

In America, and most individualistic societies, some of the worst things you could be are fragile, vulnerable, and broken, as all three imply a reliance on others. While each status carries a different implication, the underlying concept is the same: weakness. However, feminist theory, especially Queercrip feminist theory, allows us to see fragility, not as something to overcome, but a responsiveness to the world or as Sara Ahmed calls it, “a record of life” (Mehra 2017). This record of life comes from living in inherently oppressive societies, be it racism, sexism, ableism, or homophobia; we must accept that we are fragile and acknowledge that our fragility builds theory. Our personal record of life is the physical and emotional scripture written in and on our bodies as we traverse through life. What gets written upon us changes depending on how society sees us. Whether we are seen as broken, as vulnerable, as fragile, as alien, or as other, our bodies hold these inscriptions and influence all future interactions with the world, including with our theory. While being fragile may cause us to be broken more often, that brokenness leaves room for vulnerability and change. Both Sara Ahmed and bell hooks write about these concepts, particularly in regard to how our physical bodies function as a location for theory.

We cannot grow in our ideals or opinions without first deconstructing our old ones. What is key to the destruction of old ideals, is the construction of new ones, or what Ahmed would refer to as “a form of self-assembly” (2017, 27). For instance, my journey to becoming a leftist and an anti-racist was rooted in my experience of being trans and having my trans body perceived by society. Allowing myself to be fragile in how my body interacted with the world taught me vulnerability and granted me room to admit that I was wrong or ignorant. I had to build myself into a feminist, into an anti-racist, into a leftist, these ideologies did not come pre-assembled when I was born but rather had to come from the vulnerability of being the only trans person in the room, the fragility of having an outcast’s body, and being broken down by the repetition of it all. That is not to say that oppression is crucial in creating a

deeper, more sensational, relationship to theory, but being able to engage with yourself in a level of trust and care offers you that room for growth.

It is essential that you trust yourself, or in your feminist gut (Ahmed 2017), because it helps us distinguish when opposing ideologies are a threat, rather than room for growth. In my early life, I was entirely unaware that I was disabled. The signs of autism were missed and chronic pain in a 16-year-old was deemed as odd, but not a “real” problem. It was not until learning about the characteristics of autism and ways that chronic pain is a legitimate disability that I was able to seek further documentation, and at first, I had to overcome a lot of internalized ableism. The things that were being suggested to me by disabled content creators, like making sure you take time for rest, and not pressuring yourself to meet certain adult milestones like driving, were things that I considered to be products of “laziness”. But, in trusting my gut, I knew these opposing ideals were not ones that were inherently negative or harmful. Instead, they provided me with the tools to start deconstructing my ableism.

Within that deconstruction and growing trust in my gut, I began to recognize when I was sensing injustice. As an autistic person, introspection can be incredibly difficult, especially the first time I experience something. I do not have a reference for feeling something and immediately knowing why I felt that or what caused it, but due to that, I have learned to deconstruct the situation to figure out what and why I was feeling a certain way. These experiences compile and become a form of pattern recognition or my form of corporeal memory (Ahmed 2017). I am looking at and experiencing corporeal memory differently from Ahmed’s theory, as for me, my heart skipping a beat does not necessarily inform me of injustices, for all I know at the time there could have just been a loud noise. In this way, I am experiencing corporeal memory from the margins.

We cannot just accept that the body is a key factor in understanding theory, without also considering the implications of bodies that exist in the margins. Therefore, I find it particularly important to consider both Ahmed and hooks (as well as Queercrip theory) when developing our relationship with theory. hooks' theory of existing in the margins provides us with an understanding of how feminist theory exists: where new ideas can be learned, where we can oppose dominant ideology, and where we gather new tools. The margins are a necessity of theory, but as hooks points out, that does not mean they are a "safe place" (1989, 19). Here, we must accept not only our fragility but also our egos. We must accept that while we may be at the margins, that does not prevent us from being ignorant about something or that we are done growing. Here, it is crucial that we accept that we may be wrong, and with that, it is important to accept that we may be wronged. Part of locating yourself at the margins is acknowledging room for growth, which means your neighbors also have some growing to do. While "extreme estrangement and alienation" (hooks 1989, 19) often lead us to the margins, the margins are not free from these sensations.

When we locate ourselves in the margins, especially voluntarily, we like to believe that we are exempt from rash, emotional reactions when someone exposes a problem. But, even within the margins, you still "pose a problem" (Ahmed 2017, 37) when you expose one. I believe this can especially be the case within the margins because we all hold these theories so close to ourselves. We hold them within ourselves, and when we are presented with something we have not considered, it often feels as if we are inadequate, not just our theories. I see this especially present with disability justice in the margins. Disabled bodies are welcomed in the margins until ableism is exposed. From topics like masking to protect the most vulnerable among us to acknowledging the crowded loud nature of gatherings as inherently inaccessible, within the margins these problems are felt within all our bodies.

Because we do care, otherwise we would not locate ourselves in the margins, but when we acknowledge the problems that have been exposed, our routine gets disrupted.

This is why we cannot simply locate ourselves on the margins, but also do so with fragility. We must be able to cast aside our egos, and be willing to acknowledge the pain in our bodies from falling short of our own, extremely high, expectations. We must use our fragility, vulnerability, and most importantly our ability to break and be broken as tools to engage with theory on a more personal, embodied level.

Works Cited

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