

Biopolitics and the repressive hypothesis of the body: the case of swimming training in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Iris Marion Young, a feminist theoretician, argued that patriarchal society inhibits women to cultivate capable bodies. In contrast, Foucauldian arguments have stressed that to view a certain historical situation as a consequence of repression, overlooks how the idea of repression is already a product of power. This article explores this nexus between Foucault and Young, and investigates how bio/thanatopolitical projects saturate the notion of the repressed body. The article investigates how the inability to swim has been connected with inhibition in Finland in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. It argues that the repressive hypothesis of the body generates the identification with able-bodiedness in the ways in which eventually favour athletic or otherwise capable bodies. Moreover, the assumption that incapability is an inhibited way of being makes able-bodiedness appear to be primary and original. Thus, the exploration of the repressive hypothesis helps us to understand the intricate mechanisms of ableism.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 March 2014

Accepted 15 February 2015

KEYWORDS

The repressive hypothesis; ableism; biopolitics; thanatopolitics; Iris Marion Young

During the last decade, much research on disability and sports has been published. Writers focusing on disability and sports often distance themselves from simply rehabilitative points of view and ahistorical notions of the normal body.¹ Indeed, disabled bodies emerge also as athletes and increasingly in a positive light. Moreover, as women's emancipation has often been linked with opportunities to cultivate stronger and more capable bodies and feminists have sometimes used 'disability' as a metaphor for inequality (e.g. May and Ferri 2005), the relation between emancipation and able-bodiedness seems to be most intriguing. In this sense, this article puts forward a reading of Iris Marion Young's seminal text 'Throwing Like a Girl' and argues that there is a repressive hypothesis embedded in cultural understandings of bodies and that yet unquestioned hypothesis has consequences for disability rights and for larger viewpoints concerning bodies. I suggest that Foucault's ([1976] 1990) formulation of the repressive hypothesis of sexuality, the notion that interrogates the popular vision that the original sexuality is possible to find when the obstacles are removed, is an insight that helps us to understand the intricate mechanisms of ableism. Thus, drawing on the idea of the repressive hypothesis of sexuality this article explores the workings of the repressive hypothesis of the body.

Young (1980, 2005) claims in her essay 'Throwing like a girl: a phenomenology of feminine body comportment motility and spatiality' that women's performance of different physical tasks indicates their level of freedom. Moreover, Young (1980, 152) claims that 'women in sexist society are physically handicapped'. She clarifies this notion by claiming that the way patriarchal society oppresses women

makes women 'physically inhibited' (Young 1980). Young stresses that being a female person does not necessarily mean a lack of capacities. The situation of many women not having the same physical capacities as many men might simply mean, according to Young, that women have not had enough practice. Young says that women often underestimate their strengths. Her vision is that in a society which is not sexist, women would be able to move in a different way. 'If we should finally release ourselves from this spiral and really give a physical task our best effort, we are greatly surprised indeed at what our bodies can accomplish' (Young 1980, 144). Furthermore, Young (1980) claims that when a woman does not succeed in sports, this should not be interpreted as a failure of the individual woman, but as a consequence of cultural and social circumstances which have denied women the enjoyment of the same practices as men. This argument aims to emphasize social circumstances over individual women. However, through adopting the idea of the repressive hypothesis (Foucault [1976] 1990) I will show how Young's argument rests on ableist assumptions.

In what follows, I will first turn to Young's idea of inhibited female bodies and explore the argumentation of Young through Foucault's ([1976] 1990) formulation of the repressive hypothesis. Thenceforth, I will focus on a specific case which illuminates the way inhibition and incapability appear to twist together. The case is the biopolitical project focusing on swimming training in Finland in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. I explore the ways the biopolitical project of swimming training educates identification. By identification I simply mean the process that regulates who one is. Nearly 20 years ago, Wendell (1996, 91) claimed: 'Most people learn to identify with their own strengths (by cultural standards) and to hate, fear, and neglect their own weaknesses'. In this article, I investigate the biopolitical aspects of the identification with capability. I am interested in the specific biopolitical aims that regulate the way 'most people' (read: people who identify themselves with able-bodiedness) learn to recognize themselves as capable people, and thus learn 'to hate, fear, and neglect their own weaknesses'. This process takes place inside an ostensible coherent self but it is connected to larger biopolitical regimes. McRuer (2006) uses the concept of compulsory able-bodiedness to illustrate how ableist beliefs assume a standard person who coherently is able to maintain all ability norms. Drawing on the ideas of Wendell (1996) and McRuer (2006) this article investigates the identification with capability from the point of view of biopolitics. I will turn to the biopolitical project of swimming training in order to explore how assumptions around the inhibited incapable body are not separate from specific politics.

This article is based on research conducted in two archives (The National Library of Finland, The Archive of Parliament in Finland) and through using Internet searches. I have been tracking from various cultural texts how the idea of swimming skills as civic skills emerges in Finland through the twentieth and early twenty-first century. I have explored what kind of forms this idea gets both in the administrative texts and in popular culture. I read these texts drawing on cultural studies (Haraway 1989, 1997; Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992; Castañeda 2002). Thus, I explore the cultural understandings of the ability to swim through reading various cultural texts in a strategic way in order to change the dominant notions of the culture or 'ways of life' (Williams 1977, 17) of non-disabled people (cf. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992). I understand the representations of popular culture to be influential in shaping cultural understandings (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992). Furthermore, I am treating various cultural texts as equals since I am exploring how the cultural understandings of the ability to swim circulate in various genres. Particularly I have been tracing from the cultural texts concerning the ability to swim ideas focusing on nature, a geographical landscape, and the personality of the cultural figure of the non-swimmer.

In particular, this article explores how the biopolitical project of swimming training appeared in three Finnish television (TV) programmes. The first programme 'Swimming school for adults' (*Aikuisten uimakoulu*, dir. Heikki Roivas, Finland 1975) aims to educate people on the importance of the ability to swim. The second TV programme, which aired in 1984, is part of the very popular Finnish comedy sketch show *Velipuoliku*. This short sketch presents swimming training in a parodic manner. The third programme is called 'I'm afraid of swimming' (*Pelkään uida*, dir. Rita Trötschkes and Mats Hastrup, Finland 2004). This documentary could be placed in a genre that presents

apparently ordinary people with their personal stories. 'I'm afraid of swimming' exemplifies the confessional and individualizing features (e.g. White 1992; Furedi 2003) of the current media culture. I will explore what ideas concerning bodily capacities are circulated in these representations. Furthermore, I will connect the ideas circulated in these TV representations with Young's (1980) claim of female bodies being inhibited under patriarchy and ask how the assumption of inhibition appears to intertwine certain bodies.

Theorizing the inhibited body

Foucault's ([1976] 1990) criticism of the repressive hypothesis is well-known. According to Foucault ([1976] 1990), the repressive hypothesis of sexuality means that there is an assumption that there had been obstacles which inhibit forbidden sexualities, but little by little some obstacles have been removed. What is important in Foucault's notion is that while one may assume that the removing of obstacles makes sexuality that is not a part of power relations possible, the demand to remove the obstacles actually intertwines sexuality even more forcefully into some power relations. Though Foucault's critique concerns politics around sexuality, I would suggest that the repressive hypothesis perhaps operates even more intensively around disability and body politics. Sedgwick (2003, 12) pointed out that the repressive hypothesis assumes a distinction 'between repression and liberation' which presumes that if there is no repression, there are no power relations. Young's (1980, 152) exploration of female comportment shares this assumption since she assumes that if women were not 'physically inhibited' by patriarchal society, women would be able to cultivate more satisfying and freer bodily forms. However, if we closely examine Young's visions, we find that the bodily forms Young wants to cultivate are only more stronger and more capable bodily forms.

Young's idea of releasing physical potentials indicates that the capacities that are liberated are the original capacities of the body. According to this line of reasoning, a body which appears to imply inhibition or shyness can never be the original. In her later commentary of 'Throwing like a girl' Young ([1998] 2007) admits that she compared women's movements with fictional universal standards and assumed that men would be self-evident advocates of these standards.² Though Young (2005, [1998] 2007) explored, in her later writings, how different kinds of bodily experiences of women are often underestimated, she however did not scrutinize the assumption that connects capable movement and freedom with each other. Of course 'freedom' is a problematic word. Something about its vague normativity shows that when Young ([1998] 2007, 286) describes how she assumes that her daughter's generation is freer than her generation was, she explains that they 'carry themselves with [...] more active confidence'. According to Young ([1998] 2007, 286), she herself 'was inhibited' because she could not fulfil herself as an athlete. There yet seems to be an assumption of the body whose capability manifests its freedom and of the body that strives for capability in order to be what it really is. As Butler ([1990] 1999, 83) remarkably showed, Foucault noticed that the repressive hypothesis intertwines with the original and the repressed each other, and in this way the repressive hypothesis functions 'as a teleological instrument'. The repressive hypothesis suggests that the original body is possible to find when the obstacles are removed. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault ([1976] 1990, 157) puts forward his notion that 'we must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power'. This means that acts which manifest freedom in a certain moment are themselves saturated with history. In regard to Young's (1980) vision of more robust women, the hope of emancipation seems to rest on the assumption that the incapable body is an obstacle to liberating women. Drawing on Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, it is possible to dispute the idea that the development of physical skills is simply liberating. Rather, it is necessary to ask how the hope of emancipation has taken the form of ability.

Young (1980, 153) frames her argument in 'Throwing Like a Girl' with a story of how she tried to be more feminine. She explains how she practiced a feminine way of walking in her youth. When she connects this story with the assumption that women learn 'actively to hamper' their movements, in her article Young appears to be a woman who has been repressed but is now liberated

(Young 1980). This kind of story may actually make other women, who cannot capably perform physical tasks, feel shame about their inabilities.

Young claims that the consequence of sexism is that many women distance themselves from their bodies (1980, 154). When someone finds oneself incapable of doing something, and this is interpreted as being distanced from one's body, the body which one takes distance from is a body which is understood to possess the capacities to do many things. In other words, distancing oneself from the able body is understood as distancing oneself from oneself. Ableism, according to Campbell (2009), could precisely be understood as an assumption that the able body is the one and only object to which everyone is supposed to approach. Before Campbell formulated her point of view on ableism, Wendell (1989) expressed many similar ideas on able-bodiedness. She did not use the term ableism but analysed how non-disabled people distance themselves in various ways from disability. Wendell pointed out already in 1989 that able-bodied identification is learned in a culture which disgraces weak bodies (1989, 113). Indeed, I would like to ask, how an able-bodied identification appears to be self-evident and furthermore how the repressive hypothesis enables this identification in particular ways in a particular geographical location.

In the following sections, I examine how the identification with capability emerges as an original aptitude that needs to be discovered through a proper training. My reading draws on the concept of thanatopolitics. By thanatopolitics I mean politics that focuses on life, as biopolitics does, but attempts to eliminate some forms of life (Agamben 1998). Agamben (1998) states that there is an unstable line which separates biopolitics from thanatopolitics. That is to say, biopolitics, which can be defined as a tendency to focus on life and to preserve life in different ways, is sometimes intertwined with techniques which eliminate some forms of life. How biopolitics had already become thanatopolitics was most explicitly evident in concentration camps and in the strategies of the National Socialist ideology, which claimed to preserve life (Agamben 1998). Through reading the cultural texts concerning the ability to swim my idea is to explore how thanatopolitical logic saturates the learning of physical skills. I explore how bodies' potentials are understood through thanatopolitical logic. For physical skills thanatopolitical logic is difficult to resist since it promises to improve the well-being of every individual. It is not so that some people are fundamentally shut out of the opportunity to develop their capacities. Even though both Agamben's (1998) and Rose's (2001) thanatopolitics covers anyone's body in the sense that Agamben shows how the distinction between the body that should be preserved and the body which should be killed is fundamentally a political one, and how Rose examines the way characteristics which were once assumed to be unalterable, are now managed and adapted in order to preserve a more valuable life. However, they do not consider the way thanatopolitical governing of bodies involves mechanisms which attempt to train body identifications. What I am suggesting is that the Foucauldian critique of the repressive hypothesis and the notion that thanatopolitical logic regulates body identifications make possible the theorization of cultural assumptions around the inhibited incapable body.

The disappearing non-swimmer

A writer who used the name A. J-nen published an article in the *Teacher's Journal* in 1936, and argued in the writing that even though theoretically it is possible that everyone is able to swim, in practice, the writer claimed, it is hardly ever possible. J-nen (1936, 519) stated that since waterways are unfrozen and hospitable for swimming for only a very short time during the school year, there are few options for swimming lessons. 'Nature itself hinders swimming skills from becoming more general', the writer finally stated.

However, only two years later, both the social democratic and the right-wing members of the parliament of Finland proposed an appropriation for swimming teaching. The right-wingers stated that 'it is surprising that few people are able to swim in the land of a thousand lakes (Moilanen et al. 1938)'. They stated that every citizen should be able to swim. Indeed, Finland has often been described as the Land of a Thousand Lakes. As the proposal of Moilanen indicates, there was already in the 1930s

the idea of swimming skills as a civic duty. Today, the members of the parliament are still using the vocabulary of civic skill when they are talking about swimming education in the parliament (e.g. Pohjola 1997; Arhinmäki 2011; Lauslahti 2011). In this sense, the idea of the Land of a Thousand Lakes intertwines with notions of capable bodies. Swimming training appears to function as a form of national pedagogy (Tuomaala 2000; Lappalainen 2006) which aims to generate the idealized able body.

Also social democratic members of the parliament wanted to increase the level of the ability to swim among the population. However, they connected swimming education with safety at work, and argued that drowning accidents could be prevented if there were swimming lessons and teaching in artificial respiration in elementary schools (Kuittinen et al. 1938). The social democratic members of the parliament emphasized the responsibility of the society, and they claimed that society owes the teaching of the ability to swim to the young non-swimmers. Members of the parliament were both emphasizing the individual who should take care of oneself and the society who should look after its citizens. Indeed, both an individual and a society appeared to be responsible for swimming teaching. Thus, it seems that there are biopolitics at stake around swimming. I am using the term biopolitics in the sense of pastoral power that focuses on population and its welfare (Foucault 2007a). While one can indeed notice the difference between the leftist version and the conservative version of biopolitics that focuses on swimming, both versions aim to 'improve' bodies.

According to the old rote, the old dog won't learn to sit or bark. However, this doesn't hold true when it comes to human beings. Every human being who is physically and mentally healthy has good chances of learning to swim.

This is how a gymnastics teacher Olavi Kainulainen describes adult swimming teaching in the documentary 'Swimming school for adults' (*Aikuisten uimakoulu*, Dir. Heikki Roivas, Finland 1975). This documentary was filmed in the public swimming pool of the Kuusankoski commune. In the 1970s nature was no longer considered to be hindering people from gaining the ability to swim in Finland. After the Second World War, authorities advised teachers to urge pupils to learn how to swim.³ However, since few public swimming pools existed in Finland before the late 1950s, actual swimming lessons were rarely organized. The first swimming schools, which were meant for adults, were arranged in Finland in the late 1960s. The documentary opens with newspaper article samples that are about drowning accidents. After that there emerges a text on the screen and that says that 'In 1972 516 people drowned in Finland. 10 per cent of these people were not able to swim.' Next we can see how the crowd approaches the public swimming pool of the Kuusankoski commune. Simultaneously, a text says that 'There are over 200,000 adults who are not able to swim in Finland. Only 2000 of these adults acquired swimming competence last year.' The document implies that people who are walking to the pool are those adults who are learning to swim. A commentator says that the lack of favourable swimming teaching circumstances and non-swimmers' sceptical attitudes have prevented non-swimmers from taking swimming lessons. A gymnastics teacher Olavi Kainulainen stresses in the documentary film that everyone who is physically and mentally healthy is likely to learn how to swim. However, only some decades earlier the idea that everyone needs to learn how to swim was somewhat controversial. In the 1930s it was not taken for granted that everyone (even in the exclusive able-bodied sense) is able to learn how to swim.

In 1984, TV viewers in Finland saw a compelling comedy sketch that took place in a swimming pool where a swimming lesson for adults was about to start. At the beginning a swimming teacher welcomes the students by saying: 'It is my pleasure to notice how many brave people there are here.' At the same time the camera zooms towards the people standing seemingly frozen on the other side of the pool. The teacher continues: 'In this era of the super-human, it is perhaps difficult for adults to accept their faults, even though one simply lacks the ability to swim. Ok, weaklings! ... Oh, I am so sorry, dear students.'

This sketch was part of the popular Finnish TV show called *Velipuolikuu*, which explored many social questions in a parodic way. At first *Velipuolikuu* was considered unintelligible, odd and tasteless

(Annala 2006). However, it became a celebrated TV show which was repeated twice on Finnish TV, and some of the sketches have been viewed several hundred thousand times on YouTube. Popular YouTube clips of *Velipuolikuu* include, for instance, a representation of a prisoner internalizing his social exclusion, a pedagogical video about heterosexual foreplay and the problems of approaching 'the opposite sex', as well as a scene where a young man is covered with a pastry in order to put him into an oven. The way in which criminality, heterosexuality, and meat eating are explored in *Velipuolikuu* disputes naturalized positions and forces viewers to investigate circumstances usually taken for granted from a distance. In my view, *Velipuolikuu* also questions the importance of the ability to swim.

The swimming teacher is represented in the swimming lesson sketch as an extremely authoritarian figure who states that students are only allowed to talk during the lesson with his permission. He calls 'the brave people' who are to about to start swimming school 'weaklings'. The sketch underscores that these infantile-like adults who cannot swim have to accept their inability and then fix themselves. The representation of the teacher, which is obviously an exaggeration, leads to a critical interpretation of the practices of the swimming school. These practices aim to liberate people through disciplining their bodies. As the sketch continues, the teacher excessively humiliates the students in many ways. He harasses a female student and violently pushes students into the water. The teacher suggests that the students explore the water and instructs them to go in the water up to their necks. At the same time, he starts very furiously splashing water on a student who is supposed to be demonstrating the first exercise. Due to the teacher's behaviour the student starts violently coughing, and the teacher just advises the others to do the same exercise 'at their own pace' (Figures 1 and 2).⁴ This suggests that the attendees are in this situation, which certainly appears horrible, by choice. The sketch ends with a sequence where the swimming teacher kills 'a weakling'. After instructing a student on how to



Figure 1. Coughing in the pool.



Figure 2. Coughing in the pool.

glide through the water, the teacher violently starts pushing the student into the water, seemingly drowning her.

It certainly seems that governance has gone too far in this episode. If the aim of having swimming lessons is to increase safety, it is clear that in this episode the governance of the citizens is not fulfilled correctly (cf. Foucault 2007b). By governance, I mean a power that rests on rationalities which have a certain aim (Foucault 2003, 2007a). In this sense, if the aim is to increase safety, to govern the population cannot mean that non-swimmers are killed. However, in *Society Must Be Defended* Foucault (2003) examined how political rationalities focusing on population began to function in a way which allowed some people to be killed in order to improve the lives of others. Agamben (1998) calls this tendency thanatopolitics. *Velipuolikuu* hints that though the aim of swimming lessons is to prevent drowning accidents, the aim simultaneously appears to be that there should not be bodies which are not able to swim.

The thanatopolitics of bodies' potentials

In Rita Trötschkes and Mats Hastrup's (2004) documentary 'I'm afraid of swimming' non-swimmers are striving to become more capable through learning to swim. The documentary was described on the webpage of the national broadcasting company thusly:

The story of three people and how swimming inability and aquaphobia have restricted their life. It shows how the phobia can develop and how it can be overcome. During the lessons, which are meant for adults who have aquaphobia, the adults are taught without pressure to be comfortable in the water and eventually to have fun in the pool. Slowly the fear ends, the feeling of confidence in the water increases, and swimming skills develop. Overcoming the fear gives self-confidence.

'I'm afraid of swimming' is part of the confessional genre in the current media culture and consists of stories of three people who tell how gaining the ability to swim changed their lives. Therefore, how

do their lives and bodies change after learning how to swim? What happens to the weaklings whose function was to die in *Velipuolikuu*?

'Where water is a dominant element and I don't fully trust it, when water comes up to my neck, I may have difficulty being there, I feel uncomfortable', explains Sean, one of the three protagonists in one of the first sequences of the documentary. Sean says that he feels uncomfortable when he is in the water. However, now Sean is to start swimming lessons. Sean's swimming teacher is a very different kind of a person than the teacher who appeared in *Velipuolikuu* (1984). Sean's teacher compassionately advises Sean and delicately makes suggestions about new techniques in the water.

In the sequences where Sean receives private swimming lessons, he is given advice on how he can learn to be relaxed in the water. The teacher tells him that he does not have to do anything special when being in the water in order to swim. Sean's teacher shows Sean in different ways that there is nothing to be afraid of when being in the water. The teacher goes into the pool and shows Sean that he cannot do anything but float when in the water. Sean's teacher advises him: 'Take a deep breath, now hold your breath, now just relax and let your knees bend.' The teacher continues: 'You just have to be relaxed and then succumb to the water so that you can feel and experience it. These are things you cannot fight against.' This implies that learning to swim means that as long as one just trusts in the water, one will learn how to swim, and when one has acquired swimming skills, then it is almost impossible to be in the water without swimming. Now, in this situation, however, Sean cannot swim yet. So he is not as comfortable in the water as his teacher.

Sean's teacher aims to help Sean with his 'problem' by giving him the right kind of information about floating. When the documentary underscores how the inability to swim can be fixed through giving information, incapability becomes unawareness. The rightness of the information given to Sean is, however, dependent on ableist stories whose implications are masked by understanding which disgraces incapability. According to Campbell (2008), ableist stories can appear to be purely factual, and with this logic incapability always needs to be explained, whereas those who can exemplify capability can judge the improper conditions, ostensibly based on nothing. Haraway's (1989, 1997) formulation that a distinction between fact and fiction is embedded in cultural stories which foreground certain (and not other) ends explains something of the cultural logic found in the story in 'I'm afraid of swimming.' The information about the body's capacity to float is given to Sean in order to diminish his fear of the water. If those who have acquired swimming skills can float, Sean, who feels uncomfortable in the water, should also be able to float. The body's capacity to float becomes a fact in the sense that it is possible to use this notion in order to justify swimming teaching. However, it remains simultaneously fiction for those who dream of doing it but who after all cannot successfully do it.

When Sean and the teacher discuss what allowing his feet to rise from the bottom of the pool actually means and whether he should let his feet rise, the teacher answers: 'Let your feet to be wherever they want to be.' This advice is given when Sean is learning to float. It seems that one should be able to be relaxed and to do what one wants to do. However, it appears that the content of this ostensibly open suggestion is already known. The knowledge held by Sean's feet is assumed to match the ableist ideal. Therefore, how it is that bodies want to be capable?

Susanna, a woman in her 30s, describes in 'I'm afraid of swimming' how it has been difficult to be with others spontaneously because of her inability to swim. She says that she had not been able to tell her friends and colleagues that she cannot swim and consequently had been telling white lies about forgetting her swimsuit or being on her period. Now, as she tells her story to the camera, she laughs and wonders why she had behaved like that. In this situation, Susanna is able to swim and is even a competent diver. For her, the inability to swim is an event in her history. Susanna's story is reminiscent of Young's (1980) story of the feminine way of walking she practiced in her youth. Both stories connect artificiality with weakness; in Susanna's case her dishonesty is withdrawn as she gains swimming competence, for Young (1980, [1998] 2007) her forced comportment is altered into competent able-bodiedness. Artificiality and inability are put together, and liberation is connected with able-bodiedness. Thus, able-bodiedness becomes the original way of being, which has only been repressed.

When Susanna describes that she had been telling white lies before she acquired swimming skills, her inability appears to be the primary reason for this bad habit. Her 'condition' impairs her personality and hinders her from being herself with others. When Susanna becomes uninhibited and no longer hides her 'condition' she simultaneously becomes capable. Her physical capability is in this way connected with her psychological well-being.⁵ It is necessary to ask how ableism frames bodily experiences and identity, generating a structure of identification which makes some people feel good about themselves and others feel shame. In the Finnish case of swimming training, biopolitical governance that aims to increase safety intertwines with ideas of personal growth.

If, as Young (1980) implies, it is true that women's inhibited physical activity has an influence on their more general self-confidence and if we accept that Susanna's bodily experiences make it more likely for her to resort to dishonesty, we still miss how ableism frames these assumptions. It is, indeed, possible to ask how 'falsity' intertwines with certain bodies. Whereas capability or courage can appear to be real experiences, experiences of fear should be changed.

Young's (1980) assumption was that sexism inhibits female comportment, and she presumed that when a woman avoids physical tasks which demand strength, she distances herself from her body. Young's approach to physical skills emphasizes how the development of capabilities will enable living a more fulfilling life. Young claimed that women should make full use of their bodies' potentials, and she understood these potentials as new physical skills.

Young's idea was that women would be able to develop their bodies in the same way as men if they just had enough practice. This kind of practice might enable women to distance themselves from weakness and lead to an identification with capability. Similarly, Sean's swimming lessons aimed at overcoming a phobia which is seen as an obstacle to the development of physical competence. Susanna's 'recovery' from aquaphobia is represented as an important change because it makes her a more mature person. Consider how eliminating some identifications and orientations towards bodies is here taken for granted as a route to a more valuable life. Here thanatopolitics eliminates identifications with incapability. In this sense, Sean's experience of feeling uncomfortable in the water should be eliminated. Whereas, when Susanna is able to laugh at her prior self who was fearful, she begins to exemplify a body that needs to be preserved.

Swimming skills, which are my focus here, are usually understood as important because swimming skills are understood to save lives. Even though the ability to swim at least in some situations can indeed save lives, consolidation of a norm which requires swimming ability makes some non-swimmers' experiences unreal. The repressive hypothesis consolidates this unrealness. In this sense, the repressive hypothesis is a specific tool for the bio/thanatopolitical governance of bodily experiences. Puar (2007) has acknowledged that ideas about repression can consolidate national projects. That is to say, bodies which appear to be repressed do not fit into national projects which operate through the ideas of liberation. Puar's (2007) research concerns American culture and society which intensively circulates ideas about freedom. However, the non-swimmer also appears to be both repressed and unable to fulfil the demands of the nation's biopolitics. Thus, it is possible to claim that national pedagogies (Tuomaala 2000; Lappalainen 2006) can operate through the notion of repression, and preserve bodies which do not appear to be repressed.

When the assumptions which saturate the swimming lessons in 'I'm afraid of swimming' are considered, it becomes evident that the body which can learn to swim can develop aquaphobia as well. It can be afraid of deep water, and it can identify itself with capability. However, these different potentials are not treated equally with each other. Within ableist frameworks bodies' potentials tend to be considered in a thanatopolitical manner. The thanatopolitics that regulates the way one finds oneself either capable or inhibited is about the training of identification. The biopolitical project focusing on swimming training attempted to teach citizens to take care of themselves. However, as we can notice from the documentary film 'I'm afraid of swimming', if one wanted to avoid drowning, one would learn that one should not be afraid of water. In other words, biopolitical governing started to train identification. The thanatopolitics that emerges from this kind of biopolitical governing rests on the idea that bodies have potentials which either should be preserved or eradicated. I would

suggest that such thanatopolitics does not only focus on risk behaviour, unfit bodies or not even on life styles (cf. Rose 2001) but also on the identification of everyone.

The asymmetry in how the different potentials of bodies are treated reminds us of Wendell's (1989, 1996) ideas on how a culture that disfavors weak bodies affects everybody. She (1989, 1996) critiques the self-evident ubiquity of the identification with able-bodiedness. According to Wendell (1989, 112), 'idealizing the body prevents everyone, able-bodied and disabled, from identifying with and loving her/his real body'. I would suggest that instead of maintaining that everyone should be able to identify with their 'real body', as Wendell (1989, 112) puts it, we should acknowledge how the repressive hypothesis of the body makes some identifications implausible or false. Bodies that appear to be repressed seem to hide their real qualities. I have shown that when the repressive hypothesis of the body reinforces the assumption that athletic or otherwise capable bodies were repressed when they lacked physical skills, capability, and liberation appear to twist together. When the repressive hypothesis generates able-bodied identification as real, and thus, makes it unlikely for those who are considered 'repressed' to identify with weakness, the real body is already the product of the repressive hypothesis. Yet, my suggestion would be that we should consider the repressive hypothesis of the body both when it appears to question the identification with weakness and when it contests capability as the ultimate aim of all bodies. Eventually, the repressive hypothesis aims to control bodies. Furthermore, when bio/thanatopolitical projects use the notion of repression, the distinction between a body that needs to be preserved and a body that needs to be eliminated can become even more unpredictable – here the dividing line between proper and improper bodies is defined in accordance with how well one can exemplify liberation.

Conclusions

I have suggested that Foucault's ([1976] 1990) formulation of the repressive hypothesis is useful when analysing the cultural mechanisms of ableism. My argument is that the idea that some bodily capacities are repressed is only possible when we presume a particular bodily ideal that needs to be released from repression. Moreover, though the repressive hypothesis of the body assumes that one will accept one's body as it is when one is no longer repressed, my suggestion is that when particular biopolitical aims connect particular bodies with repression, the body that one accepts as one's own, is a product of this 'liberation' project. In this article, I have explored the Finnish biopolitical governance that focuses on swimming ability and argued that in this case the repressive hypothesis of the body reinforces the identification with capability as non-swimmers appear to be repressed and unable to identify with a body that can survive in the water. Further, I have shown that Young's exploration of the oppression focusing on women's bodies assumes that the identification with capability is an original tendency which has been repressed by patriarchal society. The concept of the repressive hypothesis of the body helps us to think Young's assumptions and further to consider how the demand to accept and love our bodies – the idea shared by Wendell – does not acknowledge how specific bio/thanatopolitical projects frame our relationships with our bodies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Päivi Berg, Kristiina Brunila, Sirpa Lappalainen, Xin Liu, Jens Rydström, Minna Uimonen, Niina Vuolajärvi, Emmi Vähäpassi, and two anonymous referees for their comments on previous versions of this manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland [131548] and by the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Education and Learning (FiDPEL).

Notes

1. Between January 2012 and May 2013 seven articles which explicitly concerned sports were published in *Disability & Society. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* had a special issue in 2012 called 'Paralympics and Disability Sport'. Additionally, in the field of sport sociology the perspective of disability studies has been used in order to develop more nuanced ways of thinking about athletics and disability (see, for instance, Howe 2008; Fitzgerald 2008; Thomas and Smith 2009).
2. For example, Chisholm (2008, 11) has criticized Young for adopting 'masculine motility as the idealized norm'. She suggests that Young assumes feminine modalities to be only 'negative' and claims that there are also 'positive' feminine modalities. Chisholm states that women can be capable and talented exactly because of their feminine modalities. These kinds of 'positive' ways of being are at stake when women inventively develop their capabilities instead of taking their cue from the male body. However, from my point of view, the way that Chisholm (2008) defines some modalities as 'negative' and others as 'positive' reveals the ableist logic which characterizes both Young's and Chisholm's argumentation.
3. The report of the curriculum committee for primary school II [*Kansakoulun opetussuunnitelmakomitean mietintö II*]. 1952.
4. I would like to thank Pirkka-Pekka Petelius and Kari Kyrönseppä for giving me a permission to use these photographs in this article.
5. McRuer (2006) offers an intriguing reading of the film *As Good As It Gets* and analyses the way that disability is connected with a bad personality.

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