In the preface to *Body Odor and Biopolitics: Characterizing Smell in Neoliberal America*, Nat Lazakis warns that the book responds to his interest in throwing light on an area that has "remained strangely obscure," formed by the "experience of olfactory discrimination" (p. 2). The author draws attention to the idea that human bodies give off varying scents. Accordingly, body odorlessness should be considered an ableist condition, as there are people with a specific state of their organism (as may be determined by trimethylaminuria) that prevent them from odorlessness in spite of following some strict hygiene practices. To reach his goals, Lazakis leads readers through a substantial set of reflections about the factors that determine body odor conditions and about the emotions derived from these conditions. Alongside references to misunderstanding, barriers, exclusions, stereotypes, and harassment, there are also many allusions in the text to such feelings as discouragement, insecurity, despondency, confusion, shame, irritation, and rebellion. Through this provocative, well-thought-out book, Lazakis contributes to the expansion of our understandings of diversity, inclusion, and body positivity by including odor-related disabilities. To begin with, let me say that as far as I am concerned, his goals have been fully achieved.

It is important to point out that the different aspects covered by Lazakis are clearly documented and locked in by his wish to show how the transformations induced by neoliberalism—both in governmental and economic policies and on cultural, psychological, and corporal levels—have had a negative effect on people with certain somatic characteristics. Work that connects liberal attitudes toward disabled bodies with Foucauldian research on biopolitics, he argues, has contributed to placing contemporary pressures on improving bodies within a wider historic change aimed at ensuring that the governing work is concentrated on improving two closely related questions: economic productivity and the health of populations. This is offset by the appearance of a cleansing work aimed at people whose bodies, due to disability or their own choice, infringe on the rules of hygienic discipline. Accordingly, Lazakis puts forth this argument: “that olfactory norms are imposed through the stigmatization of strong-smelling people, the construction of odorlessness as attainable through personal responsibility, and the equation of odor with a contagious disease, within a culture in which health optimization is a top pri-
ority” (p. 22). This causes the appearance of a smell-regulated population, which is made up of two types of people: odorless subjects, whose supposed right to produce and consume within odorless spaces is strengthened by governmental institutions, such as the courts; and smelly subjects, who are contemplated as a threat for businesses and health, and as a result, unworthy of gaining access to such resources as employment, knowledge, and transport. This situation generates the existence of a “submission/dominance pattern: people terrified of making a bad impression zealously consume hygiene products, while ‘leaders’—such as managers and librarians—consolidate their supremacy by posturing as judges of others’ odor and arrogating the right to evict the impure” (p. 23).

To develop his study, Lazakis resorts to an extensive bibliography that he handles effectively, although he does not use many original documentary sources. He composes a text in which his presentation unfolds coherently over six chapters. The first chapter, “The Neoliberal History of Body Odor,” summarizes research dedicated to studying stereotypes regarding odor in the racist and classist ideology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He refers to how, over the past two centuries, the momentum of hygiene strengthened links between dirtiness and illness. Smell, therefore, became the object of a growing aversion. At the same time, the industry producing products aimed at fighting dirtiness and smell used the growing proliferation of the media to spread the idea that these goods would be useful, and even essential, to increase a person’s possibilities of social acceptance. Additionally, as the industry transmitted the idea that body odor could be effectively tackled, it also promoted the fallacy that the presence of body smell was exclusively dependent on individual responsibility and had nothing to do with any corporal, economic, or social conditions. These factors contributed to an aversion to body smell and its association with certain groups. Body smell started to be considered an indicator that a person was not suitable for the capitalist market or, in general, for modern life. These ideas started to become expressed in popular culture, as well as in the academic sphere, and helped to generate a dominant concept as to what body smell represents. As Lazakis argues, increasingly body smell was related to aspects of the neoliberal ideology, such as the glorification of individual responsibility, meritocracy, and personal growth.

To examine his points, Lazakis chose two settings—the workplace and public libraries—in which this discourse was expressed and the aversion to body smell was socially managed, dedicating a chapter to each of these areas. To analyze workplaces, the author contrasts the positions of businessmen and workers. Smells were seen as a breach of the hygiene policy, leading to the discrimination of workers diagnosed with odor-related disabilities. Lazakis reviews studies devoted to analyzing the experience of workers whose demands against discrimination were taken to court under the Americans with Disabilities Act to warn of the restrictions of this rule to protect employees diagnosed with a body odor condition. When looking at workers’ narratives, Lazakis finds that the workplace represents a space in which these workers’ opportunities were restricted. These narratives express various feelings and concerns, such as harassment, the few opportunities they had to confront it, the recurring idea that their smell depended on the lack of bodily hygiene, resignation to their situation, and the need to face the alternative they found working at home. Given his analysis, the author considers that the medicalization of body smell represented by obtaining a formal diagnosis of trimethylaminuria is the only way to protect, although only partially, strong-smelling workers from discrimination. In his opinion, to overcome this state of affairs, political action is needed to challenge the lack of empowerment of affected workers and the anatomical mod-
el that is used as a reference for the management of this group of people.

The chapter devoted to exploring how bans by American public libraries play a role in the exclusion of strong-smelling people from public spaces is particularly interesting. Lazakis brings us to another setting in which there is a meeting with people who have the authority to judge whether others, in this case library users, adapt to the odor rules. The author postulates—and in my opinion he does so convincingly—that the library odor rules play an educational function as their drafting and form of application strengthen the principles of liberal ideology. The rules are articulated in exclusive terms of smell, which, as they are a mere aesthetic consideration that does not take into account such aspects as a person's social situation or their body conditions, help to strengthen the idea that bad body odor is exclusively dependent on a lack of hygiene. Additionally, to strengthen his criticism of how the bans behave as a boosting factor of a specific view of what being a strong-smelling person means, Lazakis sets his sights on the problem of the objectivity of the actions carried out by those applying the bans. Body odor is presented in the rules as a factual aspect that a librarian could incontrovertibly evaluate and measure with accuracy. For the author, this might lead to the idea that these rules are considered unquestionable.

In chapter 4, he explores, in his opinion, the lack of allies and of specific support for people with odor-related disabilities. Lazakis feels that the relevance acquired by theories and movements aimed at redefining the bodies that favorably breach moral frontiers comes up against the lack of support for people with odor-related disabilities. In one series, which he acknowledges as only representing a set of examples, Lazakis explores feminist and queer spaces, including the concept of leaky bodies or menstrual activism, and he states that he detects reluctance in these areas to publicly challenge odorlessness or to show support for people with body odor conditions. According to the author, these theories and movements do not play a role as allies for people with odor-related disabilities because they would be inadequate in two ways. First, they are formulated based on abstract definitions of the transgressive body; thereby, they avoid tackling smell and could be establishing a hierarchy of regulations that are not explicit. Second, he considers that these theories and movements appear in elitist spaces that do not take into account any other factions who do not form part of these privileged groups. His opinion is that there is an imbalance in terms of the benefits derived from anti-normative body politics among different people in terms of their degree of financial and professional security.

In chapter 5, Lazakis addresses the idea of whether environmentalism could lead to a greater acceptance of people with body conditions, such as trimethylaminuria. When evaluating the results of his analysis of different expressions of environmentalist ideologies, he is cautious and does not offer a binding answer. The author states that he can find reasons contributing both to bringing an end to feelings of shame accompanying people with odor-related disabilities and to supporting the most puritanical outlooks (for example, the connection of odor to sin) and ableist ideas of aversion to smell.

The boom of discussion networks set up by patients for information exchange, mutual support, and destigmatization leads the author to consider them as a valuable source of information for exploring how strong-smelling people discuss their life experiences. Based on the work by Nikolas Rose (The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century [2007]), Lazakis puts his sights on patient advocacy organizations to emphasize that these networks show affinities between significant neoliberal values and trends within biomedical self-fashioning. He refers to how we are called on to
control our health and to look out for risks, which leads to responsible citizens showing a commitment to constant control work over their behavior, diet, or lifestyle. The author finds these medicalization signifiers in some of these patient networks. These networks emulate radical forms of disability politics or reflect on the warnings by other groups regarding medicalization. With regard to legal and political strategy, this means a disadvantage for this group of people. Lazakis states that “the medical discourse ought to be evaluated as one of several strategies that should be contemplated as one of several possible strategies to challenge oppression.” Furthermore, he notes that “alternatives include single-issue identity politics (like body positivity activism), and a multidimensional politics that situates odorlessness as an oppressive norm required by modern capitalism and calls for destigmatization of the body as part of a broader anti-capitalist front” (p. 161). Medical usefulness could be used to debunk the myth that lack of personal hygiene is the only cause of body odor, which would help to reduce the exclusion dynamics suffered by people with strong-smelling odor in libraries and workplaces and establish policies that do not include the need to obtain a cure.

Lazakis delivers a book well documented and constructed, although at times repetitive, which serves to meet his goal of increasing the visibility of a well-hidden group of people with disabilities. His work represents a significant contribution to helping to repair what he considers a lack of attention by social scientists toward odor-related disabilities. As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the author reaches his goal. The aspects of his work referred to in this review must be taken as some of the many interesting points that Lazakis considers in his book and that I found most stimulating. I assume that others approaching his work will identify other themes that they consider more appealing or useful to their work. I would have liked to find a more in-depth reflection on the meaning of medicalization and of the medical model of disabilities, as well as allusions to social and geographical contexts outside the United States. This would have provided a better contrast to some of his evaluations and arguments. I would also have liked to see greater attention paid to how historical factors behave in relation to the modulation of the olfactory experience and discrimination. However, I think that Lazakis’s book contributes to the promotion of interdisciplinary work. Its contents provide a fertile landscape for finding research topics for those working in the sensory history field and for those working in the field of history of disabilities, and this must be considered an important added value.
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