

FUN WITH DICK AND SUSIE: THE NAMING OF EROGENOUS ZONES

By

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- Abstract -

By using an interdisciplinary approach of cultural anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and visual studies to critically analyze specific examples in pop media culture and various personal accounts, this paper explores the way people anthropomorphize erogenous parts of the body with names and nicknames. It examines what it means for people to make their genitalia have identities separate from their own, and what that means for gender in terms of how gender, naming, and identity play off one another. There are many facets of naming an erogenous body part that makes personal identity accessible or inaccessible. There is the process of giving the name, defining a name, confining a name, refusing to acknowledge a name, altering a name, amending a name, and claiming a name. This article considers how the naming of erogenous parts in American society, though seeming quite silly, is actually a complicated and insightful reflection of people's self perception and notions of gender.

Dick.

That name is common enough. Maybe a little less so now that it's come to take on the meaning of *penis*, but it's still hanging in there (no pun intended). Dicks with names, boobs with attitude, it's something seen often enough with children or bantering lovers, but what does it mean to give a piece of a person its own identity? I mean a real piece, not a persona or a metaphorical symbol, a chunk of body. Maybe in a way it does become persona and metaphor. What does it mean that the named part has an erogenous nature in relation to perceptions of gender, and how does that affect the way people identify with themselves and one another? These are things that manifest in the silly or derisive, the affectionate and especially the awkward, always in the everyday. In this paper I begin to explore the practice of naming erogenous zones¹ and its various reflections and impacts on identity and identity perception.

A little on the Nature and History of Names

When looking over online submissions I had received from various research subjects, I saw a brief flash of connection through a social networking site; two girls bonded in that short-lived, virtual space created as only Internet comment-reply interactions do. Over shared erogenous names, out of coincidence—Lavern and Shirley—just a spurt of online excitement and understanding became a common link that tied them to their bodies and tied them momentarily to one another. Breasts: the ladies, the twins,

¹ Erogenous zones here are meant in the literal: zones and/or parts of the body that are able to be sexually stimulated and/or stimulating, (i.e. genitalia, breasts, the buttocks, etc.). This extends to any region or part of the body that stimulates a person's sexual impulses.

the girls. Besides the normal routes of academia and pop-media, I conducted my research with a survey,² conversations, online interviews and through social networking websites; I found the most fantastic trends in the nicknaming process, and some of the most interesting and creative implementations for erogenous names, as people freely shared their intimate naming experiences with me. Sometimes I was given detailed, thoughtful, dramatic, moving personal histories, and sometimes the responses were short and blunt; but the thing that struck me though was this: even in the curtest and most offbeat replies, there was an astonishing frankness and openness that people approached the topic with. Something about this naming idea, illicit or not, generates a strange excitement, and in that safe zone of anonymity, this excitement is allowed to be shared and explored. I've found that it's the minutiae of these encounters with erogenous nicknaming that provoke some of the most interesting questions, and the way people seem take the practice for granted and surface worth becomes, for me, a huge source of curiosity.

What does it mean to have a name, to name something? Do you claim it as yours? Does it automatically give you an identity? Naming is something that almost everybody undergoes. When a baby is born, someone gives it a name, and usually a great amount of thought has been put into it. Will the child be teased for having a name with stigma? Does it sound too close to something inappropriate? A name carries a great burden; it presumably lingers forever. Perhaps the name belonged to someone else of great significance, perhaps the name belonged to someone one wouldn't have wanted to be

² Ramos, Carisse. "Thesis Research Project - The Naming of Erogenous Zones." Survey. 16 February 2011.

*From this point on, references and citations based on the survey I conducted will be formatted as:

Anonymous Survey Participant [subject number]. (Personal Communications, Month Date Year).

within the same thirty-mile radius of. A name diversifies and it unites. If we counted the millions of Britneys that emerged from the 90s or the dozens of Edwards and Jacobs that have popped up on recent popular baby name sites, one could even tell who the big pop sensations are in a given generation.

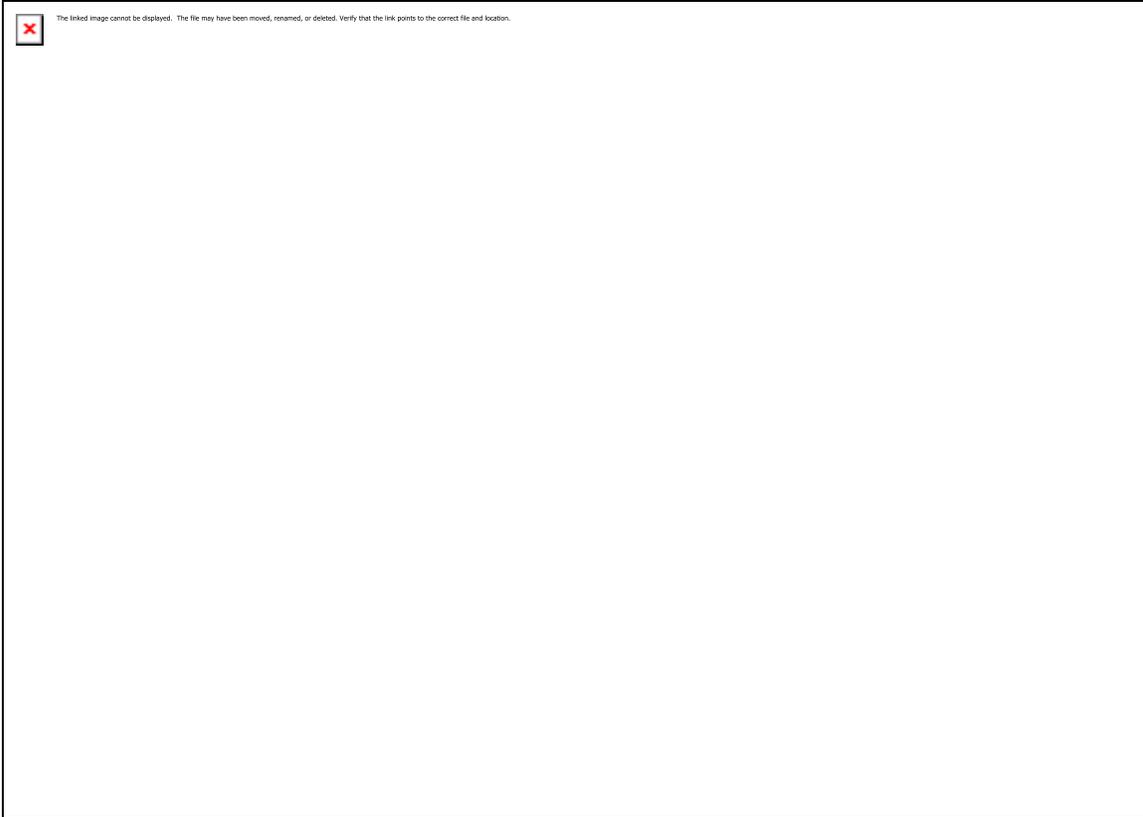
Before I can begin to talk about naming parts of the body, I must poke briefly at some of the functions that names have in and for society. Betsy Rymes' article, "Naming as Social Practice: The Case of Little Creeper from Diamond Street," touches on the social practice of naming. Her lens is the narrative of a gang member from Diamond Street, but what she asserts about naming is important and relevant to the points I am leading up to. According to Rymes: "experience with socially contextualized names indicates that proper names are not arbitrary labels. As work in various cultures exemplifies, names frequently describe the characteristics of the named individual, are linked to baptismal³ events, and change through context and usage."⁴ There are many facets to names and naming, contextually however, the nature of these titles are not without meaning and not static. This is regardless of whatever seemingly wanton impulse compels a name into being. Names affect the perceptions people have towards the named individual as well as the named's perception of his or herself, and a name can bear great weight against or for a reputation. The process of naming is a specific kind of acknowledgment, and to give a proper name, whether to a person or body part, is to give it, in turn, a specific kind of attention. Naming happens in all kinds of instances, it can mark rites of passage and denote varying levels of power; naming becomes a fluid

³ "Baptismal" here is not used in a religious sense, but rather in terms of origins.

⁴ Rymes, Betsy. "Naming as Social Practice: The Case of Little Creeper from Diamond Street." *Language in Society* Vol. 25, no. No. 2 (1996): pp. 237-260. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4168697> (accessed October 14, 2010).

process, and a name that undergoes a transformation in the way it is perceived can cause an individual to undergo a metaphoric “renaming” without the actual name changing at all. This would be where the associations, contexts or meanings shift in the eyes of a person or group or people and the person whose name is in question takes on a different identity. Naming conforms and functions with and to social constructs.⁵ This is extremely relevant to notions of identity and representation. What elevates the status of erogenous parts of the body that make people more inclined to name them over other pieces of the anatomy? What makes them so special that they become icons and even considered autonomous personified sidekicks? Perhaps this can be understood when taking into account the loaded cultural baggage associated with sexuality and eroticized parts.

⁵ Naming and the attributes that the names designate are dictated by social contexts and interpretations, not because they are unmitigated fact.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2005. Ink on Paper.

Cooters and Klein: The Importance of Erogenous Zones

Morgan once told me about her experiences in therapy.⁶ As a young child, exploring the many mysterious things about the body as many young children do, she discovered that touching certain parts felt better than others. She had been taken to therapy to get over her “problem,” which happened to be public masturbation. The memories are hazy for her now, but Morgan said that there was one facet of the therapy that she distinctly recalled: the strong suggestion by her therapist to name the part she

⁶ Morgan Facemire, email to author, October 19, 2010.

touched in order to be able to talk about it more easily.⁷ She remembers wondering as a child, why that was necessary, but as prescribed, she called her genital region her “belly” and was told to stop rubbing her “belly” in public. The advice she received to name her parts links to a larger phenomenon where it is commonplace for people to feel awkward or irritable talking about sexual parts and engagements. Her experience with erogenous naming, in this case, made these “untouchable” parts more accessible for her therapist to talk about.

People learn to associate with their erogenous parts very differently from the rest of their body. For many, they learned to associate those parts with shame and vulgarity. Conversely, some people looked at erogenous parts as keys to understanding the fundamental human psyche. Because reproduction is considered one of the most essential actions of being a living creature (along with eating and defecating), and because the sex drive is, for many, one of the most intense physical urges, erogenous parts are associated with something significant that “regular” body parts are not.

The father of psychoanalytic theory and a therapist quite different from Morgan’s, Sigmund Freud noted reproduction and sex as the end-all-be-all force behind human thought and action. He posited that the relationships people have with one another are contingent to the Oedipal Complex, which means that the ideas of penis envy and castration anxiety play an enormous part. With penis envy, a girl realizes that she cannot copulate with her mother as a man can because she does not have a penis and therefore desires her father’s penis. With castration anxiety, a boy realizes that a woman does not

⁷ Ironically (or perhaps incidentally) this friend is one of the most sexually comfortable people I have ever met.

have a penis and becomes anxious that his own penis will be removed by his rival (father). Penises are integral to Freud's point.⁸

Melanie Klein is another more recent psychoanalyst who places great importance on erogenous parts as catalysts for human reactions and interactions. For Klein, it is the breast that is key to behaviors of love, hate and reparation. It is presumed that the mother's breast is what a baby has its first interaction with outside of the mother's womb. To a baby, because it is not quite able to distinguish the difference between a part and the whole, the breast *is* the mother. The breast is what nurtures the baby. Love towards the mother stems from the love of being fed and cared for by the breast. When a breast is taken away from the baby, desperate feelings of hate and a desire to destroy the breast (or the mother) arise because the child feels wronged for being robbed of nourishment. It feels envy that the mother has the breast and it does not. Feelings of reparation then follow, as the baby feels guilt for having wanted to destroy the thing that provides sustenance and cares for it.⁹ Klein also takes off of Freud's ideas penis envy, revising and developing them from the perspective that a woman envies her mother for having access to her father's penis and the bond that arises out of that. Thus, a woman desires a penis of her own.¹⁰ Erogenous zones have been used for years to try to understand human interactions through psychoanalytic metaphor. But, on a less intellectual note, everyday people are using their erogenous parts and genitalia to become metaphors for their own identities and symbols of their relationships. In many cases, they themselves don't realize

⁸ Klein, Melanie, and Juliet Mitchell. "Chapter 3." *The selected Melanie Klein*. New York: Free Press, 1987/1986. 69-83. Print.

⁹ Klein, Melanie. *Love, Hate and Reparation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964.

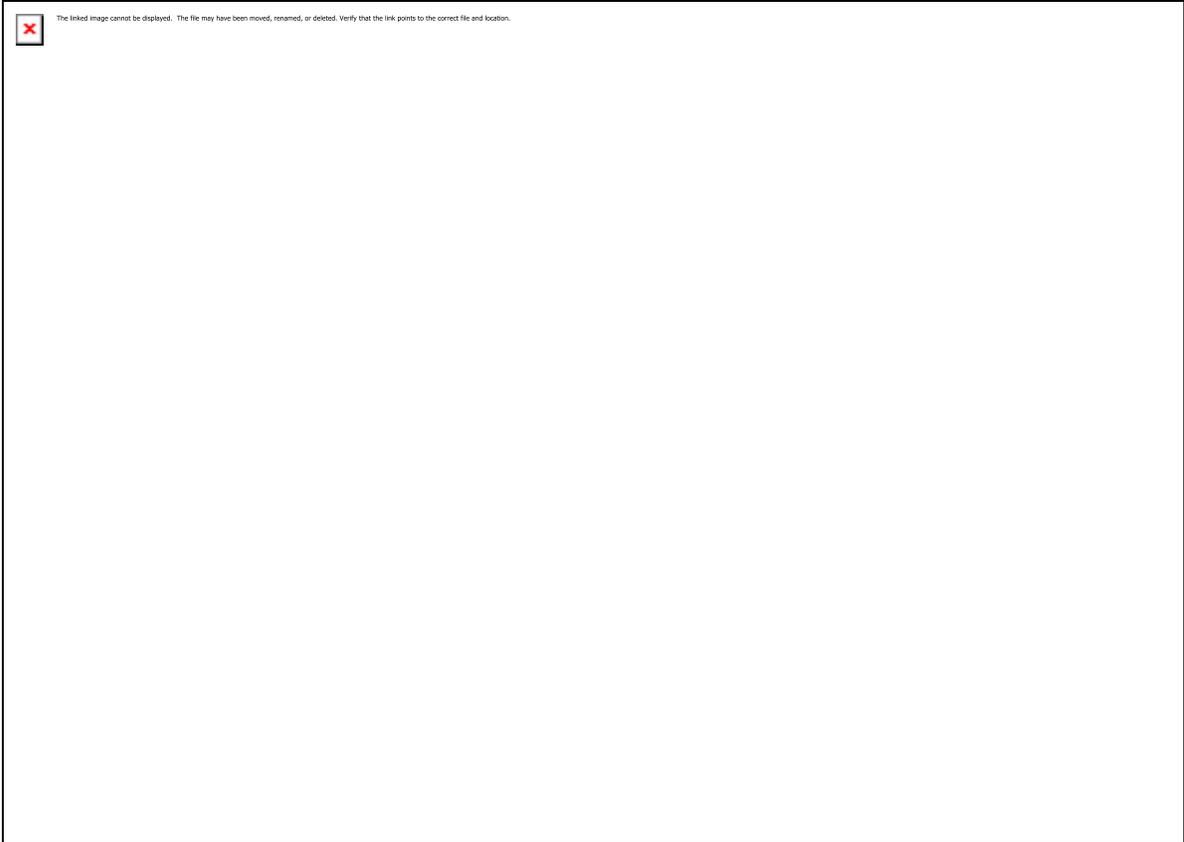
¹⁰ Klein, Melanie, and Juliet Mitchell. "Chapter 3." *The selected Melanie Klein*. New York: Free Press, 1987/1986. 69-83. Print.

it. Many people regard erogenous parts as some how more special or more significant than other body parts, especially in terms of personal relations. Perhaps this could be because of the particular function they serve in social and personal spheres. What is it about erogenous zones that set them so far apart from the rest of the body?

Martha Cornog, an active member of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, suggests in her article, “Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications,” that “although need for euphemism may inspire some people to name sexual body parts, others devise and use these names to enhance an intimate relationship or to come to terms with their seemingly "independent" sexual feelings.”¹¹ These names may be used to lighten the mood by being comical or silly, or make the relationship more erotic. Sometimes, such as is the case with some drag queens and transgendered people, naming comes into play to create a new identity based on what they feel should have been or what they would have rather been. Erogenous parts many times function similarly, becoming a vehicle to represent something personal that might only be accessed when engaging in sexual thought or practice—another self or a means to properly engage with the self. This “other” side of the person is best expressed as something being both private yet external. Because of the experiences that go hand in hand with one’s genitals and sexual parts, erogenous zones become special, for better or worse, and it begins to make sense why one would want to set them apart with names.¹²

¹¹ Cornog, Martha. "Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications." *The Journal of Sex Research* Vol. 22, no. No. 3 (1986): pp. 393-398. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3812576> (accessed October 14, 2010).

¹² Even in cases where a person’s hands might be labeled as healing hands, or where a person might be called “eagle-eyes” due to his or her stellar eyesight, the body parts in question are more or less acknowledged as tools or fine assets, not personified individuals in their own right.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2005. Ink on Paper.

Anthropomorphism

When I was in high school, my biology class performed a series of different dissections: a heart, an eye, a baby pig, and a cat. The cow heart was basic enough in terms of protocol. There was an organ in front of you with dyed veins, cradled in a plastic tray with a fair selection of tools beside it. No one in the class seemed perturbed by the fact that there was a severed heart sitting Indiana Jones style on a tray. No one really reacted to anything but the messiness of the procedure. With the sheep's eye, reactions were pretty much in keeping with the heart. The occasional wince happened when the vitreous humor started oozing out, and people began to imagine what it would be like to

have their own eyes cut out; but the eye was still just an eye. It didn't have its own life or its own personality, and the response was less pity than it was personal squeamishness. But when the time of year rolled around to dissecting the pig and the cat, our relationships to the things we were dissecting completely changed. Everybody named their animals, deliberating carefully with their lab partners to come up with something just right. The dynamic of the experience became a lot more personal. It felt wrong cutting up our cat Nigel, and when each group had to forcibly break open the jaws of their pigs in order to access the back of their throats there was audible distress from the class. It stemmed from more than disgust. I, for one, still don't think Phoebe¹³ appreciated it.

Martha Cornog relates an example of this kind of anthropomorphic personification in a story shared by one of her research subjects. While stepping out to the porch with his father so that they could relieve themselves, the subject was shocked to witness his inebriated father whip out his member for a heart-to-heart:

...we get out on the porch [and]... he takes this rather large tool out of his pants... and he starts talking to his organ and, by God, he calls the thing Hank! He says, "Aw, look at old Hank here. Poor, poor old guy." And he says, "You and I," he says, "we've been in a couple of tight places together, and we've been in and out of a couple of scrapes, but I want you to know, you old sonofabitch"-and this is where he starts

¹³ Phoebe was our lab pig.

shaking it off-"that I outlived you!"¹⁴



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2004, Ink on Paper.

The ways people relate to the heart or eyes is often very different from the way one might identify with the penis or breasts. Metaphorically the heart and eyes are very significant, as poetics and literature attest, but physically they tend to be regarded as simply as they are: just parts. Erogenous zones are different. It is not so unusual for people to view erogenous body parts, especially penises,¹⁵ the way they might view a pet dog. In both kinds of instances—penises and pets— anthropomorphosis occurs. This is when the object, thing, or creature in question is given human characteristics, especially in terms of emotions and behaviors. A penis or clitoris does not get aroused; the person

¹⁴ Cornog, Martha. "Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications."

¹⁵ Penises are talked about much more comfortably than female genitalia and are more visible and accessible. Erections, both uncontrolled and expected, make it easier to think of penises as autonomous creatures. Female genitalia on the other hand are kept much more private in both the social sense and the personal. More about this later.

with said genitalia is aroused. The body parts merely fill up with blood and expand and move as a result of it. Similarly, the dog with its mouth open and teeth showing isn't smiling. What looks like a toothy grin is just a result of the animal panting and trying to cool off. It's easy to see how one can come to these conclusions; it's easy to think a dog is smiling after it's been given new ball to play with on a sunny summer day, just as it genuinely seems like a penis or a nipple has a mind of its own when it starts perking up at the sight of an attractive individual. Regardless, the fact remains that these are human traits. We give these traits and form relationships when we hand out a name because we recognize humanity or personality in the object or creature; we recognize some kind of importance. The idea of nicknaming one's genitals is not so different from naming one's teddy bear. Neither thing has a consciousness and unlike the dog, they don't even have their own pulses.

Giving Identity

The ability to give a name,¹⁶ or to give anything for that matter, denotes a kind of power structure. One needs to have something to give it, and it has to be something that

¹⁶ This is different from name-calling. With name-calling the "names" used are simply glorified adjectives, things in the public realm that are accessible to and could be used by anybody. The act of naming requires a sort of privacy, even intimacy. Giving a name happens on a much more personal level and is specific to the person or thing.

the receiver doesn't already have.¹⁷ When it comes to giving a name, the receiver many times has little to no power over what it is or how it represents him or her. The name is based on another's perception. If the name sticks it sticks, along with its many connotations. In a sense, the one who names claims the named. The claiming is not necessarily malevolent or domineering in nature, in fact in most cases it is done with a sort of reverence and affection: "Yes, see this? I can talk about your breasts. I can talk about your breasts all the time and it's great. Also I get to name them. Because, well, they're sort of mine now."¹⁸ This quote is from one of my research participants, relating her boyfriend's feelings, attachment and expression of enthusiasm over her breasts. Whether it is the person to whom the body part is attached that designates a special kinship to it, or an intimate outsider who stakes out an identity for them, with the name comes birth.¹⁹ In the case of genitals, they have no say in the naming whatsoever and cannot act to resist, thus their new personae come not only out of the body parts' physical characteristics but is colored and informed by the characteristics of the names. An erogenous part being named by somebody other than the body's "owner" creates a sort of dual ownership, while self-naming constitutes a more personal bond.

¹⁷ It doesn't matter if the person receiving wants the "gift" (i.e name) or not, and it doesn't matter if they have multiples already. The fact remains that the specific "gift" in question does not belong to him or her until the giver gives it. The perception one has of his or her body may or may not change during the name-giving process, and the one giving the name might not put serious stock into the idea of owning the other person's body, but a certain kind of experience is shared. The gift lasts for as long as one of the naming participants or witnesses remembers that it has happened.

¹⁸ Anonymous Survey Participant 24. (Personal Communications, March 19, 2011).

¹⁹ Life, in terms of genitalia, is meant as the new "personality" that arises from the name; not life as in a penis being literally alive with a consciousness and being able to hold intelligent conversations. The naming brings a sense of autonomous life. Personality in this case doesn't exist before the anthropomorphizing.

These interactions with parts and people come into play oftentimes between intimate lovers or friends. A good example of this can be found in the pop movie hit How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, in which a notable instance of genital naming reoccurs throughout the film. To premise the example with context, the story is about two people, Andi Anderson (Kate Hudson) and Benjamin Barry (Matthew McConaughey), who are deliberately manipulating one another in order to elevate their careers. This specific movie was chosen because, though it is in no way an extraordinary or unique piece of cinema, the premise of the plot relies on the characters purposefully using what are perceived as female and male stereotypes to meet their ends. In the movie, the character Andi chooses what is taken to be a “common” practice of naming a partner’s intimate body part (i.e. his penis) and twists it (pun absolutely intended) in a way that is meant to spur the stereotypically “male” reaction of offense. She is meant to consciously mirror what would be considered “irrational” and “unwanted” female behavior, while her foil character, Ben, is supposed to be the stereotypical chauvinist male who manipulatively employs tactics that (assumedly) would convince “any woman” to desire him. This proves to be very important to our point.

Now that the general plot of the movie is revealed it can be understood that Andi is employing tactics intended to drive her “lover” away before her deadline while Ben is trapped into staying “committed” until promotion day, thus the two irrevocably thwart one another. The leading lady’s actions are meant to cause stereotypical torment among men. “Insensitive” genital naming, as a result, becomes a reoccurring thread throughout the movie.

Andi: Does Princess Sophia want to come out and play?

Ben: Who's Princess Sophia?

[Andi points at his crotch]

Ben: No, no, no, nahhh, woah, woah, woah, you're kiddin' me right? Princess Sophia?

Andi: Little, big, little, big... I don't know... we will find out!

...

Ben: Listen, listen, If you're gonna name u-uh-uh, my...member, alright, y-you gotta to name it something hyper masculine, okay? Something like Spike, or Butch— Krull the Warrior King! But not Princess Sophia...²⁰

A surprising number of things go on in this exchange: first, the naming, second, anthropomorphizing, in Andi asking if Ben's penis can "come out to play," third, Ben's reaction to the naming and the identity that has been made for him and his member, and fourth, his attempt to rename. All of this happens while Andi launches herself on top of Ben in an attempt to both tease and make him uncomfortable.

Princess Sophia.

This name is obviously meant to raise an eyebrow, in this case to send someone immediately packing. The first thing to consider is why someone would choose this particular name for this particular purpose and why one would give it such a decisively gendered form. As *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* is meant to be a romantic comedy, one must keep in mind the audience and intent of the movie as a whole. The name Andi chooses is supposed to be funny, cheesy, embarrassing, and relatable, and of course the scriptwriter is the one using it as a device to stir a loaded conversation between characters. It is easy to get caught up in the movie-moment, but one must remain aware that there is an outsider staging this entire interaction on the basis that he or she feels this scene will resonate with audiences. Based on the popularity of this movie among

²⁰ *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*. DVD. Directed by Donald Petrie. Hollywood: Paramount, 2003.

romantic comedy enthusiasts and the frequencies of views this particular clip has gotten on Youtube,²¹ one could perhaps even constitute this as a success on the writer's part. This scene is one reflection of how people regard genitals, sex and intimacy. Whether the viewers' investments into the scene stop at simple entertainment, or if they are able to directly empathize with the characters' exchange, there is something about the situation that has the resonates with the certain audiences. There is something in the naming that is meant to draws a response, and the process of naming is the writer's tool to color the spirit of the characters' pseudo-relationship.

Andi chooses a name that she knows will upset Ben's ego, further causing insult by alluding to the possibility of his penis being small,²² and Ben, in an attempt to clarify his sexual position, so to speak, insists on her choosing a better name. One to more "accurately" describe his member. Krull the Warrior King! A masculine and potent name, indeed. For some it may be interesting that Ben's shock came from the chosen name, not the idea that his girlfriend is naming a protrusion of meat from his body, because though nick-naming genitals is common enough in the present day, not everyone is familiar with the regularity of the practice. What does this all mean? The name "Princess Sophia" is employed to create distance between two people. There must be something about this naming scene that the audience responds to most, something that is reflected and responded to, and somewhere the humor comes from. Is it simply the choice of

²¹ 25,453.

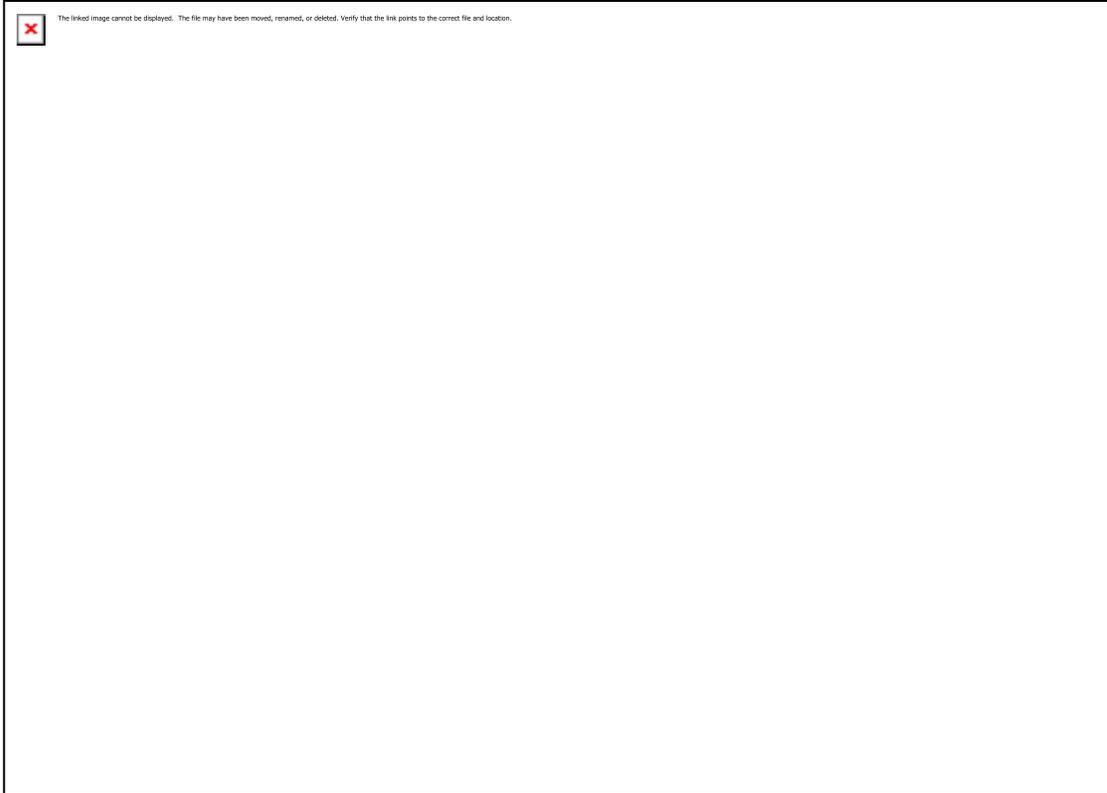
"How to lose a guy in 10 days - Princess Sophia", YouTube video, 1:31, posted by SamScribul. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvhBt_XvHNY. (Accessed December 1, 2010)

²² The implications of penis size are not explicitly analyzed in this paper, but it would be safe to assume here that this is an implied critique of Ben's sexual performance and virility. An assumption many people make is simply that a large penis equals more pleasure.

descriptive name, the fact that both titles, “Princess” and “Sophia,” are clearly feminine? Perhaps it also owes to the fact that the character Benjamin Barry is set to look like a “hypermasculine” womanizer, or that his reaction could be considered typically male. The name “Sophia” comes from the Greek word meaning wisdom and knowledge, but that hardly seems applicable in this case, nor does the real princess Sophia of Buckingham Palace, who was accused of having an incestuous affair with her brother.²³ Perhaps the most sensible Princess Sophia to attribute as the namesake would be the S.S. Princess Sophia, which sunk in 1918.²⁴ In this instance, the naming becomes less about the name and more about the characteristics of the person the penis is attached to, why the names don’t mesh. The penis still walks away with a brand new image, disjointed from the person in reports to, but the penis represents an embodiment of Ben’s sense of self. Does the name reflect on the penis’s performance or the man’s? Perhaps it feels insulted. Maybe in secret it likes being a Princess. The penis becomes a scapegoat for insecurities.

²³ Hatton, Ragnhild Marie. George I. New Haven[Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2001. 135.

²⁴ The actual S.S. Sophia sank in October 25, 1918, 30 miles away from Juneau in the Vanderbilt Reef. KTOO News. "The Wreck of the Princess Sophia." KTOO: Public Broadcasting from Alaska's Capital. <http://www.ktoo.org/sophia/> (accessed November 12, 2010).



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2005. Ink on Paper.

Accessibility of Identity

It has always been a strange phenomenon to me that penises and vaginas are considered by many people to be funny. Movies, stand-up, television shows, and high school hallways all become stages, and erogenous body parts transform into symbols and caricatures for silliness. I would be lying if I did not admit to making a few genital jokes on my own time. Perhaps some of it has to do with the discomfort many people feel when talking about “private parts” and sex, and humor has always been a standard icebreaker for uneasy confrontations. Maybe the humor stems from a special relationship one might have to his or her body or the bodies of others. I have found that, for some, the humor in naming has nothing to do with easing sexual tensions. It is simply a way to become closer

to one's partner and even to one's own body. In a survey conducted over the Internet, I received one result relating an experience where the subject and his partner came up with names "Just [for the] humor value."²⁵ He stated that the couple never used the names "in a serious context or during 'dirty talk' of any kind," but that they were the result of moments of hilarity that arose while the two of them watched television together. The participant requested the intimate names he and his partner had exchanged to be kept private, but when asked how he felt the name affected his relationship to his body and the part, he responded, "[It] gives my penis a personality, I guess, haha. Not really, but...damn, this is hard to explain. I guess I feel like it's more special, at least to my girl, because she gave it a name. It's not just a tool for sex, it's something she cares about."²⁶ Naming, in many respects, can lead to accessing intimacies, feelings and moments singular and particular to the individuals involved with the process. It all comes down to specific experiences.

Going back to Cornog's statement, sometimes an erogenous part of the body becomes a vehicle for understanding, facing, or accessing "'independent' sexual feelings."²⁷ She lists three plausible functions or reasons for intimate pet naming: intimacy/play (names, whether humorous or solely erotic, created during an intimate moment or made with the intention of increasing intimacy), euphemism (making it more comfortable to bring up "private parts"), and personification (names made to distinguish a part's independent "personality" from the whole person's). These each become ways of

²⁵Anonymous Survey Participant 18, (Personal Communications, February 18, 2011).

²⁶Anonymous Survey Participant 18, Ibid.

²⁷ Martha Cornog does not specify what kinds of sexual feelings would be classified as "independent" but I interpret this to mean sexual feelings that the individual or individuals have a hard time directly confronting and remain somewhat detached about. This might be due to personal or social expectations, experience, or cultural background.

access. In a personal communication between former marriage counselor D. Weis and Martha Cornog, the theory is raised that genital naming and the use of euphemisms can ease sexual tension between couples by making a wider and more comfortable vocabulary available for talking about erotic parts and situations. Weis relates that: "The process of thinking up names and developing this new vocabulary was a very enjoyable process of sharing for most of the couples that tried it. (December 12, 1980)."²⁸ The idea is that the implementation of pet names and word play identifies body parts that seem unapproachable in a playful manner, thus allowing couples to become more relaxed or excited. Whether it is because the proper terms are too clinical to be spoken aloud comfortably in an intimate situation, or because the situation itself has become too tense or awkward, this kind of naming can break down a barrier to communication. Sandra Metts, author of *Couple Relationships*, articulates a need for this kind of vocabulary in order for, in the case of her own study, married couples to keep healthy and communicative relationships. After noting a general trend in studies that "the quality of communication about sex is related to sexual satisfaction and the overall quality of the relationship," she stresses that "as couples build sexual relationships they need to develop a common vocabulary. This is often accomplished by the creation of unique personal idioms, especially idioms for genitalia, sexual rituals, and routines."²⁹ These idioms

²⁸ Cornog, Martha. "Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications." *The Journal of Sex Research* Vol. 22, no. No. 3 (1986): pp. 393-398. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3812576> (accessed October 14, 2010).

²⁹ Metts, Sandra, and James Jaccard. "Sexual Communication - Couple Relationships, Parent-child Relationships - Gender, Theory, Family, Development, Adolescent, Parents, Research, Journal, Adolescents, and Studies." *Marriage and Family Encyclopedia*. <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1501/Sexual-Communication.html> (accessed April 7, 2011).

help build a metaphorical bridge between people and also for individuals, who might now be more open in how they perceive and approach themselves. As suggested by one of my research participants, perhaps the naming of an erogenous body part could even help one to be more comfortable with or overcome any “imperfections” of the body part being named.³⁰ All of this might facilitate various modes of intimacy.

As Eve Ensler puts it in her play, *the Vagina Monologues*: “Let’s just start with the word Vagina. It doesn’t matter how many times you say the word, it never sounds like a word you want to say. It’s a completely ridiculous, totally unsexy word.”³¹ Getting familiar with one’s genitals can be difficult for many people, especially women. Personal and social reservations exacerbate the tendency to consciously remain ignorant of one’s body, and technical terms for parts can ironically make one’s body seem very distant. This same difficulty can be met when becoming familiar with a partner. In regards to intimate conversation, the more anatomically explicit names become in a technical sense, the more off-putting they can be to spit out. Use of words like vulva, testicles, clitoris, gonads or labia can seem a little strange or cumbersome and “touch my pudendum” is not exactly exciting grounds for foreplay. Pet-names ease this disconnect between the sexual and the anatomical. A couple is given something to bond over and a sense of familiarity is created with the part on a personal level. In this case, accessibility is reached by renaming.

Genital or erogenous naming that grants accessibility to one’s independent sexual feelings can also give way to an entirely different sexual identity that the person feels is

³⁰ Anonymous Research Participant 4. (Personal Communications, February 16, 2011).

³¹ Ensler, Eve. "Vagina Monologues Script- Eve Ensler Play." Drew's Script-O-Rama. SergeiK, n.d. Web. 3 Dec. 2010. <http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/v/vagina-monologues-script-eve-ensler.html>.

outside of oneself. In other words, instead of simply acknowledging the sexual feelings that can be identified and more easily talked about by using the name as a tool for intimacy, one has turned the sexual part into an entirely separate “person” and relates to it as such. This is again where anthropomorphizing comes into play to personify. In Cornog’s study, a small handful of the names collected were derivatives of the subject’s own name and “Eleven out of the 64 informants (17%) spoke directly or indirectly of using the pet name to personify the genitals, differentiating its ‘personality’ from their own.” She gives an example of a woman who refers to her clitoris as “She” and who blames the powerful urges felt in her clitoris for her “morally questionable” antics.³² In cases when a person uses a body part as a scapegoat to rationalize for one’s sexual forays against his or her own established beliefs, one could argue that this misdirection of disapproval allows a person to engage in a part of his or her personality that had previously gone ignored or suppressed. Cornog’s subject frees herself by mentally constructing her clitoris to have capabilities and lustful needs. She might not be able to come to terms with her views on propriety and morality, but she *is* able to access the sexuality and sexual awareness of the body she would otherwise deny herself.³³ By allowing one’s genitals to “have” consciousness, that person has an excuse to explore and understand more of his or herself even in more taboo respects because there is the rational that subsequent sexual actions and interactions are no longer deemed his or her

³² Cornog, Martha. "Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications." pp. 393-398.

³³ Cornog, Martha. "Naming Sexual Body Parts: Preliminary Patterns and Implications." pp. 393-398.

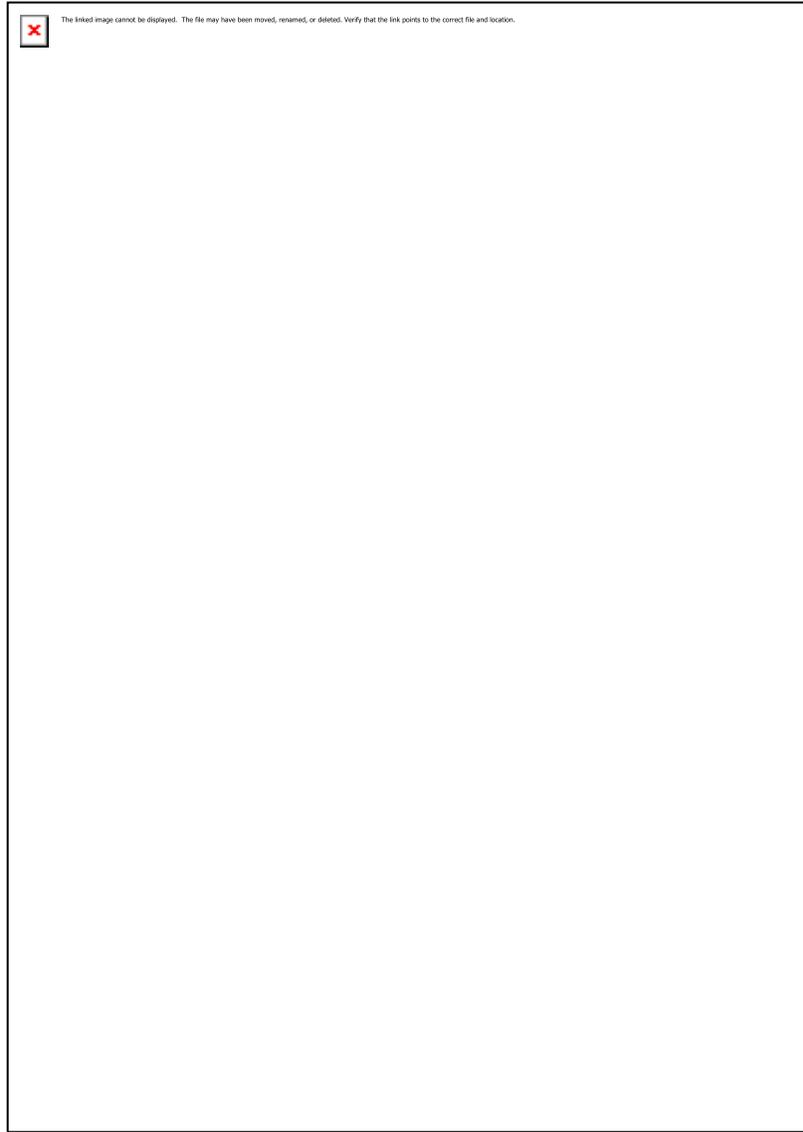
fault.³⁴

Incidentally, this also leads to an interesting opposing perspective. One could say that since the latter woman in question is not able to confront her *personal* drives and blames it on the body, she distances herself from the literal nature of her clitoris. This creates the illusion of a blameless character for her ego but becomes a denial of sexual identity rather than sexual affirmation. Her use of the personified “She” leads her away from direct acknowledgement of her clitoris as an organ and creates an escapist road because she can’t confront her self. She is aware of her body as a sexual entity, and the personification of her clitoris is a nod to that, but she denies the cognizance that she (not “She”) is behind her actions; she uses her body to separate her from the truth. However, the conflict between the good and bad of each viewpoint remains personal and is not the issue here. Naming and anthropomorphizing becomes a two-way road. Nicknames and anthropomorphized identities have a way of creating closeness and intimacy with the body and to the erogenous part, and simultaneously they create a separation between what something literally is and what it takes the place of.

An opposing view can also be taken in regards to names facilitating accessibility when taking account *who* is meant to access the erogenous part and one’s sexuality and why. When using a name or nickname to make something more accessible, there is the ability and possibility to simultaneously achieve an opposite effect. In Morgan’s case, one could say that the name given to represent her genitals made it easier for the therapist and her parents to breach the topic of masturbation while also distancing Morgan’s relationship to her own body. On one side, it became easier for the therapist to discuss the

³⁴ Refer to the section headed: Rejecting Identity for more on this.

"problem" at hand, on the other it became a source of strange confusion for Morgan and a tool used to estrange her from her body (at least in one way of directly engaging with it). The nature of how names are perceived have much to do with the way that people obtain them and create them—intention plays a large role with the function and relationship to names.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2008. Ink and Acrylic on Paper.
Framed 31 x 22,5 cm, Unframed 29,7 x 21 cm

Rejecting Identity

The subject of my story is Dean.³⁵ Dean was raised in a small rural town with a strong Christian base, and over the course of his youth (and due to his very conservative surroundings), he had developed a very cynical attitude towards sex and sexuality. His naming episode began in high school while dating a girl whom I will call Anna. The two of them held very different views of sex, Anna asserted that sex was something meaningful that happened between two people who really loved one another, Dean maintained that sex "was disgusting, and demoralizing, and degrading."³⁶ After some pressure she convinced him to do the deed and he resigned himself to it, feeling both excitement and guilt. This is not to say that he did not derive pleasure from the act, but that was the very thing that started his problems and inner conflict. Time passed and he began to wonder if sex would eventually change his feelings for Anna, if she would stop being the woman he loved and end up becoming the thing he pleased himself with. He began to wonder if honesty and personal closeness was possible in a relationship where sex was involved. Then he named his penis. Tina. After Tina Turner. Because, really, "What's love got to do, got to do with it?"³⁷

A close friend of his felt it was important to contribute her own feelings on the subject. She described how the naming of Dean's genitals became a source of discourse amongst his girlfriends, ex-girlfriends and friends, and that the dialogue created between the people he confided and engaged with pulled them into the naming process whether they were directly involved with it or not. The nickname, in turn, was pulled into the

³⁵ Names have all been changed for privacy at the source's request.

³⁶ Anonymous. Email to author. February 17, 2011.

³⁷ Ibid. February 17, 2011.

everyday. Much like her namesake, Tina became a strange and popular figure to gossip over. "One of his girlfriends later on told me that she felt he named his penis Tina to degrade it, to sort of humiliate it and make it into a joke;" she felt that "the gender [of the name] is significant because Dean wanted to emasculate his sexuality and its control over him."³⁸ Giving his penis a name didn't stop him from having sex during or after his relationship with Anna, but it came into play whenever he felt guilty about his sexual activities and would vent to those close to him. "He would usually rant about Tina. Tina screwed everything up, I should just chop Tina off. The next time Anna makes me have sex with her I'm gonna just chop Tina off."³⁹ Disturbing though his exclamations might seem, for Dean, "Tina" became an outlet that he felt was humorous. It became a way to deal with uneasy feelings and a vehicle for the subject to express his feelings to the people close to him. It could also be said that with the "birth" of Tina came a distinct separation between the relationship of mind and body, reiterating the idea of giving autonomous life to a part of the body. Dean does not hide the fact to his friends that "he is not happy about humans being sexual beings." In a way, projecting his sexuality onto his penis and then fantasizing about destroying it functions in a Kleinian sense. Imagining that it would be possible to get rid of sexual urges and desires by ridding yourself of the part that symbolically facilitates those sexual engagements is comparable to the way Klein predicts a baby feels towards the breast that stops feeding it. With the baby, feelings of destruction are aimed towards the breast because it feels robbed of the milk and care it treasures once the mother takes a break from nursing. Then feelings of guilt arise and the baby feels regretful for having had those thoughts. These feelings of guilt

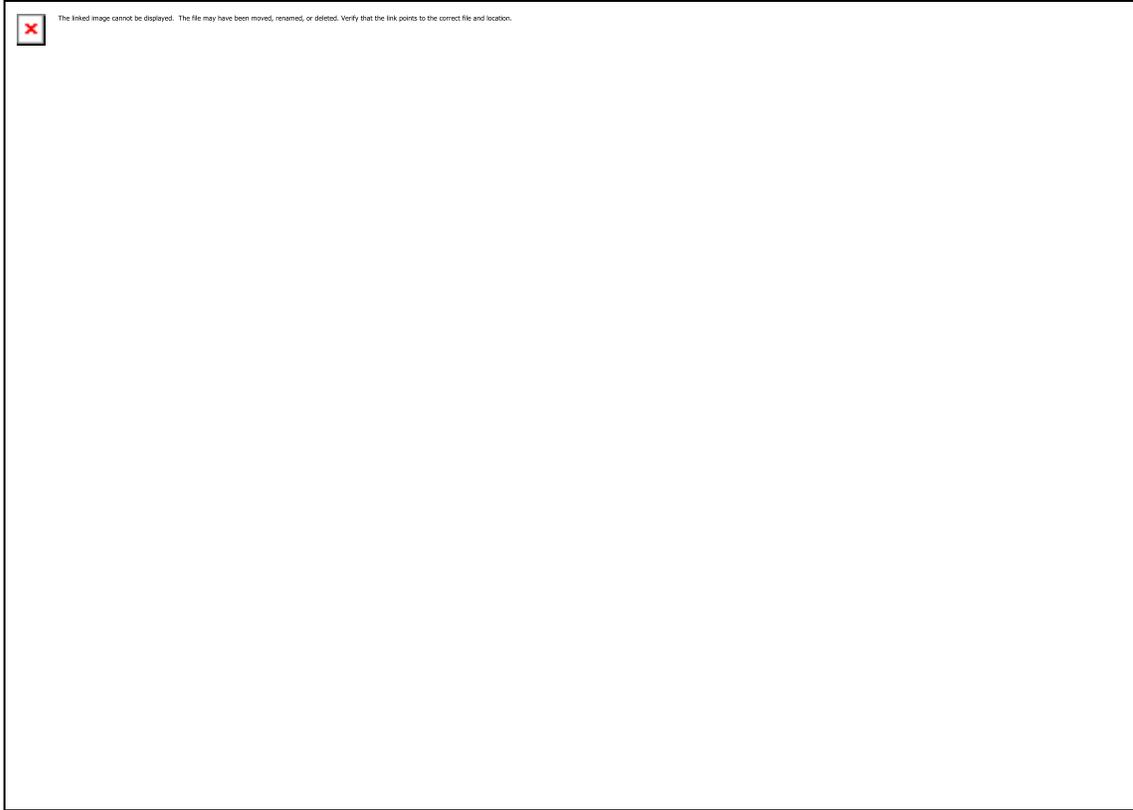
³⁸ Anonymous. Email to author. February 17, 2011.

³⁹ Ibid. February 17, 2011.

lead to feelings of reparation and reacceptance of the mother and breast as nurturer. For Dean and those in similar circumstances, one could perhaps make the guess that imagining the scenario of his penis' destruction, especially on humorous terms, makes it easier to feel those feelings of reparation and tolerance towards his penis and sexuality though he does not appreciate the conflicting emotions that they give rise to.

Dean's is a complex situation that mixes a lot of the behaviors previously mentioned. As it was in the movie "How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days," Dean uses the name "Tina" to create distance; and like the situation with the woman who refers to her clitoris as "She," the name Tina also functions as a scapegoat for presumably illicit behavior. In the case of the "She," the woman in question takes pleasure in sexual behavior and activity, but because she views it as morally questionable, she blamed her desires on physical urges stemming from her clitoris rather than facing the reality of her decisions. Cornog's subject puts her body as the perpetrator rather than her "self".⁴⁰ In Dean's case, Tina also becomes the wrongdoer and her activities are also scorned, but it isn't a question of blaming her for compromised morality. For Dean, it is an issue of Tina existing as an unwanted sexualizing entity all on her own, one that could be cut off or mangled, and unburdened from his body. As Andi Anderson uses the name "Princess Sophia" in *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* to create distance between herself and her partner, for Dean, distance is created between himself and his member.

⁴⁰ I use "self" here to represent the woman's sense of reason and morality. The "self" within the mind is made, by her preference, a separate entity from the external body.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2005. Ink on Paper.

Women and the Obscured: Vulva Vocabulary and Reducing Identity

One of the strangest things that comes to my attention about women's bodies and female erogenous zones, is that, accompanying the glorification and denunciation of women's bodies as fleshy, perhaps even edible items⁴¹, there are gaps of understanding in how women's bodies function—things that seem as though they should be common knowledge. It becomes a little surreal to meditate on. Until recently, notions of women's pleasure and the anatomical loci for sexual stimulus have been relegated to the realm of myth and speculation. The G-spot, for instance, and female ejaculation are still somewhat

⁴¹ An idea propagated by products such as Jessica Simpson's "Dessert Beauty," a line of edible cosmetics, candy bras and panties (though these are also advertised towards men), or by the slang term for cunilingus: "eating her out."

contested in their existence and “practical” function. At the beginning of 2010, Scientists from King’s College London conducted a large-scale study of 1,800 women, each twins, in an attempt to shed light on the existence and location of the G-Spot.⁴² Their declaration was that it did not exist, at least not genetically, and Tim Spector, the co-author of the study, stated enigmatically that the results definitively showed that the G-spot was subjective.⁴³ Yet several French gynecologists stepped forward to firmly dismiss this “finding.” They responded, “the G-spot was ‘a reality’ for at least 56 per cent of women and its effects could be observed in scans.”⁴⁴ The dispute remains and the nether-regions of womanhood continue to mystify. Even the clitoris has its days in hiding, as is observed in *Deep Throat*,⁴⁵ a film where actress Linda Lovelace plays a woman who cannot reach clitoral orgasm because she cannot find her clitoris. Playfully of course, her clitoris is discovered to be mysteriously located... deep in her throat. At that time, for women to be pleased or to have contact with body parts that caused sexual pleasure was considered taboo and inappropriate within many social circles.⁴⁶ When Harry Reems, the leading

⁴² Moseman, Andrew. "G-Spot Study Explodes into Controversy - CBS News." Breaking News Headlines: Business, Entertainment & World News - CBS News. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/01/tech/main6163329.shtml> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁴³ Moseman, Andrew. "G-Spot Study Explodes into Controversy - CBS News."

⁴⁴ Samuel, Henry. "French correct British scientists: G spot does exist - Telegraph." Telegraph.co.uk - Telegraph online, Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph - Telegraph. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/7095849/French-correct-British-scientists-G-spot-does-exist.html> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁴⁵ *Inside Deep Throat* - Theatrical NC-17 Edition. Film. Directed by Fenton Bailey. null: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005.

In the court case against actor Harry Reems, the judge ruled the adult movie, *Deep Throat*, to be inappropriate and profane due to the fact that a woman’s clitoris was featured.

⁴⁶ This suppression led to reactionary responses; one obvious example is the second wave of feminism, where strong pushes for the acceptance of sexuality, sexual freedom and reproductive rights were made.

actor of *Deep Throat*, was being charged with obscenity due to his participation in the film, the defense tried to make the argument that the movie was not simply smut and that it “enlightened audiences.”⁴⁷ But the prosecution was firm and the film sat poorly with the jury. The argument made against *Deep Throat* was that “this sexual satisfaction was dangerous to women because *Deep Throat* emphasized the wrong kind of orgasm: the clitoral orgasm.”⁴⁸ Ironically, the prosecuting lawyer later related how the judge didn’t know what a clitoris was.⁴⁹ The entire experience for them had been a delving into new territories of female biology previously left “untouched” behind the curtains.

Can a part be named that can’t be found? A thing with uncharted features and dubious significance? Even the vagina, arguably the most well known part of the female genitals, is often misrepresented. People frequently use the word “vagina” as an umbrella term to refer to portions of the female genitals are outwardly visible—the vulva, the labia, occasionally the clitoris—when the vagina simply refers to the internally constructed “canal” between the cervix and vaginal opening.⁵⁰ It becomes hard to imagine the process of pet-naming parts whose existences, locations and functions are left under question, powerful parts that become dampened not with pleasure but with a lack of enthusiasm. There are those who try desperately to understand the misunderstood perceptions of the body, but does it all chalk up to the “mystery” of being a woman? It is curious how the parts that make up the “inner workings” of the female can be left in a state of contention while so many other intricate finds within the body, nuances of the nervous system, fibers

⁴⁷ Inside *Deep Throat* - Theatrical NC-17 Edition. Film. Directed by Fenton Bailey.

⁴⁸ Fenton Bailey, *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Fenton Bailey. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Goldhor Lerner, Harriet . "And What Do Little Girls Have?." *Agenda* 1, no. No. 23 (1994): pp. 30-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4065943> (accessed October 14, 2010).

within the heart, are declared with gusto. What they are, where they are, who, scientifically speaking, they are and what they do—can a person become intimate or familiar with something that cannot even be termed?

Leaving a part unnamed is to leave a part largely unrecognized, more so if it goes unacknowledged at all. The same is true in reverse. Some people choose to go without nicknaming or euphemizing their body parts for various reasons;⁵¹ the practice of naming is not quite for them. For some, the process of naming a body part cheapens it and takes away from the emotional experience.⁵² The situations I am calling into question are specific—the sticky scenarios in which parts (as with people) go unrecognized because of taboo or power positions.⁵³ There is a significant difference between simply choosing not to name something and choosing not to name something because it is deemed taboo or unimportant to acknowledge. For many generations and for many places still a present day sentiment in and out of the United States, mentioning or drawing attention to female genitalia is taboo. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term “pudenda” or “pudendum” has a Latin origin “from neuter plural of *pudendus*, gerundive of *pudēre* to be ashamed.”⁵⁴ Pudenda, in general, refer to any and all external genitals, but it is used most commonly in regards to womanly parts. The vulva is a part particularly picked at

⁵¹ These people might think the practice of erogenous naming is silly, or that it seems generally unnecessary—these are not the examples that I mean to address.

⁵² Anonymous Survey Participant 6, (Personal Communications, February 16, 2011).

⁵³ Power positions meant here in regards to hegemony (culturally, socially, through gender, religion, etc.).

⁵⁴ Merriam-Webster, Incorporated . "Pudendum: Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary." Merriam-Webster: m-w.com. The Encyclopaedia Britannica , n.d. Web. 3 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pudendum>>.

No. 23 (1994): pp. 30-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4065943> (accessed October 14, 2010). for more.

verbally. There is an enormous cache for shame when it comes to exposing female genitalia, verbally, visually, or metaphorically. Parts associated with women's pleasure are more often than not relegated to the realms of the pornographic and obscene, with reactions ranging wildly starting from something so basic as higher movie ratings to the terrible denunciations of the female's rights to pleasure by carrying out female genital mutilation. One will find that in many cultures throughout the United States, the topic of female sexuality is avoided all together⁵⁵ let alone the open discussions of specific organs (breasts are the exception).⁵⁶ One research participant shared her experiences with me having originally come from a Colombian background with more "traditional" sensibilities regarding the topic of sexuality. "[My partner and I] come from a more traditional culture, and both had very conservative parents, so naming sexual parts and actions by their actual name had a taboo feeling. By using alternative names, it made

⁵⁵ The more conservative a culture is, the higher the tendency is to suppress discussion of sexuality as a positive thing, particularly for women. This is partly owing to certain established religious beliefs and teachings where women are often associated with ideas of lust, temptation and bodily desires (i.e. the Whore of Babylon, Eve, etc.). Patriarchal systems and the Eurocentric constructed idea that women are meant to remain pure, thus must resist the passions and sex that sully the soul also have led to the stifling of female sexual liberation (e.g. The Cult of Domesticity).

⁵⁶ Breasts are representative of more than the erotic. Besides being easier to engage with due to their external and visible nature, breasts also have the connotation of being a child's source of nourishment and poetically, embody the region of the heart. In addition, it is less difficult to engage with breasts because, like the penis, they are full frontal and extrude from the body. This is in opposition to the vagina, which is located within the abdomen, and the vulva, which is concealed between the legs rather than dangling exposed. While it is easier for a woman to avoid or forget about her genitals, her breasts are very confrontational and a much more obvious presence in her everyday life. Inevitably, if she were to stare into a mirror topless, they would, in essence, be staring right back. Also, female genitals are more likely to be covered, kept out of site and out of reach. Breasts are often considered assets to flaunt because they are typically viewed as attractive, less-threatening symbols of femininity. Comfortableness with the breasts is also made possible with the mainstream advertisement of bras and tops that highlight and/or pronounce their visibility.

everything feel more safe and game-like.”⁵⁷ When asked what function naming served her she listed: “intimacy, humor[ous], [a] self-esteem boost. [S]ocial in that it denied our conservative upbringing and made me (the girl is not supposed to be so openly sexual) more comfortable than saying something blunt....”⁵⁸ The more conservative the culture, the more prone people seemed to be to naming their body parts or, ironically, ignoring them all together. For some, the naming provides certain liberties denied in many everyday situations, for others, the forgoing of acknowledgement liberates one from having to deal with an awkward situation. I have found a trend in my research that men are more likely inclined to name their own penises than women their vaginas.⁵⁹ In some ways it makes sense. Penises are more confrontational. Such an icon unto itself that even the *Tour D’Eiffel* was supposedly modeled upon it. My hunch is that one would be hard pressed to find a man who has named his epididymis, and a presence is hard to ignore when it visibly alters the shape of one’s pants. Culturally, however, female genitals have grown to hold a specific kind of loaded baggage. Some of this comes in the form of the symbolism, where female erogenous parts, particularly genitalia, become representative of femininity, feminine virtue, and motherhood.⁶⁰ Additionally, the idea that one has to

⁵⁷ Anonymous Survey Participant 12. (Personal Communications. February 16, 2011).

⁵⁸ Ibid. February 16, 2011.

⁵⁹ The most common names were made for penises and breasts, though vaginas and sometimes clitorises staked claim to their own names. In terms of who named what, it was most common that partners would each name the erogenous parts of their significant other. In terms of naming one’s own parts, I found that men were more inclined to naming their penises and testicles while women tended to avoid naming their own genitals. Instead, breasts took the spotlight for female parts.

⁶⁰ Among other things, these ideas lead to conflicts over what the proper way to symbolize femininity is, what femininity means, what feminine virtue is, what it means to be/be able to be a mother, and what it means to be a “proper” woman. All the way back to sculptures of the Venuses of Willendorf and Laussel, female erogenous zones are points of importance and symbols for “Woman.”

“spread her legs” in order to access or display her genitals can lead to the common assumption that promiscuity comes with bodily familiarity. Vulvas, historically, have been far more often met with prudishness, pious reticence, and a lot less flash than their penis counterpart.⁶¹ In many ways, to not speak (or create) a name is to ignore an identity.⁶²

While many women are exceedingly proud of their breasts, and others might aspire for a certain “breast-type” to fit a desirable, familiar standard,⁶³ genitalia are conceived of in an entirely different ballpark. I’ve encountered shame and discomfort to be quite prevalent in many of my research subjects’ engagements with their genitals and the genitals of others. One particularly intimate disclosure relates a subject’s experiences with her own genitals to have been rather traumatic. The atmosphere of shame and fear she was acquainted with since childhood had strongly affected her relationship with her genitals:

I’m not as comfortable with my vaginal/labial/clitoral etc. area. In fact, I hadn’t even looked at it from other than my own vantage point until I was 19, when I took a peek using a mirror. I guess I was a bit scared. It’s a bit like looking at a wound after surgery. It’s like you’re seeing the inside of yourself and it just feels so wrong.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Feminist and reactionary sentiments have commonly sparked as resistance to ideas such as these. They are not to be discounted, nor are their views, but it is important to consider the (albeit generalized) roots to this discourse.

⁶² Obviously to say one’s genitals do not actually have personal identities is entirely valid and true, but one has to acknowledge the part and address one’s sexuality in some way in order to name it. That is something to think about. What makes it easier for men to directly relate to their sexual organs and why do most women tend to keep their parts private?

⁶³ A standard that is, even when shielded by clothing, visible by the shapes they allude to.

⁶⁴ Anonymous Survey Participant 24. (Personal Communications, March 19, 2011).

Rosa⁶⁵ gave some insight into her shift into puberty and the strangeness she felt in regards to sexuality and her body in her family life. Like many girls, the bodily shift into womanhood came as a shock to her. Her first period was met with a sort of unpleasantness and the confrontation with her body was an unwanted one. “When I first started having my period, I was so ashamed that I basically just refused to accept it. I avoided dealing with it as much as possible, [and] sometimes I would hide dirty pads to avoid having someone see me throw them out.” Rosa noted that she didn’t really know why she felt shame, only that it was there.⁶⁶

The shame and fear was not only limited to her own internalizations. In the Midwestern community where Rosa grew up, fairly conservative views towards sex, sexuality and the body are maintained. There is a degree of “propriety” that a person is expected to exercise over their body, from appearance to sexual engagements, and Christian views and aversions become key in shaping the area’s attitudes towards masturbation and promiscuity. For Rosa’s mother, curiosity about the body and sex was interpreted to stem from something far more insidious. Like Morgan, Rosa’s explorations of the body led to strong reactions of disapproval and alarm:

When I was younger ... I went through a phase where I was exploring a bit in that region. I wasn't masturbating, I was too young to really get any sexual pleasure from that kind of stimulation, I was just curious about what was down there. But then my mom caught me a couple of times and sort of flipped her lid. She probably thought I was masturbating.⁶⁷ She was always so paranoid that someone

⁶⁵ Pseudonym for privacy.

⁶⁶ Anonymous Survey Participant 24. (Personal Communications, March 19, 2011).

⁶⁷ Hostile views towards masturbation sometimes reflect the reproachful manner in which some people view engagement with the genitals. Subsequently, feelings of guilt, shame, and fear tend to arise. I distinctly recall the many occasions that my very Catholic grandmother would chide us for shaking our legs under the table and declare formidably:

in my family was sexually abusing me that I guess seeing that was fuel to the fire...⁶⁸

In catching her child in the act of exploration, Rosa's mother dove to the immediate conclusion that something was wrong. "She used to rail me for hours trying to get me to confess that I had been sexually abused," Rosa recalled, "I don't remember it ever happening But after hearing that your mom 'knows that it happened!' about a thousand times, you come to believe it yourself."⁶⁹ Rosa's mother's reaction was never really explained, whether it was from prior experience or from culturally influenced assumptions one can only guess, but the fervent resistance Rosa met when trying to familiarize herself with her body led to strong disinclinations and sometimes fear.⁷⁰ Fear is a powerful tool that can be used, inadvertently or not, to subdue people's desire to engage with the body. Ignorance, often a result of this fear, becomes the force that can lead people to formulate ill assumptions over other people and the body. This reduction of confidence over the "proper" way to engage with and understand the body sometimes leads to a complete avoidance and aversion to acknowledging certain features of the body. Efforts might in some way be made to trivialize body parts, or reduce what makes them "threatening," whether that fear stems from something rational or abstractly constructed in one's mind. Both the prevalence and lack of naming offer clues to systems of values or social constructs.

"Shaking your legs is a form of Masturbation. Stop that immediately." This was much to our awkward dismay. Parodies of this ideology can be seen in films such as *Monty Python and The Meaning of Life*, where the ludicrously large, Catholic family is portrayed singing a song with the lyrics: "every sperm is sacred."

⁶⁸ Anonymous Survey Participant 24. (Personal Communications, March 19, 2011).

⁶⁹ Ibid. March 19, 2011.

⁷⁰ Ibid. March 19, 2011.

Certain names that are given also have the ability to reduce one's identity by reducing the owner's esteem or relevance. Relevance is subjective. A person's relevance pertains to his or her place and interactions within society. When it comes to a body part, the relevance stems from how that part relates to the whole individual. An interesting role reversal occurs when calling a person the name of a body part. This type of name-calling attributes him or her with certain characteristics that the part is taken to embody. It is as if the body part becomes acknowledged as the full person, and the human being, or the whole, actually has the less significant sense of consciousness. This kind of identification is not limited only to erogenous parts, for instance one might be referred to as the "heart" of a community or the "eyes and ears" of an organization. However, when erogenous parts are referred to they are typically meant to be derisive or derogatory. In the United States, to call someone a "dick" is to mean someone is unkind or insensitive; the same goes for calling someone an "asshole". To call someone a "cunt" is to many the ultimate insult, the paradigm for inappropriate and misogynistic outbursts, and to sling around the name "pussy" is to call out weakness or over-sensitivity in the most vulgar of terms.⁷¹ Additionally "cunt" and "pussy" can be used to objectify women, insinuating that the sum is only as good as its parts. A disturbing, though extreme, example of this insinuation can be found in a controversial email allegedly written by a student member

⁷¹ This assertion is ironic, as noted by Benjamin Law: "We call someone a 'pussy' for being weak, even though the vagina contains incredibly strong muscles capable of pushing out human beings that weigh over three kilograms. When someone does something brave, we say they have 'balls', even though the testicles don't seem to do much except hang around, produce sperm and get squeezed out the side of briefs as a gross party trick." - Benjamin Law, *Frankie Magazine*. Issue 40.

of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity at USC⁷² to his fellow fraternity brothers.⁷³ Titled the “Weekly Gullet⁷⁴ Report,” the e-mail’s main purpose was to offer strategies on how to “help pin-point sorostitiutes⁷⁵ more inclined to put-out,” and be shared throughout his “brotherhood” in secrecy.⁷⁶ It is implicitly stated at the beginning of the email that the author “will refer to females as ‘targets’. They aren't actual people like us men. Consequently, giving them a certain name or distinction is pointless,”⁷⁷ and once it is quickly maintained that a woman’s identity is negligible, the author focuses for the rest of his message very simply and singularly, on the real object of his desire:

Pie: A target's vagina. Some of you may have heard phrases such as, twat, cooter, muff, snatch, poontang, cock pocket, DNA dumpster, fun hatch, cock sock, the fish flap, spunk-pot, whisker biscuit, or the rarely used, wizard's sleeve. All these terms are interchangeable and fine to use. However, for the purpose of this memo, I will refer to a target's vagina as pie.⁷⁸

The idea of the vagina as “pie” is not original. The most notable example of this euphemism appearing in the 1999 film, *American Pie*, where apple pie plays a supporting role in a lead character’s quest know what sex feels like. This new take on terming within

⁷² University of South California

⁷³ Hartmann, Margaret. "Frat Email Explains Women Are "Targets," Not "Actual People"." Jezebel: Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women. Without Airbrushing.. <http://uk.jezebel.com/5779905/usc-frat-guys-email-explains-women-are-targets-not-actual-people-like-us-men> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁷⁴ Gullet as defined by the e-mail’s author: “Usually refers to a target's mouth and throat. Most often pertains to a target's throat capacity and it's ability to gobble cock. If a target is known to have a good gullet, it can deep-throat dick extremely well. My advice is to seek out this target early in the night. Good Gullet Girls (GGG) are always scooped up well before last call.”

Ibid.

⁷⁵ A sorostitute is slang for a sorority girl with a reputation for being promiscuous.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hartmann, Margaret. "Frat Email Explains Women Are "Targets," Not "Actual People"."

the email, however, approaches the idea in a much more malicious way. In the fraternity email this idea is taken a terrible step forward, and racism meets misogyny in the realm of offensive genital labeling. The “Pie Code” goes as followed:

Blackberry: A black target
 Blueberry Pie: half-black/half-white
 Pumpkin Pie: A latin/mexican target
 Pecan Pie: half-white/half-latin
 Strawberry Pie: white target
 Cherry pie: A young white target
 Lemon Meringue: Asian target
 Note: If you are so lucky to encounter a perfect piece of pie. I mean the grip⁷⁹ is out of this world, it doesn't look like hair ever existed in the region, and it tastes like strawberry shortcake, then you are allowed to refer to the pie as crème brulee. It must hit the tri-fecta to be considered for this great and honorable distinction.⁸⁰

This kind of impersonal naming is so derogatory and set apart from the other instances that it would do better to branch into its own category; one of terms rather than pet names, but in the end they both function to personify the part and, contingently, represent the person (for better or for worse). The difference thus far is that one type of name serves to enhance and affect people’s characteristics, relationships, and personalities by way of their erogenous parts; the other serves to define people by specific body parts and limit their identities to what these parts have to offer. One is internal, the other, external.

Returning to the idea mentioned earlier that: “to not speak a name is to ignore an identity,” taboo and prejudice exercise extreme influence over the way people relate to one another. These inform the perceptions people hold over other people’s bodies. In a

⁷⁹ “Grip” as in tightness of the vagina.

⁸⁰ Hartmann, Margaret. "Frat Email Explains Women Are "Targets," Not "Actual People"."

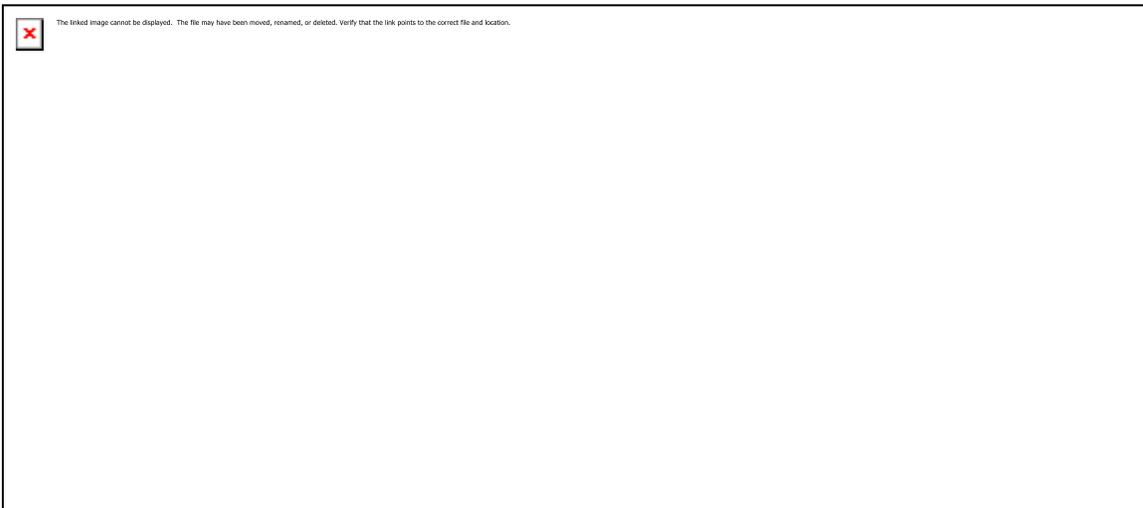
continuation of the “Pie Code,” the fraternity student made the vitriolic statement: “Don't fuck middle-eastern targets. Exhibit some patriotism and have some pride. You want your cock smelling like falafel? Filth,”⁸¹ and purposely left this racial group without a type name. There is a long, violent and bitter cultural context that surrounds this statement, and these sentiments manifest themselves in his choice to completely dismiss an entire group of women from his perverse code-system. Despite the derogatory nature of all of the “Pie” names he had been listing, there is still an overlying sense of acceptance and acknowledgment made towards each group he has classified. The author is indirectly acknowledging the women who fall under his different categories of “vagina” though he has already reduced their identity by referring to them only as “targets” and placing them as valued second to their genitals. Middle Eastern women, on the other hand, are completely cut out of his “organized” list of prospective “pie targets.” The author reduces the identities of this group of people by refusing to acknowledge their viable presence the way he does with the others, both in body and in personhood, and this plays into a cultural construct of taboo and power relations. This is one way that the lack of naming, in this case erogenous naming, suppresses identity and acknowledgement of groups and individuals in portions of society. It also highlights socio-political relationships between people, consciously and unconsciously.

Unfortunately, bigoted examples such as this perpetuate a negative and consistent stereotype of fraternity culture. This instance of terming, or name-calling,⁸² does not

⁸¹ Hartmann, Margaret. "Frat Email Explains Women Are "Targets," Not "Actual People"."

⁸² Name-calling and pet naming do not necessarily fall within the same sphere, though both have to do with the attribution of traits. In a way, name-calling could be thought of as a method to take away the ability to intimately relate to something. The subject being

pertain to all fraternity members. It does, however, provide a window into a subculture of derogatory erogenous naming and un-naming that strongly affects views of gender, race and the relationships of different social groups. Regardless of the haziness surrounding whether or not the leaked email was meant sincerely or as a crude joke, the implementation of genital naming that completely reduces the human qualities, specifically the identity of women, is present.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled*, 2005, ink on paper

Amending Identity

... I had said something negative
 About a particular word.
 A pejorative word.
 A word that's been used to declaim the vagina,
 And she needed to help me reconceive this word.
 So, for the next hour,
 She talked to me about this word,
 And when she was done,
 I was a convert.

termed is being stripped of its humanity (metaphorically and literally speaking). To name creates an personal identity, to name-call or term is to strip that away.

I wrote this for her.
 I call it...
 Cunt.
 I've reclaimed it.⁸³

Several years ago, at the height of the *Vagina Monologues*' popularity, Jane Fonda was criticized and pushed into giving a public apology. She was being chastised for mentioning the name of one of Eve Ensler's scenes during an interview with Meredith Vieira, the host of "Today," a scene that she had declined a role in. Fonda had been asked why she rejected the role she was offered within the scene and her reply had been this: "I live in Georgia, okay. I was asked to do a monologue called 'Cunt.' I said, 'I don't think so. I've got enough problems.'"⁸⁴ Oh, Cunt. The slip up caused a public uproar over the rough titling of "the most private part of the female anatomy."⁸⁵

Cunt.

As the word "Queer" has been taken and reclaimed by the LGBT community, reclaiming "Cunt" is a step that many feminists take to reclaim female identity, power and sexuality. Though it could be said that Jane Fonda's scolding and public apology undermined the entire goal of Eve Ensler's piece, the effort to reclaim "Cunt" stands strong. As Inga Muscia notes in her book, *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence*:

When viewed as a positive force in the language of women—as well as a reference to the power of the anatomical jewel which unites us all—the negative power of "cunt" falls in upon itself, and we are suddenly equipped

⁸³ Eve Ensler. *The Vagina Monologues*. Cunt.

⁸⁴ Hinckley, David. "Jane Fonda apologizes for off-color slang on 'Today' show - New York Daily News." *Featured Articles From The New York Daily News*. http://articles.nydailynews.com/2008-02-14/gossip/17892132_1_jane-fonda-apologizes-pat-kingsley (accessed March 10, 2011).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

with a word that describes all women, regardless of race, age, class, religion or the degree of lesbianism we enjoy.⁸⁶

The goal of reclaiming names is to alter the established, presupposed negative connotation in favor of a more empowered perception of identity. It changes the nature of a name. This often occurs as a resistance to oppressive social views and as a rebuttal to derogative terms and it often comes with a rise of self-esteem. There is more to changing a name than just a switch of letters. Making a name. Claiming a name. A name is a type of title,⁸⁷ and it carries great weight. It possesses a certain degree of malleability in the way that the name is perceived and identified with. When a name is changed so does, in a way, the person, place, or thing it identifies. Names are often times prone to changing and sticking depending on the characteristics or events surrounding a person. They can be tarnished and they can be altered in the same way they can be beatified and redeemed. It no longer becomes about the word's structure or its sound and visual appeal: a name is power. In taking back "cunt," women take back the body. The poison of verbal baggage is slowly melted away and what is left is a sense of solidarity.

Other Creative Uses for Naming

Unfortunately it would be impossible to make an account of every instance of erogenous naming; the ways some people have found to use the process of naming are fascinating and go far beyond the categories I have gone over. There are several of these creative implementations that I feel would be worthwhile to acknowledge at least briefly,

⁸⁶ Muscio, Inga. *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2002.

⁸⁷ In addition to the simpler means of identification, titles are things that denote position, rank, and job, and describe how one will be regarded within society.

however, and I have included several unusual but interesting tidbits in this final section that I hope others will find as intriguing as I did:

Naming for Utility:

By far one of the most interesting and innovative instances I've seen of genital naming is from one of my research participants who chose to name her breasts Ping and Pong.⁸⁸ Her reasoning originated from the need to differentiate each breast in order to make notes while breastfeeding. When pumping she scheduled ping and pong on her calendar in order to keep track of which side she was on.⁸⁹ The naming served several functions: "At the time it helped me focus on the business aspect of pumping and working instead of feelings. I would say I used the personalization of naming them as a way to disassociate from them."⁹⁰ Using the "Ping" and "Pong" allowed her to focus on what she was doing at work and disassociate herself from breastfeeding as an activity related to her children. In this way she could use the names to keep the pumping process abstract. A smaller function it served calls back to the humor aspect that naming can bring, as she felt amused by the fact that 'P' is a difficult letter for children to pronounce and it was her way to rebel from the breastfeeding process in a small way.⁹¹

Naming as Intimate Code:

As opposed to the Pie-Code, which was intended to categorize and trivialize women into objects of petty conquest, "Intimate Coding" refers to the secret code between lovers, or

⁸⁸ Anonymous Survey Participant 22. (Personal Communications. February 16, 2011).

⁸⁹ Ibid. February 16, 2011.

⁹⁰ Ibid. February 16, 2011.

⁹¹ Anonymous Survey Participant 22. (Personal Communications. February 16, 2011).

even friends, implemented in order to communicate things privately while still in public. Forming as a sort of “alter-ego,” this research participant reminisced upon “The Soldier”—a partner’s penis who’s “code-name” was used in order to talk about intimate things in public. “We could discuss [the] penis in question and desires of partners in public places.... ‘The Soldier loves your dress, he is standing at attention for you....The Soldier cannot wait to get you home...The Soldier is implementing Marshall Law and your bedtime curfew is NOW...etc.’”⁹² Another participant related a similar use for naming, but this was something she and her friends had devised as fifth graders: “making it a game and speaking in code made it fun so that we could talk about personal things in public without being extremely obvious. lisa - one boob, maggie- the other boob, marge-vagina, homer-butt.”⁹³ When the body is considered taboo or personal, naming can come in handy to enable conversations that might be constituted as unsavory under normal circumstances.

Purposeful Adherence to Clinical Names:

Some people choose to strictly adhere to calling their genitals and erogenous parts by the correct clinical term. Some extend this to their children as well, refusing to teach pet names or baby-talk in the place of the proper terminology in order to provide their children with a vocabulary that is direct and not misleading. One research subject related

⁹² Anonymous Survey Participant 16. (Personal Communications. February 17, 2011).

⁹³ Anonymous Survey Participant 12. (Personal Communications. February 16, 2011).

his mother as having this direct kind of mindset.⁹⁴ “My mom was very much into using all of the correct terms and not beating around the bush when it came to answering questions regarding body parts and sex.”⁹⁵ Some people simply feel that the naming process is silly and a childish way to go about addressing parts of the body. The subject made the interesting comment that: “I did notice that [being] in elementary school and knowing what was actually going on with my body caused people to look up to me and look to me with questions.” There is something to be said about the ability to accept a part for what it is without feeling that there is shame in referring to it directly or that there should be any uncomfortable notions attached to addressing the body. There is also something great to be said about being extremely aware of the body and the way it actually functions.

Naming as a Way to Explain:

Going along with the earlier discussion of Morgan and her experience with “belly,” naming can be used as a way to explain things. This is something commonly done with children in order to talk about their “private” parts. For Morgan, “belly” was used to explain why public masturbation was not acceptable. Having a child come up with an individualized name with which to discuss or bring up his or her erogenous parts allows for a more comfortable time talking about “private” issues or questions that arise in public. This is also helpful if the parent or adult in question has difficulty directly

⁹⁴ My sister, a nurse, also shares this direct mode of addressing the body. She always makes adamantly clear the importance of teaching her son the correct terminology for all parts of the body. Perhaps one could surmise that having a background in medicine and constant confrontation with the body might have something to do with the unfazed and straightforward approach to the body.

⁹⁵ Anonymous Survey Participant 22. (Personal Communications. February 24, 2011).

addressing the clinical names for genitalia. Ironically, the research subject mentioned above made known his preference for, to a certain extent, non-clinical names. He does not put down his mother's method, but recalls the awkwardness of becoming too technical at such a young age.⁹⁶ In some respects, naming can just as useful to use for relating to other people in addition to oneself.

Naming Outside the Erogenous:

One of the more unusual and surprising submissions I received dealt with a subject who named his chest, an erogenous zone, with no erotic or sexual intentions or inclinations whatsoever: "My chest i have named as the "Thump Keg" due to when i drink heavily, i like to "THUMP" my chest like an ape." The subject acknowledged knowing others who have engaged with the practice of naming erogenous zones, but his more personal engagement with bodily naming is his chest. The name was created during a moment with friends, out of fun and personal amusement. The subject approaches the name with humor, commenting wryly that besides functioning for his own amusement and the amusement of his friends there is "possibly some sort of primordial dominance thing as alcohol shuts down the civil part of my brain?"⁹⁷ In this approach to naming an erogenous zone, the erogenous quality is inconsequential, but the social function of the name is still prevalent.

⁹⁶ "I feel like it's weird that when I was in 3rd grade I used the term labia." Anonymous Survey Participant 22. (Personal Communications. February 24, 2011).

⁹⁷ Anonymous Survey Participant 8. (Personal Communications. February 16, 2011).

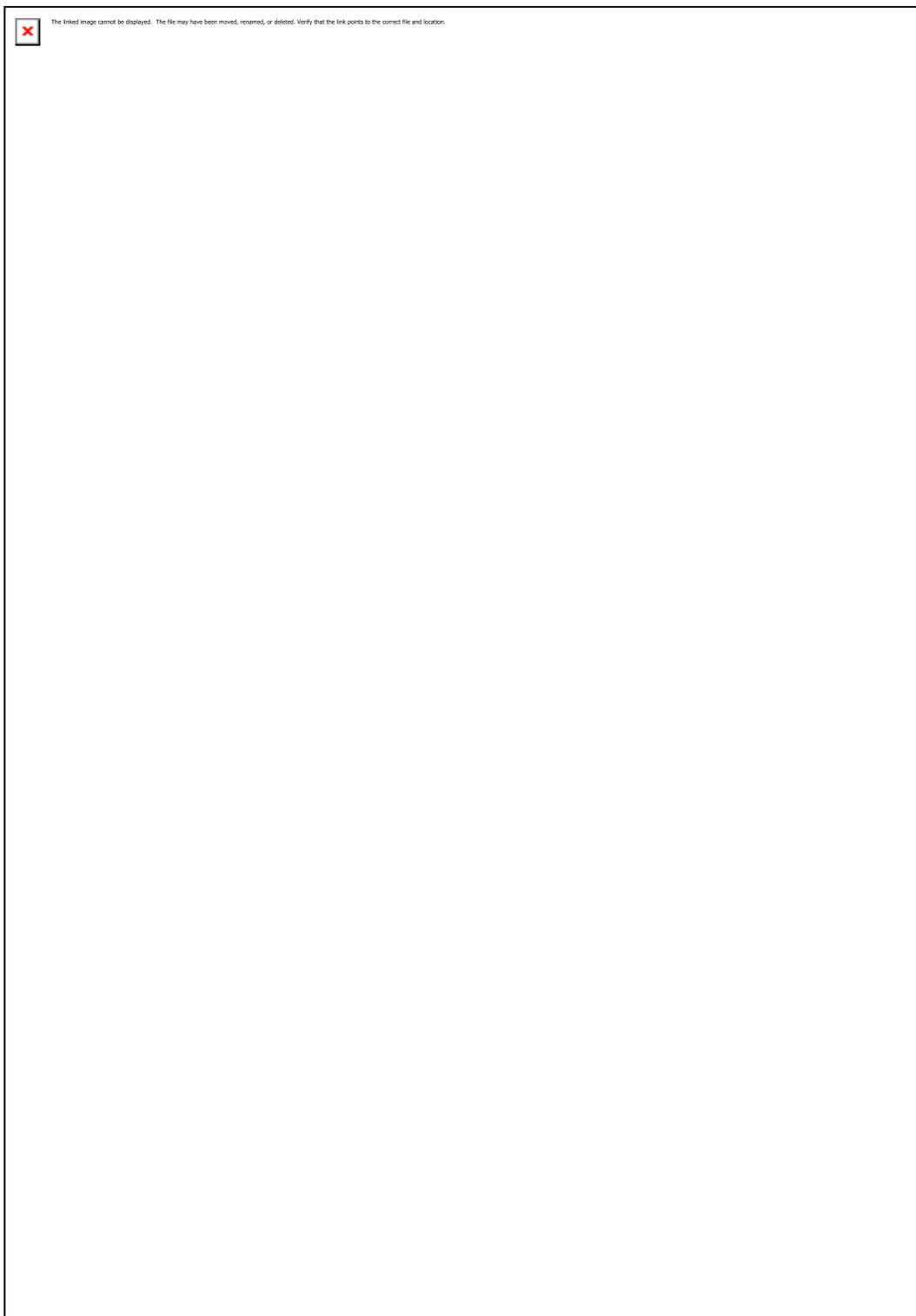
I feel that these other modes of naming, just as much as those mentioned and elaborated upon before them, are beneficial for people to know about. Not simply from a standpoint of entertainment or behavioral studies, but because they also have the potential to open up possibilities for those who might be interested. I find the variety and ingenuity of these last few examples to be both revealing and opportunities to dig further and ask more questions.

In Conclusion: Perception Shifting

While some of the experiences that have been related are wildly personal to each subject, I feel that relating some of these stories is beneficial for offering possible insights into the relationships people have to the body, themselves, the people around them, and ideas of gender. In addition, the practice of naming and identification is largely centralized around the idea of communication in its many forms. Naming is a vehicle. It serves a countless array of functions, and by reflecting on these and analyzing the different approaches people take to naming, people can potentially further their understanding of how self and social perceptions are formed and what influences them. In some ways I felt inspired. What I have learned from this analysis and research is that people struggle to find new ways to relate; to the body, the self, companions, lovers, classmates, peers, and those of different ages—the naming of erogenous zones, among others, is one of the overlooked windows in understanding these mental and physical processes. I could barely have intuited that a phenomenon as taken for granted as the naming of erogenous zones could be so enlightening in respect to the way people socially function.

Whether used in its most subversive form or as an extremely helpful tool, there is much to consider about the nature of names and the way the body shapes this idea of “us”⁹⁸. The implications of erogenous naming go beyond playfulness, the maybe immature and the silly, landing us into the palms of a variety of applications, issues and possibilities. We use naming to create distance, naming to stake claim, naming to create accessibility, naming as a gendering tool, naming to create intimacy, naming as therapy, naming as empowerment, naming as tools to cut down esteem, and then the lack of naming as un-acknowledgment and possible neglect. The politics of naming is a messy business, but names can rectify identity and social standing, and its potentials leave uncharted ideas to explore. This is only a fragment of the creative applications for naming that people have created for themselves and those around them. I posit that erogenous naming can be seen as a lens for issues and behavioral patterns that lie beneath the surface of what a name is and can be, to perhaps prod people to introspect and note important tendencies as individuals and as a social collective.

⁹⁸ The “us” as individuals, the “us” as a social body, and the “us” as we are in relation to our bodies.



Jean-Francois Moriceau and Petra Mrzyk. *Untitled.*

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