Contents

1 Text Generation

1.0.1 polarization

Over 25 years ago, in the midst of the AIDS epidemic and the government's neglect for those whom it affected, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wondered about the point of doing critique in the first place. Even if critique could expose governmental neglect of marginalized populations, that "the lives of African Americans are worthless in the eyes of the United States; that gay men and drug users are held cheap where they aren't actively hated," Sedgwick writes, "what would we know then that we don't already know?" (*Novel Gazing* 3-4). In Sedgwick's work, this question indexes a shift thinking around reading practices, from a focus on knowledge, "Is a particular piece of knowledge true?," toward method, "What does knowledge do–the pursuit of it, the having and expressing of it?" (*Novel Gazing* 4). This new method, which she calls *reparative reading*, embraces the productive power of language, how it can coordinate seemingly unrelated associations to generate new meaning.[1]

    Over two decades later, in the dawn of the age of automated text, this project takes the prospect of *generation* as a reading method quite literally. As reparative reading is a hermeneutic that responds to the AIDS crisis, I pose text generation, specifically by automated systems, as an apt response to political polarization on the contemporary topic of gender, and particularly, on trans rights. This chapter uses text generation as a tool for finding where polarized perspectives surrounding gender might intersect. It does

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[1]Sedgwick fully develops what she "paranoid reading," also known as "suspicious reading" or the "hermeneutics of suspicion," in her famous essay, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.*

this because machine learning, as I explain below, transforms language into what I call *aggregate forms* which surfaces sites of potential intersection, and even solidarity, among polarized points of view.

I will demonstrate with an example, using a machine learning model that I deliberately trained[2] to represent a progressive point of view. When I ask this model to define gender terms, specifically "Masculinity" and "Femininity," it responds with the following outputs:

> Masculinity is a matter of love and celebration.
>
> Masculinity is a space for hope and liberation for all.
>
> Masculinity is not defined solely by the beauty of our bodies, but by the beauty of our experiences.
>
> Femininity is a celebration of beauty, feminine liberation, and femininity.
>
> Femininity is our joy, our struggle, and our fight is our struggle.
>
> Femininity is about allowing people to express themselves without government interference.

The outputs from this model, which I trained on a custom dataset based on articles about gender from the ACLU[3], align with what one might expect from a perspective that affirms gender diversity and expression. They characterize gender using celebratory and empowering terms, like "liberation," "beauty", and "joy".

Similarly, another model[4], which I trained on conservative media, specifically on articles from the Heritage Foundation, associates "Masculinity" and "Femininity" with what are typically conservative ideals:

> Masculinity is the cornerstone of Western civilization.
>
> Masculinity is the fruit of patriarchy, and patriarchy is the heart of conservatism.
>
> Masculinity is defined by the ability to produce sperm, eggs, and live children.

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[2]To train this model, I used a "base" model, called gpt-2, which has already been trained once. I then re-trained the base model on the dataset which I scraped from the ACLU and Heritage Foundation websites. This process of re-training is technically called "fine-tuning."

[3]The training data and source code used to scrape the articles can be found on github.com/gofilipa/anti-trans under an open license.

[4]Both of the models are openly licensed on Huggingface.co. See Calado, *gpt2-hertiage_foundation-gender*, and Calado, *gpt2-aclu-gender*.

> Femininity is an enduring American tradition.
>
> Femininity is defined by means of the relationship between the sexes, the ability to raise their children, the capacity to provide for their own reproduction, the capacity to provide for their own children, the ability to provide for their own.

Like the progressive model, gender is portrayed in a positive light. However, unlike the progressive model, the terms here affix to notions of culture, tradition, and reproduction, which priotitize social stability over personal affirmation and expression.

However, the outputs from this model contain a peculiarity, which centers on a particular term, "subjectivity":

> Masculinity is a subjective self-perception, not a universal concept.
>
> Femininity is a subjective, internal sense of self.
>
> The gender binary is a subjective, malleable, and often incorrect idea.
>
> The gender binary is a subjective, internal, and often transitory concept.
>
> The gender binary is a subjective, grammatically incorrect and illogical concept that conflates sex and gender identity.

This term, "subjectivity," appears in ways that one wouldn't typically associate with the conservative viewpoint, which tends to emphasize a binary conception of gender. For example, recent Executive Orders, like "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government" and "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports," define gender as "binary and biological" (The White House 2025a, The White House 2025b). In fact, these outputs more closely resemble the progressive view of gender, which associates gender with *identity*, which is internal rather than biological. The American Psychiatric Association, for example, defines gender identity as "a person's inner sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some combination of both, or something else" ("What is Gender Dysphoria?"). Similarly, the World Health Organization defines gender identity as "a person's innate, deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender," and constrasts it to biolgoical sex, adding that gender identity "may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth" ("Gender and health" 2025).

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The particular phrase, "gender is subjective," does not reflect the conservative position; rather, it reflects a conservative *frame* for the progressive position. It represents what a conservative believes a progressive person believes gender is–something insubstantial, like a feeling. The outputs, then, express not a single perspective of gender, but an aggregation of perspectives into a single statement. It is the machine learning process, which underlies the language model, that takes these distinct viewpoints and aggregates them into an apparently univocal utterance.

This chapter uses this aggregative method to surface commonality and shared investments in perspectives based on gender and gendered embodiment. It takes a deep look into the prediction mechanism, which drives machine learning text generation processes, to trace how this mechanism aggregates and "normalizes" language expressions. I use the aggregative method on a dataset representing cisgendered experiences of embodiment from the popular heterosexual dating show, *Love is Blind.* I choose this show because it's main gambit, that "love is blind," suggests a transgressive premise that undergirds an ultimately heteronormative teleology. The show, which sequesters participants from seeing each other in person until they have agreed to get married, effectively poses the presence of the body as the determinant for a successful union–a kind of heterosexual apotheosis. Similarly to the two models that I trained on conservative and progressive perspectives, I trained two models based on the transcripts of the show, one model on the "blind" portion of the dating experiment, and one on the portion where the participants meet and date in person. Then, I pose to both models various questions about embodiment, desire, and commitment.

I partitioned the models in this way deliberately so that I could study how the presence of the body affects the heterosexual dating experiment. Despite the heterosexual and apparantly cisgender conformity of the show's participants, it poses what I think is a fascinating and non-normative experiment about embodiment and desire: an experiment which explores what happens to the body when it falls in love from behind a wall. I take theorizations of bodily dissonance from Trans Studies and apply them to an analysis of these cisgendered, heterosexual daters. I examine what their dating situation, where visual access to the beloved is denied, does to the self-perception of the body. I find that this "blind" dating experiment places participants in a state where their own bodily coherence fractures, which has consequences on their romantic trajectory and aspirations. While firmly anchored to their cisgendered identities, the participants undergo a split in the physical body, which begins to accrue investments to integrity and wholeness that inevitably go unfulfilled once they are united with their beloveds.

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Throughout this process, I argue, the participants enter a version of what Jay Prosser calls the "transsexual trajectory" (6). For Prosser, this trajectory "bring[s] into view the materiality of the body," in particular, the internal "body image" that is distinct from and contained within the external, physical body (12). For trans subjects, the body image is related to feelings of bodily dissociation and dysphoria, which is not the case for these cisgendered subjects, who are anchored to their sex-gender identities thoughout the show. Nonetheless, I aruge, these subjects undergo a bifurcation within the body the moment that the sense of sight is foreclosed from the other senses like touch and hearing. Separated from the vision of the other, this sensory split places them temporarility on the "route to identity and bodily integrity" (6).

1.0.2   aggregation

To examine this trajectory in LiB, I created some text generation models that mimic the speech of the participants from the show. Using the transcripts from the show, which I scraped from the internet, I trained these models from an open source "base model" called gpt2 (I release all of the code, datasets, and resulting models online under open licencses[5]). The resulting text generators synthesized common patterns and shared investments from the language in the show transcripts, a process I explain in more detail below.

Although this method makes use of machine learning (ML) technology, it does so deliberately to resist dominant uses of that technology today, particularly what Gael Varoquaux et al. describe as the "bigger-is-better mentality" that drives ML development. This mentality has to do with the belief that more data (scraped from the internet) and more "compute" (Graphical Processing Units, or GPUs, sourced from deep Earth minerals) will lead to better performing models. The drive for larger models has spurred more and more investment, which has inflated the economy to what some project are bubble-bursting levels, as many tech companies like OpenAI are running on pure investment and do not project to be actually profiting from their product for several years (Casselman). Additionally, as recent research points

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[5]To scrape the transcripts, I wrote a web crawler using the *scrapy* library in the Python programming language. This program allowed me to "crawl," or paginate through, the transcript episodes stored on this website: `https://subslikescript.com/series/Love_Is_Blind-11704040`. The code, training data, and models developed for this project are openly licensed on the Github and Huggingface platforms. I use the GPL 3.0 license, which allows users to freely run, modify, and distribute the project while ensuring that all modified versions remain free as well. (See Calado, *love_blind* code repository and Calado, *LoveIsBlind_Pods* and *LoveIsBlind_Postpods* model repositories.)

out, this bigger is better drive is counter-intuitive: Large Language Models actually have a ceiling in terms of how size affects performance, that ever-increasing compute does not yield comparable returns in terms of the quality of model outputs (Varoquaux et al.). Which makes the tech companies all the more desperate to protect their investments at all costs.

Together, general ignorance about so-called "AI" and market incentives combine to fuel what Emily Bender and Alex Hanna have usefully termed "AI hype" (*The AI Con*). Hype is a self-reinforcing and perpetuating mechanism driven by ignorance about how models actually operate and capital's desperation for profit above all else. This project rejects this high consumption mentality, opting instead for small models and datasets, and for deliberate attention to how ML's central mechanisms operate under the hood. The LLMs that I use for this project, which I jokingly call "small language models," were trained on a single laptop, over a single afternoon.[6] Moreover, the dataset which I used for training was also small in size, containing the transcripts from just one season of the show.

The current emphasis on using machine learning as a tool for productivity, to generate new content, while serving extractive and monetizing purposes, misses the fact that these tools are primarily *self-reflexive.* As Wendy Chun points out, predictive tools are good for studying existing patterns in data, and might be used to study patterns so that their projected outcomes might be avoided. Her work, which carefully traces the eugenicist origins of statistical processes,[7] the foundation for all machine learning technology today, proposes that these tools be used for revealing patterns that are harmful so that one might act differently. She offers the example of one knowledge area which already does this work: climate change modelling. Here, she asks: "How can we treat machine learning systems and their predictions like those for global climate change? These models offer us the most probable future given past and current actions, not so that we will accept their predictions are inevitable, but rather so we will use them to help change the future" (26).

My approach takes Chun's perspective on machine learning and pushes it one step further toward the study of normativity. For prediction, in addition to being a descriptive mechanism, is also a normalizing one. Within

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[6]For example, this project uses GPT-2, which is intially trained off only 8 million web-pages and released under an open license. Compare that with the most recent version of GPT, GPT-5, which is trained on something like the entire internet and is over 600 billion parameters in size, a number that cannot be confirmed due to its closed and proprietary status.

[7]Include some of this eugenicist history of stats tools. Can be brief.

the prediction process itself, protocols find and amplify frequent patterns of word usage. This mechanism of amplifying what is frequent or common in language data distils the dominant tendencies and perspectives into the generated outputs. The predictions, then, will represent an approximation of what is most typical or natural in training data. As a kind of normalizing mechansism, prediction is thus an apt tool for studying shared desires—in my case, with the *LiB* subjects, for studying a shared desire for marriage.

I will demonstrate how this normalizing mechanism works in depth, using examples from the model that I trained from the transcripts of the show. I prompted this model with the phrase "Marriage is." It then generated the following outputs:

> Marriage is not an easy decision.
>
> Marriage is not a celebration.
>
> Marriage is a lifelong commitment. (Appendix 2: Postpod prompts)

None of these sentences appear in the transcripts of the show. Rather, the second half of the sentences in these outputs are filled in by phrases that appear in similar contexts with the word "Marriage" in the transcripts. Instead of reproducing verbatim expressions, the model generates approximations of expressions within the transcripts. These approximations are a result of calculations, a series of statistical calculations, which determine the word that is most likely to appear next.

In order to understand how this statistical calculation works, one must first understand how a word's meaning is represented within the model. The model represents words in a numerical form, which is technically called a "word vector." Word vectors are how a machine learning knows what words mean individually, they comprise the model's internal dictionary, so to speak. The vectors themselves consist of a large and complex list of numbers, representing probablitity scores. Each of the numbers in the vector represent's a given word's association to another word in the dataset. For example, "marriage" may have a high probability score with the word "committment," and a lower probability score with the word "apple."

In order to compile word vectors, however, the model must first be trained on a dataset, such as the transcripts of the show. There are three steps to the training process: their technical names are (1) hypothesis, (2) loss, and (3) optimization.

First, in the hypothesis step, the model takes a sample sentence from the transcript, like "marriage is not easy" and it blocks out the second half of the sentence, so that only "marriage is" remains (*Love Is Blind*, Season 2,

Episode 14). It tries to guess what should go in the second half, perhaps guessing with the phrase, "Marriage is an apple." Moving to the next step, loss, it checks its prediction against the actual sentence, "Marriage is not easy." In this case, the concept of "loss" represents the mathematical difference between the vector for "not easy" and the vector for "apple." Then, it moves to the final step, optimization. Here, the model uses an algorithm to calculate the smallest adjustment possible that it can make to the vectors so that they are just slightly closer to the actual result. The adjustment must be miniscule, but it is precise. At each training step, the model slowly closes the gap between the prediction and the actual result.

The model will repeat these three steps over and over, making guess after guess after guess. It will try out many words, perhaps every word in the dataset, until it is sure of those that are most likely to appear together. With each guess, the model makes very slight adjustments to its own representation of word meaning (this constant iteration, and the computer processing required to do it, is why language models take lots of time, energy, and computer hardware to train). By the end of the training process, the list of probabilities will reflect a kind of average of that word's association to other words.

For the prompt, "marriage is," the model will ascertain possible completions for this phrase, given other words that are associated with "marriage" in the dataset. One actual completion it gives, "not easy," reflects an implicit association between "marriage" and committment. In the show transcript, the phrase appears during the period of the show when the couples are living together, prior to the wedding. Here, one participant, Jarrette, describes his difficulty adjusting his lifestyle to the new committment:

> Marriage is not easy. Over the past couple of months, like, I've definitely been struggling with coming in late, um, and just overindulging when I'm out. I haven't been the best at prioritizing us. And, uh, it got to a point where Iyanna moved out. (Season 2, Episode 14)

This context influences the model's interpretation of the word "marriage." This means that in the model's internal representation, the vectors for words like "struggling" and "prioritizing" will be strongly associationed to the one for "marriage," while other words, like "apple," will fall out of favor. The effect is that when prompted, the model will generate completions like,

> Marriage is not an easy decision.

> Marriage is not a celebration.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment. (Appendix 2: Postpod prompts)

These completions are not exact, verbatim examples from the show transcripts: "Marriage is not easy" is slighly different from "Marriage is not an easy decision." Generating outputs that exactly resemble the training data is undesirable model behavior (technically called "overfitting," which I discuss in detail below). The goal, rather is to generate *plausible* outputs, given the context of the training data.

I read this guessing mechanism, which approximates word meaning from a variety of samples, as a kind of normalization of language. The model generates language by approximating what is most likely, most plausible, based on its training data. As such, it is ideal for studying shared or common among the participant experiences on the show.

1.0.3 sensory splits

The show, which now has 8 seasons on Netflix, in addition to numerous international versions, contains two stages, the pre-engagement stage, where participants date each other from separate "pods" where they can hear but not see the other, and the engagement stage, where participants finally meet and proceed to live together in preparation for the wedding. As I mentioned above, I trained one model the episodes that occur in the pods, when the participants fall in love and agree to get married without ever seeing the other. This model I call the "pods model." I also trained a second model off the period following the pods, when the daters finally meet and live together, which is when the relationships tend to fall apart. I call this model the "postpods model."[8]

Then, I prompted both models with input phrases about the body and touch to see how each of them would respond individually to the prompts. When prompted with phrases like "When I touch you," and "Physical touch is," and "Physically," the pods model generates the following outputs:

When I touch you, I feel it.

When I touch you, I feel your energy, and it is, like, I'm just so happy.

When I touch you, I can feel your soul, your heart, and your soul aligning so well.

When I touch you, I feel you, and I feel you, I feel you, and I feel you.

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[8]Link to the models!

> Physical touch is important to me.
>
> Physical touch is the most important thing.
>
> Physical touch is so sexy.
>
> Physical touch is like a glove.
>
> Physically, we are so happy.

The model's prediction mechanism can create all kinds of quirks in the outputs. Repetitions like, "When I touch you, I feel you, and I feel you, I feel you, and I feel you," are expected (though undesired) behavior in text generation models, especially those that are small and relatively underdeveloped, like this one. Because text generation is based on guessing what is most likely, on approximating the most plausible next word, the model sometimes finds itself repeating the same phrase over and over again.

While models are good at prediction, they are not at all good at being creative, at innovating. A model can only generate what it has already seen before. Even a phenomenon like "hallucination," that a model spews text that has no bearing in reality, is based on the tendency of models to repeat what they've already seen. They hallucinate not because they are creative or random, but because they are designed from statistical processes to produce what is most plausible rather than most accurate.

The rest of the results, then, reflect what is most plausible given the information from the the transcripts. Because these transcripts are from a period of the show when no actual touching occurs between the couples, the model associates touch with non-tangible phenomena, like "soul" and "energy." In addition, touch—being foreclosed from the participants during this stage of the experiment–is elevated as something highly desired, to an "important," "most important," and even "sexy" quality. Finally, the last two examples, "like a glove" and "we are so happy," suggest an association between touch and compatibility, in the sense that the couples "fit" together, so to speak.

The outputs with those from the postpods model, however, put touch in very different contexts:

> When I touch you, I feel like I'm in my head.
>
> When I touch you, like, I feel like I'm literally in my head.
>
> When I touch you, you just feel like it's so weird.
>
> When I touch you, it feels like a jab.

When I touch you, it feels like something I'm about to get up and walk away.

When I touch you, I feel like it's like I've just, like, left the room.

When I touch you, the thing that's scary is, like, it's a physical thing.

When I touch you, you're like "I'm blinking."

While in the pods, touch drew the characters together, evoking non-tangible phenomena like the soul and energy, here it seems that touch repels the characters from each other. Touch is strange and jarring, "so weird," "like a jab"; associated with "scary" physicality, and signals movement, "walk away," "left the room."

Most of these outputs represent approximations, but also direct quotes taken from the transcripts. The phrase that says, "I'm blinking," is actually taken directly from the show, and is an example of an undesired but not uncommon blip in the prediction process. In machine learning, this blip is referred to as "overfitting," when a verbatim section of text from the training data, in this case, the show transcripts, is generated in the output. "Overfitting" means that the model is too accurate: that it has slipped from making predictions that are plausible to repeating exactly the data it has been trained on. A model overfitting in its outputs is generally a sign that there isn't enough training data or enough variation in the training data, meaning that the model has less examples from which to generalize. So, it resorts to simply reproducing direct examples from its training.

For my purposes, however, overfitting is not only a blip, it also points to a specific scene in the show, which highlights a tension between the sensory modes of touch and sight. The original reference to "blinking" appears in a scene with the newly engaged couple, Zach and Irina, when they meet each other for the first time in person. The doors open, and they awkwardly approach each other down a red carpet. After exchanging their first greetings, they have a conversation about their reaction to each other's appeareance:

Zach: Do I look like what you thought I'd look like?

Irina: I had no guesses of what you looked like.

Zach: Oh!

Irina: You have, like, the blankest stare in your eyes.

Zach: Really?

Irina: I'm just kind of taking it all in.

Zach: Me too.

Irina: You look like a fictional character. You look like something out of a cartoon.

Zach: I know.

Irina: You have to blink!

Zach: I am blinking.

Irina: You don't blink. You look like this.

Zach: I am blinking. I will try not to be too intense. (Season 4, Episode 4, "Playing with Fire")

Zach seems a bit insecure of his appearence, asking if he looks how Irina imagined. And Irina, in turn, seems put out, describing him as a "fictional character" and demanding that he blink. Blinking is, of course, a way of stopping the entry of visual data, of occluding it from the eyes' perception. For Irina, the request for Zach to blink might indicate her own sense of overwhelm at his physical form, at his sudden incorporation. Perhaps, the reality of his physical form is so overwhelming that, projecting her own feelings of overstimulation, she asks him to blink.

From the story of Zach and Irina relationship, it is clear that the catalyst for their breakup is a lack of physical attraction on the part of Irina. Later in the same episode, Irina explains her feelings to Micah, a woman who is coupled with Paul, another participant on the show.

Irina: And so, Zach. I feel like is my type on paper. Has, like, brown hair, brown eyes, like, chiseled face. Like, I really like dark features. And the moment I saw Zack, it was like, "I don't know who this man is." And I was like, "Maybe it's just scary, and it was a lot." Like, hopefully it's gonna grow, but I've noticed every time he does, like, touch me, I get, like, major ick. When he puts his arm around me at night, I literally was like– like, my heart stopped. And I literally go. . . But not, like, in an excited way.

Micah: I wanna, like, relate to you in a way, but it's always, like, so different.

Irina: How was it with you and Paul?

Micah: The thing with me and Paul is, like, we both, like, had such an immediate understanding as best friends.

Irina: Yeah, Paul's gorgeous. (Season 4, Episode 4, "Playing With Fire")

Zach supposedly has physical aspects which Irina finds attractive, "brown eyes, chiseled face," but something about him nonetheless repulses her. When he puts his arm around her, she recoils, "get[ting]... major ick." Though she claims her feeling of disgust have nothing to do with his physical appearance, she simultaneously conjures appearance with the phrase, "Yeah, Paul's gorgeous."

Perhaps Irina's physical repulsion to Zach results from the experience in the pods, from the forclosure of the visual sense within the pods. That may be because, sequestered from the sight of the other within the pods, the participants experience a kind of sensory split. They experience not only the physical body, the material reality of their physical body which they've always known, but something like what Jay Prosser refers to as the "body image," an internal perception of the body. Despite being internal, the body image is a physical, sensual phenomenon, which "clearly has a material force for transsexuals," according to Prosser (69). For trans subjects, this "material force" often manifests in the trope of being "trapped in the wrong body" and feelings of dysphoria. The sensory deprivation of being in the pods, I am suggesting, subjects these cisgendered participants to something akin to Prosser's bodily split, from which the body image emerges–but only for a time.

For these subjects, the body image manifests in a heightened sensation of the body, which paradoxically creates a feeling of the body's dissolution. When prompted with the phrase "My body," the pods model generates the following completions:

> My body feels like it's coming off.
>
> My body feels heavier.
>
> My body feels so different now.
>
> My body feels weird.
>
> My body makes me feel like it's real.
>
> My body feels torn between two different people.

Across all of these samples, there is an increased awareness of the physical body, which comes into apprehension in a novel and visceral way. Due to the absence of the visual sense, the body feels "weird" and "so different now," even "like it's coming off," an image that evokes Prosser's concept of the bodily split between the physical body and the body image. Perhaps, the reference to being "torn between two different people" not only refers to actual people, to dating multiple characters on the show, but to a single

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person with two bodies in tension. For these straight, cisgendered participants within the pods, the body image may be coming into sentience in a way that is not possible when they are fully integrated, outside the pods. And this may be the first (and only) time that they experience this level of bodily sensation and awareness.

But it is not a feeling that lasts long. In the postpods model, the body appears to be re-integrated. The outer body comes into view when the participants are finally given visual access to each other. Here, the language about the body shifts into notably more visual and positive descriptions:

> My body is gorgeous.
>
> My body is so cute.
>
> My body is so pretty.
>
> My body makes me feel lighter, more confident.
>
> My body makes me feel warm.
>
> My body makes me feel like I've missed my train.

The outputs address the body in concise and flattering terms: the body is "gorgeous," "so cute," "pretty." Now that the visual sense has been reincorporated to the body, it becomes the dominant sense modality, what Prosser would call the "insentient visible body" (70). Because the couples can see each other, the body feels "lighter" and "warm," offering coherence where before was weirdness and weight. In the last output, however, there is a suggestion of something not quite right: "My body makes me feel like I've missed my train." This statement, with its slightly nostalgic undertone, suggests that even when coherence is gained, something is lost.

What is lost comes into view when one considers the "insentient" aspect which has been been forsaken for the physical, that of touch:

> Physical touch is everything that I've wanted in a wife.
>
> Physical touch is everything that I've ever wanted in a partner.
>
> Physical touch is a big part of what I want.
>
> Physically, there's so much potential here.
>
> Physically, it was the perfect opportunity.

Physical touch is described in aspirational terms: it is "everything I've wanted," "everything I've ever wanted," and "what I want." The past perfect tense here, and the reference to unfulfilled opportunity is indicative: even

after meeting in person, the desire seems to freeze in place. The restoration of the visual sense, the re-integration the previously fractured body, then, does not offer completion or culmination.

Being restored their visual sense heals the *LiB* participants from the bodily split, but it does not save them from the aftermath of their investments. When the couples finally meet in physical forms, they remain plagued by the possibilities for physical connection that they felt in the pods–for a kind of touch that is "everything that I've ever wanted in a partner" (Appendix 1). And these expectations are what, for some of them, prevents their ability to accept their partners as they are. Due to their experience in the pods, the significance of touch is inflated to include other, perhaps practically unattainable, desires. Considering that the characters are now reunited with their physical bodies, there is something almost cruel in this denouement, a "cruel optimism," in Lauren Berlant's formulation, which describes the attachment that drives desire even while it wears out the desirer.

Or, more specific to their bodily predicaments, the characters experience a version of what Hil Malatino describes as "future fatigue" (20). Like cruel optimism, future fatigue generates "intense anticipatory anxiety" that "impede[s] flourishing" (Malatino 20). Unlike cruel optimism, however, future fatigue concerns trans subjects who are invested in "the promised moment of harmony between the felt and the perceived body" (Malatino 27).

In partitioning the romantic experiment into pre-engagement and engagement segments, the show poses the presence and role of the body as the variable that ultimately determines the viability of long-term commitment. In other words, it sets up an examination of how the body may affect normative trajectories and desires. Normativity, the desire for what Trans Studies scholar Andrea Long Chu describes as "a normal fucking life," is one place where trans subjects intersect with with cisgendered subjects (Chu and Drager 107). Despite being cisgendered, then, these subjects in *LiB* develop romantic feelings and attachments within the context of a sensory split, where their visual sense is foreclosed from the other senses. And most of them, when they leave the pods, cannot fulfill these aspirations within their embodied lives.

1.0.4 toward new solidarities

This chapter began with polarization as a hermeneutic impasse. In debates over gender and trans rights, polarization is often understood as a clash between irreconcilable truths: biology versus identity, objectivity versus subjectivity, tradition versus liberation. Drawing on Sedgwick's reparative reading,

I proposed text generation as a method for working otherwise with polarized discourse—-not to resolve disagreement, but to aggregate them into a kind of middle ground. Machine learning models, precisely because they operate through prediction and approximation, can surface unexpected points of overlap. What they reveal is not consensus, but intersection: shared investments, shared anxieties, and shared attachments that persist even across ideological divides.

One such site of intersection emerges in the concept of embodiment. Remembering the conservative-trained model from this chapter's introduction, the recurring invocation of "subjectivity" did not reflect a trans-affirming position so much as a conservative caricature, which casts gender as internal and as a feeling. As Judith Butler notes in *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, the contemporary far-right fixation on biological sex is less a defense of scientific truth than a reaction formation, which Butler calls a "phantasm," against the perceived slipperiness of gender, its refusal to stay anchored to stable referents. The insistence that sex is "binary and biological" attempts to foreclose this instability by reasserting the body as a fixed ground.

Trans Studies, by contrast, has long resisted the framing of gender as merely a subjective, internal sense of self. As Kadji Amin argues, "Like language, gender categories... are social and interpersonal, not individual; this is what makes them meaningful in the first place" (115). Defining gender primarily as internal identity risks marginalizing gender as expression, re-stigmatizing those whose gender is visibly non-normative and whose bodies cannot easily disappear into abstraction. Against this backdrop, the question that haunts polarized gender discourse—-if gender is subjective, why alter the body?—-reveals its own impoverished understanding of embodiment.

By applying these insights to a seemingly distant object—cisgender heterosexual dating on *Love Is Blind*, this chapter sought to expand the analytic reach of Trans Studies beyond its conventional objects. The show's sensory experiment produces a temporary bodily dissonance in which participants experience a split between their embodied sense modalities. Although these subjects remain firmly cisgender, they nonetheless encounter a version of the transsexual trajectory: a heightened awareness of the body, a longing for integrity, toward embodied normativity as a telos: a desire "quite simply, to be," in Prosser's words (Prosser 32). This revelation offers groundwork for thinking new solidarities between trans and cis subjects—not through identity equivalence, but through shared embodied experiences of desire, attachment, and disappointment.

What other fields tend not to do, but what Trans Studies does so well, is to interrogate the perimeters of embodiment, to ask how desire materializes

on the body. If this chapter has shown anything, it is that Trans Studies'
theorization of the body offers critical resources for rethinking embodiment
more broadly. In an age of polarization, such an expansion does not dilute the
political urgency of trans analysis; rather, it offers new ground for connection,
the ground which is the body, a contested yet shared site of becoming, for
everyone.

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1.2 Appendix 1: ACLU and Heritage Model Outputs

1.3 Appendix 2: Pods Model Outputs

Prompt: "Love is"

Outputs:

"Love is really important to me."

"Love is what I need in my life."

"Love is everything that I've been looking for."

Prompt: "When I touch you"

Outputs:

"When I touch you, I feel it."

"When I touch you, I feel your energy, and it is, like, I'm just so happy."

"When I touch you, I can feel your soul, your heart, and your soul aligning so well."

"When I touch you, I feel you, and I feel you, I feel you, and I feel you."

Prompt: "Physical touch is"

Outputs:

"Physical touch is important to me."
"Physical touch is the most important thing."
"Physical touch is so sexy."
"Physical touch is like a glove."
Prompt: "Physically,"
Outputs:
"Physically, we are so happy."
Prompt: "My body"
Outputs:
"My body feels like it's coming off."
"My body feels heavier."
"My body feels so different now."
"My body feels weird."
"My body makes me feel like it's real."
"My body feels torn between two different people."

1.4   Appendix 3: Postpods Model Outputs

Prompt: "When I touch you"
Outputs:
"When I touch you, I feel like I'm in my head."
"When I touch you, you just feel like it's so weird."
"When I touch you, it feels like a jab."
"When I touch you, like, I feel like I'm literally in my head."
"When I touch you, it feels like something I'm about to get up and walk away."
"When I touch you, I feel like it's like I've just, like, left the room."
"When I touch you, the thing that's scary is, like, it's a physical thing."
"When I touch you, you're like 'I'm blinking.'"
Prompt: "My body"
Outputs:
"My body is gorgeous."
"My body is so cute."
"My body is so pretty."
"My body makes me feel lighter, more confident."
"My body makes me feel warm."
"My body makes me feel like I've missed my train."
Prompt: "Physical touch"
Outputs:
"Physical touch is everything that I've ever wanted in a partner."

"Physical touch is everything that I've wanted in a wife."
"Physical touch is a big part of what I want."
"Physically, there's so much potential here."
"Physically, it was the perfect opportunity."