5

Health and fitness

Markers of difference and the body

I pushed on the door for the men's changing room and noticed the sign wiggle awkwardly. The laminated A4 paper, marking the space as a changing room for men, had come loose. The sign featured the man icon and text that warned:

> Please be aware, that at any time, there
> may be a cleaner of any sex inside.

I nudged it straight but, in doing so, dislodged its delicate Blu Tack hold. The sign fell from the door and revealed another sign hidden underneath, identical in design but with text that read:

> Please be aware there may be a cleaner
> of the opposite sex in this changing room.

The words 'opposite sex' had become 'any sex'. I entered the changing room and swiftly moved to my regular locker. I spotted faces I had seen every week for the previous two years but had never said more than '*Are you using that weight?*' Eyes trained to the floor as vests and shorts slipped on and off. In and out as fast as possible. A lifetime of policing where my eyes may mistakenly glance, and the consequences that all queer men fear for what happens next. I kept thinking about the sign tentatively fixed to the door instructing visitors who they should expect to find within. With a switch of just one word, the superimposed sign queried the idea of sex as a binary of 'male' and 'female'. But, for who knows how many weeks or months, the 'opposite sex' sign

had remained hidden underneath. Classifications are a type of palimpsest: what is replaced never really goes away, displaced categories hang around and continue to shape our experiences of the world.

Moral panics about queer people in changing rooms are a stubborn mark that also never really goes away. In late 2018, a rush of media reports documented the policing of changing rooms at UK gyms and the experiences of trans people who were told they were in the 'wrong place'. Speaking to a reporter at *Buzzfeed*, Sarah – a transgender woman – described her experience at a PureGym, 'I opened my locker – I was gonna start changing – when the manager approached me and she said I had to leave'. The manager told Sarah another customer was uncomfortable with her being there and that 'men weren't allowed in the women's locker room'.[1] Sarah asked the manager, 'If it was the official policy that if someone was made uncomfortable because I was trans that I'd have to leave' but the manager was unfamiliar with the gym's policy.[2] A few months later, the gym chain David Lloyd Leisure told *HuffPost UK*, 'Our policy is that unless [a] member holds a Gender Recognition Certificate, transgender members must use the facilities designated for their birth gender.'[3] Duncan Bannatyne, a Scottish businessman and former investor on the BBC television show *Dragons' Den*, also tweeted his support for a change in policy that would require trans members to show a GRC before using their preferred changing room at his health club chain.[4] Absent from these examples, which are equal parts impractical and illegal, are the stories of trans men or those who present as trans masculine and their experiences of discomfort and risk when using changing rooms. Researcher Abby Barras reports that, among her interviewees, 'narratives about safety in changing rooms came not from trans women, but from five of the trans masculine participants' and that 'whilst safety in changing rooms was still a real concern for almost every participant, it was voiced most loudly by those

[1] Laura Silver, 'A trans woman was asked to leave the women's changing room at a PureGym', *Buzzfeed*, 18 December 2018, https://www.buzzfeed.com/laurasilver/puregym-trans-woman-changing-room.

[2] PureGym has since updated its policy; see 'TrainSafe: Our safety commitment', PureGym, 2024, https://www.puregym.com/landing/trainsafe/.

[3] Laura Silver, 'Revealed: David Lloyd say trans people can't use preferred changing rooms unless they have gender certificate', *HuffPost UK*, 9 March 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/david-lloyd-trans-access-gym_uk_5c825491e4b0d9361626ec6c. After an online backlash, David Lloyd Leisure changed its position and its CEO Glenn Earlam explained, 'We do not have a practice of asking people for a Gender Recognition Certificate', in Ella Braidwood, 'David Lloyd Leisure says it "welcomes" trans members, after backlash over "birth gender" statement', *PinkNews*, 14 March 2019, https://www.thepinknews.com/2019/03/14/david-lloyd-gym-welcomes-trans/.

[4] Vic Parsons, 'Dragons' Den Star Duncan Bannatyne wants to stop trans women Using Women's changing rooms', *PinkNews*, 25 February 2020, https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/02/25/duncan-bannatyne-uk-equality-act-transgender-women-changing-rooms/.

accessing male spaces'.[5] The binary segregation of changing rooms as spaces for 'men' and 'women' is intended to keep people safe but this solution does not work for everyone. Across Europe, it is estimated that around one in three LGBTQ people remains completely closeted when involved in a sport and one in five LGBTQ people chooses not to participate in sport because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.[6] Like evidence requirements at the border or algorithmic sorting practices on dating apps, the changing room – as a site where people are classified – forces us all to pick a category: man or woman, gay or straight, out or closeted, and whether to participate in sport or remain on the sidelines.

I did not plan on writing a chapter about the body but it kept turning up: whether as a data point in a diversity target for an arts award, a statistic in a table of hate crimes or a container of truths to be unearthed by immigration officials. This chapter directs our attention to the topic of health and fitness and the role of classifications in the design of health data; access to gyms and changing rooms; inclusion criteria in everyday sport; and the looping effects of technologies that sit on (and inside) our bodies. I investigate policy documents published by the National Health Service, media reports and academic studies to highlight how the promise of inclusion in health and fitness requires LGBTQ communities to subscribe to a narrow selection of categories and labels. The topics I explore, under the umbrella of health and fitness, are no stranger to classifications. The modern history of sport, for example, is all about efforts to measure, categorize, compare and rank competitors.[7] What counts as a 'sport' – rather than just a group of people running around a field, throwing objects or hitting a ball back and forth – is socially constructed and has historically strengthened ideas about the white, heterosexual masculine body while discouraging women and other minoritized communities from

[5] Abby Barras, 'The lived experiences of transgender and non-binary people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK', PhD thesis. (University of Brighton, 2021), 166.

[6] Tobias Menzel, Birgit Braumüller and Ilse Hartmann-Tews, 'The relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport in Europe: Findings from the outsport survey' (Cologne: German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies, 2019), 8, https://equalityinsport.org/docs/The%20Relevance%20of%20Sexual%20Orientation%20and%20Gender%20Identity%20in%20Sport%20in%20Europe%20-%20Findings%20from%20the%20Outsport%20Survey%-202019.pdf.

[7] Sigmund Loland, *Fair Play in Sport: A Moral Norm System* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135.

participating.[8] As with the other systems documented in this book, the situation is changing. Some lesbian, gay and bisexual people are now actively encouraged to participate in sport, particularly where activities function as a type of national showcase at global events such as the Olympics and Paralympics.[9] Yet, this inclusion is sometimes premised on a willingness to present oneself as 'normal' and 'just like the other competitors'.[10] The sports scholar Judy Davidson has documented how major LGBTQ sports initiatives, such as the Gay Games, have historically worked to increase tolerance of the queer athlete 'by cleansing or rehabilitating the "good" lesbian and gay athlete/citizen *from* "abnormal" queerness'.[11] Inclusion in sport, as well as the other health and fitness activities documented in this chapter, is always qualified and contingent.

The body

In the UK, how sex is classified has become an obsession among some politicians, media commentators and campaigners. Whether the discussion relates to access to changing rooms, the collection of health data or who competes in different sporting categories, 'gender critical' campaigners deploy the language of 'common sense' to argue that their classification of sex – as something binary, immutable and central to how we organize the social world – reflects a natural truth that lies outside of politics.[12] Writing on the importance of collecting biological sex data, sociologist Alice Sullivan and others describe how 'categories like race and social class are socially

[8] Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A Critical Sociology*, Second edition (Oxford: Polity Press, 2015), chap. 6: Gender and Sexuality in Sport; Susan J. Bandya, Gigliola Gorib and Dong Jinxiac, 'From women and sport to gender and sport: Transnational, transdisciplinary, and intersectional perspectives', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 5 (April 2012): 668.

[9] OutSports, 'Olympics team LGBTQ', OutSports, 2024, https://www.outsports.com/olympics/team-lgbtq/; OutSports, 'Paralympics team LGBTQ', OutSports, 2024, https://www.outsports.com/paralympics/team-lgbtq/.

[10] There is nothing 'normal' about the bodies of competitors in elite sports so this claim is better understood as a shared ability to achieve an idealized body, discussed in Samantha King, 'What's queer about (queer) sport sociology now? A review essay', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 427.

[11] Judy Davidson, 'Racism against the abnormal? The twentieth century gay games, biopower and the emergence of homonational sport', *Leisure Studies* 33, no. 4 (4 July 2014): 373.

[12] For example, boxers Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting won gold medals at the 2024 Olympic Games but found themselves at the centre of a charged debate over differences in sex development, chromosomes, testosterone levels and the International Olympic Committee's approach to classifying competitors by sex; see Sofia Bettiza, 'Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-Ting: What does science tell us about boxing's gender row in olympics?', *BBC News*, 9 August 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crlr8gp813ko.

constructed. These categories change as society changes. But sex is different. The social implications of being male or female have certainly changed over time and differ between cultures. But the biological categories remain constant and have been recognised in all societies throughout history for the simple reason that they are the basis for human reproduction'.[13] Decades of scholarship – in fields including biomedicine, philosophy and science and technology studies – have complicated the existence of natural or universal classification systems.[14] As Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star explain, 'classifications that appear natural, eloquent, and homogeneous within a given human context appear forced and heterogeneous outside of that context'.[15] Making something appear natural, neutral or the product of 'common sense' takes a lot of effort. And, contrary to what 'gender critical' academics such as Sullivan would like us to believe, most researchers working on queer topics (myself included) believe that biological sex exists and, in some circumstances, is really important.[16] Where we disagree is the meaningfulness attached to a selection of biological traits and how these meanings are shaped by a social world where bodies live, breathe, work, relax, sleep, eat, love and die. As sociologist Jeffrey W. Lockhart explains, 'which material parts of bodies count as sex, how they relate to each other, the causes of those relationships, and their meanings are ever-changing and contested'.[17] Biomedical scientists Stacey A. Ritz and Lorraine Greaves also describe the challenge of classifying sex-related characteristics and processes as either 'male' or 'female' as 'no single trait is a definitive marker of sex' or 'the exclusive domain of one sex'.[18]

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[13] Alice Sullivan, Kath Murray and Lisa Mackenzie, 'Why do we need data on sex?', in *Sex and Gender*, ed. Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd (London: Routledge, 2023), 113.

[14] For example, George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[15] Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 131.

[16] For example, Sullivan and Todd have described how their work on sex is 'underpinned by the need to reassert scientific and scholarly values' in response to nefarious efforts by 'postmodern sex denialists to curtail scholarship', in 'Introduction', 3.

[17] Jeffrey W. Lockhart, 'Because the machine can discriminate: How machine Learning serves and transforms biological explanations of human difference', *Big Data & Society* 10, no. 1 (January 2023): 3. Also see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'The bare bones of sex: Part 1 – Sex and gender', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 2 (January 2005): 1491–527.

[18] Stacey A. Ritz and Lorraine Greaves, 'Transcending the male–female binary in biomedical research: Constellations, heterogeneity, and mechanism when considering sex and gender', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 7 (30 March 2022): 2–3, discussed in Olga Suhomlinova, Saoirse Caitlin O'Shea and Ilaria Boncori, 'Rethinking gender diversity: Transgender and gender nonconforming people and gender as constellation', *Gender, Work & Organization* 31, no. 5 (2024): 1775.

The sociotechnical decisions that occur within a classification machine – which transforms messy inputs into categorical outputs – are particularly hard to notice in scientific contexts. STS scholars Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's ethnographic study of scientists at work investigated the steps followed 'to remove the social and historical circumstances on which the construction of a fact depends'.[19] Their study highlighted how 'social' factors (i.e. 'the routinely occurring minutiae of scientific activity') disappear from view after a scientific fact is constructed, with these 'social' factors only brought back into the conversation if or when something about the science goes wrong.[20] More so than in other disciplines – such as the social sciences, arts and humanities – scientific facts possess a remarkable ability to shed their social and historical skins during the process of becoming an accepted truth. While 'common sense' definitions of gender, sex and sexuality might align with most people's experiences, this approach to classification fails many queer people. It promotes an idealized vision of classifications with streamlined categories, sorting processes that leave no one behind and docile subjects who merrily go into the box they are instructed to join, even when they know it is a bad fit. It is a classification fantasy and, as evident in the sex exceptionalism of Sullivan and Murray, demonstrates a selective politics of what categories count.

I did not want the prickly relationship between science and politics to dissuade me from writing on the queer body and the use (and misuse) of biological motifs, signs and analogies that sneak into conversations about the classification of LGBTQ lives. Queer communities experience greater health inequalities than heterosexual and cisgender people, with gaps particularly apparent in issues related to mental health.[21] Health researchers Harry Cross and others have reported 'consistent disparities in health between people who identify as heterosexual and those that do not, with bisexual

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[19] Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 105.

[20] Latour and Woolgar, 23, 27.

[21] NHS England, 'Sexual orientation', Digital, 7 March 2024, https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-collections-and-data-sets/data-sets/mental-health-services-data-set/submit-data/data-quality-of-protected-characteristics-and-other-vulnerable-groups/sexual-orientation; Victoria J. McGowan, Hayley J. Lowther and Catherine Meads, 'Life under COVID-19 for LGBT+ People in the UK: Systematic Review of UK Research on the Impact of COVID-19 on Sexual and Gender Minority Populations', *BMJ Open* 11, no. 7 (July 2021): 6. It is estimated that LGBTQ+ people are 50 per cent more likely to experience depression and anxiety disorder than the general population. Among gay and bisexual men, studies show they are four times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population, in Lewis Thomas et al., 'Opening our eyes to blind spots in NHS data: Understanding availability and quality of healthcare data for LGBTQ+ people in England', *CF*, 4 July 2023, https://www.carnallfarrar.com/opening-our-eyes-to-blind-spots-in-nhs-data-understanding-availability-and-quality-of-healthcare-data-for-lgbtq-people-in-england/.

people experiencing disproportionately the worst outcomes'.[22] Using data from the 2015/16 English General Practice Patient Survey, the research team at Brighton and Sussex Medical School and Anglia Ruskin University found that 'long-term physical and mental health problems were more than twice as likely to be reported for people within LGB groups compared to the heterosexual group for both genders, except bisexual women where the odds were more than four times greater'.[23] Sociologist Steven Epstein uses the term the inclusion-difference paradigm to describe a shift in policies and practices where groups that were previously overlooked and excluded from scientific studies (e.g. women, Black people, LGBTQ people) are actively brought into the fold.[24] After being included, groups are then scrutinized for markers of difference. Epstein explains how the inclusion-difference paradigm 'takes two different areas of concern – the meaning of biological difference and the status of socially subordinated groups' and weaves them together.[25] While usually well-intentioned, the two-step process of (i) including previously excluded communities and then (ii) surveying these bodies for markers of difference has the effect of solidifying a belief that 'social identities correspond to relatively distinct kinds of bodies' – for example, trans bodies, lesbian bodies and gay bodies – that are understood as scientifically different from the bodies of straight, cisgender people.[26] LGBTQ health studies can suggest a uniqueness about queer bodies, where innate features make them more predisposed to long-term health conditions and poor mental health. What is more likely is that LGBTQ health outcomes reveal the biosocial effects of minority stress, the long toll of historical discrimination and the intersection of LGBTQ lives with other social issues (e.g. a disproportionate number of unhoused people in the UK are LGBTQ).[27] In addition, a vicious cycle exists where negative experiences of healthcare providers – such as restrictions on blood donation for men who have sex with men, which were enforced in the UK

[22] Harry Cross et al., 'Bisexual people experience worse health outcomes in England: Evidence from a cross-sectional survey in primary care', *The Journal of Sex Research* 61, no. 9 (24 July 2023): 1346.
[23] Cross et al., 1342.
[24] In health contexts, Epstein describes how this scrutiny of difference involves 'treatment effects, disease progression, or biological processes', in *Inclusion*, 6.
[25] Epstein, 18.
[26] Epstein, 2.
[27] Research published by Stonewall in 2018 found that 18 per cent of LGBT people have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. This figure is even higher for LGBT-disabled people (28 per cent) and trans people specifically (25 per cent), in 'LGBT in Britain – Home and communities' (London: Stonewall, 2018), 10, https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/lgbt-britain-home-and-communities-2018.

until 2021 – discourage LGBTQ people from accessing the care they need.[28] As Epstein warns, for LGBTQ communities 'the tacit appeal to biology' may enhance the legitimacy of LGBTQ health studies and expand policy attention to previously overlooked groups.[29] However, the belated incorporation of more diversity into a system – on the premise they are surveyed for markers of difference – invites even more questions: who gets to become a special category? What markers of difference are meaningful? And why these markers and not others?[30]

Navigating these questions pushes many trans people into difficult situations where they are invited to present a version of themselves – using a common vocabulary of classifications – that healthcare practitioners expect to see. Historian Kit Heyam provides an example of this looping effect in their personal account of navigating an NHS Gender Identity Clinic, a specialist team that provides services related to transgender health care in the UK. After a lengthy wait for a referral, and well-versed in the classification rules of the NHS, Heyam was prepared to tell the specialists 'a version of the truth' that aligned with a 'trans narrative' that the medical establishment expected to hear.[31] Thinking strategically, Heyman decided to play by the rules of the system and describe their experiences so they matched existing classifications rather than risk being denied the treatment they desperately needed because their 'gender didn't fit the mould'.[32] Artist and academic Sandy Stone similarly documents a long history of candidates for gender reassignment surgery being aware of the behaviours they were expected to perform and the classifications that doctors would try to apply to them.[33] In some cases, high-profile doctors such as Harry Benjamin (who practised in the mid-twentieth century) wrote articles and books about the diagnostic cues he expected to see before approving a patient for sex reassignment surgery.[34] To ease their encounters with medical gatekeepers, savvy trans patients would revise Benjamin's publications and repeat the doctor's words back to him. As Stone describes, 'it took a surprisingly long time – several years – for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates'

[28] Thomas et al., 'Opening our eyes to blind spots in NHS data'; Chris Grasso et al., 'Using sexual orientation and gender identity data in electronic health records to assess for disparities in preventive health screening services', *International Journal of Medical Informatics* 142 (October 2020): 1–2.
[29] Epstein, *Inclusion*, 269–79.
[30] Epstein, 10, 258–9.
[31] Heyam, *Before We Were Trans*, 25.
[32] Heyam, 25.
[33] Sandy Stone, 'The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto', *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (29) (1 May 1992): 161.
[34] Benjamin's best known text was *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: The Julian Press, 1966).

behavioral profiles matched Benjamin's so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual communities, whose members were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery'.[35] This awareness of the boxes available to healthcare practitioners – and where they will try to assign you – poses particular problems for neurodiverse, queer people.[36] Categories of neurodiversity can become a roadblock in accessing and navigating healthcare systems, and provide healthcare practitioners with a justification to limit – or, in the case of some young people, stop – access to care.[37] For example, a trans person who suspects they are autistic faces the dilemma of whether to receive a diagnosis as someone 'autistic', as this classification may exclude or problematize their access to future gender-affirming care. The intersection of classifications associated with neurodiversity and transness becomes a reverse looping effect, where queer people actively avoid being assigned certain categories (e.g. autistic) as the assignation makes it harder to access other categories (e.g. trans and deserving of care).[38]

Markers of difference

Documenting bad examples of gender, sex and sexuality survey questions has become something of a hobby for some enthusiastic collectors. Like a lepidopterist and their butterflies or a philatelist and their stamps, I use the term percontorist – from the Latin 'to question or interrogate' – to describe people like me who love nothing more than cataloguing the weird and wonderful ways that forms, surveys and drop-down menus ask about gender, sex and sexuality. The US-based tech lawyer Kendra Albert is a fellow percontorist. Between 2020 and 2021, they ran the Twitter account @RateMyGenderQuestion, which invited people to submit survey questions and receive honest (and often amusing) feedback from Kendra. On the 24th of February 2021, @EileenGalvez posted an example from a US university

[35] Stone, 'The empire strikes back', 161.

[36] There is an association between neurodivergence and queer people more generally, noted in Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán, 'The intersection between disability and LGBT discrimination and marginalization', *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law* 28, no. 3 (1 January 2020): 2.

[37] For example, the implications of this intersection are evident in findings presented in Hilary Cass, 'The cass review: Independent review of gender identity services for children and young people', April 2024, https://cass.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CassReview_Final.pdf.

[38] I am grateful to S. J. Bennett for this example and description of the intersection of trans and neurodiversity as a type of reverse looping effect.

that asked: 'What is your gender?' with the response options 'Male', 'Female' or 'LGBTQiA+'.[39] Kendra commented with the review: 'This is bonkers' and scored the question zero out of ten. In the UK, with its unique history of prefixes and titles, it sometimes seems easier to self-define as 'The Right Honourable' than to select a gender option that goes beyond 'man' or 'woman'. Writing in the mid-2010s, journalist Will Noble discovered that the online contact form for the high-end department store Harrods let shoppers pick from a drop-down list of over forty titles ranging from 'Baron' and 'Brigadier' through to 'Viscountess' and 'Wing Commander'.[40] When technical or administrative reasons are used to justify a narrow list of gender, sex and sexuality options, remember that people's ability to self-identify using other types of identity markers has not faced the same level of hostile attention.

This section investigates the actions of human actors in classification machines and how decisions made about data – as something you invent, map and manipulate – inform the counting and classifying of queer people in health contexts. The many factors that shape the design and use of health data are particularly evident when we consider electronic health records – a type of dataset that contains individual records of a patient's medical history, diagnoses, medications and test results. Populating an EHR involves gathering data from multiple sources (e.g. a doctor's office, hospital laboratory or pharmacist) and asking patients specific questions about their physical and mental health. And yes, this data can include biological and physiological information about a person's sex (when this information is relevant to the topic under investigation).

DCB2094 sounds like the code name for a secret military operation or the Dewey Decimal number for an obscure library book. It is, in fact, the name for the fundamental information standard used by England's NHS to capture data about the sexual orientation of all patients and service users aged sixteen years and over.[41] The standard is designed to ensure a common approach and defines sexual orientation as 'the stated physical and emotional attraction a PERSON feels towards one sex or another (or both)'.[42] From October 2017, the question and response options were updated to ask:

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[39] @EileenGalvez, Twitter, 24 February 2021, https://twitter.com/EileenGalvez/status/1364583625098997762.

[40] Will Noble, 'Is this the poshest drop-down menu ever?', *Londonist*, 27 March 2018, https://londonist.com/2015/07/is-this-the-poshest-drop-down-menu-ever.

[41] NHS England Equality and Health Inequalities Unit, 'Sexual orientation monitoring: Full specification' (London: NHS England, October 2017), 5, https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/sexual-orientation-monitoring-full-specification.pdf.

[42] NHS England Equality and Health Inequalities Unit, 7.

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

1. Heterosexual or Straight
2. Gay or Lesbian
3. Bisexual
4. Other sexual orientation not listed

U. Person asked and does not know or is not sure
Z. Not stated (person asked but declined to provide a response)
9. Not known (not recorded)

Classification U enables data collectors to record when a person 'does not know or is not sure' about their sexual orientation.[43] The guidance adds 'that the question requires self-declaration' and 'in situations where this would not be possible (e.g. patients requiring care under the Mental Capacity Act, where they are not able to give consent and therefore would not be able to declare their sexual orientation) only classification 9 could be recorded'.[44] While a perfect classification system is forever out of reach, it is telling what lives and experiences most often disappear when changes are made. The standard previously included a response option that data collectors could use to record individuals who were 'sexually attracted to neither gender'.[45] With the update, this option was removed with any existing records merged into the new classification 'other sexual orientation not listed'. NHS England has acknowledged that the reconfigured classifications mean people who identify as asexual now fall between the cracks, noting how the previous code 'specifically relates to being attracted to neither gender', whereas the replacement code 'allows for patients to identify as other than heterosexual/straight or lesbian, gay, or bisexual, including but not limited to asexual or queer'.[46] NHS England has stated this classification is under review as they wish to improve upon its detail and coverage.

Designing an information standard is the easy part. The bigger challenge is ensuring all parts of an administrative behemoth – such as a national health service – follow a common vocabulary and data collectors can map responses across existing systems, frameworks and technologies. As Bowker and Star explain, an 'information system involves linking experience gained in one time and place with that gained in another, via representations of some sort'.[47] Yet

[43] NHS England Equality and Health Inequalities Unit, 8.
[44] NHS England Equality and Health Inequalities Unit, 'Implementation guidance: Fundamental standard for sexual orientation monitoring' (London: NHS England, October 2017), 7, https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/implementation-guidance-fundamental-standard-for-sexual-orientation-monitoring.pdf.
[45] NHS England Equality and Health Inequalities Unit, appendix A.
[46] NHS England, 'Sexual orientation'.
[47] Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 290.

during the process of transmitting information from A to B and back again discrepancies appear between the source material and its representations. Most obviously, as soon as data is collected and passed between different divisions and departments, it is already out of date. Health economist Sean Urwin and others undertook an innovative study to investigate the fluidity of sexual orientation among participants in a longitudinal research project. The team compared data from wave three (captured 2011–13) and wave nine (captured 2017–19) of the UK Household Survey, a survey that collects social, economic and behavioural information from around 40,000 households. Between 2011 and 2019, the study found that 5.99 per cent of individuals changed how they recorded their sexual orientation.[48] The discovery that more than one in twenty of your research participants changed how they answered the sexual orientation question called for further investigation. The researchers went on to report that 1.08 per cent of individuals shifted from an LGBT category to heterosexual, 0.96 per cent from heterosexual to LGBT, 0.17 per cent between LGBT identities and the remaining 3.79 per cent to or from the 'prefer not to say' option.[49] Contrary to assumptions about people's linear journey from 'straight' to 'gay', in this study, more people moved from LGBT to heterosexual than from heterosexual to LGBT.[50]

My account of NHS England's information standard DCB2094, the categorical challenges for asexual people and the fluidity of sexual orientation data speaks to a wider point about who is involved in the construction of queer categories. Community organizing and campaign work that flourished in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and early 1990s, in countries including the UK and United States, marked a transformative moment in interactions between queer communities and healthcare professionals. These encounters between 'activists' and 'experts' went beyond consultation or conflict but also reconfigured foundational assumptions about where scientific expertise is located.[51] The state – and its extended apparatus of agencies, departments and institutions – plays a formative role in the design

[48] Sean Urwin, Thomas Mason, and William Whittaker, 'Do different means of recording sexual orientation affect its relationship with health and wellbeing?', *Health Economics* 30, no. 12 (December 2021): 3113.

[49] Urwin, Mason, and Whittaker, 3113. The authors use the label 'LGBT' although the study did not investigate whether participants changed their trans status during the study.

[50] Urwin et al. then went one step further and explored the relationship between the fluidity of sexual orientation and people's health outcomes, information also recorded in the Household Survey. The researchers found that individuals who reported a different sexual orientation at the two time points had lower health and wellbeing, a difference that was even more pronounced among women who reported a different sexual orientation than among men in the equivalent group, in 'Do Different Means of Recording Sexual Orientation Affect Its Relationship with Health and Wellbeing?', 3119.

[51] Discussed in Laura Duncan, 'Queer data: Medical quantification and what counts about Counting', PhD thesis. (University of California, 2021), 48. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3b44054z.

and use of classifications but, as previously noted, it is not a monolithic source of knowledge and is not immune to the challenges of grassroots movements with different ideas about how things should be counted and resources distributed.[52] In his book *Impure Science – AIDS, Activism & the Politics of Knowledge* (1996), Epstein documents the tactics adopted by LGBTQ campaigners to establish the legitimacy of their voices in scientific discussions.[53] As the 1980s progressed, and frustrated by the slow speed of action and neglect of government health agencies, HIV/AIDS activists began to involve themselves in the process of scientific research – no longer on the outside shouting in, they were now on the inside doing the research.[54] Writing on developments in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s, writer Sara Schulman has documented how the Centers for Disease Control defined AIDS by symptoms that more commonly manifested among men (e.g. the skin cancer Kaposi's sarcoma) while excluding symptoms that were more specific to women (e.g. yeast infections).[55] As a result, HIV-positive women and women dying from complications of AIDS were denied access to the 'correct' diagnosis and were therefore unable to access disability benefits.[56] The activist group ACT UP brought attention to the problem with its campaign 'Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die from It' and – working with lawyers and doctors – pushed the CDC into expanding their definition in 1993.[57] As the work of ACT UP and other HIV/AIDS activists demonstrates, being kept out of a category is more than an inconvenience – it is a matter of life and death.

The closing decades of the twentieth century also highlighted growing pains when categories of sexual orientation left the pages of academic papers and diagnostic manuals and were operationalized to explain events in the social world. A peculiarity with classifications applied to sexuality is that they tend to foreground questions of identity (who you are) or bring together a mixture of practices (what you do) and desires (what you want). Within one classification – for example, bisexual men – there potentially exists a huge amount of divergent ideas and experiences. For many queer people, the classification's fuzzy borders best reflect how these feelings,

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[52] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "identity"', *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 16.

[53] Steven Epstein, *Impure Science – AIDS, Activism & the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[54] See Benjamin Weil, 'Bad blood: A critical inquiry into UK blood donor activism', PhD thesis. (UCL, 2022), 51, https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10162778.

[55] Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT up New York, 1987–1993* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2022), 33.

[56] Alexis Shotwell, '"Women don't get AIDS, they just die from it": Memory, classification, and the campaign to change the definition of AIDS', *Hypatia* 29, no. 2 (2014): 518.

[57] Shari L. Dworkin, 'Who is epidemiologically fathomable in the HIV/AIDS epidemic? Gender, sexuality, and intersectionality in public health', *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7, no. 6 (November 2005): 616.

desires and events are experienced in the social world and, as discussed in the previous chapter, there are strategic reasons why LGBTQ communities have foregrounded categories based on 'identity' rather than 'behaviour' or 'desire'. David Halperin explained, 'By making the term "gay" available to me, the movement has given me a way of naming my sexuality without describing it and without making specific reference to my sexual desires, feelings, or practices.'[58] But, in the context of health studies, Epstein has observed how 'surveys that ask respondents to name their sexual orientation will produce one set of mappings of individuals onto categories. Surveys that ask respondents who they have sex with will produce a different set of mappings, and questions about the object of desire will produce a third'.[59] While overlaps across these mappings are common, answers provided by the three groups of respondents do not always coincide align.[60] One way to address this challenge was to invent (yet another) classification: men who have sex with men. The term is inclusive of men who do not identify as gay or bisexual but engage in practices that put them in the same category as some gay and bisexual men. The classification MSM is understood to have started life as a scientific descriptor in the United States in the mid-1980s, used primarily to describe risk factors associated with anal intercourse during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.[61] By siphoning off the 'what you do' part of the classification, health researchers were better able to fine-tune their investigations and cancel out the noise that accompanied ideas about identities, desires and other queer behaviours.

The collection of sexual orientation data needs to navigate challenges associated with omissions, interoperability and the fluidity of categories – it is an uphill struggle with no simple fix. The easiest solution is to simply stop collecting the data. I am no champion of collecting more and more data – as argued in my discussion of the datafication of hate crime – but any decision not to collect data can buttress an assumption that a service provider treats everyone the same: when there is no data, it can look like there is no problem. As social policy researchers Peter Matthews and Chris Poyner argue, this omission ignores 'the basic premise of equalities data collection – that is only through collecting data that an organisation can become aware of systemic problems'.[62] Gender and sex data (and, increasingly, sexual orientation data) are routinely imagined as 'raw materials' located in the public domain that

[58] Halperin, *How to Be Gay*, 75.
[59] Steven Epstein, 'Sexualizing governance and medicalizing identities: The emergence of "state-centered" LGBT health politics in the United States', *Sexualities* 6, no. 2 (1 May 2003): 159.
[60] Epstein, *Inclusion*, 269.
[61] Tom Boellstorff, 'BUT DO NOT IDENTIFY AS GAY: A proleptic genealogy of the MSM category', *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (May 2011): 290–1.
[62] Peter Matthews and Chris Poyner, 'Achieving equality in progressive contexts: Queer(y)ing public Administration', *Public Administration Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (15 November 2020): 563.

provide a simple, combustible fuel for classification machines.[63] Inside the machine, this information is manipulated as it travels along a conveyor belt where it is grabbed, twisted and turned by the hands of civil servants, policy managers and diversity workers.[64] The non-collection of data swings the pendulum too far in the opposite direction, ignores all markers of difference and always defaults to straight assumptions. Where data was once collected about a population and a decision is made to stop, this withdrawal of state interest can also signal an end to the promise of state protection.[65] We should instead focus our attention on the sociotechnical factors that contribute to the design and operation of classifications, which – when working as planned – can give the impression of being natural artefacts that have always existed and will forever exist.

Queers in a straight space

Gyms and changing rooms are evocative locations for many LGBTQ people: spaces of queer awakenings, sites of shame and violence and places where – as a teenager – people labelled you a 'poof' before you knew you were one.[66] Health inequities researcher Stephanie E. Coen and others describe the gym 'as a place with its own stock of resources for doing gender and norms for what is gender-appropriate or transgressive', while sport scholars Shannon S. C. Herrick and Lindsay R. Duncan note how changing rooms 'operate as spaces where limited tolerance for and rejection of suspected or openly LGBTQ+

[63] Julie E. Cohen, *Between Truth and Power: The Legal Constructions of Informational Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), discussed in Ari Ezra Waldman, 'Gender data in the automated Administrative state', *Columbia Law Review* 124 (14 February 2023): 22.

[64] Writing on surveys and other technical systems that capture gender and sex data in the US civil service, Waldman describes how 'form designers work in organizational contexts in which a combination of social forces incentivize inertia'. Waldman attributes this inertia to forces including 'complex decision-making processes that make change difficult', the 'social networks of colleagues' that help maintain the status quo, 'intergovernmental dependencies that constrain design options' and 'norms against politicization of the bureaucracy', in 'Opening the gender box: Legibility dilemmas and gender data collection on U.S. state government forms', *Law & Social Inquiry* 49, no. 4 (2024): 2021–51; 'Gender data in the automated administrative state', 25.

[65] Discussed in Ben Collier and Sharon Cowan, 'Queer conflicts, concept capture and category Co-Option: The Importance of context in the state collection and recording of sex/gender data', *Social & Legal Studies* 31, no. 5 (2022): 749.

[66] On locker rooms as traumatic spaces for many LGBTQ people; see Caroline Fusco, 'Spatializing the (im)proper subject: The geographies of abjection in sport and physical activity space', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 30, no. 1 (1 February 2006): 5–28; Scott B. Greenspan et al., 'LGBTQ + and ally youths' School Athletics Perspectives: A mixed-method analysis', *Journal of LGBT Youth* 16, no. 4 (2 October 2019): 403–34, discussed in Shannon S. C. Herrick and Lindsay R. Duncan, 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 42, no. 3 (1 June 2020): 227.

patrons is expected' and, as journalist Laura Bell explains, 'the gym isn't just a sweaty cess pit designed to make you feel physically inferior, it can be a place where your whole sense of identity is challenged and put into question'.[67] This section's tour of classification practices takes us among the grunting howls of weight lifters, chafing thighs of runners and nude bodies of the changing room to highlight how classifications and the spaces where they occur are closely connected.[68] Changing rooms, for example, are organized according to the assumption that men are sexually attracted to women and women are sexually attracted to men.[69] Gym owners tend to run their changing rooms as non-sexual spaces where adults of the same sex take off their clothes, feel comfortable around one another and reduce the risk of men's sexual violence towards women and children.[70] Speaking with researchers Herrick and Duncan, Taylor – a gender fluid, queer person in their late twenties – described how 'these spaces are sex segregated and the perceived reason is sexual: to keep people's attraction separated. As a queer person, I transgress against this system in varied ways, and it causes me discomfort and makes me feel unsafe'.[71] While safety and comfort are important rationales for the gender segregation of changing rooms, one side effect of these entry rules is that LGBTQ people can feel as if they are in the wrong space.

Contrary to the segregationist ideas of figures like Duncan Bannatyne, the doors of changing rooms are not guarded so any policing tends to occur among people looking at each other within the space. Like the *discovering-discoverable* arrangement of dating apps, when situated in a changing room you are simultaneously visible to others and able to view others. What follows is a classification call-and-response, where you act upon your perceptions of others while they act upon their perceptions of you. Roving eyes and judgemental stares, of course, are not only directed at queer bodies but

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[67] Stephanie E. Coen, Mark W. Rosenberg and Joyce Davidson, '"It's gym, like g-y-m not J-i-m": exploring the role of place in the gendering of physical activity', *Social Science & Medicine* 196 (January 2018): 30; Herrick and Duncan, 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', 227; Laura Bell, 'Working out is a minefield when you're non-binary', *Vice*, 13 September 2018, https://www.vice.com/en/article/yw4gpx/working-out-is-a-minefield-when-youre-non-binary.

[68] Robert J. David et al. have documented a lack of scholarly attention to how categories (including membership, meaning and identities) shape our understanding and experience of place, in 'Putting categories in their place', 8.

[69] Judith Butler describes this principle as the 'heterosexual matrix', which conflates concepts related to gender and sexuality, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xxviii.

[70] Heidi Eng, 'Queer athletes and queering in sport', in *Sport, Sexualities and Queer/Theory*, ed. Jayne Caudwell (London: Routledge, 2006), 59; Abby Barras, *Transgender and Non-Binary People in Everyday Sport: A Trans Feminist Approach to Improving Inclusion* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2024), 118; Caroline Fusco, 'Inscribing healthification: Governance, risk, surveillance and the subjects and spaces of fitness and health', *Health & Place* 12, no. 1 (March 2006): 65–78; Herrick and Duncan, 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', 227.

[71] Herrick and Duncan, 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', 230.

similarly scrutinize bodies that are fat, racialized, old, disabled or differ from an imagined 'healthy norm'.[72] For some LGBTQ people, a gap exists between your identity – how you understand yourself – and the way you are perceived by others. When a classification error locates you as part of the dominant or majority group – for example, when a trans person is read as cisgender or a gay person is read as straight – it is described as passing. Among individuals for whom passing is a possibility, this tactic can minimize the risk of negative experiences in a changing room. In these instances, classifications only become apparent when something goes wrong. I am always waiting for something to go wrong when I am in a changing room. My eyes remain fixed on the linoleum floor – in and out with no time to see anything I should not see. I am haunted by moral panics that associate gay men with paedophilia and our presence in changing rooms as a danger to children and young people. Unfounded fears that mirror contemporary anxieties about the presence of trans women in changing rooms.[73] I am not alone. Research has documented that many queer people fear being caught in the act of looking.[74] For me and many others, the binary division of gender and assumptions about sexuality – a proposed solution to the problem of men's sexual violence – does not always create spaces of comfort and safety.

Spatial segregation continues on the gym floor, with areas designed for weightlifting (e.g. dumbbells, racks and benches) and cardio (e.g. treadmills and bikes) giving an impression that women and men engage in different fitness activities.[75] The arrangement of the space – whether real or perceived – can reinforce these binary assumptions and create zones that dissuade users from entering parts of the gym where they feel unwelcome.[76] Gym equipment also embeds certain assumptions about its imagined user. In 2017, journalist Sonia van Gilder Cooke investigated Nike gym accessories sold at the high street retailer JD Sports and found that 70 per cent of items targeted at women only come in pink.[77] Gym equipments such as a leg press – where

[72] Admittedly, bodies that match the 'healthy norm' are also scrutinized in the changing room. Herrick and Duncan describe the testimony of William (a white, gay thirty-one-year-old cisgender man and fitness enthusiast) who welcomed the gaze of other men, noting 'it's of no real importance to me. It's a bit flattering to be honest', in 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', 233.
[73] Meg-John Barker, 'A trans review of 2017: The year of transgender moral panic', *The Conversation*, 27 December 2017, http://theconversation.com/a-trans-review-of-2017-the-year-of-transgender-moral-panic-89272.
[74] Herrick and Duncan, 'Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults', 233.
[75] Helen Spandler et al., 'Non-binary inclusion in sport: Rising to the challenge' (Preston, 2020), https://leapsports.org/files/4225-Non-Binary%20Inclusion%20in%20sport%20Booklet.pdf.
[76] Discussed in Coen, Rosenberg, and Davidson, 'It's gym, like g-y-m not J-i-m', 34.
[77] Sonia van Gilder Cooke also described the experience of visiting a women's shoe aisle in a major sports retailer as 'a hot pink hellscape', in 'Seeing pink: Why is sports gear for women still so gendered?', *New Statesman*, 3 January 2017, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/sport/2017/01/seeing-pink-why-sports-gear-women-still-so-gendered.

a user sits in a chair and pushes their legs forward to lift a weight – are also often inaccessible for shorter people whose limbs do not reach the push pads and therefore more likely to exclude women and non-binary people.[78] Some gyms have attempted to break the spatial mould. For example, The Leeds People's Gym opened in September 2023 with the ambition to create a space where users can grow in confidence. Owners Daniel Browne and Chris Woods installed mood lighting to make the gym feel less intimidating and a novel type of mirror that reduces people's ability to see others watching them. Daniel told *PinkNews*, 'Up close they're fine, so you can check your form, but from a distance they're all warped like funhouse mirrors.'[79] The report *Non-binary Inclusion in Sport* (2020) also identified the benefits of positioning gym equipment to consider the 'the diverse body types and heights' of users and create mixed clusters of equipment (e.g. a cardio machine next to a bench for weightlifting) to break up spaces dominated by men.[80]

Classification practices and the spaces where they occur are inextricably linked. Barras conducted several interviews with LGBTQ+ people engaged in health and fitness activities and uncovered examples where prior knowledge of what *can* go wrong in these locations shaped people's actions. For example, Sarah – a trans woman in her late sixties – told Barras how she carries her Gender Recognition Certificate 'just in case someone wants to see it' and to minimize the risk of confrontation if challenged when using sports facilities.[81] Another interviewee, Eric – a trans masculine, non-binary person in their early twenties – had decided to avoid transphobia by 'pre-emptively' not going to places where incidents were more likely to occur.[82] People are generally aware of what has happened in the past – particularly instances where classifications go wrong or result in negative experiences – which shapes what people do and where they go in the present. Spatial interventions such as the installation of funhouse mirrors or clustering of different types of fitness equipment can upset the rhythm of how people classify each other when working out. Even when these efforts do not fully resolve the problems discussed, the creation of more welcoming and inclusive health and fitness environments not only benefits queer people but potentially creates spaces that are better for everyone.

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[78] Spandler et al., 'Non-binary inclusion in sport', 7.
[79] Patrick Kelleher, 'Sick of being bullied in mainstream gyms, two gay men decided to open Their own', *PinkNews*, 9 November 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/11/09/leeds-peoples-gym-daniel-browne-chris-woods-gay/.
[80] Spandler et al., 'Non-binary inclusion in sport', 8.
[81] Barras, *Transgender and Non-Binary People in Everyday Sport*, 115.
[82] Barras, 145.

Pulled between two poles

'It often felt like picking the lie', Al Hopkins explained to me when asked about their experience as a non-binary runner and being forced to register as a female or male entrant.[83] 'I just go where I'm expected to be seen. And, after a while, that begins to be painful, it begins to hurt, it gets tiring, and you just don't want to engage with it.' Al came out as non-binary in their mid-thirties and was President of Edinburgh Frontrunners – a running club for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and straight friends – in the late 2010s. They now work with the Scottish charity LEAP Sports to improve the experiences of trans and queer people engaged in sports and physical activities.[84] Al described how 'a lot of trans people have experiences where they don't feel safe in sport. They don't feel like sport is for them'. Their work with LEAP Sports tries to 'change these spaces so that everything around feels like it's been set up'. For non-binary people, Al provided the example of toilets: 'You don't turn up to a race and you've just got a bunch of troughs for the men and two cubicles for the women and massive queues. You've actually got gender-neutral options as well.'

Growing up in the 1980s, Al felt that sport was not open to people who did not follow gender stereotypes. 'I always felt that I just didn't fit, and this is a common theme among the trans people I work with. I definitely felt like sport was something "other people did"'. However, after coming out as gay then as non-binary, they came to realize that sports were – in fact – 'really good fun'. Al described their experience of registering for a running festival in the Scottish town of Jedburgh in 2016 and how the organizers had decided to include a non-binary category, which presented an opportunity to disclose their identity to a wider audience. 'This is me coming out to a large extent because nobody really knew at that point. And I'd just gone "click" – it was one of those weirdly amazing feelings, just validating.' Inspired by their positive experience in Jedburgh, in 2017 Al organized the Frontrunner's inaugural Edinburgh Pride Run and wanted to make the event inclusive for all participants while also ensuring all race times were officially recognized. 'I wanted to have it wheelchair accessible, because we had a frame runner in the club, and I wanted it to be free; I wanted to fly as many different pride flags as possible and I wanted it to have a non-binary category.' Al explained. This ambition would require scottishathletics, the governing body for athletics events in Scotland, to expand their entry requirements to welcome runners who did not identify as 'male' or 'female'. To Al's surprise, scottishathletics

[83] Interview with Al Hopkins, 13 May 2024.
[84] LEAP Sports Scotland, 'What we do', LEAP Sports Scotland, 25 April 2024, https://leapsports.org/about.

responded positively to the request and agreed to adapt their rules to formally include a third, non-binary category. Al explained, 'I was like, "Oh Gods, how do I actually sort that out? I'm gonna have to time this, aren't I?" So about a week beforehand we suddenly had to come up with a whole system, it was chaotic but a lot of fun.' Scottishathletics has continued to license events that include non-binary categories and, since April 2019, required all championship events to include a non-binary category as one of the entry options.[85]

Outside of Scotland, many other competition organizers, community events and fitness apps have also revised the type of registration information they gather about a person's sex or gender. For example, in 2020, the fitness company Peloton expanded the options available in its app to include 'non-binary', a move also adopted by running and cycling app Strava.[86] In 2023, parkrun – an international community of weekly, mass-participation five-kilometre races – reviewed its policy of allowing participants to self-identify their gender and register as one of four options: 'female', 'male', 'another gender identity' and 'prefer not to say'.[87] After much online attention, following a study published by the right-wing think-tank Policy Exchange, parkrun decided to no longer share course records but maintained its inclusive approach to self-identified gender categories. Parkrun justified its decision as a 'health and wellbeing charity that provides non-competitive socially-focussed physical activity, and allows people to identify in the way they feel most appropriate and comfortable'.[88] One might wonder why a weekly community run – which brings together runners of all ages, people in mobility scooters and parents with prams – briefly became a battle line in the bigger culture war over the classification of queer communities. As journalist Jonathan Liew argued in *The Guardian*, the issue 'isn't really about parkrun records, and it's not really about parkrun, and it isn't really about sport at all' – rather, the attempt to restrict how people participate in parkrun was intended to broadcast a message to 'trans women, trans men – or even anyone who looks like they might be trans – that this is not your space, and you will identify not according to your values but to

[85] scottishathletics, 'Scottish athletics policy on non-binary athletes competing within Scottish national championships' (Edinburgh: scottishathletics, 19 May 2022), https://www.scottishathletics.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Scottish-Athletics-Policy-on-non-binary-athletes-competing-within-Scottish-National-Championships.pdf.

[86] Zoe Weiner, 'Peloton has (finally) added a non-binary feature to its platform, but the fitness industry still has a long way to go toward inclusivity', *Well+Good*, 18 June 2020, https://www.wellandgood.com/peloton-non-binary/; Freddie Watson, 'My life as a non-binary rider in the world of competitive cycling', Cycling UK, 31 March 2021, https://www.cyclinguk.org/blog/my-life-non-binary-rider-world-competitive-cycling.

[87] In 2019, parkrun expanded its options to include participants who did not identify with the gender binary, in 'Gender', parkrun Support, https://support.parkrun.com/hc/en-us/articles/360005339137-Gender.

[88] parkrun.

ours'.[89] During our interview, Al also noted that when trans people take part in sport, 'you're always going to get transphobes going "They shouldn't be here", and that makes it hard'. Adding more categories beyond 'men' and 'women' offers one way to reconfigure the status quo. As Al explained, 'you've got to demonstrate that having men and women categories doesn't fit everybody. Over time, people begin to realise that there's quite a large chunk of the population who don't really fit these categories very well'. Yet, Al remained aware of limitations to the 'more categories' approach and noted, 'Labels are a funny thing because humans like categorising people. We like to put each other in boxes. When we don't know if the box fits, we shove people in the one that's closest or the one that feels most comfortable to us, not to the person who's getting boxed.' For Al, 'labels are more like tools, they're more like things you should try on. I tried on the label "non-binary" to see if it fitted and I was like, "Yes, this is comfortable"'. Looking towards the future, Al concluded, 'if there's something else that looks like it might fit better. I'll give that a try. I don't have to stick with it'.

Al's observation that 'we like to put each other in boxes' rang true and, in everyday sport, the sorting of people into gender and sex categories uses the language of fairness to justify its decisions. In this section, I consider Sara Ahmed's warning 'that solutions to problems can create new problems' and investigate what changes when an expanded number of categories are made available.[90] As a response to the historical exclusion of women and other minoritized communities from participation in sport, adding more categories seems like a positive development. Al and other authors of the *Non-binary Inclusion in Sport* (2020) report highlight how the addition of non-binary categories brings some benefits but 'does not actually address the issue of gender segregation in sports, and it does not alter the different eligibility rules that currently apply to female and male sports categories'.[91] The report continues, if introduced at a professional level, there is also a risk that 'people who do not meet the testosterone rules for women's and men's sports, could be placed into the non-binary category, even if they do not identify as such'.[92] When the boundaries of classifications are fixed and discrete, individuals

[89] Jonathan Liew, 'Why have rightwingers made even parkrun a battleground for trans people?', *The Guardian*, 14 February 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/feb/14/why-have-rightwingers-made-even-parkrun-a-battleground-for-trans-people.
[90] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 143.
[91] Spandler et al., 'Non-binary inclusion in sport', 17.
[92] Spandler et al., 17.

suffer from rules that are both under-inclusive (where individuals are denied membership of a category) and over-inclusive (where individuals are scooped up and assigned to a category not of their choosing). Concealed within well-intentioned plans to expand access and improve participation in sports, the introduction of longer drop-down lists of identity options can invent even more instances where competitors are sorted into categories that carry different values.[93]

'Recognition expands our gender imaginary but does little to challenge our collective reliance on gender categories', writes Florence Ashley on the politics of gender categories. 'It is unable to offer a radical critique of the institutionalization of gender. Conceding that gender offers a natural or acceptable junction for social categorization is already conceding far too much.'[94] Writing specifically about attempts to define and distinguish 'trans' and 'non-binary' categories, Travis Alabanza argues that all categorization has achieved is the creation of 'more boxes around gender to fit us within, rather than being a tool to smash the rigidness of those boxes'.[95] The maintenance of the existing gender binary means that gender-nonconforming people, trying to find where they fit, continue to encounter the experience of being pulled between two poles. For example, US-based genderqueer fitness coach Aleksei Weaver, speaking with the publication *Mic* in 2021, described how using a fitness programme involves 'the danger of moving away from one set of norms is that sometimes you feel like you're getting stuck in another set of norms' – countering expectations associated with a 'feminine body' means you are automatically pushed to hone a 'masculine body' instead.[96]

On a practical level, there is also the problem of small numbers and lack of competition, particularly in sports with fewer participants. Freddie Watson, a queer and non-binary cyclist who uses Strava to record their times and compete against others, has described how identifying outside male and female categories removes them from 'the leader boards, or comparisons on segments other than "all participants", but that is fine most of the time'.[97] Al also highlighted the problem 'that there are still not very many people who run in the non-binary category, which means that when you run a race there's a reasonable chance you're going to end up on the podium'. Al joked, 'I have been on a podium more times than I feel comfortable with because I'm not a fast runner' and how this visibility can invite new risks for trans

[93] John Gleaves and Tim Lehrbach, 'Beyond fairness: The ethics of inclusion for transgender and intersex athletes', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 43, no. 2 (3 May 2016): 312.
[94] Ashley, 'Genderfucking as a critical legal methodology', 5.
[95] Alabanza, *None of the Above*, 50.
[96] Tracey Anne Duncan, 'Why does fitness need to be this gendered?' *Mic*, 8 October 2021, https://www.mic.com/life/why-does-fitness-need-to-be-this-gendered.
[97] Watson, 'My life as a non-binary rider'.

competitors: 'If they sign up as non-binary, they're going to appear on a list of names and lists are not always a good thing.'

Who wins has become a sticking point in deliberations over LGBTQ competitors and the categories within which they compete – a debate that has erupted across professional sports bodies in the UK, doing little to remedy their reputation as unwelcoming for queer people.[98] Sports researcher Cathy Devine has warned that the participation of trans women in women's sport 'means girls and women are losing out on rankings, selection, qualification (for heats and finals in local, regional, national, international and Olympic events), podium places, medals, prize money and career opportunities'.[99] According to Devine, we face a future where 'women's records set by transwomen may be impossible for female athletes to reach'.[100] This stream of (mainly imagined) concerns is a feature of much 'gender critical' research: building a series of 'what if?' scenarios that work backwards to identify trans women – or the amorphous spectre of 'gender' – as the index case for bigger fears and anxieties. As philosopher Judith Butler explains, 'gender is no longer a mundane box to be checked on official forms, and surely not one of those obscure academic disciplines with no effect in the broader world. On the contrary: it has become a phantasm with destructive powers, one way of collecting and escalating multitudes of modern panics'.[101]

Gender and sex categories are one of several methods used to differentiate competitors in sporting events – other examples include impairment types in parasports, weight divisions in boxing and age groups in sports like rugby and football.[102] The design of classifications in elite sports reflects foundational assumptions about why people organize and participate in these activities. If the primary objective is to test the physiological abilities of competitors – with separate competitions for groups of people who are understood as the 'same' – then we first need to determine who is the same and who is

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[98] For discussion of national and international sporting bodies, see Reuters, 'UK athletics to apply world body's transgender rules', *Reuters*, 31 March 2023, https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/uk-athletics-apply-world-bodys-transgender-rules-2023-03-31/; Sonia Twigg, 'The rules for transgender athletes across different sports', *The Independent*, 16 April 2024, https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/transgender-athletes-ban-rules-olympics-b2529369.html. In Scotland, almost all respondents in the OutSport survey believed sport had a problem with homophobia (94 per cent) and transphobia (94 per cent), in Tobias Menzel et al., 'Sexual orientation, gender identity and sport: Selected findings and recommendations for action, Scotland' (Cologne: German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies, 2019), 6, https://leapsports.org/files/1741-Outsport%20Scotland%20Report.pdf.

[99] Cathy Devine, 'Sex, gender identity and sport', in *Sex and Gender*, ed. Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd (London: Routledge, 2023), 232.

[100] Devine, 232.

[101] Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, 5.

[102] World Para Athletics, 'Classifications in para athletics', International Paralympic Committee, https://www.paralympic.org/athletics/classification.

different. When some trans and intersex competitors are believed to bring an unfair advantage, strategies adopted by sporting organizations to include trans and intersex competitors have focused on methods to redress any real or perceived physiological benefits.[103] Fairness sounds like a value that everyone can get behind, yet its apolitical gloss masks its capacity to maintain existing arrangements that benefit those with the most privileged access to sport (e.g. competitors from affluent backgrounds).[104] During our interview, Al explained, 'there are obviously physiological differences that are relevant and need to be taken account of but they're not always as big or as significant as the transphobes would like to make them out to be'. At an elite level, 'you're always proving someone's "not a woman". They don't question the men, they question the women and they go "you're too strong, too fast, there's something not right, we don't like you, so maybe you're not a woman"'. Among the 'people who get trapped in this system', competitors are almost always from the Global South.[105]

Classifications are fugitive lines in the sand – they shorten and stretch according to who holds the tools, bend round objects when they wish to do so and get washed away when the tide pulls in. Queer participation is never universal – it is qualified and contingent on the whims of who decides. This hollow form of inclusion requires those invited into the system to change something about who they are or jump through hoops not expected of other competitors. As researchers John Gleaves and Tim Lehrbach observe, 'athletes who simply by happenstance conform to one of two socially established genders, face no questions about their participation nor any burden to prove they belong in gender-segregated sport. Their status as "normal" entitles them to participate while those who are "not normal" must prove that they fit in'.[106] As documented in the previous chapter's discussion of techniques and technologies used to determine who crosses the border, using your body as evidence is a high-risk strategy. When you say 'yes' to your body telling its own story, you relinquish your voice and give credence to the possibility of somatic truths, which are more easily manipulated by

[103] Gleaves and Lehrbach, 'Beyond fairness', 313.
[104] Bruce Kidd and Michele K. Donnelly, 'World Rugby's ban on trans players has nothing to do with so-called "fairness"', *The Conversation*, 30 November 2020, http://theconversation.com/world-rugbys-ban-on-trans-players-has-nothing-to-do-with-so-called-fairness-150589.
[105] Al noted the example of runner Caster Semenya, who is 'a Black queer woman and it often feels like she just doesn't conform to what they would like a woman to look like and act like. So they resent her being fast'. This problem is not new. Black feminist scholars have long documented how Black women's claims to the category of 'woman' are challenged when they differ too much from the white default; see Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 150.
[106] Gleaves and Lehrbach, 'Beyond fairness', 314.

the scientific instruments, analytical methods and comparators selected by the people looking for answers. What follows is a charade of inclusion – a rainbow trap – where queer competitors have the *choice* to meet the classification requirements of the system or refuse the invite.[107]

The quantified queer

Clue is a period-tracking app launched in 2012 by a team including Ida Tin, the Danish entrepreneur and author credited for introducing the term 'femtech'. From its inception, the app promoted itself as inclusive for anyone who menstruates and, by 2024, had over 10 million monthly active users across 190 countries.[108] Aubrey Bryan – who identifies as non-binary – started using the app before landing a job writing content for the company in 2020. Aubrey had long experienced anger, irrationality and mood swings associated with premenstrual syndrome and had understood this part of their cycle as a 'stereotypical, "womanly" symptom'.[109] Clue's use of inclusive language, which does not presuppose that only women experience periods, helped Aubrey reimagine their period and associated symptoms not as signifiers of gender but as a way that their body communicates with them. After using the app to track their menstrual cycle for several months, Aubrey stopped experiencing mood swings. Ultimately, as Aubrey explained, the app enabled them to 'let go of the link between my period and my gender' and feel 'free at last to explore the final frontier of my queerness'. While the story of Aubrey might just be clever marketing content, the example underscores the multi-directional nature of queer encounters with classifications, categories and labels. And how the effects of these encounters can change fundamental aspects about how someone understands themselves, their identity and their body.

This final section draws our attention to the generative effects of classification practices and how developments in health and fitness tech have energized

[107] This illusion of choice is informed by K. Aly Bailey et al., 'Building community or perpetuating inclusionism? The representation of "inclusion" on fitness facility websites', *Leisure/Loisir* 47, no. 4 (2 October 2023): 674.
[108] Clue, 'About clue', 2024, https://helloclue.com/about-clue.
[109] Aubrey Bryan, 'How tracking in clue helped me accept my non-binary identity', Clue, 14 July 2020, https://helloclue.com/articles/lgbt-voices/how-tracking-in-clue-helped-me-accept-my-non-binary-identity.

the prospect of complete control over one's body. Health and fitness tech brings us back to familiar ground: how we understand our lives through the classification machines used to observe and categorize us.[110] Michel Foucault uses the term biopower to describe an assortment of strategies, mechanisms, techniques and technologies deployed to regulate life and the living.[111] Unlike other types of control and coercion, biopower utilizes positive ideas about 'what is normal' to drive people's behaviours: people fall in line not because they are (explicitly) forced to do so but because they believe it is the right thing to do. Classifications – and their usefulness for averages, outliers and other quantitative measures – are central to this strategy, as they provide a means to compare, contrast and evaluate oneself against another.[112]

The body has become observable in new ways. Health and fitness devices that sit on our skin (e.g. fitness watches), under our skin (e.g. glucose monitors) or inside our bodies (e.g. implantable biosensors) have granted healthcare professionals, tech companies and individuals greater opportunities to scrutinize who we are and what we do.[113] Scholars have used the term dataveillance to describe the diffuse proliferation of data capture practices related to health and fitness.[114] Unlike surveillance, which suggests observation from a single source that looms above us, dataveillance is horizontally distributed and captures insights from multiple sources – for example, a skin sensor on your wrist or your location tracked via GPS. Dataveillance does not simply record what has happened but, more importantly, also predicts and modifies a person's future actions. Health and fitness tech is an ideal medium for classification-based predictions and has helped make the idea of entrepreneurship of one's body – or hacking your health – go mainstream. The Quantified Self movement is one example of the direction we might head. Starting life among tech workers in California in the late 2000s, the movement championed the motto 'self knowledge through numbers' and took an early interest in wearable devices that record data about the body

[110] My account of the disciplinary effects of being observed by health and fitness tech is informed by Foucault's discussion of the panoptic prison and the shaping effects of prisoners of always being observed, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), chap. Panopticism.

[111] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 139–40.

[112] For discussion, see Michael Sauder and Wendy Nelson Espeland, 'The discipline of rankings: Tight coupling and organizational change', *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 63–82.

[113] Gina Neff and Dawn Nafus, *Self-Tracking*, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 18–19.

[114] Discussed in Minna Ruckenstein and Natasha Dow Schüll, 'The datafication of health', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 46, no. 1 (23 October 2017): 264.

in real time.[115] Proponents of the Quantified Self movement understood this repository of data – calories consumed, steps walked and hours slept – as holding secrets that would empower individuals to seize control of their bodies and bioengineer an end to unhealthy habits. Writing in *The New York Times* in 2010, Gary Wolf, one of the movement's co-founders, explained, 'We use numbers when we want to tune up a car, analyze a chemical reaction, predict the outcome of an election. We use numbers to optimize an assembly line. Why not use numbers on ourselves?'[116] The numbers – in isolation – were only ever one part of the strategy, as these technologies became increasingly adept in identifying when and where bad habits occur and setting daily goals in response. These technologies began to intrude the non-digital world via vibrations, push messages and other nudges that tell us to chug three more bottles of water to meet our daily hydration target or go to bed in thirty minutes to maintain our sleep cycle.[117]

While access to a ticker tape of health and fitness data can alter an individual's actions to produce their desired health outcomes, how someone responds to this information can also take other forms. With entrepreneurship of the body and looping effects that accompany easy access to data about our health and fitness, we start to lose track of where the human body begins and ends. The term transhumanism was coined in the late 1950s to describe the transcendence of the category of 'human', the asking of questions about the stability of this category and its location in a vast infrastructure of other human and non-human actors.[118] More than four decades later, Karen Barad described categories – such as race, gender and sexuality – as events or encounters between bodies, rather than distinct entities in and of

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[115] Josh Cohen, 'Quantified self: The algorithm of life', *Prospect*, 5 February 2014, https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/culture/45993/quantified-self-the-algorithm-of-life, discussed in Btihaj Ajana, 'Digital health and the biopolitics of the quantified self', *Digital Health* 3 (January 2017): 2.

[116] Gary Wolf, 'The data-driven life', *The New York Times*, 28 April 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/02/magazine/02self-measurement-t.html.

[117] Natasha Singer describes these intrusions 'the nurselike application of technology', where devices 'prod' the user to take action rather than just collect data, in 'Technology that prods you to take action, not just collect data', *The New York Times*, 18 April 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/technology/technology-that-prods-you-to-take-action-not-just-collect-data.html. Ben Williamson has also argued that health tracking data has become 'a kind of active, algorithmic skin that not only sheathes but animates and orders the body', in 'Algorithmic skin: Health-tracking technologies, personal analytics and the biopedagogies of digitized health and physical education', *Sport, Education and Society* 20, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 147.

[118] Transhumanism is associated with Julian Huxley (1887–1985), the first director of UNESCO and a founding member of the World Wildlife Fund. Writing in 1957, Huxley explained, 'The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself […] in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature', in 'Transhumanism', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8, no. 1 (1 January 1968): 76.

themselves.[119] Black studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott has also highlighted the exclusionary logic embedded in our current approach to rights, which are distributed according to claims to knowable identity categories – in other words, you need to 'know' your sexuality before you can access rights related to your sexuality.[120] A transhumanist approach takes Walcott's argument one step further and asks what counts as an attendant body for the distribution of rights.

You might feel as if this chapter has lost sight of LGBTQ labels, categories and classifications and taken us on a journey where we leave behind the material body (and the world as we know it!). But perhaps this departure is exactly the point. The future will bring more technologies that reconfigure the capacities of what bodies can do, transcending 'nature' in unexpected ways.[121] The world imagined by transhumanists, in which our current understanding of the category of 'human' no longer exists, is not as outlandish as it may first appear. Futurist José Cordeiro observes how 'humans are at a crossroads like other natural species that are reclassified in the face of new relational dynamics and shifting epistemological paradigms'.[122] Our history of sorting people has used arbitrary markers of difference to determine 'who counts' as human and in what contexts. Bioethicist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has argued that disability is rarely 'presented as part of the spectrum of human variation' and more often presented 'as something that is wrong with someone, as an exceptional and escapable calamity'.[123] Similarly, the question 'who counts' as human is impossible to ask without reference to the category's entanglement in white supremacist ideologies.[124] Bringing more attention to the classification of 'human' might make things better, as the invisibility of this classification – as a constructed, constituent part of a bigger infrastructure – has excused centuries of harm and damage.

[119] Jasbir K. Puar, channelling the work of Barad and other feminist technoscholars such as Donna Haraway, also notes how these assemblages deprivilege the human body as a discrete organic 'thing' and deexceptionalize what counts as a body, extending the lens to include bodies of water, cities and institutions, in Puar, 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess'; Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity'.

[120] Rinaldo Walcott, 'Foreword, the homosexuals have arrived!', in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*, ed. OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), ix.

[121] Aren Z. Aizura et al., 'Thinking with trans now', *Social Text* 38, no. 4 (1 December 2020): 144.

[122] José Cordeiro, 'The boundaries of the human: From humanism to transhumanism', *World Futures Review* 6, no. 3 (1 September 2014): 236.

[123] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Feminist disability studies', *Signs* 30, no. 2 (2005): 1568.

[124] Discussed in Cathy J. Cohen, 'Punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens: The radical potential of queer politics?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1 May 1997): 453.

'How can we – the non-binary – be true, if the gender binary remains upheld? One of us will have to go, and so many different types of people, structures and systems have far more stakes in the latter remaining.'[125] I conclude this chapter by returning to the words of Travis Alabanza and their warning that queer co-existence with the gender binary is never going to succeed. We are living through a palimpsestic period where the labels, categories and classifications that came before us never really went away. Like the jaunty sign fixed to the changing room door at my gym, the old rules for entry are still hanging around. As Alabanza predicts, 'one of us will have to go'.

This chapter has documented queer encounters with a variety of classifications related to health and fitness. My analysis took us from sweaty changing rooms, through to EHRs and wearable health and fitness tech. These varied examples tell a bigger story about the effects of politics on the production of scientific facts; the sociotechnical factors that inform the design of data categories; the inextricable link between classification practices and the spaces where they occur; how the language of fairness is used to shore up narrow articulations of gender and sex categories; and the promise of complete control over the body.

As Al Hopkins described during our interview, LGBTQ people in the UK are weathering a period of obsessive interest in classification practices, particularly in relation to the participation of trans, non-binary and intersex people in sport. Designing a perfect classification system is impossible but it is no accident that the experiences of box breakers are routinely discounted and erased when systems are revamped and made 'more inclusive'. The promise of inclusion invites LGBTQ people to get involved – join a gym, get on a bike, run the race – without referencing the bounded set of practices and identities we are forced to adopt. It's a rainbow trap in which the many individuals located outside a curated list of knowable LGBTQ categories are further abandoned. Against this backdrop, all our bodies have become observable in new ways and – for a growing number of people – are chafing the edges and rewriting the rules for 'who counts' as human.

[125] Alabanza, *None of the Above*, 48.