling pathways, whose dysfunction had been linked by multiple studies to "affective vulnerabilities to everyday events" (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 8).

Additionally, Jungilligens et al. conducted one more gene attribution analysis using the so-called Specific Expression Analysis tool. This statistical tool enabled them to explore during which neurodevelopmental period each of the 22 identified genes was most likely to influence the formation of a particular brain region. According to this analysis, the over-expressed genes impacted the development of the FND patients' cortical structures from the neonatal period to young adulthood and the maturation of their amygdalas during adolescence and young adulthood (Jungilligens et al., 2022, p. 8).

With this latter analysis, Jungilligens et al. opened up a new research perspective on FND. Besides examining the underlying neuromolecular mechanisms through which genetic factors and life stressors interact to induce pathological neuroplastic changes that underpin the FND patients' vulnerability to subsequent stressors, Jungilligens et al. were the first to explore potential differences in the timing of such changes across different brain regions. They thus framed their search for the aetiology of the FND patients' neurobiological vulnerability in distinctly diachronic and processual terms, taking into account not just childhood traumas but also the effects of adverse life experiences during early adulthood on FND patients' neurodevelopment. And although Jungilligens et al. used a standardised questionnaire to operationalise their patients' traumatic experiences in terms of quantitative scores, it can be argued that the perceived severity of trauma is a more nuanced proxy than the frequency of exposure.

Complicating the Picture: Articulating Neurobiological Vulnerability as a Multifactorial and Dynamic Process

The three neuroimaging studies discussed in this chapter were the first to empirically explore the potential aetiological links between hysteria/FND patients' aberrant patterns of brain functions and structure, on the one hand, and patients' adverse life experiences and genetic and epigenetic factors, on the other hand. These pioneering studies are indicative of the emerging new focus on aetiological approaches within the current neuroimaging research into FND. At a superficial glance, it may appear that these studies merely used state-of-the-art technologies

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(from fMRI and VBM to genotyping and gene expression measurements) to rehash discarded nineteenth-century theories about the hysteria patients' innate neurobiological vulnerability. Yet, my analysis has aimed to show that this was not the case.

First, although the findings of these studies are preliminary and tentative, they are epistemically relevant as they go beyond simply identifying various risk factors or postulating potential (epi)genetic biomarkers of FND. Instead, they provide new insights into the neuromolecular and developmental mechanisms through which heterogeneous biological and environmental factors may produce neurobiological vulnerability to FND by disrupting an individual's biological stress processing.

Second, I argue that more than their specific preliminary findings, the most innovative aspect of these studies is the development of novel, exploratory approaches to experimentally articulating FND patients' neurobiological vulnerability. There were significant methodological differences across the studies. These included which aspect of the FND patients' underlying brain disturbance to measure (seed-based connectivity, global functional architecture, or regional alterations in grey-matter volume), whether to examine genetic or epigenetic factors, and which standardised questionnaires to use to screen for traumatic life experiences. But despite these differences, all three studies articulated FND patients' neurological vulnerability in distinctly dynamic terms – as a multifactorial process that entails complex, non-linear interactions between inherited genetic variations, neuroanatomically specific epigenetic changes, potentially distinct effects of multiple subtypes of early-life traumas, and repeated exposures to different types of stressors. In these studies, vulnerability is not only conceptualised as both innate and acquired, but the focus is placed on elucidating the processual relations between these two mutually interacting aspects of vulnerability.

Yet, this is not to say that the studies discussed here are without limitations. Significantly, none of these studies has dealt with the specific content of the self-reported traumas, thus effectively reducing the patients' lived experiences to standardised quantitative scores of trauma frequency or severity. In doing so, they failed to address how the adverse experiences were embedded into broader sociocultural contexts or to examine the subjective, symbolic meanings that particular stressors might have had for different individuals. As suggested by Freud, such contextual psychosocial factors could be argued to modulate in nontrivial ways the impact that otherwise seemingly comparable stressors have on an individual. Instead, in our case studies, the decontextualised stressors were of interest only inasmuch as their neurophysiologically damaging effects, operationalised through quantitative scores of trauma frequency and severity, were retrospectively measurable in terms of correlated aberrant neural structure or

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function and the associated epigenetic changes. Such neurobiological framing of vulnerability that disregards patients' individual differences and focuses solely on identifying shared neural, genetic, and epigenetic mechanisms and, as we have seen, relies on a mutual interlinking of multiple statistical analyses may be considered by some to be unduly reductive (Dupras, 2023).

However, I propose a different interpretation. In line with Chiapperino and Paneni, who call for a methodological complexification in the "ways of studying the biological and social factors producing diseases" (2022, p. 5), I think that future neuroimaging research should find a way to experimentally address FND patients' individual, context-specific experiences of trauma. This could perhaps be achieved through detailed interview techniques or by developing tailor-made questionnaires. Also, because most of the patients diagnosed with FND are women (APA, 2013), another thus far neglected aspect that future studies need to examine is whether there are gender-specific differences in how traumatic experiences relate to epigenetically modulated neuroplastic changes.

Nevertheless, I argue that, despite its limitations, the current neurobiological reframing of vulnerability pioneered by the three studies discussed above is not just epistemically productive in that it produces novel medical insights, but is also, in a broader sense, affirmative for FND patients. According to earlier medical framing, hysteria patients' vulnerability to adverse life events was viewed either as a shameful psychological weakness or as a feigned behaviour (APA, 1994, p. 446; Muhr 2022, sec. 2.2.3). By contrast, the current reframing of vulnerability as a genuine neurophysiological phenomenon arising from a dynamic interplay between one's biological makeup and a diachronic influence of multiple environmental factors shifts the blame away from patients for their impaired ability to cope with stress. Defined in such terms, vulnerability is neither an exaggerated attention-seeking behaviour nor a purportedly shameful character flaw and, most importantly, it is not a fixed innate property of an individual. Furthermore, there is a glimmer of optimism in this reframing. After all, if the neurophysiological vulnerability to FND is partly acquired through trauma-induced neuroplastic changes, the implication is that, once we understand the mechanisms of this acquisition, we might learn how to reverse at least some of its effects. Should this transpire, not just diverse FND symptoms but also the underlying neurophysiological vulnerability to developing these symptoms, which Charcot had regarded as a fixed predisposition, could one day perhaps become treatable.

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Part III – Narratives of Vulnerability and Resilience

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Izabela Olszewska

Emotional Indifference in Extreme Situations on the Example of Texts from the Ringelblum Archive

Introduction

One of the worst tragedies in the history of mankind was the annihilation of the Jews during the Nazi regime, which was characterised by repression, the creation of ghettos and especially the mass extermination of Jews in Europe. At that time, Polish Jews constituted a group that was socially excluded from the life of urban communities. Society in Poland functioned 'normally' to some extent, as far as the wartime circumstances allowed. Sociologically, Jews living in ghettos were an enclave of misery, a group of the social margin excluded from the benefits of civilization. Functioning in enclosed Jewish quarters under inhumane conditions – starvation, illness, death of loved ones and other traumatic experiences, they reacted and behaved in a variety of ways – from compassion and pity, through anxiety and fear to emotional indifference.

The aim of the article is a research analysis way of verbalizing emotional indifference in extreme situations on the basis of selected Holocaust texts from the Ringelblum Archive (RA). While we find many examples of the thematisation of emotions and feelings in linguistic studies[1] (including in relation to the Holocaust), emotional indifference in a dire circumstances still remains *terra incognita* in linguistic research. The author assumes that the emotional indifference of Warsaw Ghetto Jews to constant threats to their health and life, to suffering, as well as to inhumane situations and the enormity of the war's tragedy, served as an antidote to the tragic reality surrounding the Jewish community. The lack of vulnerability to human suffering became a kind of psychological protective barrier. Given the fact that psychology and psychiatry confirm such a human response to all kinds of extreme situations, the author has drawn attention to the way extreme indifference is verbalized in texts from the time of the Holocaust.

1 Cf. e. g. Marten-Cleef (1991), Spagińska-Pruszak (1994), Fomina (1999), Merten (2003), Ortner, (2014), Szczepaniak (2015).

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The Ringelblum Archive

The Warsaw Ghetto was built by the National Socialists for the Jews of Europe in the centre of Warsaw during the Second World War. In this enclosed and guarded part of the capital, some 80,000 people were killed or died of starvation and disease between 1940 and 1942. As we read in the commentary to the Polish edition of the Czerniakow diary[2] (Fuks, 1983) the ghetto accommodated

> some 350,000 inhabitants of pre-war Warsaw and almost 150,000 Jews from other places vegetating in inhuman conditions […]. This huge mass of people inhumanly crowded, starved, plagued by disease, oppressed by forced labour, street raids and deportations to concentration camps, separation of families was doomed to gradual social decline, moral destruction and physical liquidation. (Fuks, 1983, p. 395) (Translation: I. O.)

It was in such circumstances that the Ringelblum Archive was created.

The Conspiratorial Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto (the Ringelblum Archive) was established in the autumn of 1940 thanks to the initiative of Emanuel Ringelblum[3] and with the cooperation of the underground organization "Oneg Shabbat"[4]. The Archive is one of the most important testimonies to the extermination of Polish Jews, as it contains several thousand unique documents (including manuscripts, prints, photographs), comprising a total of more than 28,000 pages[5]. The aim of gathering the materials was to document in detail he fate of Jews during World War II and their extermination. As Ringelblum asserts:

> I began to collect material concerning these times as early as October 1939. As head of the Jewish Self-Help welfare organisation […] I had personal daily contact with the everyday life of the community. I was kept informed of all that was happening to the Jews of Warsaw and the suburbs. The Coordinating Committee was a sort of off-shoot of Joint, and almost every day delegates would arrive from the provinces and describe the difficulties experienced by the Jewish population. In the evening I wrote down all that I had heard during the day, adding my own observations. With time, these notes made up a sizeable volume of some hundreds of pages of small script, reflecting the events of

2 Adam Czerniaków (1880–1942), A publicist and social activist. From September 1939, he was chairman of the Jewish community in Warsaw and president of the Warsaw Jewish Council. Czerniaków kept a secret diary (a total of 9 notebooks written down in the form of short, almost telegraphic notes, which also included the date and information about the place of the event), in which he wrote down the tragic everyday life of the Warsaw Ghetto.

3 Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) – historian, social worker and founder of The Ghetto Archives, shot with his family by the Nazis in Warsaw in 1944. (see Gutman (1990). Encyclopedia of the Holocaust [EH]/V3 (p. 1283)).

4 As Ringelblum wrote: "The Ghetto Archives were created by the 'Oneg Shabbat' [Hebrew: "The Joy of Saturday"] organization during three and a half years of war. The group owed its name to the fact that its meetings generally took place on a Saturday" (RA, 2011, p. 7).

5 Cf. https://www.jhi.pl/oneg-szabat/pelna-edycja-archiwum-ringelbluma (10. 09. 2022).

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those days. As time went by, I began to make my notes weekly rather than daily and later (RA, 2011, p.23).

The Ringelblum Archive is nowadays in the collection of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and has been listed on the Memory of the World Register by the UNESCO since 1999. The texts analysed for the purposes of this article are excerpted from the book "The Ringelblum Archive. The Warsaw Ghetto, Everyday Life" (2011) (RA), which contains a selection of accounts and documents of Polish Jews – mostly shocking descriptions of the Jewish community under occupation. These reports reflect a moment-by-moment insight into the process of the annihilation that took place from 1939 until the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto[6]. These are testimonies of the everyday life of the closed Jewish Residential District in Warsaw: accounts, memoirs, studies, reports and diaries.

Emotional Indifference as an Antidote to Emotional Vulnerability

The characteristics of the causes of emotional indifference can be found in psychological and psychiatric research. It is a phenomenon characterized by an individual's lack of emotional engagement or reaction to events or situations that would typically evoke emotions such as empathy, sadness, joy, or anger. It is a state in which a person loses interest or sensitivity to what is happening around them. Emotional indifference can have various contexts and causes, and its manifestations can be observed at both the individual and societal levels. In the relevant literature, the following definitional approaches to emotional indifference are distinguished. Reber (2000, p. 192) mentions emotional anesthesia, which refers to the dampening of emotions and reduced reactivity to external stimuli as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder. Szewczuk (1985, p. 22) emphasizes that a lack of reaction to stimuli, as well as emotional indifference, a lack of active interest in the environment, and a failure to take action, can be attributed to mental or physical exhaustion or certain somatic or mental illnesses, which are characteristics of apathy.

The causes of emotional indifference can be diverse, such as emotional exhaustion (when prolonged exposure to stress, trauma, or difficult life situations can lead to emotional exhaustion, resulting in indifference as a defense mechanism), personality disorders (which are categories of mental disorders characterized by enduring patterns of, among other things, interpersonal behaviors that deviate markedly from cultural expectations), habituation (when individuals regularly experience habituation to suffering), or loss of hope (when an

6 In total, 230 pages of A5 format were analyzed.

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individual lacks hope for improvement in their situation or believes that nothing can be changed, leading to resignation and indifference) (cf. Briere & Scott, 2010). Emotional indifference in response to traumatic situations can be seen as a type of defense mechanism that an individual utilizes as an antidote to their vulnerability and susceptibility to psychological pain associated with trauma. This mechanism can help individuals avoid deepening their suffering and preserve their ability to function in challenging conditions (cf. Herman, 1998; Resick, Monson & Chard, 2019).

In the context of Holocaust trauma studies[7] passivity, indifference or feelings of helplessness assume special significance as they are a defensive reaction to traumatic experiences in the ghetto, a kind of antidote to cruelty. This characteristic is for instance visible in the statement of Aron Einhorn, journalist and employee of the Jewish Self-Help Welfare Organisation:

> On the streets, cruelty can be seen at every step. People pass by scenes which, in a different place, would have been shocking. They step over dead bodies with a cold indifference. (RA, 2011, p. 116)

The following behaviours become a defence reflex against the traumatic reality: lack of empathy and abandonment of Jewish traditions and values, resignation to the (tragic) fate.

a) Lack of empathy

Eisenberg (2005) defines empathy

> as an affective response resulting from perceiving or understanding another person's emotional state that is the same as what the other person is feeling, or what we think he or she might be feeling, or very similar to both. (Eisenberg, 2005, p. 850) (Translation: I. O.)

Goleman (2018, p. 15) distinguishes between three types of empathy: "cognitive empathy" (i. e. the ability to understand the other person's point of view), "emotional empathy" (i. e. the ability to feel what the other person is feeling) and "empathic concern" (i. e. the ability to sense what the other person expects from us) (2018, p. 16).

7 As Orwid states, the Holocaust is an example of collective trauma brought about by human action, and although the Second World War claimed fifty million lives, "the Holocaust was an unprecedented event in history, an event that changed the very nature of human thinking. It was the realisation of the idea of the liquidation of an entire nation […]" (cf. Orwid, 2009, p. 81 f.).

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In his chronicle of the ghetto, Ringelblum frequently signals the emotional indifference among the Jewish community:

> In recent times almost every day you can see people lying in the streets, in the middle of the pavement, either unconscious or dead. This sight no longer makes an impression. (RA, 2011, p. 56) (Translation: I. O.)

Particularly noticeable is the lack of pity, compassion and regret, which are replaced by indifference and shamelessness:

(1) Powoli zamiera we mnie jakiekolwiek drgnienie uczucia. Tyle widziałem i słyszałem. Z drugiej strony męczy, rozsadza głowę myśl, czy mam prawo do jakichkolwiek wzruszeń i uczuć? (RA, 2011, p.152)

[Any twinger of emotion is slowly fading within me. I've seen and heard so much. On the other hand, the thought gnaws at me, whether I have the right to any emotions and feelings. (Translation: I. O.)]

b) Abandonment of Jewish traditions and values

Related to the apathy syndrome is also the resignation of some Jews from the traditions of Judaism – the main determinant of Jewish identity. This manifested itself in the absence of moral authorities, the lack of respect for religious commands and prohibitions and, above all, in the awareness of the meaninglessness of Jewish existence in the ghetto:

(2) Życie religijne upadło i jest to wielkie nieszczęście. Religijny fundament dawno już się zawalił. Brakuje nam, niestety, religijnych autorytetów, które byłoby stać na obudzenie w masach wartości duchowych i wiary. (RA, 2011, p. 117)

[The religious life has collapsed, and it is a great misfortune. The religious foundation has long since crumbled. Unfortunately, we lack religious authorities capable of awakening spiritual values and faith in the masses. (Translation: I. O.)]

c) Resigning oneself to a (tragic) fate

The Jews in the ghetto, particularly towards the end of its existence, were aware of the hopelessness of the situation in which they found themselves. In this context, the rejection of the attitude of rebellion and struggle for a better fate, and the acceptance of their tragic fate, is also part of the phenomenon of emotional indifference.

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(3) Co mogę w obecnej chwili powiedzieć i czego żądać? Kiedy stoję na granicy życia i śmierci, kiedy bardziej jestem przekonana, że zginę, niż że będę żyła – chcę się pożegnać z moimi przyjaciółmi i moimi pracami. (RA, 2011, p. 193)

[What can I say at this moment and what can I demand? When I stand on the border of life and death, when I am more convinced that I will die than that I will live – I want to bid farewell to my friends and my work. (Translation: I. O.)]

Linguistic means of expressing emotional indifference in RA

As Schwarz-Friesel (2007), a researcher on the relationship between emotion and language, states:

> The so-called final solution of the Nazis, the annihilation of European Jewry, resulting in the systematic and planned killing of 6 million people, cannot be explained in any way. […] If this horror is unconceivable as an abstract idea in the consciousness of those who reflect on it, how much more incomparably difficult and problematic for those directly affected it is to articulate their experience of suffering? To put into words the unbelievable? (Schwarz-Friesel, 2007, p. 312) (Translation: I. O.)

The accounts of the traumatic events of the Holocaust recorded in the Ringelblum Archive contain all kinds of negative characterizations of the emotions and feelings of a person in a border situation. The emotional indifference, characterized in the article, appears in moments of resignation, overwhelming, helplessness, lack of fear caused by resignation to fate, lack of empathy/reaction to crisis situations, as well as (extreme) physical and mental exhaustion or even deprivation of all human feelings.

The description of the emotional indifference on the pages of the Ringelblum Archive is a specific construct, created and recorded through specific linguistic phenomena. These include the use of key words, metaphors, phrasal verbs (especially collocations), negations, rhetorical questions, or lexemes referring to a lack of emotion.

Keywords

I define keywords after Wierzbicka (2007) as those words that are relevant to a given culture and are a priceless source of information about it: "'Keywords' of a culture are words that are significant to that culture in some particular way and that can say a lot about it" (Translation: I. O.). The definitional framework of keywords is therefore somewhat intuitive, as:

> There is no such thing as a finite set of "key words" of a given culture, nor are there any objective procedures for identifying them. […] The problem, however, is not to prove

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> that a word is or is not one of the key words of a culture, but to be able to say something truly important and revealing about that culture on the basis of a detailed analysis of certain selected words. (Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 42f.) (Translation: I. O.)

Furthermore, according to the author, it is characteristic of key words that they lead to some important conclusion in relation to a given culture and derive from words that are commonly used rather than marginal. Their "general frequency of occurrence" is irrelevant. Instead, it is worth noting whether the words are frequently used in some single area (e.g. the field of emotions or moral judgements).

In RA's texts, the reality is terrifying. Traditional values are set aside, and the rules of traditional Judaism are not and cannot be fully adhered to. Jewish culture becomes a culture of suffering, pain, hunger, and death[8]. Key words include therefore following lexemes: 'death', 'corpse', 'hunger' / 'starvation', 'silence' / 'quietness' or 'pain'. They undoubtedly refer to the tragic situation of the Jews living in the ghetto, the circumstances in which they had to function on a daily basis, the problems they had to cope with – not only from a material or existential perspective, but specifically from an emotional one. For some, it was hunger that was the emotional blocker, for others it was the death of loved ones. Silence / quietness was also symptomatic – both for those aware of what was about to happen (deportation to a concentration camp, imminent death due to serious illness or starvation) and for those who still remained in the ghetto. The following example conveys deep feelings of hopelessness and emotional indifference that accompany Jews struggling with hunger and difficult living conditions. It emphasizes the obsessive thoughts of the refugee about food, which dominate their thoughts and daily life. However, the described psychological state of the refugee is complex. Although they dream of food and constantly think about bread, they simultaneously fall into resignation and apathy:

(4) Umierający z głodu to w znacznej mierze uchodźcy z prowincji, którzy czują się zagubieni w obcym środowisku, są zupełnie zrezygnowani. Ich protest wyraża się w żebraczym lamencie. Pokrzyczą sobie nieco, a potem milkną i z rezygnacją oczekują śmierci. Rozmawiałem z uchodźcą, który przez dłuższy czas głodował. Cały jego umysł był zaprzątnięty całkowicie kwestią jedzenia, chleba. Gdziekolwiek był i szedł, śnił o chlebie. Zatrzymywał się przed każdą wystawą z żywnością. Równocześnie jednak wpadł w rezygnację, apatię. Nic go nie obchodziło. (RA, 2011, p. 93)

> [Dying of hunger, these are largely refugees from the provinces who feel lost in a foreign environment, completely resigned. Their protest is expressed in a beggarly lament. They will shout to each other for a bit, and then fall silent, waiting for death with resignation. I talked to a refugee who had been starving for a long

8 Cf. Olszewska, 2019.

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time. His entire mind was completely occupied with the issue of food, bread. Wherever he was and wherever he walked, he dreamed of bread. He would stop in front of every food display. However, at the same time, he fell into resignation, apathy. Nothing mattered to him. (Translation: I. O.)

The next example containing the key word 'death' illustrates exhaustion, resignation, and a desire for the end of suffering. Death typically evokes emotions of fear, emotional pain, or dejection, whereas the words "Or perhaps death is better…" suggest rather inner conflict and contemplation about the meaning of continued life in the face of hardship or suffering. The speaker expresses this in a melancholic manner, pondering the possibility of ending suffering through death, which is perceived as solace:

(5) A może śmierć lepsza… Większość spośród nas była już wymęczona oczekiwaniem, zrezygnowana. Niech to się już raz skończy – śmierć, wieczny spokój, zamiast przerastającej siły udręki. (RA, 2011, p. 199)

[Perhaps death is better… Most of us have already been worn out by waiting, resigned. Let it end once and for all – death, eternal peace, instead of overwhelming torment. (Translation: I. O.)]

The theme of suffering, moral anguish, which becomes the carrier of immense and unexpressed pain, is exemplified by (6). However, it is the silence in the face of tragedy that captures the reader's attention; the pain has not been shouted out because the Jews submit to and accept the situation they find themselves in:

(6) W żeńskim więzieniu znajduje się parę specjalnych cel przeznaczonych dla więźniów inteligencji. Tam jest czyściej, jaśniej […]. Oni nie narzekają, ale w ich milczeniu jest tyle bólu, tyle moralnego cierpienia, że nie potrafię przekazać tego piórem. (RA, 2011, pp.164–165)

[In the female prison there are a few special cells for prisoners from the intelligentsia. It's cleaner and brighter there. […] They don't complain but in their silence, there is so much pain, so much moral suffering that I cannot find words to express it. (Translation: I. O.)]

Negations / denying of information

The main function of negative verb phrases, such as "I do not see", "I do not hear", "I do not look", "they do not cry", etc. in the texts from the Archive is the defense mechanism of negation, as well as a total emotional blockade, in order not to be hurt even more, not to suffer any more:

(7) Już nie patrzę więcej na ludzi, gdy słyszę jęki i łkania; przechodzę na inny chodnik, gdy widzę łachman drżący z zimna, bez bielizny, wyciągnięty na ziemi, odwracam się i nie chcę widzieć… Nie mogę. Za dużo na raz. (RA, 2011, p. 114)

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> [I no longer look at people when I hear moans and sobbing; I switch to a different sidewalk when I see a scruff shivering from cold, without undergarments, stretched out on the ground, I turn away and don't want to see… I can't. That's too much at once. (Translation: I. O.)]

The sentences, "I turn away and don't want to see… I can't. That's too much at once," are deeply emotional and indicate that the author is overwhelmed by the amount of suffering they witness. By turning away and not wanting to look, they demonstrate the need to protect their own emotionality from being too burdened. The text conveys feelings of emotional exhaustion, powerlessness, and being overwhelmed in the face of the sight and sound of suffering. A similar situation is seen in example (7). The text expresses an emotional shift and the author's perspective regarding past experiences. We can distinguish two emotional stages here: the initial feelings of fear and horror, and the current feeling of change and adaptation, with a lack of emotional reaction:

(8) Trzy lata temu przeżywałem pierwsze naloty; okropnie się bałem – zdawały mi się szczytem okrucieństwa. Teraz nie. (RA, 2011, p. 200)

> [Three years ago, I experienced first air raids; I was terribly afraid – they seemed to be the height of cruelty. Not anymore. (Translation: I. O.)]

The passage, "Three years ago, I experienced the first air raids; I was terribly afraid – they seemed to me the height of cruelty" illustrates that when the author experienced first air raids, he felt intense fear and terror, with the words "I was terribly afraid" and "the height of cruelty" suggesting that these events were extremely traumatic and horrifying experiences for the author. The subsequent passage suggests the author's process of adapting to difficult events from the past, resulting in a change in his emotional reactions over time. The words "Not anymore" indicate a shift in perspective. The author states that now, he no longer feels the same fear or considers the air raids as the "height of cruelty".

Emotional indifference, manifested by a lack of reaction even in the face of death, is evident in the relationship with the transport of Jews to the place of execution:

(9) Ten transport szedł bez żadnej eskorty, a Żydzi – wiedząc, że idą na śmierć – nie uciekli! (RA, 2011, p. 175)

> [This transport went without any escort, and the Jews – knowing that they were going to their deaths – did not escape! (Translation: I. O.)]

The passage suggests a lack of typical emotional reaction from the Jews in an extreme situation: "Knowing that they were going to their deaths – did not escape!". This sentence expresses both surprise or astonishment at the behavior of the Jews who, despite knowing about their inevitable death, didn't attempt to

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escape. It also indicates the immense suffering and powerlessness that the Jews experienced in the face of the inhumane situation they found themselves in.

Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are a stylistic figure, a phrase to which no answer is expected because it is well known. Rhetorical questions are intended to draw attention to an issue and make the audience think. The rhetorical questions appearing in the RA (also with anaphora) thematize the hopelessness of the situation of Polish Jews, the tragedy of life in the ghetto, the lack of perspectives, the anticipation of death approaching, in the view of the sender of the text, and consequently the sense of futility of any action and emotional passivity. Characteristic here are the question marks: "why?", "what for?", "for whom?".

The following passage expresses astonishment, disapproval, and a certain kind of reflection on the lack of emotional reactions in the face of tragic events or experiences:

(10) Dlaczego nie płaczemy? Dlaczego nie rozdzieramy szat? Lada chwila czeka nas ten sam okrutny los, jaki spotkał nasze rodziny […]. (RA, 2011, p. 198)

[Why aren't we crying? Why aren't we tearing our clothes apart? At any moment, the same cruel fate awaits us, which befell our families… (Translation: I. O.)]

The rhetorical questions, "Why aren't we crying? Why aren't we tearing our clothes apart?" verbalize the absence of emotional reactions to current and future events. Meanwhile, the passage, "At any moment, the same cruel fate awaits us, which befell our families…" emphasizes the fear of the future and the re-experience of the cruelty that previously befell their families. This suggests that the author feels the threat of a repetition of tragic events and is wondering why there isn't a greater emotional reaction or action in the face of this threat.

The author's rhetorical questions in example (11) emphasize the lack of sensitivity and emotional indifference to human suffering. This excerpt expresses, on one hand, a sense of outrage towards the observed behavior of Jews in the context of children's suffering. The author appears to be asking why there is no reaction or assistance and expresses disapproval of this lack of response. On the other hand, it is precisely questions, "Isn't it shameful for the Jews? How can they allow this?" that highlight that people from the same social group can remain indifferent to the suffering of children.

(11) Dlaczego Żydzi dopuszczają do tego, aby wychudłe, bosonogie dzieci przełaziły na drugą stronę i tam żebrały? Czy nie wstyd Żydom? Jak mogą do tego dopuszczać?" (RA, 2011, p. 109)

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[Why do the Jews allow for emaciated, barefoot children to crawl to the other side and beg there? Isn't it shameful for the Jews? How can they allow this to happen? (Translation: I. O.)]

Lexemes relating to the absence of emotions

On a linguistic level, the mental state of emotional indifference corresponds to the following lexical-semantic variants: indifference, resignation, lack of emotion, inactivity:

PASSIVE / PASSIVITY
Definition: 1. lacking initiative. 2. expressing submission to an activity[9].

The following example describes a tragic situation of the Jewish population and suggests that extreme conditions, such as hunger, led to their emotional indifference and lack of response to suffering. The use of the word 'passivity' implies that the population may be too weakened to take any action or protest. "They are dying of hunger silently, without a word of protest" emphasizes the tragic aspect of this passivity and suggests that suffering and death occur in silence, which may evoke feelings of sadness and empathy:

(12) Być może ta bierność, będąca wynikiem głodu, spowodowała, że ludność żydowska wymiera z głodu milcząco, bez słowa protestu. (RA, 2011, p. 93)

[Perhaps this passivity, resulting from hunger, has caused the Jewish population to silently perish from starvation, without a word of protest. (Translation: I. O.)]

INDIFFERENCE / INDIFFERENT
Definition: 1. not showing interest in someone or something, not caring about someone or something; also: indicating such an attitude. 2. not arousing strong feelings, meaningless to someone[10].

In example (13), emotional indifference becomes the focal point of the statement. In the sentence "However, I was so indifferent that I didn't move from the spot" the narrator reacts to the situation with emotional indifference, showing no emotions or responses to the potential threat to life. They appear exhausted and emotionally detached in the face of a difficult situation:

(13) Rzuciłem niesiony ciężar na ziemię i stanąłem nad nim ciężko dysząc. Dostrzegł to jeden z żołnierzy patrolujących plac, zdjął karabin, wymierzył we mnie i zaczął liczyć – ja jednak byłem tak zobojętniały, ze nie ruszyłem się z miejsca. (RA, 2011, p. 44)

9 https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/bierny.html (10. 09. 2022).
10 https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/obojetny.html (10. 09. 2022).

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[I dropped the burden I was carrying onto the ground and stood over it, breathing heavily. One of the soldiers patrolling the square noticed, took off his rifle, aimed at me, and started counting – however, I was so indifferent that I didn't move from the spot. (Translation: I. O.)]

RESIGNED

Definition: one who has come to terms with an unpleasant situation and has given up trying to solve his or her problems; also: indicative of such a condition[11].

The resignation visible on the faces of the Jewish people suggests that they have succumbed to the difficult situation or see no way to improve their condition. The words "a kind of indifference to their own fate" confirm that the Jews exhibit a certain type of indifference towards their own fate, which may evoke a sense of helplessness or hopelessness:

(14) Twarze wyrażały głęboką rezygnację, rodzaj obojętności dla własnego losu, o który i tak nie da się walczyć, otępienie. (RA, 2011, p. 172)

[The faces expressed profound resignation, a kind of indifference towards their own fate, which is impossible to fight anyway, stupefaction. (Translation: I. O.)]

UNMOVED

Definition: unshakeable, unyielding[12].

(15) Na Smoczej, Stawkach, placu Parysowskim – obraz jest wszędzie uderzająco podobny. Suterena albo strych. Barłóg szmat albo tapczan bez pościeli. Trupy albo obrzękłe albo wysuszone na kość. I nigdzie żadnego, najmniejszego wzruszenia ze strony najbliższej rodziny. (RA, 2011, p. 156)

[In Smocza Street, at Stawki, at Parysowski Square – the picture is strikingly similar everywhere. Basement or attic. A den of rags or a bed without sheets. Corpses, either swollen or dried to the bone. And nowhere is there any, even the slightest emotion from the closest family members. (Translation: I. O.)]

The described living conditions and circumstances above depict the harsh reality of people who have found themselves in extremely difficult situations. The words "And nowhere is there any, even the slightest emotion from the closest family members" describe the absence of emotional reactions from the closest family members in the face of their loved ones' difficult situation, emphasizing the existence of emotional indifference in the midst of a challenging reality.

11 https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/zrezygnowany.html (10.09.22).
12 https: //sjp.pwn.pl/słowniki/niewzruszony.html (10.09.22).

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Phraseologisms as linguistic means of expressing emotions

It is also phraseologisms (including biblical ones) and especially collocations in the Ringelblum Archive that constitute a linguistic means of expressing emotions. Indifference, non-resistance, resignation are expressed, among other things, by means of word compounds referring to the following issues – the death in inhuman conditions, like animals ("to go to slaughter" or with the perpetrator "to be driven to slaughter"), the prospect of a better life "on the other side" ("to go to salvation"), or the awareness of the inability to change one's fate ("to accept one's fate", "to accept with cold blood", "reality without tomorrow"). The expression "going to slaughter" indicates a catastrophic or destructive situation in which one can expect great failure or disaster. It has a negative connotation and is used to describe a very difficult situation. In example (16), it verbalizes the passivity of the Jewish intelligentsia in the face of danger and also suggests a general sense of helplessness and lack of activity in the midst of challenging circumstances:

(16) Inteligencja żydowska zbyt późno dowiedziała się, że plany okupanta i jej dotyczą, dlatego tak słabo na to zareagowała. Szła na rzeź – podobnie jak masy ludowe – cicho, bez protestu, bez oporu. (RA, 2011, p. 215)

[The Jewish intelligentsia learned about the occupier's plans too late and how they concerned them, which is why they reacted so poorly. They were going to slaughter – just like the masses – quietly, without protest, without resistance. (Translation: I. O.)]

Metaphors

According to Schwarz-Friesel (2007)

> emotions and feelings are internal, subjective phenomena and often difficult to talk about, which is why metaphorical constructions are increasingly used to refer to emotional states and processes. (Schwarz-Friesel, 2007, p. 199)

In the accounts from the RA we encounter first of all the metaphorical expressions of the impotence, pain / suffering experienced by the Jewish people in the ghetto:

(17) Jesteśmy bólem, męką, krwawym cieniem zamordowanych, bliskich, przyjaciół. Gdybym mógł, to bym otworzył żyły, namoczył pióro we własnej krwi i pisał te słowa, bo krwią ociekają kartki naszej historii, historii pogromów i rzezi. Ale tu koniec, tu kres. (RA, 2011, p. 198)

[We are pain, torment, the bloody shadow of the murdered, the close ones, friends. If I could, I would open my veins, dip the pen in my own blood, and write these words, for the pages of our history are soaked with blood, the history of pogroms and massacres. But here it ends, here is the limit. (Translation: I. O.)]

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The text contains metaphorical elements aimed at expressing deep emotions and experiences. Metaphor is used to convey experiences in a more vivid and suggestive manner. In the sentence "We are pain, torment, the bloody shadow of the murdered, the close ones, friends" the words pain, torment, and bloody shadow are used as metaphors to describe a shared fate and suffering. The words "I would […] dip the pen in my own blood, and write these words, for the pages of our history are soaked with blood, the history of pogroms and massacres" contain the metaphor of blood as a medium for recording history, emphasizing the significance of these events and symbolizing a deep connection to the past. The words "But here it ends, here is the limit" contain the metaphor of 'end' and 'limit' symbolizing the boundary of the ability to express suffering and history. It also expresses a sense of absence of further options or possibilities.

Conclusions

The aim of the article was to examine the phenomenon of emotional indifference in extreme in selected texts of the Ringelblum Archive. On the basis of the analysis of accounts, diaries and reports, the author demonstrated that emotional indifference was conveyed in the texts by means of the following linguistic strategies: the use of key words, metaphors, phrasal verbs, negations, rhetorical questions or lexemes referring to the lack of emotions.

Emotional indifference and resignation in the face of human suffering and tragedy, as well as the ways of verbalizing them, can be found in the following contexts of the Ringelblum Archive texts:

- Lack of hope (most of us were already *exhausted by waiting, resigned; they are completely resigned; faced the reality without a tomorrow*)
- Lack of positive emotions or a state of apathy (*it depressed and disheartened* us even more)
- Silence as an expression of suffering and lack of emotions (they don't complain, but there is so much pain *in their silence*)
- Lack of reaction as avoidance or withdrawal (regarding a specific situation or problem) (*I no longer look at people when I hear moans and lamentation; The eyes of a person unaccustomed simply avert from this sight*)
- Lack of feeling fear (*Now no longer*; *Without feeling fear*, not realizing that a bullet could hit any of us; *not pondering over anything*)
- Lack of physiological reactions, such as crying (*They no longer cry*)
- Lack of emotional reaction or a change in behavior in the face of cruelty (*What has happened to us?*)
- Lack of emotions or detachment in a dramatic situation (*as if nothing had happened; nowhere any, even the slightest, emotion*)

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- Lack of emotional involvement (I am already very tired, *indifferent; with cold blood*)
- Lack of emotions and passivity in difficult conditions (*silently, without a word of protest*)
- Lack of emotional reaction due to familiarity with the situation (*We looked almost indifferently at the tears of mothers*)
- Lack of emotional reaction due to resignation to a harsh fate (*resigned masses, reconciled with their fate; quietly, without protest, without resistance*)
- Indifference or resignation in reacting to other people in difficult situations (*I no longer look at people*)
- Indifference to children's suffering (*Why do Jews allow skinny, barefoot children to crawl to the other side and beg there*)
- Lack of emotions and difficulty in the face of overwhelming suffering or difficulties (*I turn away and don't want to see… I can't. It's too much at once*)

Although the study of emotions in terms of linguistics is currently at a very advanced stage, linguistic means of expressing emotional indifference, lack of emotion, resignation, have not yet fully seen the light of day. The issues presented in this article do not exhaust the problem of analysing apathy as a defensive reaction to tragic events; however, the collected empirical material may become a contribution to further research into the symptoms of trauma (including the Holocaust) from a linguistic perspective.

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Joanna Pędzisz

On the Perception of Vulnerability in Aesthetic Dance Discourse[1]

Theoretical assumptions

This paper focuses on the experience of ballet, in which ballet students expose themselves to ballet teachers' evaluation in a ballet class. Performativity of the evaluation, i. e. verbalization of the mistakes concerning the execution of movement qualities: the dynamics of movement, mobility, strength, speed, balance, coordination, flexibility, etc., often leads to highlighting the shortcomings of the (dancing) body. The feedback is to revisit the dance skills, the limitations and the capabilities of the dancing body as well as to correct the movements and the way of achieving specific movement qualities. It seems that the reflection as a process determines vulnerability of the ballet students, which is confirmed by Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung (2020):

> If 'reflexive' means people need to constantly look back at and question themselves and their own actions in order to find effective ways to cope with risks, vulnerability should be one of the most important aspects of that process. (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 8)

As a result, ballet students become a group that is considered vulnerable, because they and their skills are constantly subject to the process of reflection.

Ballet students as vulnerable group

Significant is the fact that vulnerability, understood as "[…] defencelessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks, and stress" (Chambers, 1989, p. 1) and "lack of buffers against contingencies" (Chambers, 1983, p. 103), manifests itself

1 This paper is a continuation of and an elaboration on considerations presented in the text entitled "Performatives Handeln der zeitgenössischen Tänzer*innen als soziale Praktik im Tanzunterricht" (Eng. Performative actions of contemporary dancers as a social practice in dance classes) (text in review).

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in "[…] an inability to avoid or absorb potential harm" (Pelling, 2003, p. 5). Vulnerability also means the lack of access to power, resources and assets that prevent one from properly and effectively forecasting, coping with and recovering from the effects and impacts of risks or disasters (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 17). Keywords that can be identified as starting points for the understanding of vulnerability of the ballet students are: exposure to shocks and stress, lack of buffers, lack of access to resources, inability to avoid something.

In the context of ballet classes as a communicative situation, specific requirements are placed on ballet students, and they must demonstrate unique skills. The information about particular skills, or rather lack thereof, is communicated openly in ballet class. Thus, frequent issues discussed in a dance studio include: imprecise ballet position, inability to repeat a sequence of moves, favouring someone or comparing them to those more talented. During the ballet class ballet teachers focus intensely on the body. Such an approach changes reality because the body is supposed to perform a specific movement, perform a sequence of ballet positions, generate a specific quality of movement. Consequently, the function of the comments of ballet teachers – the act of saying something – changes the perception of the body, its feeling, awareness at the proprioceptive level, and defines how particular parts of the body affect one another. Hence the instrumentalization of the body and the perception of it as 'only' a work tool that is supposed to perform the task perfectly, makes the ballet class a context for abuse, stigmatisation, evaluation and even depreciation of appearance other than the accepted canon. As the case study (chapter 3) will show, the ballet teachers' comments regarding the body, its appearance and the way it performs certain movements and accuracy of body movements generate situations in which students are powerless and unable to defend themselves.

In addition to the phenomenon of body-shaming (Schlüter, Kraag & Schmidt, 2023; Resnick, 2022; Novitasari & Hamid, 2021; Informational Sites Collective, 2012), which, as the analysis will show, is a common approach in ballet, students become a vulnerable group, because this practice undermines and questions their professional development and prospective career as a professional ballet dancer. This confirms the concept of vulnerability which is related "with the futuristic dimension where the concept of risk comes into play" (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 17).

Thus, ballet students become a group exposed to stress. They cannot avoid it and have no possibilities to change the age-old master-apprentice model, the classical asymmetric hierarchical system, based on dependencies. These circumstances refer to the theses of Mechanic & Tanner (2007), who try to answer the question how moral values and judgements interrelate and determine whether groups are perceived as deserving or undeserving of support (Forbes-

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Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 21). Scientific knowledge and beliefs, personal resources and personal agency (i. e. an ability to control one's own reactions in situations beyond control), social capital as well as demographics including age, socioeconomic status, race, and physical location are issues that influence societal views of who is vulnerable (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007) and cover different dimensions of vulnerability (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 21). Hence, media reports concerning alarming situations in ballet schools worldwide and around the world put ballet companies in an unfavourable light and influence the opinions about it shaped from the perspective of values and moral judgments.

Consequently, vulnerability has been identified as a weakness of social systems which, when coupled with external factors, triggers crises, disasters or the state of being harmed (Forbes-Mewett & Nguyen-Trung, 2020, p. 20). According to Quarantelli (2005, p. 345):

> […] disasters stem from the very nature of social systems themselves… They should not be seen as the result of an external force from outside impacting the social system. […] Rather a disaster is rooted in the weaknesses of a social system that manifest themselves depending on the dynamics of that system. (Quarantelli, 2005, p. 345)

Thus, the ballet teacher – ballet student communication system becomes a weak system in itself. Its asymmetry means that often, regarding of many media reports, the issue of violence and power is raised, i. e. the power of the ballet teacher who often usurps the right to determine the rules of communication and develops a specific practice based on them. This becomes a social practice as outlined in chapter 2 of this paper.

Thus, drawing on Adger and Kelly's (2012, p. 22) determinants of vulnerability, the analysis presented in the following chapters aims to show the causes of vulnerability of the affected communities, i. e. ballet students, in its broader context, i. e. the natural environment – ballet class – and social systems – the teacher-student relationship – including the domination of the institution – the ballet school. Considering this and according to Alexander's classification (2013, p. 982)[2] a ballet class triggers two types of vulnerability: total vulnerability caused by the lack of organisation or readiness in coping with threat of disaster and vulnerability in relation to disaster, crisis and stress. Since vulnerability refers to

2 Alexander (2013, p. 982) used external threats/causes to classify vulnerability. He categorised seven types of vulnerabilities: a. total vulnerability: caused by the lack of organisation or readiness in coping with threat of disaster, b. economic vulnerability: caused by the lack of adequate occupation, c. technological or technocratic vulnerability: caused by the riskiness of technology, d. residual vulnerability: caused by the lack of modernisation in terms of adaptation, e. delinquent vulnerability: caused by corruption, negligence and other forms of anomie, f. newly generated vulnerability: caused by changes in circumstances, g. vulnerability in relation to disaster, crisis and stress.

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various forms of loss at a particular moment (Alexander, 2000, p. 13), the purpose of the case study will be to determine what kind of loss ballet students experience when ballet teachers verbalise their mistakes made during the ballet class.

Interaction in the ballet studio

Following this and the assumptions of interactional linguistics (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2000, pp. 78–79), the aim of this case study is to characterise the verbalization of the mistakes during the ballet class. There are quoted statements of the ballet teachers in the articles in which the cases of abuse in the ballet schools were presented, described and commented. Interesting in this context is the determination of the phenomena that are identified as mistakes or shortcomings concerning performance of the ballet students. What becomes the object of reference in the verbalization of the mistakes? Do the ballet teachers refer to the dance movement qualities such as position, effort, dynamic, extent or final position? What contributes to the fact that the body of the dancers becomes vulnerable?

To emphasise the connection between language and social interaction, Selting and Couper-Kuhlen (2000) propose the term "interactional linguistics" based on the concept that the relations between prosody and conversation, grammar and interaction as well as contextualization of language become the subject of research. Related to this, language structures become resources of speech in interaction (talk-in-interaction according to Schegloff, 1998, p. 236) (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2000, p. 78). Viewing language as an interactional resource helps answer the question how linguistic structures are tailored to fulfil their functions in organising social interaction (descriptive and functional-linguistic interactional linguistics) (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2000, p. 78). The comparison of languages and their contrastive analysis (cross-linguistic interactional linguistics) leads to the presentation of the relation between language structure, its use and interaction practices, thanks to which the dependence of grammatical structures on the type of interaction in different languages (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2000, p. 79). A general linguistic perspective allows to determine "wie Sprache in der sozialen Interaktion strukturell und funktional organisiert ist und gehandhabt wird" (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2000, p. 79)[3]. Considering the functional-linguistic and general linguistic perspective the focus of further considerations is on the fundamental question of whether the verbalization of mistakes is considered a social practice during ballet class and what (social)

3 (Eng. how language is organised and handled structurally and functionally in social interaction). (Translation: J. P.)

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consequences could follow from highlighting the shortcomings of the dancing body. The examples presented in the case study constitute activities of ballet teachers.

It should be emphasised that the actions of ballet teachers and ballet students during the ballet class become actions of a community which implements social practices in the space-time continuum, in the physical space and in the discernible time. According to Schatzki (1996), with their help the community can create structures, order, comprehensibility, clarity and normality:

> Practices, in addition to being the elements and circuits forming the "flexible networks" in which the social field consists, also (1) help institute which mental states and actions humans are and can be in and (2) are the contexts in which humans acquire the wherewithal to be in these states and to perform the actions that compose practices. (Schatzki, 1996, pp. 12–13)

Thus, it is postulated that during ballet class the body in the learning process forms the essence of a social practice, because the knowledge about the rules and norms in a dance technique and/or quality of movement can be embodied. Furthermore, the social practice of dance is realized through ballet teachers' instructions.

Verbalization of mistakes during ballet class as a performative social practice

Ballet teachers are the focus of interest and draw attention to themselves. They observe ballet students, demonstrate and explain body movements, describe sequences of positions and ballet techniques. Since ballet class provides the situational context for all activities and actions of ballet teachers and ballet students, it has a performative character. To illustrate that, ballet teachers, their bodies and movements, ballet students, their bodies and movements, as well as what is perceived in the studio (space, directions in the space) are put into relation (Pędzisz, forthcoming). Consequently, the body becomes "medium of our relation to the world" (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 210). This bodily phenomenological view means that the aesthetic and sensual experience (Trapp & Schicht, 2021, p. 223) constituted in and through dance is transformed into the experience of one's own physicality and therefore to the physical co-presence with others (Fischer-Lichte, 2012, pp. 54–56). The togetherness during the ballet class in the studio as well as the presence of the other dancers make the artistic and learning processes meaningful (Trapp & Schicht, 2021, p. 223). Taking into account the roles in the dance learning process, dance teachers become mediators who facilitate the dialogue with the body of the dance student. This is how the to-

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getherness in the studio is expressed. The dance teachers negotiate with the dance student's body through their verbalised questions, requests, remarks and assessment so that the dance students can better understand and embody the quality of movement, its extent, intensity, tension, direction, and accents as well as the relationships in space and towards space within a ballet room, which constitutes the sense of the sensual and aesthetic experience as outlined above. These requests and assessments are regarded as a performative verbalization of the mistakes in the realisation of movement qualities. Hence, the study focuses on the analysis of a particular dimension of performativity.

According to Lauer (2000, p. 3), there are performative utterances, i. e. the act of saying, and the object referred to by this performance. Thus, performativity enacts reality and is fundamental to social actions (Wulf, Göhlich & Zirfas, 2001, p. 12; Fischer-Lichte, 2012, p. 44). Verbalization of the mistakes is performative because it represents an action which is expressed through what is uttered. Furthermore, the act of saying – the first dimension of the performativity, i. e. the verbalization of the quality of movement, performing particular moves and being in motion perceived as the activity of the body, which is performed non-verbally. The performative utterance is accompanied by and visualised with a movement demonstrated by the ballet teacher's body (Pędzisz, forthcoming). This motor demonstration is the act of doing, which creates the second dimension of performativity, but considering the vast corpus-based research database, which consists of the statements published in the literature, the second dimension of performativity is not considered in the study presented below.

During the ballet class, the body in the learning process is the essence of social practice. For Schatzki "a practice is a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleo-affective structure and general understandings" (2002, p. 87). Hence, a practice means "actions and socially given (if renegotiable) meanings, knowledge, and expectations" (Cox, 2012, p. 178). Thus, the body is 'equipped' with knowledge – rules, norms, quality of movement, technique etc., which depends on the style of ballet that is being trained. Through ballet teacher's remarks, performative actions, the social practice of 'dance' is executed. It is via body that the social practice can be materialised (Pędzisz, forthcoming).

Looking at it from this perspective, the quality of the movement is the reference object for ballet teachers and ballet students. Corrections to movement qualities expressed verbally and demonstrated by the ballet teachers are embodied by ballet students in response and therefore they are material, spatial (take place in the studio) and temporal (occur during the dance workshops). The verbalization of the mistakes or the demonstration of the wrong movement qualities and the corrected movement are carried out simultaneously. The ballet teacher's instructions and remarks are perceived at the same time as linguistic

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actions and social practices. The ballet teachers see the body as a tool. That means that bodies or body parts become three-dimensional objects during the dance workshops. Thus, the body becomes an artefact and must be present so that a dance practice is developed and reproduced (Pędzisz, forthcoming).

The competent bodies of ballet teachers are artefacts, too. Ballet teachers (as speaking and moving individuals) interact with their own bodies (practice as performance). (Bodily) doings and sayings as the basic unit of activity (Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki, 2002, p. 72) are physical and verbal activities of ballet teachers and are regarded as a bundle of performing actions that are coherent, connected, carried out simultaneously, organised spatially and temporally.

According to Schatzki (1996, p. 106), social practices are "out there", i. e. they are not a property of individuals. They do not exist in their minds. Individuals get familiar with the practices through explicit or implicit learning. That is why the way in which the performative verbalization of mistakes in dance workshops materialises can be so different.

But what if the ballet teachers' instructions and remarks are not negotiable and the togetherness during the ballet class in the studio does not support the learning process? What if "the act of saying" is a constitutive element of violence as social action and a 'practice' consisting of stigmatization, depreciation, is regular and is an expression of power? The following case study focuses on the statements of ballet teachers and choreographers that are quoted in articles written in Polish, German and English which describe abuses in ballet schools and ballet companies.

A case study

"Abuse Allegations Rock Vienna Ballet School"[4], "Canada's ballet world rocked by abuse scandal spanning 30 years"[5], *Ballett brutal*[6], *Missbrauchsvorwürfe an der Tanzakademie Zürich*[7], *'Wyglądasz jak naładowana armata, krowo'. Co działo się w warszawskiej szkole baletowej?*[8] These are just some of the titles of articles that appeared on the websites of the opinion-forming press and concern the reality of

4 Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/arts/dance/vienna-state-opera-ballet-academy-abuse.html (24. 08. 2023).

5 Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/01/winnipeg-royal-ballet-nude-photos-class-action-lawsuit (24. 08. 2023).

6 Available at: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/wiener-staatsoper-ballett-kindesmisshandlung-1.4404234 (24. 08. 2023).

7 Available at: https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2022-06/zuerich-hochschule-kuenste-tanzakademie-ballett-missbrauch (24. 08. 2023).

8 Available at: https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,25453716,co-sie-dzialo-w-warszawskiej-szkole-baletowej-wygladasz-jak.html (24. 08. 2023).

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ballet schools. In the last five years, these cases included, among others the New York City Ballet and Paris Opera Ballet, and recently – the Berlin State Ballet School and School for Acrobatic Arts (SBB), as well as the Ballet Academy of the Vienna State Opera in Austria, Ballettschule Theater Basel, Stadttheater Bern, Ballettakademie der Wiener Staatsoper, Tanzakademie Zürich.

Based on the explanations presented above, the case study applies the following analytical categories as points of reference:

1. The object of reference in the verbalisation of the mistakes;
2. Linguistic units used to name the object of reference;
3. Function of linguistic units with which the objects of reference are named;
4. Intention of pointing out the content or passages of conversation that are hurtful or stigmatizing.

Methodological basis for the analysis in this case study is the DIMEAN (Diskurslinguistische Mehr-Ebenen-Analyse) by Warnke and Spitzmüller (Warnke & Spitzmüller, 2008; Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2011). Linguistic means are defined and specified on the basis of this model. Since single-word and multi-word units[9] in the DIMEAN model are constitutive for the semantics of texts (Spitzmüler & Warnke, 2011, p. 140), they also become an image of linguistic routines and indicate certain patterns of action (Warnke & Spitzmüller, 2008, p. 25). Thus, words with the status of stigma words (Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2011, p. 144) are the focus of interest. A ballet lesson as a communicative situation in which spoken text dominates requires specifying which speech acts (Searle, 1976) are performed by ballet teachers. Determining their categories will make it possible to reconstruct the motives and intentions that underlie the verbalization of mistakes made by students.

The case analysis includes statements of the English, German and Polish ballet teachers, so the example sentences in German and Polish are translated literally to reflect the specificity of these acts. The corpus includes 45 articles published on thematic websites and press websites. The following fourteen excerpts from press articles contain quotes of the ballet teachers' utterances. These statements were grouped by reference objects.

9 Ein- und Mehrworteinheiten (Spitzmüller & Warnke, 2011, p. 140).

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Body

Example 1

"I danced so much I had very low body fat. I looked very young when I was 20. I remember one girl who developed breasts, and the teacher said, 'you're the wrong body for ballet'," Hershenson tells Romper.[10]

Example 6[11]

"Schülerinnen der Akademie berichten davon, wie sie an den Haaren gezogen, gekniffen und blutig gekratzt oder getreten worden sind. Zu den laufenden Demütigungen gehörten Sätze wie 'Du tanzt wie eine Hausfrau' [Eng. "You dance like a housewife" (A)[12]] oder 'Du hast Hasenzähne' [Eng. "You have buck teeth" (B)]. Fast systematisch seien die Kinder in Essstörungen getrieben worden mit Empfehlungen, eine Woche lang nur Wasser und Kiwis zu sich zu nehmen oder nur eine Semmel am Tag zu essen."[13]

Example 11

"W drugiej grupie uczy się Natalka. I razem z dwiema najsłabszymi 12-latkami musi wytrzymywać: 'Z tej mąki chleba nie będzie'[Eng. "This flour will not make bread" (A)], 'Tutaj nawet konkursu piękności nie wygracie' [Eng. "You won't even win a beauty contest here" (B)] albo: 'Wielka pupa, gruby brzuch!' [Eng. "Big butt, fat belly!" (C)]. Najgorzej się czują, gdy pedagog omija je bez słowa, gdy stoją przy drążku i wykonują te same ćwiczenia, co pozostałe dziewczynki. Z czasem w szatni nikt już z nimi nie rozmawia."[14]

10 Available at: https://www.romper.com/p/is-ballet-abusive-the-dark-side-of-a-beloved-sport-3073756 (22. 08. 2023).

11 The lack of the correct order of example numbers results from the fact that the examples were first numbered and then grouped into the described categories.

12 For the clarity of the analysis, the utterances were assigned with letters of the alphabet.

13 "Students at the academy talk about having their hair pulled, having been pinched and scratched until bleeding or kicked. The ongoing humiliations included phrases like 'You dance like a housewife' or 'You have buck teeth'. The children were almost systematically driven into eating disorders with recommendations to only have water and kiwis for a week or to eat only one bread roll a day." Available at: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/wiener-staatsoper-ballett-kindesmisshandlung-1.4404234 (22. 08. 2023).

14 "Natalka is studying in the second group. And together with the two weakest 12-year-olds, she has to endure: 'This flour will not make bread', 'You won't even win a beauty contest here' or: 'Big butt, fat belly!'. They feel the worst when the teacher passes them by without a word, when they stand at the bar and do the same exercises as the other girls. Over time, no one talks to them in the locker room anymore." Available at: https://katarzynawlodkowska.pl/baletowa

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Example 13

"Pani A stosowała metodę kar fizycznych. To przedziwne, ale najczęściej upadlała przy wszystkich swoją córkę. Inna, jak na przykład pani B, mówiła: 'Spójrz, jakie masz grube uda, krowo' [Eng. "Look (A), how thick your thighs are (B), cow (C)"]."[15]

Commentary

The ballet teacher perceives the whole body of a given ballet dancer (example 1) or parts of it (example 6 B, 11 C, 13 B) as problematic because they are far from what they are supposed to look like in a professional dancer. The ballet teacher calmly announces this state of affairs (Representatives: examples 1, 6 B), does it emotionally (Expressives: examples 11 C, 13 C) or by making reproaches (Directives: example 13 A) as well as literally points to those parts of the body that are not perfect. Comparison of the body to the cow or another animal threatens the image of the ballet students. Single words such as "cow", "buck teeth" which are assumed to be neutral become in this context stigmatizing words that expose specific imperfections of the ballet students. The problematic areas of the body are: thighs, stomach and buttocks. And the adjectives 'big', 'fat', 'thick' further reinforce this stigmatization.

Weight

Example 2

"There were many factors that caused the perfect storm. But I will tell you that the trigger pull was prepping (sic!) to audition for a company production of *The Nutcracker*. The director came in and basically said 'we all needed to lose weight'."[16]

-szkola-przemocy-tato-oni-mnie-tam-bili/ (22.08.2023). Released in *Duży Format* newspaper, July 2, 2018.

15 "Mrs. A used the method of physical punishment. It's strange, but most of the time she brought down her daughter in front of everyone. Another, like Mrs. B, said, 'Look how thick your thighs are, cow.'" Available at: https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,177344,24783534,za-murami-szkoly-baletowej-wiele-dziewczynek-obwiazywalo-sie.html (22.08.2023).

16 Available at: https://www.romper.com/p/is-ballet-abusive-the-dark-side-of-a-beloved-sport-3073756 (22.08.2023).

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Example 3

"The often damaging culture of ballet schools has been well documented with various pupils discussing their experience. A former student of influential ballet choreographer George Balanchine, Gelsey Kirkland, released the book *Dancing On My Grave* in 1986. In this, she discusses how she was told by George Balanchine to 'eat nothing' (A) and that he wanted to 'see the bones' (B)."[17]

Example 4

"Nina Veech, 19, another former student, said in a telephone interview that she had also witnessed rough treatment, but that the 'biggest issue' for her was that some teachers verbally attacked students, especially about their weight. They'd say things like, 'You're too fat (A), you should just drink water and eat pineapple for the weekend (B),' Ms. Veech said."[18]

Example 5

"'It was like a psychodrama,' Ms. Veech added of one teacher's obsession with students' weight. We did a performance and she said, 'You have to lose 4 kilos (A). The stage makes you look fatter. (B)'"[19]

Example 8

"Wszyscy chcieli być najlepsi, ale byli faworyci. Na początku nie było szans na zostanie faworyzowanym. Dzieci czuły się gorsze i słyszały, że koleżanka jest lepsza, bo chudsza i zdolniejsza. Bardzo często padały słowa 'spuchłaś jak pączek' [Eng. "You swelled up like a donut" (A)] albo 'gruba krowa' [Eng. "fat cow" (B)]."[20]

17 Available at: https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/blog/2023-blogs/body-shaming-abuse-at-ballet-schools/ (22.08.2023).

18 Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/arts/dance/vienna-state-opera-ballet-academy-abuse.html (22.08.2023).

19 Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/arts/dance/vienna-state-opera-ballet-academy-abuse.html (22.08.2023).

20 "Everyone wanted to be the best, but there were favourites. In the beginning, there was no chance of being favoured. The children felt inferior and heard that their friend was better because she was thinner and more talented. Very often the words 'you swelled up like a donut' or 'fat cow' were said." Available at: https://parenting.pl/balerina-opowiada-o-koszmarze-w-szkole-baletowej-natalia-maria-wojciechowska-o-konsekwencjach-treningu-w-szkole-baletowej (22.08.2023).

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Example 9

"'Spójrz na siebie, ty gruba krowo. Jak ty wyglądasz?' [Eng. "Look at you (A), you fat cow (B). Watch (C) what you look like? (D)"]. Przemoc i strach w szkole baletowej"[21]

Example 11

"W drugiej grupie uczy się Natalka. I razem z dwiema najsłabszymi 12-latkami musi wytrzymywać: 'Z tej mąki chleba nie będzie' [Eng. "This flour will not make bread"], 'Tutaj nawet konkursu piękności nie wygracie' [Eng. "You won't even win a beauty contest here"] albo: 'Wielka pupa, gruby brzuch!' [Eng. "Big butt, fat belly!"]. Najgorzej się czują, gdy pedagog omija je bez słowa, gdy stoją przy drążku i wykonują te same ćwiczenia, co pozostałe dziewczynki. Z czasem w szatni nikt już z nimi nie rozmawia."[22]

Example 13

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Commentary

Undoubtedly, the presented ballet teachers' statements are dominated by those referring to the issue of weight. Verbs that ballet teachers use are to draw attention to the need to lose weight. Verbs which draw attention to the necessity and the duty to critically evaluate oneself and lose the supposedly unnecessary

21 "'Look at you, you fat cow. Watch what you look like?' Violence and fear in a ballet school." Available at: https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/balet-przemoc-i-strach-w-szkole-baletowej/06mgz8d (22.08.2023).

22 "Natalka is studying in the second group. And together with the two weakest 12-year-olds, she has to endure: 'This flour will not make bread', 'You won't even win a beauty contest here' or: 'Big butt, fat belly!'. They feel the worst when the teacher passes them by without a word, when they stand at the bar and do the same exercises as the other girls. Over time, no one talks to them in the locker room anymore." Available at: https://katarzynawlodkowska.pl/baletowa-szkola-przemocy-tato-oni-mnie-tam-bili/ (22.08.2023). Released in *Duży Format* newspaper, July 2, 2018.

23 "Mrs. A used the method of physical punishment. It's strange, but most of the time she brought down her daughter in front of everyone. Another, like Mrs. B, said, 'Look how thick your thighs are, cow.'" Available at: https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,177344,24783534,za-murami-szkoly-baletowej-wiele-dziewczynek-obwiazywalo-sie.html (22.08.2023).

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weight (Directives: examples 2, 3 A, 4 B, 5 A, 9 A, 9 C, 13 A). The modalities that can be observed in these statements ('have to', 'should', 'look') signal the degree of importance of this evaluation.

On the one hand, the weight of ballet students becomes an object that evokes strong emotions in teachers (Expressives 9 B, 9 D, 13 B, 13 C) who use stigmatizing words like "fat cow" or "cow". But the issue of weight is also communicated directly to students? (Representatives: examples 4 A, 5 B, 8 A). Ballet teachers also change the benchmark against which they judge students' weight (Representatives: examples 5 B and 8 A). In example 8 A, both the 'swelling' and the 'donut' evoke unambiguous pejorative associations with the students' overweight. This again stigmatizes ballet students as people who do not fit into the canon of slender ballet dancers. The ballet teachers also assume the role of those who make demands on how much a student weighs (example 3 B).

Movement quality

Example 6

"Schülerinnen der Akademie berichten davon, wie sie an den Haaren gezogen, gekniffen und blutig gekratzt oder getreten worden sind. Zu den laufenden Demütigungen gehörten Sätze wie 'Du tanzt wie eine Hausfrau' [Eng. "You dance like a housewife" (A)] oder 'Du hast Hasenzähne' [Eng. "You have buck teeth" (B)]. Fast systematisch seien die Kinder in Essstörungen getrieben worden mit Empfehlungen, eine Woche lang nur Wasser und Kiwis zu sich zu nehmen oder nur eine Semmel am Tag zu essen."[24]

Example 7

"Auch bei Fehlern zeigten die Lehrpersonen keine Gnade. Jeden Tag sei den Schülerinnen und Schülern eingetrichtert worden, dass sie 'absolut scheisse tanzen' [Eng. "dance absolutely shitty"] und es niemals zu etwas bringen würden."[25]

24 "Students at the academy talk about having their hair pulled, having been pinched and scratched until bleeding or kicked. The ongoing humiliations included phrases like 'You dance like a housewife' or 'You have buck teeth'. The children were almost systematically driven into eating disorders with recommendations to only have water and kiwis for a week or to eat only one bread roll a day." Available at: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/wiener-staatsoper-ballett-kindesmisshandlung-1.4404234 (22. 08. 2023).

25 "Even when mistakes were made, the teachers showed no mercy. Every day the students were told that they 'dance absolutely shitty' and would never get anywhere." Available at: https://

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Example 10

"Zuza wychodzi do szkoły z bolącym brzuszkiem, ale tańczy nawet z otartą stopą. Liczy kalorie, czeka na pochwałę. Nigdy jej nie słyszy. Zamiast tego: 'Jak ty wyglądasz?!'Eng. "Watch (A) what you look like?!" (B)], 'Jesteś beztalenciem' [Eng. "You're talentless" (C)], 'Z takimi dziećmi nie da się pracować!' [Eng. "It's impossible to work with such children!" (D)]'. Pod koniec roku zwierza się matce: 'Boję się pani od baletu'".[26]

Commentary

Ballet teachers establish the "I – you" communication structure, which is based on the message: "I can – you cannot". Ballet teachers do not directly name the mistakes in the execution of the quality of the movement, but they point out the ballet students' inability to dance (Representatives: examples 6 A, 7) and Expressives (examples 10 A, 10 B 10 C). Stigmatizing words "absolutely shitty", "talentless", "such children" create an image of students who are unable to meet the requirements and the impression that movement qualities generated in ballet are unattainable for them. Their movement qualities are far from ideal. They probably lack the ability to keep the line, maintain the precise performance of positions or fulfil the requirements of the ballet style.

It can be assumed that the comparison to the housewife (example 6 A) could be viewed as a funny remark instead of a serious reproach but it is still stigmatizing. It can be associated with the pejorative image of a housewife, which in other contexts is reinforced with the words 'pathetic' or 'just' and may be associated with insignificant work, dependence, bland character, being expressionless, submissive. For many women being called a 'housewife' is offensive and probably evokes the image of a housewife from the 1950s.

www.watson.ch/schweiz/kunst/391780598-der-tanzakademie-zuerich-wird-missbrauch-vorgeworfen-betroffene-erzaehlen (22.08.2023).

26 "Zuza goes to school despite stomach ache, and she dances even with foot pain. She counts calories, waits for being praised. She never deserves it. Instead: 'Watch what you look like?!', 'You're talentless', 'It's impossible to work with such children!'. At the end of the year, she confides in her mother: 'I'm afraid of the ballet lady.'" Available at: https://katarzynawlodkowska.pl/baletowa-szkola-przemocy-tato-oni-mnie-tam-bili/ (22.08.2023).

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Dance skills

Example 11

"W drugiej grupie uczy się Natalka. I razem z dwiema najsłabszymi 12-latkami musi wytrzymywać: 'Z tej mąki chleba nie będzie' [Eng. "This flour will not make bread" (A)], 'Tutaj nawet konkursu piękności nie wygracie' [Eng. "You won't even win a beauty contest here" (B)] albo: 'Wielka pupa, gruby brzuch!' [Eng. "Big butt, fat belly!" (C)]. Najgorzej się czują, gdy pedagog omija je bez słowa, gdy stoją przy drążku i wykonują te same ćwiczenia, co pozostałe dziewczynki. Z czasem w szatni nikt już z nimi nie rozmawia."[27]

Example 14

"Wciąż słyszałam teksty rzucane w kierunku innych: 'Nigdy nie będziesz solistką' [Eng. "You'll never be a soloist" (A)], 'A co ty myślisz, że jesteś taka dobra?' [Eng. Do you think you're so good at it? (B)]"[28]

Commentary

Regarding the dance skills (part 3.3 of the analysis), ballet teachers refer to the future of ballet students. They announce (Representatives: examples 11 A, 14 A) that the ballet students have no chance for individual careers. Objective statements are intertwined with biting remarks (Expressives: example 11 B) and questions asked. However, the way the question is formulated makes it Expressive (example 14 B), according to Searle's thesis, that saying makes it so (1976, p. 13).

The lack of success in the beauty contest (example 11 B) stigmatizes the appearance of ballet students which is intensified by the word 'even'. The ballet teacher knows that the students are not participating in the ballet class in order to win a beauty contest. In this context, it becomes a symbol of the "consolation prize" and students do not even deserve this prize.

27 "Natalka is studying in the second group. And together with the two weakest 12-year-olds, she has to endure: 'This flour will not make bread', 'You won't even win a beauty contest here' or: 'Big butt, fat belly!'. They feel the worst when the teacher passes them by without a word, when they stand at the bar and do the same exercises as the other girls. Over time, no one talks to them in the locker room anymore." Retrieved from https://katarzynawlodkowska.pl/baletowa-szkola-przemocy-tato-oni-mnie-tam-bili/ (22.08.2023). Released in *Duży Format* newspaper, July 2, 2018.

28 "I kept hearing lines thrown at others: 'You'll never be a soloist', 'Do you think you're so good at it?'" Available at: https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,177344,24783534,za-murami-szkoly-baletowej-wiele-dziewczynek-obwiazywalo-sie.html (22.08.2023).

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Hierarchy in the studio

Example 12

"Straszenie panią dyrektor, jeśli dziecko nie zrobi jakiegoś ćwiczenia należycie. Kiedy uczeń pyta, dlaczego ma w jakiś forsowny sposób wykonać pozycję lub ćwiczenie, nauczyciel wydziera się: 'Rób tak, bo ja tak mówię! Inaczej pójdę do pani dyrektor!' [Eng. "Do it because I say so! (A) Otherwise, I'll go to the principal! (B)"]. To jest ostateczny argument dla dziecka, które zrobi wtedy wszystko. Tancerze żyją w permanentnym stresie."[29]

Commentary

The hierarchical relationship between the ballet teacher and the ballet student is the quintessence of work in the studio. On the one hand, ballet teachers are the only instance that decides about the activities in the studio. The ballet teachers organise and even give orders and commands. Their plan is not negotiable (Directives: example 12 A). On the other hand, in this hierarchy, on a macro scale, i. e. the institution as a whole structure, there is someone higher who supervises. At the same time, there is the person who will discipline if a ballet student does not follow the ballet teacher's instructions. Expressives (example 12 B) which function as threats become a tool to objectify the student and reduce him to the role of someone executing orders.

Summary: A Vulnerable Dancing Body in Dance Workshops

Actions and activities are physical, and all are performative in nature. In this case, the dancing body can be viewed as a purely material, biological entity. During dance practice, the body itself is a phenomenon that acts and practices. The dancing body is engaged in the process which is based on repetitiveness and routine. The dancing body is here a vulnerable body. It is a dancing organism which is not marginally present, but has meaning and makes meaning.

The case study above shows that the vulnerable body cannot cope with the pressure of verbalization of the mistakes and has not the capacity to respond. It

29 "Threatening children with bringing the principal if they don't do an exercise properly. When a student asks why he has to perform a pose or exercise in some strenuous way, the teacher yells, 'Do it because I say so! Otherwise, I'll go to the principal!' This is the final argument for a child, who will then do anything. Dancers live under constant stress." Available at: https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,177344,24783534,za-murami-szkoly-baletowej-wiele-dziewczynek-obwiazywalo-sie.html (22. 08. 2023).

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should be noted that this study represents only a fraction of the image concerning ballet class and ballet teachers. That dance style is about the virtuosity of the body, perfect and ideal movement that is required in dance classes. Hence, ballet teachers' statements stigmatize the inability to dance, and recognize the reasons for this inability. The case study also shows the ballet teachers' statements as "an integral part of face-work" (Goffman, 1955) in which the ballet teachers' feedback establishes particular relationships between the ballet students and ballet teachers. Developing ballet class interactions is not based on symmetry and does not allow ballet students to save their face. There is no doubt that the analysed utterances formulated by the ballet teachers during the class are 'image-threatening' and constitute a crisis situation that ballet students are unable to cope with and appear vulnerable. Regarding the question of what kind of loss ballet students experience when ballet teachers verbalise their mistakes made during the ballet class, that is the face they lose when they get embarrassed and humiliated.

Thus, the dancing body exposes itself as the one that is constantly open for the recognizable vulnerability. According to Butler (2006, p. 43) "[…] when a vulnerability is recognized, the recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself".

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Natalie Rauscher

In the Face of Disaster – Narratives of Community Vulnerability and Resilience in Media Coverage of Natural Catastrophes in the USA

Introduction

The last few decades have seen enormous rises in costs and damages from natural catastrophes around the globe (SwissRe, 2018). In the United States, natural disasters are frequent and often more damaging compared to other developed regions, for example in Western Europe. Several factors play a role including climate change but also population movement into disaster-prone areas such as the Gulf Region or the West and a myriad of policy failures on the local, state and federal level which includes the ineffectiveness of government programs (e. g. the National Flood Insurance Program, NFIP) (Colten, 2021; Rauscher & Werner, 2022). Extreme weather and disaster events are affecting everyone in a given place, yet, in relative terms, there are members of a community that are more affected by these events than others. They are thus more (socially) vulnerable to disaster events and natural hazards. Social vulnerability to disasters and the (lack of) resilience need to be studied in order to arrive at a more nuanced picture of the impact of natural disasters in the United States. In this equation, not only institutions and governments play a role, but public discourse does as well.

Public and political discourses, and narratives commonly used in these discourses, reflect disaster events in multiple ways. Several studies in different fields such as Economics (e. g. Robert Shiller) or Social Sciences (e. g. Taylan Yildiz et al., 2018) have shown that discourses and narratives play a role in reflecting events and attitudes by different stake-holders but they also have the ability to reinforce the status quo or bring about change. Narratives include elements from lived experience or can be based on myths, rumors or even falsehoods (Shiller, 2017, p. 968). But through their dispersion and popularity, narratives can form and influence public and political perception about a given topic. This shapes people's attitudes and awareness of certain events or issues and can ultimately even impact their behavior. The use of language deserves special attention when studying the "Kulturtechnik des Erzählens" (Yildiz et al., 2018, p. 136) as Yildiz et al. have put it, as certain strategies of language use can be as effective to shape

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public discourse as the power of the better argument (cf. Yildiz et al., 2018, p. 136).

Media discourses can play a crucial role in framing the perception of disaster situations. Mass media takes on different roles in a disaster event, from issuing warnings, information, description of events, or "even contributing to individual and community recovery and to community resilience." (Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012, p. 607) In media depictions of disasters, news media often focuses little on any causal explanations but rather emphasizes dramatic descriptions of events, and that only for a short time span (Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012) with a focus on the affected region only. Given this dynamic, it seems clear that media discourse plays a role in the lack of effective (local and national) disaster mitigation in the U.S. and therefore also the lack of community resilience to disasters, which will be examined in this chapter.

Media coverage has the power to draw attention to and "normalize dominant cultural assumptions" as well as "influence social attitudes […]" (Cox et al., 2008, p. 470). Thus news and print media influences the cultural understanding of a crisis event and the role people have in it (Davis & French, 2008, p. 243). People also evaluate the response to the disaster (Cox et al., 2008, p. 470) and how they ultimately recover from it. Thus the study of discourses in this chapter can illuminate if and how disaster risk reduction policy in the United States – or the lack thereof – is presented and evaluated. First, this chapter will introduce common understandings of social vulnerability and resilience as well as risk perceptions. Then a specific case study[1] of media sources will be presented, which will illuminate how media coverage represents disaster events in affected communities.

By doing so, this chapter argues that media discourses play a role in the cycle of failed disaster risk reduction in the U.S. By analyzing the portrayal of vulnerable communities in media discourses around natural disasters in the U.S., this chapter finds that the media focuses heavily on 'resilience' as well as 're-occurrence' narratives that display local sacrifice in the face of disaster and local communities ultimately prevailing over and over again. This leads to a focus on resilience of communities rather than a reflection of underlying causes for high vulnerability among certain societal groups. This is contributing to the lack of awareness of why some communities are hit by disaster repeatedly and could reinforce the widespread unwillingness to support more effective mitigation policies on all government levels. The focus on resilience seems to be consistent with a larger shift in the political debate and in the agendas of government

1 For the case study different textual corpora based on media outlets were compiled. The corpora include articles from *The New York Times* and news transcripts from *ABC News* as well as from *Fox News Network* between 2017 and 2020.

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institutions (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 598). Nevertheless, there are underlying reasons why a growing number of people are affected by natural disasters in the U.S. today and a sole focus on resilience rather than vulnerability obscures the underlying history of structural problems in disaster risk reduction policy in the U.S. This seems to be consistent with findings from risk studies that perception of risks is crucially influenced by underlying cultural ideals which can lead to overoptimistic views in the face of complex situations and underlying uncertainty that natural hazards and disasters represent.

Social Vulnerability and Resilience to Natural Hazards

Although a catastrophic event affects the whole population in a given region in absolute terms, certain groups in a community are much more affected in relative terms. These groups are socially vulnerable to natural hazards. Vulnerability as a concept is used across many fields including disaster management, development, economics, sociology, anthropology, geography, health, global change, and environmental studies (cf. Bergstrand et al., 2015, p. 392). This chapter uses the definition of the term utilized in risk management literature, for example by researchers like Susan Cutter who focuses on conditions that make communities vulnerable to natural hazards such as social systems, development level, infrastructure, demographic structure and more generally the socio-economic makeup of a community (Bergstrand et al., 2015, p. 392). Additionally, vulnerability as defined in this chapter focuses on the human element in this theory, meaning that all disasters originate in human agency and therefore the question of social support after a disaster is especially crucial (Zakour & Gillespie, 2013, p. 12).

Compared to vulnerability, resilience "refers to coping with and recovering from a hazard that has already occurred." (Bergstrand et al., 2015, p. 392) Just like the term vulnerability, the idea of resilience is used and studied in a lot of fields such as economics, ecology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, public health, geography or disaster management. When talking about resilience, one often hears phrases such as "bounce back" or "build back better" (UNDRR, 2017), which can be understood as a focus to prepare and build capacity in order to prevent disasters from leading to a long-term downturn of progress in a given community. Resilience capacity includes, for example, technological capacity, high skill and education levels, high economic status, quality of the natural environment and resource management institutions, stable political structures, adequate infrastructure or flows of knowledge and information between political levels and inside communities (UNDRR, 2017).

Apart from ideas of vulnerability and resilience, understandings of uncertainty and risk (perceptions) are crucial in the area of natural disaster miti-

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gation. The sheer complexity of certain problems – such as natural hazards or climate change – leads to uncertainty (Wakeham, 2015, p. 716). For example, uncertainty about how to make sense of hazards or prepare for them. This can be true for both decision-makers and the population. Risk and uncertainty are often combined as concepts. While risks are generally understood as 'known' potential negative outcomes of a course of action, the perception of large risks are more likely to produce uncertainty about possible action (Wakeham, 2015, p. 717). If it is unclear in what way a situation will develop, it is difficult to decide a course of action which could potentially be costly. In the face of very complex risk situations the level of uncertainty is therefore higher. Cultural ideology plays a strong role in perception of risks – in this case, natural hazards. Often, a certain culture can prevent "people from anticipating the worst possible outcomes, skewing their perceptions to be overly optimistic." (Wakeham, 2015, p. 720) In this context, uncertainty continues to loom in the background and culture "shapes what areas of uncertainty receive more attention with a given social context, and thus, what areas of uncertainty people may fail to see coming." (Wakeham, 2015, p. 720) Cultural ideals of individualism, self-reliance, the "pursuit of happiness" and limited government – underlying societal and cultural norms that are strongly intertwined with American culture and society (Cullen, 2003) – are a factor in risk reduction and mitigation measures in the United States (Nietfeld, 2023). It seems likely that these ideals can skew the perception of looming risks towards being "overly optimistic."

Vulnerability to natural disasters has changed over the last decades and there are certain communities that are more affected by frequent and recurring natural catastrophe events than others. In the U.S., the most vulnerable communities are those that are located in dense (urban) areas, are racially and ethnically diverse and have a lower socio-economic status than the average population (Cutter & Finch, 2008). Although there are efforts by local groups to achieve more effective "community resilience," the sheer magnitude of some disaster events demands the support and responsibility of the (local, state, and federal) government. Understanding how communities differ when it comes to disaster risk and recovery preparedness is central to understanding how communities will react to a disaster event: "Social vulnerability and community resilience are two essential concepts for evaluating both communities' risks and coping capacities when dealing with hazards." (Bergstrand et al., 2015, p. 392)

Interestingly, U.S. government institutions have seemingly shifted their focus away from "disaster vulnerability" towards "disaster resilience" which is associated with "a more proactive and positive expression of community engagement with natural hazard reduction." (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 598) A focus shift like this, while certainly meant to address challenges and develop better strategies, might lead to negligence in addressing the factors behind disaster vulnerability of

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certain communities. It might thus add to policy failures in this field which are not adequately addressed. While resilience strategies must certainly be part of any well-rounded strategy to address natural hazards, vulnerability as a concept taking a back seat will steer away the focus from fighting underlying structural problems that are likely to lead to disastrous situations again and again.

Given the complexity of hazards and developments like climate change as well as underlying cultural factors in the U.S., (community) resilience to hazards seems difficult to achieve. In this context, it is crucial to communicate risks in an effective way. But what is effective communication of risks and uncertainties and how can citizens be reached and skewed perceptions of risks overcome? One aspect is the reflection of risk in the public – for example through media portrayal and reporting. Yet, as this chapter will show, the media discourse on natural disasters in the U.S. is unlikely to play an effective role in the communication of risk or the enhancement of resilience to natural disasters.

Narratives of Community Vulnerability and Resilience in Media Discourses

Media discourses reporting on natural disasters are taking part in portraying risks, vulnerability and resilience to disasters in affected regions. Studying how natural disasters are portrayed as well as the role vulnerable communities play in this portrayal is significant because it influences the way the population views their own position and capabilities in recurring disaster situations. Despite the fact that 'community' as a term might not be easily defined and that in today's politically polarized America "locality, affinity, and community often seem to be at odds with one another" (Duclos-Orsello, 2018, p. 183), there is no denying that certain groups in specific regions in the U.S. are more vulnerable to catastrophic events than others. As said before, inside these regions those groups with a lower socio-economic status, a certain demographic make-up and a heterogeneous ethnic background are even more vulnerable than others. In the field of disaster management and natural hazard research 'community' is defined as "the totality of social system interactions within a defined geographic space such as a neighborhood, census tract, city, or county." (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 599)

Past studies on media coverage of natural disaster events have suggested that the recovery processes in a given community after an extreme event can be even more challenging than the impact of the disaster itself (Flynn, 1999, In Cox et al., 2008, p. 470). In this context, discourses are the "social practice of disaster recovery." (Cox et al., 2008, p. 470) Studying these discourses as part of disaster recovery and with a focus on community, responds to the increasing "complexity

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of the recovery process and a growing salience to individual and collective well-being." (Cox et al., 2008, p. 470) The examination of media discourses and the role of local communities in them can thus help to understand the vulnerability to natural catastrophes in more detail. For example, if communities are portrayed as resilient rather than vulnerable, could this influence the willingness or likelihood to prepare and mitigate disasters?

Methodology[2]

The following case study uses several different news outlets (*The New York Times*, *ABC News*, *Fox News Network*) between the years 2017 and 2020 as source material to investigate media discourses and narratives of vulnerability and resilience around natural catastrophes in the U.S. Using these outlets, more mainstream liberal but also conservative viewpoints are included. By using national news outlets and print media, the case study investigates an external perspective on local communities. These news outlets reference a broader perspective on natural catastrophe events in the USA and influence broader perspectives on disaster events and local regions. The case study addresses questions such as: How are natural disasters in affected regions portrayed and which narratives dominate the discourse? Are the discourses concerned with catastrophic events and their immediate effects or do they also reflect underlying weaknesses in the prevention of natural catastrophes? What role do vulnerable communities themselves play in their portrayal?

In Graph 1 the different corpora used for this discourse study are displayed. The sizes of the different corpora rank from 250,822 tokens[3] (*ABC*), to 1,606,677 tokens (*NYT*) and 2,594,117 tokens (*Fox*).[4] As a reference corpus, a sample

2 In this chapter, the analysis of discourse will focus more narrowly on hurricane events in the Louisiana region of the United States which is hit frequently by these severe storms and flooding. The state is severely impacted by disaster and faces a "land loss crisis" (Colten, 2021) that will only exacerbate through climate change. The textual corpora are based on articles compiled through the search terms 'hurricane' and 'Louisiana.' The data was collected over the Nexis Uni platform. Hurricanes and the consequent flooding are one of the most frequent and common natural disaster events to occur in the USA every year. Floods also continue to be one of the costliest natural disaster events in the USA. Louisiana is frequently hit by these events and some of the biggest disaster events of U.S. history devastated New Orleans (Hurricane Betsy, Hurricane Katrina) which triggered national discussions over vulnerability and resilience in the region and in the USA more widely. Louisiana also continues to be one of the poorest states and thus displays high levels of socially vulnerable groups (low socio-economic status, dense urban areas, mixed ethnic and racial make-up of the population).

3 Token refers roughly to 'word.'

4 Although the corpora have different sizes, measures like word frequency can be displayed in relative terms which makes it more comparable. We also see different amounts of articles and

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Corpus of the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary English) was used (approximately 9 million words). COCA stands for what can be considered 'regular' use of the English language. Using the COCA sample corpus as a reference point, it can be determined whether a certain keyword occurs more or less often in the investigated discourse than in 'regular discourse' which can then inform about significant points in the discourse.

Outlet	Number of articles/transcripts	Corpus Size
NYT	829	1,606,677 tokens
ABC News	266	250,822 tokens
Fox News Network	317	2,594,117 tokens

Graph 1: Textual Corpora.

In a first step, the corpora are analyzed quantitatively using the corpus linguistic software LancsBox (Brezina, Timperley, & McEnery, 2018). The quantitative study of discourses in this chapter focuses on frequency of keywords. In a second step, the corpora are investigated qualitatively looking at text samples.

Quantitative Discourse Analysis: Frequency Analysis

The corpora were first examined using a list of keywords[5] divided into different keyword categories. In the following, only one key word category, "Local Communities," will be portrayed in more detail. In Graph 2, the different thematic keywords are displayed showing their frequency in the textual corpora (bars). The COCA-line indicates the frequency of these terms in 'ordinary' English discourse.

When we look at Graph 2, we generally see that local communities are definitively a strong focus point in the discourse around natural disasters exemplified in the investigated textual corpora. The most significant terms showing this are neighbor* or resident* which occur much more frequently in the corpora than in general English, indicated by the COCA line.[6] Especially the *NYT* and *ABC* material show a high relative frequency of terms that refer to local communities which shows that these outlets are more concerned with integrating the portrayal of local communities in their reporting on natural disasters. *Fox News* displays

transcripts. This is due to the fact that written articles (*NYT*) are shorter than TV segments. *Fox* segments are also longer than *ABC News* segments and therefore the total size of the *Fox* corpus is larger than the others, although the number of segments is comparable to *ABC*.

5 The keyword list was informed by close reading of text samples from the corpora, as well as through the engagement with natural hazard literature.

6 * refers to so-called wildcard terms, taking into account different forms of the same word e. g. flood, floods, flooding, etc.

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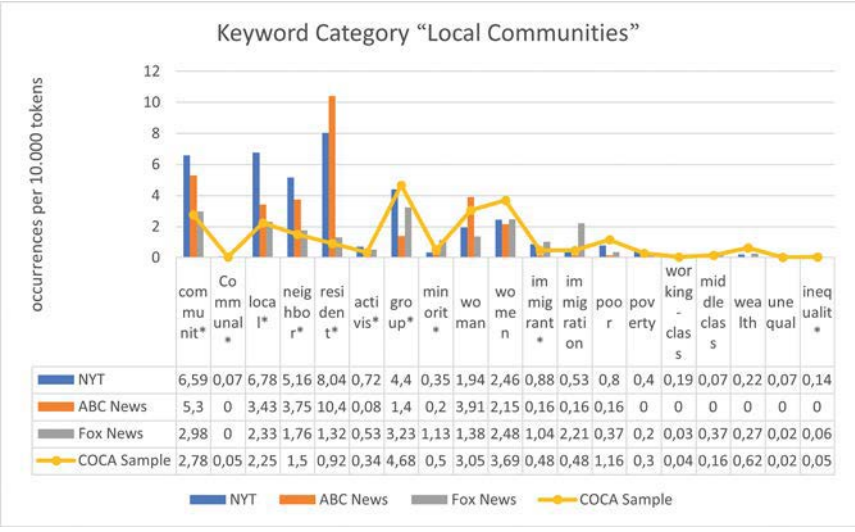
the lowest frequencies of these terms and also the keywords local* and communit* are significantly less frequent in the *Fox News* material than in the other two outlets. Overall, this could indicate that *Fox News* speaks less frequently about local communities in the context of natural disaster events than the other two outlets.



	community*	Communal*	local*	neighbor*	resident*	activis*	group*	minorit*	woman	women	immigrant*	immigration	poor	poverty	working-class	middle class	wealth	unequal	inequalit*
NYT	6,59	0,07	6,78	5,16	8,04	0,72	4,4	0,35	1,94	2,46	0,88	0,53	0,8	0,4	0,19	0,07	0,22	0,07	0,14
ABC News	5,3	0	3,43	3,75	10,4	0,08	1,4	0,2	3,91	2,15	0,16	0,16	0,16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fox News	2,98	0	2,33	1,76	1,32	0,53	3,23	1,13	1,38	2,48	1,04	2,21	0,37	0,2	0,03	0,37	0,27	0,02	0,06
COCA Sample	2,78	0,05	2,25	1,5	0,92	0,34	4,68	0,5	3,05	3,69	0,48	0,48	1,16	0,3	0,04	0,16	0,62	0,02	0,05

Graph 2: Keywords Local Communities.

All other terms here seem less significant. There seems to be less coverage of specific groups or minorities in the context of natural disasters such as women, immigrants, working class, or middle class. The topic of poverty and (wealth) inequality also does not seem to play a large role in the coverage around natural disasters although the material focuses on the region of Louisiana, one of the poorest states in the United States, and vulnerability to disaster is increased through low socio-economic status. In fact, 'wealth' as a keyword occurs even slightly less frequent than in contemporary English discourse. This might already indicate that underlying structural factors in social vulnerability to disaster – such as the socioeconomic make-up of a region – do not feature strongly in the investigated discourse.

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Qualitative Discourse Analysis: 'Resilient' communities in the face of recurring disaster

The following qualitative analysis will focus on the specific term 'community' in more depth. The term community appears in many different instances in the different corpora. In the *NYT* material there are 600 separate instances, 91 occurrences in the *ABC News* material and 488 instances in the *Fox News* material. Not all of the instances directly refer to communities in natural disaster events but the following analysis focuses on these contexts in particular. The occurrences of the term are grouped around two narratives that occur most often in the reporting: The "resilience narrative" and the "re-occurrence narrative."

Resilience Narrative: Tight-knit and resilient communities despite devastation

One of the strongest themes around community and natural disaster events in the U.S. is that local communities are portrayed as tight-knit entities that come together despite disasters. This narrative is woven through the discourse by different actors. As the outlets investigated here are national outlets, there is always a national and external perspective which talks about the community. Here we see statements by national political actors or (academic/business) experts who are praising the resilient nature of the affected communities. For example, federal agencies are quoted in the outlets saying:

> Federal Coordinating Officer FEMA: […] Survivors are able to not only have us help them, but they're able to help their community as you saw during the response. It was Texan helping Texan. In fact, we had folks from Louisiana, the Cajun Navy, coming over and helping during the response. (*ABC*)

After the flooding after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, we see a lot of coverage, especially on *Fox*, about the whole (American) community coming together:

> […] We are also seeing the better side of America in these images as celebrities and athletes, politicians and regular folks pitch in with money, supplies, and hard work to help. (*Fox*)

In another instance, President Trump is quoted about local communities, saying:

> Together we will help them all recover from this tragedy. We will renew our hope and community and we will renew our hope and rebuild those homes and businesses and schools and places of worship with a strength and vigor that comes within ourselves. (*Fox*)

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Expert voices who are quoted include academics who talk, for example, about environmental history concerning the Gulf region or the issue of settlement in these communities:

> It's a struggle that every community is facing in South Florida […] there is a constant battle between our ability to prepare for hurricanes and the pressure for urban expansion. It's a great place to live. But it does come with some risk. (*NYT*)

Apart from quoting expert and political actors, the media outlets themselves also play a role in talking about communities and painting a picture of the regions affected by disasters. When it comes to specific disaster events, there is a lot of dramatization in media reports. Especially TV audiences are presented with pictures of devastated regions:

> Dramatic before and after photos showing the inundation's swallowing roads, entire neighborhoods. (*Fox*)

The communities on the ground are then portrayed as responding to these events in a brave fashion:

> Yeah, because we're here in Louisiana with a look at the toll this hurricane season has taken along the Gulf Coast, and the unbreakable community spirit is here, as well. (*ABC*)

ABC reporters on the ground are commenting on what they experience inside the communities, painting a vivid picture of community resilience:

> […] I know this town, I know this community. It's a community of faith, family, and boy, they like to have fun, but it hasn't been that way the past two months, pandemic, hurricane, resurgence of the pandemic, another hurricane. Even this self-reliant community needs help. (*ABC*)

Everyone in the community is portrayed as doing their best to help each other:

> It's also just the local community at large. You look at local businesses like mattress matt […] bringing people in, feeding them, giving them water. You look at the role of churches opening their doors serving food and water, taking people in. You look at even corporate, big corporate giants like Wal-Mart donating $20 million. […] Churches, so it's not just about government. I think this actually underscores your point the individuals as well stepping up and local communities as well. (*Fox*)

On *Fox News*, veterans play an important role in individual disaster response and they are mentioned over and over, serving their community – after already serving their country:

> Veterans are amazing people who are giving to their community. I was so proud to be with them today and to be able to see this firsthand. (*Fox*)

On *ABC News*, there is a recurring segment called *Hometown Heroes* which portrays locals "working to help the community get their comeback." (*ABC*) All

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these segments reinforce the idea that communities themselves can and are taking the lead when disaster strikes and emphasize the individual responsibility and capability to address disaster.

Interestingly, there are also some segments where the media coverage of disasters is discussed critically, albeit lacking any self-reflection. For example, after disaster events media attention often quickly shifts to new things, which leaves communities struggling for help long term:

> An unimaginable loss for so many in this hard-working community […] they're coming together to clean up after all this catastrophic damage that has been left behind, and their hope is to not be forgotten. (*ABC*)

Communities are hoping not to be forgotten – yet *ABC News* and other media outlets are themselves taking part in 'forgetting' about these communities by shifting away attention. On another occasion on *Fox News*, a guest on the show argues that the media is the 'loser' in the reporting on disaster events, not because of reporting falsely but because of shifting focus away from affected communities:

> Again, hurricane coverage, this is what the media lives for. By and large the coverage was good and a lot of uplifting and heart-wrenching stories about the resilience of the community. But the media always manages to overstep, and they did with his obsession about Melania Trump's stiletto heels, writing in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* the fashion section, it was just a disaster. (*Fox*)

We thus see that occasionally the problematic dynamics of the news cycle are briefly mentioned – yet without any self-reflection on the part of media outlets themselves. Moreover, it is not only the loss of interest but the focus on "uplifting and heart-wrenching stories" that plays a part in the problematic portrayal of affected communities by media actors. Media outlets focus on the uplifting stories from local communities, but they are not talking about underlying causes of why these communities are hit by disaster again and again – the resilience narrative takes precedence.

Apart from many outside perspectives on local communities in the news outlets, members of the community also play a role in their own portrayal, albeit one that is narrowly defined by the resilience narrative. Often there are local political actors like city managers commenting on the situation:

> We want our community to be sustainable should we have another major hit from a hurricane. (*NYT*)

Facing disasters or threats, local political actors are often quoted talking about their efforts to address and prepare the community. For example, the mayor of Galveston, TX is quoted:

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> If that hurricane had come into Galveston, it've been devastating to this community. […] it would have ruined everything residential and commercial. So, we're fortunate. We were prepared. We evacuated. We did everything we could to prepare for it and thank heavens it didn't come this way. (*ABC*)

Apart from local political actors, there is a lot of portrayal of local residents, especially in TV segments. Most residents report on working in relief efforts in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Many give what they can – money or their time – to help others. Media outlets thus emphasize how horrific the disaster was, but that nothing can really destroy the community spirit because hard working Americans take their fate into their own hands. The *Hometown Heroes* segment shows this most strongly. Here, local residents of destroyed regions are featured on news segments, mostly acting in a hands-on fashion with anything they can organize:

> [*ABC:*] …what do you want them to know about this community, your community? […] the community of Lake Charles is truly a melting pot. We work together, We're a blue collar community and we do everything we can to try to help each other. And this a time where our resilience will be tested but as the 15 White Coats say, resilience is in our DNA and I know the city of Lake Charles will bounce back. (*ABC*)

Another Hometown Hero, a veteran, is also featured saying:

> I did this because it's my community, I live here. This is my backyard. This is my home. (*ABC*)

These Hometown Heroes want to keep the attention on their communities after disaster and want to prevent the news cycle from moving on:

> […] when you see the country rallying around your community, how does that feel? […] it's a feeling that we've been longing to feel here in Southwest Louisiana, in Lake Charles because we, you know, the press cycle was so short on the coverage, people didn't even think it happened. Every street looks like a bomb blew up on it. It's devastation everywhere, no facilities, no power, no water, and the world has moved on. So the fact that y'all are here, it means everything to the people in this area. […] (*ABC*)

Apart from TV segments, the insistence on bravery and strong community resilience can also be found in other outlets such as the *NYT* where (former) local residents are quoted. For example, a letter to the editor after Hurricane Laura is called "I take everything back I said about Southwest Louisiana" and speaks about resilience and community spirit of the people living along the coasts especially in the Cajun and black community which stands together across ethnic boundaries. This portrayal of local communities also shows that local residents often do not believe they are valued or understood outside of their communities, which is why they themselves have to work together, knowing best what to do in the face of disasters:

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> The policymakers 'n't do place value on anything but the money, not the longevity of these communities, not the culture', said Tracy Kuhns, 64, a longtime resident of the Barataria community across the bayou from Jean Lafitte. (*NYT*)

Local sacrifice in the face of disaster – but also the resilience of communities that are ultimately prevailing – is a narrative that is emphasized again and again. Local community actors thus play a role in their portrayal in the media, but they are framed as part of the resilience narrative most of the time. The purpose of their appearance is thus to make the events relatable but also serves to show community spirit and strength of a community despite devastation.

Apart from these 'ordinary' voices of community actors, first responders from different organizations and institutions such as the fire or police departments, the Red Cross, community organizations, local cultural actors but also the National Guard are mentioned repeatedly and complimented intensively. They are portrayed as the ones who actually keep the ball rolling on the ground – much more so than any other outside actors such as the (federal) government.

Re-occurrence narrative: Communities threatened by disaster again and again

Another narrative that is apparent in the reporting on natural disasters in the media – which is connected to the resilience narrative – is the "re-occurrence narrative". Many communities are hit by disaster repeatedly and although the community spirit is strong, there is some allusion to the fact that some regions face the same problematic situations again and again. Apart from allusions to climate change, the re-occurrence of drastic consequences of natural disaster events seems to be a puzzle that the media outlets are incapable of truly addressing. In many instances, media outlets are again focusing on local community actors getting back on their feet and local politicians claiming that they want to restore the communities to the way they were. This is of course an understandable sentiment, but it also reveals a problematic aspect about the reporting on disaster-prone regions. Some of these communities are hit again and again by the same events without changing course in any way. This is not discussed critically to any large extent in the media, which makes it seem that some communities are just 'naturally' vulnerable and that there is in fact nothing wrong with past reactions to disasters.

One such community, Lake Charles in Louisiana – regularly hit by major weather events – is discussed on many occasions. For example, the local sheriff is quoted about the members of his community:

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> Some of them don't have insurance, some of them can't afford the high deductibles that they're going to pay for their insurance, so hopefully they can get some type of assistance, either from the federal government or from private sources. We want our community back the way it was. (*ABC*)

On another occasion in the *NYT* there is the insistence that the way of life along the coasts should be preserved the way it has always been:

> In the years since Hurricane Katrina, he had grown weary of being rebuffed in his quixotic campaign to encircle Lafitte with a tall and impregnable levee. He could rhapsodize all he wanted about preserving his community's authentic way of life. […] (*NYT*)

There are also some local political actors who talk about a different way of rebuilding but rather in general terms – again insisting that the community is actually very resilient. The Governor of Puerto Rico is quoted saying:

> […] after this catastrophe, we need to rethink how to build and how to make our community safer and how to prepare for some of these disasters. […] So I think the people of Puerto Rico are very resilient. You'll see. We'll be standing up, […] in the long run as we start building through the process of reconstruction, our focus should be to rebuild better than ever, using technology and being, being very innovative. (*ABC*)

Quotes like these reinforce the notion that the resilience of communities is the overarching theme and that there is not much fundamentally wrong with (local) societal or political approaches to disaster mitigation. In some instances, there is even the claim that things have actually improved:

> [*Fox* host:] […] we've just gotten so much better as a country with how to respond to this from a federal government, from a state government, and really, again, a community level. (*Fox*)

At the same time, there is also the call for help from the federal government once disasters strike the communities – which happens again and again:

> Damages are already in the billions much of that, especially for private residence, may not be covered because some 80 percent of the victims we're told did not have flood insurance. They will be turning to the government for help. […] (*Fox*)

Or another quote from the *NYT:*

> The magnitude of our destruction is so huge we cannot come back as a community on our own. We cannot restore our homes on our own. We need the help of the American public, if we can get it. (*NYT*)

In many instances, there is no reflection of the fact that there might be something wrong with the self-repeating cycle of a people living in extremely hazardous areas, the lack of effective disaster risk reduction policy and calls for the federal government to step in whenever disaster strikes. The media is rather reinforcing

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the notion that this is the federal government's role. While this is of course part of the role of government, there is no discussion of the problematic cycle of a lack of preparedness, devastating events and rebuilding in the same places over and over again. Only in recent years, there seems to be some reflection that this cycle of destruction and rebuilding is unsustainable, especially in written material like the *NYT:*

> With local officials incentivized to replicate the past, experts in disaster relief say changes in federal law and regulations may be needed to reorient the system to reflect climate realities. Yet the Trump administration, if anything, is moving in the opposite direction. (*NYT*)

Yet, a real reflection of the underlying causes and remedies for the situation are still rarely featured despite even some voices on *Fox News* highlighting disaster relief priority shifting under the Trump Administration:

> And now you have a situation where in the President's budget, he's cutting funding with things like insurance for people who live in flood zones. He's cutting back on community, the bill and block grants that will help people rebuild. So may the power of seeing this, the real measure of empathy […] his ability to say, I'm going to help you and give help in terms of funding or other federal aid […]. (*Fox*)

Rather surprisingly, *Fox* is even briefly mentioning the issue of the ineffective system of flood insurance:

> [*Fox News* host:] You know what a really boring segment would be but in fact, one that people have to know about is flood insurance. [Other segment follows] The whole controversy behind flood insurance is absolutely astounding. The types of repeats floods and what happened and how much is paid out. It would bore you to tears but it is probably one of the most important stories out there. (*Fox*)

Here, one can see that the underlying problems of disaster risk mitigation more generally are not adequately represented for audiences. Even when reporting turns to an aspect that is crucial, the flood insurance system, TV hosts actively turn away from the issue because it is deemed too boring. This exemplifies how discussions of effective risk mitigation policy is absent from media portrayals of disasters in the U.S. This seems especially true for TV outlets.

Apart from that, the *NYT* features some articles that try to report and explain certain disaster response policies. In 2017, the *NYT* features an extensive article called *When Rising Seas Transform Risk Into Certainty* (*NYT*). The article talks in great detail about the ineffectiveness of the National Flood Insurance Program:

> As storm damage becomes more costly, it has left the NFIP tens of billions of dollars in debt and federal officials scrambling to bridge the divide between the rapidly growing expense of insuring these properties and comparatively tiny, taxpayer-subsidized premiums that support it. (*NYT*)

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The article goes on to explain that the program has led to the wrong incentives in disaster mitigation across vulnerable regions and communities:

> The NFIP was meant to encourage safer building practices. Critics argue that instead it created a perverse incentive – a moral hazard – to build, and to stay, in flood-prone areas by bailing people out repeatedly and by spreading, and that way hiding, the true cost of risk. (*NYT*)

Apart from this crucial issue with the NFIP, another problematic element is discussed in this article, namely that disaster risk mitigation is often unpopular with local communities as it demands drastic measures:

> "When you go out to the end of the century, some of these neighborhoods don't exist, so it's hard to get community engagement," he said. "Nobody wants to talk beyond where the dragons are on the map, into unchartered territory." (*NYT*)

Although this is a detailed article in the *NYT*, pieces going into detail on the history, problematic aspects and wrong incentives of federal disaster programs are a very rare occurrence both in written media as well as in TV segments. Yet, at least in the *NYT*, there are some articles talking about possible disaster risk reduction policies including "managed retreat" measures that states like Louisiana have been contemplating. All of these articles seem to be rather recent, especially from the year 2020, and talk about the 'unavoidable' relocation of entire neighborhoods:

> Louisiana issued a sweeping strategy for its most vulnerable coastal parishes, laying out in great detail which parts would likely be surrendered to the rising seas, and also how inland towns should start preparing for an influx of new residents. (*NYT*)

In the context of relocation plans, there are some local political actors quoted arguing that there has been a shift in perspective of how to address disasters in the region:

> That's not a conversation that we were comfortable having, as a state or as a series of vulnerable communities, say, five years ago. […] It's now a conversation that we can have. […] We don't have ready-made solutions, Mr Sanders said. But talking openly about retreat, he added, can produce better outcomes than if we do nothing. (*NYT*)

Other articles, however, still show that there are many communities who want to go back to normal and advertise their communities for tourism and business despite the recurring risk of disaster. This is exemplified in an article about Lake Charles in the *NYT* from 2020 called *How Do You Advertise a Town Ravaged by Hurricanes?* (*NYT*)

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Discussion of Results and Conclusion

Looking at the discourse data, one can infer that media portrayals of catastrophic events are dominated by "resilience narratives" as well as "re-occurrence narratives" that fail to illuminate the actual reasons behind vulnerability to natural disasters. We see the continuous emphasis on the sacrifice of local tight-knit communities and their resilient spirit rather than allusions to the reasons such as policy failure or moral hazard that lie behind the rising damages from natural disasters in many communities in the U.S.

Overall, we can see that the strongest narrative surrounding the portrayal of local communities in media discourses is the "resilience narrative." Brave locals are coming together as a community and they know best how to address the disaster they are facing. Ultimately, they will prevail. The focus on this narrative obscures, however, that many events are so massive that individuals are not capable of truly alleviating their situation. Additionally, the focus on sensationalism of immediate catastrophic events and heart-warming stories about locals also lacks any reflection of the underlying causes for the vulnerability of these communities and what factors have led to or are exacerbating their vulnerable state.

We also see a strong presence of the re-occurrence narrative in the media outlets without reflecting on underlying causes for this re-occurrence of disasters. The way of life of many communities along the coast are portrayed as threatened through continuous hazards. We see that many want to "go back to normal" and just rebuild the communities the way they were. Here we again see the discursive focus on the consequences of disasters for communities but little reflection on the reasons why communities are so vulnerable in the first place. There is rarely any deeper analysis or explanation about the causes of vulnerability in these communities including the population development as well as the lack of effective measures by local households themselves (e.g. insurance coverage) or by the (federal, state, local) government. From time to time, there is an allusion that political polarization also plays an additionally negative role in disaster aid policy today, but these allusions still do not go into detail or reflect on the long history of failed disaster risk reduction policy in the U.S.

In some more recent articles in the *NYT*, there seems to be some effort to introduce policies to address vulnerable communities including managed retreat or (very rarely) an article about the purpose of the National Flood Insurance Program. Often these programs are portrayed as detached from and unpopular with local communities who dislike high insurance premiums, falling house prices and having to face the abandonment of their community. Even more so than in the written content analyzed here, some TV segments mention policies like flood insurance before immediately turning the attention elsewhere. This is

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emblematic of media coverage of disaster events and affected communities. The focus rests on immediate sensationalist coverage as well as 'feel-good' stories emphasizing the general bravery and sacrifice of local communities that supposedly satisfy audiences. What is not included in media discourse is a discussion of the necessity of federal programs to mitigate major disasters, their purpose as well as weaknesses and much needed reforms of these programs and institutions. This is in line with other studies on the subject, which for example show that much needed reform of the NFIP is very seldom covered by mainstream media (Strother, 2018, p. 470). Strother and others have argued that the very technocratic nature of disaster policy makes it a policy area "without a public" (Strother, 2018, p. 468) of which details and complexities are not salient among the public and policy-makers. The more important it would be that issues around disaster policy, factors for high vulnerability and possible improvement of resilience, would be covered more intensively in the media. But this is not the case, as this chapter shows. Thus the emphasis on the resilience of communities rather than on any discussion of underlying vulnerability factors actually furthers the failure of the U.S. society and political system to adequately address natural hazards and mitigate disasters in vulnerable communities.

There is very little to no analysis of the fact that people have systematically moved into the disaster-prone areas and that government policy has failed to change this or make communities more resilient (with some articles being the rare exception). Overall, written sources are more detailed in the analysis, while TV segments focus on dramatization and (often short-lived) on-the-ground reporting to provide visual evidence from devastated regions. This means that in general, very little reflection of underlying causes of disasters is reaching American media audiences. Additionally, because large parts of the U.S. population have traditionally turned to TV/news media[7] as their main source for information (Pew-Research-Center, 2016), this effect is even more pronounced for the large majority of Americans who rarely consume print media.

As indicated before, the findings of this chapter are consistent with other studies on media coverage of disasters which found a lack of reflection of causal explanations for disasters (Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012, p. 620). Thus, mass media seems to be largely unable to play a crucial role in enhancing community resilience either locally or for other places around the U.S. that lie outside of the most frequently devastated regions. Media coverage is mostly focused on specific regions without making larger societal or political inferences (Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012, p. 620).

7 Meanwhile, many people turn towards digital sources more often but TV remains among the top news sources for many (Pew-Research-Center, 2021).

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Overall, the case study in this chapter shows that resilience narratives framing local communities as pulling themselves up by their bootstraps seem to be among the most common features of mass media reporting on communities during natural disaster events in the U.S. today. This shows how underlying cultural ideals in the U.S. such as individualism and self-reliance play a strong role in possibly underestimating the risk of natural hazards. These ideals can also lead to favoring limited government ideas and therefore to a general distrust in the (federal) government's ability to play a positive and effective role in mitigating disasters. Media outlets are not doing much to alleviate this notion as underlying causes or solutions to more effective disaster risk policy are not discussed to any large extent. It can only be inferred that this, among other factors such as political polarization, also between Southern and Northern regions of the U.S. (Hochschild, 2016), and the technocratic nature of disaster and mitigation policy (Strother, 2018), plays a role in the lack of awareness of vulnerability to natural hazards in disaster-prone communities as well as nationwide. This could exacerbate the unwillingness to support more effective disaster mitigation among Americans in the future. In this way, media discourses play a part in the vicious cycle of ineffective approaches to disaster risk reduction in the U.S. today.

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Kendra Willson

Appeals to Vulnerability in Icelandic Personal Name Law Discourse

Introduction

Iceland is known for a strong tradition of linguistic purism, which has been a central focus of national identity and played a crucial role in Iceland's campaign for independence from Denmark in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Kjartan G. Ottósson, 1990, pp. 76–103)[1]. One manifestation of purism is a relatively strict law on personal names (Lög 45/1996 um mannanöfn), which remains in force (notwithstanding some liberalizations) despite repeated challenges, which have been framed in terms of human rights, equity, and individual freedom.

The notion of vulnerability is a recurring theme in the discourse surrounding personal name law in Iceland. On the one hand, the Icelandic language has been perceived as fragile and at risk from foreign influences and changes. On the other hand, the individuals who wish to give or take names that do not fulfil the legal criteria are often presented as helpless in the face of capricious legislation and bureaucracy. They may be in vulnerable positions relative to the population as a whole – for instance, having immigrant background or representing sexual and gender minorities. Many cases involve children, who usually do not choose their own names. In name law debate, these different vulnerabilities are played against each other in a variety of ways.

A long history of linguistic purism

The Icelandic language is known for its conservatism, particularly in the area of morphology (Leonard & Kristján Árnason, 2011, p. 91). The ancestors of present-day Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish formed a common language area through the Middle Ages. Compared to the Mainland Scandi-

1 In this paper, Icelanders are cited by full name in the text and alphabetized by first name in the bibliography, in accordance with Icelandic practice.

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navian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish), Icelandic has maintained a much more intricate inflectional system, with four cases, three genders, and a great number of inflectional classes. A large fraction of the vocabulary used in the sagas of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is still in use, although meanings have changed and new words have been introduced.

The reasons for the conservatism of the language have been discussed and speculated about for a long time (cf. e. g. Helgi Guðmundsson, 1977). Iceland was founded as an outpost of Norwegian culture and during the first centuries viewed itself in relation to Norway; hence the pattern of "conservation at the margins" applied. Dialect mixing during the formation of the new society contributed to creating a relatively uniform language. The unity of the language was further maintained thanks to the law, which Stephen Pax Leonard (2012) refers to as a "'lump of language' in the middle of Icelandic" (Leonard, 2012, p. 84). In the absence of a king or executive government, the law itself was regarded as the highest authority in the country, which held the society together during the commonwealth period (930–1262 CE). The lawspeaker recited one-third of the law each summer at the Alþingi (general assembly), which gathered a few percent of the population from all around the country. A strong vernacular written culture starting from around the twelfth century also had a conservative effect on the language.

Isolation on an island at least a week's sailing from Norway obviously reduced external influences. While Low German influences reshaped the languages of Hanseatic cities in the High and Late Middle Ages, Icelandic was much less affected. Another significant factor was *vistarband*, a law against vagrancy, which required each person to be affiliated with a farm and effectively prevented the formation of towns – Reykjavík was founded only in 1786. In the absence of substantial peer groups, young people interacted more with older generations, which also slowed language change (Helgi Guðmundsson, 1977, p. 319).

The conservatism of the language has been enhanced by widespread puristic efforts. While the roots of puristic discourse have been traced to the sixteenth century, with such figures as Oddur Einarsson (1559–1630) (Stefán Karlsson, 2000, pp. 43–44), Guðbrandur Þorlákssson (1541/2–1627) and Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) (Svavar Sigmundsson, 1991, p. 128; Sölvi Sveinsson, 2007, pp. 127–128), it gathered momentum with the nationalist movement led by Icelandic students and intellectuals in Copenhagen, which started in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in the foundation of the Republic of Iceland in 1944. The conservative language and the medieval literature played central roles in the campaign for independence (Kjartan G. Ottósson, 1990, pp. 76–103). Iceland was seen as preserving the shared heritage of the whole Nordic region in the form of the medieval literature and the ability to read it (Stefán Karlsson, 2000, pp. 41–42). The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during which the best-known Old

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Icelandic texts were produced, has been seen as a kind of golden age (Hilmarsson-Dunn & Ari Páll Kristinsson, 2010, p. 213) and Icelandic language planning has often looked back to this period, focused on *varðveisla* 'preservation' of the connection to the medieval literary language (e. g. Baldur Jónsson, 2002, pp. 428–431). The often repeated claim that Icelanders can read medieval sagas in the original language depends on normalization of both. Normalized orthographies were developed simultaneously for Old and Modern Icelandic and were deliberately kept close to one another (Stefán Karlsson, 2000, pp. 61, 67).

Patriotic efforts to preserve and improve the language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been credited with unusual impact: replacing many loanwords with neologisms (Kjartan G. Ottósson, 1990, pp. 119–121); nearly eliminating a stigmatized vowel merger (known as *flámæli* or 'gaping speech') that was widespread at the start of the 20th c. (Kjartan G. Ottósson, 1990, pp. 136–137); and restoring some inflectional paradigms to medieval models (Kjartan G. Ottósson, 1992, p. 240). Some of these narratives of success have been questioned (Heimir Freyr van der Feest Viðarsson, 2017, pp. 154–155), but at any rate Iceland has historically been characterized by a high degree of language awareness and support for linguistic purism as part of the national project.

The fragile Icelandic language

The discourse of Icelandic linguistic purism often presents the language as fragile. Icelandic is distinguished from its close relatives, the mainland Scandinavian languages, particularly in the smaller number of loanwords and the preservation of complex and irregular inflections, with four cases, three genders, and many inflectional categories. Loanwords and indeclinable words have been seen as threats to its essential nature, which is connected to the medieval literary heritage. Norwegians have sometimes been said to have "lost their language" when they were no longer able to read medieval texts with ease:

> Norðmenn glötuðu málinu vegna þess að þeir áttu engan [sic] bókmentir á eigin máli að lesa. Við hjeldum málinu vegna þess að forfeður okkar í tuttugu liði, höfðu aðgang að því, að lesa það, sem þeirra eigin feður höfðu skrifað. (Ajax, 1936, p. 3)
>
> [The Norwegians lost the language because they had no literature to read in their own language. We maintained the language because our ancestors for twenty generations had access to reading what their own fathers had written. (Translation: K. W.)]

Declensions and declinability of personal names have been a persistent issue in Icelandic name law discourse, with a fear that names that do not fit the Icelandic inflectional system could lead to a more widespread breakdown. In debate over whether Icelanders should take up (indeclinable) surnames in the early twentieth

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century, the prospect of Icelandic losing its inflections and becoming like the Mainland Scandinavian languages is posed as a threat:

> En nái sníkjumenningin beygingunum úr tungu vorri, þá er slitið sambandið á milli vor og fortíðarinnar, þá er íslenzkan orðin ill danska. (Bjarni Jónsson frá Vogi, 1923, p. 100)
>
> [But if the parasitic culture takes the inflections out of our language, then the connection between us and the past is broken; then Icelandic has become bad Danish. (Translation: K.W.)]

With the decreased status and presence of Danish in Icelandic society following independence, explicitly anti-Danish rhetoric has become less prevalent. The most prominent contact language is English, which has become ubiquitous in Icelandic society (Haselow, 2012, p. 128) and is often perceived as a threat to Icelandic (see for example Kristján Sigurjónsson, 2018).

While Icelandic language planning has historically aimed "to maintain internal homogeneity and invariant rules, both in space and time, and thus a uniform language" (Haselaw, 2012, p. 127), there is a growing interest in variation as part of the richness of the language. Some linguists, such as Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson (2022), have tried to promote the idea that variation and change in language are natural and positive, and that purism can backfire in alienating young people from the language (Áslaug Árna Sigurbjörnsdóttir, 2020). The writer Þórarinn Eldjárn, in a text that was set to the tune of *Battle hymn of the republic* and used to promote the dairy association Mjólkursamsalan's campaign about the Icelandic language (Á íslensku má alltaf finna svar), warns:

> Ef íslensk tunga er aðeins spariflík
> að endingu hún verður fagurt lík.
> En sé hún höfð að ígangsklæðum enn
> hún áfram lifir ný og forn í senn. (Þórarinn Eldjárn, 2001, p. 66)
>
> [If the Icelandic language is only dress-up clothes / in the end it will become a beautiful corpse / but if it is kept as everyday wear / it lives on, new and ancient at once. (Translation: K.W.)]

Changing discourse in a changing world

In the eighty years since independence, Icelandic society has changed in myriad ways which also affect language use. The British and American military presence during the Second World War and after Iceland joined NATO at its foundation in 1949 brought cultural influences as well as financial capital from the Anglophone world. Reykjavík and other towns grew rapidly. Modern communication technology and media have put Icelandic in intense contact with other languages in ways that would not have been imaginable at the time of independence (Sigríður

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Sigurjónsdóttir & Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, 2020). The circumstances which made the Icelandic language uniform and conservative no longer hold. In addition to urbanization, Icelandic society has been transformed by rapid increases in immigration, multiculturalism, globalization and tourism. Norms regarding gender roles and family structure have also changed quickly.

After the triumph of independence, the imperative for Icelandic purism has gradually declined. Value systems and discourse surrounding language use have shifted from protecting the language from foreign influences and other changes toward trying to make sure that language use is inclusive and tolerant, with the intention to create a more equitable society and the perceived threat that if people feel excluded from the Icelandic language (for example, if they feel they are "léleg í íslensku" (Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, 2022, p. 62) [bad at Icelandic (Translation: K.W.)], i. e. failing to control the norms, or do not find usage consistent with their gender identity, or do not feel accepted as speakers with foreign accents) they may choose to speak English instead (Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, 2022, pp. 62–64, 307–308).

Personal names as part of the language

Personal names serve a variety of functions. They are simultaneously linguistic entities, markers of identity on numerous levels (individual, family, gender, ethnic, religious, etc.), and identifying labels used by governments and other institutions to keep track of individuals. There is some tension among these functions – whether the question of name choice belongs solely to the individual or family, or whether the state has an interest in ensuring uniformity in name structures and their compatibility with the national language.

The criteria for acceptance of new names focus on orthography, declension, and tradition (*hefð*). The 1996 law gives the following criteria for given names:

> Eiginnafn skal geta tekið íslenska eignarfallsendingu eða hafa unnið sér hefð í íslensku máli. Nafnið má ekki brjóta í bág við íslenskt málkerfi. Það skal ritað í samræmi við almennar ritreglur íslensks máls nema hefð sé fyrir öðrum rithætti þess. (Lög 45/1996, 2. kafli 5. grein)
>
> [A given name shall be able to take an Icelandic genitive ending or have established a tradition in the Icelandic language. The name may not be inconsistent with the Icelandic language system. It shall be written in accordance with the general orthographic rules of the Icelandic language unless there is a tradition for a different spelling. (Translation: K.W.)]

While the principles of Icelandic orthography have been published in the document *Ritreglur*, the concept of tradition is more nebulous. In the 1990s the

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personal name committee developed working rules to interpret this nebulous clause in a consistent way (Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson, 1993; Svavar Sigmundsson, 1995, pp. 101–102). Their solution was to define tradition in terms of census numbers: if a name had appeared in enough censuses and was borne by enough people, it was considered to have established a tradition.

Surnames vs. patro- and metronymics

One of the most persistently thorny issues in Icelandic name law debate concerns the competition between surnames inherited in a fixed form and patronymics. While between 1828 (Denmark) and 1923 (Norway), other Nordic countries passed legislation requiring all citizens to have surnames inherited in a fixed form, Iceland in the early twentieth century went in the opposite direction, choosing to ensure the future of the patronymic system by forbidding citizens to take up surnames. At that time surnames were associated with upper and upwardly mobile classes, particularly with people who had spent time abroad.

Questions of gender equity have been connected to the discussion of surnames vs. parentonyms in various ways. Both systems as traditionally implemented are patriarchal: surnames in most European countries are inherited patrilineally and wives have been expected (and at times required by law) to take their husbands' surnames. The absence of such name changes has been invoked as an advantage of the Icelandic system from the point of view of gender equity (Frumvarp til laga um mannanöfn, 1995, comment 4 on chapter 3, comment on chapter 4). On the other hand, while metronyms appear occasionally in Old Icelandic sources and through history (Guðrún Kvaran, 1996; Johannessen, 2001), parentonyms in Iceland have overwhelmingly been patronymics. In cases where a child's father was not in the picture, a grandfather's name might be used to avoid the stigma of a metronymic.

Páll Björnsson (2021, subtitle of book) characterizes the debate over surnames and patronymics as "átök um þjóðararf og ímyndir" [a confrontation on national heritage and images (Translation: K.W.)], which has continued from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first. In general, surnames are perceived as international and modern, while the patronymic system is seen as part of Iceland's cultural heritage and closely connected to the language. The language of linguistic purism and concerns about the inflectional system have been used in arguments for preserving the patronymic system (Willson, 2002). The uneasy compromise which has persisted in Icelandic name law for nearly a century at the time of this writing (since 1925) – that Icelanders are not allowed to take new surnames, but surnames that previously existed can continue to be transmitted by inheritance – has been widely attacked as discriminatory. In addition to

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linguistic purism, the debate connects to discourses on gender equity and the rights of immigrants (Willson, 2017).

There have, however, been some liberalizations to surname law since the 1925 stipulation "Ættarnafn má enginn taka sjer hjer eftir" [Henceforth no one may take a surname. (Translation: K.W.)] (Lög um mannanöfn, 1925, article 2, p. 1038, cf. Guðrún Kvaran & Sigurður Jónsson frá Arnarvatni, 1991, p. 78). The 1991 law introduced the category of *millinöfn* 'middle names', which resemble surnames in their form, are underspecified for gender and could be used regardless of gender before the Gender Autonomy Act (Lög um kynrænt sjálfræði, 80/2019), but are used in addition to rather than instead of parentonyms and are not automatically inherited.

In 1991, the rules regarding inheritance of the relatively few Icelandic surnames were liberalized in the name of gender equity, so that a person was entitled to bear a surname if any grandparent would have had that right according to the new law. This greatly expanded the set of people who are eligible to take a surname. Baldur Jónsson (1991, p. 2) wonders whether this is really the intent of the law. Guðrún Kvaran says in an interview (Eyrún Valsdóttir & Málfríður Gylfadóttir, 2007, p. 82) that it became common for an older person to adopt a surname under the new law so that his or her younger relatives could do so in turn.

Although this change did not address the persistent problem that Icelanders have unequal access to surnames, it is an example of how a legal change motivated by social equity may go through although it can be predicted to have side effects contrary to the overall intent of the law.

Vulnerable name bearers

News coverage of name law cases and social media discussion tend to focus on the individual denied the right to a chosen name, who appears as a David confronting the Goliath of the state apparatus, with seemingly arbitrary rules and a bureaucracy without procedures for appeal. Many of the petitioners who wish to take or give unusual names can also be viewed as being in vulnerable positions relative to the general population. They may have immigrant background or represent gender minorities or religions other than the dominant Lutheran church. While some cases concern individuals seeking to change their own names, frequently the naming acts affect young children, who are unable to represent themselves legally.

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Immigrants vs. Icelanders

From 1952 until 1996, foreign-born persons seeking Icelandic citizenship were required to take Icelandic names, and the Icelandic name law applied to their Icelandic-born children (Lög um veitingu ríkisborgararéttar, 1952, article 2, p. 50; Svavar Sigmundsson, 1992, p. 87). In the assimilationist discourse of the mid-twentieth century, this was perceived as an aid to integration, as well as a measure to protect the language. However, as values shifted, the name change requirement came to be perceived as a human rights infringement.

Svavar Sigmundsson (1992, p. 86) cites the European Convention on Human Rights as one reason for liberalizing the name rights of immigrants and their offspring. Páll Sigurðsson (1994, p. 422), however, suggests that much is uncertain as to how this clause or the analogous article 12 of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights are to be interpreted in the context of personal names. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, 2021), affirming the right to private and family life, has been invoked in a number of cases judged at the European Court of Human Rights concerning personal names. While in some cases it has affirmed a state's right to adapt the spelling and inflection of a name to the national language (Mentzen alias Mencena v. Latvia, 2004; Kuharec alias Kuhareca v. Latvia, 2004), in other similar cases this has been judged to be a rights violation (e. g. the case of Raihman v. Latvia, 2007; see Human Rights Committee, 2007). Other name issues, such as surname use within a family and the name rights of trans* people have also been addressed under the rubric of article 8.

Gender minorities

Likely the greatest change to Icelandic name law and practice since the 1989 and 1996 laws were passed is the Gender Autonomy Act (Lög um kynrænt sjálfræði, 80/2019) of 2019. This law affirms individuals' rights to recognition of the gender with which they identify and is a significant step for trans* rights in Iceland.

As a result of the Gender Autonomy Act, the clause of the personal name law that stated that a boy should be given a masculine name and a girl a feminine one was removed. Individuals registered as neither male or female in the national registry (an option which became possible in practice the following year) could choose instead of *-son* or *-dóttir* to bear a parentonym with the neuter suffix *-bur* or simply the genitive form of a parent's name with no additional suffix.

Beginning in 2020, the Personal Name Committee approved some names based on grammatically neuter nouns (a strategy suggested in the documentation to the proposal that became the Gender Autonomy Act (Frumvarp til laga

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um kynrænt sjálfræði 2018–2019, um 18. grein)), such as *Regn* 'rain' (October 2020, Stjórnarráð 2020a), *Frost* 'frozen weather' (December 2020, Stjórnarráð 2020b), *Kaos* 'chaos' (February 2021, Stjórnarráð 2021a), *Logn* 'calm weather' (April 2021, Stjórnarráð 2021b). Willson (2023) situates this change in the history of Icelandic name law discourse and considers possible ramifications for Icelandic naming practice and the inflectional system of an increase in gender-neutral names and loosening the correlation between the grammatical gender of a name and the social gender of its bearer.

Declension classes are typically specific to one grammatical gender. While in some instances the gender of a noun can be guessed from its shape, this is not generally the case. There are examples of nouns with identical nominative forms that belong to different genders and have different declensions, e. g. *skúr* f. 'rain shower' (gen.sg. *skúrar*, nom.pl. *skúrir*) vs. *skúr* m. 'shed' (gen.sg. *skúrs*, nom.pl. *skúrar*) (BÍN). As the law specifies that a name must be able to take an Icelandic genitive ending, inflection becomes a legal issue. Typically feminine nouns that end in a consonant in the citation (nominative) form take the genitive ending *-ar*. Neuter nouns ending in consonants have the genitive *-s*. Both these endings occur in masculine nouns; while most nouns have only a single option, some masculine personal names have alternative declensions with *-s* and *-ar*, e. g. *Haraldur:* gen. sg. *Haralds* or *Haraldar* (BÍN).

Prior to the passing of the law, there were discussions e. g. of whether *Blær* could function as both a masculine and feminine name that focused on its relationship to existing declension classes. Margrét Jónsdóttir (2001) argues that it fits better with masculine declensions, as does Guðrún Kvaran (Eyrún Valsdóttir & Málfríður Gylfadóttir, 2007, p. 86).

There have also been discussions of how the traditionally feminine name *Sigríður* should be declined when it is borne by a man, as Sigríður Hlynur Helguson Snæbjörnsson took the name for himself in the wake of the Gender Autonomy Act (Snorri Másson, 2019).

In a comment on the proposal that became the 1991 law, it is suggested that indeclinable names (in this case surnames) are outside the Icelandic grammatical system and are not really nouns because they do not have gender (Um frumvarp til laga on mannanöfn, 1990, p. 20).

Linguists' opinions on the ramifications of indeclinable names and names with variable declension for the Icelandic inflectional system vary. As mentioned above, since the early twentieth century the prospect of loss of inflection has been seen as a threat to the Icelandic language, and this view is expressed in contemporary times by some language and name planners (see for example Guðrún Kvaran in Svensson, 2016). Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson (2019), however, views names as a sufficiently narrow and distinct field that inflectional innovations in that field are unlikely to affect other areas of the language.

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While the language already has some homonyms of different genders and words of unstable gender (e.g. *jógúrt* 'yogurt', which is treated variously as feminine and neuter (BÍN)), an increase in names of variable gender or names with a different gender than that of the bearer may lead to more variation in practice, perhaps some new inflectional classes and other changes to the overall system. Here the "fragility" of the language is seen as less important than the human rights issue of gender equity and inclusion of gender minorities.

Protecting the children

Name law discourse sometimes conflates individuals' right to choose their own names with the right to select names for their children. Children's rights are invoked in name law debate by "both sides". On the one hand, it is stated that if the government trusts parents or guardians to raise children, it should trust them to choose names for them. Others raise the spectre of parents who give their children names that the writers deem unsuitable to argue that such a law is needed. Presumably it is rare for parents to choose names that they think will hurt their children, but tastes differ. Guðrún Kvaran has stressed in an interview (Eyrún Valsdóttir & Málfríður Gylfadóttir, 2007, p. 84) that it is not the committee's task to have opinions about names. She notes that the committee distinguishes between names that people want to adopt themselves and ones that they wish to give their children; the threshold for judging that a name could cause trouble for the bearer is higher in the former case, but was crossed, for example, by the proposed name *Dúnhaugur* 'down heap' (Eyrún Valsdóttir & Málfríður Gylfadóttir, 2007, pp. 83–84).

The clause in the name law "Eiginnafn má ekki vera þannig að það geti orðið nafnbera til ama" (Log um mannanöfn 45/1996, 2. kafli. 5. grein) [A given name may not be such that it could cause trouble for the bearer. (Translation: K.W.)] may be more prominent in the popular imagination than in committee deliberations. According to people who have served on the personal name committee, the *amaákvæði* 'trouble clause' is rarely invoked. It has been mentioned in relation to names that connote the devil, such as *Lúsífer* (Stjórnarráð, 2021c). *Hel* refers to the world of the dead in Norse mythology (Þórdís Arnljótsdóttir, 2017; Stjórnarráð, 2021d). In some cases it is mentioned as an additional argument when there are also orthographic or grammatical issues with the proposed name. *Lucifer* (2019) was rejected because of the *c* (a letter not used in Icelandic) as well as the meaning (Stjórnarráð, 2019); *Finngálkn* was based on a grammatically neuter word (before the Gender Autonomy Act) as well as denoting a type of monster (Stjórnarráð, 2003).

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When parents have left their children without official names for years while continuing to fight for their chosen names, this causes administrative difficulties. On documents and in registries appears only *stúlka* 'girl' or *drengur* 'boy'. This requires explanations, e. g. at day care centers, schools, clinics, or other places where centralized databases from the national registry are used. It may also lead to difficulties in obtaining identification documents. For instance, Harriet and Duncan Cardew, who had one British and one Icelandic parent and who were left without official names because their parents did not want to give them Icelandic names, were unable to obtain passports because the national registry had ceased to issue passports with such placeholders (Ingvar Haraldsson, 2014).

Gradual liberalization

Judging from discourse in media and social media, the Icelandic personal name law appears very unpopular. It is regarded as outdated and discriminatory. Linguistic purism has taken on connotations of racism.

Nonetheless the law seems surprisingly resistant to attempts at liberalization. Proposals for new name laws appeared roughly every decade from the 1950s through the 1970s and frequently during the 2010s, but most have failed to pass.

Several individuals have successfully sued the government for the right to their chosen name: the cases of Blær (2013) (Blær vann mál sitt gegn ríkinu, 2013), Zoe (2018) (Hæstiréttur, 2018), and Alex (2019) (Freyr Gígja Gunnarsson, 2019). The Blær and Alex cases questioned the principle that names should be gendered, while the Zoe one forced a reinterpretation of the application of Icelandic orthographic principles to names. Liberalization occurs gradually, through such individual cases and legislation on other matters such as the Gender Autonomy Act.

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Nina Holzschuh

Gender and Vulnerability in the Courtship Plot of the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*

Introduction

In this article the connection between gender and vulnerability in the courtship plot of the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied B* will be examined. Its goal is to open up a diachronic perspective on vulnerability. The *Nibelungenlied*, dating back as far as 1200 AD, was chosen for two reasons. The first reason being that in the *Nibelungenlied* there are more women who use violence compared to other pieces of medieval poetry (Lienert, 2003, p. 7). The second reason is that it depicts one of the few episodes in heroic poetry that explicitly describes the experience of pain (Layher, 2010, p. 193).

The courtship plot recounts King Gunther wooing the extraordinarily strong Brunhild, who will exclusively marry any man who previously defeated her in battle. Since Gunther is not able to defeat Brunhild by himself, Siegfried assists him using his magical cloak, which makes him invisible to others and gives him the additional strength of twelve men. Later on Gunther tries to consummate the marriage during the wedding night but Brunhild rebuffs him. To restore the hierarchy between husband and wife, Gunther again asks Siegfried for help the next day. The following night Siegfried enters the bedroom underneath his magical cloak and overpowers Brunhild instead of Gunther. Thereafter, Gunther is finally able to consummate the marriage and consequently Brunhild loses her virginal strength.

Brunhild's attraction is defined by the combination of female beauty and male strength. Additionally, Siegfried perceives the battle against her as a battle of the sexes and aims to restore the social hierarchy between men and women by overpowering her. Hence, it can be argued that negotiations of vulnerability are connected to gender discourses and that the difference between physical pain and vulnerability is based on whether an action conforms to the social order. Given that the topic concerns the pre-modern period, it seems necessary to reflect first on how the modern theoretical concept of vulnerability can be applied to me-

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dieval culture, anthropology, and literature, followed by a close reading of the courtship plot of the *Nibelungenlied*.

Vulnerability in the Middle Ages

Even though there is no "generally accepted definition of vulnerability" (Weichselgartner, 2016, p. 20), the different theoretical approaches have several characteristics in common, limiting the direct applicability to medieval literature. Firstly, recent vulnerability theories oftentimes focus on critical infrastructure, states, disasters, catastrophes, crises, marginalized social groups or vulnerable individuals (Fekete & Hufschmidt, 2016; Ridder & Patzold, 2020, p. 3). Due to the different views on society, individuals, and identity as a whole in medieval noble society, medieval views on vulnerability are likely to differ from today's perspective. Even Manuel Braun and Martha Albertson Fineman, who both emphasize vulnerability as a *conditio humana* and a universal concept, have argued that the alterity of medieval culture and literature has to be taken into account because vulnerability is dependent on its perception and its social, institutional, and discursive environment, which varies over time (Fineman, 2017, p. 134; Braun, 2020, p. 327). Secondly, most vulnerability theories do not consider the historical dimensions of vulnerability, underlined by the fact that vulnerability has only recently become a topic of interest in Medieval Studies (Ridder & Patzold, 2020, p. 1). Hans Werner Goetz has therefore suggested not only considering whether recent vulnerability theories can be applied to the Middle Ages, but also analysing how medieval authors could have perceived something like 'vulnerability' (Goetz, 2020, p. 45). Therefore it is necessary to search for all kinds of vulnerability, applying a wide conceptual understanding of the term (ibid., p. 46).

Goetz (2020) has identified several aspects of vulnerability mentioned in medieval historiography. Other scholars also discuss many of these aspects in connection to a wide range of genres. In bigger picture, vulnerability in the Middle Ages can be linked to the Christian eschatological view on the Last Judgement and the apocalypse. Salvation is in jeopardy because of earthly temptations and sin, leading to the vulnerability of mankind (Goetz, 2020, pp. 50f., 68). Due to the fall of man, the vulnerability of the human body threatened by disease, war, and hunger is directly connected to the weakness of the soul and the endangerment of salvation (Braun, 2020, p. 327ff.; Layher, 2010, p. 196). Because of this close connection of vulnerability and religious beliefs, the semantics of lexemes for the description of vulnerability and violability simultaneously include the physical dimension of the body as well as psychological and emotional dimensions (Bowden, Miedema & Mossman, 2020, p. 8). In regards to social order, social peace, particular groups or families could also be threatened by wrong behaviour of individuals or groups

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(Goetz, 2020, p. 51f.). Moreover, certain empires could have been in jeopardy because of political threats or war (ibid., p. 52). Lastly, regarding the individual, vulnerability arose through disability, starvation, poverty, or disease (ibid.).

When reviewing the scholarship on vulnerability in the Middle Ages, it becomes evident that vulnerability cannot be viewed excluding the discourse on pain, woundedness, violence, and power. Middle High German courtly epics narrate many battles and fights; wars and feuds must have been a ubiquitous phenomenon in the Middle Ages. Pain and torment, however, as well as the disabilities of survivors are seldomly commented on (Kerth, 2002, pp. 271f.; Braun, 2020, pp. 329–334), therefore little is known concerning their views on vulnerability. Violence and power are also connected to status, attractivity, and lordship (Lienert, 2003, p. 6). The *homo debilis* was not regarded as fit to rule and govern, because in the pre-modern political system of feudal society, power and lordship depended on the ability to enforce violence (Braun, 2020, p. 333). This point links power and violence directly to gender relations. Women were regarded as vulnerable and violent aggression therefore was a habitus forbidden to women. Since the ability to rule was not available to women, they were systematically put in a vulnerable position (Lienert, 2003, p. 21). Moreover, violence between sexes is oftentimes connected to sexuality and sexual abuse in medieval literature (Braun & Herberichs, 2005, p. 25). Sonja Kerth points out that sexuality was a potential frontier and a threat to heroic masculinity (Kerth, 2002, p. 271). Regarding the description of vulnerability in literature, previous studies have argued that the depiction of violence, pain, and vulnerability widely depends on genre conventions, language use, and the respective understanding of literariness (Braun, 2020, p. 352; Bowden, Miedema & Mossman, 2015, p. 15).

These theoretical preliminaries lead to the key questions structuring the close reading in the third part. The courtship plot will be analysed by raising the question at which points pain, violations, and vulnerability are discussed. Furthermore it will be asked where inner insights into the characters are given, why characters try to conceal their vulnerable positions within character constellations and power structures, how gender concepts and vulnerability are linked to each other and how this relationship is depicted in the medieval text. Additionally, it will be considered how vulnerability influences the perception of kingship and public institutions like the court.

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The Courtship Plot of the *Nibelungenlied:* Gender, Social Order and Vulnerability

The whole courtship plot is told primarily from the male characters' perspective (Jönsson, 2001, p. 279). It starts with the counselling of the Burgundian men in order to decide how the wooing expedition should be carried out. Despite the assumption of Peter Strohschneider (1997, p. 47) and Priska Steger (1996, p. 352) that the objective of the King's wooing is the consolidation of his dominion and position as the sovereign, the possibility that the journey may end in death for the wooer and his companions is emphasised constantly. The narrator mentions several times that previous wooers have died and that the journey is very dangerous (e. g. *NL*, 326,4; 452,2; 439,3). Brunhild is extraordinarily strong and will only marry a man who is able to defeat her in a triathlon of long jump, throwing a stone as well as throwing a javelin.

Ez was ein küneginne gesezzen über sê,
ir gelîche enheine man wesse ninder mê.
diu was unmâzen scœne, vil michel was ir kraft.
sie scôz mit snellen degenen umbe minne den scaft.
(*NL*, 326)

There was a queen who resided across the sea, whose like no one knew of anywhere. She was exceedingly beautiful and great in physical strength. She shot the shaft with bold knights – love was the prize.
(Edwards, 2010, pp. 325f.)

From Brunhild's first appearance on, it is obvious how extraordinary and unique her strength is. The narrator describes it as *unmâze* and states that no other woman is like her. Apart from that, the verse *sie scôz mit snellen degenen umbe minne den scaft* establishes a close connection between love and strength. This combination precisely is what fascinates Gunther the most about the queen and leads to his decision to woo her. In contrast to this, the text emphasises at all times that female violence and strength represent an infringement of the social order (*ordo*) because it implies a reversal of the courtly ideal of femininity (Jönsson, 2001, p. 290) and jeopardises the patriarchal order (Müller, 1998, p. 191). Therefore, the defeat of the men would be a catastrophic disruption of order, which has to be avoided at any cost (Schulze, 2002, p. 127). Interestingly, the rules of Brunhild's competition do not violate the social principle of female subordination in general because the competition aims to identify a man to whom she can submit according to her own rules (Jönsson, 2001, p. 287). At the same time, even Gunther himself knows that he will not be able to win the contest against Brunhild without the help of the hero Siegfried. At the very beginning of

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the courtship, the plot is already driven by the misguided desire of the king to choose a woman whose demands he cannot meet.

When the committee arrives, the men lie about Siegfried's status. Leading Gunther's horse and holding his stirrup (*NL*, 396f.), Siegfried's acts symbolise feudal subordination (Schulze, 1997, p. 37), meant to compensate Gunther's weakness (Lienert, 2003, p. 8) and establish him as the only proper wooer. In addition, this performative act is confirmed verbally (*NL*, 420–422). According to Ursula Schulze (2013, p. 189) this leads to a fundamental confusion of the natural order and the corporative system.

Brunhild immediately starts to establish an asymmetrical distribution of power during the greeting at Isenstein, putting the men into a vulnerable position. While the Burgundians are only allowed to enter the hall unarmed (*NL*, 406), Brunhild strides to the ceremony with at least five hundred armed men (*NL*, 418). At this point, the *leit* of the male characters is mentioned for the first time (*NL*, 418,3). The male characters' speech reflects that the Burgundians are aware of this imminent danger. When Brunhild hears the men's concerns, which are explicitly named as *vrouwen übermuot* (*NL*, 446,4 – "ladies' pride") by Hagen, her ironic reaction testifies to the fact that she sees herself in a position of superiority and total dominance (Starkey, 2003, p. 166): *mit smielendem munde* she looks *über ahsel* (*NL*, 447,2[1]). She commands that the Burgundians shall be given back their weapons because she does not fear their attack.

The vulnerability and fear of the men becomes even more evident when the equipment for the competition is brought. The carrying of the shield, the javelin and the stone are described in a parallel manner, starting with the number of men that are necessary to carry the item in the first strophe and giving insights and opinions of the men as reaction to this in the second strophe, connecting Brunhild with the devil.

Der schilt was under buckeln, als uns daz ist gesaget,
wol drîer spannen dicke, den solde tragen diu maget,
von stahel unt ouch von golde; rîch er was genuoc,
den ir kamerære selbe vierde kûme truoc.

Alsô der starke Hagene den schilt dar tragen sach,
mit grimmigem muote der helt von Tronege sprach:
"wâ nû, künic Gunther? wie vliesen wir den lîp!
der ir dâ gert ze minnen, diu ist des tiuveles wîp."
(*NL*, 437f.)

The shield that the maiden was to carry was, beneath its buckles, so we are told, some three spans in breadth, of steel and also of gold – it was of ample splendour. Her chamberlain and three others could scarcely carry it. When mighty Hagen saw that

1 "Smiling, she looked over her shoulder" (Edwards, 2010, p. 447).

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shield being carried forward, the hero of Tronege said grimly: "What now, King Gunther? Are we to lose our lives like this? She whom you desire to woo there is the very Devil's wife!"
(Edwards, 2010, 436 f.)

Von des gêres swære hœret wunder sagen.
wol vierdehalbiu messe was dar zuo geslagen.
den truogen kûme drîe Prünhilde man.
Gunther der edele vil harte sorgen began.

Er dâhte in sînem muote: "waz sol diz wesen?
der tiuvel ûz der helle wie kund'er dâ vor genesen?
wær' ich ze Burgonden mit dem lebene mîn,
si müeste hie vil lange vrî vor mîner minne sîn."
(*NL*, 441 f.)

Hear marvels told of that javelin's weight: three-and-a-half ingots had been beaten to make it. Three of Prünhilt's men could scarcely carry it. Noble Gunther began to grow very anxious. He thought to himself: "What is to come of this? How might even the foul fiend prevail here? If I were back alive in Burgundy, this queen here would long be free of my love!"
(Edwards, 2010, 440 f.)

Diu Prünhilde sterke vil grœzlîche schein.
man truoc ir zuo dem ringe einen swæren stein,
grôz unt ungefüege, michel unde wel.
in truogen kûme zwelfe, helde küene unde snel.

Den warf si z'allen zîten, sô si den gêr verschôz.
der Burgonden sorge wurden harte grôz.
"wâfen", sprach Hagene, "waz hât der künec ze trût!
jâ sol si in der helle sîn des übeln tiuvels brût."
(*NL*, 449 f.)

Prünhilt's strength was all too apparent. They carried a heavy stone into the rink for her, great and bulky, massive and round. Twelve of those bold and valiant heroes could scarcely carry it. She always threw it after she had hurled the javelin. The Burgundians grew greatly anxious. "Good grief!" said Hagen. "What a beloved the king has found! She should be the foul fiend's bride in Hell!"
(Edwards, 2010, 449 f.)

Brunhild's strength is exaggerated by numerical relations. Four chamberlains are needed to carry the shield, three men to carry the javelin and twelve heroes to carry the stone. Tilo Renz (2012, p. 74) has argued that these numbers indicate the comparability of male and female bodies, as Brunhild is able to carry the weapons by herself easily. But the men's statements show how this supposedly abnormal female strength is evaluated by men. By referring to the devil three times, it is illustrated how unnatural and frightening Brunhild appears in the eyes of the

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men (Newman, 1981, p. 77). They can only explain their vulnerable position and fear of a woman recurring to supernatural forces (Classen, 1991, p. 13).

This distribution of vulnerable positions is still evident during the contest. The wooers win in a joint effort, questioning the invulnerability that Siegfried gained by bathing in dragon blood. Siegfried enters the contest on Isenstein with numerous advantages. He is known to be the strongest hero, is invulnerable and equipped with the cloak of invisibility, which enables him to secretly come to Gunther's help and gives him additional strength. Nevertheless, Siegfried starts to bleed from his mouth when Brunhild's javelin hits him (*NL*, 458,1). Although it is surprising that an invulnerable figure starts to bleed, this is not commented on in the text at all. Julia Zimmermann (2006, p. 334f.) has provided an interpretation of this: When Siegfried and Brunhild fight each other, their mythical characteristics cancel each other out. Brunhild's strength can only be overcome by the use of a magical item and fraud.

After the men's victory, Brunhild sends messengers to organise the transfer of power. The Burgundians therefore fear an ambush and Siegfried offers to bring warriors from the land of the Nibelungs (*NL*, 476–479). At the same time, the Burgundians give away Brunhild's wealth so generously that Brunhild has to object, since the loss of her wealth also deprives her of an important tool of power (*NL*, 515–518). Thus, the courtly virtue of *milte* (generosity) is perverted in order to place the future wife in a vulnerable position in which she will be completely dependent on her husband and not be viewed as able to rule and govern by herself.

At the beginning of the episode on Isenstein, a gender-specific inversion occurs in the depiction of vulnerability since the queen appears powerful while the men seem vulnerable and fearful. After the initial vulnerability of the men, they systematically push the woman back into a vulnerable position by fighting her with the help of magical items, by cunning, and by giving away her wealth. As long as Brunhild does not know about the lies and Siegfried's help, she seems nonetheless satisfied at the end of the episode. Since no inner insights into Brunhild are given while simultaneously having a lot of introspection of the male characters, it becomes evident that only infringements against the gender hierarchy by the women are perceived as real vulnerability. Since these infringements are against the social order, the weak position of women is accepted by Brunhild herself in the end. Below the surface, crucial mechanisms of the courtly society are corrupted by the men's actions. On one hand, the difference between public and secret actions is a problem to a culture that is generally based on public visibility (Ehrismann, 1992, p. 171). On the other hand, the lie about Siegfried's status likewise perverts the social order and is assessed by Maren Jönsson (2001, p. 284) as the beginning of the collapse of the feudal system in the *Nibelungenlied*.

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As early as during the shipping from Isenstein back to Burgundy, Brunhild refuses to have sex with Gunther for the first time (*NL*, 528,1f.). Thereby Brunhild's courtly *zuht* is contrasted with Gunther's inability to control his desires (Jönsson, 2001, p. 295f.). Even at the wedding Gunther is controlled by his libido and can barely await the night with Brunhild (Classen, 1991, p. 12) although she has already announced to refuse him since she is unhappy about the marriage of Kriemhild and Siegfried (*NL*, 620–625). After the lie about Siegfried's status on Isenstein, marrying the king's sister Kriemhild to the alleged vassal Siegfried must appear to her like a dishonour and breach of class rules. Brunhild announces that she will not consent to the consummation of the marriage as long as Siegfried's status is not clarified. By still looking forward to the wedding night happily, Gunther shows a remarkable non-perception of the female character (Jönsson, 2001, p. 302) that is constitutive for female vulnerability. When Gunther nonetheless tries to consummate the marriage at night, he is rebuffed by Brunhild and fails miserably at subduing her:

Si sprach: "ritter edele, ir sult iz lâzen stân.
des ir dâ habet gedingen, ja'n mag es niht ergân.
ich wil noch magt belîben, (ir sult wol merken daz)
unz ich diu mær' ervinde." dô wart ir Gunther gehaz.

Dô rang er nâch ihr minne unt zerfuort' ir diu kleit.
dô greif nâch einem gürtel diu hêrlîche meit,
daz was ein starker porte, den si umb ir sîten truoc.
dô tet si dem künige grôzer leide genuoc.

Die füeze unt ouch die hende si im zesamne bant,
si truoc in z'einem nagele unt hienc in an die want,
do er si slâfes irte. die minne si im verbôt.
jâ het er von ir krefte vil nâch gewunnen den tôt.
(*NL*, 635–637)

She said: "Noble knight, you must let it be. What you're hoping for can't come to pass. I want to remain a maiden still – be sure you mark this! – until I find out the truth of the matter."
Then Gunther grew hostile towards her. He struggled for her love and tore her clothes apart. The proud maiden then reached for a girdle, a strong braid that she wore around her waist. She then caused the king sorrow in abundance. She bound together his feet and hands; she carried him over to a nail and hung him up on the wall. When he deprived her of her sleep, she forbade his love-making. Her strength had almost proved the death of him.
(Edwards, 2010, 635–637)

Primarily Brunhild verbally forbids Gunther to touch her and announces to stay a virgin until she learns the truth about Siegfried. When Gunther tries to touch her in a second step, she ties him up with her belt and hangs him to a nail in the wall

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where he has to stay the whole night. Since Brunhild is evidently physically superior to Gunther, she can easily tie up his hands and feet. Brunhild obviously uses her sexuality and virginity as a tool of power to achieve her goals (Lienert, 2003, p. 9). By refusing Gunther, the marriage is not legally valid (Renz, 2012, p. 94). The lexeme *leide* suggests Gunther's pain and injury. The narrator comments mockingly on this, contrasting Brunhild's gentle sleep and the king's painful night. Courtly vocabulary such as *ritter edele* or *herlîche meit* is used in a humorous way to describe the embarrassing failure of the king. With irony and grotesqueness, the king is ridiculed by the narrator, which further exacerbates his vulnerability.

Sine ruochte, wie im wære, want si vil sanfte lac.
dort muost' er allez hangen die naht unz an den tac,
unz der liehte morgen durch diu venster schein.[2]
ob er ie kraft gewunne, diu was an sînem lîbe klein.
(*NL*, 639)

She did not care how he fared, for she lay in all comfort there. He had to hang there all through the night until day broke, and the bright morning shone through the windows. If his body had ever possessed strength, there was little of it left.
(Edwards, 2010, 639)

During the painful night Gunther loses all his strength. As outlined in section two already, strength and the ability to use violence are essential for a king in order to impose his will and to rule. By losing his strength during that night, Gunther does not only fail as a man and husband but also as a king, and is therefore transferred into a highly vulnerable position. This is again indicated by the use of the lexeme *leit* (*NL*, 640,1 f.). Never should the scandal become known to the court. Concurrently, it is also in Brunhild's interest to keep the affair secret. As a woman her honour and status depend on her husband's reputation (Lienert, 2003, p. 9). Paradoxically, Brunhild's dominance over her husband puts her in a vulnerable position. For this reason, Brunhild agrees to untie Gunther the next morning

2 Phrases such as *die naht unz an den tac* or *liehter morgen* and *liehter tac* occur three times during the courtship plot (*NL*, 639, 650, 683). Ehrismann (1992, p. 170) and Wailes (1971, p. 368, following Hatto, 1969, p. 88) see a reference to the lyrical genre of dawn song in these formulas which may be ironic. Despite the tendency of the *Nibelungenlied* not to mark intertextual references and to refer more to genres than to individual texts, and the oftentimes inconclusive direction of references (Lienert, 1998, p. 281), these findings can be described as allusions (Lienert, 1998, p. 281). In all strophes the rhyme is *lac*/*tac* and similar vocabulary such as *sanfte*, *minne pflegen* and *minneclîche* is used. The character of a genre reference to the dawn song becomes more likely by comparing these findings with the first strophe of the typical dawn song (Kragl, 2019) *Bi liebe lac* of Ulrich of Winterstetten (Lyrik des deutschen Mittelalters, 2019). Further discussion on how these allusions could be interpreted is necessary.

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before the servants enter the chamber (*NL*, 641 f.). Gunther asks Siegfried for help again the next day to end the unbearable state:

Dô sprach der wirt zem gaste: "ich hân laster unde schaden.
want ich hân den übeln tiuvel heim ze hûse geladen.
do ich si wânde minnen, vil sêre si mich bant.
si truoc mich z'einem nagele unt hie mich hôhe an die want.

Dâ hieng ich angestlîchen die naht unz an den tac,
ê daz si mich enbunde. wie samfte si dô lac!
daz sol dir vriuntlîche ûf genâde sîn gekleit."
dô sprach der starke Sîvrit: "daz ist mir wærlîche leit. ["]
(*NL*, 649 f.)

The host replied to the guest: "I suffer disgrace and loss, for I have invited the foul fiend home to my house. When I thought to make love to her, she tied me up in tight bonds. She carried me over to a nail and hung me high up on the wall. There I hung in fear through-out the night until daybreak, before she untied me. How softly she then lay! Let this complaint be made to you in confidence and friendship!"
Strong Siegfried replied: "I am truly sorrow for that."
(Edwards, 2010, 649 f.)

Both the narrator as well as the characters Gunther and Siegfried agree in the fact that Brunhild has to be put in her place to avoid violating the gender order furthermore. Again, Brunhild is described as the devil. Siegfried offers his help and enters the bedroom of Gunther and Brunhild under his magical cloak the following night to restore the hierarchy between husband and wife. The battle is told from Gunther's perspective, who listens attentively to it in the darkness (Jönsson, 2001, p. 306):

Do er niht wold' erwinden, diu maget ûf dô spranc:
"ir ensult mir niht zerfüeren mîn hemde sô blanc.
ir sît vil ungefüege, daz sol iu werden leit;
des bringe ich iuch wol innen", sprach diu wætlîche meit.

Si beslôz mit armen den tiwerlîchen degen.
dô wold' si in gebunden alsam den künic legen,
daz si an dem bette möhte haben gemach.
daz er ir die wât zerfuorte, diu vrouwe iz grœzlîchen rach.

Waz half sîn grôziu sterke unt ouch sîn michel kraft?
si erzeigete dem degene ir lîbes meisterschaft.[3]

3 The lexemes *meister* ('master') and *meisterschaft* can be found three times during the courtship plot (*NL*, 423, 672, 678). Wailes assumes that this refers to a thirteenth-century discourse about marital dominance and female exuberance in the German literature of the thirteenth-century. He has found examples for this discourse in texts of the Stricker and Berthold of Regensburg where the references occur in the context of the story of god's creation and its

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si truoc in mit gewalte (daz muos' et alsô sîn)
unt druht' in ungefuoge zwischen die want und ein schrîn.
(*NL*, 670–672)

When he would not give up, the maiden then leapt up: "You are not to tear apart my shift, so white as it is! You are most uncouth – this will cost you dear! I'll make the consequences clear to you!" said the comely maiden.
She grasped the mettlesome knight in her arms. She wanted to tie him up as she had done the king, so that she might be at peace in the bed. The lady had avenged herself abundantly upon Gunther for tearing her clothes. What use was his great strength and massive might to Sivrit? She showed her superior strength to the warrior. She carried him by her sheer force – he had no choice! – and squeezed him roughly between the wall and a chest.
(Edwards, 2010, 670–672)

The description of the battle reiterates several topoi from the earlier descriptions of the battles against Brunhild, so that the fight can be seen as increased repetition. The comical twist trivialises the drastic violence (Lienert, 2003, p. 10), for example by variations of *sanfte*, *nâhen* and *ligen*, which creates a humorous contrast between eroticism and fight (Wailes, 1971, p. 369). Unusually, it is mentioned several times that Siegfried and Brunhild inflict pain on each other (*sît getet diu vrouwe dem küenen Sîvride wê*, *NL*, 666,4[4]; *ir tâten sîne krefte harte grœzlîchen wê*, *NL*, 676,4[5]). These references to pain are found often in the metrically emphasised second part of the fourth verse of the stanza. This position emphasises the importance of this finding. In two strophes, the infliction of pain is combined with the verb *druhten* ('squeezing') as mode of combat. William Layher (2010) has discovered that bruising is a topos in medieval heroic poetry which is oftentimes linked to the rare mention of the hero's pain. Layer argues that this pattern occurs when the hero fights against an extraordinary opponent that is othered as a giant or a monster. Through the hero's suffering during the fight the texts negotiate the fluid border between the hero and the 'Other' and indicate the precariousness of heroic superiority. By the use of this topos for the description of the fight between Siegfried and Brunhild, Brunhild is also subject to this kind of othering (Layher, 2010, pp. 199f., 208–211). At the same time, as she wounds him again to the point where he is bleeding, her dangerousness for the hero is elucidated (*NL*, 675,2f.).

The infringement of order, which refers to the virginity after the wedding, the female use of violence, but also to the strange men in the royal chamber, is made

inherent gender order by implicating that Eve's insurrection against Adam's *meisterschaft* was incited by the devil (Wailes, 1971, p. 374). In this way, the *tiuvelin* Brunhild stands at the beginnings of a social and cultural history of criticising female dominance.

4 "The lady was to cause bold Sivrit harm." (Edwards, 2010, 666)

5 "His strength caused her anguish in abundance." (Edwards, 2010, 676)

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clear by the negation of the courtly key term *fuoge* four times (something is in the right manner/done appropriately, *NL*, 670,3, 672,4, 674,3 & 676,1). In courtly culture, "*fuoge* is used in an ethical or social sense, with particular reference to human conduct in relation to the accepted code of courtly 'morality'" (Willson, 1963, p. 83). The foundation of courtly order is the *adaequatio* ('correspondence') of inner discipline, morals and sentiments with the outer discipline of the body and its movements. This correspondence is theologically grounded (Bumke, 1994, p. 70ff.; Bumke, 2008, p. 422f.) The courtly order is part of the universal *ordo* of god's creation (Willson, 1963, p. 85; Newman, 1981, p. 77) which is violated in this episode.

Siegfried's thoughts and the narrator's comments show that the fight seems hopeless in the beginning. The narrator even questions the usefulness of Siegfried's strength in this context (*Waz half sîn grôziu sterke unt ouch sîn michel kraft? NL*, 672,1[6]). In contrast, no information on Brunhild's inner thoughts is given. In Siegfried's thought-speech the exclamation *Owê* highlights his enormous concerns about his own death.

"Owê", dâht' der recke, "sol ich nu mînen lîp
von einer magt verliesen, sô mugen elliu wîp
her nâch immer mêre tragen gelpfen muot
gegen ir manne, diu ez sus nimmer getuot."
(*NL*, 673)

"Alas!" thought the warrior. "If I am now to lose my life at the hands of a maiden, then all women will forever be high and mighty in their dealings with their husbands after this, little though they act like that now!"
(Edwards, 2010, 673)

Siegfried classifies the fight as part of a larger context than merely the royal marriage. For him the fight is about the gender order and thus also about the social order as a whole, whose endangerment by riotous women must be fought. Thus, the fight in the royal chamber becomes a battle of the sexes. Only this drastic urgency gives Siegfried the necessary strength and determination to overpower Brunhild. After Brunhild has awarded the *meisterschaft* (*NL*, 678,4) to her opponent, the marriage between Gunther and Brunhild can finally be consummated. Before leaving, Siegfried takes Brunhild's ring and belt with him as trophies.

Er pflac ir minneclîchen, als im daz gezam,
dô muoste si verkiesen ir zorn unt ouch ir scham.
von sîner heimlîche si wart ein lützel bleich.
hey waz ir von der minne ir grôzen krefte entweich!
(*NL*, 681)

6 "What use was his great strength and massive might to Sivrit?" (Edwards, 2010, 672).

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> He caressed her lovingly, as well became him. She was then obliged to renounce her anger and her shame. His intimacies caused her to become a little pale. Oh, how much of her great strength abandoned her because of that love-making!
> (Edwards, 2010, 681)

Due to the consummation of the marriage, Brunhild loses her virginal strength and is no longer different from other women. The narrator emphasises that the sexual act was performed in an appropriate manner which made Brunhild's anger fade away. The love of the couple is mentioned several times. Brunhild's body language no longer indicates that she considers herself to be in a vulnerable position. A possible explanation for this observation is that Brunhild now thinks that Gunther is the 'right' man according to the rules of her wooing competition. This suggests that the feeling of being vulnerable only arises if the social order is visibly violated. At first glance the social order now seems to be restored. The king's public reputation is no longer threatened by Brunhild humiliating him, the hierarchy within the marriage has been re-established, and Brunhild behaves like the perfect noble wife (Jönsson, 2001, p. 311): She now fits perfectly into the courtly order (Müller, 1998, p. 177). For that reason Elisabeth Lienert (2003, p. 11) has assessed defloration and sexual violence as a proper act to rehabilitate Gunther's damaged masculinity. Moreover, Brunhild later secures the continuation of the dynasty by giving birth to a son (Schulze, 2013, p. 194). The violence exercised by men thus reverses their vulnerable positions – but in a dishonest way. Many years later, this underlying dishonesty becomes virulent again when Kriemhild shows Brunhilds's ring and belt – the symbols of her defloration – to the courtly public during her quarrel with Brunhild. As a result, these objects are the catalysts for the murder of Siegfried. Brunhild's ring and belt are therefore signs that keep the vulnerability of all characters symbolically present throughout the ensuing plot. Albrecht Classen (1991, p. 17) describes the murdering of Siegfried as the elimination of the last remaining danger by which the honour of the king and thus also of the whole court could be stained. Siegfried had become a weak link in the web of lies around Brunhild. Siegfried's failure to comply with the social order by conflicting the courtly principle of visibility leads to a vulnerable position.

Conclusion

Even though all characters seek to conceal their vulnerability and try to fight it by sexual refusal, acts of violence or male bonds against women, their vulnerabilities show latent visibility in the courtship plot. Eventually their striving for hegemony and agency is not successful, especially seen in light of the overall catastrophic

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ending of the *Nibelungenlied*.[7] For example, this is shown by Siegfried starting to bleed despite his mythical invulnerability, but also by Brunhild finding herself in a vulnerable position after physically overpowering her husband because her status depends on his honour. Moreover, the two men who conspire against her put her in a vulnerable position. The strong woman is ultimately rendered powerless.

The analysis reveals complicated interdependencies between power, violence, vulnerability, strength, woundedness, pain, and knowledge. The epic poem negotiates this contradictory field in many facets. These include the lexical level, symbolic items such as Brunhild's ring and belt as well as rhetorical strategies such as exaggerations, numerical relations, irony, and repetitions. Furthermore, the courtship plot is related to other discourses which discuss the preservation of the social order, e. g. through intertextual references to Minnesang. Focalisation also plays a role in this context. Vulnerability is not only negotiated through the body's inherent strength and power in battle; but also in way of wealth. As an instrument of power and public reputation, wealth is also important. Vulnerability arises from Gunther claiming to be a suitable wooer for Brunhild without actually meeting these standards. Finally, there is a structural vulnerability of the female character on the level of the narration since Brunhild appears powerless against the male alliance of the narrator and the male characters. The narrator omits interior views of Brunhild and demonstrates unity with the male characters through pejorative wording towards Brunhild. In general, vulnerability is negotiated within the field of sexuality – a field that is *a priori* characterised by a high vulnerability of all parties.

I argue that a distinction can be made between the mere vulnerability of the body ('Verletzbarkeit') and the social vulnerability of the status of a character ('Vulnerabilität'). On the level of social position, there are no gender-related differences in the literary depiction. Although women have a disadvantageous role in the social order from today's point of view, the perception of being vulnerable in the second sense and a feeling of pain (*leit*, *wê*) arise in the courtship plot only when social rules and the social order are violated. A differentiation between the two types of vulnerability is supported by Brunhild's love after the second wedding night and her satisfaction at the end of the competition on Isenstein. Although she was injured by Siegfried in battle, she does not feel vulnerable because Gunther seems to be the 'right' man according to her wooing rules at that point. Based on these results, the study of vulnerability in the *Nibelungenlied* contributes a new perspective to scholarship on courtly society and social order and matches the foci of modern vulnerability theories. As other

7 One of the reasons for this outcome is that with Kriemhild another female figure massively transgresses the boundaries of the gender order.

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scholars have outlined before, the perception and experience of vulnerability and being vulnerable indeed depend on the way institutions like the court and discourses create frames of reference. Moreover, vulnerability in the courtship plot shows a connection to Christian discourses, e. g. the discussion of the endangerment of salvation by depicting Brunhild as the devil. A vulnerable position can only be avoided by fitting into the social order, which is based in the Christian order created by God.

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Part IV – A Dialogue instead of an Epilogue

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Tomasz Basiuk / Carsten Junker

Conceptualizing Vulnerability in Cultural Historiography – A Conversation

The following is the transcript of a conversation between Tomasz Basiuk and Carsten Junker that took place at the closing plenary session of the conference *Real, Imagined, and Displayed Fragility: Vulnerable Positions and Positioning in Society* at the University of Warsaw, 27 March 2021. As scholars of cultural history with backgrounds in (American) Literary and Cultural Studies, the authors are in conversation about the multifaceted meanings that vulnerability acquires in their respective research areas. Engaging in dialogue, they address how vulnerability becomes relevant in their research and where it serves to frame and even constitute their objects of study, asking what insights vulnerability affords that might not be gained without it. Considering the epistemological potential and theoretical implications of this concept in their respective projects and beyond, Basiuk and Junker reflect on how conceptualizations of vulnerability relate to the question raised in the purview of work on sociopolitical struggles for recognition ("identity politics") and categorization ('intersectionality'), as well as other concepts such as 'shame' and 'victimization'. The authors address universalizing and particularizing claims to vulnerability and dynamics of appropriation as well as the ethical implications of such dynamics. Not least, they consider how discursive articulations of vulnerability are formalized and how these formalizations shape their work in cultural historiography.

Carsten Junker: Let me begin by asking a general question: What is your field and where do you situate your research?

Tomasz Basiuk: My field is both American studies and queer studies. My institutional affiliation is with an American Studies department, and I have worked on a crossover of American and queer studies. For example, I did research on US gay men's life writing. I have also worked on queer studies in the Polish context, including a project in which I interviewed people about their lives. How would you describe your field?

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CJ: I work and teach in the field of American Studies with a focus on what might be called "Diversity Studies."

TB: What is it that interests you in American Studies and Diversity Studies? What do you think is distinct about them?

CJ: These are fields out of which there has come important work on questions of power, on cultural differences and social hierarchies, on hegemonic orders and dynamics of marginalization and strategies of empowerment. These fields allow us to raise questions about social movements across and beyond national boundaries, to address histories of violence, such as North American settler colonialism and transatlantic enslavement and to reflect the legacies of such histories for today. They provide a forum for addressing racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and disability, among other things. And American Studies attuned to diversity is also a disciplinary place that looks at cultures of protest and the strategies that marginalized subjects and groups use to empower themselves, make themselves visible, and critique social inequalities.

TB: Can you illustrate these aspects of American Studies and Diversity Studies with some projects you have worked on?

CJ: Taking stock of two larger projects, I would say that the red thread that runs through them is an interest in the ways that subjects are positioned in frameworks of power relations, and more specifically, in how discourses assign subjects positions that invest them with power or divest them of power and that make them vulnerable, we might say. As a literary and cultural studies scholar, I am primarily interested in questions of form and in how discourses are formalized.

For instance, I have done work on the genre of the essay as an instrument of critical intervention in the mid-twentieth century, as a tool that allows marginalized subjects – writers such as James Baldwin, who was Black and gay – to authorize their voices, that allows them to speak out and create visibility for themselves, that enables them, not least, to reflect on questions of vulnerability (Junker, 2010).

In another larger project, I am particularly interested in how those who are in relatively dominant subject positions can claim vulnerability as a relevant issue that allows them to position themselves in discourse (Junker, 2016). Here, I look at the role that white men played in the discourse of early abolition, the campaign to end the trade of enslaved Africans around 1800, and I am particularly interested in how these abolitionists put the plight of enslaved people – who are vulnerable to complete dehumanization – on their agenda, how they made the absolute powerlessness of the enslaved their project. I am interested in how these

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hegemonic subjects benefited from their advocacy for the utterly vulnerable, how they could stabilize their subject positions and aggrandize themselves because, as it turned out, they positioned themselves on the right side of moral history, as it were. And they also contributed to solidifying the enslaved as the vulnerable 'objects' of discourse, even to the effect of consolidating the status of the enslaved as dehumanized commodities.

TB: Vulnerability, then, has been a long-standing interest for you, especially in its relationship to power in different historical contexts. Is it still present in your current work?

CJ: Yes, I am currently working on the complex negotiations of subjects who are positioned in highly ambivalent ways in relation to power and powerlessness, who make others vulnerable while at the same time being or becoming vulnerable themselves. Specifically, I am interested in texts written by veterans of the recent wars and ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan (2001–2021) and Iraq (2003–2011), which followed the September 11 attacks in 2001. This is a body of texts that has been emerging over the past years, about the personal experiences of those who are directly involved in military conflict. These are narratives of American soldiers who are part of a strong, overpowering military apparatus that makes the enemies they fight vulnerable, but they themselves also become vulnerable subjects within this apparatus. The material I am looking at is fictionalized, these are short stories, but they are written by authors who are all veterans themselves, so the narratives are inflected with the autobiographical experiences of their writers and oftentimes read like personal essays, not least because most of them are written from a first-person point of view.

What are you currently working on?

TB: Right now, I am finishing publications stemming from a HERA-funded project which lasted 3.5 years and which officially ended in 2019. The study, dubbed *Cruising the Seventies: Unearthing pre-HIV/AIDS queer sexual cultures*, or CRUSEV for short, focused on queer cultures in the 1970s. Poland was one of the four countries covered in the study, alongside Germany, Spain, and the UK. In addition to archival work, my co-investigators and I conducted oral history interviews with queer individuals. These interviews are linked to my previous work on life writing because both projects are concerned with people leading queer lives and narrating their experience.

Before I expand, could you elaborate further on how 'vulnerability' as a concept features in the last project you were describing? What is the specific sense in which vulnerability is a concern for war veterans?

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CJ: Let me answer this by saying first that the material of this project begs the very general question of the possibilities of writing about experiences of war. And to tie this in with the topic of the conference: a central issue in these texts concerns the vulnerability of these veterans to the difficulty, if not to the impossibility, of adequately relating their war-time experiences and the atrocities of war. Many of these texts explicitly reflect what it means to be unable to connect to those at home, and to feel vulnerable to friends and family who have no clue what it means to be deployed, or who are unsympathetic, or indifferent or ignorant of the wars. This frustrates or disappoints many of the characters in these texts. The stories address head-on how difficult it is for their protagonists to speak about their experiences, which are oftentimes traumatic, and relate what it means for them to be exposed to the violence of war *and* also to commit violent acts themselves. These stories provide plausible accounts of the moral complexity of their characters' deployment, of being situated somewhere between the poles of vulnerable victim and perpetrator who exposes others to conditions that make them vulnerable.

TB: How does this ambivalence toward vulnerability play out in these stories?

CJ: One way to approach this would be to differentiate between a structural and a personal level on which we can find answers to the question first, of *how* vulnerability can be told, and second, of *who* is placed in a position of vulnerability. We might assume that on a structural level, those who act from inside the US military apparatus are assigned positions that make them anything but vulnerable. We can assume that they are well-protected by the infrastructure of this highly sophisticated machinery of war, an apparatus that is completely superior to its enemies. It would then rather be the enemies the Americans fight – Iraqi insurgents, indistinct terrorists – that are vulnerable to US military might, that are powerless and defenseless. So structurally: invulnerability on the part of the Americans and vulnerability on the part of their enemies.

These texts, however, paint a much more complex picture. And that has to do with focusing their attention on the very personal experiences of these veteran soldiers after combat. They are oftentimes configured as vulnerable subjects on a personal level, who are suffering long-term effects from war-time exposure to bodily harm in certain situations of combat. And, even more noteworthy, they are shown to be vulnerable because they are unable to make those close to them back home relate to their experiences.

TB: What causes this difficulty? Why are these veterans unable to make themselves intelligible to others? Perhaps you could give an example of this?

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CJ: Let me briefly mention the work of perhaps the most celebrated literary writer of the recent wars: Phil Klay, a Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq, and whose short story collection *Redeployment* from 2014 won the National Book Award for Fiction. In Klay's writing, it is less Iraq than the US home front that serves as a prominent site for soldiers to address the psychological and social consequences of war and an overall assessment of it.

In one story titled *Psychological Operations*, the unnamed narrator/protagonist and anti-hero has protracted quarrels with himself over his own attitude toward the US and the war he fought in Iraq. He is a veteran from a low-income background, a Coptic Christian Arab regularly mistaken for a Muslim who signed up for military service primarily in order to gain access to college.

TB: It sounds as if this character had been in a structurally vulnerable position prior to his enrollment in the army.

CJ: That's right. And indeed, despite his family's low-income background, he is able, after his return from the war, to overcome this institutional vulnerability, when he enrolls at a prestigious private liberal arts college in Massachusetts. In this privileged environment, he befriends a woman who is highly critical of US military operations abroad. When he agrees to share his experiences of his military deployment with her, this becomes a strenuous encounter that leaves him emotionally exhausted. He says at one point:

> I felt nervous, even though she'd been good to me. Patient. But if I kept going and told her the story, I didn't know if she'd understand. Or rather, I didn't know if she'd understand it the way I did, which is what I really wanted. Not to share something, but to unload it. […] I didn't know how to tell her what coming home meant. (Klay, 2014, p. 203).

In the course of telling his story, the narrator reveals that the marines used pornographic language as a weapon against the enemy. It was his task to broadcast sexual insults in Iraqi Arabic over loudspeakers, use these words to humiliate Iraqi insurgents, and provoke them to come out of their building into the street, so that his fellow marines could then shoot them. The unnamed narrator literally used words to kill. When he tells his friend all this, she reacts negatively, she is completely appalled and walks off. She doesn't leave him off the hook as a perpetrator of war-time atrocities; and yet, he had hoped to see in her someone to whom he could confide and relate his experiences, perhaps even for therapeutic purposes.

TB: This sounds paradoxical: the story shows him to be vulnerable to his feelings of guilt and shame as a perpetrator, which prompts him to make a confession. But the confession may have made things worse.

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CJ: Yes, absolutely. This story denies its main character a kind of closure in the sense that he might be able to narrate his version of the war to his friend, and neither can he find common ground with her to discuss their respective attitude toward the US involvement in Iraq – an ethical question. By showing and reflecting the difficulties of narrating war on a personal level, the story refuses to provide an overall political or ethical assessment of it. Its protagonist remains caught in a binary, or perhaps he overcomes this binary distinction between a position of (structural) perpetrator and (personal) victim of his deployment.

Such a position between victim and perpetrator has recently been theorized by Michael Rothberg, who talks about this as a problem of "the implicated subject". Implicated subjects, according to Rothberg,

> occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to it, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. (Rothberg, 2019, p. 1)

What remains for the protagonist of the story, is that he continues to be vulnerable to the burden of having to live with his feelings of guilt.

But let us shift focus to vulnerability in your work.

TB: Vulnerability was prominent in both the life writing project and the CRUSEV project in numerous ways. Although I did not use this term when I was working on life writing, in retrospect I might as well have. Memoirs which chronicled HIV/AIDS, to call on one subgenre, include works such as Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time* (1988) and Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast* (1996), which focus on the writers' life partners' physical and mental frailty and gradual deterioration due to illness, and on the myriad ways in which HIV/AIDS and the need to care for people with AIDS has affected entire communities of people, including the writers themselves. Next to HIV/AIDS itself and the severe AIDS-phobia prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s which made both living with AIDS and living with people living with AIDS extraordinarily difficult, there is plain old homophobia, another related cause of vulnerability in these writings. These factors are interlaced with advantages and disadvantages stemming from social, economic, and cultural capital, and so on.

CJ: You make an important point here. I find that different, interdependent factors like health and homophobia can amplify or diminish the degree of vulnerability. A keyword here for me would be 'intersectionality'. Could you elaborate more on how vulnerability plays out in your recent interview project?

TB: You are right. Intersectionality has a lot to do with what you are calling structural vulnerability. But to answer your question, my interview partners in

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the CRUSEV study described their vulnerability to homophobic and transphobic social institutions, such as their families of origin and the formally indifferent socialist state which monitored same-sex activity but fell short of penalizing it. They also described – and this is something which interests me immensely – their own susceptibility to heteronormative expectations, including the mostly unspoken rule that they should keep their same-sex desire under cover and lead so-called normal, 'straight' lives. Especially striking for me has been the frequently irresistible pull of a norm dictating that one should start a family and raise children with an opposite-sexed spouse. The many queer life trajectories that included heterosexual marriage and child-rearing testify to these subjects' inability, in the 1970s, to imagine an alternative social role. Vulnerability to this naturalized social norm has shaped their lives, defining it for a number of decades before some of these marriages were dissolved.

These examples already show that vulnerability is a useful concept for making sense of queer life stories, which combine what you described as structural and as subjective, or personal, vulnerability.

CJ: And it seems that they also illustrate that vulnerability is a relational concept, or rather a concept that acquires meaning among relational subjects – that subjects become vulnerable when they, in their dependence on others to recognize their personal needs and rights as citizens, are denied this recognition.

How does 'vulnerability' compare to other, similar concepts in your work?

TB: Again, I think you are correct in pointing out that vulnerability and recognition are related. In this vein, a concept which comes to mind is witnessing. One can read both gay men's life writing and oral history interviews with queer subjects as testimonies. These subjects are testifying to the truth of their experience. In doing so, they assume a real risk of being misunderstood or simply ignored. More than Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" (Lejeune, 1989, p. 14), they are seeking to enter into the "parrhesiastic pact," as Michel Foucault calls it (Foucault, 2019, p. 9). This means that the parrhesiastes speaks openly even if their words will challenge a powerful interlocutor's sense of being morally upstanding. The parrhesiastes is counting on being heard out rather than silenced or punished; that is the point of the pact. At a minimum, they hope to not themselves be judged or dismissed as immoral before being heard out. One may say that they are looking for a friendly witness who will hear their testimony, which is their personal, subjective truth, but also a truth which they may be using to change their interlocutor's mind, or their readers'.

CJ: Can you illustrate this point with an example?

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TB: The notion of witnessing is thematized again and again. For example, in *Heaven's Coast*, Doty sees writing on a wall which says, "Is a snowflake responsible for the avalanche?" (Doty, 1996, p. 277). He reads these words as pertaining to his role in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. His response to this question is that a snowflake is responsible *to* the avalanche rather than *for* it; just as he, as an individual, may not be responsible for the epidemic but is nonetheless responsible *to* this unfolding event. Doty's insight pertains both to his actions and to the writing itself. The specific modality in which he meets this responsibility is by bearing witness. For example, he is looking after his lover Wally, who has lost his mind after the virus crossed the blood/brain barrier, and who occasionally becomes incontinent. Cleaning up Wally, Doty reminds himself that the body he is handling is still the same man he has known and loved. In doing so, he testifies to Wally's selfhood, rhetorically making him whole as a human being despite his debilitated condition. This making whole is accomplished with an act of witnessing. Such witnessing is also the point of the memoir, which interpellates the reader to a reciprocal act of witnessing. The reader, too, is invited to make Wally whole despite his condition and despite his queerness. The reader is invited to show interest rather than disgust. To act as a friendly witness.

The witnessing I am describing is closely linked to shame and to the vulnerability to being shamed. This vulnerability is something which most of us share – perhaps even all of us share it – but queer subjects may be especially prone to experiences of shame. This is a point that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) makes very well, and she is someone who has profoundly influenced my thinking about shame. The concept of a friendly witness makes special sense in the context of queerness because a friendly witness is someone who shows interest in the shaming experience and, by doing so, helps overcome the shame. Shame stops being something which paralyzes or debilitates and becomes a source of usable energy.

There is a very striking sexual scene in Edmund White's autobiographical novel *The Farewell Symphony* (1997) which illustrates this point well. The narrator's lover, named Fox, prompts scat play and in this way relieves the narrator of a persistent sense of shame about his body and his sexuality. The narrator realizes that he was the victim of shame only when that shame has lifted, so much was it a part of his self. Strikingly, he describes his shame as "something fundamental" (White, 1997, p. 347). He says, "I wept from shame and gratitude as the horrible smell of something fundamental within me rose all around us, something that Fox, too, was breathing, sharing" (ibid.). "Fox had somehow […] tapped the corruption residing in my heart, not just the waste passing through my tripes" (ibid.). Fox is a friendly witness: someone who takes an interest rather than showing disgust.

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CJ: It makes a lot of sense to be connecting vulnerability with shame in this context. Do you have more examples?

TB: To give one final example, then, I became interested in the fact that the first bestselling gay memoir in the US, Andrew Tobias' *The Best Little Boy in the World* (1973), published under a pseudonym at the time, describes the boy's shame when he is first confronted with a mention of homosexuality (in connection to the 1948 Kinsey report on male sexuality). Strikingly, this event precedes his first conscious sexual thought, which means that his queer self is interpellated by socially induced shame linked to queerness before his sexual awakening. Moreover, Tobias interpellates his readers to the position of a friendly witness by suggesting that he and his readers share vulnerability to being shamed. In his opening sentence he admits to a troubled relationship to flatulence in his young age and follows this with an account of his similarly troubled relationship to masturbation. This humorous overture is likely to win the reader's empathy prior to any mention of same-sex desire. Tobias is attempting to lure the reader, whom he imagines to be a straight man, into assuming the position of a friendly witness before he broaches the topic of his homosexuality.

By the way, it's no coincidence that these three examples have to do with flatulence and feces. These writers deliberately deploy images of defecation and anality to tackle the shaming stereotypes about (male) homosexuality. And all three perform the gesture of reaching out to a reader who is supposed to be a friendly witness. This gesture is based on assuming a shared sense of vulnerability, especially vulnerability to shame, though it does not assume that the reader is another queer.

But I have a question for you. Your comment about Phil Klay's *Psychological Operations* has made me think that there is a strong analogy between his narrator telling his friend about his war experience and what I have been saying about shame and friendly witness. The protagonist's wish to "unload himself" by making his interlocutor understand his account the way that he understands it seems to me tantamount to seeking a friendly witness who would help him overcome the shame he feels about himself and his involvement in the war.

CJ: Yes, the man is seeking in her a friendly witness to overcome his shame, even though it is a shame – and a sense of guilt – that comes from very different sources. It is almost as if he were confessing to her, but that complicates things between them because he is also subjecting himself, like in any confession, as we also know from Foucault, to her moral standards (Foucault, 1978, pp. 61–62). He is making himself dependent on her and what she represents, vulnerable to her recognition and witnessing. And then, at one point, she stops to listen to his confession and walks off.

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TB: I wonder if he was looking for forgiveness, which implies a sense of guilt, or for a way to make a part of himself intelligible to her and also to himself, which suggests that he was struggling with shame. To stop listening, as she does, is equivalent to refusing to look. The gesture of averting one's gaze is inherently shaming. Refusing to look at a person communicates that there is something wrong with them.

CJ: Yes, that is very true. Let me ask: what is the relationship between 'shame' and 'guilt' in the life writing you are describing?

TB: These writers focus on shame rather than guilt. Typically, they are not confessing to having done anything morally objectionable. Neither is it the point that they are breaking some clearly stipulated prohibition, such as a law penalizing same-sex behavior (even when this is occasionally the case, given the time frame of their narratives, as same-sex acts were legalized across the US only in 2003). Instead, they are feeling shame about who they are, mostly as a result of their socialization, which reflects the social taboo around same-sex desires and behaviors. Their sense of shame pertains to the self, and not to any particular transgression. When White's autobiographical narrator describes his sense of shame as rooted in a "fundamentalist belief," he means the sense of shame about who he is sexually, rather than a sense of guilt about some specific transgression.

A focus on shame rather than guilt is constitutive of the coming-out story, which dramatizes the debilitating effect of shame, and which posits the need for a friendly witness to the subject's coming out. Of course, there are other modalities of queer literary self-expression. For example, Jean Genet's refusal to distinguish between guilt and shame underlies his specifically perverse celebration of queer transgression and of the humiliation which it brings. Genet proposes camp posturing as a response to vulnerability. He does not envisage a friendly witness, and consequently, does not imply the minority's integration with the social.

CJ: So, guilt results from a transgression of established norms to which people are subjected, while shame would imply that people do not meet expectations of norms on which they tacitly agree and which they internalize. They become vulnerable to, or can possibly resist conforming to these internalized norms. That would again highlight vulnerability as a phenomenon of relational subjects – who are dependent on others for the recognition of their needs and who are situated in shame-inducing environments.

Did the interaction, or the distinction, between shame and guilt also play a part in the CRUSEV project? And what about the concept that you are proposing, of a friendly witness, in this context?

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TB: A similar logic certainly applies to oral history interviews because at least for some queer subjects, giving an account of themselves entailed talking about shame or otherwise confronting shame. Poland is actually a good example of how shame about being queer can function in the manner of a taboo, without an outright prohibition, because its criminal code has not penalized same-sex activity as such starting with the interwar years. And yet, there was widespread understanding that one did not speak about homosexuality, unless perhaps to mock someone who was homosexual or to express disgust. Polish society had disciplined itself to condemn homosexuality and even to pretend it wasn't there. This was accomplished with the repeated threat of shaming anyone who dared to unveil this subject.

The working of shame as a mechanism of social control is illustrated by a number of oral history interviews I conducted. The choice made by numerous queer subjects to marry an opposite-sex partner is a case in point. For example, a woman interlocutor described having heard offensive comments addressed to a male neighbor known to be homosexual and linked them, in her account, to her decision to marry a man despite having previously been in a same-sex relationship. She had every reason to think that she was a lesbian but she married a man and together they raised two sons. For two decades, she stayed in a marriage which made her feel suffocated, although she had no specific complaint about her husband. In fact, they remained friends after the divorce. Several male interlocutors who married (and later divorced) women cited as their motivation their own inability to countenance or even imagine leading an openly queer life. These interlocutors internalized the unspoken social norm which marked same-sex activity and relationships as inferior to and incompatible with a fulfilling life; in short, as impossible. Shame played a role in shaping their own homophobic attitudes, as some interlocutors expressly acknowledged.

CJ: That is something to think about. Let me shift focus here and ask: what significance and function does the form of the interview have in addressing these aspects?

TB: Some interviews were occasions for confronting past or present feelings of shame. Some interview partners asked for an interviewer whom they thought capable of grasping their experience, which suggests that they were seeking a friendly witness. For example, they asked for a female interviewer or for someone in their age bracket. Some wished to ascertain that the interviewer was queer, too, or that he or she shared similar experiences. These instances confirm that some interviews were experienced as testimony-giving and that the interviewees were counting on reciprocal witnessing. They saw shared vulnerability as a bridge between themselves and the researchers.

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CJ: So, the form of the interview itself had a decisive impact on how the interview partners shared their life stories. It seems the interview as a form provides a framework that in itself shapes the social relations that impact how vulnerable subjects are, to what degree they become or make themselves vulnerable. That aspect of form and of the formalization of discourse seems very important with reference to larger questions of cultural historiography, to relate this back to the title of this contribution.

Let us return to vulnerability more generally as a concept, as a conceptual tool: where do you see the epistemic potential of 'vulnerability,' and where do you also see its limits?

TB: The concept of vulnerability carries a universalizing potential, which has been articulated by Judith Butler. We are joined together in our bodily as well as mental vulnerability, in our susceptibility to ingrained prejudice, institutionalized discrimination, as well as brute force being used against us. This universal vulnerability does not mean that everyone is vulnerable in the same way or to the same degree. Instead, it suggests that we can be motivated to reach out to one another by virtue of our common susceptibility to these and other adversities – a species of mutual empathic understanding may arise from our shared vulnerable condition.

CJ: Butler even talks about what she calls "the ontological claim" that human beings are vulnerable. In her work on precarious life, for instance, she says that "the ontological claim is that human life is precarious" and, by extension, vulnerable, and that this is not "a highly disputable claim" (Butler, Engel, 2008, p. 136).

TB: Butler suggests that this shared vulnerability may form a basis for resistance. Interestingly, she insists on a distinction between resistance and resilience, where the latter term suggests a more self-dependent response to vulnerability. She notes, critically, the discursive connection between resilience and neoliberalism. One may speak of the resilience of a group, of course, not just of an individual, but the reason why Butler prefers the term resistance has precisely to do with vulnerability's open-ended, universalizing potential. She does not deploy the term vulnerability to simply gauge degrees of vulnerability, even though she does not suggest that everyone is equally vulnerable. Rather, she underscores shared vulnerability's potential for motivating joint resistance. And vulnerability is a quality of being alive.

CJ: She also insists that it is imperative, "to highlight the unequal distribution of vulnerability," (Butler, 2020, p. 71) as she notes in her recent book titled *The Force*

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of Non-Violence. For Butler, this unequal distribution has manifold implications and raises a whole set of questions, such as: who is in a position to claim that certain individuals or groups are vulnerable, and what effects does this have? To her, making that claim can entail that those who inhabit dominant, privileged subject positions recognize their obligations toward those who are disproportionately exposed to suffering and violence. Identifying a specific group as vulnerable can create visibility for this group and raise others' awareness; it can incite members of less vulnerable groups to act, vulnerability can create ethical demands for action. But, according to Butler, this can also broaden a divide between groups and place those who consider themselves invulnerable in positions that are marked by benevolent paternalism (Butler, 2020, p. 70). Here, I think Butler talks about vulnerability as a marker in discourse that constitutes groups, that divides people into different groups – despite or beyond the claim that vulnerability is something shared by everyone.

TB: Yes, this is an aspect of vulnerability which connects to what you were saying about intersectionality and about the implicated subject. But I think that the term's universalizing potential is just as important for Butler. She uses it in the manner of an "empty signifier," as defined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, that is, as a sign centrally positioned in a particular discourse, whose meaning and referent are left strategically open. Butler has previously deployed the term 'queer' in this way, in the essay *Critically Queer* (1993).

The universalizing potential of vulnerability undergirds the notion of friendly witnessing. There is a similarity here to Leo Bersani's and Adam Phillips' idea of "democratic analysis," which is when strangers become intimate conversation partners functioning in the manner of analyst and analysand, also reciprocally, that is, by switching between these positions (2008). Such a relationship is possible because these imaginary strangers have no vested interest in establishing which one of them is more or less vulnerable.

But using the term vulnerability also implies an ethical, and perhaps an ethico-political position. Resistance by the vulnerable and on behalf of the vulnerable may stem from shared victimhood or from another common identity. That may raise the specter of inequality even as inequality is being addressed. Butler has critiqued the manner in which some lives are treated as more grievable than others – a distinction commonly applied in the context of a war …

CJ: This unequal distribution of vulnerability is highlighted also by the short stories about the veterans. Because their narrative discourse is focalized around the vulnerability of their protagonists, they affirm the losses and the grief, and ultimately the precious humanity, of these subjects while they relegate into the background the grievability of their Iraqi enemies; their vulnerability is not an

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issue. Readers are likely to develop empathy with the central characters of these narratives, but they are unlikely to acknowledge the suffering, the vulnerability of those against whom they fight.

TB: And this is valid also in other contexts, for example, numerous AIDS memoirs portray the once commonplace refusal by one's family of origin to acknowledge the loss suffered by the surviving partner in a same-sex relationship. In other words, a queer life was not considered grievable. Refusing such unacceptable gradations of grievability may be grounds for resistance, also for readers.

I am thinking here of the efforts of writers, readers, interview partners and researchers to address the vulnerability of queers to being misunderstood and outright ignored. Queer existence is unintelligible to many because it is underrepresented. These writers and others are engaging in a joint effort to bring intelligibility to something which had previously been opaque and deliberately obscured, for example, by shaming. In my work on gay life writing, I referred to Jacques Rancière's terminology to suggest that authors and their readers partake in a reconfiguration of what he calls the partition of the sensible: an aesthetic-and-political divide which makes it possible to see some things in the world but not others. They partake in dissensus, which Rancière describes as a count of those unaccounted for, or a manifestation of two worlds where most people see only one. In his view, politics is always about esthetics (Rancière, 2010, pp. 27–44).

CJ: How, in your understanding, does Butler's approach to resistance differ from Jacques Rancière's notion of dissensus?

TB: Rancière's and Butler's approaches differ when it comes to articulating the motive for what he calls 'dissensus' and for what she calls 'resistance'.

Rancière insists that theoretical analysis does not directly motivate political action, which is instead ignited by the sense that a situation one is protesting or trying to change has become unbearable (2004, p. 127). He argues, as did the psychologist Silvan Tomkins in another context, that affect motivates our behavior (Tomkins, 1995, pp. 33–38). By contrast, Butler sees the sense of shared vulnerability as motivating resistance. Their formulas are not mutually contradictory in the practical sense because she does not rule out affect as motivating resistance while he does not rule out the possibility that a diagnostic analysis of a situation may play a role in creating the sense that that situation has become unbearable. Rather, Rancière's point is that a theoretical analysis is not that which actually motivates behavior; neither does he seek a universalizing formula for resistance, as Butler does. From Rancière's theoretical perspective, Butler's

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formula of vulnerability is a particular articulation of dissent that leads to a reconfiguration of the partition of the sensible. From Butler's position, Rancière's more abstract argument about dissent as motivated by affect may appear to lack an ethical dimension, as it deliberately withholds an explicit distinction between right and wrong, or between those who are more vulnerable and those less vulnerable, and as it appears to equate politics with change.

CJ: So, is Rancière's position less ethico-politically inflected, then, than Butler's?

TB: One way to throw the difference between Butler and Rancière into sharper relief is to say that they rely on different spatio-temporal metaphors. Rancière's partition of the sensible suggests that there are always elements of reality, as well as potential political subjects, who remain invisible, unrecognized, or left out of purview. The partition of the sensible may shift but it will not be eliminated. Butler's discussion of discursive inclusiveness and of that which remains outside the discursive frame, in the context of her consideration of 'queer' as a strategically undefined term, suggests that she was postulating, implicitly if not explicitly, a movement toward ever greater inclusiveness. This is quite different from Rancière's language, which contains no such promise. Butler's more recent discussion of vulnerability does not stipulate that those who see themselves as vulnerable are morally right or even objectively convincing in this assessment. The opposite may be the case, as the organizers of this conference noted in the call with their formulation about vulnerability becoming an object of appropriation. For example, the conservative right often sees and presents itself as especially vulnerable also when it is able to install regulations heavily skewed in its favor, as has been the case in Poland with the recent ban on abortion or with laws prosecuting blasphemy. Nonetheless, the term vulnerability implies both moral and objective gradation, and I think that this is a deliberate choice on Butler's part. The question, then, becomes whether it is better to have a neutral description of how political change takes place, as Rancière offers, or a description which implies a value judgement, as Butler does.

CJ: This also raises the overall question of what we want scholarship to accomplish, which might be a fitting way to close our conversation: where should scholarly work be situated on a spectrum between the poles of description and critique, if they are in fact opposite poles?

TB: We might ask, then, how we as scholars can take on the responsibilities that come with taking on the position of a witness, perhaps a "friendly witness."

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