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"It Helps if I Don't Come Across as the Intersex Person but as the Regular Guy". LGBTIQ* Movements, Credibility, and Mis-Fitting in Knowledge Spaces in Austria

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Abstract: Knowledge spaces as diverse as universities, parliaments, and activist organisations are fraught with difficulty for those who do not easily "fit" into them. They are governed by discursive, behavioural, somatic, and material norms concerning who does or does not belong in them as well as which/whose knowledges are or are not to be considered credible. Thus, members of minoritised groups often have to negotiate their presence in hostile knowledge spaces in ways that go beyond abstract epistemological considerations. In this paper, I discuss how LGBTIQ* activists and academics in Austria navigate knowledge spaces that may treat them as "space invaders". Based on semi-structured interviews, I explore how participants may seek to de-emphasise or emphasise their mis-fit regarding the spaces they traverse. I examine examples of how such attempts may either not work in the first place or backfire in unintended ways, and their connections to wider societal norms and intersectional exclusions.

Keywords: Agency, Knowledge, LGBTIQ, Performativity , Social Movements

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Introduction

Knowledge spaces are fraught with difficulty for those who do not easily "fit" into them. Knowledge spaces, here, are socio-material environments in which claims to knowledge and credibility are made and evaluated. Many spaces can function as knowledge spaces as knowledge-related processes take place in them. They might thus comprise, among others, universities, medical conferences, state institutions such as ministries and parliaments, and activist organisations. These spaces are often governed by discursive, behavioural, somatic, and material norms concerning who does or does not belong in them as well as which/whose knowledges are or are not to be considered credible. Thus, LGBTIQ* activists and scholars and other members of minoritised groups often find themselves navigating knowledge spaces in which they are treated as "space invaders" (Puwar 2004), having to negotiate their presence in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways that go beyond abstract epistemological considerations.[1]

Struggles around knowledges and credibility have been at the core of many emancipatory movements in the last decades, and hegemonic norms for judging the legitimacy of knowers and knowledges have been critiqued as both reflecting and reproducing societal exclusions along lines of difference such as gender, race, sexuality, dis-/ability, and class (Collins 2000; Espinosa-Miñoso/Lugones/Maldonado-Torres 2021; Harding 2008). Additionally, scholars in fields such as Social Movement Studies and Science & Technology Studies have emphasised the centrality of knowledge practices to social movements, including, among others, engagement with institutionalised holders of legitimised knowledge (Casas-Cortés/Osterweil/Powell 2008; Epstein 1995, 1996; Eyerman/Jamison 1991; Frickel/Gross 2005; Frickel et al. 2010; Waidzunas 2013, 2015). Com-

1 Throughout this paper, you will find linguistic constructions that do not align neatly with the anti-individualist performative agenda I pursue, such as talk of actors, "negotiating" spaces or my implying people to "be" this or that category. I ask that you take them as signs of social scientific idioms in which I remain implicated (see also the section on methodology).

bining these two approaches, it is clear that members of minoritised groups are often affected by exclusionary norms governing legitimacy and credibility in knowledge spaces (Ahmed 2012; Dolmage 2017; Kilomba 2010; Pereira 2014, 2017, 2018; Pitcher 2018; Sow 2014).

In the context of LGBTIQ* movements, such struggles for credibility have been examined most explicitly in interactions with academic institutions and professional bodies, for example, in the case of HIV/AIDS activism and the conducting of clinical trials (Epstein 1996, 1995) or controversies regarding the legitimacy of so-called conversion therapy (Waidzunas 2015). Issues around the everyday demarcation of il-/legitimate knowers and knowledges have also been explored in some depth in relation to what Maria do Mar Pereira (2017) calls Women's, Gender, and Feminist Studies (Hark 2005; Hemmings 2011; Liinason 2010; Messer-Davidow 2002; Pereira 2014, 2017, 2018). However, while accounts of LGBTIQ* movements, including in German-speaking contexts, often touch on the importance of knowledge practices and credibility, they rarely explicate how they are negotiated in specific contexts (Baumgartinger 2017; Baumgartinger et al. forthcoming; Brunner/Felten/Sulzenbacher 2023; Huber 2013; Ihrig 2023; Repnik 2006; Shukrallah 2024).

Bringing together broader societal arrangements of power and the specificities of how particular spatial norms play out, the notion of "mis-fitting" (Ahmed 2014; Garland-Thomson 2011) offers a way of thinking about how norms regarding credibility are performatively enacted in specific situations. In this paper, I examine the "mis-fit" between the embodied subjectivities of LGBTIQ* activists and academics in Austria and the sedimented norms governing the knowledge spaces they traverse. Based on semi-structured interviews/conversations[2] and a performative theoretical framework, I explore how boundaries around legitimate and illegitimate knowledges and knowers are drawn and redrawn. After outlining my methodology and my theoretical framework, I begin by discussing modes of de-emphasising or emphasising the mis-fit between research participants and the spaces they traverse in ways that have less to do with epistemological considerations and more with strategies for claiming credibility. Undermining an easy distinction between "emphasising" and "de-emphasising" the mis-fit, I then turn to examples of how such attempts may either not work in the first place or may backfire in unintended ways, and their connections to wider societal norms and intersectional exclusions. In doing so, I hope to contribute to broader discussions on the intersection of knowledge politics, social

2 See the section on data and methodology, below, on why I refer to them as "interviews/conversations".

movements, and the challenges encountered by minoritised groups in asserting credibility in the face of hegemonic norms.

Data and Methodology

The results developed in this paper are based primarily on semi-structured interviews/conversations with 17 individuals in LGBTIQ*-related activism and/or academia in Austria. The interviews were conducted between April 2018 and November 2019 and lasted from just under 1 hour to 2.5 hours, with an average of about 1.5 hours. All interviews were conducted in German, and I have translated extracts to English for the purpose of this paper.[3] My interpretations are supplemented by an earlier qualitative project with volunteer translators for an LGBTIQ* migrant organisation in Austria (En/En 2019) as well as my own auto-ethnographic immersion in (some of) the knowledge spaces in question (Adams/Jones/Ellis 2015). However, these do not feature explicitly in this paper.

The interviews/conversations were semi-structured insofar as they were guided by a list of topics that I wanted to address, though the flow of the conversations did not need to follow a specific order. Over the course of the research, I adapted the list slightly based on issues that came up repeatedly. For example, I included conflicts in LGBTIQ* communities and ways of addressing them as a topic in the guide after they had spontaneously come up in several conversations. The "conversations" were conversations insofar as I was an active participant rather than an ostensibly objective disinterested researcher. My decision to approach the research interactions in this way followed from both an ethical commitment to challenging hierarchies often reproduced in social research (Duncombe/Jessop 2002; Detamore 2010) and the fact that I also inhabit the wider field I was/am studying. The latter meant that a) I had known or encountered several of the participants outside the research setting and b) I had my own experiences in knowledge spaces similar to the ones participants frequented (see also Pereira 2017). Thus, while some conversations took the shape of "conventional" question-and-answer sessions, others involved my sharing my own stories and experiences. At the same time, it is not possible to simply undo hierarchies in research processes, including not only those between researchers and research participants but also those related to wider relations of power that intersect the research setting (Birch/Miller 2002; Gorman-Murray/Johnston/Waitt 2010; Grenz 2005).

3 This means that they are by no means "objective" or "neutral", as translations never are (Spivak 1997). Additionally, I have removed certain features of spoken language to make the quotes easier to read.

In reaction to the impulse amongst both students and established researchers to attempt to connect their approach to analysing qualitative data to some named and thus authorised "method", Clive Seale (2004, 299) suggests that "[p]erhaps this phenomenon is due to the fact that people lack confidence in using their everyday intelligence to look for interesting things in qualitative material". He uses the term "interpretive analysis" to describe the "very common activity of looking for interesting things in qualitative data" (Seale 2004, 299). My analysis combines this "interpretive analysis" with a "diffractive reading" indebted to feminist materialist approaches (Jackson/Mazzei 2012; see also Barad 2007). Diffractive reading means the reading of "theory" and "data" through each other as opposed to rigorous "categorical" (Mason 2002, 150) coding, which, according to Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei, would only "[take] us back to what is known, not only to the experience of our participants, but also to our own experience" (Jackson/Mazzei 2012, 2; see also St. Pierre/Jackson 2014). Thus, my analysis comprised two interrelated processes. The first one consisted of reading the interview transcripts "over and over" (Jackson/Mazzei 2012, 4), looking for "interesting things" (Seale 2004, 299) that were interesting specifically in terms of theories of boundary-work and performativity as described below. This also involved a going back and forth between the "data" and the "theories" as my understanding of both shifted through the process of diffractive reading. Secondly, I analysed segments pertaining to these *interesting things* in relation to more linguistic aspects (for example, the relative positioning of specific claims and how they thus fit into the overall conversation) in order to better take into the account the context of these segments (Silverman 2006, 2017). In doing so, I treated the conversations as both interactive constructions to be analysed as such and as referring to "processes and realities located beyond [the] specific text and context" (Henwood 2007, 72). Finally, even as my analysis engages with the conversations as discursive traces, it follows an understanding of "discourse" in which discourses are not simply resources for human subjects to "draw on" or otherwise "use"; instead, such discourses produce (but do not fully determine) those human subjects in the first place (Foucault 1998; Butler 2004). Thus, broader discursive and material patterns and arrangements are expressed in and through the conversations I had with research participants. At the same time, neither the interviews nor my analysis provide a transparent representation of a given reality "out there" as my analysis itself is subject to performative ambivalences that go beyond any notion of individual agency.

I did not ask participants for demographic details and do not present such details in a generalised way alongside extracts from the interviews; neither do I use consistent pseudonyms for participants. One reason for this is that the

relatively narrow context of my research means that providing consistent pseudonyms and demographic details may make it significantly easier to identify individual participants (see Pereira 2017). Additionally, I was interested in how categories and positionings were *made salient* in the conversations themselves (see En 2020; En forthcoming). And finally, providing demographic details may very well contribute to an illusion of ease and closure: as if qualitative data could be interpreted and transformed using the same basic understandings as quantitative data, and as if generalised demographic traits were either fully determinant of individuals' positions and responses or provided reliable correlations with these (Silverman 2017; En 2020; see also Puar 2017). The choice of not following the usual conventions of presenting such demographic details is an uncomfortable one, and I cannot claim that it is *the right* one. However, I believe in the importance of maintaining that discomfort rather than seeking methodological and ideological purity (Ahmed 2004; En 2022).[4]

At the same time, considering the long history of academics' making broad claims based on narrow data, I do not wish to utterly obscure patterns in my data that may very well have a bearing on the usefulness of my analysis. Almost all participants in my main data set used for this paper (see above) were white. The gender positions of most participants were at odds with the binary gender system, with a majority of participants positioning themselves as trans and several as intersex. Few participants positioned themselves as disabled. A majority inhabited middle-class positions at the time of our conversations. Most did not mention having children. Participants' social ages reached from their mid/late twenties to post-retirement, with a majority somewhere in between. It is likely that all were Austrian citizens or long-term legal residents. The majority of participants positioned themselves in both activism and academia, and a few positioned themselves exclusively in either activism or academia.

How I was/am positioned[5] will also have had an impact both on my interpretations and on the way these conversations proceeded. Some of the people I talked to were friends or acquaintances, some colleagues, some strangers. Additionally, how I was positioned along lines of social differentiation in the conversation – as white, as a PhD candidate, as queer/gay/non-binary, as young, as en-abled[6] – will have affected our conversations, and participants' understan-

4 This discomfort may of course reveal something about my own anxieties about mis-fitting and my expectations about which conventions I should or should not follow.

5 The ambivalence of this passive-voice statement is intentional, as "positioning" is not simply my choice nor necessarily reflective of some deeper truth. Positioning could thus be understood in terms of Karen Barad's agential realism, in which "individual" constituents are produced only in and through "intra-action" (Barad 2007).

6 I use this term to indicate the connections between dis-/ability and which positions are *enabled* in society.

ding of me along those lines did not always or necessarily overlap with my own (for example, regarding age, sexuality/gender, dis-/ability). It would be hubris to claim that I could have fully understood these positionings and their influence on how our conversations went, and thus could have fully incorporated them into my analysis. Similarly, I cannot claim full cognisance nor provide a comprehensive account of my emergence as a subject (Butler 2005). Again, I would like to resist an illusion of closure through self-positioning or attempts to "reflect" my way out of these binds. Instead, I hope that while I may not sit more or less comfortably in a fixed spot, I do my best to perform my epistemological movements responsibly (Haraway 1991), refusing purity and simple means of *moving on* (Ahmed 2004).

Knowledge Spaces, Mis-Fitting, and Performativity

Thomas Gieryn's (1983, 1999) concept of "boundary-work" seeks to elucidate the ways in which scientists stake out spaces of il-/legitimacy in the pursuit of professional authority and resources. He argues that epistemic authority "exists only to the extent that it is claimed by some people [...] but denied to others" (Gieryn 1999, 14). However, while boundary-work and studies drawing on it have been critiqued as focusing on the agency primarily of "white western men in positions of relative authority" (Pereira 2017, 55; see also Pereira 2018), members of minoritised groups in general and LGBTIQ* movements specifically often encounter epistemic "climates" (Pereira 2017) in which their credibility is likely to be challenged. In the context of her study of women and Black people/people of colour[7] in the UK parliament building, Nirmal Puwar (2004) argues that even though there are no longer formal rules prohibiting their presence, there are a myriad subtle and implicit ways in which their non-belonging in that space is demonstrated, felt, and enforced. In spite of the formal equality enacted in such spaces, thus, some people are treated as "space invaders" (Puwar 2004; see also Ahmed 2012).

Being positioned as a space invader can be conceptualised in terms of a mis-fit between any individual or group and the norms – including the "somatic norms" (Puwar 2004) – governing who is or is not expected/allowed to inhabit a certain space as well as what forms such habitation should take. In "The Cultural Politics of Emotion", Sara Ahmed describes the fit between a subject and a space as akin to "sinking into a comfortable chair":

7 In line with UK discussions about the politics of using "black people" as an umbrella term rather than referring to specific ethnicities, Puwar uses the term "black people" to refer to people "associated with the African and South Asian diaspora" (Puwar 2004, 171).

> "[C]omfort is about the fit between body and object: my comfortable chair may be awkward for you, with your differently-shaped body. Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a 'sinking' feeling. It is, after all, pain or discomfort that return one's attention to the surfaces of the body as body [...]. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. *One fits, and by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view.*" (Ahmed 2014, 148; my emphasis)

Just as the grooves in a well-worn chair into which one may or may not fit are the result of particular bodies' sitting in that chair again and again (and sitting in the chair in particular ways), the norms that govern spaces can be conceived of as the sedimentations of the bodies that have passed through these spaces as well as how they have comported themselves: "fitting" allows "bodies to extend into spaces that have *already taken their shape*" (Ahmed 2014, 148; my emphasis). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) also proposes mis-fitting as a feminist materialist approach to dis-/ability, focusing on the potential fit or mis-fit between embodied subjects and their environments and emphasising how mis-fitting happens in specific contexts and specific situations rather than being a universal state of being: "The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits." (Garland-Thomson 2011, 593)

How the grooves/norms of a space are deepened through repetition – as well as how they may be open to change and challenges – can be conceived of in terms of performativity. J. L. Austin (1962) introduced the concept of performativity to refer to such speech acts that do not simply "describe" some external reality but bring about specific effects. Judith Butler (1990) offers a well-known example of this in "Gender Trouble": when a newborn is declared to be "a girl" or "a boy", this sets in motion a whole performative chain of girling or boying. A speech act such as "it's a boy" never simply *describes* reality, but always plays a role in *bringing about* the reality it appears to describe. Similarly, claims to credibility and the (often tacit) norms according to which these claims are evaluated are not simply statements about an external reality, but embedded in performative chains that contribute to the emergence of certain realities – and the non-emergence of others.[8]

8 Barad (2003, 2007) has framed performativity more explicitly in terms of not only "speech acts", but also material becomings. However, while my understanding is influenced by Barad's work, I am wary of telling stories about feminist theory that posit a clear division between earlier work that is said to "over-emphasise" language and "later" work that seeks to "bring back materiality" (see Hemmings 2011).

The sedimented norms governing mis-/fitting in knowledge spaces thus impact how claims to credibility are evaluated, which claims can be made in the first place, and which claims do not even need to be made because they appear self-evident – and impact them differentially for members of minoritised groups. Such claims to credibility – and performativity more broadly – should not be conceived of only in terms of language, but also institutional and material arrangements and their mis-/fit with particular bodies and subjectivities. These institutional "habits" (Ahmed 2012) are expressive of which bodies and subjectivities can and should inhabit certain spaces in the first place, and they may materialise in interpersonal interactions, documents, institutional structures, and the material configuration of these spaces. Additionally, even if they do not prevent subjects from entering spaces, they may prescribe how these spaces are to be traversed, impressing themselves on those who would inhabit them. On the other hand, such arrangements may also provide "wiggle room" and may be open to being reworked in their encounter with mis-fitting bodies and subjectivities. A performative approach thus connects broader epistemological considerations about hierarchies of power to everyday enactments of credibility in knowledge spaces while simultaneously maintaining the possibility of change. Norms are not set in stone nor summoned up out of thin air: performatives work only by being part of an iterative chain, and norms are always only reiterated incompletely. It is this iterative re-enactment that allows room for manoeuvre and change (Butler 1993, 1997). However, if performativity never fully succeeds but always fails to an extent, this applies equally to attempts to rework norms. Such attempts themselves may give rise to side-effects that go beyond or even re- and misdirect any actor's intentions (Butler 1993, 1997, 2010).

We might thus ask: how do wider societal and institutional arrangements of power impact whether an attempt to claim credibility will fail or succeed? How might these conditions be open to performative reworkings and what forms might such reworkings take? And finally: How might attempts to rework performative norms themselves involve unintended consequences?

In my conversations with participants, various ways of trying to negotiate norms around credibility emerged. Participants moved through knowledge spaces in which their credibility might be challenged in different ways, including state institutions, academic spaces and activist organisations. Their attempts to do so depended on sedimented norms governing whose credibility is recognised and on what terms, but simultaneously, these norms allowed for agency and change. Below, I first describe modes of *de-emphasising and emphasising the mis-fit* between participants and spatial norms. I then discuss how a degree of "fitting" underlay opportunities both to work with and to challenge the norms

of knowledge spaces, which were thus constrained by wider societal arrangements of power – *"boundary-work that does not work"*, in Pereira's (2018) words. Finally, I examine how attempts to performatively work and reshape spaces may *misfire or backfire* as participants are shaped by these spaces in turn.

De-Emphasising the Mis-Fit

For members of marginalised communities, moving through knowledge spaces is often not a case of "seamless fitting" in which the boundaries between subjectivities and spaces disappear (Ahmed 2014). However, participants talked about ways of de-emphasising the mis-fit between their bodies, subjectivities, and political goals on the one hand and the institutions with which they sought to engage on the other hand. One participant described this in terms of learning (and applying) "institutional grammars", which often required strategic adherence to certain norms to alleviate the strangeness of particular embodied subjectivities in particular spaces.

Attempts to de-emphasise the mis-fit thus often sought to transform participants from being unwelcome presences – space invaders – into individuals that can speak on a topic from an ostensibly more "neutral" or "authoritative" position. In doing so, participants sometimes drew on subject positions that are historically unmarked in Western society, that is, white, middle-class, cis, male, en-abled, etc. Additionally, one aspect of participants' mis-fitting (for example, queerness, disability, etc.) might be offset by a different, more prestigious kind of mis-fitting (for example, holding advanced academic degrees or wearing formal clothing even if such clothing is not officially mandated or expected).

While formal markers of qualification such as academic degrees are routinely used in judging individuals' claims to knowledgeability (Collins/Evans 2007), they often did not work simply as indicators of expertise in relation to a specific field but as tokens of authority and perhaps trustworthiness more generally: credibility and authority were mutually entwined.[9] Donning formal clothes – especially suits, no matter the individual's usual gender position – in contexts in which participants expected to be challenged worked in a similar way. Being recognised as someone who can credibly speak on a topic was thus not a matter simply of knowledge in any usual sense, but of drawing on hegemonic norms and expectations. Here are a few examples:

9 This may very well be especially true in Austria, where academic degrees are traditionally highly important for indicating/conferring social status.

> *activist talking about working with courts:* "because it makes a huge difference [...] when I call [the court] and say, ah, yes, this is Dr. XXX, I'd like to request access to the files on such-and-such, then [they say] yes, when would you like to come by, and so on, and we would gladly also copy the file for you, and so on and so forth."
>
> *neurodivergent academic talking about using their PhD to counter negative associations with neurodivergence:* "when people meet someone and that person is [...] something they don't know, but on the other hand also something they value, then sometimes they can also take that unknown thing with this sense of appreciation."
>
> *participant talking about meetings in institutional spaces:* "I practice this very often, that I very deliberately go somewhere wearing a suit and tie, like, to sensitive appointments. Not at all because it's the dress code, but because if, so to speak, I fit in well outwardly, I have a much better chance of getting my message across. And the message, ultimately, is: 'LGBTIQ is okay, it's allowed to exist.'"

While taking on behavioural norms in order to de-emphasise the mis-fit allowed participants to *pass through* spaces more easily, some participants drew a connection between this kind of passing and being able to *pass as* a relatively innocuous inhabitant of these spaces in the first place. They enacted different orientations in relation to hegemonic systems depending on the spaces they moved in. This included emphasising their academic side in some contexts and their activist side in others depending on which aspect of themselves they expected to be challenged (see also Rand 2014) as well as navigating tacit norms around politeness connected to class and race. In particular, participants drew on ways of gendered passing:

> *trans/intersex activist about talking in academic spaces:* "And especially in contexts where there's little community, generally few queer people [...] in the room, it often actually makes a difference in the sense that I'm listened to more [...] and my knowledge is seen as truer, more important, more relevant if I approach it like 'I'm working on this with a bit of academic distance.' [...] And I also have the feeling that I have [...] [laughs briefly] cis passing and an academic demeanor, but [...] if people somehow read me as ambivalent – under big quotation marks – regarding my own gender, then it feels like it quickly shifts away from 'Okay, what you're doing is very academic.'"
>
> *intersex activist:* "I think with doctors, it sometimes helps, especially with the more conservative ones, if I don't come across as the intersex person, but as the regular guy from [rural part of Austria] who has somet-

> hing to say about this, so I play that quite consciously sometimes, [...] for example, we were in Parliament this spring, educating MPs about the topic of intersex, and I definitely notice that [...] when I'm talking to [conservative] MPs, I push the 'country boy' angle even more."

While the first example may seem like a simple case of drawing on conventional (that is, middle-class) professionalism in asserting credibility (see Ward 2008), "pushing the 'country boy' angle" appears at first glance to offer only a somewhat hapless subject position. However, far from being helpless, being hapless here might signify appearing less *threatening*: the intersex activist is already a space invader in medical and political spaces, and presenting a harmless – white rural masculine – gender allows him to not appear quite as invasive. De-emphasising the mis-fit can take many different forms, but usually involves drawing on some norms and expectations in order to stand out less, or stand out in ways that are considered benign or even authoritative.

Emphasising the Mis-Fit

In (apparent) contrast to seeking to de-emphasise the mis-fit between themselves and the spaces they moved in, some participants also talked about *emphasising* that very mis-fit. Instead of trying to pass in and through spaces by drawing on strategic if partial conformity with hegemonic norms, participants might draw attention to these norms; instead of seeking to appear innocuous, they might emphasise their status as space invaders. This ability to emphasise the mis-fit was often linked to having been authorised as a legitimate (if perhaps precarious) presence in a space in the first place (and thus *fitting* to some extent already): through partial conformity/passing; through holding relatively secure positions in a professional context; or through being specifically invited to certain spaces to give talks etc. This partial legitimacy may have allowed participants to more easily deal with or even evade the consequences of drawing attention to their mis-fitting:

> *trans/intersex activist:* "when I was invited to give talks, I would stand in front and not say anything, and I kind of turned it into a performance lecture, and then intervened by saying something like: Okay, there's this non-normative body that's here somehow, and [laughs briefly] once I wasn't wearing much, just shiny, reflective panties, in academic settings where it's already clear: okay, this goes against all the conventions of what I'm supposed to be wearing there."

> *academic on talking to a colleague about additional legal gender options being introduced in Austria:* "then I'm sitting here in the office, and someone says to me: 'Well, now there are six options, I think that's almost too many already', and I'm like: 'I couldn't care less what you think about it, because you are already represented, and maybe it's not so important what you think about it because it doesn't concern you.' [...] And then: 'Yeah, but I still think I'm allowed to have my opinion' – 'Yeah, and I'm allowed to tell you that I don't care about it.' [both laugh]"

Emphasising the mis-fit might work to expose the fragility and constructedness of the norms governing certain spaces, turning (partial) mis-fitting into a form of resistance. Notably, such stories of emphasising the mis-fit were often accompanied by laughter on the part of both participants and myself. Perhaps, while both de-emphasising and emphasising the mis-fit involved a degree of agency, such agency is easier to notice, or more enjoyable, when it involves attempting not to fit into spaces but to subvert them. Laughter may indicate an affective rupture here, disrupting the "normal" seriousness of moving through these spaces, while at the same time foregrounding participants' and my (presumed) joint resistance in the face of exclusionary spaces. As one participant suggested in response to my asking what constitutes activism for them: "[it is] when you're not ashamed [...] when you simply, insolently allow yourself to be the way you are." The instances of laughter also stand in marked contrast to stories about de-emphasising the mis-fit, which were often followed by expressions of discomfort because participants feared that their ostensible "fit" might work to reinforce existing norms in these spaces. For example, the intersex activist who talked about "pushing the 'country boy' angle" immediately afterwards expressed discomfort about the risks of "fraternising" with "the enemy".

"Boundary-Work that Does not Work"[10]

Opportunities both to emphasise and de-emphasise mis-fitting are derived in part from fitting into the moulds provided to at least *some* extent, for example, by claiming neutrality in terms of (apparent) embodiment or by invoking tokens of expertise such as academic credentials. Ostensible adherence to certain norms and thus appearing as unremarkable inhabitants of a space often underlay participants' ability both to appear to "fit in" better and to challenge certain norms – a certain degree of fitting was the foundation both for emphasising and de-emphasising the (thus constructed) mis-fit. For example, financial security and academic productivity made it easier to risk being perceived as "difficult",

10 Pereira (2018)

and norms around whiteness meant that white participants had an easier time speaking up about racist exclusions.

At the same time, participants got to experience the norms governing the spaces in which they sought to move directly as they ran into the "brick walls" (Ahmed 2012) that circumscribe what is and is not possible. Participants told stories about being refused professional positions and appointments as well as their claims to credibility not being recognised because of their positionings along lines of difference such as gender, race, dis-/ability, age, and class. Thus, the strategies mentioned above, such as deploying academic degrees, might occasionally be rendered inert through the mis-fit between participants and spaces. Several participants expressed anger and frustration about having to contend with exclusionary practices and ignorance among the majority inhabitants of the spaces they traverse, and several participants talked about refusing to participate in spaces they positioned as exclusionary to their embodied subjectivities.[11]

> *academic of colour:* "In predominantly white contexts, I really don't feel like talking much anymore, because it's always the same person sitting there, repeating things, and it goes in one ear and out the other without really doing anything, or everyone's just happy, like: Wow, you managed to invite a person of colour to your panel or something [...] I really don't feel like taking on the 'of-colour role' anymore in a white panel organised by white people with a white audience [...]."
>
> *trans/intersex activist with a postgraduate degree:* "when I'm invited as an 'activist,' in quotation marks, whatever that means, [...] almost every time I've had the experience that in the announcement [...] for everyone else, their assistant title or some other long academic title is listed, but for me, my academic degree suddenly disappears, even though I provided it [...] and also, the invitations will say it's an expert panel, and then there's this long list of people who have worked on trans topics in their respective fields [...] and underneath there's a separate category for something like 'stories from activism' or something like that[...]."

Not only were participants excluded from spaces entirely, but sometimes, even their being invited did not mean a comprehensive reworking of the usual norms around knowledge and credibility in these spaces. While spaces might be formally inclusive, participants' epistemic status in these spaces might still be different from that of those who inhabit them more "naturally". They might be positioned as an "expert" on one level, but their words and actions do not gain any per-

11 Notably, this also included "old white men" feeling unwelcome in activist spaces (see En forthcoming).

formative force (that is, do not "do anything"). Their presence may be tolerated or even welcomed, but only on the basis of certain preconditions: for example, that they might be required to behave a particular way or leave again after having "enriched" the space with their presence (see also Nash 2019). And they may simply be ignored altogether. Their status as "exhibits" of a particular group may override their academic degrees. Even when they are not treated as interlopers or space invaders, mis-fitting subjects might thus function as visitors or guests, not as permanent fixtures. They are strangers who are already known *as strangers* prior to their appearing in the space (Ahmed 2000), and their strangeness conditions the performative possibilities in these spaces.

Mis-/Backfires: Playing the Game and Being Played by the Game

Even when they appear to work, attempts to engage with the norms governing credibility in knowledge spaces may come with unintended side-effects which individual subjects cannot control. For example, de-emphasising the mis-fit by donning a suit or adapting an academic habitus might simultaneously cut off LGBTIQ* embodiments that are characterised precisely by *not fitting* into the behavioural and sartorial norms of the spaces in question. Using academic degrees to make it easier to pass through knowledge spaces may simultaneously serve to uphold norms that position all holders of doctorates as more trustworthy. Emphasising one's formal educational achievements in the face of ableism may be folded into "hero narratives" around disabled people in which they are said to have "overcome" their disability through their own, individual, heroic effort, downplaying the social construction of disability (see also Kafer 2013). Trying to de-emphasise the mis-fit also may involve a risk of what one participant referred to as "desolidarisation": clinging to one's own relatively precarious position by either actively positioning others as even less credible or not standing up to norms that exclude those others; and it might negatively affect one's own mental and physical health, leading to exhaustion and depression (see also Pereira 2017). Finally, attempting to strategically use and perhaps rework the norms governing knowledge spaces may end up reworking participants instead: learning and using institutional grammars is not a one-way street. Unsurprisingly, many participants expressed ambivalence in the face of these issues.

> *intersex activist talking about drawing on normative gender expressions to achieve credibility:* "it's something I keep thinking about, because it's definitely uncomfortable as well when you realise that you're adapting to,

> to phrase it in an exaggerated way, 'the enemy,' like fraternising [...] with someone you actually don't want to do that with."
>
> *academic talking about following certain norms in writing academic project proposals:* "and for me, at least, there was this point where, at first, I did it consciously, but then suddenly, after about a year, I realised that these norms, which I initially just pretended to follow to include them in my proposals, I had suddenly internalised and actually started to believe in them."
>
> *neurodivergent academic:* "I can pass more easily as neurotypical, or I get passed, or I have strategies that can hide it, some of which come at the expense of my own mental health [...]. And I have many suppression strategies, [...] like I also had strategies of self-deception, more or less, to avoid appearing 'disabled,' even to myself."

While the potential risks of de-emphasising the mis-fit were brought up by several participants, this was often framed in terms of being able to recognise these risks or *having already recognised them*. Additionally, such risks were not brought up in the context of strategies of emphasising the mis-fit, and as I suggested above, the latter may even be associated with increased agency and enjoyment. Perhaps the more openly oppositional stance taken in emphasising the mis-fit means that the risk of getting attuned to exclusionary spaces seems less immediate. However, even ostensibly oppositional stances are not exempt from the workings of power, and their consequences are just as fraught with performative uncertainties as strategies that appear more conventionally complicit with hegemonic arrangements of power. For example, while refusing to appear in these spaces may make foundational exclusions more visible and allow for the nourishing of alternative spaces in alternative places, such refusals may also mean forgoing opportunities to reshape hegemonic spaces. At the same time, attempts to remain in spaces in which one is treated as an invader and following or even reworking norms that are founded on the exclusion of one's very existence can all too easily lead to exhaustion and negatively affect one's health. Yet again, positioning oneself as a space invader may come with a sense of agency but also carries a very real possibility that one will then be removed from said space – and appearing as too little of a space invader in hegemonic knowledge spaces may be met with distrust in more marginalised LGBTIQ* communities.

Conclusion: Performative Ambivalences of Mis-/Fitting

In this paper, I have sought to trace some of the contradictions and ambivalences that emerge as members of LGBTIQ* movements grapple with norms around credibility in knowledge spaces in which they may be treated as "space invaders". These include various strategies for either de-emphasising or emphasising the mis-fit between participants' embodied subjectivities and the norms of the knowledge spaces they traverse, where people's ability both to work and to challenge the norms of particular spaces is constrained by wider societal distributions of power and where these spaces have the capacity to "bite back" even if they seem relatively pliable at first. Participants framed these strategies in different ways, where modes of d*e-emphasising the mis-fit* were often accompanied by self-doubt and shame about complicity in hegemonic systems while *emphasising the mis-fit* was associated more strongly with joy and active agency. As became clear in my conversations with participants, different spaces and different situations may involve different kinds of mis-/fitting and different kinds of adaptation. As a result, many participants did not exclusively talk about one or the other side of the apparent coin of emphasising/de-emphasising the mis-fit. For example, complying with authorities' expectations in the context of a court case or openly challenging academic norms from a relatively secure job position give rise to very different kinds of mis-fitting as well as ways of engaging with that mis-fit.

Members of LGBTIQ* movements and other minoritised people inhabit complicated, sometimes contradictory positions in knowledge spaces as well as in society at large, both because of the way intersectional power relations cut through LGBTIQ* positionings and because of the neoliberal "integration" of difference into hegemonic norms and governance. For example, Antke Engel (2009) offers the notion of "projective integration" to capture how images of diversity may offer different modes of interpretation for both hegemonic and subjugated subjects, promising identification to both. Integration here does not simply mean open subordination under norms that are openly hegemonic and exclusionary. Instead, it is characterised by a "positive, appreciative stance towards difference that appears usable as cultural capital" (Engel 2009, 42; my translation). Similarly, Jennifer Nash argues that racial alterity and the notion of "intersectionality" as standing in for that alterity may be valued in neoliberal universities while "the fleshy materiality of black women's bodies continues to be theoretically neglected" (Nash 2019, 29). And Jane Ward suggests that as "diversity skills" – that is, the ability to "deal with" deviation from hegemonic norms –

become valued in LGBTIQ* activist organisations, the possession of these skills in a demonstrable form (such as certificates and degrees) may end up benefitting white middle-class subjects who have easier access to these forms of credentialisation (Ward 2008). Clearly, any belief that "institutional grammars" can be appropriated all that easily would be misguided, and a certain flexibility in dealing with "diversity" may well be a feature of neoliberal forms of governance in which alterity and protest are folded into normalcy and thus defanged.

At the same time, thinking performatively, easy distinctions between "complicit" and "resistant" modes become more muddled. "Fitting in" might also mean reshaping a space so it might fit other/more embodiments than before (Butler 2015; Ahmed 2014): as a square peg pushes itself into a round hole, both the peg and the hole might be reshaped – in mis-/fitting, subjects and spaces are implicated in each other and constituted together. Similarly, apparent "complicity" might sometimes be a matter of sheer survival; and on the other hand, openly oppositional stances may also be folded into existing expectations and exclusions. And as José Esteban Muñoz (1999) argues in relation to queers of colour, those who are differentially excluded from multiple communities cannot simply utterly reject or completely conform to these norms, so reworking dominant norms and deploying them against themselves is a matter of *both* survival and resistance.

Enactments of LGBTIQ* knowledges and claims to credibility always take place within broader societal arrangements that are characterised by a complex interplay of "complicity" and "resistance". Performativity is where broader epistemological considerations meet "complex questions about agency and accountability" (Puar 2017, 231) in the muddiness of the everyday. Even as questions of which knowledges and which knowers are considered legitimate and credible are negotiated in specific spaces, these spaces carry the sedimentations of the subjects that have moved through them and continue to do so, and with them broader societal distributions of power and inclusions and exclusions along lines of gender, sexuality, race, class, age, dis-/ability, and more.

Claiming credibility, then, like gender, is "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler 2004, 1).[12] As such, a performative understanding of negotiations of credibility warns against both an overly celebratory and an overly pessimistic view of how members of LGBTIQ* and other emancipatory movements pass through/in knowledge spaces in which they/we may be positioned as space invaders. We are neither helpless, nor are we heroes; we are neither

12 I would like to thank Sabine Grenz for pointing out the parallelism between claiming credibility and gender as improvisation.

only victims nor mere accomplices. It is in the muddiness of the everyday that we have no choice but to grapple with the ambivalences of performative agency whose effects go beyond individual intentions. The performative consequences of the claims to credibility we seek to make are not fully within our grasp, and they hold the potential for transformation as well as for furthering the exclusion of “other Others”. Moving in knowledge spaces and negotiating credibility, then, is not just about individual and singular acts of defiance or complicity, but about collective reworkings of knowledge spaces through ongoing, and occasionally contradictory, iterative practices.

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The research material will not be published to protect participants’ identities.

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