THE GHOST OF ANATOMIES PAST: SIMULATING THE ONE-SEX BODY IN MODERN MEDICAL TRAINING

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Examining the gender of the patient-body presented in the simulators, and the way medical professionals accept it as an uncontested standard, indicates that the simulators still contain traces of the one-sex body model found in pre-enlightenment anatomies. Given what we as a social collective know about how the universal male has resulted in skewed medical practices, the question becomes, how can the medical community not see this as problematic? I argue that it is because the people who are using the simulators see the male body not as ‘male, not female’ but rather ‘male including female’. Only when female sex organs are interesting to a practice (as in gynaecology) does a simulator need to become ‘female, not male’. Combining Laqueur, Faulkner, and Lie’s terms, it appears as if the ghost of the one-sex model is haunting these simulators, with the result that analysing them through the prism of binary gender is not useful. The apparent dominance of a binary gender system is actually masking varied localised practices of gendered understandings.

The consequences of seeing this are two-fold. Firstly, while discovering that the reification of medical knowledge can still be haunted by conceptual paradigms of the past forces us to create a more nuanced view of medical practices and underlines the importance of looking closely at localised practices and paying attention to the variety they can contain. Secondly, seeing the ghosts of anatomies past in modern simulators and observing the ease with which their reified knowledge is embraced by subjects who also exist in a world of binary sex points to the complexity our subjectivities can embrace and forces the researcher to acknowledge the complexity of context (geographical, disciplinary, cultural and historical, to name a few) within which the simulators are enacted into simulations.