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Identities without origins : fat/trans subjectivity and the possibilities of plurality.

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IDENTITIES WITHOUT ORIGINS: FAT/TRANS SUBJECTIVITY AND THE
POSSIBILITIES OF PLURALITY

By

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B.S., University of Louisville, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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May 2016

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A Thesis Approved on

April 20, 2016

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DEDICATION

To Leslie Feinberg

The “original” originless.

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ABSTRACT

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MC Lampe

May 14, 2016

This project draws upon the work of Michele Foucault, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway to critically analyze the political power and utility of origin stories as they are used within discourses of identity. I specifically examine the dominant cultural and counter-origin stories of transgender and fat bodies and argue that the counter origin stories constructed by both trans and fat studies/activism continue to engage with norms that regulate identity. These regulations create an impossible situation for individuals who are both trans and fat as they are not recognized as intelligible subjects within either category due to their lack of appropriate origin story. I argue that the fat/trans subject is an example of Haraway's cyborg figure and offer an alternative approach to identity and politics that does not require engaging pure origin stories.

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INTRODUCTION

From everyday comic book narratives explaining how superheroes gained their powers, to everyday inquires asking, where are you from? To more conceptual questions regarding the root cause of gender oppression, stories that seek to explain origins permeate every aspect of our lives. Within media specifically, stories of origins are so common that books, comics, television shows, and films often create entire plot lines about revealing a character's backstory, and answering the question, how did they come to be they way they are? Some of the more famous origin stories can be found in the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents sparking his commitment to taking revenge through fighting crime as Batman, or in a science student's obsession with breathing life in to nonliving matter leading to the creation of Frankenstein's monster. Origin stories tell us how people, places, events, and/or things came into being. Although there is nothing inherently right or wrong about origin stories, it remains imperative to study them. Due to their continued prominence throughout society, we must ask why origin stories have such great importance, and explore what issues can arise when a specific account of origins creates a dominant narrative designating what is considered to be 'normal.'

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Michel Foucault examines the complexity of origins. Through a discussion of Nietzsche's past work, Foucault distinguishes the genealogical method from other approaches to history (78). While history seeks to unearth a single purity from which all events originate, the genealogy rejects the notion

of the origin and seeks to instead look for the multiplicity of events, accidents, and coincidences, often inscribed upon a body, to understand an account of beginning. The search for the origin, he writes, assumes a fall from a singular purity with the intent to make pure again (79). Foucault's analysis reveals the way quests for origins have particular motives. For example, individuals in fat studies/activism and transgender studies/activism often use origin stories, most frequently in the form of narratives, to create intelligible subjectivities, yet the role these origin narratives play in perpetuating a dominant cultural script has not yet been subject to critical analysis.

Donna Haraway offers another analysis of the Western reliance on origin stories in "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century." Much like Foucault, she emphasizes that the Western origin story relies on a myth of an original wholeness or unity that has since splintered, but continuously promotes striving towards a return to the original (Haraway 292). Haraway uses the cyborg (a figure she says has no origin story but instead embraces plurality, partiality, and hybridity) as a tool to disrupt the quest for holism, bringing other ways of being to the forefront (292-293).

Similarly, Sandy Stone's account of origin stories in "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," focuses on the ways origin narratives promote normativity and regulation. Stone stresses the need to critically analyze origin stories, the ways they are used, and the roles they play within society. She calls transsexual people to action and challenges them to share their own narratives as a way to disrupt the established cultural story (14). Stone's call for questioning the sources transsexual stories come from does not only challenge the origin stories of transsexuality, but also closely mirrors what Haraway

suggests with the cyborg, a tool of social and political resistance (Haraway 294). Both argue that the retelling of these stories by a multiplicity of subjectivities and moving away from the origin story as a quest to return to wholeness are the only ways to disrupt the continued perpetuation of the harmful and regulatory stories already being told. In this thesis, I address this need and critically engage with the role of origin stories, especially as they function as locations of regulation and control.

To critically analyze origin stories, I locate my work within three bodies of knowledge. While Feminist Theory provides the broad context of my work, Fat Studies and Transgender Theory serve key roles within my analysis. Specifically, I explore how both Fat and Transgender individuals use origin stories as a site of political strategy, intelligibility, and regulation. These separate but often overlapping modes of inquiry within which my analysis rests often question why things are the way they are, as well as encourage the challenge of oppressive systems.

Feminist theory has a long-standing history with attempting to find the origin of oppression in order to bring to light a hidden narrative or to somehow subvert/liberate. In Mary Daly's "Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism," she seeks to expose the origins of the patriarchal myth and argues that it is creating a story of history that highlights women's voices that will allow the long standing deceptions of patriarchal history to be rendered obsolete (16). According to Daly, if all of society's history could be retold and the origin of the "original" history, the history of women, was brought into the light, patriarchy as we know it would end. Women's lack of history and the consequences of this lack of history is also a concern Simone de Beauvoir raises in *The Second Sex* as she explores how the category of woman, especially woman as an

oppressed class, came to be (Beauvoir 28). Catharine MacKinnon, Gayle Rubin, Kate Millett, and Shulamith Firestone, all notable radical feminist scholars, similarly but distinctively argue for their own understanding of the origins of sex based inequality and domination (Firestone 226; MacKinnon 477; Millett 23; Rubin 159). For them, it is the return to the whole, the pure origin that Foucault references, that is depicted as the ultimate liberator of women from male domination.

In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich argues that it is through the consistent historical denial of lesbian existence that women fall victim to the regulatory power of dominant origin stories, explicitly heterosexuality (136). While Rich still heavily relies on origin stories to make her claim, she differs from many other radical feminist writers in the emphasis she places on the power of dominant narratives that have been embedded in the fabric of culture itself. Ironically, while Rich and Stone have very little in common ideologically, it is their emphasis on dominant narratives that have been embedded in the fabric of culture itself where both come to agreement. Both writers call for those who are oppressed to tell their stories, their personal origins, not as an account of ultimate pureness, but as a challenge to the dominant narrative of control. Though their intentions and end goals may not coincide, Daly, Stone, and Rich spotlight the political and potentially emancipatory power of the origin story.

In this thesis I will examine the impact of origin stories on fat and transgender subjectivity in an attempt to assess the relationship between different origin stories, the subjectivities they produce, and the ways in which they shape and regulate identity. Using transgender and fat subjectivity to explore these relationships presents a unique

lens from which to conduct a critical analysis of how origin stories are used to create dominant narratives as both fat studies/activism and transgender studies/activism have used and continue to use the origin story as a means of creating intelligibility.

In order for transgender individuals to gain access to medical services such as hormones or gender affirmation surgery for their transition, they often have to recite specific origin stories to qualify. The narrative that is told to physicians in order to be granted access is most frequently reflecting that the individual feels as if they were “born in the wrong body” (Stone 11). Stone explains that one of the reasons for the proliferation of the dominant trans origin story was because when doctors were not yet sure what the exact criteria for accessing medical transition should be, they created very strict guidelines with which an individual had to conform or else they were not able to access hormones or gender affirmation surgery. In other words, one must be “correctly” transgender in order to be considered intelligible by the medical system.

Judith Butler explores the relation between intelligibility and origin stories in many of her past works on identity and subjectivity. According to Butler, intelligibility is the means by which the human emerges, is recognized, and becomes the subject. The conditions of this intelligibility rest on the established cultural norms such as adherence to assigned gender roles, for example, that regulate what will be recognized as personhood (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 183). Intelligibility as a transgender individual is most often established through the telling of the narrative (Drabinski 305; Hausman 336; Najmabasi 233; Prosser 84; Stone 6-7). The telling of the intelligible transgender narrative does offer some empowerment to the individual as a subject. The narrative allows access to tools that aid in medical transition, a transition that is imperative to many

transgender individuals, but the narrative has also historically recreated an established norm that situates transgender embodiment within a context of medicalization (Stone 11). Stone specifically discusses the role of the origin story regarding transsexual subjectivity and how by expressing a desire to return to the “whole,” desiring a body that aligns with one’s sense of gender identity, transsexual individuals were granted medical access to hormones and gender affirmation surgery. In this perceived journey towards a whole, medical professionals searching for a specific set of diagnostic criteria and the transsexual individuals perpetuating a singular narrative to gain access created one normative origin story from which all transsexual people are assessed (11-12).

For fat activists, intelligibility of fat embodiment primarily concerns the malleability of the body. What is at stake for fat activists when discussing the malleability of the body are the various explanations of origin from which fatness is constructed and interpreted. In *What’s Wrong With Fat?* Abigail Saguy organizes the how the fat body is commonly interpreted into what she calls “fat frames,” concerning herself mostly with the medicalized frame of obesity. This specific frame relies on an understanding of the body as having a norm for weight to fall within and therefore fatness is positioned as abnormal, as pathology. Medicine must address a patient’s abnormal fat body as well as weight loss; an understanding of the body as something that can and should be changed is presented as fatness being disease (6). In her attempt to shift the discourse about fat bodies away from medicine, Saguy presents other common frames of interpretation and explores their origins, internal logic, and social implications, eventually proposing a frame of fat rights from which to explain the origins of fat embodiment. Within this specific frame, fatness is portrayed as an innate identity.

Understanding fatness as innate identity calls back to the search for purity or wholeness that both feminist and transgender theory have used to establish a history and intelligibility. It is from this frame that fat activists make their strongest claims about the nonmalleable nature of the body, often comparing attempts to make fat people thin with practices of gay conversion therapy (63 & 65). Those who write from the fat activist frame, as Saguy discusses, suggest that the body is intended to remain in the state it is in and, as any other innate identity category, a natural element of human diversity that cannot be changed (Harding & Kirby 4 & 10; Wann ix-xvii).

The malleability of the body is a key location of contention between fat and trans subjectivity. As a part of my exploration of origin stories and their influences, I analyze fat and transgender subjectivity as well as how fat/trans individuals are unrecognizable within an established system of norms. I frame fat/trans subjectivity as a manifestation of cyborg hybridity, the joining of varied embodiments whose normative origin stories conflict, in an attempt to conceptualize and explore the transformative and subversive possibilities when one lacks an origin story and/or has no interest in attaining one.

Haraway makes an argument in “A Cyborg Manifesto” for the figure of the cyborg to serve as an “imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings” (292). The cyborg’s relationship with origin stories, in that it does not have one and has no interest in attaining one, makes the cyborg a unique frame for the exploration of alternate understandings and political possibilities of fat/trans embodiment. The cyborg as a hybrid invested in “partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” as well as being “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (292), allows us to shape a

different understanding of origin's implications and the never before explored possibilities of analyzing origin stories through their interactions with subjectivity.

Moving forward, I do not wish to dismiss origin stories as an entirely harmful or even negative phenomenon. Similarly, I do not intend to suggest origin stories and their relationships to power are the sole contributor to how we construct identities and give accounts of ourselves. That argument is not within the scope of this project. Instead, I engage with origin stories as a kind of tool with which many aspects of society have been and continue to be constructed.

In my first chapter, I detail the ways in which origin stories have been constructed, explored, and deployed throughout feminist theory. This examination provides the theoretical framework for the rest of this project. Most importantly, this examination demonstrates the ways in which origin stories can be used to build movements and create intelligible subjectivity. My analysis accounts for historical trends and timelines. However, my aim is not to construct an origin story of my own. Rather, I engage with historical accounts to analyze how feminism and feminist theory have engaged with origins. I do so in preparation for further analysis of the regulatory power of origin stories and the ways in which dominant origin narratives mobilize political movements, facilitate recognition, and shape who is or is not an intelligible subject.

My second chapter builds upon the first chapter's analysis of feminist origin stories and engages with the dominant origin stories of fat and transgender subjectivity and how these origins allow fat and transgender individuals to be recognized as intelligible subjects both to themselves and by others. This chapter draws upon a large body of scholarship from both fat and transgender studies. I explore the role of bodies in

the construction and circulation of hegemonic origin stories about trans and fat people. Narratives of the body act as interpretive tools to assess intelligibility, reify normativity, and challenge dominant norms. Within this chapter, I examine the two specific examples of trans and fat origin stories. I do so to analyze how the dominant origin narratives for each participate in the production and regulation of fat and trans subjectivities. I focus on trans and fat origin stories because of their shared history of medicalization, the counter narratives established by trans studies/activism and fat studies/activism, and the way both provide narratives of their existence to establish legitimacy.

In my third and final chapter, I build upon my previous analysis of the impossible status of the fat/trans body and ask: how does one exist in a body deemed unable to exist? how might identity categories be reimagined without the demand for an origin story? and, what possibilities open up when one cannot produce an intelligible origin story or refuses the answer the demand for one? In my exploration, I draw heavily upon Haraway's figure of the cyborg. The cyborg provides a framework for reimagining the fat/trans subject's lack of intelligible origins as a position of possibility rather than limitation. I also explore the political power of embracing partial identities rather than forcing fractured narratives of a whole self into categorization. Most importantly, I explore the potential in refusing to adopt or align with any origin as an effort to redefine recognition and political subjectivity. My use of the cyborg engages with what existence without origins could mean for a society built upon them. This thesis will therefore offer new insight into how and why origin stories are constructed and the possible implications for challenging them on both a personal and political level.

THE POLITICAL POWER OF ORIGIN STORIES IN RADICAL FEMINISM

In this chapter, I detail the ways in which origin stories have been constructed, explored, and deployed throughout feminist theory. This examination provides the theoretical framework for the rest of this project. Most importantly, this examination demonstrates how origin stories can be used to build movements and create intelligible subjectivity. My analysis does account for historical trends and timelines; however, my aim is not to construct an origin story of my own. Rather, I engage with historical accounts to analyze how feminism and feminist theory have engaged with origins. I do so in preparation for my analysis of the regulatory power of origin stories and the ways in which dominant origin narratives mobilize political movements, facilitate recognition, and shape which subjects are or are not intelligible. Regulatory power, as I use it here, refers to a system of norms that govern social intelligibility. The recognition granted by regulatory norms defines the parameters about what is, and is not acceptable in today's society. The enforcement of these norms participate in shaping conceptualizations of what is 'normal,' what is 'abnormal,' as well as the formation and enforcement of strict categories of self and identity that, by existing, marginalize the 'abnormal.' Regulation is not simply an external force, but processes that "require and induce the subject in question" (Butler, *Prearious Life* 41).

Conceptualizing Origins

The majority of theories regarding origins can be loosely grouped into those which hold that origins contain innate meaning and value and those which consider origins to be constructed accounts in need of analysis and interpretation. Origin narratives that appeal to an innate truth assume a pure essence prior to the influence of outside forces (Foucault, “Nietzsche, genealogy, history” 78). Second wave feminist theorist Mary Daly offers an example of origins as an account of original truth in *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* where she argues that the hidden history of women is the key to the liberation of women from sexism. For Daly, revealing women’s hidden history legitimizes an original time before sexism existed and launches a call for the eventual return to that time (16).

Twentieth century schools of thought such as existentialism, phenomenology, and post-structuralism challenge essentialist accounts of origins. I focus on the post-structuralist approach to origins. Foucault, influenced by Nietzsche, offers one of the clearest critiques of origin stories that assume the existence of an internal original essence and/or truth. Although a claim of inner truth is often the basis of many accounts of existence and identity, Foucault argues the truth sought within an origin is at best fabricated, if not entirely absent (“Nietzsche, genealogy, history” 78-79). Origin accounts assume that before a specific event, there was a pure, whole, and fundamental nature that if removed, would remove all sense of meaning as well (“Nietzsche, genealogy, history” 79-80). This framing of history through reference to an originary event is common, particularly where history is approached as a set of events unified and directed by a

metaphysical explanation. Such accounts illustrate the utility of origins to create a broad, clear, and easily accessible narrative, with the capability to unite large numbers of people.

As Foucault argues however, history's appeal to origins is problematic because it depends upon identifying and reestablishing that origin. Utilizing these accounts to make sense of historical events assumes a single location from which all proceeding events originated. This assumption ignores the potential for differing interpretations and/or experiences of both past and present. As such, Foucault resists origin stories of history within his own analyses by intentionally examining the many events, accidents, and happenstances that generate any particular situation. There is no one true starting point we can identify; there is no pure moment we have lost. Rejecting the belief in a whole from which everything splintered allows for further and deeper analysis into the role origin accounts play in how we understand our own history ("Nietzsche, genealogy, history" 79-80). In his analysis of history, Foucault uses the genealogical method to analyze history without appealing to origins and to challenge and deconstruct truth, fact, and knowledge while highlighting how these perceived 'original' essences reveal themselves to be constructed, fragmented, contradictory, pluralistic, and ultimately entangled with power ("Nietzsche, genealogy, history" 77-78).

Origin Accounts in Radical Feminism

The search for origins is certainly not limited to feminist theory, but feminist scholarship has had a vested interest in understanding the importance of origins and their relationship to gender, power, and oppression. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, philosopher Simone de Beauvoir poses the question "What is a woman?" (25). To frame her exploration of this fundamental question, Beauvoir engages with the role origin

stories play in understanding what it means to be a woman. Throughout the text she explores the possible origins of women's marginalization and highlights the lack of defined accounts of women's oppression within the established historical canon. Beauvoir argues it is this historical absence that defines women's problem, stating that "women's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential (37). Beauvoir is not searching for a fundamental truth regarding the history of women's oppression. Instead, she seeks to understand how women have been constructed as a category and why that construction has manifested in the manner in which it has (30).

The Second Sex was heavily used in the development of second wave feminism and scholarship. Second wave feminism, as it is used here, refers to the surge of feminist activity and scholarship during the mid to late 1960s through the early 1980s and is also frequently called the Women's Liberation Movement (Wright 127). Though *The Second Sex* is frequently cited as foundational to second wave feminist thought, many texts of the movement overlook Beauvoir's attempt to distance her argument from the search for an innate truth. Instead, these texts use Beauvoir's claims of the need for women's history as fuel in their discussions of the origins of gender oppression and the domination of women (Daly, *Gyn/ecology* 168; MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 55; Millett 239; Rich, *Of Woman Born* 60; Wright 127).

Radical Feminism – a branch of feminist thought and political organizing within the second wave – in particular called for an interrogation of the origins of gender-based oppression. Their interest in origins was linked to a political desire to dissolve the

sex/class system. Radical feminism thus differed from the approach taken by other feminist groups at the time who worked to effect change by operating within the legal system and pushing for feminist legislation (Echols 6-7; Firestone 37; Radical Women 21). The work produced by radical feminist scholars is frequently concerned with the origins of sexism. Moreover, those origins are presented as an original 'truth' that needs to be revealed to overcome male domination. This 'truth' for many radical feminists is that sexism is the original form of oppression and all other oppressions stem from that of gender-based oppression. Some feminists also claimed that humanity's roots began under a matriarchal system, which eventually fell to patriarchy (Bunch 8; Daly, *Gyn/ecology* 16-17; Millett 239; Radical Women 21-23; Willis 91; Wright 128).

Why did radical feminists have such a stake in establishing the origin of women's oppression? As Joanna Wright argues, most origin stories have political power at their core. Radical feminists used origin stories that were counter to the normative origin stories of patriarchy when they claimed gender oppression as the original manifestation of oppression and search for a singular time in history where women were first dominated by men. Radical feminists' goal of identifying and claiming origins was an attempt at identifying and claiming a universal history of women, the same historical account Beauvoir argues is key to understanding women's marginalization (Wright 9-11; Beauvoir 184). Investigating the origins of women's history had the important political effect of challenging male power by showing its own origins could be contested. Radical feminists legitimized themselves by challenging patriarchal origin stories and some offered an alternate origin story of a primary matriarchy. These presentations of counter-origins gave feminists the opportunity to reclaim power for themselves and claim the

power to shape how people understood society. Those who shape the story of history do more than shape a story of linear events. They structure – and delimit – how we make sense of ourselves as products of history and as actors in the present. The generation of origin stories allowed radical feminists to use an alternative narrative of history as a tactical strategy and a political rallying point to further their fight against patriarchy (Wright 9-11 & 130).

Matriarchy as Prehistory

In addition to Beauvoir's work, many radical feminist scholars relied on Frederick Engels' conclusions regarding the origins of gender divisions in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. In the text, Engels argues that the original class divide of humanity was the divide between male and female. That divide is the origin of the patriarchal system. He argues that all societies were originally matrilineal until issues of property and the distribution of labor led to the formation of the patriarchal family (66-68). While many disagreed with parts of Engels' claims (Firestone 2; MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 13; Millett 169), radical feminists in particular engaged with Engels' depiction of a time before patriarchy where primitive societies were matrilineal and women did not experience oppression (Evans, Redclift & Sayers 4; Humphries 39; Radical Women 21; Redclift 136). Both the focus on identifying an original moment of oppression, and the treatment of matrilineal societies as a state of near perfection manifest the "fall from grace" Foucault identifies at the heart of origin stories ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 79-80).

Many of the radical feminists who engaged with the importance of origins did so by positing a primordial matriarchy prior to any gender-based oppression (Davis 15;

Wright 135). Such feminists did not necessarily intend their claims to be historically accurate (Wright 131); instead radical feminists drew upon the mythical lost history of matriarchy, picking up where historical evidence left off in an attempt to fill the gaps of women's history. Elizabeth Gould Davis' *The First Sex* is one of the most detailed accounts of mythical matriarchal origins to be published during the second wave. Davis argues that within the matriarchal system, women were not equals with men, but instead in a position of dominance. She writes:

The primacy of goddesses over gods, of queens over kings, of great matriarchs who had first tamed and then reeducated man, all pointed to the fact of a once gynocratic world. The further back one traced man's history, the larger loomed the figure of woman. If the gods and goddesses of today are but the heroes and heroines of yesterday, then unquestionably the goddesses of historical times were but the reflected memory of the ruling hierarchy of a former civilization. (15-16)

Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* uses Davis' above account as evidence for the original existence of a matriarchal society (94). Both Davis and Daly present an original matriarchal society as differing greatly from patriarchal society. Original matriarchal society was nurturing, peaceful, and egalitarian. Patriarchy on the other hand was considered, and for radical feminists remains, violent, restrictive, and hierarchical in nature. These oppositions in radical feminist texts contrast a politically dangerous present where women have no power with a pure and utopian ancient system erased by history but waiting to be uncovered. The loss of this hidden history identifies the origin of women's oppression. Subsequently, the recovery of that history holds the key to liberating women and

initiating a return to the pure matriarchy (Daly, *Beyond God the Father* 94 & 184; Davis 17-18; Echols 252; Wright 127).

How should we understand these matriarchal origin stories? For many radical feminists, the revelation of women's hidden history affirms "our original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living. This finding of our original integrity is remembering our Selves" (Daly, *Gyn/ecology* 39). Even scholars who reject the existence of an original matriarchy acknowledge the importance of women having a cohesive historical account from which to understand their oppression. Adrienne Rich discusses matriarchies in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. However, her focus is not proving the existence of an original society free of gender-based oppression. Instead, Rich approaches claims for a matriarchal prehistory with caution. In her analysis of feminists such as Davis and Daly she avoids any clear acceptance or rejection of matriarchal prehistory.

Instead, Rich discusses how particular tellings of history can distort or erase alternative accounts, creating a dominant narrative that shapes how women are treated in society (Rich 46-47). Rich insists that the idea of matriarchal prehistory should not be dismissed, but rather reinterpreted as having political merits. She argues for approaching origin claims with skepticism while also respecting their political utility, stating, "a critical exploration backward in time can be profoundly radicalizing. But we need to be critically aware of the limitations of our sources" (85-86). The process of discovering a history that has been erased is important for feminist organizing as it attempts to create a universal women's identity. The creation of a universal definition of 'woman' is key to the importance of regulatory narratives within feminism (Wright 152-153). This universal

category of 'woman' reifies norms and strengthens the boundaries of identity, erasing those who do not fit.

Though many second wave feminists appeal to a primordial matriarchy to counter patriarchy's influence on the construction of history, often second wave scholars complicate the matriarchal origin story. They do so either by asserting their own understanding of women's origins or by acknowledging the role origin claims play in producing dominant and often regulatory societal norms. Unlike Davis and Daly's assertions of matriarchy, Firestone, Millett, and MacKinnon do not explicitly invoke the existence of a golden age of women's dominance. All three indicate possible origins of women's oppression, but never assert any one totalizing claim. Firestone, for example, does not specifically affirm or reject claims of matriarchy. In fact, she references matriarchy in a contrary manner, asserting that women's oppression originates from their biological role in reproduction. This biological divide, she states, predates any other class divide and eventually creates the conditions of patriarchy (13).

Like Firestone, Millett acknowledges the possibility that biological differences in reproduction contribute to the rise of patriarchy. However, she also acknowledges the lack of evidentiary support for any one defined origin story, whether an original matriarchy or an original patriarchy. Instead of seeking an origin story, Millett explores how gender-based oppression is perpetuated. Instead of asserting any specific claim of how women's oppression came into being, she discusses the varied origin narratives on patriarchy (25, 28 & 108). Without relying on any one origin story, Millett does argue that male domination is rooted in structures of sexuality (23).

Understanding the origins of women's oppression preoccupied much of second wave feminism, especially the radical form. Most feminist arguments made in reference to origins invoke history either to demonstrate the existence of a pre-patriarchal world, or as a method of locating oppression's origination. However, some second wave feminists stray slightly from feminism's historical approach to unveiling and understanding origin stories by offering an analysis that is more closely related to Foucault's genealogical method. Such is the approach taken by Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin seeks to account for the pervasive hatred of women throughout culture and history. While her account at times engages the search for origins, she takes care to avoid treating her telling of history as a comprehensive origin story. She does this by declaring that the history she is recounting is not intended to be a whole or pure account, but instead the amalgamation of fractured events placed together with a broken tool of language (26). The recognition of history as an imperfect account suggests that Dworkin is more aware of the power origin stories have in shaping culture than some other second wave feminist theorists. Her writing discusses themes similar to those in Daly's account of religion's influence on the proliferation of sexism; instead of assuming Daly's approach of analyzing how the origin account of Christianity fostered male dominance, Dworkin chooses to analyze the power of myth and origin stories to create and perpetuate dominant cultural narratives (Dworkin 163).

Origins in Feminist Consciousness Raising

The origin stories of second wave feminism were present not only within theoretical texts; in fact, many women involved in feminist organizing began sharing personal stories of self and bodily experience in a way that they had never done before.

Consciousness raising, a practice used in the Civil Rights Movement and further developed in the Black Liberation Movement, was taken up by radical feminists as a method of sharing their personal origin stories, learning from each other's experiences, and ultimately raising feminist political consciousness (Dworkin 19-20). MacKinnon offers the most explicit account of the relation between consciousness raising and politics, writing, "the collective critical reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it...it approaches its world through a process that shares its determination: women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as collective social being" (*Toward a Feminist Theory of The State* 83-84).

Radical feminists who practiced consciousness raising believed that sharing personal experiences and stories would allow women to identify their collective struggle, reveal the history of their oppression, and establish a heightened urgency for the feminist movement (Dworkin 20; MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State" 515). Further, MacKinnon argues that consciousness raising makes women's collective identity and oppression visible in ways that would have otherwise remained unrealized. By engaging this practice, women can then be ready to politically challenge patriarchy (MacKinnon 84). The collective identity MacKinnon aimed for assumes the absolute unity of women's experiences and bodies. Because there is no singular 'woman's' experience or body, MacKinnon's assumption creates a monolithic picture of 'women.'

While not a direct example of consciousness raising as MacKinnon defines it, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* illustrates the power of sharing stories defining a political feminist consciousness. Published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* attempts to expose the shared experiences of women, specifically those who were housewives, by

uncovering a shared suffering the women express as “the problem that has no name” (15). Throughout the book, Friedan uses women’s individual personal stories to demonstrate the commonality of their experiences. She recognizes the importance of narratives in the process of understanding identity and she uses them in an attempt to show connections in experience, suffering, and oppression between women (20). “The problem that has no name” refers to the feeling of un-fulfillment housewives in the 1950s and early 1960 felt as the result of trying to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers (15). Once housewives identified their problem it became placed within a greater context of women’s oppression, reflecting the role consciousness raising served in the attempt to construct a universal women’s experience for the purposes of feminist political organizing.

The problem with utilizing consciousness raising as a method of producing political awareness and realizing identity is located in the very element that MacKinnon claims makes the practice revolutionary: the assumption of a shared women’s body and experience (MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of The State* 84). Under this belief, Feminists could use personal origin stories and lived experiences to construct a narrative counter to dominant patriarchal origin claims by creating a different account of women’s history and identity. Unfortunately, the ‘different’ account itself becomes regulatory. MacKinnon attempts to defend consciousness raising’s universalizing effect, emphasizing the political power of connecting individual experiences to a larger group political consciousness. She also acknowledges the various manifestations of women’s experiences across race and class lines, but ultimately claims there is a greater and more totalizing lived social reality of being a woman that encompasses all variations of

women. It is her argument that consciousness raising is the methodology of realizing women's political power (MacKinnon 90). Similarly, Friedan's work has been widely critiqued for generalizing from a specific set of women's lived experience, contributing to a cultural narrative that legitimizes the bodies and experiences of specific kinds of women while ignoring or even erasing other possibilities (hooks 1). While Friedan was a liberal feminist, unlike the rest of the feminists discussed in this chapter, *The Feminine Mystique* is widely considered a foundational text of second wave feminism. It was read by many who came to understand feminism through the very specific lens provided by the text's construction of women's lives. Consciousness raising and the sharing of personal narratives has proven useful to many marginalized identity groups, often constructing a narrative of identity that can be politically mobilized to counter dominant cultural norms. But as the conservative elements of Friedan's text indicate, the political utility of counter narratives does not erase their regulatory nature, offering particular accounts of identity as if they were universal.

Bodies that were legitimized through feminist consciousness raising as a tool of creating a counter narrative were typically white bodies (Collins, 6) as well as those who were 'women born women,' or as radical feminist Janice Raymond writes, 'natural women' (65). Raymond's emphasis on 'natural women' and rejection of transsexual women as 'real' women demonstrates radical feminism's focus on the body as a location of oppression and how this helped to construct and define the boundaries of 'woman'. These boundaries rendered those who did not have the appropriate 'woman' body unrecognizable as women, the significance of which I explore further later in this chapter.

Critique of Feminist Origin Stories

To politically mobilize women for the purposes of feminism, many radical feminists participated in the creation of alternate origin stories of women's history and alternative narration of women's identities in order to explain, and challenge patriarchy's assertion of male dominance. The aim of these counter narratives is liberation. However, such narratives can also be as restrictive and regulatory as the narratives they intend to resist. Creating a regulatory counter-origin story continues participation in a normative discourse of wholeness and truth. This discourse reifies the boundaries of identity and often contributes to the erasure of those who do not align with the counter-narrative. Rigid identity categories posit a particular kind of expression as being 'right,' ignoring or erasing those who do not fit within the rigid structure. The dangers of erasing the voices of marginalized individuals through origin stories is why I turn to Donna Haraway and her analysis of the power of origin stories within knowledge creation.

Haraway's critical study of universal stories highlights the issues of how knowledge is created, who can create knowledge, and how appeals to innate truth further specific political interests and expression of power ("Situated Knowledges" 581). Haraway advocates for an established approach to knowledge creation that deconstructs truth claims and calls for a new kind of objective knowledge by acknowledging the origins of a perspective of partiality. I will explore the uses of partiality in more depth in a later chapter. Here, I want to call attention to Haraway's suggestions that it is only by the joining of parts without the intent to construct a whole that the desire for universalizing and regulatory origin narratives might be disrupted ("Situated Knowledges" 586).

Haraway warns of the pitfalls in using origin stories. Specifically, she states that in the production of situated knowledges we must avoid creating holisms or a totalizing position that offers an alternative historical account, but does not challenge the methods of knowledge production (“Situated Knowledges” 586). As an example, she points to the ways feminist theorists have attempted to establish a history in opposition to dominant cultural narratives. Of particular importance for my argument, she details how these same feminists have themselves established normative origin accounts of their own (“Situated Knowledges” 594-595).

Origin Stories and The Matrix of Intelligibility

Radical feminism’s use of origin stories to identify women’s lost status suggests that these stories hold a great deal of power on both a structural and individual level. Origin stories, like those constructed and deployed by radical feminists, play a fundamental role in how we understand ourselves and others (Wright 3). An individual is frequently required to account for their origin as a singular and predefined ‘self.’ In these moments, one is compelled to form a coherent narrative that accounts for an innate identity. Butler defines identity as an effect of discourse constituted through repetitive actions regulated by norms that come to form one’s sense of ‘self’ (*Gender Trouble* 22). Though Identity is an effect of discourse and therefore not innate, the term is commonly considered to be a reflection of personal inner truth. Revealing one’s inner identity by way of an appropriate origin narrative produces an “I,” which appears as an innate status of the self and identity (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 17; Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 66-67).

Foucault challenges this construction of the subject. He argues that the subject is not, in fact, a manifestation of an inner truth, but rather the effect of discourses of power in relation to a set of established regulatory norms and temporality (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 17; Butler, *Gender Trouble* 2; Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 66-68 & 133). Foucault's understanding of the subject as being an effect of power insists upon the productive nature of power. Power produces the subject by means of discursive norms, limitations, and regulations that form, define, and validate specific manifestations of subjectivity. For Foucault there is a significant double meaning to the word 'subject.' He offers these definitions stating that subject means both, "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" ("The Subject and Power" 781). In other words, the subject is both the product of power by means of existing cultural constraints while also being simultaneously produced by the act of self-evaluation and reflection (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 2; Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 60).

Judith Butler deploys Foucault's understanding of the subject and the conditions generating subjectivity in order to examine the effects of feminist theory's failure to accurately account for subjectivity. Butler critiques the common appeal to universality as suggesting a preexisting and totalizing identity of womanhood. Though she recognizes the political utility of a single representation of 'woman,' Butler argues that discourses of political and linguistic representation have specific advance requirements and regulations from which the subject is produced. As a result, only certain representations of subjectivity will fit within a specific definition of woman, denying recognition to any other possible subjectivities (*Gender Trouble* 2-3).

Butler critiques feminist theory's regulation of subjectivity by mapping out the absence of an innate gendered subject. She argues that gender is produced by the repetition of specific signifying acts that exist within a set of parameters consisting of dominant norms within political/linguistic discourse (*Gender Trouble* 34). The repetition of these normative acts produces a coherent and consistently gendered subject interpreted within what Butler calls the "matrix of intelligibility" (*Gender Trouble* 24). The matrix of intelligibility serves as a kind of cultural map of meaning. It allows individuals to make sense of the world and themselves through a process of repetitive subjectification and signification. (24).

The matrix of intelligibility is shaped by cultural norms and expectations, while also shaping the norms and expectations that participate in its construction. This cycle is repetitive in nature and establishes a system for recognizing the subject while also shaping subjectivity and creating defined identity categories. Because the matrix of intelligibility is always being constructed, it is not a fixed and static system. The fluctuating nature of dominant cultural norms also means that the standards of intelligibility are flexible and inconsistent in reference to temporality (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 2-3; Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23-24).

Though cultural norms and standards of intelligibility are always in flux, this system is more than cyclical or repetitive. The matrix of intelligibility serves a useful function for understanding ourselves and the world around us. Establishing certain subjectivities as intelligible requires being able to differentiate between what is intelligible, and what is not. Though identity discourse within politics most often

discusses identity as an innate set of characteristics, identity is always shifting existing norms and intelligible identities (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 8-9 & 20).

If it is possible for the subject to produce a coherent origin within the standards set forth of the matrix of intelligibility, that same matrix must also disavow other origin stories. The matrix of intelligibility recognizes specific subjectivity. Those who do not fit within the confines of the dominant cultural narrative can only be understood as being outside of intelligible norms and recognition (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 42-43). This unintelligible status does not deny subjectivity but does expose the subject to violence enacted as a result of the failure to adhere to regulatory norms (*Gender Trouble* xx-xxi). Norms that constitute the borders of identity categories are highly policed. Violence on the basis of not fitting norms can and does include physical violence as well as the violence of not being recognized as a valid life.

Defined identity categories are the most commonly obvious locations of intelligible subjectivity. Origin stories contribute to an individual's own sense of intelligibility, as well as their intelligibility to broader culture. What is important is less the origin story itself but the desire for the pure, whole, and/or truth that is mobilized by the origin claim and how those claims function as regulatory systems of norm reinforcing power. As the boundaries of identity categories shift and change over time, the various regulatory frameworks that contribute to the construction of what is and is not intelligible can be brought into crisis. At such a point, the one clear line of intelligibility may blur. The frameworks can adjust, expand, or collapse (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 24).

Origin stories and constructed identity categories will continue to be produced by regulatory systems of power. Those who are found to be intelligible are recognized as full

complete subjects, and those who do not fit within the confines of intelligibility are found to be unintelligible and are marginalized (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 22-24). Marginalization as a consequence of unintelligibility creates a specific situation where even those who are marginalized are compelled to offer an origin story that adheres to as many norms and/or expectations as possible in an effort to gain at least partial recognition as an intelligible subject. For some, adhering to an intelligible origin story, even one that is not truly their own, is a matter of necessity due to the backlash and violence that occurs for not adhering to norms.

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, origin stories have the ability to build movements, assert power, and create intelligible subjectivity. My analysis of the multiple ways second wave feminist theorists engage with origin stories exposes the political usefulness of creating a pure narrative as well as the pitfalls of constructing counter origins that continue to perpetuate regulation and normativity. Feminist's attempt at creating a universal 'woman' identity generalized women's experiences and contributes to the construction of a very limited idea of what an intelligible woman is.

Looking forward, I utilize my analysis of the complexity of origin stories and the way the recognition any subject depends upon a matrix of intelligibility to explore the roles of bodies in the construction and circulation of origin narratives. Specifically, I examine the ways that transgender and fat bodies engage with and navigate existing origin stories while also constructing counter narratives as resistance. I ask: In what ways does the abnormal body engage with origins? In what ways are bodies used to assess intelligibility? How do trans and fat dominant origin accounts regulate and produce normativity? And finally, what possible conflicts might occur between multiple origin

narratives interpreted through a single body? Ultimately, I argue that a comparison of the dominant origin narratives of transness and fatness brings to light incongruences when considering fat/trans subjectivity.

INTELLIGIBLE BODIES AND FAT/TRANS ORIGIN STORIES

In this chapter I continue my analysis of origin narratives. As we have seen in chapter one, origin stories serve specific purposes and rely on different understandings of how an origin functions. Here, I look at trans and fat origin stories and the ways in which origin narratives contribute to dominant discourses of identity. One's lived bodily experience, the corporeal manifestation of that experience, and the interpretation of the body by others, are integral aspects of identity production. In *What Does it Cost to Tell the Truth?* Riki Wilchins replies to a question Foucault poses about making oneself an object of knowledge for others. Wilchins emphasizes how bodies are produced and interpreted within shared meanings of language. She writes,

In order to grasp our bodies, to think of them as well as to understand the cultural gaze that fixes upon them, we must construct what our bodies can be said to mean and to look like...Almost everything about bodies is discovered through comparison from the collection of meanings stored in a common language. (Wilchins 551)

Wilchins reiterates similar claims made by Foucault and Butler, suggesting that bodies are not things we 'have,' but rather the effect of language, culture, and power. Bodies and their boundaries do not simply end at the skin; they are sites always under construction through interactions. The meaning made from the body relies on the interpretation of others and the comparison to cultural norms to determine intelligibility (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 33-35). As Butler illustrates, there is no inherent truth or origin to gender.

Without an inherent origin, specific acts shape bodies and dominant norms of gender while also being shaped by the norms already in place. When bodies adhere to gendered norms and when an individual's account of gender adheres to those norms, intelligible subjects emerge (*Gender Trouble* 30-33). In this chapter, I will explore the role of bodies in the construction and circulation of hegemonic origin stories about trans and fat people. Narratives of the body act as interpretive tools to assess intelligibility, reify normativity, and challenge dominant norms. Here, I examine trans and fat origin stories to analyze how the dominant origin narratives for each participate in the production and regulation of fat and trans subjectivities. I focus on trans and fat origin stories because of their shared history of medicalization, the counter origin narratives established by trans studies/activism and fat studies/activism, and the way both use such narratives of their existence to establish legitimacy.

Origin stories are not inherently bad or wrong, and I do not intend to suggest as much. Nor do I intend to suggest that fat is 'like' trans. Rather, I argue that narratives offered by trans and fat subjects demonstrate how dominant frameworks of intelligibility regulate those who fall both within and outside of their boundaries. The comparison of dominant narratives in these two examples also brings to light incongruences among origin accounts of different bodies and subjectivities. That incongruence leads me to my central question, explored in chapter three, of the challenges and political possibilities for fat/trans people lacking an existent and intelligible origin story.

Before beginning my analysis, I must first note its limitations. In order to clearly discuss the dominant narratives of trans and fat subjectivity, I reference these specific subjectivities using generalized terms. In reality, neither trans, nor fat, are homogeneous

categorizations. I make every attempt to avoid mischaracterizing a specific narrative, though the act of generalizing risks creating a monolithic reference point and ignores the large amounts of diversity within both groups.

Moving forward, I use trans to refer to both transsexual and transgender subjects. The term transsexual, Susan Stryker explains, refers to an individual with the desire to change their sexual morphology in order to live entirely as a gender they were not assigned at birth (*Transgender History* 2-3). Transgender was developed in the 1980s to describe an individual who changed their social gender through presentation of self, without recourse to medical transformation. However, since the publishing of Leslie Feinberg's 1992 pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, transgender has come to be more of an umbrella term for uniting various forms of gender variance. Feinberg's use of transgender is presented as an adjective rather than a noun, referring to a political movement of those who are marginalized due to gender difference (Feinberg 205; Strkyer, *Transgender History* 4). This use of transgender encapsulates transsexual subjectivity as well as other iterations of gender variation.

I use fat within my analysis as a reclaimed term to describe any body deemed to be abnormally large within cultural body standards. Most commonly, discourse about fat bodies has associated the word 'fat' with bodies that are bad, immoral, and/or sick (Rothblum & Solovay 1). Fat bodies are frequently referred to as 'overweight' or 'obese,' but these terms perpetuate an image of fatness as shameful or pathology. To counter the association of fat with moral failings or illness, I consciously chose to only use 'overweight' and 'obese' in reference to medicine and medical narratives of fatness. Medical narratives of trans and fat subjects as well as the counter narratives provided by

trans and fat studies/activism provide useful examples of the specific purposes of origin stories. The following exploration of both narratives demonstrates the influence of origin stories in determining which bodies and subjects are recognized and valued, and which are not.

Transgender Bodies and Medical Origins

The field of medicine has largely defined the norms framing discussions of trans subjectivity. Though the trans subject as understood today did not appear until the defining of the term transsexual in the 1950s, medical professionals within the field of sexology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discussed “sexual inversion” as an innate reversal of gender habits, dress, mannerisms, and desires. A sexual invert, for example, would be an individual who is biologically female, but possesses attributes of desire, interests, and behaviors associated with males (Ellis 1-2). The cases presented by sexologists of patients with sexual inversion reflected the medical professional’s observations of the patient’s body, as well as narratives of their life experiences. These cases played a fundamental role in forming the medical origin story of the trans subject.

In the accounts given to sexologists, patients often conveyed that they felt their biological body was standing in the way of being the sex they felt themselves to be. Medical professionals positioned these accounts as ‘problems’ and began to investigate cures for those who were sexual inverts. Most thought that if medicine could realign the body with the mind, the patient would no longer express signs of sexual deviancy. This discourse from patients and sexologists constructed the medicalized narrative of inversion, which then becomes the medical narrative of transsexual subjectivity. The trans subject produced by medicine was recognizable, but only through the repetition of a

specific narrative of being born in the wrong body (“The Empire Strikes Back” 8). This ‘born in the wrong body’ narrative has since become one of the dominant origin stories of trans subjectivity.

Sandy Stone recounts the construction of the ‘wrong body’ transsexual origin story by detailing how the medicalization and gatekeeping of medical treatment led to trans individuals parroting a specific narrative to gain access to the medical resources required for their transition (“The Empire Strikes Back” 8). Much of this original narrative came from early texts on the issue of transsexualism. Stone cites Harry Benjamin’s *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, published in 1966, as an original handbook used by both transsexual individuals seeking access to services and doctors seeking observable criteria to identify transsexualism while interviewing possible patients. As these criteria became common knowledge amongst those seeking services, trans individuals invoked the criteria whether or not they were aligned with the individual’s personal narrative (“The Empire Strikes Back” 9).

The wrong body narrative can also be seen in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) from 1980, when transsexualism was added as a mental illness in the DSM-III, and maintained up until the recent shift in the 2013 DSM-V to gender dysphoria. The diagnosis of transsexualism and later gender identity disorder included criteria such as “a strong and persistent identification with the opposite gender. There is a sense of discomfort in their own gender and may feel they were born in the wrong body” (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). In the more recent DSM-V the diagnosis has shifted slightly, but the born in the wrong body origin narrative persists. As the DSM states, “there must be a marked difference between the individual’s

expressed/experienced gender and the gender others would assign him or her” (American Psychiatric Association 2013). This interpretation of the narrative continues to position the body as incorrect. It gives primacy to the inner ‘truth’ of identity, thereby upholding the dichotomy between an inner truth and a wrong body (Engdahl 268). Doctors thereby created a dominant narrative of transsexual subjectivity where there was originally no coherent universal account. Patients’ repetition of ‘proper’ symptoms in order to appear intelligible to doctors, and doctors’ use of this framework to gauge intelligibility, created a narrative neither entirely accurate nor truthful. Nevertheless, this cycle installed the specific ‘wrong body’ origin story as the standard of transsexual experience and medical diagnostics. Many of the criteria set by medical professionals of the early clinics have shifted and changed over time, but, as Stone writes, they had a lasting effect on the construction of the dominant narrative of the intelligible trans subject (“The Empire Strikes Back” 8-9).

The ‘born in the wrong body,’ or ‘trapped in the wrong body,’ narrative refers to the misalignment individuals feel between their body and their gender identity (Engdahl 267; Stone 2). Though there are many trans people for whom the ‘wrong body’ origin story does resonate, it is by no means the only way transgender individuals experience and narrate their bodies. The dominant narrative of the ‘wrong body’ coincides with decades of medicalized and pathologized diagnostic criteria. In this narrative, an understanding of trans-ness requires a dichotomous relationship between the body and the self. Within this frame, the self is believed to contain the inner truth of gender. The body exists as a different entity entirely, constantly opposing an individual’s true sense of self (Engdahl 268). Certainly some have sought to reinterpret the ‘wrong body’ narrative,

including Gayle Salamon's "felt sense of body," which emphasizes the role cultural influences play within the experience of the body. However, these interpretations have not displaced the dominance held by the original interpretation (Engdahl 269; Salamon 2).

Cultural 'Wrong Body' Origin Story

The establishment of the dominant origin narrative of transness through medicine has profoundly shaped cultural narratives of trans subjects. I turn to media accounts of the 'wrong body' narrative to demonstrate how the medical origin story of a "wrong body" permeates culture and the prominence of 'wrong body' stories. Media is both a reflection of societal norms and a way to spread possible ideas and interpretations. Because of this far-reaching cultural appeal, Media is a common outlet for the perpetuation of the 'born in the wrong body' origin narrative. Since the coverage of Christine Jorgenson's public transition in the 1950s, media outlets featuring origin stories about trans individuals have used 'born/trapped in the wrong body' as a way to explain and often sensationalize trans individuals' existence. A 2013 episode of *20/20* spotlighting the story of 11 year-old trans girl named Jazz, for example, takes a mere twenty-five seconds before interviewer Barbra Walters declares, "she is the brave and beautiful new face of a child born in the wrong body" ("Jazz").

Images of trans people in the media are rare in general. In 2015 there were no trans characters appearing as series regulars on scripted television shows and only two appearing in Internet streaming shows (GLAAD). Because of the scarcity of representation, the trans individuals who do appear are often on unscripted news and talk shows where they are taken as representative of all trans individuals and their

experiences. Many of these representations feature trans individuals who use the ‘wrong body’ narrative to explain their transness to audiences (“Josie Romero” 2012; Wyatt 2015). Media’s wide-reaching influence means that representations of trans individuals that do exist are integral in reinforcing dominant origin narratives and weaving them throughout the fabric of society.

It is not just interviewers who reify the ‘wrong body’ origin story. Trans people themselves proliferate usage of this narrative throughout autobiographies, memoirs, and fictionalized texts of trans experiences (Stone 11). In her autobiography, *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders*, Jennifer Boylan writes, “the awareness that I was in the wrong body, living the wrong life, was never out of my conscious mind” (19). Boylan’s account, along with many other autobiographical texts published since the early to mid twentieth century, contributes to the construction and spread of the ‘wrong body’ narrative by repeating the original diagnostic criteria for transsexualism (Addams, 150; Bono, 2011; Hill, 110; Jorgenson, 66). This does not mean that these individuals did not and do not truly identify with this origin story; however, it does demonstrate the limited options that trans people have when seeking to find language to describe themselves and their experiences as an intelligible origin story.

Transgender Studies/Activism Origin Story

Trans autobiographical writing is not limited to popular culture representations. The growing field of transgender studies also includes many autobiographical texts that explore what it means to be trans as well as scholarship analyzing elements of trans subjectivity. Even within transgender studies, a field that Stryker describes as the study of the many ways bodies and identities can be interwoven (“(De)Subjugated Knowledges”

8), some scholars continue to use the dominant ‘wrong body’ origin story in their discussions of trans narratives (Meyerowitz 365-366; Prosser 102). There are, however, many within transgender studies who offer alternate accounts of the transgender ‘self’ and challenge the dominant medical origin narrative (Halberstam 171; Hines 65; Salamon 2; Stone 13). Those who write autobiographical narratives challenging the ‘wrong body’ origin as the only way to conceive of trans identity attempt to diversify the available stories of trans subjectivity. To some extent these texts succeed, and a world with alternate intelligible origin stories becomes easier to imagine. However, many who engage with counter-origin narratives to challenge the dominant norm, still maintain bodies as original and whole. Even with shifting and changing narratives of trans subjectivity, there remains a conflict between those who believe the ‘wrong body’ narrative applies to most trans people and those who imagine different ways of conceiving the trans subject.

As we have seen, the ‘wrong body’ narrative conveys a split subject. The Trans scholar Jay Prosser argues the transsexual autobiography works to unite the split transsexual subjectivity. Using the imagery of mirrors, Prosser likens seeing an image in the mirror as a split between the ‘self that is reflected upon, and the self that reflects’ (102). It is the narrative, he claims, that allows the transsexual individual to make sense of their split sense of self. He writes, “I was a woman, I write as a man. How to join this split? How to create a coherent subject? Precisely through narrative” (102). Prosser challenges the position that transsexual autobiography is an instantaneous act of performativity (Hausman 337). Instead, he argues that the transsexual autobiography is a “recounting of a personal history of a ‘persistent’ identification and the interconstitutive

although thoroughly contestatory relations between author and reader that characterize the transsexual diagnosis” (Prosser 106). As such, Prosser’s analysis of the trans personal history validates the origin story recited by trans individuals seeking intelligibility through medicine, but he ignores the specific historical context of the medical origin story. Additionally, he does not consider the ways normative origin stories are reproduced to reify boundaries and recognize intelligible subjects.

Prosser suggests that trans individuals repeat the wrong body narrative because it best reflects their embodied experience. He refers to the stories offered by many trans individuals who reiterate feeling discomfort with the physicality of their body, often suggesting a desire to shed the skin that keeps them trapped in their current state. For example, he quotes Leslie Feinberg’s account of feeling as if they could ‘unzip’ their skin and step outside of their body, as well as the story of a transsexual woman who refers to her skin as a ‘diving suit’ that is a false covering of an inner self (68-69). Prosser’s argument for the use of the ‘wrong body’ narrative relies on a conception of trans identity as an inner truth and a view of transness as embracing location and specificity. His use of the feeling of ‘home’ to describe the reuniting of the inner self with the ‘right’ bodily materiality offers an origin story of a lost wholeness the trans individual must work to recover in order to be intelligible to their selves, and to others. While Prosser’s use of a ‘whole’ origin perpetuates the idea that only specific kinds of trans subjects are *really* trans, he does mention the regulatory nature of standardized narratives. Instead of critically engaging with the incongruence between his argument and his acknowledgement of the regulatory origin stories, Prosser blames the creation of a kind of standardized narrative on the expectations of medical professionals (107).

Although Prosser's specific argument supports the 'wrong body' origin narrative, there are a growing number of other voices within transgender studies scholarship and trans activism who challenge and critique the merits of this narrative. Through their critiques some have offered alternative narratives to better reflect differing experiences. For example, Judith Halberstam critiques Prosser's claim about the potential of 'wrong body' narratives to unite the 'wrong' body with the 'right' mind, thus affirming the realness of gender. Halberstam states that Prosser assumes a strict binary that "relies on a belief in the two territories of male and female, divided by a flesh border and crossed between surgery and endocrinology" (164). Stone similarly maintains the 'wrong body' origin narrative appeals to a pure conceptualization of gender identity. She explains how under this narrative, once one unites the body with identity, the trans individual is responsible for constructing a normative history for the self in order to be reabsorbed back into normative society (11-12).

Adhering to categories of identity as 'real' or 'natural' reproduces the idea of innate truth and, specifically for the trans subject, depicts the surgical transition as the authentic trans experience. This experience unites the 'wrong' body with the assumed to be 'right' identity/mind, returning the fractured subject to a natural and original whole. Once whole, the trans subject can be recognized as intelligible, not as a trans but as one's natural gender. Prosser's claim that the transition is a reconstitution of wholeness instilling a sense of 'home,' suggests that there is no room for ambiguity within identity, only attempts at constructing a whole and pure origin story (Halberstam 163; Prosser 201).

Those within transgender studies and activism who present a growing challenge to the ‘wrong body’ origin narrative often advocate for the spreading of different and more diverse narratives of trans experiences as a method for subverting the constraints of the ‘wrong body’ origin story. In “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back,” Stone calls for trans individuals to resist appealing to norms and instead reclaim their individual histories that embrace plurality and resist creating totalized identities (14). Halberstam’s approach to blurring the boundaries of identity categories is a similar call to action, arguing the need to construct trans histories that embrace ambiguity and illegibility instead of repeating the dominant narrative to attain recognition as ‘properly’ or ‘correctly’ trans (20). Though both Stone and Halberstam call trans individuals to share their own narratives there still remains the risk of creating a counter-origin story that resists the ‘wrong body’ narrative but still reifies the regulation of intelligible subjectivity by continuing to engage with origin stories of wholeness or purity. The dangers of engaging in counter discourse of origins as a source of liberation include simply repeating the same oppressive structures and creating new norms to govern identity borders, but many trans scholars, like Halberstam and Stone, argue for embracing ambiguity in trans history, though not all have embraced the same notion (Halberstam 20; Stone 14).

As I have explained, dominant ‘wrong body’ origin narrative has wide cultural prominence, even though trans individuals themselves may or may not understand their experience in those terms. Though many within transgender studies/activism have begun to question the regulatory nature of dominant origin stories, some, like Prosser, continue to argue the need for reifying binaries and boundaries of identity in favor of constructing the body as ‘real’ or ‘natural’.

Individuals participating in fat studies/activism have similarly engaged in discourse about the marginalization of fat bodies. However, the approach taken within fat studies/activism differs from the aforementioned attempts within trans studies/activism to counter dominant origin stories. The different approaches apparent in both fat and trans studies/activism require further analysis into the use of origin stories in liberatory organizing practices. Moving forward, I explore the dominant medical narrative of fatness as well as the counter narrative of fat studies/activism and how these discourses interact, reify, and challenge one another.

Fat Bodies and Dominant Origin Stories

In the past few decades, thousands of books and articles have been published dedicated to debating the true cause of rising obesity rates in Western society. Nearly all of these texts position fat bodies as a manifestation of illness that everyone should actively work to avoid or overcome (Rothblum & Solovay 1). The terms ‘obese’ and ‘obesity’ are used to describe and categorize fat bodies within medical origin narratives of fatness. These terms were created by medical professionals in reference to the Body Mass Index (BMI) scale, which uses an individual’s weight and height to assess the percentage of fat in their body (Saguy 7-10; Wann xiv-xvii).

The BMI was first used in a 1972 study published by physiology professor Ancel Keys. In his study, Keys measured the body mass percentages of more than 7000 men using a formula of weight divided by height squared. He named the scale of percentages the Body Mass Index and the scale’s popularity spread over the next decade. Though ‘obese’ as a term began being negatively linked to fat bodies in the early twentieth century, ‘obese’ as a medicalized term used in reference to fat and therefore sick bodies

gained widespread popularity of use from its use on the BMI scale. A BMI over 30 is considered 'obese'; this translates to a 5 foot 4 inches tall person who weighs approximately 175 pounds (Singer-Vine 2009; Stearns 16).

In more recent years, fatness has been framed in a variety of ways. Saguy specifically identifies two dominant frames as the 'problem' frame, and the 'blame' frame. The 'problem' frame draws upon the medicalization of the fat body, treating fatness as a disease that must be cured (Saguy 28). The 'blame' frame also positions fat as a problem. However, instead of searching for a direct 'cure,' those who participate in the 'blame' frame seek an origin of, and explanation for fatness. The 'blame' frame includes medical professionals, public health officials and government officials, amongst others, who are searching for a 'cause' for fatness on the assumption that the world would be better if the cause of fatness were explained and, in some cases, eliminated. Saguy explains how most understand the 'causes' of fatness as direct results of an individual's personal responsibility, genetic makeup, and/or access to healthy and nutritious food (69). The 'problem' and 'blame' frames do not exist separately. Interacting with one another, these narratives construct the intelligibility and the limits of intelligibility for fat subjectivity.

Both the 'problem' and 'blame' narratives position the fat body as negative and in need of change. As a result, thinness is subsequently positioned as being the 'right' body that all should strive towards (Saguy 6). The frames of the fat body attempt to establish origin stories in order to both explain the origin of fatness, and to recognize the fat body as an intelligibly medicalized body. Fat studies and fat activists continue to challenge those who position fatness as an issue to be resolved by presenting origin stories of

fatness. Instead, these stories position fatness as a *natural* manifestation of human diversity.

Fat Bodies and Medical Origins

Medicine has provided the dominant narrative of fatness. The dominant medical narrative is frequently and widely analyzed throughout fat studies literature (Gaesser 37; LeBesco 29; Saguy 28; Saguy & Ward 4). The medical narrative of fatness pathologizes fat bodies, often using ‘obesity’ as a diagnosis. During most of the first half of the twentieth century, fatness was considered a manifestation of moral deviancy. But the emerging medical profession focused on ways to prevent and/or treat deviant fat bodies by reclassifying fatness as an illness and obesity began being treated as if it was a disease. In 2013 the American Medical Association officially recognized obesity as a diagnosis for fat bodies, further solidifying cultural perceptions of fat bodies as sick and needing ‘help’ to return to the normal state of thinness (Pollack 2013).

Fat individuals cannot escape the medicalization of their bodies. Medicine’s treatment of fatness as a disease and the search to find the cause of ‘obesity’ creates a specific origin story where thinness is positioned as the pure state of being. The fat body has strayed from its proper state and weight loss is the method of reuniting the body with its intended state. The medicalization of fat bodies perpetuates itself whether fat individuals opt to participate or not. Many do in fact seek treatment from doctors to reduce their body weight and treat their ‘disease’ (Phlen & Wing 222). While treatment for ‘obesity’ may or may not be effective, those who reiterate the medical origin narrative for their body weight and actively take steps to combat their ‘illness’ receive recognition as intelligible bodies because they offer an account of themselves that aligns with the

specific medical narrative. Medicine provides a platform for the fat individual to gain intelligible subjectivity, but only under the pretense that the fat individual is taking steps towards an acceptable thin body (Saguy & Ward 5).

The medical narrative positions thin bodies as normal and fat bodies as abnormal and defined by pathology. Anyone who is not thin must be fixed by way of weight loss, while those who are not fat are consistently encouraged to take steps to avoid becoming obese themselves. The treatment of fat as an illness and medical condition shapes the varied intelligibility of fat individuals as well as those who have smaller, acceptable bodies. This creates a matrix where different levels of intelligibility are granted to fat bodies that are ‘correctly’ fat and withheld from those who are not interested in ‘treating’ their condition (LeBesco 29; Saguy 6). Those individuals who are not ‘correctly’ fat are considered irrational and deviant. The recognition of some bodies over others creates a framework where fat individuals who are not interested in weight loss are rendered outside of the framework and therefore are unintelligible.

Fat Studies/ Fat Activism’s Counter Origin Story

In 1973, activists from a small group concerned with the treatment of fat bodies within society wrote “The Fat Liberation Manifesto.” The authors demanded equal treatment and respect for fat individuals; aligned themselves with the struggles of other groups oppressed by race, class, sexuality, and gender; and denounced any ‘reducing’ techniques designed to facilitate weight loss such as diet clubs, weight loss doctors, diet books, supplements, appetite suppressants, drugs, and surgery. The manifesto declared the first formal action against the cultural narrative of fat as a medical problem and from

that time fat activism has continued to grow. The academic discipline of fat studies is a product of fat activism's rapidly moving expansion (Freespirit & Aldebaran 1973).

Fat scholars and activists reject the dominant origin narrative of fatness as an illness or public health issue. In response, they construct origin stories for fat bodies that are intended to empower fat individuals and reconstitute what counts as an intelligible narrative of fatness. The dominant counter- origin story within fat activism considers fat bodies to be natural bodies that should be appreciated for their diversity rather than mandated to change (Saguy 61). Fat activism and Fat Studies scholarship relies heavily on positioning fatness as a type of identity category where fat individuals can align fat identity with other marginalized identity categories of sexuality, gender, and race (LeBesco 85; Saguy 61; Saguy & Ward 2; Wann x & xiii). This Identity discourse of fatness relies heavily on framing fatness as a civil rights issue. Positioning fatness as a naturally manifesting identity allows fat individuals to use the same rhetoric of rights and protections common among other minorities. While many fat studies scholars have explored the relationships between fatness and race, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation, claiming fatness as 'natural' establishes fat identity as innate and immutable (LeBesco 3 & 85; Saguy 6; Solovay & Vade 168; Wann ix & xiii; White 88).

The connection between fatness and sexual orientation within fat activist discourse is especially prominent. Sexuality's status as an innate identity has been a highly debated topic during the past few decades. The argument used to combat those who view non-normative sexualities as unnatural is often referred to as the 'born gay' narrative. This narrative claims that sexual orientation is an innate characteristic one is born with that cannot and will not change (D'Emilio 157). Using a similar argument for

fatness, many fat activists argue that fat bodies are natural and immutable. This approach can be interpreted as an attempt to gain intelligibility by locating identity within an innate, natural, and unchosen origin, a tactic that has worked well for the fight for rights based on sexuality in recent years.

Explorations of fatness and the fat body's relationship with sexuality can be found largely within queer theoretical texts. As Kathleen LeBesco notes, both queer and fat identities, have been medicalized, pathologized, and stigmatized within dominant culture. She demonstrates this connection by exploring how queer and fat individuals have been depicted as the manifestation of an underlying cultural problem, the center of moral panic, and sexually deviant (85 & 89-87). Fat activists who have latched on to the similarities in the fat and queer experiences as a location of comparison have adopted rhetoric typically used for queerness. The most prominent example of this is fat activism's use of the coming out narrative.

Many fat activists have positioned their public acceptance of their fatness as a 'coming out.' Saguy and Ward explore the ways fat activists 'come out' as fat, as well as how the coming out narrative functions for fat individuals. They argue that individuals who were both queer and fat contributed to fat activism's adoption of coming out as a political action, but once adopted, the narrative shifted due to differences between sexuality and fatness (Saguy & Ward 1-2). The most glaring difference between sexuality and fatness is that sexuality is not an inherently visible identity. The act of coming out is used to bring that invisibility into the light and create a more visible narrative for non-normative sexual orientations. Fatness, on the other hand, is entirely visible. Fatness is written on the body. There is no need to declare oneself as fat, those observing and

interpreting fat bodies decide this independent of declaration. Due to the absence of need to declare themselves fat, fat activists have used the coming out story as a tool of resisting the larger cultural framework of intelligibility that insists that if an individual is fat, they must always be working towards becoming thin to gain recognition. Coming out is an exclamation of pride and a rejection of the shame that fat individuals are expected to feel within the dominant cultural origin story of fatness (LeBesco 88; Saguy & Ward 1-2).

Those who come out as fat often declare their bodies to be natural and biological and their body size to be immutable and nonnegotiable (Murray, *The 'Fat' Female Body* 87-88; Wann ix & xiii; White 88). While there may be a use for adopting the coming out narrative declaring fatness as an innate identity as a part of fat activism, it should be noted that this approach substitutes one regulatory origin story for another. In the same way that the medical account of fat as an illness which must be cured positions thin bodies as pure and desirable, fat studies/activism's claim to fatness as a natural identity suggests any kind of essential account that does not include individuals who do lose weight or wish to lose weight, within intelligible fat bodies. The very narrative that seeks to reject regulation does not liberate fatness as it intends. Instead, it further constricts and regulates fat subjectivity and ultimately fails to include those who may be fat but do not fit within the specific fat rights frame of intelligibility.

Murray critiques Wann, along with the majority of fat activist discourse, for constructing a counter-origin story arguing that a majority of fat activist political discourse fails to critically engage with the ways in which the subject is formed through

the interpretation of the other as well as the harm done by attempting to construct a universal fat subjectivity. She writes:

Wann's politics, like that of the majority of fat activists, falls back on liberal humanist logic: mobilizing uncritical 'feel-good' discourses in their various interventions into social and political constructions of the 'fat' female body... in mobilizing these particular discourses, much fat activism reaffirms – albeit inadvertently – the very systems of power/knowledge it sets out to challenge. (*The 'Fat' Female Body* 87-88)

Murray concludes that fat activism's insistence on the creation of a universal, singular, and unambiguous 'fat' political identity is an attempt to create a politics of liberation by appealing to an essentialist original. The result, however, is a politics of constraint. Fat activism's attempt at creating a particular origin story as an act of resistance still relies on the creation of an origin story, which is inherently regulatory in nature (*The 'Fat' Female Body* 88).

Fat, Trans, and the Gendered Subject

In the accounts detailed previously, origin narratives of transgender and fat subjectivity are depicted as separate, as they are in much of the scholarship about specific bodies and subjectivity. Though these stories seemingly lack much connection between fat and trans subjectivity, this does not mean that the two do not influence each other. An example of how fatness and transness affect and influence one another is demonstrated by an examination of the gendered subject. The intelligibility of gender is most frequently based on the visual perception of bodies by an outside observer. The more an individual's body aligns with the norm of an established gender category, the more likely it is the individual will be recognized as that gender. These observations of gender are often based on physical indicators such as breasts, body hair, body fat distribution, and general

body shape (Bergman, “Part-time Fatso” 141). Intelligibility frameworks of transness and fatness are deeply intertwined with the gendered body. An examination of how trans and fat intelligibility interact with gender norms allows for a more in-depth analysis of how fat and trans subjectivities interact (White 89).

Cultural gender norms use very specific kinds of characteristics as the measuring stick for gauging intelligibly gendered bodies. For the ‘woman’s’ body within Western culture, this norm is established as thin, feminine, breasts, soft features, and long hair and the ‘man’s’ body is established as tall, hairy, muscular, breastless, and with a square jaw line. These standards present issues for any body that does not fit within the specific parameters, and especially for both fat and trans Individuals and how they navigate intelligibility. Fatness is typically interpreted as masculinizing for women’s bodies, and feminizing for men’s bodies (Bergman, “Part-time Fatso” 141; Solovay & Vade 167; White 89). Due to the masculinization of fat female bodies, many fat activists actively try to reclaim their femininity by wearing clothing or participating in activities that are typically deemed off limits for female fat bodies within a culture that posits thinness as an integral part of the framework of intelligibility for women (Asbill 299).

While many who are fat may find the practice of reclaiming their femininity empowering, engaging with strict ideas of hyper-femininity has unintentionally constructed an image of fat activism that only includes feminine women. Some fat women do not fit these standards of femininity. By trying to liberate fat individuals from one framework of intelligibility for women’s bodies, fat activists have instituted their own framework that still regulates what is considered a recognizable body. As a result, individuals who are both fat and trans (fat/trans) are marginalized as they are not

accounted for within fat activism's counter origin story, or the subsequent reclaiming of the feminine fat body as intelligible. Transgender women often cling to hyper femininity in a way that is similar to that of fat activists. Instead of being an act of empowerment and liberation, many trans women are forced to participate within hyper-femininity in an attempt to be read as an intelligible woman (Gonzalez 15).

The reclamation fat femininity does not fit everyone who is fat. What about those who cannot or do not wish to be perceived as feminine? Masculine performance does differ in some ways from feminine performance when dealing with fatness. Masculine fat bodies are more likely to be considered intelligible, but fatness may undermine intelligible physical features by enhancing secondary sex characteristics, feminizing the masculine body (White 94). For a fat/trans man who aims to produce a masculine gender presentation, his fat distribution may cause his breasts to be more pronounced or his fat to be distributed in his hips; neither of which are perceived as signifiers of a culturally intelligible man (Bergman 141-142). The relationship between fatness and gender legibility is multi-layered. Both fat and trans subjectivity interact to produce a unique body not clearly accounted for within any one framework.

Fat/Trans Subjectivity and the Malleability of the Body

Both fat and transgender bodies are considered abnormal bodies within current cultural discourse. Due to this positioning, both trans and fat individuals have had to create their own origin accounts in attempt to liberate themselves in some way. The dominant transgender origin story positions trans subjects within the medicalized framework in order to gain access to medical interventions available for gender transition, allowing trans individuals to appear intelligible to themselves and others.

Instead of operating within the already established cultural narrative, fat scholars/activists reject the medicalization of the fat body and substitute their own origin account of fatness as a natural and innate identity. Not only do the dominant narratives of trans and fat often ignore how one narrative may interact or influence the other, but the ways that trans and fat activists/scholars narratives construct the body in regards to issues of malleability entirely contradict on another. As a result, certain subjects become unintelligible, lacking a frame origin. Fat/Trans individuals are placed in a challenging position when trying to produce a gender presentation that is both intelligible to themselves and to those around them. White argues that neither transness nor fatness inherently excludes the other. The conflict created when attempting to consider both within the same body leads to a fat/trans individual having no established framework of intelligibility to operate within as a subject (White 91).

According to the dominant account of trans subjectivity the body is inherently malleable and should be changed to align with the non-malleable innate gender identity of the mind. These changes occur most often through medical interventions such as hormone replacement therapy and various surgeries to create a desired sexed body and gendered appearance. Understanding the body to be malleable allows the trans person to understand the body as a tool to be manipulated with the end result reflecting an inner self (White 91). Within dominant discourses of fat studies/activism, however, the account of the body is the exact opposite. Fat scholars/activists construct their account of the fat body to be innate and unchangeable, akin to the trans understanding of inherent identity. The medical narrative of fatness considers the fat body as not just malleable, but expected to change. Fat scholars/activists resist the body as a malleable entity to counter dominant

cultural discourses of obesity and weight loss. In her book *Fat!So?*, prominent fat activist Marilyn Wann includes a section entitled “anatomy is destiny” in which she claims that the body you have is the body you are born with, and there is little anyone can or should do to change or shape the body. Wann makes a similar claim in the Forward for *The Fat Studies Reader* insinuating that those who seek to change fat bodies are conducting a ‘witch hunt’ to eradicate fat bodies (*Fat! So?* 47; “Foreword-Fat Studies” x). Her sentiments are repeated later by Bugard et al. who write, “When fat people organize, we are saying that we own our bodies, that they are not for sale to the highest bidder. They are not malleable – they are fat bodies and will stay that way” (338).

A place of especially high tension between trans and fat accounts of body malleability is the decision to make surgical changes to the body. Trans individuals often treat the body as a reflection of inner truth and therefore as something to be changed, manipulated, and constructed in order to align the ‘wrong’ sexed body with the ‘true’ gendered mind. Transness does not always imply surgical change, but the ‘wrong body’ narrative suggests that there is an ultimate ‘right’ body that reflects a specific identity and through medical transition the ‘right’ body can be brought closer to reality.

Medical ‘treatments’ that aid in transition include hormone replacement therapy, electrolysis to remove body hair, various procedures to reduce and/or redistribute fat, the removal of breast tissue, the construction of breasts, as well as procedures to remove and/or construct sex specific genitalia. Prosser argues that the medical transition is central to trans subjectivity, suggesting that in concert with markers of gender such as clothing, hair, and voice, the affirmation of the trans subject relies on the body being malleable (66-68). This sentiment is repeated throughout many texts within transgender

studies/theory with nearly all of the authors celebrating the changing of the body and newly affirmed sex characteristics (Bergman, *The Nearest Exit* 198-199; White 91).

The dominant origin story within fat studies/activism suggests an opposing stance to the manipulation of the body through surgical means, holding that the body should not and cannot be changed, especially through surgical influence. The medical narrative of fatness as a disease encourages medical professionals to look for a ‘cure.’ Since the 1950s, weight loss has become a multi-billion-dollar industry in the United States alone. Advertisements for diets, workout routines, diet pills, and in recent years, weight loss surgery are increasingly everywhere in American culture. Bariatric surgery for the purposes of weight loss is increasingly frequent; some doctors now even choose weight loss focused bariatric medicine as their medical specialty. These surgical interventions include procedures such as gastric bypass where nearly 90 percent of the stomach is removed leaving only a small pouch able to hold tiny amount of food, or the laparoscopic gastric band (Lap-band) where a band is placed around the stomach to create a small pouch that holds food (Morgan 3).

Kathryn Morgan explores weight loss surgery and its relationship with power. She argues that though the process of undergoing weight loss surgery produces subjectivity, the surgery is a means of regulating unruly bodies and producing normative ones (14). Wann similarly argues that weight loss surgeries are forces of regulation, but goes even further in her claim that “weight-loss surgery is a mutilation of healthy body parts... [and] never justified” (*Fat!So?* 41). The fat activist discourse rejects the medical implementation of weight-loss surgery and instead instills rhetoric insisting that those who chose to surgically alter their weight are mutilating their bodies and conforming to a

culture of fat hatred. They position the body as unable to be naturally malleable, and therefore any act to change, shape, or manipulate it is an act of violence (*Fat!So?* 47).

The conflict between the dominant discourses of trans and fat subjectivity and politics presents a particular difficulty for an individual who embodies both fatness and transness at the same time. Fat/trans existence contradicts both narrative accounts in ways that are fundamental to their boundaries. An example of this contradiction is demonstrated by the weight restrictions placed upon individuals seeking any kind of surgical gender transition. The trans account of the body is that of malleability, but most surgical procedures for gender transition require patients to be below a BMI of 30 to qualify for the surgery, some doctors require even lower (The Philadelphia Center for Transgender Surgery 2016). This requirement means that the fat/trans subject may not have access to the bodily transformations imperative for trans subjectivity within the dominant narrative unless they were to lose weight, entirely turning their back on fat activist narrative of the static nature of the body. If fat bodies are not able to access medical procedures for transition, trans subjectivity is constructed as only involving thin bodies. This assumes that a truly dedicated trans individual will lose whatever weight necessary to receive the procedure and dismissing those who do not/ cannot lose the weight as not correctly trans (White 94).

The established relationship between gender and the fat body within fat activism/studies demonstrates a need for a discourse of fat/trans bodies. Scholars that do discuss the intricacies of gender and fatness from a fat activist perspective typically neglect to consider fat/trans subjectivity as a contradictory position, most often discussing cisgender bodies as they relate to normative gender ideas (Murray, “(Un/be) Coming

Out” 158; Meleo-Erwin 191). The majority of texts focus on women’s gendered relationship with weight, though some scholarship in recent years has included cisgender men into discussion of fatness. Ignoring how fatness and gender affect each other’s intelligibility outside of normative cisgender bodies creates a unified idea of the fat subject within fat activism/fat studies, not leaving room for alternative possibilities of subjectivity, including intelligible fat/trans subjectivity (White, 94).

In a manner similar to fat activism/studies’ ignoring of the relationship between gender and fat bodies as it pertains to transness, the trans account of medically shaping the body to reflect an inner truth ignores the marginalization of fat bodies within medical discourse. While reifying the medical wrong body narrative grants access to trans individuals who wish to attain medical transition services, the same system actively perpetuates the medical account of fatness that constantly tries to ‘cure’ fat bodies. The medical account of fatness assumes that a normative thin body is the inner truth one’s body must align with to be healthy and whole. The fat body here is the ‘wrong body,’ and the fat individual is always expected to be taking steps to change. Fat studies/activism’s counter narrative takes issue with medicine’s attempt to shrink fat bodies, but their assertion of the body not being malleable once again places the fat/trans individual in an impossible position.

Within trans discourse the body is positioned as open to being changed, but within fat studies/activism discourse, changing the body is an act of violence. The use of a regulatory origin story is to assume a narrative that is universalizing, pure, and whole. Using the dominant stories of transness and fatness as frameworks of intelligibility, a fat/trans individual cannot construct an intelligible narrative of self. For the fat/trans

individual, gaining intelligibility through any established dominant origin account is impossible. Contradicting narrative accounts place the fat/trans body in a position of unspeakability: there is no route to gain a full account of the self within either trans studies/activism's dominant narrative of transness or fat studies/activism's dominant narrative of fatness. If, as previously established, intelligibility is crucial for the recognition of the subject, then fat/trans individuals are not and cannot be recognized as subjects within current dominant origin accounts. Fat/Trans subjectivity has no single claim to an origin, thus, no claim to intelligibility.

In the next chapter, I explore the unspeakability of fat/trans subjectivity and the transformative and subversive possibilities of a body with no claim to an intelligible origin. I ask: How does one exist in a body that has been deemed unable to exist? How is identity constructed without an origin account? What possibilities arise when one cannot produce intelligible subjectivity, or refuses the demand for an origin story? To frame my analysis, I deploy the figure of the cyborg as a tool to examine origin accounts and explore alternative understandings and political possibilities of fat/trans subjectivity. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway imagines the figure of the cyborg as a hybrid invested in "partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" as well as being a figure that is "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (292). The cyborg's relationship with origin stories, in that it does not have one and has no interest in attaining one, allows for the interrogation of the implications of lacking an origin as well as the possibility of refusing to engage with origin accounts all together. It engages with what existence without origins could mean for a society built upon them, offering new and challenging ways to consider subjectivity and identity.

THE FAT/TRANS SUBJECT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE CYBORG

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence.
(Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 293)

In my previous chapters, I have explored how radical feminism used origin stories to contest male power and to create narratives that allow an individual to make sense of their self and interpret others within defined identity categories. As I showed, those 'liberatory' origin stories also function as regulatory and exclusionary ways of generating political tactics. I then turned my account to contemporary efforts by marginalized groups like fat and trans persons to generate alternative origin stories as a form of empowerment and resistance. Hereto, we find that origin narratives intended to liberate often continue to reify boundaries of identity and criteria for recognition. Paradoxically such counter discourses place those whose location cannot be traced to a single origin – such as the fat/trans subject – in a position where fully intelligible subjectivity is impossible to produce. In this chapter, I build upon my previous analysis of the impossible status of the fat/trans body and ask: how does one exist in a body deemed unable to exist? how might identity categories be reimaged without the demand for an origin story? and, what possibilities open up when one cannot produce an intelligible origin story or refuses the answer the demand for one? In my exploration, I draw heavily upon Haraway's figure of the cyborg. The cyborg provides a framework for reimagining the fat/trans subject's lack of intelligible origins as a position of possibility rather than limitation. Throughout my

engagement of the cyborg, I use the terms cyborg and hybrid interchangeably to refer to the same figure. Using the cyborg figure, I explore the political power of embracing partial identities rather than forcing fractured narratives of a whole self into categorization. Most importantly, I explore the potential in refusing to adopt or align with any origin as an effort to redefine recognition and political subjectivity.

The Impossibility of Fat/Trans Subjectivity

Those who are both fat and trans experience the lived reality of being unable to gain full recognition due to their lack of a whole intelligible origin story. The dominant counter origin narratives of both transness and fatness construct a situation where the fat/trans body is located in a position of impossibility. Totalizing narratives that define a category of identity create what Haraway calls “antagonistic dualisms” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 313). Such dualisms shape and limit the boundaries of categorization. Fat scholars/ activists who have declared fatness as an innate identity category create a dichotomous relationship between fatness and thinness, constructing thinness as the fat body’s categorical opposite (Saguy 69). There is no denying that constructing fatness as an innate identity grants some political benefits to fat scholars/activists, especially those who position themselves in opposition to the medical narrative of fatness as a disease. But even with these moments of usefulness, the power of defining a category of existence creates boundaries that regulate who counts – and who does not count – as legitimate within that category.

Similarly, the dominant medical narrative of trans identity constructs a defined category of existence, which allows the trans individual to be intelligible within those specific boundaries, regulating who can and can’t count as a recognized transgender

subject. Some involved in trans studies/activism reject the dominant medial ‘wrong body’ narrative for attempting to create a totalizing origin of trans experiences. Many of those in trans studies/activism are working towards alternate understandings of trans lived experience. But there are some within trans studies/activism, like Prosser, who continue to reify the ‘wrong body’ narrative (68-69). Both the medical ‘wrong body’ narrative of transness and the medical narrative of fatness as a disease are examples of how norms regulate ‘abnormal’ bodies. The dominant origin narrative within fat studies/activism of fatness as an innate identity continues to participate in the reification of identity boundaries. The conflicting narratives within trans studies/activism depict a shift away from Prosser’s use of the ‘wrong body’ origin story towards a less defined but potentially more liberating approach to understanding trans bodies and politics.

Both trans studies/activism and fat studies/activism participate in the construction of origin stories that define the boundaries of identity, though they may have differing approaches. The body is at the center of how both trans and fat individuals come to make sense of themselves within the alternative narratives of fatness and transness. Though both narratives feature the importance of the body, the accounts differ greatly when addressing body malleability. It is this location that prevents access to a single origin narrative for the fat/trans subject (White 88).

The fat/trans body does not align with either established narrative of transness or fatness. Rather, if a fat/trans individual aims to appear as recognizable subject within either trans or fat narratives, they must make every attempt to abandon plural status to better align with a recognized origin story, or resign themselves to being repeatedly unable to be definitively interpreted with no claim to an established identity category, or

to the community that develops from the shared repetition of intelligible origin stories. As Butler argues in “Precarious Life, Grievable Life,” in order for a subject to be intelligible it must first be intelligible as a life. In reference to this failure to recognize life, she states, the individual ‘lays claim to no certain ontological status, and though it can be apprehended as ‘living,’ it is not always recognized as life” (7-8). I argue that at present, the fat/trans body resists recognition as a life. To be clear, the act of ‘living’ continues, but because the multiple locations of the fat/trans body are not captured by any one frame or matrix of intelligibility, the fat/trans body is barely apprehended as a life. As an unrecognized life, the fat/trans subject challenges how the self is typically thought to come into being. The self emerges in response interaction with the other. “I” can only be referenced if there is some other being from which to differentiate itself. As Butler writes, “There is no ‘I’ without a ‘you’” (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 46). The fat/trans subject’s own sense of self is fractured. In a sense, the self becomes the other.

There are specific consequences as the result of being an unrecognizable and othered subject. These consequences vary in severity. For the fat/trans subject, examples of these consequences include a constant misreading of intended gender presentation due to the effect of weight on the gendering of the body (Bergman, “Part-time Fatso” 141-142), the heightened feelings of depression and anxiety that often accompany marginalization (Anzaldúa 77), undesirability, and, at times the threat of violence for not adhering to norms of gender and weight (Mey 87). This violence may even originate from those who have been recognized as intelligibly fat or trans as they themselves attempt to regulate norms and boundaries of identity (Murray, *The ‘Fat’ Female Body* 87).

The costs for those with unintelligible bodies encourage individuals to constantly search for a way to reproduce intelligible origin narratives. As we saw in chapters one and two, origin narratives are essential to individual identity and political status. The result is that bodies not currently intelligible often try to adapt to existing narratives, even if the narrative does not fit their specific bodily experience (Stone 8). Rather than addressing this situation by producing a new origin story resolving these fractures in a single site, I interpret the fat/trans body as a figuring of the cyborg. The cyborg embodies multiple partial identities. It rejects the need for an innate origin and challenges the dualisms that participate in the construction of totalizing categories of identity.

The Illegitimate Promise of Feminism

Similarly to the previous analysis of radical feminism's reliance on origin stories in my first chapter, Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," offers a critique of those forms of feminism that rely too heavily on dualisms. These categories, she writes, create taxonomies of women that 'tend to remake feminist history so that it appears to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time' (297). For example, critiquing MacKinnon's totalizing approach of constructing 'women's' experiences through consciousness raising, Haraway argues that MacKinnon's universal category of 'woman' enforces the boundaries of what can count as women's experience. The result is a collective consciousness that erases differences amongst women and silences the voices of those who fall outside of her definition (299). While the creation of a collective consciousness was politically useful for second wave feminists, the practice installs borders around what it means to be a woman. This shaping of identity created a dualistic

model, normalized those who fit feminist's established definition for 'woman,' and labeled all who do not fall within the boundary lines as other. The "antagonistic dualism" created by radical feminists established one kind of woman as legitimate, while all others were silenced and often erased (313).

Haraway's criticism of feminist discourse targets Western culture's reliance on antagonistic dualisms between the One and the Other as a means of creating order and categories of identity. The figure of the cyborg is the response to this Western dualistic impulse, and a way to challenge boundaries, including those put in place by the limiting feminist constructions of 'women' and 'women's experience' (291). The cyborg is a new possibility of consciousness, a hybrid of machine and organism. It is the joining of human and technology, a figure that rejects unifying accounts as a politics of liberation and embraces partiality as a means of challenging dualisms inherent in the ways categories of difference are constructed.

Fat/Trans Consciousness in a Post-Gender World

The cyborg exists as both fiction and lived experience. As Haraway argues, it is a "fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings" (292). Fiction in this sense does not mean false or unreal, but the imaginative creation of yet to be fully realized possibilities. Technology and the cyborg as the ambiguous joining of the technological and natural, places the personal in conversation with a social and political context. That joining opens a space for questioning innate truth and exploring of alternative ways to understand existence and its narrative modes of consciousness. The cyborg blurs rigid boundaries; seemingly

impossible states; and makes possible a politics of liberation not concerned with defined categories of identity (292).

Critique of second wave feminist consciousness offers new and less restrictive ways to imagine a possible post-gender world. Post-gender, as Haraway describes, refers to an image of the world without restrictive identity categories such as gender. Many read Haraway's assertion of the post-gender cyborg to mean occupying a world without gender. However, she insists that her use of post-gender references a utopian time free from constrictive identity categories and normativity (292; Lykke 329). Haraway's critique of second wave feminism is not, then, a view of feminist consciousness as entirely negative. Haraway's critique instead suggests the existence of alternative possibilities to organize feminist epistemology (Lykke 326). The movement of the fictional into lived social reality allows for categories to be reimagined and sites of contention to become potential locations of liberation.

Similarly, interpreting the fat/trans body as a cyborg body reconfigures the contradictory relationship between gender and body size. As stated in chapter 2, the intelligibility of gender is based most frequently on the visual perception of bodies from an outside observer. Fatness affects the ways in which gender is interpreted on the body. Fat women are seen as masculine or genderless while fat men are feminized due to their weight and body shape (Bergman, "Part-time Fatso" 141-142). Fat/trans individuals often have a difficult experience with their body and gender expression. The fat/cyborg as a post-gender figure blurs the boundaries between gender and allows for envisioning of alternative.

As the cyborg's blurring of boundaries indicates, the profound importance of the cyborg is its indifference to origin stories. That indifference is especially relevant to the fat/trans subject. The cyborg eradicates the oppositional relationship between human and technology. The shaping of the body by means of technological production is one of the most common ways a cyborg comes into being. The fat/trans subject who attempts to construct and/or shape the self by surgical means occupies an especially contested position between trans and fat activist discourses. Transgender bodies may or may not be surgically altered, though one of the defining characteristics of the transsexual subject is changing or intending to change one's physical body by means of medical intervention as a uniting of the body with an experienced sense of gender identity (White 92). The dominant trans narrative constructs the body as malleable through technology. In contrast, fat activists resist categorizing the fat body as malleable to appeal to an 'innocent body': an immutable body possessing original purity. Many fat activists argue that weight-loss surgery is an act of violence against an immutable identity category. Further, some activists actively compare weight-loss surgery and conversion therapy for LGBT people. (Wann, "Foreword-Fat Studies" xvii).

As explained in the previous chapter, the coexistence of fatness and transness in a single body troubles the framing of both fat and trans bodies. Fatness limits the trans subject's access to certain means of medical transition due to set BMI limits enforced by medical practitioners. The norms created by both fat activist and trans activist frameworks shape the boundaries of Identity. The contradiction of the trans the body being considered malleable and the fat body being considered immutable renders the

fat/trans body incoherent and unrecognizable within the frame of the intelligible fat subject or the intelligible trans subject.

The fat/trans cyborg is produced within the contradiction of fatness and transness. But whereas the fat/trans subject finds two incompatible framings of origins is unintelligible, a cyborg of the fat/trans body allows for an exploration of such contradiction. The ability of cyborg consciousness to break down the boundaries which produce dualisms of competing and incompatible identities, creates subjects that do not demand a singular allegiance. The cyborg welcomes the blurring of boundaries with technology as well as the fractured and partial identities of fatness and transness, the location where fat/trans consciousness is produced. Cyborg consciousness critiques all regulatory categories. After all, one of Haraway's motivations in writing "Cyborg Manifesto" was to counter regulatory practices within feminism. That same impulse positions cyborg consciousness to challenge regulatory categories of transness and fatness. From the standpoint of the cyborg, the fat/trans subject is no longer an impossible figure incapable of 'true' subjectivity because 'true' or 'pure' subjectivity as measured by having one origin story or a singular identity cease to have meaning in the world of the cyborg.

The Politics of the Fat/Trans Cyborg

What might subjectivity and politics look like if we trace the potential of fat/trans subjectivity and the possibility for a fat/trans cyborg politics? The critical force of the fat/trans cyborg body is its resistance to compliance with the Western demand for origins. As a figure born of multiple identities and locations, the cyborg actively deconstructs all-encompassing origin stories. Cyborg politics organizes across multiple fronts that do not

insist on unity in a defined innate category in order to achieve political significance. Interpreting the fat/trans body through the figure of the cyborg makes possible the imagining of a fat/trans subjectivity that no longer seeks an origin narrative to be intelligible. The cyborg is a singular body who is about multiplicity and partiality as a mixed plural subject and does not define its status on patriarchy, identity, 'B history,' or a pure origin. The cyborg models the fat/trans subject which, free of pure origin stories operate within a non-binary model of categorization (295).

The practice of labeling identities and classifying them, results in the exclusion of those who do not appear within the category. Haraway examines this type of attempt of constructing a unified category of women as a means of political organizing. She states such feminists are guilty of participating in an essentialist narrative "at least through unreflective participating in the logics, languages and practices of white humanism and through the searching for a single ground of domination to secure our revolutionary voice" (300). The fat/trans cyborg frees the fat/trans subject from impossibility, from offering an intelligible origin story, and from the demand that the offering of such an origin story serves as a condition for liberation. The cyborg embraces the power of ambiguity and the political utility of partiality (296). For the fat/trans cyborg, the embrace of ambiguity allows a subject to turn away from constant attempts to offer an intelligible origin story as fat or trans and move towards an existence that finds clarity from confusing the boundaries between fat and trans. According to Haraway, the 'cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (295). She insists on the power of language in defining boundaries, suggesting a move away from a

political identity of ‘us’ that inherently implies an oppositional ‘them’, and towards a politics of ‘we,’ creating a united front without the need to construct an original and singular whole (296). This shift away from trying to establish a universal historical category of ‘women’ allows for political unity that is built around affinity instead of identifying with origins of pure identity. Affinity organizing, as Haraway describes, is organizing “not by blood but by choice” (295).

For Haraway, organizing around affinity allows for a reimagining of coalitions and community building by appreciating and organizing around differences (296). The disconnected status of a fat/trans body that does not fit simple identity categories produces the fat/trans cyborg subjectivity within political discourses of fatness and transness. The tactic of organizing around identity and then legitimizing that identity reiterates identifiable origins and continues to rely on the same framework of regulation and domination that creates the need for political unity in the first place (296). By organizing around identity, the voices of those who do not and cannot fit are silenced or erased entirely. Establishing a politics of affinity rejects the need for a community based upon a shared identity category. This strategy of politics allows those with multiple and/or partial identities to speak in a way that has not been encouraged by any identity based politic. The fat/trans cyborg finds community partiality and rejects any sense of an original family, building coalitions from an analysis of the web of domination. Cyborgs are not concerned with defined categories of identity (296-297).

Cyborg Writing and Reimagining Origin Stories

Cyborg politics are organized across lines of difference, embracing the fractured, partial, and conflicting pieces of the self that often exclude one from any kind of identity

based political discourse. Pointing to the writing work of women of color, Haraway suggests writing as a tool for lifting the voices of those who have been silenced by their own plurality. Cyborg writing subverts origin story by retelling essentialist accounts that have been disassembled and reassembled to represent the fractured nature of cyborg existence. Cyborg writing does not assert a counter narrative to normative origins in attempt to create political unity. Rather,

Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (311)

The cyborg text does not reinscribe 'real' history. The matriarchy is an account of purity and wholeness that affirms the boundaries of women's identity and marginalizes those who cannot offer a whole story of their own. Cyborg writing counters origin stories and incites a struggle over language as a tool to subvert dominant norms of Western hegemonic identity. To write cyborg texts is to create a new method of recognizing the self.

Haraway discusses the writing of women of color as examples of cyborg writing. These texts often retell or rework narratives typically used to colonize the other and can provide a powerful tool for the creation of subjectivity from the joining, meshing, and fusion of multiple and often partial 'outsider identities' (311). She uses two of Audre Lorde's books, *Zami* and *Sister Outsider* as examples of cyborg writing that layers an account of the self within a specific political-historical context (Lorde 1982 & 1984). Both texts draw upon the cyborg as inhabiting both fiction and lived reality. Lorde's creation of the biomythography – a weaving together of myth, historical- political

context, and biography into narrative form (Lorde 1982) - provides a template for how the cyborg is able to write the self into existence without engaging with narratives that seek to reunite a lost whole (Haraway 311). Cyborg texts often navigate similar themes, especially the experience of living with a multiplicity of unintelligible identities.

The New Mestiza and Fat/Trans Borderlands

An example of a cyborg text that encompasses both narrative and historical-political context without the reference to an origin story is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. *Borderlands* is a semi-autobiographical text that explores the invisible borders of identity. In the chapter "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a new Consciousness," Anzaldúa discusses the figure of the new mestiza, a pluralistic joining of ambiguity and possibility. As an example of a cyborg figure, la mestiza emerges from the tension between competing partial identities and social locations of race, gender, sexuality, and location (amongst others), each discounted by the regulations and confines of the other. Like Haraway, Anzaldúa describes the confines of identity categories: "the borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within" (101). As demonstrated with fat/trans subjectivity, the borders of identity do not allow for the recognition of those who inhabit multiple, fluctuating, partial, and often contradictory positions. The conflict located on the fat/trans body, stems from the inability to offer an intelligible origin story. Therefore, the fat/trans subject is relegated to continuously exist in the borderlands.

The importance of borders is of great relevance to the cyborg. Haraway argues that defining the cyborg constitutes a border war, fought in the spaces between science

fiction and lived social reality. The cyborg deconstructs the boundaries between established dualisms, “taking pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and...responsibility in their construction” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 292). For Anzaldúa, the stakes of plural existence are tangible experiences. She discusses the development of mestiza consciousness as a tool to cope with the psychic restlessness that comes from being located in an ambiguous and contradictory position (101). La mestiza incorporates plural positions of race, gender, class, and sexuality (among countless others) and situates these positions within the physical location of Texas/Mexico border (3). Anzaldúa’s lived experience as a bilingual Chicana lesbian inhabiting the borderlands informs her exploration of the complexity inherent in her plural existence.

Borders of identity can manifest in both visible and invisible ways. As a cyborg figure, the fat/trans subject navigates, blurs, and transgresses the borders of defined fat and trans bodies. For example, many fat and trans individuals express a desire to feel ‘at home’ in their bodies (White 92). For trans individuals ‘home’ typically means reconciling the felt sense of gender identity with the ‘right’ gendered body. For fat individuals, feeling ‘at home’ means resisting the ingrained socialization of beauty standards, rejecting medical stories of the fat body as sick, and claiming pride and love in one’s fatness as a radical existence (White 92). However, like la mestiza, the fat/trans body has no claim to a single home. The home references a return to the whole and a joining of dissonant feelings of self. The fat/trans body has no home to claim, no original to make whole once again. Similarly, la mestiza has no claim to home. Anzaldúa recognizes the power in this position stating,

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out;
yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s

sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races) ... I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (102-103)

The fat/trans subject, like the mestiza is able to engage in politics that cross and negotiate boundaries because of its multiple and fractured existence. The lack of a singular home facilitates a politics of movement, fluidity, and adaptability.

The lives of fat/trans subjects are not monolithic. Fat/trans subjectivity may be differently constructed and shaped by different parts and experiences such as the effects of race, class, or location placed together in an endless number of combinations. Inhabiting a body defined by partiality, marginalization and contradiction, the fat/trans subject can construct an account of self that doesn't require an origin story or reference to any whole identity. Organizing across lines of difference and embracing the confusion of the contradictory self, the cyborg and la mestiza present powerful possibilities for redefining the borders of fat/trans existence as well as what it means to live without origin stories. Both approaches to consciousness offer new ways of imagining the fat/trans subject. These new approaches recognize the fat/ trans subject as lacking an origin story and as uniquely positioned bodies embracing plurality and hybridity. Both the cyborg and mestiza reference new meanings and interpretations of identity, allowing not just space for marginalized voices, but the creation of a shared new language. This language is constructed from the reworked structures of once clearly defined categories, the borders of dualisms transgressed and the origin stories of wholeness deconstructed to serve as tools of liberation from oppression.

Originless Politics and Refusing the Origin Demand

I conclude my exploration of origin stories and the ways they define and regulate categories of identity and politics by expanding my analysis of the fat/trans subject's inability to produce an origin story. Here I turn toward considering other relationships with origins. Haraway and Anzaldúa point to the possibilities opened up by those unable to offer an intelligible origin story of self, such as the example of the fat/trans subject. Moving forward, I draw upon the cyborg and mestizo to explore the possibilities of *refusing* an origin story though an intelligible account of the self could be offered. I suggest that the refusal of an intelligible origin illuminates new possibilities for political organizing, presents options for destabilizing and restructuring systems of power and identity, and creates room to imagine a different kind of fluid existence.

*We have no origin
We want no origin
We seek no origin
We refuse to answer the origin demand
- Dr. Anne Caldwell*

Asking for an origin is a kind of demand. The demand for an origin story, especially an origin of the self, is a demand for an inner truth. Responding to the demand and offering an account of one's self produces the subject within specific relationships of power (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 124-125). The demand to offer an origin of the self is a common occurrence, as one is repeatedly prompted to account for the truth of innate identity. Not unlike the use of origin stories by second wave radical feminists to define a universal category of 'woman,' current approaches to identity-based political organizing demand individuals produce an origin story that aligns with an established dominant identity narrative. The intelligible response to this demand grants the subject

recognition, while contributing to the reifying of gender norms, strengthening the borders of identity and continuing to render invisible those who do not fit.

The cyborg challenges defined lines of identity in favor of a united but not totalizing front. As a strategy for organizing, affinity relationships embrace partial and fractured identifications and unify on the basis of that partiality rather than a shared identity (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 291). This concept is not at all new as it has been a staple of the politics of marginalized women for decades (Collins, 15). Anzaldúa's map of mestiza consciousness demonstrates how marginalized women build political consciousness without offering a universal identity as a basis for a specific kind of politics (80). The politics of the cyborg as demonstrated by the mestiza and the fat/trans subject, reject the need for intelligibility and work to erode borders of identity.

The modes of political consciousness that both Haraway and Anzaldúa offer are removed from any attempt to offer an intelligible origin story of self as those who engage with politics from these positions are already unintelligible subjects. Though these approaches are imperative for organizing across current locations of unintelligibility, I push further to ask what may become possible if a subject deployed a similar kind of consciousness while having access to a clearly intelligible origin story of self. This construction of consciousness is not for the purposes of constructing a new language of meaning and knowledge as both cyborg and mestiza consciousness. Rather, it is a call to confuse the borders of identity from a location of recognized subjectivity within a system of power. An imagining of this position questions the demand of an origin and *refuses* to respond to the demand as an attempt to destabilize boundaries of identity and systems of

domination. The refusal to answer the demand though an individual could offer an intelligible origin story, allows one to engage with originless politics.

The refusal to respond or address demand is an active challenge to systems of domination. Kathi Weeks argues the importance of refusal in her argument for an ‘anti-work’ politics. To refuse to respond to a demand, she writes, is a refusal of the present conditions and structure of society (Weeks 32). Originless politics critique current systems suggesting alternative possibilities free of the regulatory boundaries created from Identity categories. Refusing to respond initiates a counter demand of sorts. Weeks positions her argument for an ‘anti-work’ politics as a utopian demand. The utopian demand, according to Weeks, is a “distinctive mode of thought and practice,” that makes possible a world where the idea the utopia promotes is accepted as both “practical and reasonable” (Weeks 176).

Refusing the origin demand does have limitations. The subject as observed by the other cannot entirely be separated from the meaning placed upon the interpretation of the body. Existing within systems of power that rely on the act of signification to produce difference creates a situation where one may never be able to fully deconstruct identity lines. This does not negate the importance of offering challenges to systems of normativity; rather, it affirms the imperative nature of actively and repetitively refusing the demand for an origin story, encouraging shifting approaches to refusal each time to confusing other’s interpretations. Engaging with originless politics still requires one to operate within the systems of power that govern and regulate society, as these systems are inescapable, but an intentionality of action must occur when engaging with systems of power that actively challenges the demand of truth. Because of the inescapability of

power and the constant interpretation by the other, originless politics are utopian. They imagine a system not yet in existence, but the ability to imagine a utopian system suggests the possibilities of the future. The utopian nature of originless politics ensures a visualized goal of current actions and brings into existence alternative configurations of society.

Taking up an originless political position by refusing to offer an intelligible origin story does not deny or discount various crossings of social location and the relationships to power present at these crossings. There is no denial of position or location as such a denial contributes to the construction of recognizable boundaries. Instead, originless politics resist providing an inner truth inherent in the use of identity categories as a means of accounting for the whole of the self. Refusing to participate in the formation of identity boundaries, those engaging in originless politics traverse these boundaries. Their exploration does not occur because they are forced into a land without option, like those who deploy plural consciousness from a position of unintelligibility. Those who engage with originless politics refuse to establish a home within the confines of normative boundaries to destabilize norms and illuminate alternative models of existence.

Embracing originless politics as a mode of refusing the origin demand is a challenge to dominant norms and structures of domination. Accepting the possibility of such an existence, even as the product of a utopian demand, opens channels for establishing material ways in which those interested in challenging dualisms could participate in an originless political position. Riki Wilchins' discussion of those who transgress the gender binary may serve originless politics well as a location to begin imagining. In *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*, Wilchins

discusses genderqueer as a modality of transcending the boundaries of gender categories. The genderqueer, as Wilchins describes, is someone who actively engages with the instability of gender and uses fluidity as the means for calling identity boundaries into question. The figure engages with the cyborg's politics of affinity creating identity as an effect of political activism rather than assuming an identity as the means of establishing a unified category prior to political action. Even when identity is formed it is temporary and fluid, always shifting in response to new alliance (86). Using the genderqueer's disruption of the boundaries of gender through fluidity, I suggest looking toward a practice of fluid existence as a place to begin imagining lived originless political action. Not only does a fluid existence, one without specific location or identity, suggest potential for originless politics, but also it offers a map for navigating the many boundaries of identity and suggests how to contest them. The fluidness of self in the face of the demand for origin stories is a refusal of innate truth. The blending of identity boundaries, similar to the approach of both the cyborg and new mestiza, questions the limitations of categorization. These questions, when continuously asked, wear down the restrictive walls of the borderlands.

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