

Invincible yet Vulnerable: Race, Disability and Trauma in South Africa after Oscar Pistorius

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Abstract

When the global sporting icon, Paralympian and Olympian Oscar Pistorius was accused of killing his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp on the morning of Valentine's Day in 2013, one of his many defences was, simply put, that his disability made him do it. An expert witness for the defence made the connection between disability and violence that suggested that disabled people are particularly prone to 'over-react' as it were because they feel especially vulnerable. This defence provides the link between the two extremes claimed by Pistorius's public persona, that of invincibility and vulnerability – extreme physical ability epitomized by sterling sporting prowess and fear of victimisation because of his physical limitation. The formula proposed by this defence is that extreme vulnerability results in extreme aggression. Here I want to analyse what this claim suggests about prevailing social attitudes toward disability and disabled people, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa – or more accurately in post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) South Africa. In this article I propose that the corrosive legacy of TRC created rich ground for white victimization and popularised the medical model of trauma.

Keywords: *Social Media, Disability, Trauma, Truth and Reconciliation, supercrip, inspiration porn*

When Oscar Pistorius, a South African world-renowned athlete, and double-amputee who gained world fame for competing in both the Paralympic and Olympic Games from 2004 to 2012 was reported to have murdered his girlfriend on Valentine's Day in 2013, jokes about his disability proliferated in social media. It was as if a valve had been released on the pressure cooker of social revulsion against disabled people and social media users felt free to break social taboos around stigmatizing disabled people. The proffered excuse for this opprobrium was that Pistorius had earned ridicule through his actions and that he was mocked for what he had done rather than as a disabled person, even though much of the scorn focused on his disability.¹ By the time he was on trial, some of the jokes had become defining features of the social media discourses around him, and there were websites, Facebook pages and twitter accounts dedicated to mocking him as a disabled athlete who had conned everyone or at least misrepresented himself.² Of course, the scorn heaped on Oscar Pistorius has become standard in the wake of OJ Simpson and many athletes and celebrities who have fallen from grace and

¹ Twitter jokes about Pistorius 'not having a leg to stand on', and tasteless puns about Pistorius being totally 'legless' when he shot his girlfriend were shared over and over again on various social networking platforms.

² The hashtags #pistorius, #OscarPistorius and #Oscar were buzzing with jokes and puns about legs like this one <https://twitter.com/YoniHaz/status/302089805523722240> [accessed 20 September 2018].

have become the butt of jokes, particularly because they had been previously elevated. What stands out in the Pistorius case is that the flippancy with which social media users discussed disability broke social taboos around maligning disabled people and in the process pulled a curtain on the festering social resentments about persistent inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa.

In mocking Pistorius, many social media users vented their frustrations about white privilege, class inequalities, gender violence and the exceptionalism of disabled people (particularly the access enjoyed by white disabled people). The fact that much of this venting focused on the body relates to how disabled people are framed culturally, particularly as dependent and lacking. Pistorius had sought to distance himself from these perceptions by cultivating the image of a supercrip, a disabled person who is able to accomplish 'superhuman' feats, and is therefore able to 'heroically overcome' his disability³. When Pistorius was eventually tried for murder, his defence claims also fuelled the social opprobrium toward disabled people that had come to characterise the discussion of Pistorius on social media. Pistorius legal counsel advanced three lines of defence: that of rampant (black) crime and lawlessness, masculinity/ (white) male chivalry and lastly, disability as trauma. In fact, this defence is neatly summarised in the affidavit he swore at his bail application a few days after the shooting wherein he stated that when he heard a sound in the bathroom, 'terror rushed through him' and that:

It filled me with horror and fear of an intruder or intruders being inside the toilet. I thought he or they must have entered through the unprotected window. As I did not have my prosthetic legs on and felt extremely vulnerable, I knew I had to protect Reeva and myself. I believed that when the intruder/s came out of the toilet we would be in grave danger. I felt trapped as my bedroom door was locked and I have limited mobility on my stumps.⁴

Given South African history and politics, the prevailing perception, especially from the media, was that the imagined intruder in this statement is black,⁵ but in order to ensure that his fear of black criminality in well-secured environment does not appear irrational, in this statement Pistorius inserts disability as an exacerbating factor, that makes him feel extremely vulnerable. And lastly, Pistorius makes sure to paint himself as Reeva's protector. While these defence claims have been variously discussed and challenged by the prosecution, scholars, social media users and other social commentators,⁶ not many

³ As I will make clear, the supercrip, as articulated by disability studies scholars such as Eli Clare, Robert McRuer and Michael Berube among others, serves to subject disabled people to different standards and does nothing to challenge ableism, and in Pistorius's case, his cultivation of the supercrip image obscured the intersections of disability with race, class and sexuality.

⁴ 'Pistorius Affidavit at Pretoria Bail Hearing', *Reuters* 19 February 2013 via www.reuters.com [accessed 30 March 2018].

⁵ Margie Orford, 'Oscar Pistorius Trial: The Imaginary Black Stranger at Heart of the Defence', *The Daily Maverick* (4 March 2014). Orford, Margie, 'Heart of Oscar's Defense' *The Daily Maverick* (3 March 2013); available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-03-heart-of-oscar-defence-imagined-threat-of-a-black-stranger/#.WznGBIp9jIU>. [accessed on 22 February 2018]; Jacqueline Rose, 'Bantu in the Bathroom', *The London Review of Books* 37.23 (3 December 2015): 3-10.

⁶ Pierre de Vos, 'Pistorius Will Go to Jail; We Just Do Not Know if It Is for a Sex Crime or a Race Crime', *The Daily Maverick* (3 December 2015); available at <http://firstthing.dailymaverick.co.za/article?id=73017> [accessed 30 March 2018] challenges the imaginary intruder defence, while Lisa Vetten's 'Racial Scare-Mongering in South Africa Makes Light of Women's Murders', *Africa Check* (17 July 2013); available at <https://africacheck.org/2013/07/17/racial-scare-mongering-makes-light-of-womens-murders-2/> [accessed 30 March 2018] dismisses the idea of Pistorius

have linked all three in order to explicate what the Pistorius defence strategy reveals about South Africa after apartheid, in particular South African society after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Not many scholars and social commentators have looked at how race, gender, sexuality and class intersect with disability to fuel discourses around Pistorius and his murder trial.

Those who mocked and disparaged Pistorius as a disabled person were able to do so because they couched their statements in familiar parlance and stereotypes about sexism, racism or white privilege. Take, for instance, the much-retweeted sexist ribaldry that 'surely Oscar Pistorius can't be the first bloke to wake up legless on Valentine's Day and shoot a load into his girlfriend thinking she was somebody else.' Superficially, this joke paints Pistorius as a regular, albeit insensitive, guy who did what most drunk young, heterosexual males do, and yet its punchline is that Pistorius is not drunk (legless) but really has no legs, and did not have sex (shoot a load) with his girlfriend but has literally shot her. Such tasteless humour circulated precisely because everyday ableism, like sexism, and trivialization of gender violence, goes unremarked. But beyond tasteless tweets and Facebook posts, much of the commentary around the Pistorius saga seemed to struggle with the diversity within disability. It was lost to most commentators that disability as a social identity is fluid and porous. As Mark Sherry makes clear, 'disability is always sexed, gendered, racialized, ethnicized and classed experience' and, as he continues, 'every response to disability operates within a framework of multilayered and complex patterns of inequality and identities.'⁷ This means that there is difference within disability in terms how differently impaired people identify and also in terms of their differing social locations. Without inputting diversity and difference within disability, one can only focus on how Pistorius is ridiculed for being disabled and miss other ways that this lampooning taps into social anxieties about other bodies that defy what is considered normal.

Thus, whereas there have been numerous disquisitions on how the trial shaped perceptions around disability in South Africa and internationally, and analyses of the racial politics of the trial and what it says about the post-apartheid state, or how the trial taps into social constructions of gender, class and racial inequalities,⁸ very few have sought to link all these together and look how the trial dealt with interlocking oppressions, even cursorily. I propose looking at the trial as part of the afterlives of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because doing so will link the trial, including public discussions of the trial and the media personality of Oscar Pistorius before and during the trial, to pervasive narratives of violence that followed

as Reeve Steenkamp's protector. Finally, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's 'Elegy for Oscar Pistorius', *Al Jazeera* (14 March 2013) and Rebecca Davis's 'Oscar Pistorius and the Paradox of the Disabled Super-Athlete', *Daily Maverick* (7 July 2014) both question the defence claim that disability made him exceptionally vulnerable.

⁷ Mark Sherry, *Disability and Diversity: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008), 75.

⁸ Leslie Swartz, 'Oscar Pistorius and the Melancholy of Intersectionality', *Disability and Society* 28.8 (2013): 1157-61; Kharnita Mohamed and Tamara Shefer, 'Gendering Disability and Disabling Gender: Critical Reflections on Intersections of Gender and Disability', *Agenda* 104/29.2 (2015): 2-13; Garland-Thomson 'Elegy for Pistorius' Palash Ghosh 'Oscar Pistorius: A Symbol of South African Men's War of Violence Against Women', *International Business Times* (19 February 2013), www.ibtimes.com [accessed 19 September 2018]; Alex Perry, 'Oscar Pistorius and South Africa's Culture of Violence', *Time Magazine* 181 (11 March 2013), www.time.com [accessed 19 September 2018].

the TRC and how such narratives are inextricably tied to social inequalities. Here I want to suggest that the discursive space created by the trial, including events leading up to it, was shaped by popular understanding of the legacy of the TRC. An analysis of media commentary, social media conversations and scholarly examination of the trial and Oscar Pistorius the public person will provide the basis for this discussion. I analyse these using the 'afterlives' to refer the way that the TRC processes and the history it produced often leach away from the public domain, while its narrative styles, modes, and rituals, and practices continue to shape the present.

The TRC is an important nodule in the timeline of South African history because it was a process that was designed to put distance between the brutal apartheid past, characterised by racial inequality and violence and the (envisioned) new non-racial South Africa that is now a constitutional democracy. As the Chairman of the TRC, Archbishop Tutu made it clear in his foreword to the TRC Report, the commission sought to expose the brutalities of the past in order to foster a new culture of human rights.⁹ As such, the TRC sought to expose apartheid history in its brutality, its gross human rights violations and perpetrators of such violations, to create conditions for both victims and perpetrators to tell the truth in order to provide 'as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed'¹⁰ during a particularly brutal phase of apartheid spanning 34 years from 1960 to the dawn of democracy in 1994. Framed as an open process that prized the truth above all – those who sought amnesty had to tell the whole truth pertaining to their actions, demonstrate the political nature of their actions and prove its proportionality in order to be granted amnesty – and encouraging individuals from all sectors of society to come forward with their stories, the commission was meant to be an inclusive airing of past grievances in order to heal and reconcile. A process that accepted four kinds of truth – social/shared, healing/narrative, personal and forensic truth – the TRC obviously understood that past inequalities meant that not everyone, in fact, many of the country's racialized and poor, did not have access to official bureaucracy and therefore were cut off from representation; many would not have been able to produce official records or forensic evidence, the commission resolved to hear personal and narrative truth.

Here, I would suggest that the commission, as ceremonial event that normalized particular forms of public speaking, brought into South African consciousness and jurisprudence ways of self-representation that favoured spectacular affective modes such as loud crying or wailing, atavistic public reactions such as fainting and vomiting in public formal forums. Most importantly though the TRC concretised a clinical, western understanding of trauma. Although the commission and organizations assisting the commission understood that trauma could be collectively experienced, they advanced a medical model that framed trauma as a personal experience that individuals needed to heal from. The TRC further imbued victimhood with morality such that those who had suffered had the power to not only forgive but to reconcile with perpetrators and assist in reintegrating them to society. Such framing of victimhood became particularly problematic when the Commission turned to white pain and it is the corrosive legacy of white victimhood that I identify as the afterlife of TRC whose traces were evident in the Oscar Pistorius trial; this article will focus on the wounded white privilege that characterised the Pistorius trial and what it portends for disability discourses in an unequal society like South Africa.

⁹ Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 'Foreword' to the *TRC Report*, vol 1 (1998), 1-23.

¹⁰ Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995.

While the scope of this essay cannot accommodate a thorough analysis of the representational modes of the TRC or how they influenced South African jurisprudence, nor can it accommodate an exhaustive analysis of social media discourses surrounding the Pistorius trial, I investigate the way that the TRC shaped, even standardised, the way that violence can be publicly recounted. The article looks at echoes and traces of the TRC in the way that wrongdoing, popular understanding of trauma and its relation to violence and framing of social identities were individualised. It demonstrates how the pre-murder trial Oscar Pistorius relied on hegemonic, heterosexual, white masculinity to structure his public personae, the peri-and post-murder trial Oscar Pistorius drew on his disability to eschew the same registers that had fed his image as a highly paid elite athlete. In what follows I track how, to paraphrase Eli Clare, public discourses about Oscar Pistorius reached into gender, wrapped around class, strained against heterosexuality, collapsed on race and folded into disability, as all discussion pivoted on one human body.¹¹

The Race to Normate: Oscar Pistorius and Ableist Masculinity

In contrast to social media that was saturated with puns about legs and cheap humour about Pistorius's disability, none of the traditional media commentators mentioned his disability as an important factor in the case. In fact, before the commencement of his trial for the murder of his girlfriend, very little was said to link Pistorius's disability to his crime. Leslie Schwartz suggests that superficially the focus on race, crime and gender violence and not on disability in the public discussions of Oscar Pistorius may be evidence of the success of mainstreaming, that 'Pistorius had become such a mainstream icon that his impairment seem irrelevant.'¹² But, when one digs deeper, according to Swartz, the issues relate to intersectionality, specifically the failure to chart ways that disability, gender, race and class work with and against each other. However, even if superficial, the mainstreaming of Oscar Pistorius is still important, because his public personae embraced a hyper-masculinity that subscribed to able-bodied¹³ heterosexual hegemony. In this hegemony, as critical disability studies scholars drawing upon a range of disciplines and theoretical standpoints have amply demonstrated, the social and cultural constructions of disability as abnormality in turn produce institutions and architecture that treat disability as an alien condition that requires special accommodation.¹⁴ Pistorius's public image embraced the construction of disability as

¹¹ Eli Clare's oft-cited dictum that "gender reaches into disability, disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race ... everything finally piling into a single human body" pinpoints the intersectionality that attends all identities but also posits disability as difference within difference. Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 143.

¹² Leslie Swartz, 'Oscar Pistorius and the Melancholy of Intersectionality', *Disability and Society* 28.8 (2013): 1159.

¹³ I am using able-bodied here to refer to the cultural representation that Pistorius subscribed to in his public image, which as I demonstrate frames disability as a choice rather than a socially constructed reality, so my intention in using this word is to highlight its meaning for Oscar Pistorius: while 'able-bodied' is cultural construction, his public image bought into it as a reality, especially through his comments about disability.

¹⁴ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997); Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006); Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (1999).

deviance or difference that one can, with admirable fortitude of course, overcome. He did not reject these social constructions of disability but reinforced them when he pushed his own story of overcoming and transcendence. In his various retelling of his life-story, Pistorius emphasised his own persistence and drive, rather than social support or identitarian solidarity. His narrative of overcoming and assimilating depoliticizes disability and instead portrays physical impairment as personal tragedy that gifted and driven individuals can overcome. His personal story makes light of his class, race, gender and sexuality. While many individuals are positively recalled as having supported and helped him throughout his life: for instance, his extended wealthy family provided financial support for him to attend the best school in the country, which were equipped with the best sporting facilities, he had coaches who recognized and nurtured his talents, all of which are social structures that his life narrative treats as individual blessings.¹⁵

When Pistorius is extracted from the cultural and social conditions that facilitated his success; for instance, when he is depicted as the ‘ultimate meritocrat’ in a ‘nation obsessed with disadvantage’¹⁶ as Alex Perry claims, the social barriers that prevent many disabled people from living full lives, let alone exceptional ones like Pistorius, are depoliticized. This is the narrative of the supercrip that Pistorius embraced, that of someone who excels at many physical pursuits, more so than the ‘abled’ people, so much that he exhorts or motivates or inspires others to do the same. It was this image that was celebrated by those who covered Pistorius before the murder. Nearly all commentators focused on his super-ability, how he ‘defied the odds’ ‘never let his physical impairments limit him’ and his own oft repeated claim that ‘You’re not disabled by your disabilities but abled by your abilities’ also emphasised individual prowess over social redress.¹⁷ As a supercrip, Pistorius fell into the ‘inspiration porn’ trap that many scholars identify,¹⁸ where disabled people either performing amazing or mundane tasks are held up as examples for other disabled people to follow and as reminders to the normates that life could be worse. This is the so-called inspiration porn that is criticized for objectifying, devaluing and individualizing disabled people. As Eli Clare wryly observes that the inspiring supercrip narrative serves to reinforce the superiority of nondisabled people and does nothing to change the conditions that make the lives of disabled people challenging. Media writing about Pistorius before the murder exalted his ability to ‘transcend’ his disability and to inspire others to ‘overcome’ their challenges. When he sought to compete with nondisabled athletes in

¹⁵ John Carlin, *Chase Your Shadow* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014), Michael Sokolove, ‘The Fast Life of Oscar Pistorius’, *New York Times Magazine* (18 January 2012), via www.nytimes.com [accessed 30 September 2018].

¹⁶ Perry, 181.

¹⁷ Before the murder trial, Pistorius was to feature in the ‘It Gets Better Campaign’ meant to encourage gay youth and against bullying, and in various message he punted the message that anything can be ‘overcome’. Granted, as the late activist and comedian Stella Young remarked: ‘Most journalists seem utterly incapable of writing or talking about a person with a disability without using phrases like “overcoming disability”, “brave”, “suffers from”, “defying the odds”, “wheelchair bound” or, my personal favourite, “inspirational”’. (Stella Young, ‘We’re Not Here for Your Inspiration.’ ABC; available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-07-03/young-inspiration-porn/4107006>. 2012 [accessed 10 September 2018].

¹⁸ See Young. Jan Grue also makes the point that inspiration porn fetishes disability and ‘focuses on impairment, and specifies disability as biophysically caused and symbolically distinct’ (‘The Problem with Inspiration Porn: A Tentative Definition and a Provisional Critique’, *Disability and Society* 31.6 (2016): 838-49).

the Olympic Games, he stretched the supercrip narrative even further to the discourses of 'too abled', superhuman and therefore 'freakish' as Eli Clare would put.¹⁹

The late disability activist and educator Stella Young has argued that images of 'inspiring' disabled people ignore the social construction of disability, because as she puts it, '[b]y far the most disabling thing in my life is the physical environment',²⁰ and, most importantly, these exhortations to view what disabled people do as inspiring ignore other associated oppressions faced by people with disability. Young observes: '[t]here's the one pictured here. It's of a little girl running on a set of prosthetic legs alongside Oscar Pistorius, also using similar prostheses. Those legs, for the record, cost upwards of \$20,000 and are completely out of reach for most people with disabilities.'²¹ When Pistorius cultivates this image of disability as inspiration, he is extracted from South African society where the majority of the population would not have the kind of access that he has. Wendy Chrisman has tried to recover inspiration for disability studies, urging scholars not to discard the concept that people with disabilities can be inspired by the work that they and others do²² and there is plenty of evidence that for many Paralympic athletes Pistorius was as inspiration. For example, Sabelo Radebe, his 4x100 m relay teammate for the London Paralympics credits Pistorius for improving his performance.²³ However, whereas such examples are important, they do not translate to political solidarity with other disabled athletes, since among other disabled athletes, Pistorius stood out precisely because unlike many black, disabled, and poor people, he enjoyed wealth and access that facilitated his rise to the top. Class and race added extra fuel to his sporting ambitions, and historically, apartheid provided support and access for white people with disabilities, a fact that is reflected in the over-representation of white athletes in the Paralympics.²⁴

When disability is objectified and individualised in order to highlight the individual's ability to transcend limitations, Stella Young adds, other people living with disabilities are shamed, hence the tag 'your excuse is invalid.'²⁵ As a super-crip, Pistorius was not just projected as a super-athlete, and a humble nice guy to boot, but as an almost mythical alpha male, who bought and sold tigers, loved guns, fast cars and women. In fact, a year before the tragic killing, the *New York Times Magazine* wrote an acclamatory article titled 'The Fast Life of Oscar Pistorius' about his super-ableism that included references to his love of guns, extreme sports and his boundless energy.²⁶ The picture of Oscar Pistorius that emerges from this article is of a young carefree athlete who is living what is a 'normal' professional athlete's life of privilege and access that exceeds that of elite disabled athletes. As disability activist Eddie Ndopu remarked, 'Oscar's stardom as a professional athlete stemmed from his capacity to "overcome" the

¹⁹ Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 98.

²⁰ Young.

²¹ Young.

²² Wendy L. Chrisman, 'A Reflection of Inspiration: A Recuperative Call for Emotion in Disability Studies', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 5.2 (2011): 173-84.

²³ See Carlin.

²⁴ Leslie Swartz, 'Oscar Pistorius and the Melancholy of Intersectionality', *Disability & Society* 28.8 (2013): 1159.

²⁵ Young.

²⁶ Sokolove. And as an aside, the article also hinted at his love of women: 'Pistorius had recently broken off a relationship with his long-time girlfriend, though another young woman was visiting when we got there.'

“tragedy” of a “broken body” by outperforming what Robert McRuer calls “a compulsory ablebodiedness” and in so doing, re-entrenching it in the able normative imagination as a benchmark of personhood.’²⁷

The pre-murder portrayals of Pistorius perform what Judith Butler terms, in ‘Critically Queer’ an approximation of the norm.²⁸ In approximating ableism, rather than challenging debilitating stereotypes about disabled people, or questioning normative hegemony, Pistorius re-inscribed normalcy at the heart of hegemonic ableism. As many disability studies scholars have highlighted, in fact, disability studies theories, in particular crip theory,²⁹ hew close to queer theories in regarding approximation with suspicion as a reiteration of hegemonic identities. Thus, when Pistorius built his public career on rejecting the limitations of his physical impairments, in fact on transcending disability, he was not subverting ‘compulsory able bodiedness’,³⁰ but rather reaffirming the portrayal of disability as a flaw or deviance that needs to be fixed or at least transformed through medicalisation. When Pistorius went further than competing in disabled athletics and sought inclusion in the Olympic Games, he was not rejecting the exclusion of athletes with disabled or ab/normal bodies, rather he was facilitating his own passing; and, according to Swartz and Watermeyer, he was reinforcing ‘the neo-liberal pecking order of capital accumulation and the economy of power.’³¹ However, Swartz and Watermeyer go on to suggest that Pistorius was seeking to destabilize this pecking order, threatening to ‘move successfully from one discursive meaning system, where he may be seen to belong, to another.’ And by so doing ‘shaking ‘the very foundations of the attribution system which maintains the separation as meaningful.’³² However, I argue the contrary, that by seeking inclusion into the ‘abled’ category, Pistorius was succumbing to the power of the system, making the case that he was exceptional enough for its rules to admit his inclusion. His was an approximation of the heteronormative ableist norm. His hyper masculine image, ‘the bullet in the chamber ads’, was framed as compensation for whatever shortcomings he might be perceived to have. Pistorius did nothing to challenge the image of disability as pain and trauma, he claimed to have surmounted both. It is not coincidental that magazine articles referred to how his stumps would bleed after practice or races, to emphasize the price of admission, which was, in his case, the pain he had to endure in order to accomplish his goals.³³ He therefore was not seeking to subvert or rejig social orders but seeking a higher place in the social hierarchization of bodies that is inherent in professional sports.

²⁷ Eddie Ndopu, ‘Oscar Pistorius: Salvaging the Super Crip Narrative’, *The Feminist Wire* (2013), via www.feministwire.com [accessed 30 September 2018]. Also quoted in Swartz, ‘Oscar Pistorius and the Melancholy of Intersectionality’, 1157-8.

²⁸ Judith Butler, ‘Critically Queer’, *GLQ* 1.1 (1993): 17-32.

²⁹ Michael Berube, Robert McRuer, Eli Clare are among the leading Crip theorists who have drawn parallels between Crip and Queer theories

³⁰ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 16.

³¹ Leslie Swartz and Brian Watermeyer, ‘Cyborg Anxiety: Oscar Pistorius and the Boundaries of What It Means to Be Human’, *Disability and Society*, 23.2 (2008): 188.

³² Swartz and Watermeyer, 188.

³³ Of course, De Oca points out that ‘the athlete who heroically emerges from physical and mental trauma is a repeating metaphor or trope of masculinity in sport films’. See Jeffrey Montez de Oca, ‘Paradox of Privilege: Sport, Masculinities, and the Commodified Body’, in eds David L Andrews, Ben Carrington, *A Companion to Sport* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2013), 153.

Many anecdotes illustrate Pistorius's disavowal rather than denial of his impairment; in various articles he refers to an incident where his mother instructs his older brother to put on his shoes, and him (Oscar) to put on his leg and get in the car.³⁴ Another equally illustrative anecdote appears in the biography *Oscar Pistorius: Chase Your Shadow*, where Pistorius and his mother are interviewed by the headmaster at Pretoria Boys High and the headmaster expresses concern about whether Pistorius will cope at the school. His mother reportedly responded: 'But please don't worry. There's no problem at all. He's absolutely normal.'³⁵ In both these anecdotes, Pistorius is taught to at once acknowledge and ignore his physical impairment. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson refers to the differentiation between felt and ascribed identities and suggests that one becomes disabled when one's disability is recognized and accommodated. As Garland-Thomson explains, '[s]imply put, one's felt identity is how one experiences oneself as an embodied, perceiving, conscious subject at the center of one's own world. One's ascribed identity is the subject position other people project upon one or understand one to occupy.'³⁶ It is only at his trial that Pistorius seeks accommodations as it were, where he wants to merge his felt identity with his ascribed identity as a disabled person.

For pre-Murder Oscar Pistorius, subscribing to the supercrip image was not necessarily noteworthy or even contradictory because for elite athletes, frequently framed as role models, there is an expectation of 'extraordinariness' and for disabled athletes, according to Jan Grue '[t]he ideal Paralympic athlete is so impaired that ordinary achievement looks inspirational, but not so impaired as to be incapable of truly inspirational, extraordinary accomplishment'.³⁷ It's not the performance of unimaginable feats for the 'ordinary' folk, or excelling at something that few excel at, it's doing so within limits; it's the visible limitations that are rendered 'meaningless' even as all signification depends on them. To put it in other words, there is a reason why in what Stella Young calls 'inspirational porn', as mentioned earlier, the disability is always prominently displayed, whether it's stumps or the wheelchair next to extraordinary feats, either physically sculpted bodies on wheelchairs or mountain climbers with no hands, the 'inspiration' of the message imagines someone with arms or not on a wheelchair, someone who just does not have the right attitude, because they have no real impediments. Oscar Pistorius wanted to move beyond the fetishistic focus on his impairments, rather he sought to 'normalize' and then transcend *as if he were normal*. I emphasize this because his public image depended on the oft repeated stories of how he had never been accommodated, how his prosthetic legs were as different as a pair of shoes, so that, as mentioned earlier, his mother can tell his brother to put on his shoes and Pistorius to put on his legs, both acts being the same. A big part of his case against the IAAF, when he wanted to compete with 'abled athletes', was that he gained no advantage from his carbon fibre prosthetics.

If, as Robert McRuer suggests, 'compulsory able-bodiedness functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there actually is no

³⁴ See, for instance Sokolove and Carlin.

³⁵ Carlin, 48.

³⁶ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'The Story of My Work: How I became Disabled', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34.2 (2014): no pagination; available at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4254/3594> [accessed 30 September 2018].

³⁷ Grue, 843.

choice',³⁸ then Oscar Pistorius constructed an image of someone who chose to be abled; his entire public personae hammered home the idea of disability as choice and accommodations as unnecessary luxuries for the self-indulgent. This glossed over class and race experiences of many of South Africa's disabled, who could not have access to schools, sports facilities and therapies that most whites, regardless of class, had. Pistorius was able to subscribe to the disability as choice notion through what McRuer describes as the 'well-nigh universal valuation of flexibility'³⁹ which he articulates as the hegemonic social order's ability to expand and contract to accommodate and exclude depending on circumstances. The notion of able-bodiedness can expand to include Pistorius when he checks many other boxes in the social order and complies with capitalist imperatives to instrumentalize his body. He becomes a particularly useful symbol for what Michal Ran-Rubin calls the liberal citizen subject, a subject who 'is the liberal, labouring subject of modernity: in other words, the autonomous rights-bearing subject who exhibits the qualities and capacities – such as rationality, free will, and intellect – deemed necessary to ensure formal equality; who produces and consumes for the nation-state; who possess an equal moral weight in comparison to all other subjects and can therefore be held responsible for his or her own actions.'⁴⁰ So the heteronormative able-bodied hegemony can be flexible enough to accommodate Pistorius even with his visible impairments if he more than compensates in other aspects, particular where he reiterates individual choice where many expect social support. It makes sense therefore that many commentators ignored the social construction of Pistorius as a disabled person and focused instead on his actions as a white wealthy, heterosexual male because, difference, in disability scholarship struggles to encompass other alterities. What are we to make of Lisa Vetten's comment that:

Disabled men and women often struggle with their sense of masculinity or femininity because they are to some degree dependent. I have seen examples of them placing particular pride on physical attractiveness. Maybe he struggles with that. The guns and sports cars gave an impression that he was over-compensating so as to be seen as 'normal'⁴¹?

Such generalizations simplify what is a complex interlocking of race, ethnicity and class; they pretend that disability cuts across all these categories seamlessly. For millions of South Africans guns and sports cars do not connote normal, and for even more there are many differing cultural interpretations of what constitutes disability so much that 'attractiveness' is an insignificant factor. The question of dependence also has so much to do with one's social location that it is hardly generalizable.

Whose Trauma Is It Anyway? White Victimhood after the TRC

In the previous sections, I have been referring mainly to pre-trial Oscar Pistorius to track the many contradictory claims that he relied on to either carve out an important

³⁸ McRuer, 8.

³⁹ McRuer, 7.

⁴⁰ Michal Ran Rubin, 'Keeping the Peace: A Tale of Murder and Morality in Postapartheid South Africa', *PolAR* 31.2 (2008): 247.

⁴¹ Lisa Vetten, quoted in Alex Duval Smith 'South Africa's macho society, where attacks on women are the norm' *The Guardian*, 17 February 2013, via www.theguardian.co.uk [accessed 30 September 2018].

cultural space for himself or to avoid consequences for his actions. Such differentiations refer only to the claims made by Pistorius, his legal counsel or his publicity machine, and not to the actual person, because this article engages with Oscar Pistorius's public personae and how that figure has moved through various phases in public discourse. There is also Oscar Pistorius as the subject before the law, what Michal Ran Rubin calls the legal-liberal abstract subject with abstract rights.⁴² This Pistorius was a construction of his legal team and it is his claims about trauma, vulnerability and rights that I will endeavour to link to the wider social discourses of white vulnerability in South Africa.

Part of Pistorius' defence in his trial was that he feared crime and had shot through the door because he thought there was an intruder lurking in his bathroom. In his bail application, he filed an affidavit that emphasised this defence and sought to paint himself as shocked and traumatised by the death of his girlfriend because he had not intended to murder her. This fear though, as Alex Perry was quick to point out, has a troubling history in South Africa.⁴³ Crime writer Margie Orford calls it the South African version of the 'black peril', which she goes on to describe as 'perhaps the most atavistic of white South African fears.'⁴⁴ Thus, even before the trial commenced, Orford was able to predict that the trial would be haunted by the phantom black body of this peril:

So the trial will revolve around Pistorius' intention: essentially, the psychology of a man who claims to have been driven by fear to shoot before asking any questions. This claim inserts a third body into an all too familiar narrative of domestic violence. This imaginary body, of the paranoid imaginings of suburban South Africa, has lurked like a bogeyman at the periphery of this story for the past year. *It is the threatening body, nameless and faceless, of an armed and dangerous black intruder.*⁴⁵

This imaginary black intruder was meant to resonate with the South African middle class that was struggling against rampant crime and lawlessness; and was, therefore, not a racial imagining. Yet, this fear of the black intruder, particularly in its use in the Pistorius trial, was linked to various popular perceptions of white victimization, particularly the white victimization after the advent of the democratic dispensation.⁴⁶ It is this victimization that Pistorius's father, Henke Pistorius, appealed to when he blamed the ANC government for Steenkamp's shooting, claiming that the government failed to protect white people.⁴⁷

A few days after the shooting, Pistorius swore an affidavit in his bail application which was to be the basis of his defence. At his trial, he expanded on claims made in

⁴² Rubin, 247.

⁴³ Perry, 30 and 37; Rose; Christopher Hope, 'The Pistorius Killing: The South African Shots Heard All Around', *Mail and Guardian* (1 March 2013); available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-02-01-00-the-pistorius-killing-the-south-african-shots-heard-all-around> [accessed 30 September 2018].

⁴⁴ Margie Orford, 'Heart of Oscar's Defense'; available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-03-heart-of-oscar-defence-imagined-threat-of-a-black-stranger/#.WznGBIp9jIU>, emphasis added [accessed 22 February 2018].

⁴⁵ Orford.

⁴⁶ Daniel Conway 'Shades of White Complicity: The End Conscriptio Campaign and the Politics of White Liberal Ignorance in South Africa', *Exploring Complicity: Concept, Cases and Critique*, Michael Neu, Robin Dunford and Afxentis Afxentiou eds. (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2016); Kopano Ratele and Leswin Laubscher, 'Making White Lives: Neglected Meanings of Whiteness from Apartheid South Africa', *Psychology in Society* 40 (2010): 83-99.

⁴⁷ Aislinn Laing, 'Oscar Pistorius's Father Blames South Africa's Gun Culture on ANC', *The Telegraph* (3 March 2013), via www.telegraph.co.uk [accessed 23 April 2018].

this affidavit where he paints himself as someone who did not harbour racial prejudices and who had friendly interactions with black neighbours, security guards and other black workers.⁴⁸ He interspersed his testimony with anecdotes that highlighted the high level of crime he always faced in a way that was supposed to set up his later claims of generalized anxiety disorder. Throughout his testimony and from cross-examination, this was clearly his defence strategy. Pistorius sought to paint a picture of violent lawlessness that threatened all lives, especially in middle class suburban areas, and a corrupt police force that was wholly incapable of dealing with criminals. As Orford claims above about the phantom (yet ubiquitous) armed and dangerous black male intruder at the heart of these fears, this hallucination legitimizes all manner of violence against the black poor. So, in his claims about the imaginary intruder, Pistorius was linking together many cultural stereotypes about social relations in post-apartheid South Africa. The first is that white people are targets for violent crime, a claim which is popular despite statistics showing that white people are 8.9 times less likely to suffer violent crime than black people.⁴⁹ Second, perhaps most glaringly evident in the so-called family murders of the late 1990s, that white women and children deserve protection from this menace at all costs – a claim that has been used to explain all manner of violence against white women and children. Third, that white fortunes drastically changed for the worse after 1994, which again justifies all manner of transgressive acts by white people, especially socially prominent ones. All three stereotypes that paint a picture of white people under siege in South Africa are undergirded by popular understanding of trauma and its effects, which I want to suggest, is linked to the way the TRC framed trauma in its proceedings, and how the media also popularised that framing.

Early on in the TRC's life, there was concern that white people were not visible at the public hearings, specifically the victims' hearings into human rights violations and this gave the impression of black victimization and white apathy or worse, white-sanctioned violence. As former commissioner, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela explains:

Public hearings had been in session for two months throughout all the regions and white people were simply not visible at the hearings... The first step was to figure out how to engage white people with the process, to find something that they [sic] could make them identify with the work we were doing. Now, army conscription is one thing in apartheid history that affected all white families. So we approached a woman whose son had been killed in 'action' and asked her if she could tell her story before the TRC.⁵⁰

In hindsight (perhaps at the time it was not so obvious) such assertions raise racially charged questions: why it was important to have 'white visibility' at the hearings, or why would a process designed to counter the effects of a system that had been labelled a crime against humanity, a system that unashamedly advanced and protected white hegemony, need white people to identify with it? Of course, at the time, the commission took its 'reconciliation' mandate seriously, and part of that mandate, at least in the commissioner's interpretations of it, meant white and black/coloured/Indian people coming together. But how far did this reconciliation go when there is white fear

⁴⁸ Some of Pistorius's claims in his trial can be viewed on YouTube, the trial transcript is not publicly available.

⁴⁹ This makes statistical sense considering that white people make 8.9% of the population

⁵⁰ Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 'Women's Contribution to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', via www.womenwagingpeace.org [accessed 30 December 2015].

that still trembles at imaginary black danger nearly 20 years after the TRC held its last victim's hearing?

During its run, the Commission relied on the western medical notion of trauma to bring everyone together, and there were oft repeated references to wounds of the past that needed to be exposed to healing light. The past was framed as a trauma that everyone needed to recover from, both perpetrators and victims. One of the ways of bringing people together was around the notion of trauma as harming everyone in similarly debilitating ways. For the TRC, apartheid had been a traumatic experience for many people, black witnesses testifying at the commission were describing 'traumatic events', and many displays of emotion were characteristic of relating traumatic experiences. Radio broadcasts of the Commission's proceedings were preceded and followed by contact details of the Trauma Centres for counselling where listeners could seek help if they needed it. The Commission itself made extensive use of trauma counselling centres and employed various counselling specialists. These popular framings of trauma ignored culturally specific ways of thinking about suffering and healing. Furthermore, even in cases where specific brutalities were inflicted on communities, the collective aspect of the suffering was reframed as individual trauma by the TRC. As many critics have subsequently pointed out, the Commission individualised both the perpetration of human rights violations against groups of people, and the suffering of human rights violations in its preferred binary of victims and perpetrators.⁵¹ When used to interpolate a recalcitrant white minority into a national project, trauma is depoliticized and diluted to variety of harms and individuals. And trauma as popular psycho-legal concept that is portrayed as a pathology relating to a set of events risks medicalisation, which in turn negates its social and cultural significance.⁵²

The TRC's medicalization of the experiences of apartheid brutality created a framework where everyone could claim to have been harmed by apartheid and could therefore seek reconciliation over the trauma of apartheid. For the TRC, this meant recognition of white trauma in the hope of reassuring the white public that it was not a witch hunt meant to villainize the white populace, but rather a forum to air grievances about the brutality of apartheid. Thus, as Commissioner Gobodo-Madikizela states, the conscription hearings could foreground white suffering; where white families were lied to by their government and young white men were pressed to serve an abusive government and were in the process maimed or killed.⁵³

⁵¹ Mahmood Mamdani has written extensively about how the Commission was not just caught up in apartheid legality but in focusing too much on individual perpetrator and victims ignored bystanders and beneficiaries. Mark Sanders also criticizes the Commission for focusing on 'extraordinary violence' in a way that ignores everyday violence of apartheid against communities.

⁵² For instance, the term PTSD was bandied about in much of the TRC writing of the time, Commissioner Wendy Orr wrote about her work under the title 'PTSD and the Truth and Reconciliation', *Continuing Medical Education Journal* 16 (1998): 142-3. A clinical psychologist writing about the 'trauma of testifying at the TRC' wrote that '[p]eople who testify or give statements to the TRC are survivors of horrific traumas and violence, and many of these people are coping well with the stresses which they have endured. Counselling provides an opportunity to understand and work through the symptoms of their trauma' (See Trudy de Ridder, 'The Trauma of Testifying: Deponents' Difficult Healing Process', *Track Two*, 6.3-4 (December 1997), 2).

⁵³ These were hearings held at the urging of Commissioners Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Wendy Orr to hear about the experiences of young white males who were conscripted to join involuntary service to apartheid security forces for two years after completing high school. See Wendy Orr, *From Biko to*

When victims like Mrs McGregor appeared before the commission, the TRC was radically configured as a space for harmed, traumatised individuals who were victimised by a vicious (apparently faceless) system. That is because Mrs McGregor testified about losing her son, Wallace McGregor, when he was conscripted in 1986, and her testimony was anchored in the belief that the apartheid government lied to her about what her son was doing and how he died. She was disturbed by the fact that she had never been allowed to see her son's body when he was brought home for burial. Her TRC appearance received extensive media coverage, and outpouring of responses in the media, creating space for white victimization. The public outpouring also allowed the commissioners to pontificate about the shared grief of mothers who lost their sons and the public at large to externalize human rights violations as 'apartheid's war' that left victims on all sides. To put it another way, while before the McGregor moment, white apathy was described as a 'problem' requiring a solution, and not a statistical reality, or a reflection of how apartheid operated, after McGregor, pop psychology explained white apathy as a symptom of suffering. The commission imagined a wounded white public that needed a channel to voice its collective pain and the image of the grieving mother, willing to embrace the other (much was made of the black women who embraced Mrs. McGregor)⁵⁴ served to draw in the apathetic white audience.

This attention to white victimhood, especially through conscription, allowed social discourse of 'white genocide'. For instance, the cultural legend of bossies, literally 'bushes', a colloquial reference to PTSD symptoms exhibited by those those returning from conscription was immortalised in Paul Slabolepszy's play *Saturday Night at the Palace*. The vulnerability of white males also featured in the works of Mark Behr, Michiel Steyn to mention a few.⁵⁵ So, Pistorius's claim of special vulnerability has a history and context, he becomes a poster child for 'unspoken' (while loudly trumpeted) white pain. Thus, just as the TRC, a process that was meant to heal the wounds of apartheid, presumably a system that harmed black South Africans ended up attending to white pain (even if for a while) through conscription hearings, the Oscar Pistorius trial turned away from the dead white woman and the black male phantom she was purportedly imagined to be, and focused on white male trauma of exclusion. As Jacqueline Rose puts it:

To save his skin, Oscar Pistorius ventriloquised a woman, or was led by his legal team to do so. He took her place. Behind what might be seen as a moment of unanticipated and welcome gender confusion – since gender confusion is always, or nearly always, to be welcomed – we might also, or rather, see a man going to the furthest lengths he can go, including sacrificing the image of himself as a man, to make absolutely sure that no one hears the voice of a woman crying out in fear for her life.⁵⁶

It is this ventriloquism that disability studies needs to address in order to be useful in a South African context where apartheid history and the TRC has always marginalized black pain. The medical model of trauma allows whiteness to ventriloquize and

Basson: Wendy Orr's Search for the Soul of South Africa as a Commissioner (New York: Contra Press 2000).

⁵⁴ Orr, 18.

⁵⁵ Michiel Heyns' *Children's Day* (2009), Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1997), Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2006) are all novels that deal with white children who suffer apartheid related traumas, and whose childhood is marred by apartheid cruelty.

⁵⁶ Rose, 10.

eventually displace black pain. Trauma as a medical concept that defines a particular experience of dealing with painful experience appealed to the Oscar Pistorius defence team because it explained his actions and absolved him of culpability. As a disabled white male with a history of marginalization and victimisation as a white person, he suffers both individual trauma as a person with disability and collective trauma suffered by other wealthy white people whose wealth makes them the target of crime. Support of Pistorius, the white interest groups like Afriforum and other media, sought to tie his actions to persistent white fears of falling victim to black crime or being dispossessed by the new dispensation. It is in this context that Pistorius's father could blame the ANC government for his son's actions, as he emphasised that 'crime against white South Africans was a huge problem.'⁵⁷

While some of those who defended Pistorius bought into this whiteness under siege in South Africa portrayal, Pistorius's defence also laid claim to individual trauma. This defence focused on Pistorius's body as the primary site of trauma, during his trial and sentencing he 'embodied' his defence claims, retching and crying when emotional testimony was heard, and walking on his stumps in lieu of testifying during the sentencing phase, after the state had successfully appealed his earlier conviction. During the trial he claimed that his disability made him particularly vulnerable to crime and that his disability would make imprisonment exceptionally cruel and unusual as prison lacked proper accommodations for his physical impairments. For someone whose entire public persona was based on his careful management of his body to the extent of transcending his disability, it was particularly jarring that much of the reportage on his trial focused on his 'broken-ness': he was a broken man, broke down during his testimony, and so on. Ironically, the defence tallied in a macabre way with earlier claims of disability as a matter of attitude. Essentially, the claim that Pistorius had generalised anxiety disorder which made him prone to violence at the slightest provocation, placed disposition at the heart of disability. Such representations resonate with pernicious stereotypes of 'disability as the most traumatic experience on earth'.⁵⁸ Where before Pistorius was acclaimed for transcending his disability, he was now pathologized for having been taught to repress his disability and ignore its effects on his life. Where before he had objectified himself as an inspiration, he now became a pitiful spectacle. At issue here is that Pistorius is right about the vulnerability of disabled people and the prohibitive built environment that does very little to protect them and correctional services that was not built to accommodate people with disabilities. However, he could have done so without constructing disability as a trauma. His counsel would have done better to point out how ableism constructs disability as lack, deviance and difference, and could have raised trauma with regards to ableist prejudice. When Pistorius claimed disability as trauma in his defence, he effectively valorised the self above social context and historical conditions. On the one hand, many commentators sought to cast Pistorius as a stand-in for many white South Africans who are terrified of crime and many also referred to his purported crime as a symptom of

⁵⁷ Cyrus Engineer, 'Oscar Pistorius's Father: Government to Blame for Gun Culture', *The South African*, via www.thesouthafrican.com [accessed 22 April 2018].

⁵⁸ Lupkin 2014 quoted in Clare Harvey, 'What's Disability Got to Do with it?', *Disability and Society* 30.2 (2015): 302.

South Africa's violent culture.⁵⁹ And while his defence tapped into these generalizations, by claiming a unique pathology that results from his disability and how he was raised to view it, Pistorius was at once incorporating and rejecting these generalizations; simultaneously claiming to be part of a community that was exceptionally vulnerable to victimization and yet an individual who suffered from anxiety due to being raised to repress his disability.

The Unfinished Story of History and Trauma

Trauma as a cultural concept (for instance in trauma studies theories), may at first appear to be a useful way to think about reconciliation, and it may appear that the TRC could have framed trauma as a useful concept for reconciliation, as Cathy Caruth, envisaged that 'trauma may provide the very link between cultures'.⁶⁰ However, it is the western understanding of trauma that frames it as that link, because if trauma is about grappling with the unspeakable, then we need to understand the mutability of the unspeakable, that is, we need to accept that what is unspeakable in one context is not universally so. Trauma is therefore not a universal experience and pain as a cultural concept necessitates a cultural response. As Stef Craps has usefully pointed out, by mapping 'the Euro-American concept of trauma and recovery onto the apartheid-colonial situation [the TRC] was subject to the same problems and limitations faced by trauma theory.'⁶¹ For Craps, one of those limitations is that trauma theory individualizes suffering and therefore depoliticizes it. He writes: '[s]urvivors are pathologized as victims without political agency, sufferers from an "illness" that can be "cured" within existing structures of institutionalized psychiatry.'⁶² Hence, the western model of trauma does not account for pain and suffering in different cultural contexts. I am thinking here of culture as learned behaviour and therefore the way that we are taught what events are worth committing to memory, how to think about the past and even how to feel about certain events. In this sense, traumas must inherently be defined through difference. The way that Pistorius became the 'inspiring' hero was through denial of difference and marginalization of raced and gendered experience of disability. Hidden in this image is the racialized access that Pistorius enjoyed as a disabled white male. In the image of Pistorius as an inspiration, many were supposed to learn about transcending the historical legacies of apartheid even if no resources were made available to do so. In the previously cited *New York Times Magazine* article for instance,⁶³ Pistorius takes the journalist on a site visit to Khayelitsha, a township outside Cape Town, and impresses upon him that the prevailing inequality and black poverty cannot be ignored. And yet the resulting article does precisely that, rather than offer any account of this 'site' and its history, Khayelitsha and its poor are mere props in the story about Oscar Pistorius's social consciousness, humility and disposition. Oscar Pistorius

⁵⁹ Alex Duval Smith, 'South Africa's Macho Society, Where Attacks on Women Are the Norm', *The Guardian* (17 February 2013); available at www.theguardian.com [accessed 30 September 2018]; Ghosh, Davis, Perry.

⁶⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 11.

⁶¹ Stef Craps, 'Wor(l)ds of Grief: Traumatic Memory and Literary Witnessing in Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Textual Practice* 24.1: (2010): 51.

⁶² Craps, 56.

⁶³ Sokolove.

the villain however, the man who lived in fear of being victimised by black criminals, gives us the self in history. A white self that emerged in the TRC hearings, the victimised white male of the conscription hearings, whose wounds were 'equally' worthy to be licked by the TRC. In holding the conscription hearings solely to hear young white males' experience of apartheid, the Commission advanced the idea that there was pain on both sides, as if there were two sides. By creating a forum for white pain the Commission truckled to apartheid racial imaginary of different races that needed to figure out a way of co-existing. Had the TRC been attuned to the different cultures under apartheid, and how difference meant separate and unequal, it could have reconfigured trauma in a way that is conscious of its historical context. Similarly, Pistorius's claims of victimization and vulnerability, as unconvincing as they were for many who watched the trial, call attention to the ways that disability as a social construction needs to be sensitive to each context. As a star athlete Pistorius's popularity relied on denial of the social limitations faced by many disabled people in South Africa, and in his trial he produced these self-same social limitations to defend his actions.

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Invincibil, dar vulnerabil: problematicile rasei, ale dizabilității și ale traumei în Africa de Sud după procesul lui Oscar Pistorius

Atunci când personajul devenit iconic la nivel global, câștigătorul la Paraolimpice, Oscar Pistorius a fost acuzat de uciderea prietenei sale, Reeva Steenkamp în dimineața zilei de Sfântul Valentin din 2013, una dintre multiplele apărări ale sale s-a bazat pe faptul că dizabilitatea sa fizică l-a făcut să ucidă. Un martor expert din partea apărării sale a făcut conexiunea dintre dizabilitate și violență și a sugerat că oamenii cu dizabilități au tendința naturală să exagereze deoarece se simt foarte vulnerabili. Această apărare prevede legătura dintre cele două extreme ale persoanei publice ale lui Pistorius, aceea a invincibilității și aceea a vulnerabilității – o abilitate fizică extremă definită prin modul în care a bravat fizic ca sportiv și teama de a deveni o victimă din cauza limitării fizice. Formula propusă de avocații apărării este aceea a vulnerabilității extreme care rezultă în agresiune extremă. Acest articol încearcă să analizeze

ceea ce se sugerează prin această revendicare a dizabilității în legătură cu atitudinile sociale privind dizabilitatea și persoanele cu dizabilități, în mod particular în Africa de Sud din perioada post-apartheid – sau mai precis în perioada de după înființarea și funcționarea Comisiei pentru adevăr și reconciliere (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission*). Articolul sugerează că legalitatea fragilă a acestei comisii a creat un teren fertil pentru victimizarea albilor și a popularizat un model medical al traumei.