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# Toward a Politics of “Raw Dicks”

## *Authenticity, the Alt-Self, and New Understandings of the Phallus*

Chris Ashford and Gareth Longstaff



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**Abstract:** Law arguably shapes contemporary culture and phallic politics. In England and Wales, like much of the Global North, the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century saw a general shift from a criminal legal framework that understood sexuality as sexual acts to a civil law framework that seeks to privilege institutions - notably marriage - and lifestyle as signifiers of sexuality. This article contributes to legal and cultural understandings of the phallus, specifically the “raw dick,” as key to understanding the self-representational spaces of “authentic” and “alt” selves on social media. It situates the “raw dick” as the locus of this cultural, legal, and social exchange in which the legal outlaw of male phallic desire has been incorporated into queer citizenship. We argue that the aesthetics of the alt-self provides us with new and important ways to understand the phallus and its relationship to sex and sexuality.

**Keywords:** authenticity, dick, desire, phallus, Queer, raw



This article provides an original analysis of how the symbol of the phallus is reinscribed and reimagined as a “raw dick” and how this can be understood as an authenticating symbol of sex and sexual desire between men. We use the term “phallus” to refer to the cultural and socio-legal discourses of the penis, while the term “dick” is used to refer to the bodily presence of the penis and its corporeality. It argues that forms of authenticity allied to the signification of the raw dick are dependent on how the phallus has largely been silenced in law. Furthermore, we are positioning authenticity within a precarious context of the raw dick and as something that is often strategically mediated and captured for an audience to view. This coalescence with legislative and phallic discourses of power underline both the emergence of the dick’s “raw” presence in queer culture as well as in socially mediated settings characterized by the curation and self-presentation of “alt profiles” on platforms such as Twitter and OnlyFans. Our focus here is particularly



upon those profiles constructed and curated by male users who identify as gay, bi, queer, and trans.

The raw dick is displayed as a form of revelatory phallic desire, promiscuity, community, and the “alt-self” in which people construct an “alt” Twitter profile in contrast to their “mainstream” profile. In addition, this provides another layer of space to present as a sexualized and authentic self but which might operate alongside an aesthetically domestic “mainstream” profile. We draw on literature and arguments across the disciplines of law and cultural studies to provide a unique synthesis and original understanding of the phallus as it is mediated and curated as a “raw dick” in these online spaces and how this relates to queer forms of authenticity, belonging, and the transgression of homonormative value.

As well as this, the combination of socio-legal subjugation and liberation as a crucial way of imagining and representing the phallus as a “raw dick” can be delineated through the dominant ideology and thus signification of the gay male phallus. Tim Dean (via his seminal queering of Jacques Lacan in *Beyond Sexuality*) observes that the phallus as a symbolic object should be considered as “provisional rather than foundational” (2000: 45). He claims that the basis for this approach is because many of the functions that the phallus lay claim to are prone to a precarious slippage between the actuality of the penis as a sexual organ and its relationship to phallic power and phallic fallibility. Since the 1990s, there has also been a critical re-inquiry into the politics of the phallus. Through strands of third wave feminism and queer scholarship, such as Jan Campbell’s *Arguing with the Phallus* (2000) and Deborah Luepnitz’s “Beyond the Phallus: Lacan and Feminism” (2003), there has been an intentional shift to arguing with, dislocating, and dethroning the phallus. Building on this position, we situate the phallus and phallic desire’s “epistemological status as provisional” (Dean 2000: 47) and therefore precarious. In this way and vis-à-vis Dean’s queering of Lacan, we see that “the function of the phallic signifier thus depends for its intelligibility on an *image* of the penis” (2000: 48) so that if the concept of the phallus is used and relied upon too readily or simplistically to articulate and theorize desire, then desire itself becomes a foreclosed concept.

The contingency of what we refer to as the “prism of raw dicks” and an “aesthetics of raw dick” can also be connected to how dicks are strategically documented to emphasize and accentuate the tensions that exist between their power and fallibility. On social media and via their alt, non-studio, amateurish, and authenticating relationship to conventional pornography, we see that users and “content-creators” often strive to visually capture a

sexualized truth and authenticity. It is here that the raw dick is documented through "a sense of presence guaranteed by what is perceived as a privileged relationship to the real" (Patterson 2004: 113).

The aesthetic and ideological qualities of raw dicks that we see on Twitter and OnlyFans utilize and exploit this because they are often self-represented in ordinary and domestic settings; they may also be captured through "jerky" and erratic camera angles and camerawork, poor sound quality, and inexpert editing. Here sexual encounters are filmed to amplify and heighten perceptions of authenticity and amateurism so that "raw" sex between men seems more closely aligned with "true" desire. This dynamic between raw sexual practices and ordinary or everyday realities and settings also underpins the visuality of rawness and its capacity to simultaneously efface "mediation and intervention" (Tziallas 2019: 119) while also producing a "constitutive self-exploratory practice" (Tiidenberg 2016: 1564) of desire and authenticity. Raw dicks also connect to key narratives of gay male cultural experience, such as HIV/AIDS, barebacking and condomless sex, sex-work, and the production and consumption of pornography. In addition to this, the raw dick is tethered to affirmations and experiences of casual sex, pleasure, risk, promiscuity, and anonymity between men and how the prevailing conditions of queer liberalism, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, have affected the authentic operation of sexual experiences and forms of intimacy, otherness, and belonging.

This article draws on the disciplinary backgrounds of the authors in law and cultural studies, and a shared queer theoretical lens, to provide an original synthesis of these two disciplines. It advances a novel, theoretical intervention that develops queer studies and the intellectual agendas of both cultural and socio-legal studies. We position the "raw dick" and the politics of "alt" self-presentation and self-representation as a way of avowing community, promiscuity, and modes of sexual belonging and identification. We argue that the practices of amateurism, authenticity, and legitimacy (for instance, the content found on Twitter and OnlyFans) expediate and renegotiate how sex between men is articulated and understood. This also suggests that men who both produce and consume their "raw" sexual practices around raw dicks and desires do so in ways that reflect broader cultural structures and shifts allied to the law, pornography, and desire in queer liberal contexts.

## Phallic Politics and the Law

Edward Sagarin, the late American sociologist, writing under his pen name, Donald Webster Cory, in 1953 sought to answer the then often asked question, “What does the homosexual want?” He suggested that the question was perhaps harder than some heterosexual interrogators might imagine, noting that “the homosexual society, such as it is and to the extent that it exists at all, reflects differences of opinion on the social solution of this question just as does any other group of people on any problem confronting them” but observing that perhaps one thing that could be agreed upon was that the present situation is “unjust and that change is necessary” (1953: 225–226). In seeking to imagine an end goal, a future imagined world, he suggested that homosexuality would parallel the heterosexual world noting that “some people require a mate; others do not. Some pursue sex relentlessly; other organize a life in which the physical gratification of their impulses plays a rather minor role” (1953: 231). Almost sixty years later, Halperin (2009) would ask a similar question in his essay *What Do Gay Men Want?*, and a decade and a half before that Warner asked, “What do queers want?” (1993: vii). These recurring questions have debated—before and decades after partial decriminalization—what identity ought to look like and regularly focus on the de-sexing of gay, bisexual, and queer male identity. This regulation seeks to, at best, constrain and hyper-regulate the phallus and the desire it represents. Yet these phallic politics—and our contemporary ongoing quest for authenticity and a sense of true desire achieved such as that which we see in the prism of rawness—is rooted in the legal process that created these identities as legal lived experiences. For the purposes of this article, we focus on the law relating to England and Wales. This also has a historical reach into a number of other jurisdictions and nations, based on common law, for example, the United States of America.

Writing after the publication of his 1957 report, John Wolfenden described the then legal position as a “complicated situation” and noted that there wasn’t even a shared and agreed definition of homosexuality (1960: xi). In other words, part of the legal debate was who it was that would be included in a new legal identity that would grant new freedoms. To access these new legal rights, it also therefore would necessitate an identification and performative engagement with whatever identity was created.

In one sense, this marked a significant shift from a regulatory approach based on acts to one based on identities. Yet, the association with sex acts—notably buggery—could form an identity albeit one that might be regarded

as ephemeral and opportunistic. In England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially decriminalized homosexuality and provided the first construction of homosexuality in English law, through decriminalizing a homosexual act in private, provided that the parties consent and are aged twenty-one years or over. It specifically limited this to two people and automatically criminalized homosexual acts in public lavatories. The legislation also made clear that "homosexual acts" related to men who committed buggery or gross indecency with another man (see Davenport-Hines 1991: 135–142; Lewis 2016: 4–6; Tudor Rees 1955: 3). The phallus was arguably central to the politics of decriminalization.

Thus, the authentic or real gay sex was buggery and "gross indecency." This nebulous legal category was designed to capture a broader category of homosexual behavior. First introduced in Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, and later stated in the Sexual Offences Act 1956, its precise meaning was never defined in statute (and was ultimately abolished in 2003). Leslie Moran (1996: 229) noted that the Court of Appeal in *R v. Howells* (1976) ruled that the mere participation and cooperation of two or men in an indecent exhibition constituted gross indecency. The men had been observed by police officers masturbating in adjacent cubicles in a public lavatory. In *R v. Court* (1987) the House of Lords required an "indecent" act to have some proximity to the genital area. We do, therefore, come back—albeit after a rather protracted legal path—to the centrality of the phallus, which arguably remains limited and hidden. Richard Davenport-Hines has described the Wolfenden Report as "the finest flower of Victorian notions of privacy" (1991: 327); for while it did provide for a partial decriminalization, it limited those who could enjoy phallic pleasure to two men and their encounters to the private sphere where they would not be observed.

The law, therefore, has historically served as a chastity cage, encasing and restricting the phallus. It hands control to others to determine when pleasure and release is permitted and the manner of that freedom. It arguably subjugates phallic desire to the will and control of the State to determine what phallic desire will look like. In doing so, it also regulates notions of the authentic and true, while also rooting the non-visible and prohibitive in narratives of gay shame. Warner has noted the complexity of shame but noted that—at least in Anglophone North American cultures—"shame encompasses in some sense guilt, degradation, abasement, abashedness, bashfulness, shyness, embarrassment, self-consciousness, modesty, dishonor, disgrace, humiliation, mortification, low self-esteem, indignity, ignobility, abjection, and stigma," concluding that "it's like having thirty-two words for

snow” (2009: 290). Law therefore has a long history of creating a space in which shame coexists; thus, the phallic desire to express those often silenced and prohibited desires—those outside the narrow domestic and private construction of gay, bi, and queer male sex—become truer and more authentic for some as a rawer, non-limited restriction of self. A sense of real desire.

Warner in his 1993 attempt at addressing his own question, “What do queers want?”, concluded that “queer theory, in short, has much work to do just in keeping up with queer political culture” (1993: xxviii). As law has evolved and re-defined legitimate gay, bi, and queer male sexual desire, it has shifted the broader queer political culture in encouraging and shaping the presentation of phallic desire and notions of the true and authentic. The legal landscape of same-sex marriage, reproduction rights, employment protections, and so on deepen David Eng’s (2010: 30) notion of queer liberalism but in drawing boundaries, also prompts a questioning of those boundaries and borders. So it is that a rawer and more authentic sense of phallic desire is contested. Bareback, rather than with condoms, multiple partners, chem-enhanced, a quest for sex rather than domestic coupledness, is both a rejection and an incorporation of capitalist success and individual neoliberal value. Thus, hypersexualized promiscuity and the intimate celebration, and indeed representation, of a raw cum-covered penis, one stimulated and enhanced by chems, sweat-drenched, and thrusting and spurting cum into multiple partners, multiple holes, is both a product of law, and points both toward the formation of a liberatory phallic desire and a queering of the phallus toward a politics of the “raw dick.”

## **Authenticity and the Prism of Raw Dicks**

This relationship between the queer and liberational potentials of the phallus and its realization as a “raw dick” are also informed by how rawness is constructed and presented as an authenticating visual form. This rawness relies on the promise of the condomless dick and the premise that to “fuck without condoms is to embody the fantasies and potentials of gay liberation, to relive the period before the split of safe and unsafe” (Tziallas 2019: 119) while also absorbing those “memories of a tumultuous and optimistic past (of gay liberation) as well as a horrifying one (the AIDS crisis)” (120). Across alt profiles and within the visual culture of Twitter and OnlyFans, this tension between the barrier of the condomed dick and the unsheathed raw one produces an optical prism of pre- and post-rawness (with the raw

dick at its core) allied to intimacy and authenticity. Here the raw dick is the authenticating object that seethes, sweats, throbs, stinks, and spurts as it penetrates, pleasures, and permutates in its pursuit of this sexual authenticity. In its quest for authenticity, this raw prism of dick provokes us with both the "question of the real, of reality, of realness" as well a form of precarity that Lauren Berlant (2011: 24) has termed "cruel optimism.". For Berlant, optimism in late capitalist consumer culture is cruelly constructed and mediated because it hinges on an impossible and unattainable spectacle of desire and fantasy and "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object" (2011: 24). Here the alt profile and raw dick as signifiers of desire between men align to how platforms like Twitter and OnlyFans energize a precarious exchange of authenticity because "the present moment is made possible by the fantasy of you, laden with the x qualities I can project onto you, given your convenient absence" (Berlant 2011: 25). In this way, the digital presence and ubiquity of the raw dick as a cum-drenched, condomless, throbbing, and precarious signifier of masculine authenticity is "woven into the fantasy of returning to something 'real', of effacing mediation and intervention" (Tziallas 2019: 119).

It is in pursuit of this effacement that the illusion of an authentic raw dick and the prism of rawness takes place. The raw dick becomes embedded in a paradoxical "desire to liberate oneself from the antiseptic politics associated with regimes of intervention" (Tziallas 2019: 119) and to "dispense with barriers" (Dean 2009: 2) as it is interpellated across platforms where self-representational display, self-promotion, strategic amateurism, profiting from your ordinariness, liveness, self-surveillance, and the tensions between how sexual desire as a fantasy are transposed and sustained through the creation of an intimacy with and authenticity of the performer all converge together. This is also defined within a late capitalist and neoliberal trajectory of having to pay for the "free choice" (Patterson 2004: 116) of engaging and participating in a form of intimate and authentic sexual exchange with raw dicks. This interactivity is shaped by an arousing process of cultural and economic engagement.

Yet this interactive element is buttressed by a level of interpassivity and its powerful allure to situate interactive exchanges as illusory forms of pleasure between performer and fan so that it is "unclear how much substantive interaction is taking place and whether we want it if it were there" (Patterson 2004: 117). In this instance both Twitter and OnlyFans function as a vessel and composite space where the digital, networked, and mobile media conflate and permit desire to mix. In these self-representational

spaces of sexual desire, the prism of raw dick offers “an ensuing confusion about the specificity of tasks and labour” (Patterson 2004: 118) and the affirmative “pleasures of the technology itself, and the particular fantasies it has to offer” (Patterson 2004: 119) all happening at the same time.

For law, these cultural narratives and illusions of authenticity and rawness also create a complex challenge of definition and signification, given the long-standing attempt by law to regulate the sexual sphere, and particularly the socio, legal, and cultural politics of the phallus. Historic legal interventions in England and Wales—and the lasting legacy in former British colonies and common-law based systems—has been for the law to focus on sodomy and buggery as notions of homosexuality in law. This has been a cis-gendered male-based conception but also one focused around the phallus and its relationship to the anus. Here the penetrative power and stigma that exists between the phallus and anus has been constructed around a complex politics of fascination, abjection, and disgust. For example, Moran (1996: 21) has noted that in the context of England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially decriminalized “homosexuality”—a concept and identity that had never previously existed in the legal text of this jurisdiction, which had instead focused the criminal law upon acts. Moreover, the 1967 legislation did not repeal legislation relating to buggery, yet it had the practical effect of partially decriminalizing anal sex between consenting males aged over twenty-one, in private.

In the United States, the 2003 Supreme Court of *Lawrence v. Texas* 539 US 558 (2003) in which it was ruled that criminal punishment for sodomy was unconstitutional. Libby Adler (2018: 32) has noted that while Justice Kennedy—who wrote the main opinion in *Lawrence*—“did not make it entirely clear in his opinion that sodomy is now protected by the right to privacy, what the case does hold is that states may no longer prohibit non-commercial sodomy between consenting adults in private,” although Adler goes on to note that the concepts of consent and private are “highly contested.” This shift reflects Foucault’s claim that “sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history” (1998: 43). This was, however, a personage in which, arguably, the phallus and phallic desire remained central. Here the phallus is implicated in the criminal act of sodomy and its “real” as well as its imagined function as a penetrative, rigid, and erect dick binds it to an enigmatic politics of fantasy and threat that ideologically bolsters the rhetoric of gay male desire and more specifically the “raw dick.”

This regulatory framework and pornographic fantasy of raw phallic desire exists as one that arguably operates in a framework of what Eng has described as “queer liberalism” and which “functions as a supplement to capital, but in a desexualised, repackaged, and contained form. In other words, we might say that neoliberalism enunciates (homo)sexual difference in the register of culture” (2010: 30). Eng goes on to note that the *Lawrence* decision showed how sodomy could be transformed into an authenticating form of intimacy, “coming together with the logic of queer domesticity in an aestheticized heteronormative model of the liberal human, an abstract national culture and community” (2010: 30). This aestheticized heteronormative model—or one might argue, even a homonormative one (Ashford 2011)—is one that is arguably particularly evident in contemporary mediated displays of sex(uality) that seek to present rawness and the raw dick as an authenticating or real experience. Beyond the porn studio, we find that the use of the hotel and motel room and their mundane aesthetics underpin how we see rawness and authenticity on OnlyFans. Ryan has also noted that instead of the production studios, poorly designed sets or rented apartments of the porn set “subscribers are brought directly into the homes of content producers, more specifically their bedrooms and bathrooms” (Ryan 2019: 127–128). Here the law’s domesticated construction of phallic desire—as one rooted within and arguably controlled by domesticity—is displayed through a prism of rawness.

While the development of “alt” social media spaces might provide a disruptor to domesticity of Eng’s queer liberalism it would also seem to deepen the commodification of phallic desire through the authenticating signification of the “raw dick” as self-branded commodity and a form of content creation (2010: 30). Yet the content creator and perhaps more so the individual entrepreneur displayed on OnlyFans reifies and amplifies their “authenticity” to users through their sexualized “rawness” and its relationship to the “differential forms of physical, affective, and socio-political meanings we bring to sex, how it is desired, how it is practiced, and how it provides for complicated forms of pleasure” (Varghese 2019, xxviii).

## Law, Raw Dicks, and Liberating Phallic Desire

Reform of the law in England and Wales in the 1950s and 1960s was never predicated on liberational lines. It was—as from the outset of *Wolfenden*—about managing a “problem,” and the problem was homosexuality,

specifically as a visible identity (see more generally Chesser 1958; Cocks 2010). The associated crimes—notably blackmail—were all based around the challenges of visibility and a revelation of queer phallic desire and how that desire is practiced. This brings us back to the question Wolfenden posited as to what is even meant by a homosexual (1960: xi). In the content of the law reform that follows, this becomes focused upon identity and visibility ; the desire that is permitted and with it the symbiotic construction of “rawness.”

The Sexual Offences Act 1967 was the legislation that ultimately flowed from Wolfenden’s recommendations and focused partial decriminalization on acts “in private” and thus invisible to the public. Yet even here, the idea of what might take place was regulated in prohibiting more than two persons to be present. With new freedom comes new regulation (see Jakobsen 2005). While the legislators’ imaginations apparently ran to group fucks and orgies, or threesomes at the very least, they did not imagine a context of chemsex and fetishized bareback fucking as evidence of rawness and authenticity. João Florêncio’s (2020) documented “pig” masculinities were for the future. A focus on the law in the creation or evolution of the identity of the “homosexual” has been criticized for privileging the law and courts as sites of cultural production (Cook 2006: 65) at the expense of subcultures and sexual identities that pre-existed legislation. Arguably, law is critical in contributing—alongside cultural narratives—to our understanding of sexual identities and the privileging, rarefying, and vesting of utopian desire in the phallus. Moreover, it is within this framework that our notions of the authenticity of “raw” can be understood, gain power, and form as responses to law’s production of queer identity.

Peter Wildeblood’s landmark account of 1950s life for homosexual men was to note that “the pathetically flamboyant pansy with their flapping wrists” does not represent the majority of homosexuals (1999: 7). It was this “pansy” homosexual that seemed the focus of initial journalistic commentary with the journalist John Gordon memorably dubbing the Wolfenden Report “The Pansies Charter” (Wolfenden 1976: 141). Wildeblood suggested however that “we do our best to look like everyone else, and we usually succeed” (1999: 7). Wildeblood’s statement—designed to reassure and reduce “otherness” of gay identities—actually does the opposite, reflecting the “hiding,” closeting of sexuality that the law and culture necessitates and invoking the silenced alt. This arguably provides the historic queer genealogy to the contemporary alt of social media and OnlyFans. This “hiding” requires the wearing of a cloak of normativity to disguise raw,

real, and arguably “authentic” same-sex phallic desire while simultaneously producing the alt-self.

It was, therefore, the law that historically framed homosexuality through two aspects—visibility and with it, a public–private construction of sex. These were notions rooted in an exclusively phallic-centered construction of homosexuality, for English law never criminalized or conceptualized lesbianism. Wolfenden himself noted that this perhaps led to many erroneously believing the “homo” in homosexuality stood for male (1976: 131). More broadly, the timing of the 1967 Act coincided with a broad liberal re-framing of society, led by UK Home Secretary Roy Jenkins. This also meant that homosexuality would be associated with the so-called permissive society; thus, once again, caution was suggested in embracing a more public and celebratory notion of “gayness” or same-sex phallic desire (Harvey 2011: 201). Rather than viewing this as a libationary moment of opportunity, the permissive society represented a threat for some and something that might lead to a backlash. Raj has noted that “privacy has worked to zone queer intimacies and identities away into a space hidden from public view” (2020: 26). This shift toward the private sexual identity and—over time—a public domesticity was also reflected in broader queer politics that “broke with the progressive utopian historical vision of some versions of gay liberation and second-wave feminism” (Love 2007: 158). This is a politics in which same-sex marriage and queer liberalism has come to the fore. Ruskola predicted that “when same-sex marriage arrives, we will know whose sex is good and whose is bad” (2005: 243). Arguably, sex—outside of the familial reproductive model—remains a source of shame and yet underlines the power of the raw dick to act as a nexus through which memory meets fantasy and truths are constructed. Rawness remembers and produces an alternative world of desire, risk, and pleasure and offers up the fantasy of a queer utopian alternative (Muñoz 2009). This is a fantasy of the authentic and “authentic intimacies” and, with them, a space of futurity and belonging.

This queer utopian vision also serves to highlight the limits of law. Yvonne Zylan has noted that activists and scholars remain divided on whether legalism as a strategy “has been ‘good’ for progressive movements or ‘bad’ for them” and whether these legal strategies have been sufficiently transformative (2011: 35). However, the emergence of the alt profile, the aesthetics of rawness that it often contains, and tensions of phallic authenticity suggest that the law has been key in creating a landscape in which sexual cultures have responded to its influences by fragmenting “transformation” and the idea of the “transformative” into a concept understood

in normative mainstream terms and the “alt” queer pluralistic identities that can coexist through virtual platforms. These virtual platforms have been significant for allowing the alt-self—not a new concept for the reasons previously set out—to connect with other alt-selves in the same ecosystem as the “main” or “mainstream” self. This, we would suggest, provides a space for affirmation, belonging, relatability, and a “coming together” of a community of “raw dicks.”

Florêncio, citing De Angelis (2017), has noted that “of there is nothing but the relation itself, then the *cummunion* we are seeking is not a coming-together predicated on shared commons but always and primarily a *communing*, an active social relation. A doing-in common rather than a being-in-common” (Florêncio 2020: 152). So it is that these spaces do not bring us to a liberatory singular notion of the “homosexual,” that question debated by scholars and posed by Wolfenden, but rather they serve to highlight the active social relations between phallic politics and queer desire. Yet these raw relations are also shaped by the legal tolerance—repression and normativity—that generates them. Mario Mieli, citing Marcuse (2002) has argued that “repressive tolerance...only confirms our marginalization” and thus recognizing “the right of those who are ‘deviant’ to live on the basis of their ‘deviance’ and hence to be marginalized” (2018: 93–94). In this way, the phallus is ordinary and domesticated and also revealed in its extraordinarily “raw” aesthetic reality by technological means and within digital and networked spaces.

## The Aesthetics of Raw Dick

These (extra)ordinary “raw” aesthetics are catalyzed and sustained across the self-promotional, self-branded, and entrepreneurial features and users of Twitter and OnlyFans. Here the intersections of gay liberation, queer liberalism, austerity, globalization, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic mingle with how the user strategizes, monetizes, and self-brands their raw dick as a tool of the “attention economy” (Marwick 2013) for individual profit, fan-subscription and a self-aggrandizing desire for individual celebrity and queer agency. This also provides a foundation and scene for what we are terming an “aesthetics of raw dick.” The techniques and tools of self-representation allow individuals to self-construct and maintain levels of authenticity and intimacy that reify the raw dick into a proximate object of desire. This initially works because the signification of the raw

dick seems to metaphorically reflect and personalize an identity constructed through narratives of relationality and belonging. Yet, the amateur camera techniques and modes of signification that attempt to capture this desire for raw dick also ensure a sense of metonymic displacement insofar as these men are performing and acting out a fantasy of the raw dick to gain more followers, subscribers, or to be gifted items from their Amazon Wish List (Ryan 2019: 120).

In this way, the authentic and intimate scene of rawness is strategized and rehearsed. These are the raw dicks riven by the cruel optimism and illusion of belonging, affirmation, and acceptance. Their authenticity and rawness rely upon an adherence to the regulatory norms and rules of Twitter and OnlyFans and those of an imagined or subscription audience. In this way, and within the rhetoric of self-representational pornography, the raw dick serves to duplicitously personalize and impersonalize desire. For instance, their rawness and their dicks are self-captured in ways that seem to "personalize" this ordinary aesthetic and closely interrogates their body in intimate detail. Yet this is also informed by the self-manipulation and self-presentation of bodies through technological devices that we see within the scene. Laptops with webcams, cameras on tripods, tilted lighting devices, and mobile phone camera devices are persistently visible and generate a sense of their strategically pitched amateurism and the "do-it-yourself" authenticity. The visibility of these self-representational tools is a key trope that defines these sexual encounters as "content creation" to ensure that "the process of intimacy and identification is cemented by the somatic identification of one body experiencing sexual pleasure and sexual arousal with another body experiencing the same thing" (Patterson 119: 2004) on a mobile device or computer. This also connects to the urgency and awkwardness of filming raw dick and often raw dicks participating in group sex so that the rawness becomes a limitless form of mediated promotional content that "participate(s) in the logic of the commodity and helps support neo-liberalisms mystifications" (Hennessey 2000: 109).

Here the pursuit of rawness affirms and captures something of the user's participation, yet this is mediated as "an incitement for subjective identification with the performer, for this ever-fuller sense of participation with that performer's life, and that it is this ever-elusive relationship, in effect, that itself becomes the obscure object of desire" (Patterson 119: 2004). Across digital and networked media, this commodification of the ordinary serves to intensify how an alt-self and more so the raw dick is signified. In this context and more specifically if we think of the self-representational and

ideological desires allied to the raw dick, we see that this tension between desire, liberation, and the law is captured when sexually explicit and networked content is produced as an attempt to authenticate a raw dick and its potential for intimacy, belonging, and community. It may be here that the expectancy for arousing and often strategically authentic and amateur content of raw dicks and the men allied to them is most visible and thus evident.

Here, the boundless search for rawness and the pleasure of the raw dick comes from an excessive and affirming aesthetics of promiscuity. The raw dick provides a setting where the simultaneity of sexual self-promotion, self-branding, and cruel optimism of consumption capture the pleasure and excess of sexual desire. The visual “frenzy” (Williams 1989) of sex and sexuality which is mediated as a pornographic commodity indicates that in this context the ubiquity and pervasiveness of raw dick is informed by an aesthetics of visual authenticity, surveillance, ordinariness, and amateurism (Mercer 2017: 170–171). Raw dicks are an affirmation of amateurism but one that is often knowingly performed and manipulated strategically to signify amateurism vis-à-vis “the pose of the amateur even while inhabiting the sphere of the professional” (Ibid.). This strategic amateurism is reliant upon corporate and symbolic elements as well as the core tensions “between the professional (embodied in the gay porn star) and the non-professional (embodied in the amateur)” (Ibid.: 174) that users embrace and exploit across Twitter and OnlyFans. The sexual authenticity of an ordinary raw dick coalesces with the fantasy dicks of porn stars to cultivate and sustain a self-assured, self-produced, and self-aggrandized awareness of how everyday experiences might compound with the porn industry, porn stardom, and pornographic distribution across various platforms. The raw dick exploits the ideological and aesthetic qualities of “professional amateurism” in porn, which supports a broader “vocabulary that many men use to construct their sexualized bodies for consumption online” (192) so that the subtleties of everyday life seem to be authentically disrupted and enhanced by this object of sexual fantasy.

## Conclusion—Spluttering, Trembling, Rawness

Rawness and the new phallic politics it captures provide a queer disruption and resistance to the queer liberalism of monogamy, domesticity, and homonormativity. This rawness also perhaps responds to Wolfenden’s

(1960: xi) dilemma as to defining what the homosexual is through revealing the “other” that law constructs when it seeks to impose boundaries around the self. This resistance also challenges Mieli’s argument that “if any human being, even a homosexual, overtly rejects his own homosexuality, all he does is repress this and adjust to the repression” (2018: 180). Yet we’re seeing repression (the mainstream profile) and resistance (the alt-self) coexisting and disrupting binary assumptions. This queering and disjuncture of the self also suggests a “legal consciousness” (Harding 2011) that understands the normative rights that one has and navigates a space of resistance through sexual desire and self-expression. As Sharif Mowlabocus has observed in the context of chemsex, “it represents that which has not been—cannot be—assimilated” and so would suggest, the alt-self offers up, that which has not and cannot be incorporated or assimilated (2021: 16).

Similarly, Jamie Hakim claims that by positioning and thinking about chemsex between men “conjecturally,” we may begin to see how flows of intense and relational encounters occur as “affective charged intimacies within material conditions shaped by neoliberalism’s struggle for hegemony” (2020: 126). More so and in this space, there is the potential for an “intense connection for groups of gay and bisexual men when the material conditions for this to flourish have been diminished for everyone” (Ibid.: 128). Correlating this to our consideration of raw dicks, we see that chemsex offers us a glimpse (albeit it an ethically and politically problematic one) into the “joys of collectively feeling together in ways that demonstrate that the hegemony of neoliberalism is not quite as totalising as some accounts might suggest” (Ibid.: 128). Gareth Longstaff suggests that practices of both barebacking and chemsex involve “bodies that splutter” (2019: 163–187) whereby “spluttering involves processes of bodily and egotistical expulsion that falter, stumble and hesitate” (171) toward “a transgressive level of phallic pleasure” (182). The raw dick fits to this concept and the blissful emergence of a phallically “spluttered jouissance” as “instantaneous and ejaculatory, abject and enigmatic” (Ibid.: 183).

Florêncio has also observed that “we tremble when, despite our being afraid of it, we have no option other than moving towards it. Because fleeing is not an option; because it is only by being propelled towards it that we, paradoxically perhaps, can actualise our own becoming ourselves” (2020: 176). The alt profile is arguably a response to this kind of “spluttering” and “trembling” and the law’s power to sometimes regulate and silence queer desire. Here, the alt-self uses the rawness of the dick to exuberantly push at the bounds of the phallus and its connection to cultural and socio-legal

discourses of control. Its ways of navigating and (dis)orienting the layers and possibilities of what rawness might be also structure an affirmation of its queer allure, resilience, and resistance. The alt-self reflects the anxiety of displaying one's authentic, pure, unrestrained, and raw desire and, concomitantly, the futility of seeking to extinguish this desire entirely. Yet the existence of the alt-self also shows the coexistence both of a tenacious pain—or shame—that persists and is repressed and the existence of intense pleasure and the celebration of phallic desire.

Mieli stated that “I hoard my treasure in my ass, but my ass is open to everyone” and in doing so was also observing that “what in homosexuality especially horrifies *homo normalis*, that cop of the hetero-capitalist system, is getting fucked in the ass” (2018: 157). Dean observed that “the most marvellous thing about Mieli is that he really seems to mean open to *everyone*” and that “his butt offers a welcoming smile to the reader” (Dean 2018: vii). The alt profiles of Twitter and their linked OnlyFans document the raw dicks that will fuck those raw and open asses, and their availability to all, and do so “again, and again, and again” (Longstaff 2019: 182).

Rawness has arguably always existed—for as long as identity is constructed by law, society, and culture—in inverse existence to the regulated self produced by law. Technology and specifically the platforms of Twitter and OnlyFans provide voice and visibility to the once largely invisible and silenced in a drive to authenticate phallic desire and intimate rawness. In these new spaces, this intimacy and authenticity of the raw dick may also come from ordinary evocations and relational encounters with it in which we move toward a politics of rawness and raw dicks that assist us in gaining new understandings of the phallus, authenticity, and the alt-self. As José Muñoz has argued, “to access queer visibility we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now” (2009: 22), and in doing so, we suggest, we may construct a new framework for queer liberation and a queer radical politics in which we glimpse new assemblages of belonging, selfhood, desire, raw dicks, and phallic futures.



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