Sexuality, disability and aging: queer temporalities of the phallus

Bev Pollitt

To cite this article: Bev Pollitt (2019): Sexuality, disability and aging: queer temporalities of the phallus, Disability & Society, DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2019.1623537

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1623537

Published online: 11 Jun 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 79

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Sexuality, Disability and Aging: Queer Temporalities of the Phallus is an educative text which contemplates how disability and aging work together to undermine one’s sense of self. In the first of three sections, Gallop draws on an assortment of sources which she methodically explores to inform her prose. This examination facilitates her construction of a neoteric theoretical framework, which she postulates to enrich the sphere of disability and sexuality, believing the ideology will aid the rumination of a largely unexplored and unacknowledged intersection. As such, Gallop’s offering should be regarded as instrumental in the development of this uncharted field.

The introductory chapter of Sexuality, Disability and Aging witnesses Gallop embarking on a comprehensive exploration of existing literature pertinent to the amalgamated themes. Gallop draws on renowned offerings including Robert McRuer’s crip theory and Rosemary Garland-Thomson’s Extraordinary Bodies to assist her in ‘challenging the ideas that predominate the sexual realm’ (3). Gallop progresses and firmly grounds her theoretical framework by educing on Gullette’s ideologies surrounding decline theory which become central to this text. The reader is taken on an enlightening journey within this literature review, peaking when a space is identified within the existing sources which unequivocally illustrates that at the intersection of this triad lies a multitude of recurrently overlooked and dismissed experiences. Gullette’s theoretical offerings are the final contributions which influence Gallop in constructing an abstract space whereby this trio are firmly united, an action which validates her theoretical framework to ‘celebrate the perverse sexuality of the no longer young, no longer so able’ (13).

Gallop advances by considering psychoanalytical theories and their relationship to the phallus. It is during this reflection that the philosophy pertaining to her own theory deepens as she educes on further scholarly work to assist her confrontation of the pre-existing androcentric notions surrounding the phallus and its allied semantic complexity. She successfully realigns the phallus as being gender neutral whilst illustrating how aging and disability are threatening towards sexuality and gender, a process which she defines as castration anxiety. These movements underpin and provide substantial support for Gallop’s theory.

The conclusion of this introductory section witnesses Gallop elucidating anecdotal theory, an advantageous methodology which relies on original narratives to ‘reveal concrete conditions that produce knowledge’ (26), and the milieu is now set for the remaining text. At this juncture, Gallop has solidified her postulated theory and, by having strongly positioned her theoretical framework, readers are able to navigate their way through the remaining chapters with ease. The timely integration of authentic narratives within the ensuing chapters sensitively alters the tone of the book and allows the reader to connect with candid experiences relating to this intricately intertwined triad.

Chapter one, ‘High Heels and Wheelchairs’, commences with Gallop’s anecdotal account of her experiences travelling to New York and how these transformed with age and the late onset of disability. The story climaxes with a powerful and surprising ending, forcefully alerting the reader to the notion of sexuality and disability. This
finale prompts readers to consider how, despite being in a wheelchair, Gallop has recouped her phallus; and the astute inclusion of this tale permits the countering of cultural constructions which denote the wheelchair as a site of castration. Furthermore, the anecdote includes a manifold of facets which can be psychoanalytically probed to realign them as being phallic in their offering. It is this prospect which sees the remainder of this chapter eloquently explore several features of the guileless prose. Gallop contends that her ideology relating to the notion of temporal castration and how sexual desires can be regained through the process of disability and aging is encapsulated within this narrative, an assertion she efficaciously verifies.

‘Post-Prostrate Sex’, the final instalment within this text, follows in the same vain as the preceding chapter. In this second uninhibited anecdote, Gallop explores the evolving dynamics within the sexual relationship with her long-term lover post prostate surgery, which allows the reader to consider an alternative viewpoint at the juncture of the nominated triad. She details how the late onset of her partner’s disability egotistically affects her and how she interprets his limited performance as a reflection of her desirability, including how she must attune herself to his nuanced arousals. This narrative successfully portrays the fall from phallic to castrated whilst also positively demonstrating how this is temporal and the phallus can be recaptured. Noticeably, this chapter follows the same format as the previous one, with Gallop extricating aspects of the narrative to aid the application of her framework. The narrative contained within this chapter not only encompasses the viewpoint of both Gallop and her lover, but serves to deeply enrich her hypothesised ideology whilst challenging the reader to reconsider the triad from alternative standpoints.

The central thesis of this unprecedented book successfully accentuates the intersection between sexuality, disability and aging, denoting it worthy of supplementary scholarly research in order to augment understanding within this historically underdeveloped intersection. *Sexuality, Disability and Aging* is a vital read for those interested in disability and sexuality as it contributes to indispensable discussions whilst simultaneously offering an alternative framework with which to aid progression within the field. Gallop composes this book in a logical fashion; not only does she make it accessible to all, but she adroitly constructs her tenets and engages the reader from the outset. She begins by drawing on literature, which she then perceptively coalesces with existing renowned psychoanalytical theory to posit her own neoteric theoretical framework. After patently laying out her ideology, she triumphantly demonstrates its application via skilfully composed anecdotes. Gallop meticulously extracts facets of her narratives and indubitably links them to the tenets of her ideology, fruitfully demonstrating how her postulated framework is pertinent to practice. Gallop has compiled an accomplished text which is forward-thinking, unorthodox and paves the way for further discourse within the realms of disability, and for this, she must be commended.

Bev Pollitt

*Department of Disability and Education, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK*

14010314@hope.ac.uk

© 2019 Bev Pollitt

https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1623537

Check for updates