

Invisibility and hypervisibility essay



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The disappearance of hypervisible bodies and increased visibility of bodies which are understood to be invisible functions in a way that stigmatizes the abnormal body and affirms the normative body. Bodies are made hypervisible when they exist outside of what it means to look like a normal body. Hypervisible bodies are often stigmatized as being abnormal and unintelligible as they do not conform to how normal bodies look and therefore are expected to perform inefficiently. Invisible bodies are made invisible due to the fact that they are unmarked and meet the normative expectation of how a body should look.

Although it has been demonstrated that invisible bodies often occupy positions of power and are socially visible, and hypervisible bodies are often silenced and disappear socially, there are certain cases in which bodies that threaten dominance are made visible as well. Priscilla Wald presents the example of Mary Mallon, a healthy carrier who presented a massive threat to the understanding of bodies and America as a nation in her article “ Cultures and Carriers: ‘ Typhoid Mary’ and the Science of Social Control. ” The body of Mary Mallon initially became visible as she was determined to be a healthy carrier, which meant that although she was considered healthy she could still transmit a disease. The disease in question was Typhoid, and it wasn’t until Mary Mallone’s ‘ willful disobedience’ (Wald, 182) that she was transformed into the public menace of ‘ Typhoid Mary. The body of Typhoid Mary made itself visible due to the danger it posed to the community and nation as a whole. Mary Mallon’s body became marked as a “ sexually transgressive, generally recalcitrant, masculine woman,” and “ as a threat to social control.

” (Wald, 196) The body of Mary Mallone became increasingly visible as she was unwilling to surrender her body for the greater good of the nation, which resulted in her stigmatization as a menace and a threat to the dominant idea of personhood and nation.