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# Different bodies: Normality and embodiments of disability and gender

**Abstract:** This article is devoted to the challenge of human diversity being perceived as difference, eventually resulting in *othering* and social oppression. We introduce Luan, a young disabled woman, and her gendered disabling experience in terms of embodiment, which we argue is a form of socially situated knowledge. Our intention is to shed light on a society-critical approach to gender and disability in order to counter recent developments in educational studies towards individualisation and away from socialisation as a central pedagogical moment. Luan's experience is presented in a phenomenological reading to gain an understanding of embodiments of normality and difference and to simultaneously question how far they emerge from external oppression and/or internalised desires of conforming to social norms. We conclude that for a critical and empowering pedagogy of gender and disability, both individual and societal factors have to be taken into consideration, and we accordingly introduce pedagogical perspectives of empowerment.

**Keywords:** embodiment, disability, gender, phenomenology, pedagogy

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'All are different'  
(Middendorf 2010, p. 221)

## Introduction

To define and construct deviance of any kind (and for the purposes of this article, consequently, in terms of gender and disability), constructions of *normality* are constitutive. Without an understanding of what is *normal*, gender and disability cannot exist as categories of social oppression. The need for some sort of normality as a guideline for human action is socially, historically and normatively constructed (Coleman Brown 2010; Hohmeier 1975) and characteristic of a certain type of society. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that people began to use *norm* and *normality* as specific terms in the English language. In contrast to antique ideas of an ideal body that individual human beings could never embody, normality became a desirable societal average. Unlike an ideal, normative concepts imply that most people should somehow conform to that norm; however, alongside the desired conformity come constructs of deviations or extremes (Davis 2010). Link (2009), on the other hand, defines normality as a discursive event by emphasising the distinction between *normality* and *normativity* (ibid., pp. 33–35), which according to him lies in normality as an operative, societal category that runs contrary to the juridical character of norms.

Applying a discursive approach to gender and disability, it becomes clear that discourse constitutes dichotomous categories of which the *One* seems preferable to the *Other*. Siebers, for example, describes this for the dualism of able/disabled: 'the ideology of ability is at its simplest the preference for ablebodiedness'<sup>1</sup> (Siebers 2010, p. 317). From a gender perspective, it was the infamous Simone de Beauvoir (originally in 1949) who referred to patriarchal discourse as 'masculine ideologies that do not in any way express feminine claims' and by identifying the construction of women as the *Other* (de Beauvoir 2011, p. 182).<sup>2</sup> Such ideologies expand to aspects such as societally desired corporal normality, which especially affects disabled women since in patriarchal culture, people judge women by their bodies to a greater extent than they do men, and the struggle

<sup>1</sup> In a similar manner, Campbell (2012, pp. 217–218) defines 'ableist normativity' as 'the view that assumes the preferability of abledness'.

<sup>2</sup> Others have made this point as well, e.g., Butler (1991), Kirby (1997), and Barad (2003).

against oppression is much harder for disabled women than for able-bodied women (Wendell 2010).

Nowadays, economic and social resources seem less dependent on gender than a few decades ago; thus, the body acts as a late reminder of gender difference and serves as a tool for self-representation (Mogge-Grotjahn 2015). Quite the opposite may be the case for the category of disability, especially in combination with gender. Women with disabilities still experience multidimensional discrimination in many areas of life, among them career opportunities and starting a family, which in turn raises questions about gender-specific societal expectations (Karačič and Waldschmidt 2017). How do such expectations and gender roles constitute themselves? Dausien and Walgenbach (2015) document a paradigm shift away from gender socialisation towards individualisation in educational studies that offers a broad range of legitimate possibilities for subjects to form their personal biography. However, they view such developments as cautious pleading for a comeback of a more society-critical approach to gender in educational studies.

Hereafter, we further introduce the underlying principles of this article and then move on to a phenomenological reading<sup>3</sup> from one of the authors' recent doctoral theses (Ganterer 2019), which describes Luan, a young disabled woman. The excerpt illustrates how the desire to be *normal* in terms of not having a *different body* is part of the dynamic constellation of embodied affect. When, where and how does Luan feel the need or wish to embody normality and to what extent does it emerge from external oppression and internalised desire to be normal and normal-being? We ask these questions concerning both gender and disability and, in the end, try to look beyond individualisation by connecting subjective experience to the constitution of societal normality.<sup>4</sup>

## Embodiments of disability and gender

Disability and gender are societal categories. The binary classification of gender, female or male, is normal to most people, whereas disability is some sort of deviance category of being a normal woman or man (Köbsell 2010). However, where does this leave the body itself? If we assume that gender and disability are social constructs, how do we view, in relation, sex and impairment? Both in feminist theory and disability studies, scholars initially distinguished between biological difference in terms of sex and impairment and the social constructs of gender and disability. More recent theories suggest that regulatory norms materialise sex (Butler 1993) and impairment (Goodley 2016; Shakespeare 2014), which means that they are constructs, too. Thus, sex and impairment are not a priori to gender

<sup>3</sup> Specific to a phenomenological reading is the recognition of the ambiguity that constitutes human phenomena. To expose and to hide, to speak out or to remain silent – those belong together and are just as relevant for the reading. A phenomenological reading aims to discover descriptions and (multiple) understandings rather than evaluation and explanation. Constellations of 'as well as' and/or 'neither/nor' become visible through such a reading.

<sup>4</sup> In the knowledge that there are many gender-identities, we use 'woman' and 'man' for *cis-gender*, introduced by Volkmar Sigusch (1992). Cis refers to people whose gender identity matches their biological sex.

and disability; they emerge and gain meaning through discourse. The social and the biological are not two separate things but exist in constant interdependency. It is at this point that a *theory of complex embodiment* (Siebers 2010) offers new insight into the social meaning of the body.

A theory of complex embodiment stresses that all knowledge is socially situated and ‘situated knowledge adheres in embodiment’ (ibid., p. 326), meaning that on the one hand, our bodies determine the perspective of our experience, while on the other hand, our bodies already consist of lifeworld experience that we use to interpret new situations. What does this mean for the double Other: female and disabled? According to Köbsell (2010), girls with disabilities learn early on that they will not become ‘real’, beautiful and desirable women and that typical female roles are ‘out of question’ (ibid., p. 21) for them. Disabled women embody knowledge about gender-specific societal expectations, but they also might embody knowledge about disability as deviance from being a normal woman or man. Campbell (2009, p. 160) refers to similar phenomenological ideas, stating: ‘People with impairments have impairment – mediated proprioceptive ways of experiencing being in the world.’ She then concludes that the development of self of disabled people might be ‘radically different from people who have an ableist orientation’ (ibid.). Campbell (2001, p. 44) defines ableism as a ‘[...] network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human.’

### **Becoming a woman from a pedagogic angle – Establishing subjectivity**

Today, most parents or professionals do not explicitly mean to raise girls to femininity and boys to masculinity; they unconsciously act upon generalised concepts of feminine and masculine (Rendtroff, 2006). In other words, they embody gendered knowledge and pass it on to children who then again embody their lifeworld experience. Liebwein (2008), for example, found in her research that parents in all kinds of social milieus, employing diverse parenting styles, raise their children gender-specifically. What precisely people define as female or male depends on, in addition to general, comprehensive tendencies, aspects such as culture and milieu (Demmer 2013). Combining stereotypical gender and disability characteristics reveals that disability itself is a gendered phenomenon in many ways. This leads to the assumption that many traits people conventionally perceive as female are also characteristic of disability, such as, amongst others, being weak, passive, dependent and childlike (Köbsell 2010, p. 23). However, in practice, many professionals or even family members still deprive girls and women with disabilities, especially those with learning difficulties, of gender and ascribe asexuality to them (Hollomotz 2008; Priestley 2003). Additionally, girls and women with disabilities frequently experience overprotection on behalf of others (Nosek et al. 2003; Retznik et al. 2017). Nosek et al. (ibid.) link overprotection, amongst other factors, to lower self-esteem and lower self-cognition (the perception of how others see them) in women with physical disabilities. Interestingly, some authors have found that self-perceptions

of women who experienced disability later in life began to change towards more 'unfeminine' and self-determined perceptions (cf. Karačić and Waldschmidt 2017).

Still, in many ways, people continue to stage gender in conventional, dichotomous manners, meaning male-being refers to hardship, strength and courage while female-being correlates with dependency and vulnerability (Mogge-Grotjahn 2015). Contesting stereotypical gender staging, queer studies provide new perspectives on gender and body, partly overlapping with disability studies. The interest in bodies as both gendered and disabled merges in the field of queer disability studies (McRuer 2004). Gallop (2015, p. 323) describes the emphases of this, noting that '[...] within queer theory, disability studies is not a special-interest application, but an advance in theorizing queer.' According to Karačić and Waldschmidt (2017), the field of queer disability studies questions binary perspectives of gender as well as heteronormativity, but scholars have yet to undertake empirical studies in this area. The intersectionality of other manifold manifestations of discrimination has been a growing field of study, and over the last few years, intersections have been of greater concern to educational studies' scholars (Budde 2013; Walgenbach 2017). Yet, Goodley (2016, p. 45) stresses that disability is often sidelined in diversity approaches, citing Davis (2006), who refers to persons with disabilities as '*the ultimate intersectional subject*' for understanding both exclusion and resistance. For the purpose of our empirical argument which follows, we will mainly focus on the intersections of gender and disability, leaving other important intersectional aspects such as social class, poverty, origin, religious and sexual orientation for another time. In the following chapter, we will first introduce Luan (cf. Ganterer 2018) and then continue to engage with the phenomenon of *normal-being* in her account as well as initially asked questions on normality and embodiments of gender and disability. We especially focus on the development of links between normality, disability and gender in the example of Luan.

## Methodology

The doctoral thesis we draw from for this article focused on body modification, the experience of embodiment and processes of inter-subjectivation of adolescents. The primary research question was this: *Which experiences and strategies of action inform adolescent body shaping with regard to their inter-subjectivation?* The methodological and conceptual framework was strongly influenced by (amongst others) Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment as well as feminist perspectives. To engage with (as yet) verbally unarticulated experience expressed through adolescent body modification, a qualitative design was chosen for the empirical study.

The thesis is based on a hermeneutical approach, following Oevermann (1979) and Flick (1995), to episodic interviews. Ganterer (2019) interviewed 14 adolescents chosen through theoretical sampling (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967) and, during the interviews, focused on stimulating verbal and non-verbal statements of self-perception and embodied experience in the interviewees. The focus of the hermeneutic analysis was language as written documentation of reality, but to engage deeper

with unspoken embodied experience, the methodology was extended by drawing from theories of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty (1966), Waldenfels (1999, 2000) and Meyer-Drawe (2000, 2001).

In this case, we draw from the phenomenological theory of subject, which refers to the experience of the corporal human body<sup>5</sup> as *being-at-world* (Merleau-Ponty 1966). Thus, it is the corporal human body that acts as medium for the experience and negotiation of disability and gender. People adopt gender and disability through embodied experience and embodied knowledge; therefore, the active shaping of the body and constructs of gendered disability/disabled gender do affect the corporal human body. The self constitutes itself through conscious *being-at-world*; in other words, everything any person knows and perceives is based on embodied experience of the world. (Merleau-Ponty 1966, p. 462).

### Luan: ‘You’ll notice, when people are staring you’<sup>6</sup>

Luan, a 19-year-old from a town of moderate size, has lived with her grandfather and *step*-grandmother (she frequently emphasises the *step*-part) ever since her parents died. Luan both works and studies; she has a physical impairment, uses a wheelchair and receives personal assistance with daily life. Luan has modified and continues to modify her body: she has three tattoos, a few ear piercings and artificial eyelashes; additionally, make-up and appropriate, stylish clothes are important to her. However, she considers herself a sleepyhead, and so she does not *have time for something in the morning* (meaning to get ready); therefore, Luan thought of permanent makeup as *quite practical*. Luan’s appearance is important to her; she only feels comfortable when her look is carefully put together. When she is not feeling so well, she does not put on makeup and dress the same way, but she would never consider attending university or work without what she feels is proper makeup and clothing. Her grandparents reinforce her looking appropriately attired and made up all times: *So, my grandpa always wants me to look good and nice [smiles]. Always a little bit of makeup and such... he always likes that. And my step-grandmother is always dressed very well.* These expectations of her family are likely to be products of gendered ideals that are also connected to Luan’s early childhood experience of her mother putting herself together carefully. *My mum was always well styled, back then. She was always in the bathroom for hours [...]. And then because she always did that, of course, I would want that too (laughs).* Whilst it can be a powerful source of resistance to ableism and sexism for disabled women to act on traditional gender roles (Haraldsdóttir 2018), Luan does not seem to resist an ableist deprivation of gender but rather to fulfil her family’s expectations and embody gendered knowledge from watching her mother as a child.

<sup>5</sup> In the German language, we would refer to this phenomenon as *Leibkörper*, which is not properly translated into English by *corporal human body*. Nevertheless, we decided to use the term *corporal human body* due to a lack of alternative translations.

<sup>6</sup> This excerpt from Luan is an empirical example from Julia Ganterer’s doctoral dissertation (published 2019 by Budrich Verlag), which introduces the creativity of body modification as a response to normativity.

Luan has had a number of experiences of people staring at her and even commenting on her when out with friends. The gazes of others awaken a feeling of shame in Luan. She experiences shame on a regular basis: *Always, actually [smiles]*. It is less in her workplace; however, when she goes out, she feels that people are looking down on her. It is only through these external reactions that Luan experiences her physical impairment as *difference* instead of *normality*. It is because of these strangers' gazes that disability becomes tangible for Luan, that it becomes embodied experience. In Butler's words, the body becomes a phenomenon of the *Other*; in Luan's own words, she notices: *That you're being gazed at. You'll notice that a lot of people are just staring*. Luan understands her body in terms of embodied ideals and social norms, but then again defines her own ideals against those norms: *I would like to be thinner. Of course, the way I am standing now, in my case, it looks ridiculous anyway. [...] If I could just walk normally, for example, even that would be ideal for me. Most certainly. Doesn't have to be something special*. Luan considers her appearance abnormal in a way, which she describes in terms of not being able to walk *normally*.

Experiencing strangers' gazes entails an emotional burden for Luan; the gazes constitute her body. In the following, Luan's own experience of gazing at herself in the mirror shows the significance of visual power dynamics.

### Luan's own gaze in the mirror

Asked about experiencing shame about her own body or appearance, Luan stated the following: *That is certainly true with the wheelchair ... because it is just not the ideal [...] I always find myself too fat [laughs]. Really, every time I look at the mirror. So, I don't really like myself.*<sup>7</sup> Luan responds to the interview question promptly and without hesitation rather than avoiding the question. Luan provides a direct, clear and precise answer, which she seems to be sure of. Through the act of laughing, her insecurity still shows. The words from her quote *I always find myself too fat* are expressive, concise and pregnant with meaning. Luan speaks of *not ideal* and *too fat*, comparing her own body to others. It establishes a relation between social desirability, collective normativity and her personal perception and potential desire to fit in or be normal. Interestingly, the phenomenon of difference only appears, and thus objectifies her body, when Luan looks in the mirror and has access to the embodied gazes of others. Before or after, Luan does not perceive herself as abnormal or too fat. When Luan is not looking in the mirror, not seeing her reflection, she experiences what is, to her, a normal corporal state of being. The mirror acts to represent the gazes of others, reflecting embodied knowledge for Luan. She sees herself through the eyes of others and problematises certain body parts that are otherwise normal and unproblematic to Luan.

The mirror functions not only to expand her perspective but additionally widens and opens up her physical perception to an alternative horizon of meaning.

<sup>7</sup> This interview quote is a translation from Austrian-German and has been slightly adapted in language to retain its meaning.

Meanwhile, her eyes lose focus and she becomes estranged from her usual state of normal-being. Through the mirror, she sees and perceives herself as abnormal, different and too fat. It is interesting that Luan uses the phrase *I find myself too fat* instead of *feeling* fat and laughs afterwards. This shows how Luan does not only express internal emotions or feelings arising from her own concerns; rather, she also internalises the external: the judgement or opinions of her society. As mentioned before, educational studies have taken a turn towards individualisation (cf. Dausien and Walgenbach 2015) to explain gender in terms of personal biographies rather than socialisation. In a society-critical manner, however, Luan's narrative is a great example of socialising gender and disability through embodied knowledge. Through the embodied experience of strangers staring at her in reaction to a perceived difference, Luan herself enters a stage of differentness and therefore transfers the disabling experience she had on behalf of other persons in front of the mirror. This aesthetic scheme of (re)experience contains a language elusive to physically objective cognition; yet, it shows a phenomenon appearing in a deep and complex form of expression.

Butler understands identity as a discursive product emerging from existing systems of knowledge and power. Those systems limit potential *alternative* identities and gendered bodies; the body is always an embodiment of historically conditioned and restricted possibilities (Butler 2002, p. 40). Subject and action therefore stand and emerge side by side as well as within one another. Subjects are bound to power and the powerful, and this bond both opens and closes individuals' perception and empowered action. Butler (2001) uses the term *subjectivation* to explain the power of subjectivation and materialisation in actions produced by relations of power.

Luan's reflection in the mirror visualises *abnormality*, making *difference* the conflicted subject of the situation. Simultaneously, *normality* becomes the desired object and thus a socially and discursively constructed matter. In a process of *subjectivation*,<sup>8</sup> on the one hand, Luan herself is a subject that is a discursive product; on the other hand, she potentially gains empowerment through self-reflectivity. From the perspective of Butler, the body provides discourse with power, but the body can never completely conform to the norm. However, the norm must be constantly repeated and created in performance or collectively mirrored in order to retain its discursive power (cf. Butler 1993, p. 3f). Although Butler refers to doing gender rather than embodying disability, it is central for the constitution of both phenomena that each 'not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power; the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls (Butler 1993, p. 2). Like an assumed biological sex, the whole body is a regulating (and regulated) ideal and takes part in constructing (visual) normality. Constant performance of the enforced norm materialises the body in a socially coercive way (cf. Butler 1993, p. 3f). The body is therefore not only something that someone *has* or what someone *is*; rather, it forms the wholeness of a subject within her or his social environment. Luan's embodied knowledge of being *not ideal*, and *too fat* evolves into inner ambivalence.

<sup>8</sup> Initially, it was mainly Foucault who used the term *subjectification* in his work, followed by, amongst others, Butler (2001).



## Constructions of disability and normality

Images and reflections are not the same thing. Reflections ‘act as strange doubles who are tied to a shadow of a role model of which there is no archetype. Reflections have their own reality’ (Meyer-Drawe 2011, p. 160). What a person sees in and through the mirror, the actual reflection, always coincides with the present, never the past or future (unlike images, which can serve as reminder or desire). Their own reflection teaches people that they will never see themselves in the same way they perceive others. Therein lies both ambivalence and contradiction, which provide the opportunity to be not only the *One* but also ‘*neither-nor*’ and ‘*as-well*’ (Meyer-Drawe 2000, p. 11). Through a process of subjectification, Luan can potentially gain power and experience empowerment to be neither ideal nor abnormal, a woman as well as disabled. Previous embodied experience can be re-experienced through corporal images because images are tied to the body as a place, a carrier and a producer. Luan’s experience exemplarily shows the impact of embodied knowledge on young adolescents. Her gaze into the mirror shapes images of perceived and embodied gazes of others. Through the mirror, the experienced gazes constantly project onto her lived body; embodiments of disability, gender and normality let Luan recognise something different that she otherwise might have seen as normal. In this situation, Luan experiences non-conformity to current societal corporal and body norms as well as normalised ideals of beauty; yet, she does not perceive herself as abnormal when not looking in the mirror. Instead of providing a clearer picture, the mirror creates uncertainty and confusion. Luan is unsure and insecure about herself; she does not identify with the embodied knowledge her reflection recalls, which results in an ambivalent relationship between her sense of self and external reactions.

This phenomenological engagement with gender, disability and normality draws attention to pre-reflexive positions that mainly function uncritically. It may be striking that impairment (or an assistive device like a wheelchair) is mainly perceived in terms of difference rather than a diversity continuum; nevertheless, constructions of normality create constructions of dis/ability potentially resulting in pejorative treatment like staring. Goffman (1963) tried to explain this by means of *stigma*, arguing that a discreditable attribute automatically calls for negative reaction amongst *Normals*, which his work has increasingly been criticised for (cf. Waldschmidt 2007, 2008). Stigma theory is outdated in many ways and disability has, contrary to stigma, also served as a source of empowerment and pride (Taylor S. J. 2008; Watson 2002), but still, ‘stigma is a response to the dilemma of difference’ (Coleman-Brown 2010, p. 179). Embodied experience of stigmatisation might just have led to Luan seeing a *different* version of herself in the mirror.

## A pedagogy of gender and disability?

In Lena Middendorff’s (2010) social work projects, disabled girls describe the sameness and difference of girls with and without impairment in terms of differ-

ence being a part of sameness.<sup>9</sup> She appeals for acknowledgement of the expertise of disabled girls concerning experience of gendered disabling (*ibid.*), therefore taking into account embodied knowledge (socially situated knowledge) as defined in Sieber's (2010) theory of complex embodiment. The body is central to every person being in the world yet is often overlooked or at least underrepresented in society-critical approaches to gender and disability. It is a well-known fact that disabled women and girls, in particular, are at greater risk for intersectional disadvantage, discrimination and violence all around the globe (WHO 2011), and in more and more countries, actions have been taken to support disabled girls' and women's empowerment, education, safety and resistance. For example, in Iceland, Freyja Haraldsdóttir (2018) and colleagues have established a feminist disability movement to provide 'safe spaces' for empowerment on both a personal and a political level. Their movement is based on peer support, meaning that the movement is run by disabled women for disabled women and has been an important platform for an increasing number of disabled women in Iceland to share their stories, demand social change and take action. Here, individual and societal aspects are linked by 'speaking out' and seeking 'the political in the personal' (*ibid.*, p. 79).

Middendorf's (2010) projects, too, focus on empowerment as well as public work, raising awareness and increasing (political) participation of disabled girls. Amongst other issues, body images are a main topic of the projects, which involve creating spaces for disabled girls (and, in some of the projects, also for non-disabled peers) to discuss sexuality, puberty and their bodies in general. In relation to the empowerment projects, she concludes that in order to equalise disadvantage, we have to put a name on it, always also including a comparison to the norm: 'But it has to be about uncovering all forms of disabled-being and being-disabled' (*ibid.*, p. 221). The goal is, according to her, to explore commonalities where differences have already been assumed. Mogge-Grotjahn (2015) sees the body as potential resource for social work; she claims critical reflectiveness of body and gender, 'queer practices' and awareness of social work professionals.

As a conclusion from Luan's experience, we argue that for a critical and empowering pedagogy of gender and disability, both individual and societal factors have to be taken into consideration. Luan sees her body through the eyes of others, evaluates herself and forms her physicality from it. She experiences discomfort and shame resulting in embodied disabling experience. Luan's narrative exemplarily shows how young adolescents in particular perceive themselves as different when deviating from contemporary social beauty criteria and body normativity. Luan has, through the constituting gaze of others, learned that her appearance is perceived as different whilst, at the same time, she maintains certain body modifications that require a lot of attention, effort and power in order to conform to gendered norms. In the end, Luan tries to fulfil certain societal expectations of her body in terms of gender (such as her artificial eyelashes), but she too has embodied ableist gazes at her body using a wheelchair.

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<sup>9</sup> In the German language article the exact quote was: „Gleich ist, dass alle anders sind“.

## Conclusion

In post-phenomenological reading, we have to reflect upon our own perspectives as an indispensable starting point of our analysis. To understand the constitution of gendered disabling experience, however, it is more useful to begin by reading anthropological and sociological investigations, for example, medical reports on intersex children or psychological studies of children's perceptions of gender, rather than to analyse one's own, normatively limited, experience (Oksala 2006, p. 238). Although Luan's account, of course, does not remain untouched by the normative limitations of the interview situation, we have approached her narrative in a similar way but from a pedagogical angle. The pedagogics of gender and disability are tightly tied to socialisation and so, therefore, is education, in its broadest sense. The constitution of disabled people, especially disabled women, as the different *Other* emerges from separation and exclusion from *normal* society. Social exclusion, although an important and ever-current issue, is not limited to the educational system but rather relates to every aspect and area of daily life. Historically (and in large parts of the world even today<sup>10</sup>), children, women and men with impairment have been hidden away or, more recently, been *object* to materialisation through, for example, charity advertising (cf. Taylor, M. 2008).

People are socialised to conform to certain societal norms, to a contemporary normality, and as we can see with Luan, disabled people are no exception in longing to be part of the mainstream. Socialisation provides each and every one of us with embodied knowledge; however, irritation can be caused by an encounter in which a (possibly non-disabled) person lacks experience of understanding impairment in terms of a diversity range and therefore tries to fall back on *normality* as scheme of interpretation. When a situation counters embodied knowledge, people start to doubt, or as Meyer-Drawe (1999, p. 35) puts it: 'Because we are used to a sense of self as creature of reason, we act helpless when our patterns of rationality hit into the blank'.

From a pedagogical-phenomenological perspective, disability can be seen as an extended and alternative answer to a person's being in the world. To whatever perceivable *difference*, may it be in terms of gender, disability, origin, religion, sexual orientation or other, human *diversity* and equality could be a more appropriate answer than discrimination and stigmatisation. Returning to the initially cited quote, 'All are different', we conclude that still today, pedagogy lacks sensibility for raising, educating and supporting diverse children and adolescents on equal terms. Additionally, we see an urgent need for more awareness regarding the body as a medium of subjectivation, always interacting with its immediate environment. Luan has illustrated the formation of internal and external perceptions through her embodied experience of gender and disability. We therefore appeal for a diverse and alternative being together in the world, reflecting normative thinking and uncritical labelling of human beings.

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<sup>10</sup> For an impressive collection of perspectives from the Global South, see Grech and Soldatic (2016).

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## DRUGAČNA TELESNA: NORMALNOST IN UTELEŠENJA NEZMOŽNOSTI IN SPOLA

**Povzetek:** Članek je namenjen obravnavi izzivov, ki izvirajo iz dejstva, da smo si ljudje različni, a je ta različnost pogosto razumljena kot drugačnost, kar nazadnje vodi v *drugačenje* in družbeno zatiranje. Predstavljamo Luan, mlado žensko, ki se sooča s telesno nezmožnostjo, in njeno izkušnjo, za katero trdimo, da je ena od oblik družbeno pogojenega znanja. Naš namen je osvetliti socialno-kritični pristop k spolu in nezmožnosti (angl. gender and disability) in se zoperstaviti sodobnim težnjam na področju pedagogike, ki vse bolj vodijo k individualizaciji in se distancirajo od socializacije kot osrednjega pedagoškega momenta. Luanino izkušnjo predstavljamo skozi fenomenološki kategorialni aparat, ki omogoča razumevanje utelešanj normalnosti in drugačnosti, in si zastavljamo vprašanje, koliko so ti procesi oddaljeni od zunanjega zatiranja in/ali ponotranjene želje po podrejanju družbenim normam. V sklepu poudarimo, da je za kritično ter k opolnomočenju zavezano pedagogiko spola in nezmožnosti treba upoštevati tako individualne kot družbene dejavnike, zato ustrezno temu tudi predstavljamo nekatere pedagoške vidike opolnomočenja.

**Ključne besede:** utelešenje, nezmožnost, spol, fenomenologija, pedagogika

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