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Fatness, Queerness, and Neurodivergent Narratives of Intersectional Identities in Media and Pop Culture

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This special issue of *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific,* 'Fatness, Queerness, and Neurodivergent Narratives of Intersectional Identities in Media and Pop Culture,' signifies a crucial but inadequately researched domain of identity and representation. The representation of marginalised identities is becoming increasingly significant as cultural spaces continue to impact on social norms and perspectives. Media and popular culture have the ability to either reinforce stereotypes or contest the status quo by emphasising varied, nuanced narratives. The comprehension of the intersections between neurodivergent, queer, and fat identities offers valuable insight into the lived experiences of numerous individuals, thereby promoting inclusivity and empathy in a society that frequently marginalises diversity. Intersectionality, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, serves as the basis for analysing the interrelated systems of oppression and privilege that affect persons possessing several marginalised identities.

Fatness, queerness, and neurodivergence intersect within social prejudice, each dimension possessing distinct stereotypes and prejudices. The convergence of these identities exacerbates the obstacles encountered by individuals, since the experiences of obese queer neurodivergent persons are not only additive but compounded in complexity. Neurodivergence includes various cognitive differences, such as autism, ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), and other atypical neurological diseases. Historically, neurodivergent characters in media have been shown as 'quirky' or as challenges to be surmounted rather than as fully developed humans. Furthermore, the absence of intersectional representations results in the underrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals of colour, queer neurodivergent persons, and fat neurodivergent individuals. Fatness, queerness, and neurodivergence are not discrete identities but rather intersect with cultural prejudices and structural obstacles. Media and popular culture have the capacity to transform these myths, providing more inclusive and genuine depictions that mirror the variety of human experience. Embracing intersectionality enables the creation of a cultural environment that honours many identities, promotes understanding, and celebrates differences. By using intentional storytelling and representation, the tales of obese, queer, and neurodivergent persons may transition from the periphery to the forefront, enhancing both media and society.

The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw,[1] provides the epistemic foundation for analysing interwoven systems of oppression. While originally applied to the interrelation of race and gender, intersectionality has expanded to include the interplay of sexuality, class, body size, and cognitive difference. Within this framework, identities such as fatness, queerness, and neurodivergence are not discrete but co-constitutive—each shaping and being shaped by the others in a dynamic process of social negotiation. Fat studies interrogate how cultural aesthetics privilege thinness as a moral and social virtue, positioning fat bodies as deviant or undesirable.[2] Queer theory, emerging from the works of Judith Butler[3] and Eve Sedgwick,[4] destabilises heteronormative binaries, arguing that identity is performative and fluid. Neurodiversity studies, inspired by scholars such as Nick Walker[5] and Melanie Yergeau,[6] reconceptualise cognitive variation as part of natural human diversity rather than pathology. Together, these frameworks reveal how media operates as a cultural apparatus that disciplines bodies and minds according to normative aesthetics. The fat body, the queer body, and the neurodivergent body are each rendered as 'other,' often as spectacles of excess or deficiency. This special issue challenges such portrayals by foregrounding how these identities intersect to produce both oppression and resistance.

Media and popular culture wield immense power in shaping public consciousness. Visual storytelling—whether in cinema, animation, or digital platforms—does not merely mirror society but actively constructs the symbolic boundaries of normalcy. For individuals inhabiting multiple marginalised identities, the lack of intersectional representation results in a 'double erasure'[7]: they are not only underrepresented but also misrepresented when visible.

This issue's contributors collectively reveal how the politics of visibility extends beyond inclusion toward redefining the terms of representation. Their works demonstrate how filmic and visual narratives can subvert normative aesthetics and reframe embodied difference as sites of power, creativity, and resilience. In 'Am I Disgusting? Exploring the Spatial Embodiment of Fatqueer and Neuroqueer Bodies in Cinema,' Parveen Kumar interrogates the politics of spatiality within cinematic narratives. Kumar's analysis reveals how fatqueer and neuroqueer bodies occupy marginal or liminal spaces—doorways, corners, peripheral frames—reflecting their social marginalisation. Yet, through close reading, the

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[1] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine.' *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989).

[2] Linda Bacon and Lucy Aphramor, 'Weight Science: Evaluating the Evidence for a Paradigm Shift,' *Nutrition Journal* 10, no. 9 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-10-9.

[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990), 45–49.

[4] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, 1993), 10.

[5] Nick Walker and Dora M. Raymaker, 'Neuroqueer: An Introduction,' *Autism in Adulthood* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw.

[6] Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Duke University Press, 2018),76.

[7] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 65.

paper demonstrates how these spaces also become zones of reclamation, where embodied otherness challenges the dominant visual order. Kumar's intervention bridges spatial theory with affect studies, positioning disgust as both a social affect and a site of resistance. Kashish and Arosree Biswal, in 'Brainless Bullies and Frantic Bodies: A Qualitative Study of Select Indian-Broadcast Animated Programs,' explore how animated television perpetuates neurotypical and body-conforming ideals. By analysing character design, movement, and dialogue, the authors argue that such media normalises cognitive and bodily conformity from an early age. Their qualitative approach situates children's animation as a pedagogical site that both mirrors and shapes cultural norms. The paper's strength lies in connecting entertainment with the formation of moral and social hierarchies, showing how humour and play conceal deep-rooted ableist ideologies.

In 'The Error in the System: Fat, Queer, and Neurodivergent Bodies Against Algorithmic Futurism,' Himani Choudhary critiques the algorithmic infrastructures of digital media. Choudhary's paper examines how algorithms, trained on normative data sets, reproduce systemic biases that render certain bodies 'errors.' This provocative work situates technology within affective capitalism, arguing that digital spaces not only exclude but also commodify difference. Through the lens of algorithmic futurism, the author contends that the 'fat, queer, and neurodivergent body' resists quantification and prediction—offering a powerful metaphor for unpredictability and creative subversion in the age of data. Pragya Sinha and Meghna Prabir, in 'Excess and Otherness: Fatness, Witchcraft, and Queer Deviance in Studio Ghibli's Spirited Away and Howl's Moving Castle,' reframe Japanese animation as a site of queer feminist resistance. Their analysis of corporeal excess and witchcraft situates fat and deviant bodies as carriers of subversive potential rather than moral corruption. Drawing on Japanese mythological archetypes, the authors argue that these characters destabilise aesthetic hierarchies and open affective spaces for empathy. Their paper is notable for its cross-cultural lens, demonstrating how global media texts can encode localised yet universally resonant forms of resistance.

In 'Neurodivergent Narratives, Fatness, and New Materialistic Agencies: Rethinking Traumatised Bodies in Double XL and Disfigured,' Rajesh Bharvad and Neha Kumari adopt a new materialist approach to explore how matter itself becomes agential in shaping embodied experience. Through filmic analysis, they argue that fat and neurodivergent bodies should be read as affective assemblages rather than static categories. The authors connect trauma theory with posthumanist thought, suggesting that representation is not only visual but also vibrational and sensory. This reorientation from the symbolic to the material opens new avenues for understanding embodiment in cinema. Shraddha Tripathi, Kriti Vashishtha, Charu Dhankar, and Ruchi Joshi, in 'Beyond the Margins: How Indie Films are Redefining Fat, Queer, and Neurodivergent Narratives,' highlight independent cinema as a space for radical experimentation. Unlike mainstream industries constrained by marketability, indie filmmakers employ narrative vulnerability and authenticity to portray complex subjectivities. The authors illustrate how low-budget aesthetics often produce more ethical representations, foregrounding stories of belonging and resistance without sanitising difference.

In 'Neuroqueering the Ableist Spaces: Rethinking Post-Normative Possibilities through Neurocosmopolitanism in the Graphic Novel, *The Thud,*' Aritra Ghosal and Shri Krishan Rai

extend the discussion into the realm of visual literature. Their work introduces the concept of neurocosmopolitanism—a vision of mutual cognitive acceptance that transcends neurotypical hegemony. The authors argue that graphic novels, through their multimodal storytelling, embody neuroqueer aesthetics that disrupt linearity and linguistic dominance. By doing so, they create inclusive cognitive spaces that honour diverse ways of sensing and thinking.

Across these contributions, three major thematic threads emerge: embodied resistance, aesthetic reclamation, and epistemic redefinition. Together, they signal a paradigm shift from viewing difference as deviation to understanding it as a vital epistemic resource. First, embodied resistance reclaims the fat, queer, and neurodivergent body as an active participant in cultural meaning-making. Media that portray such bodies not as metaphors for tragedy or comedy, but as sites of agency, disrupt entrenched hierarchies of beauty and intellect. Second, aesthetic reclamation operates through visual and narrative subversion. By occupying the 'margins' of cinematic and digital frames, these identities redraw the boundaries of what are considered desirable, intelligible, and cinematic. Third, epistemic redefinition foregrounds the idea that cognition, perception, and affect are diverse human phenomena rather than deviations from a norm. Neurodivergence, in particular, becomes a framework for rethinking creativity, temporality, and narrative itself.

The contributing scholars to this special issue collectively propose that inclusivity in media cannot be achieved by token representation alone. Instead, it demands a structural reconfiguration of how difference is visualised, valued, and narrated. Their works embody what Lennard Davis calls a 'dismodernist' approach—an epistemology that centres the body's difference as constitutive of humanity rather than exceptional to it.[8] This special issue stands not only as a collection of critical research papers but as a manifesto for intersectional media scholarship. It invites readers, creators, and educators to reconsider how narratives shape empathy and exclusion. By engaging with fat, queer, and neurodivergent embodiments, the issue envisions a media ecology that is inclusive not by assimilation but by transformation.

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