Are All Bodies Good Bodies?: Redefining Femininity Through Discourses of Health, Beauty, and Gender in Body Positivity

Rayanne Connie Streeter

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Sociology

Christine Labuski, Co-Chair
Toni Calasanti, Co-Chair
Neal M. King
Rebecca J. Hester

May 10, 2019
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Body Positivity, Gender, Beauty, Health, Social Media, Instagram, Fat Studies

Are All Bodies Good Bodies?: Redefining Femininity Through Discourses of Health, Beauty, and Gender in Body Positivity

Rayanne Connie Streeter

ABSTRACT

Previous research has explored the ways in which health, beauty, and gender discourses are used to promote and regulate an ideal of thinness. Further, research has explored how the fat acceptance movement and fitspiration has fought to resist such narratives. However, in the age of hashtag feminism a new group on social media, body positivity, has become the buzzword among celebrities, news conglomerates, and fashion companies. This study draws on interviews with 12 body positive influencers and an examination of 210 Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive or #fitspiration to examine the extent to which body positive influencers and users modify understandings of normative feminine body ideals and to what extent they resist and accommodate traditional discourses of gender, health, and beauty. Findings suggest that body positivity is understood by influencers as a conglomeration of five contentious tenets: (1) a connection to the fat acceptance movement; (2) an opposition to diet culture; (3) the belief that all bodies are good bodies; (4) celebrating self-love; and (5) proclaiming that all people have a freedom to be beautiful. In addition, my examination of Instagram posts shows that although a greater variety of body sizes appear in posts tagged #bodypositive than those tagged #fitspiration, both center hyper-feminized and sexualized white women who transgress norms of femininity in one dimension, fatness or muscularity. As such, Instagram influencers and users struggle to negotiate an adherence to the traditional discourses of femininity, beauty, and health at the same time as they seek to expand them.

Are All Bodies Good Bodies?: Redefining Femininity Through Discourses of Health, Beauty, and Gender in Body Positivity

Rayanne Connie Streeter

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In that last 5 years body positivity has gone "mainstream"—gaining the attention of women across the United States, circulating across a variety of mass media sources, being viral content on social media, and becoming the buzzword among celebrities, news conglomerates, and fashion companies. But what is body positivity and its impact? This dissertation sought to explore that question as it relates to gender, health, and beauty in the context of social media. Drawing on interviews with 12 body positive influencers and an examination of 210 Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive or #fitspiration I examine the extent to which body positive influencers and users modify stereotypical understandings of femininity, particularly the idea that the healthiest, most attractive, and most feminine body is a thin body. Findings suggest that body positivity is understood by influencers as made up of five aspects: (1) a connection to the fat acceptance movement; (2) an opposition to diet culture; (3) the belief that all bodies are good bodies; (4) celebrating self-love; and (5) proclaiming that all people have a freedom to be beautiful. In addition, my examination of Instagram posts shows that although a greater variety of body sizes appear in posts tagged #bodypositive than those tagged #fitspiration, both center hyper-feminized and sexualized white women who transgress stereotypes of femininity in one dimension, fatness or muscularity. As such, Instagram influencers and users struggle to negotiate an adherence to the traditional understandings of femininity, beauty, and health at the same time as they seek to expand them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, the *New York Times* proclaimed that "Instagram has become a body-image battle ground" after several celebrities—including Gigi Hadid, Vin Diesel, and Demi Lovato—defended themselves against body-shaming critics on Instagram (Friedman 2015). Diesel wrote, "body-shaming is always wrong!," captioning an image of him showing off his abs and Lovato urged followers to "learn to lurrrrrvveee yerrrrr currrrrvveees" with an image of her lounging in a playsuit and heels. Since then, the *New York Times* has gone on to publish more articles claiming that we are in a "body-positive moment" and that "radical body love is thriving on Instagram" (Barnes 2017, Salam 2017). Digital news and entertainment outlets such as *BuzzFeed* and *Bustle* have also paid significant attention to body positivity. For example, *BuzzFeed* held a "Body Positivity Week" where a variety of authors posted "content devoted to exploring and celebrating bodies and our often complicated relationships with them" (Gerstein 2016). Further, in 2016, Barbie got what some called a "body positive makeover" launching three new Barbie body types (curvy, tall, and petite) with new skin tones and hair colors and textures (Sciarretto 2016). Fashion companies have also jumped on the body positivity bandwagon—expanding the sizes they carry, hiring plus size models to walk during New York Fashion Week, and creating marketing campaigns centered around body positivity (e.g. Aerie's #AerieReal campaign). And of course, celebrities continue to post on Instagram. Take actress Hilary Duff who made headlines in the summer of 2017 when she posted a photo of her cellulite filled butt telling people to "#kissmyass" and encouraging women to "be proud of what [they've] got and stop wasting precious time in the day wishing [they] were different, better, and unflawed."

Celebrities, news conglomerates, and fashion companies are not the only people using Instagram as a tool to tout body positivity and push back against decades of discourses that conflate fatness as unhealthy, unattractive, and pathological. Social media influencers are also part of the dialogue happening via sites like Instagram. Influencers, like those seen in body positivity, can be understood as micro-celebrities who use images, videos, blogging and alike to present themselves as coherent, branded, yet personal and authentic packages to their online fans outside the more centrally controlled star systems of studios and publishers (Marwick 2013, Senft 2013). In particular, *body positive* influencers primarily use their social media platforms to regularly disseminate body positive messages to their followers in hopes of making changes to how we understand and value bodies. Although celebrities like Demi Lovato and Gigi Hadid may post similar messages the focus of their social media accounts is not primarily body positivity. That said, celebrities are and can be involved with influencing the conversations about body positivity and help it reach a mass audience. Further, body positive influencers have used Instagram as a platform to gain more than micro-celebrity—getting modeling contracts, book deals, and more. For example, prominent body positive influencer Megan Jayne Crabbe, under the username "bodyposipanda," has been able to use her 1.1 million followers to garner the publication of her first book *Body Positive Power*. Similarly, Tess Holliday (username "tessholliday"), has parlayed her popularity on Instagram with 1.8 million followers and widespread use of her hashtag #effyourbeautystandards into a successful modeling career.

But what is body positivity? Even with little definitive agreement (Dalessandro 2016) and few empirical examinations, most scholars contend that body positive influencers seek to highlight the socially constructed nature of the ideal body represented by mainstream media (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Darwin 2017, Miller 2016, Sastre 2014b). In doing so, body positive

influencers challenge the discourses that normalize thin bodies as healthier, prettier, and more morally upstanding than other, primarily fat, bodies and modify the boundaries of which bodies are deemed normal, of value, and worth fighting for. Following the mantra of "all bodies are good bodies," body positive influencers advocate for self-love, inclusivity, and the showcasing and celebration of bodies in all shapes and sizes. Through targeting young women, the largest user base on Instagram (Anderson 2015), body positivity takes place mostly via social media sites, like Instagram, where users post selfies of their allegedly non-normative bodies, tell stories of their experiences, and encourage themselves and others to "love your body."

Body positivity then is a response to the ways in which dominant groups in the contemporary U.S. attempt to control and "fix" non-normative bodies. Bodies deemed non-normative or unruly by Western standards (i.e. those that are not white, thin, able-bodied, and young) are often met with disciplining discourses that seek to make them fit into normative standards and play by the rules. Following Bartky (1990), Bobel and Kwan (2011:1) explain, "there is no shortage of rules dictating what we should or should not wear, inhale, and ingest; the size, shape, and overall appearance of our bodies; and even our gestures, gait, and posture." One of the most powerful feminine body rules after the nineteenth century, and one which tyrannizes Western (and mostly white) women, is that women should be thin. As Saguy (2013:19) argues, "white women have more class and racial privilege to lose by being fat, whereas the prospects of women of color of all sizes is limited by racism." This isn't to say that black and Latina women do not encounter such oppressive rules, but sociologists have found that they tend to have a more positive body image than their white counterparts in part due to their community's acceptance of women with a larger body size (Patterson 2014). However, research also supports that this may be changing for some women of color especially as they gain higher socioeconomic status (Perez

and Joiner 2003). Nevertheless, to regulate women's bodies to comply and support this rule of thinness dominant groups rely on discourses of gender, health, and beauty as forms of disciplinary power. Being fat has been constructed as out of control, pathological, unattractive, and a threat to a woman's femininity. Thus, many Western middle-class white women, and increasingly, upwardly aspiring women of color, strive to do almost anything (e.g. exercising, dieting, surgery) to avoid becoming fat in hopes of achieving normative feminine body ideals.

Given Western society's obsession with thinness, and how this polices and regulates women's bodies into acceptable ideals, it's not surprising that much of body positivity is centered around fatness. Therefore, rather than "fix" non-normative bodies, body positive influencers seek to expand the boundaries of what an ideal feminine body can be by including fat bodies. However, body positivity is not the only group that has attempted to modify the boundaries of what it means to be feminine. Both the fat acceptance movement (FAM) and fitspiration have also sought to constitute new rules of femininity, each with a different focus. Like body positivity, the FAM, a movement coming out of the 1960s and influenced by both the civil rights and feminist movements, is also concerned with fat bodies focusing explicitly on challenging anti-fat discourses and discrimination and has moved to blogging to support this cause (Cooper 2016). By contrast, rather than seeking to reduce the stigma attached to fatness, fitspiration (also known as fitspo), promotes women's strength and muscularity by posting pictures on Instagram in celebration of such bodies (Boepple et al. 2016). Overall, body positivity, like the FAM and fitspo, strives to resist the normative responses to unruly bodies by attempting to expand the boundaries of femininity to include more than slender bodies via the context of social media. However, unlike the FAM and fitspo, body positivity has gone "mainstream"—gaining the attention of women across the United States, circulating across a

variety of mass media sources, and emerging as an ideology not just seen on the fringe of society's countercultures (Jones 2016, Ospina 2015). When Barbie makes body positive dolls, when companies, like Aerie, make entire ad campaigns focused on body positivity complete with hashtags (e.g. #AerieReal), and when posts tagged #bodypositive reach over 9,020,759 on Instagram as of March 2019 then its safe to say that body positivity has captured the attention of our society and it deserves to be examined. But also the discourses of gender, health, and beauty contribute to material harms, such as depression, disordered eating, and discrimination (Bordo 2003, Pausé 2014b). Therefore, it is important to examine a group who has the potential to challenge these discourses and make positive change.

Therefore, I sought to more fully understand what body positivity is and its impact, especially as it relates to gender, health, and beauty, and in the context of social media. The larger concern underlying my research is to understand to what extent body positivity modifies understandings of femininity and related body ideals, including race, age, and ability, and, in doing so, to what extent body positivity uses and re-shapes the related discourses of health and beauty. I address these by asking the following research questions:

1. What are the goals of body positive influencers? Do these goals vary among influencers?
    a. How/do they differentiate their goals from related groups such as the fat acceptance movement and fitspiration?
2. What bodies are represented in body positivity and fitspiration Instagram posts, and how is femininity, health, and beauty displayed in the bodies and non-bodies (i.e. quotes, food, objects) represented?
    a. How do body positivity and fitspiration posts differ in regard to femininity, health, and beauty?

3. How are body positivity Instagram posts received by Instagram followers?

Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current body positive influencers in the United States and a content analysis of Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive and #fitspiration my research provides a lens to examine femininity and the discourses surrounding it. Understanding what body positive influencers' goals are, how they differ from other resistant groups, and how it is represented and received through social media tells us about the ways in which groups attempt to deal with unruly bodies and resist or challenge normalizing discourses of femininity. In their attempts for inclusivity and modifying boundaries of femininity, body positive influencers may draw upon the same discourses they seek to challenge—those of gender, health, and beauty as forms of disciplinary power. In drawing on these discourses, influencers may make their reframing of femininity seem more legitimate. In addition, body positive influencers may also use them to create new boundaries of femininity—designating which bodies can now be identified as feminine, healthy, and beautiful, while marking others as still deviant.

My research then asks which bodies still remain at the margins even in a movement that encourages us to rethink the boundaries of the feminine body. By centering fatness, body positive influencers may privilege certain non-conforming bodies over others and not only mark them as more feminine, and thus more valuable, than other types of non-conforming bodies (e.g. black, disabled, and/or old bodies), but also designate new boundaries of acceptability to their millions of followers. This might be complicated further by placing limits on how fat a body can be or what fat bodies can look like. For example, are 500-pound bodies represented, and thus valued, as much as the 200-pound body in Instagram posts? Are certain hourglass silhouettes favored over pear shape silhouettes as Patterson (2014) found in the plus size modeling industry?

Examining which groups are newly included and excluded from body positivity tells us about which bodies body positive influencers see as appropriately feminine and valuable. If all bodies are good bodies, as body positive influencers claim, then shouldn't all bodies be represented equally? As is the case with all groups, body positivity must draw boundaries of who will and will not be included and these boundaries (i.e. who is in and who is out) give us a clearer idea of which bodies are "good" (and thus feminine). Put another way, without some bodies being represented as unfeminine, we would not know who or what counts as feminine in body positivity. The boundaries of who is included and those left out of body positivity help to constitute a feminine body even as its influencers seek to expand this. What is at stake then is that not only are these boundaries telling us what kind of feminine bodies body positive influencers see appropriate, but perhaps even more so is the influence that these influencers have on their social media followers. What body positive influencers think and display about femininity and the related discourses of health and beauty may be adopted by others, especially as body positivity gains rapid mainstream attention.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore the extent to which body positivity modifies understandings of femininity as it relates to health and beauty, I first need to examine the discourses used to regulate unruly bodies. Lupton (2013:8) understands discourses as:

> defined and coherent ways of representing and discussing people, events, or things, as expressed in a range of forums, from everyday talk to the popular media and the internet to expert talk and texts. Discourses are contextual, embedded in particular historical, political, and cultural settings. Discourses both reflect common understandings and perpetuate them, contributing to ways of thinking about, living, and treating bodies.

Therefore, in the following sections I outline the three discourses most relevant to my study and which contribute to the ways we think about and treat fat female bodies: gender, health, and beauty. Following this discussion, I explain how each of these discourses are part of what Foucault (1979) understands as disciplinary power. Through a regulating and normalizing gaze each of these narratives seek to create good neoliberal citizens, those who are productive, and imbue us with a sense of personal responsibility. However, with the advent of hashtag feminist activism on social media, groups have sought to resist feminine body norms and modify the boundaries of acceptable forms of femininity. Much like the Fat Acceptance Movement (FAM) and fitspiration, body positivity attempts to redefine 'femininity' by making it more accepting of a wider variety of bodies. Therefore, in addition to outlining these normalizing discourses, I will also discuss how the FAM and fitspiration have sought to resist body norms and expand the ideals of what a feminine body can be in two divergent ways—fat and fit bodies—and what this might tell us about body positivity. Finally, I explain how social media has served as the context and means for embodied resistance to occur. Ultimately, explaining what this might mean for body positivity and the goals of this project while outlining my research problem in depth.

GENDERING BODIES

Bodies play an important role producing and displaying gender in all aspects of people's lives. Through the notions of "doing gender" and "gender performativity," West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990; 1993) respectively, explain that gender is something we "do" and is performed habitually through people's bodies. The ornamental surface of the body displays gender through clothing, makeup (or lack thereof), and body size, but also by the gestures, movements, and postures that a person "does" (Butler 1990, Butler 1993, West and Zimmerman 1987). Each of these displays, gestures, movements, and postures work together in a system to signify one's gender (Butler 1993). For example, long hair is not inherently feminine, but when combined with heavy makeup, lingerie, and pose where the hip is jutted out creating a curve to the body like an S, these signifiers work as a system to indicate femininity. Further, these signifiers are marked as appropriate or inappropriate based on one's perceived gender. In other words, gender is marked in and on the body and is done in such a regularized, constrained, and repetitive way that seems "natural" even though bodies cannot be interpreted outside of the cultural regimes which inscribe and reify them. However, due to these naturalized assumptions, men and women's bodies become imbued with different and unequal social meanings.

Far from being the inevitable outcome of a biological imperative, femininity and masculinity is produced through a range of practices, including the normative body-altering work used to attain thinness and muscularity. Femininity and masculinity are modes "of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh" (Butler 1985:11). For women appropriate bodily displays of gender often focus on appearance including thinness, having long hair on your head, but none anywhere else, wearing making, having soft skin with no signs of age, and alike (Bartky 1990). On the other hand, bodily norms for men focus on what men can do with their bodies rather than how they look with an emphasis on them as forms of

dominance, activity, and control (Vaccaro 2011). In the contemporary United States, these ideas of masculinity and femininity are tied to the belief that gender is a binary—that men and women are different and contrasting.

Departures from these gender norms frame bodies as non-normative or unruly eliciting negative reactions for those who rebel (Bobel and Kwan 2011). Therefore, gender bodily norms exert near-magnetic effect on us, compelling us, often unwittingly, to fit in or risk censure, condemnation, and in some instances danger. For bodies that do not fit in, whether by circumstance or choice, society seeks to regulate and discipline them in order to make them fit (Foucault 1979). For gender, this means stigmatizing females with non-normative bodies as masculine, lesbians, unattractive, and alike, limiting access to material resources, or causing physical harm to these bodies. This is also true for folks who identify as transgender, queer, or nonbinary whose existence is seen as an assault on the presumed "naturalness" of the gender binary and norms and thus can elicit negative reactions. Ultimately, it is difficult to untangle gender norms from other discipling narratives as they help to co-construct one another.

Therefore, in the following sections, I show how gender discourses intersect with discourses of health and beauty as forms of disciplinary power to construct and regulate feminine bodily norms of thinness. As I will explain, normal, healthy bodies have been constructed as thin because fatness is now seen as an illness needing to be cured (Boero 2012, Murray 2008). In addition, because health is assumed to be visibly read on the body, health is undeniably tied to appearance (Kwan and Trautner 2009, Metzl and Kirkland 2010). Therefore, fatness is read as both unhealthy and unattractive. However, the burden of being aesthetically pleasing is excessively placed onto female bodies whose social value often comes from their appearance (Bartky 1990, Bordo 2003). While fatness is portrayed as negative and pathological for all

people it is particularly an issue for women since their body and beauty are tied into their worth and by being fat they are deemed less worthy. Because of the focus on the aesthetics of women's bodies, women are required to participate in more beauty and health work than men to ensure they don't gain weight. And if they do, they are disciplined through normalizing gazes, such as medicalization, and can be pushed into medical procedures or shamed to correct what is seen as a personal failure in order to achieve the status of an appropriate woman.

MEDICALIZING FAT BODIES

The medicalization of fatness and changing attitudes towards fat bodies in the U.S. has been well documented across academic disciplines, including sociology, law, and literature (Klein 1996, Lupton 2013, Murray 2008, Rich, Monaghan and Aphramor 2011). Once seen as a way to ward off disease, a marker of beauty, and a sign of good health, high social status, and wealth, over the course of the twentieth century, the narrative of fatness shifted. This shift labeled fatness as a sign of overindulgence by the elite, a moral failing linked to the sin of gluttony, and a symbol for the unattractive woman by magazines (Klein 1996, Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008). Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century the U.S. has seen an unprecedented intensified focus on fatness and its presumed negative health and economic effects culminating in what many have called an "obesity epidemic" (Boero 2012, Lupton 2013, Rich, Monaghan and Aphramor 2011). Despite its noninfectious nature, the obesity epidemic is the often-used shock phrase by the media, health policy, and medicine to describe what scientists have called a staggering increase in persons identified as obese over a short time (Martin, Schoeni and Andreski 2010, Mokdad et al. 2004, Murray 2008). For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that more than one-third of adults in the United State are obese

which has contributed to the heightened focus, surveillance, and concern of obesity (Ogden et al. 2014).

Fatness can be understood to have been medicalized into obesity as it has become defined in medical terms, medical language is used to describe it, it is mostly understood within a medical framework, and because medical interventions are used to treat it (Conrad 1992). And this medialization occurs even though, as Boreo (2012:4) explains, obesity is a "postmodern epidemic," a non-contagious, non-pathological illness for which science has yet to find a "magic bullet" to explain biological or genetic causes or cures. Anxiety for the obesity epidemic has reached such a pinnacle of concern, and thus a critical point of medicalization, that both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Medical Association (AMA) have officially recognized obesity as a disease (Gailey 2014, Murray 2008, Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008). However, if medicalization literally means to make medical, and is a process which is deeply embedded in historical, social, cultural, and technological contexts and actors, then it is important to examine who has driven the moral panic surrounding fatness (Boero 2012, Cohen 2002, LeBesco 2010).

Following Cohen (2002), LeBesco (2010) and Boero (2012) explain that the obesity epidemic can be understood as a moral panic because fatness has been defined as a social threat, been met with intense hostility, and despite disproportional reports of harm there is consensus among people that something must be done to stop it. Many moral entrepreneurs, individuals or groups who "play a key role in defining the crisis through their interest-based claims-making," have been involved in constructing this moral panic and medicalizing fatness into obesity including: doctors, medical professionals and organizations, such as the American Obesity

Association, pharmaceutical companies, and the media (Boero 2012:6). And each who have much to gain politically and economically from obesity being designated as a disease.

First, "the organization and structure of the medical profession has [had] an important impact [on medicalization]…the professional dominance and monopolization have certainly had a significant role in giving medicine the jurisdiction over virtually anything to which the label 'health' or 'illness' could be attached" and this includes body weight (Conrad 1992:214). This is especially true given the quantification of the body, and body weight in particular, and as especially aided by insurance companies. In the 1940s the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company developed a height and weight chart through the help of statisticians in order to track the mortality of its clientele and establish a standard body size (Boero 2012). By way of this, the use of other mathematical formulas became prominent, but none as critical as the Body Mass Index (BMI) (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Gailey 2014). According to Lupton (2013:37), the BMI "was a major factor in making the obesity epidemic possible because it provided the opportunity to classify individuals and to statistically measure body mass across population groups, allowing for comparisons between different groups". The BMI creates a statistical norm by which people are judged to be normal (thin) or abnormal (fat). By adopting a positivist stance, fatness, and thus illness, health, and consequently people, become observable, quantifiable, and standardizable. Once this occurs people are more easily controlled in the domain of biomedicine because this quantification becomes empirical "truths" whereby medical professionals can assess risk, prevent illness, monitor or regulate bodies, and exert social control even if such standards are socially constructed (Lupton 1995).

Other key moral entrepreneurs include the American Obesity Association (AOA) and the North American Association for the Study of Obesity (NAASO) who lobbied heavily for the

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to recognize obesity as a leading health indicator in *Healthy People 2010*, an encyclopedic report outlining health improvement opportunities (Boero 2012). The AOA and NAASO both deployed a variety of strategies to ensure obesity would be framed as a significant biomedical health concern. In doing so, they attempted to solidify their place as key sources of information and research on all things obesity and enhance their political clout. As Oliver (2006) explains, "the very same people who have proclaimed that obesity is a major health problem also stand the most to gain from it being classified as a disease." And they did just that—both the weight-loss and pharmaceutical industries profited economically from the designation of obesity as a disease by WHO and AMA (Conrad and Leither 2004, Dumit 2012, Gailey 2014, Lupton 2013). In this designation, these industries solidified their multi-billion-dollar businesses by justifying the consumption of their products to the public because they might "cure" obesity and encouraged researchers to continue to produce data to support obesity as a disease given that pharmaceutical companies often fund research and clinical trials (Dumit 2012, Gailey 2014, Lupton 2013).

To further ensure these stakes, moral entrepreneurs relied heavily on the media to disseminate fat panic to the general public. And the media was central in conveying obesity as a catastrophe which threatened societal interests and convinced a wide audience that something needed to be done about the obesity epidemic—either individually through weight-loss products, surgeries, and/or prescription drugs or structurally via support from the government and organizations (Boero 2012, Gailey 2014, LeBesco 2010, Murray 2008). This is particularly clear just by looking at the numbers—the *New York Times* published 751 articles on obesity between 1990 and 2001 compared to 544 on smoking and 672 on the AIDS epidemic (Boero 2012). By way of the media's influence on the general public, the medicalization of fatness was further

cemented. Fatness was constructed and solidified as something that was excessive, out of control, and pathological (Saguy and Gruys 2010).

However, even as attention towards the obesity epidemic grows there is still conflicting evidence about whether obesity is unhealthy, known as the "obesity paradox." According to Campos (2004), the portrayal of obesity as causing poor health and morbidity is erroneous and highly exaggerated. In fact, some studies find that moderate obesity can be optimal to one's health. For example, Gaesser (1999) found that body fat may have health benefits such as protection against certain forms of cancer and osteoporosis. Similarly, Flegal et al (2013) found being overweight was associated with significantly lower all-cause mortality. Further, studies have shown that extreme thinness is associated with increased mortality while moderate "obesity" is associated with optimal health (Cao et al 2014; Ernsberger and Haskew 1987). The obesity paradox in conjunction with the stance of moral entrepreneurs demonstrates the constructed nature of fatness within a medicalized framework. Being thin may not equal healthiness, just as fatness may not equate to unhealthiness, however, our current and dominant understandings of health, as aided by the crusade of moral entrepreneurs throughout the twenty-first century, is still deeply entrenched in the thin/healthy fat/pathology dichotomy.

A final component to the medicalization of fatness into obesity that I need to address is that bodies are not medicalized equally. Medicalization is stratified in that some bodies are more or less medicalized than others. Conrad (1992) explains that there are "degrees of medicalization" wherein the degree to which an individual or groups of individuals are medicalized differ based on a variety of circumstances (i.e. gender, class, race) leading some bodies to be fully, partially, or minimally medicalized. In particular, women's bodies have historically been more fully medicalized than men's bodies, especially in relation to issues of

reproduction, and this remains true for body weight (Clarke et al. 2008, Conrad 1992, Wray and Deery 2008). Biomedical discourses have not only constructed fat as unhealthy, but have constructed fatness as a female problem. Women's assumed natural connection to the material body (discussed in following section) and thus fleshiness of fat has come to designate fatness as female—as emotional, as excess, and sexual desire. As Wolf (1991:191-192) explains,

> What, then, is fat? Fat is portrayed in the literature of the myth as expendable female filth; virtually cancerous matter, an inert or treacherous infiltration into the body of nauseating bulk waste. The demonic characterizations of a simple body substance do not arise from its physical properties but from old-fashioned misogyny, for above all fat is female; it is the medium and regulator of female sexual characteristics.

This means that much of the fat panic I've described above has been noticeably gendered, targeting women and men differently. For example, parents and friends monitor and restrict girl's and women's food intake while they urge boys and men to eat regardless of size (Gailey 2014, Wolf 1991). In addition, men are less likely than women to be recommended bariatric surgery by their doctor and this may contribute to why women are several times more likely than men to undergo bariatric surgery (Wee et al. 2014). Health propaganda on body weight and size is also more likely to be directed at women and reference themes of beauty, happiness, and date-ability with smaller size (Hesse-Biber 1996, Wray and Deery 2008). Lastly, this "fat as female" discourse might also explain why body positivity, as well as the FAM, have been mostly comprised of women. Since women are at the forefront of fat panic they are in a unique position to fight back.

BEAUTIFYING FAT BODIES

Complicating this narrative of health further is our understanding of appearance and beauty. As Metzl and Kirkland (2010:2-3) explain, "health is intimately connected to, and

ultimately defined by, a person's appearance," offering the example of health-themed magazines

to solidify this point:

> A recent issue of *Health* asks readers to consider whether, in the name of "beauty," they would consider having plastic surgery on their toes, or whether they would consider getting facials on their "fannies" to reduce cellulite. The magazine opines on such topics as "the best jeans for your body," "secrets to a good hair day," and "in search of the perfect bra," while inviting readers to share their weight-loss stories by divulging secret tips and by submitting before and after photographs that illustrate how their health has changed since their weight loss…Calling such language *sexism* or *cultural narcissism* would mobilize a particular critique. But calling it *health* allows these and other magazines to seamlessly construct certain bodies as desirable while relegating others as obscene. The result explicitly justifies particular corporeal types and practices, while implicitly suggesting that those who do not play along suffer from ill health. The fat, the flaccid, and the forlorn are unhealthy, the logic goes, not because of illness or disease, but because they refuse to wear, fetishize, or aspire to the glossy trappings of the health of others (emphasis in original).

If medicine is seen as having direct authority over bodies; it is not only about healthy feeling

bodies, but also healthy, and thus beautiful, looking bodies. There is a normative aesthetic

standard to bodies and beauty and health are often conflated in this construction (Chrisler 2012,

Zola 1972). In relation to body weight then, thinness is not only a sign of health, but also one of

beauty.

However, the burden of being aesthetically pleasing is excessively placed onto female

bodies (Boero 2012, Bordo 2003, Chrisler 2012). As Kwan and Trautner (2009:59) argue, "while

attractiveness matters for men, for women it is essential, nearly compulsory." Underpinning this

gender disparity in beauty is the Cartesian dualism. Attributed to René Descartes, this theory

argues that the mind is distinct from the body—while the mind is associated with thought,

reason, control, and transcendence, the body has been associated with unruly passions, excess,

and immanence (Grosz 1994). In this dualism, the immaterial mind is viewed as superior because

of its ability to control the vulgar and unruly material body (Richardson 2016). This matters for

gender and beauty because the dualism is gendered. Spelman (1982:123) explains, "woman has

been portrayed as essentially a bodily being, and this image has been used to deny her full status as a human being." If woman is marked by the material body then man is marked by the immaterial mind. In this dualism, men are positioned as superior to women who need to be controlled. Similarly, fat bodies are seen as violating the cartesian dualism by being all body and no mind (Richardson 2016). Like the female body, fat bodies signify a lack of control; a body which has not been disciplined by the mind. As such, fatness and female-ness are often linked.

Contemporary cultural representations of beauty in the United States are homogeneous and ubiquitous, emphasizing a feminine ideal of slenderness and a masculine ideal of strength and muscularity (Bordo 2003, Hesse-Biber 1996, Pope, Phillips and Olivardia 2000). Filling countless magazine pages and hours of airtime, western aesthetic norms celebrate and promote the thin ideal through popular media's depictions of women's bodies as extremely thin, yet with buxom breasts. As Richardson (2010:1) explains, "we live in an era which is obsessed with the body. Turn on the television any night of the week and we are able to find programs devoted to the body; or more explicitly the regulation and discipline of the body so that it conforms to acceptable standards of beauty." Society's obsession with thinness and how this polices and regulates women's bodies into acceptable ideals is known as the "tyranny of slenderness," but our engagement in the cult-like intense day-to-day work in pursuit of thinness is understood as the "cult of thinness" (Chernin 2009, Hesse-Biber 2007). Both concepts get at two sides of beauty's intense ideal of thinness—the cultural and social understandings of thinness as valuable, moral, and normal, but also the great lengths we will go to to attain thinness by almost any means.

The beauty practices that individuals perform on themselves to elicit certain benefits is known as beauty work (Kwan and Trautner 2009). For women, in particular, doing this beauty

work is also doing gender. Not only has thin embodiment become the standard of beauty, it has also come to be the ideal of femininity. In working towards the pursuit of the right size and shape (i.e. the thin ideal), women also display the proper styles of feminine embodiment (Bartky 1990, Kwan and Trautner 2009). To be feminine is to take up as little space as possible and one way in which to achieve that feminine goal is to be thin (Young 2005). The beauty work needed to achieve and maintain the thin ideal suggests to women that their natural bodily state is unacceptable or deficient and the only way to achieve success is through disciplining their bodies.

And women are rewarded individually and institutionally for upholding beauty norms through this type of beauty work. Cultural representations of beautiful people often equate them with status and success and research shows that much of this holds true (Kwan and Trautner 2009). People who are considered attractive are often treated better and experience desirable outcomes such as encountering more opportunities and greater peer acceptance and interpersonal influence. Further, physically attractive people are associated with more positive traits including happiness, talent, and competency whereas fat or unattractive people are seen as lazy, immoral, and sad (Farrell 2011). Relatedly, people with fat bodies face stigma, stereotyping, and discrimination (Carr and Friedman 2005, Farrell 2011, Saguy and Ward 2011). Perceived physical attractiveness (or lack thereof) also affects ones outcomes in social institutions such as work, education, and relationships. For example, Fikkan and Rothblum (2012) found that women are penalized for having excess weight in employment and income, education, romantic relationships, and health care. Conley and Glauber (2005) found that increases in women's weight result in a decrease in family income and occupational prestige. Moreover, research on

students identified as obese found that they encounter difficulty at all levels of the educational system and during the college application process (Puhl and Brownell 2001, Solovay 2000).

The social rewards and consequences that accompany conforming to beauty ideals provide a strong incentive to participate in beauty work. This work can range from mundane acts such as dieting and exercising or extraordinary ones such as bariatric surgery. And because women experience more pressure to conform and have greater consequences if they don't conform to beauty ideals, they engage in more of these day-to-day practices than men (Bartky 1990, Kwan 2009b, Kwan and Trautner 2009). In fact, many women experience normative discontent, consistent and perpetual bodily dissatisfaction, as they try (and fail) to meet these standards (Gailey 2014, Kwan and Trautner 2009). Extensive literature has documented the harms of exposure to images and rhetoric of beauty ideals, including body dissatisfaction, disordered eating and exercising, negative body image, and depression (Bessenoff 2006, Bordo 2003, Tiggemann and Slater 2004).

This rigid and nearly unattainable standard gives way to what Wolf (1991) has called "the beauty myth." Wolf (1991) argues that the idea that beauty is objective and universal is a myth. She explains that beauty is a nearly unreachable cultural ideal that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement by maintaining men's dominance and power. Rather than focus on advancements in other domains such as work or school, women are trapped in an endless cycle of cosmetics, beauty aids and ads, and diets—making their bodies into "prisons their homes no longer were" (Wolf 1991). Femininity and womanhood is portrayed as a bodily spectacle in which virtually all women must participate if they hope to attain some power, but in doing so reflects the gross imbalances of social power between men and women (Bartky 1990). While men gain power because of their mind or in the strength and power of their

bodies, women's worth is tied to their bodies as objects to be looked at. Even as women try to

gain power through conforming to beauty standards by being thin their success usually only

amounts to attention (Bartky 1990, Kwan and Trautner 2009).

All of this isn't to say that men do not experience the negative consequences of the

beauty myth and the tyranny of slenderness. In fact, Bordo (2000) and Pope, Phillips and

Olivardia (2000) argue that men too are beginning to participate in beauty work in more

prevalent numbers, however, this participation is distinctly different. Men are not subjected to

the same type of gaze and scrutiny as women. Women often exist in a space of "to-be-looked-at-

ness" in ways men do not experience. Additionally, there is a wider range of body types

acceptable for men. While it may be ideal to be muscular, men can also achieve masculinity by

having a beer belly or dad-bod—denoting how fatness is something that comes with conviviality,

yet still masculine (Richardson 2016). Taking up space does not threaten men's masculinity in

the same way it does for women. Therefore, although men may face consequences for not

conforming to appearance norms by being thin they experience it in a way which is not as

threatening to their status as men.

There is an important racial dimension to beauty ideals. Like fat bodies being defined as

the Other to thinness, black bodies are the Other that the beauty ideal (i.e. white bodies) defines

itself in opposition to (Collins 1991, Kwan and Trautner 2009). Collins (1991:79) explains,

"[b]lue-eyed, blond, thin women could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black

women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair."

Despite the potentially corrosive and stigmatizing effect that white models of beauty could, and

can, have on women of color, women of color seem to be able to resist some of the negative

effects of the beauty myth (Collins 1991, hooks 1993, Lovejoy 2001, Patterson 2014). Research

suggests that black girls and women tend to be more satisfied with their body size and weight and exhibit lower levels of disordered eating behaviors than white girls and women, despite having higher rates of obesity (Flegal 2015, Lovejoy 2001, Patterson 2014). Sociologists have attributed this difference in body satisfaction and relationship to beauty ideals from dominant Western (and white) discourses to cultural differences between white, black, and Latina populations. For example, black communities are believed to have a more flexible and egalitarian aesthetic of beauty based on concepts of uniqueness and harmony that enables black women to counteract societal devaluations of their looks and body size (Patterson 2014). Moreover, black and Latina women have more community support in resisting negative societal ideals of thinness and beauty because of this greater cultural acceptance and even preference for larger bodies (hooks 1993, Lovejoy 2001, Patterson 2014). However, this does not mean that black and Latina women are immune to the realities of the Eurocentric beauty ideals. Research increasingly indicates that as black and Latina women gain socioeconomic status, the preferred size of women's bodies decreases and begins to look more similar to Western white ideals (DeAngelis 1997, Gailey 2014, Perez and Joiner 2003). Paterson (2014:262) explains "once [black female and Latina adolescents] move from their indigenous environments, they begin to take on practices of the dominant group, including anorexia, bulimia, and body image ideals." In addition, because of the culture surrounding positive body image in black communities Lovejoy (2001) suggests there may be a denial of the true harms of white beauty ideals. Even so, black women represent one space in which some women have resisted feminine body norms, but does this hold true for body positivity? Is body positivity a space for all women, despite race, to resist against feminine body ideals, including beauty norms, or will their bodies continue to remain at the margins?

This question holds true for other women at the margins such as old and disabled women. These women, like women of color, are pushed outside the boundaries of what society deems feminine, healthy, and beautiful. Like fat bodies, old and disabled bodies have been constructed as pathological and unattractive (Calasanti 2005, Garland-Thomson 2002). For example, the discourses of gender, health, and beauty in the contemporary U.S. are bound in ageism, a prejudice based on preference for the young and the equating of signs of aging with decreased social value (Butler 1969). Therefore, like bodies read as fat, bodies read as old either because of sagging, wrinkling, graying, or alike, are deemed in need of fixing through anti-aging activities (Calasanti et al. 2016). And like fatness, this is especially true for women who are often seen to be "old" much sooner than men.

Looking at issues of disability, feminist and disability scholar Anna Mollow (2015), suggests that "the modes by which fat people are oppressed are indistinguishable from ableism: architectural barriers, discrimination, pathologization, pity, and staring are common social responses to both fatness and disability." Meaning much of the discourses I've outlined above could easily replace the word fat with disability. And I'd argue this holds true for age as well. Disability, like fatness, exists outside the boundaries of acceptable (and therefore unthinkable) forms of femininity, health, and beauty. As Gerschick (2000) explains:

> Bodies are central to achieving recognition as appropriately gendered beings. Bodies operate socially as canvases on which gender is displayed and kinesthetically as the mechanisms by which it is physically enacted. Thus, the bodies of people with disabilities make them vulnerable to being denied recognition as women and men. The type of disability, its visibility, its severity, and whether it is physical or mental in origin mediate the degree to which the body of a person with a disability is socially compromised.

But it's not just about being read as feminine, women with disabilities are also denied the recognition of being beautiful and healthy. Overall, gender, race, (dis)ability, age, and size all exist in the same "pervasive cultural system that stigmatizes certain kinds of bodily variations"

that "functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent—all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such statuses" (Garland-Thomson 2002:5-6).

DISCIPLINING FAT BODIES

As the previous sections have outlined, health, beauty, and gender help to constitute one another and construct the ideal body. In order to look aesthetically pleasing one needs to be thin, but that thinness also demonstrates that you are healthy. And both these processes (i.e. beauty and health) are gendered. However, more so than creating ideal bodies, the norms surrounding health, beauty, and gender ensure that we create disciplined bodies. As Donaghue and Clemitshaw (2012) explain, "it is via the cultural nexus of thinness, femininity, success, health, and happiness that the thin ideal exerts its disciplinary power."

Foucault (1978) argues that modern society has seen a shift in the exercise of power. Rather than merely punish, imprison, or coerce bodies under the threat of death directly, governments seek to encourage its citizens to take responsibility for their own bodies (and thus life) through techniques of surveillance, regulation, and norms. It is these techniques, called biopower, in which power operates through and with the body "achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1978:140). One form of biopower, surveillance, may most famously be seen in Foucault's (1979) use of Jeremy Benthem's design of the panopticon—the circular prison where the guards occupy a watchtower enables them to monitor the prisoners, but not be seen. Eventually, not knowing if and when they are being watched, prisoners begin to police themselves, or become "docile bodies." Outside of prisons, contemporary societies create docile bodies by constantly observing the bodies of the citizens they wish to control through a regulating and normalizing gaze via institutions such as education

and medicine, but also by ensuring the internalization of such disciplinary narratives (Bartky 1990). And this power has become widely pervasive even as it remains hidden. As Foucault (1980:151) explains, the effects of this power "circulate through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and their daily actions."

Within this shift in modern power, biomedicine has become a major institution of social control, scrutiny, and regulation in part because the "health" of the state is seen as dependent on the "health" of its citizens (Murray 2008, Zola 1972). Healthy citizens are crucial to the modern neoliberal state because they keep it functioning with minimal economic burdens, unlike unhealthy persons who are defined as being a drain on the state. In this form of governmentality, it becomes a requirement that people maintain their health so that they can work, participate in the economy, and be seen as productive citizens. Hence the state's interest in monitoring and surveilling the health of its citizens through quantifiable means, such as the BMI (Lupton 1995, Lupton 2013). From this view, medicalizing fat bodies is part of a disciplinary gaze and surveillance that attempts to normalize and control them because they are considered excessive, out of control, and pathological—a threat to society. The regulation of fat bodies is seen in the state sponsored programs that monitor and encourage the weight loss of its citizens (Lupton 2013, Saguy 2012b). For example, regulation occurs through direct campaigns such as Michelle Obama's commitment to *Let's Move!*, having participation in groups like Weight Watchers be tax-deducible, and funding research to better understand and intervene in obesity (Gailey 2014, Lupton 2013, Murray 2008, Pausé 2014a). These government policies and state-sponsored health promotional materials are part of the apparatus of disciplinary power wielded by neoliberal states to regulate, normalize, and discipline its unruly citizens to render them more productive.

In addition, fatphobia, or the stigmatization of fat people, plays a regulatory role by placing the gaze of others upon the fat, pathological body. This can include more subtle forms like clothes and spaces not being made for fat bodies and assessing gazes, but also more direct body-shaming (Boero 2012, Gailey 2014, Lupton 2013, Pausé 2014a). Stigmatization of fat people encourages the use of self-disciplinary practices (i.e. beauty work) to achieve a socially desired body. However, this shaming is not only done by outsiders—we also do it to ourselves through self-regulation or self-surveillance. Rather than rely on coercive external approaches from the state, the government depends upon its citizens internalizing these narratives of fatness and policing themselves. Working from Foucault (1979), Murray (2008:12) explains that the disciplinary power functions by encouraging "individuals to monitor their own conduct and measuring it in relation to dominant health discourses" and thereby taking personal responsibility for themselves. In this paradigm, victim-blaming runs amok—if you are unhealthy or not beautiful you are identified as the cause because of your lifestyle choices, your immorality, and inability to control yourself. This is furthered by the dominant healthism perspective in the U.S. which views "illness as the result of a series of quantifiable risks, with a corresponding view of health as a direct outcome of personal choices" (Donaghue and Clemishaw 2012:416; See Crawford 1980 and Rose 1998).

Personal responsibility narratives are further fueled by the importance of free choice stressed by neoliberal societies. Free choice presumes that citizens use their own assessment of the risks and benefits when making choices about lifestyle behaviors (and commodities). The government, in their support of free markets, seek to "inform" citizens of the risks associated with certain behaviors (Lupton 2013). For example, the government informs us of the dangers of obesity, while also telling us which populations are most at risk (e.g. people of color and poor

populations). However, there are highly established and profitable markets attempting to sell

consumers products that are linked to both gaining and losing weight (e.g. fast food vs. gym

memberships). In neoliberal societies, both are encouraged, but it is up to the consumer/citizen to

make the wise choice and demonstrate self-discipline. In this line of reasoning, if you're fat it is

because you lack self-control and discipline to conform to the standards of "normal" body weight

when given the freedom to choose. As good citizens we must surveil our choices and our bodies

to ensure we don't become unruly. In this way, individual determinants are centered and social

causes such as access to healthcare, discrimination, and economic conditions are ignored

(Anderson, Smith and Sidel 2005, Porter 1997).

However, this disciplinary gaze and self-surveillance is not experienced equally. The

bodily experiences of men and women differ; creating women's bodies as more docile than

men's bodies. Although men and women are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices,

these practices produce a quality of embodiment that is particularly feminine. In Bartky's

(1990:42) much quoted passage she explains this difference:

> The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has
> caked or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo,
> who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle or who, feeling fat,
> monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon,
> a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. This self-
> surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy. It is also the reflection in woman's
> consciousness of the fact that *she* is under surveillance in ways that *he* is not, that
> whatever else she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please or to excite
> (emphasis in original).

As described previously, female bodies are subject to the normalizing and interiorizing gaze

much more than men. Because of women's association with the material body and subsequent

value that's derived from their ability to adhere to the normalized feminine ideal body women

must participate in higher rates of work, or what Foucault (1979) terms practices of self. Because

of the focus on the aesthetics of women's bodies if they gain weight they are increasingly medicalized and as such can be pushed into medical procedures and beauty regimens to regulate what is seen as a personal failure in order to achieve the status of an appropriate woman (Saguy and Ward 2011, Puhl et al. 2008). They must surveil, control, and fit their bodies within feminine body ideals to ensure their status, citizenship, normality, and womanhood. As we can see then health, morality, beauty, and citizenship all become entangled and conflated in this web of governmentality. It is our moral and civic responsibility as good neoliberal citizens to enact proper self-regulation through monitoring our weight and intervening if necessary, especially for women (Pausé 2014a). If we fail to live up to our civic responsibility by attaining and maintaining a "normal" weight then we are characterized as putting a strain on the public.

With such intense gendering, beautifying, and medicalizing as disciplinary forms of power, fat bodies are defined as inherently subversive because they resist discipline. The existence of fat bodies defy normativity in appearance, practice, and stylization (Gailey 2014). Further, women's fatness denies the patriarchal ideal of the perfect female body. But what is even more subversive are fat women who actively reject societal demands of body work, such as dieting, that are expected of them in order to achieve the "ideal" female body. Some groups form a resistance to these disciplinary powers of surveillance and regulation seeking to create a counter-discourse, challenging our commonly held notions about seemingly unruly, pathological, unattractive, and immoral bodies (Meleo-Erwin 2012, Tremain 2006). Body positive influencers are one group of people trying to do this resistive work by challenging the normalization of health and beauty ideals, especially related to fatness, through advocating self-love, inclusivity, and celebrating bodies in all shapes and sizes. However, body positive influencers are not the

only people trying to modify the boundaries of what an acceptable body is. The FAM and fitspiration have also sought to resist these ideals, each with a different focus.

RESISTING NARRATIVES OF NORMATIVE BODIES: FAT ACCEPTANCE AND FITSPIRATION

When it comes to the body, there is tremendous pressure to play by the rules. Our bodies are vulnerable to a disciplinary gaze which compels us to follow social norms of looking and behaving along health, beauty, and gender ideals. But even with this intense pressure to play by the rules, groups have often resisted the constraining ideals of normative bodies. As Frank (1991:47) points out, "the 'government of the body' is never fixed, but always contains oppositional spaces." And these oppositional, resistive groups have been seen in a variety of spaces and times, fighting for a variety of bodily causes. For example, women a part of the second wave feminist movement gathered at the 1968 Miss American Beauty Pageant to protest exclusionary Western beauty ideals and women's objectification by American culture (Kreydatus 2008). At the same time black women held a Miss Black America contest to celebrate black women as beautiful and in defiance of the American cultural norms that upheld whiteness as the standard of beauty. Both groups fought against ideal beauty norms, albeit for different reasons. There is also a long history of groups fighting medicalization and health norms. For instance, there has been much struggle over the medicalization of transgender bodies and Gender Identity Disorder (Loeb 2008, Spade 2013). On the one hand, the "diagnosis" allows access to medical procedures and state recognition. Yet on the other hand, it is limiting to the type of people who can access these resources and defines those who do as pathological. The Black Panthers also fought for increased access to healthcare while simultaneous challenging medical discourses that labeled black people as genetically inferior (Nelson 2011). While these groups have sought a

variety of changes to bodily norms many overlap in their attempts to address access to health care services, inequality and discriminatory practices, and de-medicalizing their bodies marked as pathological.

Although there is a wide variety of groups enacting embodied resistance, defined as "oppositional action or nonaction that defies contextual body norms," (Bobel and Kwan 2011:2) for the purpose of my research I will focus on two that have the most direct ties to body positivity, the fat acceptance movement and fitspiration. Both groups seek to challenge and resist body norms and expand the ideals of what a feminine body can be in two divergent ways—fat and fit bodies. Further, both fat acceptance and fitspiration enact their resistance in ways similar to body positivity—by focusing on fatness and using social media as a platform to disseminate their message, respectively. In the following discussion, I will explore each of these resistance groups, setting them up for later comparisons to body positivity.

The Fat Acceptance Movement

Emerging in the late 1960s, the FAM came about during a heightened time of political and social activism which left its mark on the movement. As Afful and Ricciardelli (2015:454) explain, fat activists "adopted early discursive strategies and approaches to collective organization that reflected the rhetorical influences of [African-American Civil Rights, Gay Liberation, and Feminist Movements]." During this time, two organizations, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and The Fat Underground, emerged to fight for the rights of fat persons.

Founded in 1969 by William Fabrey, a fat admirer who wanted to create a supportive environment for his fat wife, NAAFA focused on being a safe haven for fat persons and offered social opportunities including dances and swim parties (Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008).

Because of the focus on creating a community rather than social justice, NAAFA was seen as an assimilationist organization. In response to this reception, the Fat Underground was born. The Fat Underground was seen as the more radical of the two organizations; organizing public demonstrations, disrupting weight loss lectures, and writing the Fat Liberation Manifesto. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Fat Underground disbanded (Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008). Since the disbandment of the Fat Underground, NAAFA has become more radical by focusing more explicitly on the civil rights aspects of fat acceptance, even sponsoring protests such as the Million Pound March (Lupton 2013). In addition to NAAFA and the Fat Underground, other organizations have developed to fight for fat acceptance including the Association for Size Diversity and Health, an international professional organization that promotes research and services that are health enhancing, but not weight discriminating, and the smaller organizations Pretty, Porky, and Pissed Off and the National Organization of Lesbians of Size (Saguy 2012b).

Although these organizations differ in a multitude of ways, as a whole, their fat activism is explicitly and passionately political and seeks to challenge the medical association of obesity and ill-health by reframing fat bodies as healthy, positive, and attractive and drawing attention to weight-based discrimination and the marginalization of fat persons (Cooper 2016, Lupton 2013). One way in which fat activists achieve these aims is by adopting a social justice frame which appeals to human rights (Epstein 1996, Kwan 2009a). The social justice frame enables fat activists to fight for the right to nondiscriminatory healthcare, the right to refuse weight loss interventions, and the right to be free from ridicule, shame, and harassment. Members of the FAM argue "that it is not fatness itself that causes ill health, but rather the negative social attitudes and portrayals of fat people that lead to their marginalization, shaming,

and…discrimination" (Lupton 2013:30). This frame is further seen in the FAMs campaign to have height and weight be included as protected legal categories because, as they argue, fat people, like other historically disadvantaged groups, need equal protection under the law (Kwan 2009a).

In addition to the social justice frame, the FAM adopts a position which celebrates body diversity and self-love. There is a desire among fat activists to discard the notion of the moral failing of fat people and instead to celebrate and normalize fat bodies (Gailey 2014). To do this, fat activists encourage people to reject the Body Mass Index, which they see as a discriminatory and stigmatizing device rather than as a tool to predict health, and reject beauty standards created, in part, by the mainstream fashion industry by making fat bodies visible and campaigning for companies to make clothes in all sizes (Boero 2012, Bronstein 2015, Connell 2013, Kwan 2009a). Fat acceptance activists then challenge medical and beauty narratives that claim fat is unhealthy and unattractive instead adopting the framework that fat is healthy and attractive and bodily diversity is natural (Gailey 2014, Saguy 2012b).

With the rise of the internet and social media since the 1960s the FAM has moved into digital spaces. The fat acceptance movement has utilized social media, primarily blogs, as a form of political action and resistance to some of the body ideals described above via the "fatosphere," an interconnected network of blogs maintained by fat activists (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Bronstein 2015, Connell 2013, Dickins et al. 2011, Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012, Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013, Lupton 2017a, Trainer et al. 2016). A central component of the fatosphere are "fatshionistas'" fashion blogs. These blogs aim to disrupt normative standards of beauty by making fat bodies visible through images posted to blogs, by creating counter-discourses that resist restrictive dress conventions, and celebrating fat bodies as attractive (Connell 2013,

Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013, Peters 2013). The fatosphere also covers topics such as sexuality, body image, and others aimed at empowering and supporting (primarily) women to resist social pressures to be thin and accept themselves for their current body size (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Bronstein 2015, Dickins et al. 2011, Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012). In essence, members of the FAM are doing everything that I have outlined previously, including presenting a social justice framework and celebrating body diversity, just through the fatosphere instead of physical spaces.

Outlining the history and position of the FAM enabled me to show the ways in which fatness has been previously used in resistance efforts to modify the boundaries of normative bodies. Body positivity seems to be a new iteration or continuation of these efforts given its centering of fatness. It appears that the FAM and body positivity overlap in their missions—celebrating self-love and focusing on fat bodies. The similarities may even become more apparent as FAM continues its foray into social media spaces via the fatosphere since body positivity takes place primarily through social media. Despite its similarity and conflation is body positivity something different than the FAM? Although body positivity focuses on fatness, the lack of fat in the name appears to lend itself to being open and positive about a variety of bodies—something that FAM does not do.

Asking this question about difference allows me to understand how body positive influencers differentiate themselves from this long history of fat activism. If both groups can be understood as responding to the unruly fat body by attempting to include fat bodies within the boundaries of normative and acceptable (feminine) bodies, how do body positive influencers understand themselves as a unique group? Understanding the goals of body positivity and how they differentiate these goals from fat acceptance tells us how they draw on narratives of health,

beauty, gender, and discipline to respond to unruly female bodies, but also illuminates which bodies are deemed more feminine and valuable. While the FAM is explicitly about fatness, is body positivity about more? And if body positivity is more inclusive, are there still bodies left out? By looking at what bodies are still left out, we get a sense of the kind of feminine body that body positivity producers and consumers see as appropriate. Finally, the FAM has been examined extensively, especially through the lenses of gender, health, and beauty, but body positivity has yet to receive this same attention. We must extend this to body positivity because it has grabbed the attention of society in a widespread and mainstream way and has the potential to combat serious individual and structural issues such as eating disorders and discrimination.

Fitspiration

While the FAM attempts to modify the boundaries of feminine body ideals by incorporating fatness, fitspiration (an amalgamation of fitness and inspiration) seeks to expand these same boundaries by incorporating fit, strong, and muscular women. Coming out of fitness communities, fitspiration is a network of influencers on social media who post images, videos, and/or text designed to motivate people to pursue a healthier lifestyle through exercise, clean eating, and self-care (Boepple et al. 2016, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015). By promoting "strong not skinny," fitspo seeks to champion an empowered body image by combating the thin ideal with the seemingly more liberated athletic ideal focused on strength and muscularity (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016). In doing this, fitspo promotes "health and fitness" rather than thinness and weight loss unlike its predecessor thinspiration (also known as thinspo). Both thinspo and fitspo share inspirational imagery on social media with the aim of inspiring users to achieve certain body ideals, but for very different goals (Talbot et al. 2017). One the one hand, thinspo, a product of

the pro-anorexia movement, purposefully upholds beauty and thinness ideals to the greatest extreme by featuring images of emaciated women and inspiring women to lose weight by any means. One the other hand, through the images of women exercising, eating nutritional food, and selfies, fitspo is attempting to shift feminine body ideals by allowing and encouraging women to take on the masculine defined characteristics of athleticism, muscularity, firmness, and strength (Robinson et al. 2017, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017). In making these fit and strong women's bodies visible, fitspiration expands our understandings of what feminine bodies can be. And fitspo is proving to be wildly popular with over 68 million posts on Instagram alone between the hashtags, #fitspo and #fitspiration (as of March 2018).

Given fitspiration influencers' reach, their purported focus on empowerment, and their possible effect on body image, researchers, especially psychologists, have been interested in better understanding the content of fitspiration on websites and social media. Content analyses have demonstrated that although fitspo claims to encourage fitness and activity much of the imagery focuses on the appearance of the body rather than its functionality (Boepple et al. 2016, Carrotte, Prichard and Lim 2017, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016). Further, the appearance of these bodies celebrates and privileges a homogenous female body. One that is young, toned, white, and slim, but not emaciated (Carrotte, Prichard and Lim 2017, Lupton 2017b, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016). In addition to the types of bodies displayed, the way the bodies are displayed is in line with normative portrayals of feminine embodiment. For example, in one study by Australian sociologist Deborah Lupton (2017a:6), women in fitspo were represented in overtly sexualized ways: "working out in tight and skimpy fitness wear or posing in swimsuits that drew attention to their lean and fit bodies." This was also the case with men who were often depicted shirtless or in revealing fitness clothes meant to highlight their muscular bodies (Lupton

2017b). Similarly, Australian psychologists Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) found that a majority of the fitspo images they examined on Instagram featured at least one objectifying aspect, most commonly a focus on a particular body part (e.g. abdominal muscles or legs) rather than the whole individual for both men and women (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016). However, in another study conducted by Australian psychologists, they found that women depicted in fitspo were more likely to have their buttocks emphasized and be sexualized than men and less likely to have their face visible in posts than men demonstrating that this objectification may not be experienced equally (Carrotte, Prichard and Lim 2017).

Although the images depicted on fitspiration websites and social media may not completely dismantle feminine body ideals as they still encourage a particular body, focus on appearance, and sexually objectify female bodies, they still seem to be more resistive than thinspiration images (Boepple and Thompson 2016, Talbot et al. 2017). For example, an interdisciplinary group of researchers in nursing, psychology, and management from the U.K. conducted a content analysis that compared body-focused images with the hashtags thinspiration, fitspiration, and bonespiration across three social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, and WeHeartit) and found that thinspiration and bonespiration content contained more thin and objectified bodies compared to fitspiration (Talbot et al. 2017). In addition, fitspiration featured a greater prevalence of muscles and muscular bodies. Similarly, a content analysis of fitspo and thinspo websites in the U.S. found that thinspo websites featured more content related to losing weight, praising thinness, and providing food guilt messages than fitspo websites (Boepple and Thompson 2016). However, this doesn't mean that fitspiration websites aren't immune from having these messages, they just might have fewer. Fitspo imagery still promotes thinness, stigmatizes fatness, and has dieting restraint and excessive exercising messages similar to

thinspiration (Boepple et al. 2016). Even so, fitspiration seems to be expanding the boundaries of what women's bodies can be by including fit, muscular, and strong bodies even if they remain in line with normative ideals of beauty and health in other ways.

In addition to examining the content of fitspiration imagery researchers have been equally interested in understanding the impact of fitspiration on body image. Looking at Australian undergraduate female students, Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) found that acute exposure to fitspiration led to increased negative mood and bodily dissatisfaction in comparison to travel images. Using the framework of social comparison theory, Robinson et al. (2017) found that acute exposure to athletic ideal and thin ideal images led to increased body dissatisfaction among the Australian female undergraduates in their study, but exposure to muscular ideal images did not. Further, both Robinson et al. (2017) and Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) found that exposure to fitspo led participants to feel more inspired to improve their fitness through exercise. Contrary to Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) and Robinson et al. (2017), Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs (2017) did not find that exposure to fitspo resulted in significantly poorer body image and negative mood compared to neutral images on Instagram among her participants who were female undergraduate students in the South of England and Wales. The fact that these two different populations of undergraduate students differ in the impact of fitspiration on their body image might be telling to how women in different geographical areas might have different relationships or understandings with their own body image, but also fitspiration.

Although fitspiration research is growing there is still much left to study. First, only one of the studies outlined has taken a sociological look at fitspiration, instead most taking a psychological perspective. Although it is important to understand the psychological impact of bodies in this setting it is equally important to understand the social dynamics of fitspiration and

connect what we've previously found in content analyses to sociological and feminist theories of gender and health. What does it mean that previous research shows us fitspiration focuses on the appearance of a homogenous body? What does it matter that the bodies in these images is often sexualized? Like body positivity, fitspiration images tell us something important about what types of feminine bodies are valued in our society even in resistance movements. Further, very few of these articles complicate health discourses, taking for granted that our understandings of what a healthy body is, is socially constructed. For example Talbot et al. (2017) explains that "the findings from [their] study should not be used to suggest that fitspiration is a healthy form of content or that the bodies featured within this content are normal bodies," but doesn't complicate what "healthy content" is and/or "normal bodies" are. By comparing fitspiration and body positivity we can better understand how these two groups of influencers draw from health, beauty, and gender narratives and construct new boundaries of what is considered feminine.

Second, most of the studies examining fitspo are conducted in Australia. Although this doesn't negate their findings, it is quite possible that fitspo images vary based on geography, culture, and algorithms. What might be pulled as top posts in a search of #fitspiration or #bodypositive on Instagram in Australia might lead to very different findings if they were pulled in the U.S. Connected to this, the previous research only examined the image itself and not the captions or comments which may bolster or contextualize the image along issues of gender, health, and beauty and tells us how these images are received. Finally, although fitspiration has been compared to thinspiration, no study has examined fitspiration alongside body positivity. Comparing fitspiration and body positivity enables us to see how two different groups of influencers respond to unruly bodies. Although body positivity is trying to expand understandings of the normative feminine body to include fatness, fitspiration is trying to do the

same just with fit bodies instead. In making these modifications, do they rely on the same narratives of health, beauty, gender, and disciplinary power? Do they both understand this as a form of empowerment? How might they try to distance themselves from each other and highlight the bodies they see as more feminine? Overall, comparing fitspo and body positivity enables us to see the similarities and differences among movements resisting normative ideals of female bodies by how they draw boundaries on what they see as feminine/unfeminine, healthy/unhealthy, and beautiful/unattractive, but also to see which bodies aren't being represented and/or valued by these influencers.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is becoming a major aspect of bodily resistance campaigns. The FAM utilizes blogging in their attempts to reframe fat bodies as healthy, positive, and attractive while fitspiration shares images via Instagram to inspire women to get fit and strong through exercise. And this is the case for body positivity. Body positivity takes place mostly via social media sites, like Instagram, where users post selfies of their non-normative bodies, tell stories of their experiences, and encourage themselves and others to "love your body." Further, given mass media's important role in communicating beauty ideals and medicalizing fatness it's important to adjust this focus to the role of social media in these endeavors especially as people turn more of their lives towards these sites. For example, the Pew Research Center (2018) reports that 69% of Americans use some type of social media, up from 5% in 2005. And social media has become a daily part of our routine with around sixty percent of Instagram users and seventy-four percent of Facebook users visiting these sites at least once a day (Center 2018).

Clearly, social media is becoming a ubiquitous part of many people's lives. As Lupton (2015:165) argues, "our bodies are literally constantly in physical contact with digital devices or

rendered into digital formats via digital technologies." But what is social media and how does it differ from other mediums we've seen before? In addition, what does this difference say about the use of social media in activism and/or bodily and gender resistance? Treem et al. (2016:770) describes social media as having three attributes: "(i) they are web-based, (ii) they provide a means for individuals to connect and interact with content and other users, and (iii) they provide the means for users to generate and distribute content on the respective platforms." Social media is an interesting context in which to examine bodily issues because digital technology helps to constitute selfhood, embodiment, and social relations in ways which are both qualitatively different from, yet similar to, other mediums that we've seen before (Lupton 2015).

First, and most relevant to my study, digital technologies, including social media, have provided people the opportunity to create their own content, including content concerning their own and others' bodies (Beer and Burrows 2010, Lupton 2015, Lupton 2017b). Consumers have moved beyond passive reception of print and visual mass media, such as television, and are now asked to participate in its creation and dissemination of content in what has been dubbed "prosumption" (a combination of production and consumption) (Beer and Burrows 2010, Ritzer 2014). On social media, users are both the sources and receivers of original or remixed (e.g. memes, gifs) content and thus actively shape what they see and create. This contrasts with what we've come to experience in mass media where users do not have a similar access to the means of production.

This type of prosumption helps to constitute new kinds of visual productions and audiences by facilitating constant visual documentation of one's own life from the highly public to the highly intimate. Indeed, Lupton (2015) contends that social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook encourage the production and circulation of greater intimate knowledge

about and between users than ever before. Through status updates and images, we create a

chronological account of the various aspects of our lives and geographical movements in an

almost confessional style. Lupton (2015:29) further explains this:

> by both revealing the intimate details of their lives and responding to others' reactions, users may engage in self-reflection and self-improvement as well as participating in the evaluation of others' actions and practice. Such social media use may therefore be thought as an ethical and social practice that contributes not only to the self-formation but reproduction of social norms and expectation to which people are expected to adhere.

This might be most heavily seen in the phenomenon of the "selfie," photographic self-

portraits taken by oneself using a cellphone or similar digital device. The selfie, in particular, is

of interest because it has become the standard representation of the body (and self) in social

media (Lupton 2015). The use of selfies and other visual images allows users to discuss and

visually represent theirs and others' bodies incessantly as part of using social media.

Specifically, Instagram, a platform developed entirely around images, focuses on uploading,

curating, and sharing images of the body. The ubiquity of the selfie demonstrates that users enjoy

the opportunity to shape their bodily image in online forums in ways that allow them full control

of what the image looks like. Further, the selfie expands what bodies can be represented given

that "ordinary" people can engage in the personal practice of representing their unique body on

social media (Lupton 2015).

From thinspiration and pro-anorexia accounts to tattoo and body-modification devotees,

those engaged in self-harming practices and the variety of accounts devoted to transgender and

queer bodies, and not to mention pornography and sexual fetish sites—bodies are displayed in a

multitude of ways and engaged in a variety of practices that are both normative and go beyond

the norm. This includes body positivity. Body positivity displays bodies that are not readily

available in mass media and if are they are they are often framed in the pathological, immoral,

and unattractive ways described previously. For example, like "Fat Monica" in *Friends*, the 2018 release of Netflix's *Insatiable*, deploys the use of a fat suit on thin actor Debby Ryan to demonstrate her transformation from grotesque, out of control, and unattractive to beauty pageant queen posed to get the guy (Guillaume 2018, Richardson 2016). Instead, body positivity challenges that trope by advocating self-love, inclusivity, and celebrating bodies in all shapes and sizes by simply making visible fat bodies in positive ways via social media. Social media has enabled body positivity the opportunity to create their own positive content about fat bodies, something previously less available in other forms of print and visual media.

However, although digital platforms might function as a site of empowerment and identity formation, they also provide the means for a web of surveillance, self-monitoring, and governmentality (Baer 2016). When people's bodies, normative or otherwise, become increasingly digitized through social media the potential for ever more detailed surveillance becomes evident (Lupton 2015). Social media, by definition, requires users to engage in a social and participatory surveillance whereby we take part in voluntary watching practices of ourselves and others. Through likes and comments, we learn to self-monitor, censor, and adapt in order to present a version of the ideal self that other users will respond to and we do the same thing in return (Duffy 2017, Treem et al. 2016). In this reciprocal surveillance we expect people to observe and comment on our content and it is a motivating force for prosumption. And depending on what content is most widely liked users reconfigure their bodies to ensure continued observation and support of the content they create (Duffy 2017, Lupton 2015).

Second, compared to the physical labor of workers, digital technology has changed the way economic value is produced and distributed. Drawing from Smith (2013) and Thrift (2006), Lupton (2014:22) argues, "where once it was the physical labor of workers that produced surplus

value, now the intellectual labor of the masses has monetary value, constituting a new information economy in which thought has become reified, public, and commodified." This is attributed to what Thrift (2005) calls "knowing capitalism": due to the increasing rate of innovation and invention the capitalist economic system has turned to information as a source of profit. Digital technology has contributed to this move because it has changed the way knowledge is produced and made it easily accessible. In addition, each act of communication via social media is transformed into aggregated digital data, a valuable entity which has become commoditized for use by commercial and government organizations (Lupton 2015). This digital data and the content of social media itself are used by corporations to advertise and sell direct to consumers. Through utilizing the excitement of consumer communities, the automating and mass dissemination of word of mouth, and the using algorithms to make suggestions about future purchases, knowledge about the product and consumer are created and generate more value than the sale itself (Lupton 2015, Thrift 2005). Marketers can more easily track how their campaigns are doing, launch new products, and see who might be interested in buying their product.

More relevant to my study is the way in which corporations actively seek to monetize content sharing by co-opting the creative efforts of social media users (Bird 2011). To sell more products and lower the cost of advertising, corporations seek to exploit the prosumption of users by using them as marketers for their products. This can be through direct sponsorship of influencers, but also through encouraging every day users to post selfies or photos of themselves using the products with a corresponding hashtag identifying the brand. And much of our bodily performances on social media can and have been used for monetary gain, with or without our permission. Within the scant literature on body positivity, both Miller (2016) and Cwynar-Horta (2016) show that body positivity has been commodified by corporations, often at the expense of

their transgressive messages. For example, Cwynar-Horta (2016) found that while some body positive influencers on Instagram started out challenging the dominant ideal of the thin body, they eventually used their platform to promote detox teas that assist in weight loss and claim to shed belly fat. Further, some influencers went on to use Instagram to sell a variety of products from sponsors, such as lipstick and subscription boxes, to promoting their personal published books and yoga classes.

In another example, Miller (2016) found that the transgressive message of body positivity was co-opted and re-packaged by a celebrity yogi in an image rebranding effort after poor press. Using the hashtag #loveyourbody, the radical ethos of body positivity was decontextualized and erased; positioning the ideal yogi body as a white, thin, heterosexual, and female that loved herself at the center (Miller 2016). A similar case appeared in January 2018, when Aeire, an intimate apparel brand owned by American Eagle Outfitters, introduced its #AerieREAL campaign under the promise of "No retouching. Body positivity. Girl power." (Figure 1). The campaign centered around gold medal gymnast, Aly Raisman, Yara Shahidi, an actress in the Freeform network comedy *Grown-ish*, singer-songwriter Rachel Platten, and English model and body positive activist Iskra Lawrence in a mix of loungewear and underwear. Like Miller (2016) found, all but Lawrence could be described as thin (yet she is still small and has an hourglass body shape), and Shahidi, the only non-white woman in the group. Given the economic implications of social media and the already evident co-optation of body positivity for commercial gains, it is important to think critically about what this economic dimension means for what gets posted. Might the economic incentives mean that certain bodies are excluded because they are too transgressive and thus don't sell? Further, might body positive influencers

draw more heavily on normative gender, health, and beauty narratives in order to make them more accessible and accepted by wider audiences?

Even with these dangers of co-optation, social media has found a space among activist groups and influencers. Although Instagram, as well as other social media sites like Twitter, have contributed to normative understandings of bodies to often negative effects, it is also a potential tool that can be employed to challenge and expand our understandings of what a healthy, beautiful, and/or feminine body is. This is particularly salient given the rise in "hashtag activism" over the last ten years as seen by the Occupy movement and Black Lives Matter (Bonilla and Rosa 2015, Gleason 2013). Tufekci and Freelon (2013:843) explain that digital technologies, like social media, are so influential in activism that "it no longer makes sense to ask if digital technologies will exercise influence; rather, we can and should be looking at how and, also crucially, through which mechanisms." Recent hashtag activist campaigns, such as the feminist #Free_CeCe and #YesAllWomen, support the notion that social media can encourage social change by, at minimum, disseminating and challenging knowledge and creating a way for people to engage collectively with others around a common cause (Baer 2016, Bonilla and Rosa 2015, Castells 2013, Fischer 2016, Gleason 2013). The burgeoning research on hashtag activism shows that social media has become a powerful site for documenting and challenging political authority and modes of social control (Castells 2013, Lupton 2015, Treem et al. 2016). According to Castells (2013), social media can provide an autonomous space where individuals feel as though they can speak out and resist oppression. This is in part due to the sharing and connecting that social media allows in a seemingly safe place that is difficult for authorities to control. Social media enables individuals to come together outside of the confines of their geographical location and at relatively low cost to collectively create, debate, and engage in ideas aimed at changing

the values of society and achieve justice and recognition (Castells 2013, Earl and Kimport 2011, Treem et al. 2016).

However, this doesn't mean that social media as a form of resistance and/or activism is free from problems or critiques. Of particular concern to this study is that not all people have equal access to the internet and thus do not have equal access to engage in this type of embodied resistance or other forms of social media activism (Fuchs 2013, Lupton 2015). Many groups lack the expertise and access to digital technologies, and thus there is a disparity in those who can use social media for activist purposes. Because of this, certain groups may not have their concerns met and may be excluded from existing social media campaigns. Even among those who do have the means and expertise to access these channels, inequality persists in online activism. Fischer (2016) explains that although social media allows for broader reach and raises public consciousness, the centrality of whiteness in organizing permeates online activism limiting its transformative effects. But algorithms also contribute to inequality in social media by garnering search results which stereotype marginalized populations or ignore them altogether (Noble 2018). Therefore, in any study on groups who participate in resistance through social media, like body positivity, we must be concerned with how race, and other intersecting oppressions, influence who is able and allowed to participate. Further it is important to examine who gets represented in these campaigns as a result. Are black/old/disabled bodies able to be body positive?

Notwithstanding these important issues, as described above, both the FAM and fitspiration utilize social media to challenge the normative feminine body. For the FAM that is most readily seen in blogging sites, like Tumblr, where fat activists discuss a variety of topics including fashion, the stigma they face due to their physical size, frustrations with diets and

doctors, and the like (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Bronstein 2015, Connell 2013, Dickins et al. 2011, Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012). According to Pausé (2014a), by blogging fat women feel empowered and supported to resist social pressures to be thin, to accept their bodies at their current size, and to push back against societal narratives of fatness by presenting an opposing picture of fatness as beautiful and happy to followers (Pausé 2014a). Fitspiration uses Instagram to challenge normative female body ideals by making visible and celebrating fit and strong female bodies through images. Like the FAM, fitspo seeks to present an opposing picture of the female body; in this instance, one that can be muscular.

Given the FAM's push for greater acceptance of fat bodies and fitspiration's use of Instagram it is not surprising to see body positivity take shape on social media. Feminist activists' foot-hold online and the constraining ideals on bodies concerning beauty, health, and gender normalized in the United States further contribute to the means and motivations for body positivity's online presence. Digital technologies, like social media, have provided feminist activists with the means to mount resistive campaigns like body positivity, among others such as #metoo and #YesAllWomen. Baer (2016:18) argues that "digital platforms offer great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge." In addition, members of other socially marginalized groups, including people with disabilities and people who identify as queer or transgender, have also found the internet to be a source of support and political mobilization (Barker 2008, Ellis and Goggin 2014, Soriano 2014). At the center of many of these political uses of social media is the body which represents "a provocative and risky space for an emergent feminist politics that moves away from an emphasis on equality and rights pursued through conventional legal and legislative channels" (Baer

2016:18). Given the well-known discussion that fat is a feminist issue (see Chrisler 2012, Fikkan and Rothblum 2012, Saguy 2012a) and the rise in hashtag feminism, body positivity seems to be at the perfect intersection for exploring how social media influencers modify the normative constraints on the feminine body and to what extent they draw on the gendered, medicalized, and beautified narratives described above.

RESEARCH PROBLEM: BODY POSITIVITY

The extant literature on body positivity shows that body positive influencers are engaging in resistance similar to the fat acceptance movement via social media (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Darwin 2017, Sastre 2014b). Both Sastre (2014b) and Darwin (2017) examined body positivity through popular websites, with the former seeking to explore how the body is conceptualized and enacted via body positivity sites, and the latter examining how fat versus hairy bodies are given attention via the comments section on popular media sites, like *Huffington Post*, with each finding contradictions within body positivity even as they attempt to resist normative beauty standards. Sastre (2014b) found that body positive websites fostered particular paths of participation by encouraging and displaying specific kinds of photographic images and textual stories predicated on authenticity, exposure, and transformation. For example, contributors to the three websites examined were required to represent their body positive ethos through exposing their bodies in images that highlighted their flaws, such as their stomach. This required contributors to be in their underwear or nude furthering their exposure, but also increasing their claims to authenticity. In addition, an essential component to participating in body positivity required a story of transformation in which contributors overcame hardship in their journey to self-acceptance. This path to participation demonstrates that there is a right and wrong way to perform body positivity and these paths often reflect the very narratives of conformity and

regulation they sought to reject. In particular, Sastre (2014b) argues that the discourse of transformation is similar to those seen in makeover programs like *The Biggest Loser* where fatness is represented as the material manifestation of emotional pain that one must overcome. Further, she argues that the images of half to fully naked bodies continue the disciplinary practice of surveillance. Although Sastre (2014b) believes these websites are well-intentioned they ultimately continue to constrain bodies through certain means of representation. Finally, Sastra (2014:930) alludes to the fact that the bodies depicted on these websites are primarily bodies that are "not-quite thin enough to stand in as an ideal" yet "not-quite large enough to incite panic," though she does little to explain or expand on this idea. However, this might highlight another limitation on how and what types of bodies are represented via body positivity.

Similarly, Darwin (2017) found that despite claiming to be about all non-conforming bodies, body positivity centered fat bodies over hairy bodies, therefore privileging certain non-conforming bodies over others, and the notion of a right way to be body positive. Darwin (2017) argues that the body positive campaigns "Natural Beauty" and "Hair Everywhere," which focused on body hair on women's underarms, legs, and pubic regions, received more negative attention than the "Real Women in Lingerie" campaign centered on women's fat bodies. In comparison to fatness, hairiness was seen to epitomize a pariah femininity with commenters identifying hairiness as more deviant to practices of femininity and threatening to gender hegemony (Darwin 2017). Given that hairiness is associated more with masculinity while fatness is more associated with femininity, having members of body positivity center fatness rather than hairiness may make the movement more palatable to a wider audience because it is more gender normative. In attempts to expand the boundaries of acceptable feminine bodies, body positive influencers may take smaller steps, incorporating or highlighting one non-normative bodily

characteristic, rather than many or more radical ones in order to seem more legitimate. However, this might also be fueled by corporations who want to capitalize on the publicity of body positivity. Looking at Instagram, Cwynar-Horta (2016) found that though body positivity was originally intended to use social media to challenge beauty ideals, the commodification by corporations has led to it being represented by conventionally attractive, thin white women. This is further seen in Miller's (2016) study on yoga blogs, magazines, and a hashtag campaign that found that yoga companies have commercialized body positivity in a way that positions the ideal yogi body as white, thin, heterosexual, and female.

However, the one study that focuses specifically on men's experience with body positivity is a bit less critical of body positivity than those previously described (Caruso and Roberts 2017). In their research, Australian sociologists Caruso and Roberts (2017) explore how men construct, represent, and perform masculinity on the Tumblr site "Body Positivity for Guys." They found that this blog demonstrated a more inclusive construction of masculinity that was pro-gay, anti-racist, and anti-misogynistic. Male contributors to the blog resisted and challenged dominant hegemonic norms of masculinity by expanding the boundaries of what masculine men could do. For example, men on this site were encouraged to be emotionally vulnerable, offer homosocial support, utilize feminine language (e.g. referring to themselves and others as pretty or cute), and demonstrate a range of sexual preferences and behaviors without homophobic retaliation. Further, this site was particularly inclusive of a variety of bodies given their support and representation of black and trans bodies in ways not seen or addressed in the previous studies (Caruso and Roberts 2017).

These few studies on body positivity demonstrate that although influencers are using digital technology, including social media, to disseminate their perspective on non-normative

bodies, resistance to feminine ideals via this outlet is complicated. Resistance to normative understandings of gender, beauty, and health in attempts to modify boundaries of feminine bodily norms is not an "either-or story" (Bobel and Kwan 2011). Bobel and Kwan (2011:2) argue, "every action…potentially contains elements of both resistance and accommodation. At times, resistance is a clever and complicated dance of negotiation, and it is rarely a zero-sum game…resistance is multifaceted." For example, some websites and campaigns, like the ones Darwin (2017) and Sastre (2014b) examined, transgress gender in only one site of non-conformity, fatness. This may demonstrate the ways in which body positivity compromises its original, more radical messaging of inclusion and positivity in order to sustain their group and message at large. However, empirically we know little about body positivity's "dance of negotiation." Further, we know little about how this might take form in social media contexts outside of blogging, and in relation to normative understandings of not only gender, but health and beauty as well. The importance at looking at Instagram in particular is that it has 1 billion active users meaning that it had a wide reach (Instagram 2019). Further, Instagram enables more quick and direct interactions among people and centers images which is important when examining issues of representation and beauty.

Previous research, especially in fat studies and body positivity, has often tackled the subjects of health, gender, and beauty separately, taking for granted that in our everyday experiences these are often conflated and lack the theoretical separateness as portrayed in research. For example, although, Darwin (2017) and Caruso and Roberts (2017) examine femininity and masculinity in body positivity, respectively, neither explore how these issues of gender are complicated by narratives health and beauty. Although the previous work on body positivity demonstrates that it might be constrained, few explore how in their campaigns to resist

normative body ideals, they might draw on normative discourses of gender, health, and beauty to bolster their claims which is important for understanding how resistance is negotiated and is often constrained by prevailing discourses. In addition, the work by Sastre (2014b), Miller (2016), Cwynar-Horta (2016), and Darwin (2017) allude that either by choice or by commercialization, body positivity might not be for all bodies. My research specifically sets out to examine the entanglement of gender, health, and beauty as body positive influencers set out to modify understandings of feminine body ideals. Further, I question to what extent body positive influencers use and re-shape these discourses and who is left out in these modifications. By understanding these pieces, I can better understand the embeddedness of these discourses in our culture, but also greater understand issues of privilege.

As mentioned previously, body positivity's attempt at bodily transgression is complicated, not only because of its constructions of gender, health, and beauty, but also given its similarity to and conflation with the fat acceptance movement. In addition, body positivity utilizes Instagram in similar ways to fitspiration groups. Body positivity, the FAM, and fitspiration all seek to expand the understandings of the normative feminine body albeit for seemingly different ends (i.e. fat vs. muscularity) and through different means (i.e. via social media or in person). Examining how body positive influencers understand the goals of the group and how they differentiate themselves from other groups will enable me to more clearly understand what their goals are and how they are or aren't achieving them. Further, examining how these goals (and bodies) are represented on Instagram illuminate which bodily characteristics are most represented. Which types of bodies are most worthy of fighting for? By examining who and/or what is left out of body positivity, we get a sense of the kind of feminine body that body positive influencers see as appropriate. Even as groups attempt to modify gender

and create a more inclusive and accepting space some characteristics of femininity may remain more salient and untouchable telling us about race, ability, and age privileges.

To better understand to what extent body positivity modifies understandings of femininity and related body ideals, including race, age, and ability; and to understand to what extent body positivity accommodates and resists the related discourses of health and beauty, I ask the following research questions:

1. What are the goals of body positive influencers? Do these goals vary among influencers?

    a. How/do they differentiate their goals from related groups such as the fat acceptance movement and fitspiration?

2. What bodies are represented in body positivity and fitspiration Instagram posts, and how are femininity, health, and beauty displayed in the bodies and non-bodies (i.e. quotes, food, objects) represented?

    a. How do body positivity and fitspiration Instagram posts differ in regard to femininity, health, and beauty?

3. How are body positivity Instagram posts received by Instagram followers?

Knowing the goals of body positive influencers enables me to examine how they understand femininity, health, and beauty, and if these are different from normative conceptions of the female body (Question 1). For example, a goal of body positive influencers may be to dispel stereotypes that fat women can't be fit. In doing so, influencers are drawing on normative conceptions that fit equals healthy, but also expands the notion of femininity to include fit fat women. However, understanding how body positive influencers differentiate their goals from related groups is also important in that their notion of fit might be different from how they see fitspiration defining fit (e.g. fit equals visible muscles and thinness) which demonstrates how

influencers are expanding the discourses of health. Question 2 also helps to address my underlying research question by continuing what was laid out by Question 1, but via social media spaces. Examining both body positivity and fitspiration Instagram posts enables me to see which bodies are represented and how they are represented. Do both body positivity and fitspiration posts feature predominantly white women? Are these women displaying normative forms of feminine beauty through make-up, sexual objectification, or certain color motifs? Exploring these questions allows me to understand how each group sees and represents femininity and if one is more expansive than the other. Finally, my last research question (Question 3) allows me to examine how these modifications of femininity, health, and beauty are received. For instance, maybe I find that body positivity is inclusive of all bodies including those that differ by race, age, and ability and encourages others to not care whether fat is healthy as long as the fat person is happy, but in response followers comment that the post glorifies obesity. In this interaction, although body positive influencers have tried to modify the boundaries, followers have not received what is intended. If these modifications are not received positively, then it bears on understanding the extent to which body positivity is making changes or challenging our understandings of femininity, health, and beauty on a larger scale.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

To address these research questions, I employed both in-depth, semi-structured interviews with body positive influencers and a content analysis of Instagram posts and comments. Qualitative methods were most suitable for this project because of (1) its emphasis on meaning; (2) exploratory qualities and; (3) iterative process. First, qualitative methods typically focus on human subjectivity or the meanings that participants attach to specific events or to their lives (Schutt 2001). As Gillham (2000:10) explains, "qualitative methods are essentially descriptive and inferential in character…and focus primarily on the kind of evidence…that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on." Qualitative research is based on a desire to discover and describe the complex patterns of human behavior and experience. In this way, research then revolves around answering questions which "stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:8). This was important to my work because my research questions sought to understand the meaning influencers gave to femininity, health, and beauty through the experience of body positivity via social media.

In addition to the emphasis on process and meaning, qualitative methods are also well-suited for exploratory research. Rather than testing a specific hypothesis, exploratory research involves understanding the "how" and "why" which emerges from a research setting and to investigate phenomena where little is known about the matter (Schutt 2001). In this sense, qualitative methods proved themselves useful for this study because little academic research has been conducted on body positivity. Taking an exploratory qualitative approach to looking at body positivity and its relationship with femininity enabled me to ask broader questions about what influencers' goals are and how they relate to gender, health, and beauty in order to have a better understanding of what this phenomenon even is. Furthermore, because of this exploratory

nature, qualitative research offers an iterative process whereby I was able to continually reexamine my position, interview guide, and coding scheme at every level of the qualitative process. For example, in my content analysis I was able to modify my coding scheme to add codes which addressed aspects of personal responsibility (e.g. no excuse not to work out).

Given the proliferation of body positivity on social media, previous research has rightfully focused its attention on collecting data from websites (Caruso and Roberts 2017, Cwynar-Horta 2016, Miller 2016, Sastre 2014b). This research continued this tradition by focusing on posts on Instagram but furthers the empirical research on body positivity by interviewing influencers and examining comments of posts as well. In doing this, I gained the perspective of the producers of content, and also how this content was received by followers. This allowed for a comparison between what producers say they create, what is actually circulating for people to consume, and how Instagram users respond. Further, I was able to broaden and contextualize what I observed on Instagram by what my influencers described body positivity is supposed to be. Having two data sets helped me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of body positivity and how influencers understand what it means to feminine by capturing different dimensions of the phenomenon (Hancké 2009). Using both interviews and analysis of posts created a more complete picture of the ways in which influencers draw boundaries of what is and isn't feminine and how this is or isn't distinct from other groups such as fitspiration and the FAM.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted semi-structured interviews in order to gather a wide range of information about body positivity based upon the experiences and reflections of my participants (Hesse-Biber 2014). I prepared a specific interview guide, but included open-ended questions allowing me to

explore new topics as they arose (see Appendix A). This allowed for consistency in the questions participants are asked, but also flexibility for participants to tell me their stories in ways most meaningful to them and in a conversational style. Participants were able to discuss topics in their own terms, from their point of view, and in contexts specific to their situations (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999, Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Schutt 2001). This allows for meanings and processes to be identified, interpreted, and conveyed from the source. Further, given the difficulty in talking about gender, the flexibility of this method and interview style enabled me to better grasp the nuances and complexities of the issue. Topics covered in the interview guide include demographic data; histories of involvement in body positivity; goals for the movement and how these are seen to differ from those of other groups; the role of social media; and their ideas about femininity, health, and beauty. Interviews took place either by phone or Skype/FaceTime based on the preference and location of the participant and lasted 50 to 120 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In all, I interviewed 12 body positive influencers popular in the United States. I attempted to have a larger sample, but recruiting participants was much more difficult than I anticipated. I contacted over one hundred body positive influencers and was only able to attain 12 interviews. Most requests went unanswered, some answered but inconsistency in response to emails made it difficult to schedule a time to conduct the interview, and some wanted monetary compensation which I was unable to provide. Although, having more participants would have allowed my study to be more representative, generalizable, and have more theoretical saturation, I did my best to get as many as possible. Body positive influencers were defined as people who use Instagram for body positive causes (e.g. their bio mentions body positivity in some way; they have been put on "who to follow" lists for body positivity; consistently have posts which

mention body positivity in some way), have a minimum of 10,000 followers, and who post at least once a week. However, after encountering difficulty in recruiting participants, I began to allow influencers with less than 10,000 to be interviewed for this study. There were no restrictions based on gender, race, age, sexuality, or other similar identity characteristics. Upon receiving IRB approval, participants were recruited through a multistep convenience and snowball sampling method. First, I recruited initial participants by asking prominent body positive influencers directly to take part. Prominent body positive influencers were identified by my personal knowledge of the movement, doing searches on Instagram, and looking at "who to follow" lists.[1] Then, I used a snowball sampling method, gaining recommendations of potential interviewees from my original participants.

Despite the difficulty in recruitment, my sample is relatively diverse (Table I). The age range of my participants is 24 to 37, with an average age of 30. Seven influencers identified as white, three as black, and two as Latinx. Of the 12 participants, 9 identified as a woman, female, or cis-gender woman, 1 as a transgender woman, 1 as a queer femme[2], and 1 as a non-binary femme. In relation to their sexual orientation, 6 identified as straight or heterosexual, 3 queer, 2 pansexual[3], and 1 as "mostly straight." Over half were unmarried, single, or divorced (N=7), while the rest were married (N=4). Only one had children. Further, the influencers were well-educated. All participants were in the process of completing or had completed a bachelor's degree. In addition, six had post-baccalaureate training, three of which had completed a master's degree. A majority of the influencers were self-employed, or their employment was related to the

---

[1] An example of the "who to follow" lists: https://www.self.com/story/body-positive-instagram-accounts
[2] Femme is an identity that performs femininity that refuses to approximate patriarchal norms of femininity that reserves gender expression for the sole use of cis-gender, female-bodied persons (Eves 2004).
[3] Pansexuality is understood as individuals who feel they are sexually, emotionally, spiritually, and romantically attracted to any person regardless of gender or sex (Belous and Bauman 2017).

work they do with body positivity, such as blogger, speaker, author, or model. Finally, the number of followers influencers had ranged from 3,991 to 506,000 with an average of 163,9000. Overall, while my sample is diverse in race, age, and sexuality, they are all relatively class privileged.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The second set of data for this study came from publicly available Instagram posts—posts featuring the hashtag #bodypositive or #fitspiration and posts from the body positive influencers I interviewed. As I noted above, body positivity takes place most prominently on Instagram, and thus this platform is the best site for examining issues related to the topic. Combining visual imagery, captions, and hashtags, Instagram is a social media mobile application (also known as an app) and feature-limited website that allows users to share and comment on photos among their 1 billion active users (Instagram 2019). Both hashtags, #bodypositive and #fitspiration, are designed to indicate participation in their respective online communities at all levels (including prominent influencers and every day Instagram users), provide context for an image, and provide a searchable tag. Each hashtag was chosen because they are not connected to any specific person, celebrity, brand, or campaign and because of their prominence and popularity, having millions of posts being tagged with them. Further, hashtags are essential for searching relevant content on Instagram and thus choosing and using these hashtags was important for data collection.

In addition to the publicly available Instagram posts featuring the hashtag #bodypositive or #fitspiration, I also sampled posts from the body positive influencers I interviewed. I did this to ensure that I obtained a variety of types of posts—from prominent influencers all the way down to more casual users of the hashtag #bodypositive, and also to address how body positivity

is received. Being prominent and popular influencers of body positivity, their posts receive much attention (i.e. getting the most likes and comments). Therefore, to ensure that I have an accurate representation of the movement and to ensure that I have an adequate number of comments to examine, it was important to sample posts that were more likely to have higher numbers of comments. Further, examining posts from interviewees added to my understandings of their goals for body positivity, their use of social media in achieving these goals, and more knowledge on how they represent and/or modify norms of femininity.

For the purpose of this study, both the photo and caption (and thus any other hashtags placed in the caption) of an Instagram post served as data and were used to address research question 2. It was important to take into account both the photo and caption during coding and analysis because "each provides something different and complementary to the viewer…work[ing] together to create meaning" (Pennington 2016:4). To address question 3, the comments of Instagram posts were also used as a source of data. As Laestadius (2016:15) explains, "comments and likes can add new meaning to posts…[and] researchers seeking to understand user engagement, the effects of posts, or meaning creating will want to capture and find a way to make use of these data."

To collect Instagram posts for my qualitative content analysis I engaged in both random and purposive sampling by using Instagram's search function on their website rather than their mobile phone app, and through the use of the website Iconosquare, an analytic program that allows users to sort and filter Instagram posts. I made this decision because the website was more suitable for capturing and storing the posts via screenshots through Iconosquare, data-capturing software from OneNote, and copy/paste functions than in the app. This made it easier to import the data into the NVivo 12 Plus software program, which aided in data analysis.

In examining posts across Instagram's app and website and Iconosquare at the same time, I found that there were both similarities and differences between the posts that come up in searches that I want to address. First, while the posts that come up across all 3 platforms have similarities (i.e. some of the same posts come up on all platforms), they are not totally identical; there is some variability in terms of what posts come up in searches across platforms. That said, two users on two separate phones who searched #bodypositive on Instagram's app at the same time could also garner different results. Instagram utilizes complex algorithms that influence which posts come up on any given device, program (i.e. Iconosquare), or through the app or website. Thus, any differences I would see in sampling the website instead of the app would happen either way. Instagram's use of algorithms creates some level of randomness that I could not control for, but this would have been the case for all researchers and users. By using only one platform, the website, I at least generated a sample that was not influenced by differences across platforms.

Second, in the search function of both the app and website, the search compiles "top" and "recent" results (Figures 2 and 3). However, this differs slightly between the two platforms. In the app, both the top and recent results are separated by two tabs and the results are seemingly endless, loading new posts continuously as you scroll. On the website, instead of two tabs, the top posts are placed above the recent posts and only consist of 9 of the top posts, while the recent posts, below, are like the app where new posts populate as you scroll. Iconosquare does not distinguish between top and recent posts, pulling all available posts based on the filters set, but in a manner similar to the recent section of Instagram (Figure 4). As I will describe below, this difference of top and recent posts on the website means I sampled the posts differently than I

might have using the app, but again, it was consistent by platform, and the website proved more suitable for data collection.

I sampled 210 posts that featured either the hashtag #bodypositive (N=105) or #fitspiration (N=105). To be selected for this study, the post had to be in English, be a photo rather than a video[4], and have a minimum of three comments. The sample was collected on 15 random days between the months of June 2018 and August 2018 (5 days per month). The days were picked by a random number generator. For example, the month of June consists of 30 days; prior to June I used a random number generator to pick 5 numbers between 1 and 30 that corresponded to the days in June. Since the random number generator picked 8, 11, 18, 26, and 30, I collected data on June 8, 11, 18, 26, and 30. This was done another 2 times for the months of July and August. In addition, I varied the time of day I sampled the posts.

On data collection days, I searched each hashtag using Iconosquare to filter results based on the criteria outlined above. From the "recent" posts, I sampled five, choosing the sixth of each post based again on a random number generator. From the "top" posts, I sampled two posts that had the most comments. Sampling the ones with the most comments demonstrated a heightened probability of being received by others and added to the number of comments I could examine. Because the top posts could not be filtered using Iconosquare, I sampled from Instagram's website directly. Further, because there are only nine posts available per sampling period, I was limited in the amount of posts I could sample. For instance, on some data collection days, of the nine top posts, two were videos, one was in Spanish, and another few had no comments. This greatly limited the amount of "top" posts I could sample from. However, I was lucky that for

---

[4] In March 2016 Instagram introduced the ability to post 60-second videos. I choose not to analyze videos because of the difficulty in capturing and storing such data and because they prove to be far less popular than photos. For example, between April 4, 2018 and April 13, 2018 only 7,840 videos were posted to Instagram with the hashtag #bodypositive compared to 70,960 photos.

each data collection day I was able to sample two. I chose to include them in my data collection despite this difficulty because they serve an important aspect of my research given that "top"-ness indicates some algorithmic form of specialness.

I also sampled 54 Instagram posts from the body positive influencers I interviewed. I made the decision to include these posts because they added to and bolstered the findings of the previous posts, but also added to the sample of comments since these posts had a higher number of comments per post given the influencers' expansive followings. Therefore, these posts aided in the analysis of how body positivity is received by others, but also told me how the most prominent influencers represent body positivity and how this differed from posts tagged #bodypositive. Unlike the previous collection of posts, these posts were selected using a non-random purposive sampling method—selecting posts that had the highest number of comments between June and August 2019. I sampled four to six posts per influencer depending on the number of posts they had total during those months. For example, one influencer, Amber, had considerably more posts than another influencer, Maddie, so I sampled 6 from Amber and 4 from Maddie. In addition, one influencer I spoke to had recently deactivated her account during data collection and thus I did not sample any post from her. Because I wanted to sample all influencer posts at the same time, sample posts with the most comments, and vary the amount of posts to sample, I chose to sample these posts at the beginning of September after all possible days to post something in my collection period had finished.

In addition to the posts themselves, which included the image and caption, I also collected and examined 6,113 comments attached to said posts. Comments enabled me to better understand and capture the discourse surrounding body positivity, but also the reception. Are followers responding positively to the messages influencers and users make in their Instagram

posts? Do they agree or disagree with an influencer's or user's argument that you can be fat and fit? In my preliminary searches of posts featuring the hashtag #bodypositive or #fitspiration and of prominent influencers' accounts, I found that a majority of posts have fewer than one hundred comments unless they are prominent influencers' posts. Even then, the number of comments can vary widely from under one hundred to over one thousand. Therefore, I collected and analyzed the first one hundred comments per post. It was important to analyze groups of comments rather than taking every nth comment because doing so allowed me to examine the interaction between followers, and followers and influencers. How are varying users talking to one another and what kind of discourse are they creating around body positivity? Without looking at all of the comments or a significant number of comments on a post, I would have missed the dialogue between users, only gleaning a partial picture of what was happening. However, like with participant recruitment, I encountered a problem while collecting and analyzing comments. Posts and the comments within them are in a sense "living" in that they can be changed through edits and deletions at any moment. This was particularly true of comments. I found that often negative or trolling comments would be deleted before I got a chance to save them which is a significant limitation to my study. I knew that these comments were once made because other followers would comment in response to those trolling comments, but the original comment has disappeared. Although I could surmise what the comment said, I cannot know for certain and this might be the reason so many comments were positive rather than negative. Finally, when collecting data (posts and comments), I captured and stored the data using screenshots of the posts via the data-capturing and archiving software OneNote before importing them into NVivo for analysis.

ANALYSIS

Coding and analysis were completed in a similar manner for both interviews and Instagram posts—through a multi-step, inductive, thematic coding process that was aided by the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 11. Similar to analyzing interview transcripts, "content analysis is the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual [or visual] data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes" and "may reveal broader discourses" (Julien 2008:2-3). Therefore, analyzing interview transcripts and Instagram posts entail a similar process. Unlike quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis does not limit itself to manifest content and frequency counts, but instead adds to this by encouraging researchers to take an inductive approach, beginning with a deep, close reading of the text/images and attempting to uncover the less obvious or latent content (Hand 2016, Julien 2008, Schreier 2014). Qualitative analysis not only answers "what" questions, but "why" and "how" by looking for more subtle and symbolic levels of meaning and perceptions through thematic analysis (Hand 2016, Pennington 2016).

With this in mind, the codes and/or themes of my research were produced through inductively analyzing the data in detail through the use of both concept-driven and data-driven coding schemes (Schreier 2014). Working in a concept-driven way required me to base initial codes on previous knowledge such as theory, prior research, or everyday knowledge. For example, previous work of femininity and beauty standards informed codes that centered on women wearing makeup, whiteness, being young-looking, and the type of pose the person is doing. This told me not only what bodies are represented in body positivity and fitspiration, but how femininity is being performed through these representations. In addition, the data itself also drove the development of the coding scheme, allowing for codes to emerge outside of predefined and rigid categories which I could not foresee until working with the data. For example, I didn't

expect for influencers to distinguish between individual and collective reforms in body positivity and had to create a code to explore this notion that emerged from my participants. Because qualitative analysis is an iterative process that allows the data to drive the coding scheme, I coded both the interviews and posts a minimum of two times, modifying the coding scheme in the initial coding before coding again. Beginning with open coding, I coded text and images along similar themes with the goal to code text into as many categories as necessary (Bailey 2007). In the next step, I engaged in focused coding, taking the initial codes and linking them as parts of larger thematic categories while also recognizing their distinctions within them. For example, the code of "self-love as unrealistic," "commercialization," and "individual over collective" were subsumed into the larger category of "anti-self-love," yet I made use to recognize how each of these codes made up the larger whole.

In addition to this thematic coding of Instagram posts, I also utilized more quantitative content analysis-like codes that examined the frequency and manifest content. For example, I had codes which noted the frequency of certain bodies represented in body positivity and fitspiration Instagram posts along gender, race, dis/ability, and/or approximate age (e.g. the percent of posts which feature white women), if weight-loss is depicted—yes or no, or if the comment on a post is positive—yes or no.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS BODY POSITIVITY?

What is body positivity? This might seem like a simple question, especially for "body positive" influencers on Instagram. However, for my participants, answering this question proved challenging. When I asked, "what is body positivity" and "what are its goals," many influencers um-ed, others stuttered, and some even laughed. For example, Margaret Nelson[5], a white, 37-year-old body peace life coach, laughed when I asked what the goals of body positivity were. She answered, "I'm only giggling because I think, I don't know that there is a purpose per se." Similarly, Virgie Tovar, a 36-year-old Mexican-Iranian woman and creator of the hashtag #losehatenotweight, said, "With body positivity, I'm just like, what are we doing? Is the goal here having gentile brunches every weekend? Is that the fucking goal? I just don't understand." While Margaret and Virgie were unsure how to define body positivity, others, like Carina Shero, a 30-year-old white woman known for her burlesque photos and performances to her over 500,000 followers on Instagram, explained it varies saying, "Well, it depends on who you're talking about. Like whose goal? You know, like the people that created this movement or the people that are currently in it or what were the initial intentions for it? Where is it now and where is it being taken? Like in a commercial aspect, you know?" The uncertainty or vagueness of what body positivity is and its goals demonstrated by my participants is not unique (Dalessandro 2016). Body positivity is known for lacking a singular definition and specific goals and my conversations with influencers reveal that this stems from several sources: (1) a lack of structure, leader, or organizing body; (2) various groups making claims to body positivity; and (3) commercialization that dilutes the message.

SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

---

[5] All but two participants requested that I use their real or stage name. Margaret Nelson is a pseudonym.

For some influencers, the lack of one specific unifying definition of body positivity and a clear outline of goals stems from the absence of a collectively organized governing body. Gia Natalia Narvaez, a 28-year-old Latina transgender woman, repeatedly mentioned that body positivity lacks a "structured understanding" of its goals that makes her question, "what is body positivity? Am I still a part of this movement?" For her, having "a more uniform understanding or mission or goal of what body positivity should be" could not only help the movement "move forward collectively," but the group would be at a better pace of achieving their goals "instead of stalling and having companies run in" and "make a profit off of it." Likewise, the reason why Margaret laughed and responded, "I don't know" when asked about the goals of body positivity was because "there's no leader at the helm for this…so…there's different pockets out there." Without someone to lead body positivity, whether that be an organization or single person, body positivity will continue to suffer from a lack of collective identity and solidarity around a specific cause, aspects that are key to successful social movements (Pyle and Klein 2011, Taylor and Whittier 1992). Although there are body positive organizations, including The Body Positive[6], none were mentioned by participants, demonstrating they are not identified as THE center of body positivity.

If there is a *center* of body positivity it is social media, particularly Instagram. The defining features of Instagram, and social media generally, is that it allows anyone to simultaneously produce and consume (i.e. prosumption) meanings around any give topic (Beer and Burrows 2010, Ritzer 2014). As such, each user of Instagram helps to shape what body positivity means, but also contributes to the uncertainty and variety of the term's definition since each person has their own, potentially conflicting, idea of what it means. Gia, who has over

---

[6] https://www.thebodypositive.org/

28,000 followers on Instagram and is also an admin for @effyourbeautystandards[7], believes that "people are so confused all the time about what body positivity is…because there are a lot of influencer accounts out there that are huge and each one of them have different goals in mind." The combination of a lack of central leadership and the prosumption of Instagram create a perfect storm where anything can be body positive because there is no one to argue otherwise.

The array of Instagram users engaged in prosumption leads to the second source for why body positivity is so difficult to define—there are different groups that each have their own idea of what body positivity is. According to Taylor and Whittier (1992), the key to successfully making change via a social movement is for the group to have a collective identity with intentional goals. According to Amber Karnes, a 36-year-old white yoga instructor and owner of Body Positive Yoga, body positivity lacks this collective identity because "a lot of other movements get sort of lumped in with body positivity and…the individual movements lose their teeth…" because they "have different goals." On Instagram different influencers emphasize distinct aspects of body positivity over others—some focus on disability while others highlight fitness, then others work on eating disorder recovery and so on. For example, Sally Thomas[8], a 27-year-old white woman, emphasizes fashion to her over 448,000 followers on Instagram while Jessamyn, a 31-year-old black queer femme, focuses on yoga to their 411,000 followers. Sally explained, "I think for me [fashion is] just what I've always been super interested in, other people it might be more fitness and eating healthy plans…And for other people it might just be…fat positivity…there's so many different realms of [body positivity]."

---

[7] https://www.instagram.com/effyourbeautystandards/ : This is a communal account founded by body positive influencer and model Tess Holliday and managed by "6 body positive babes." This account has over 420,000 followers and the accompanying hashtag #effyourbeautystandards has over 3,697,114 posts.
[8] Sally Thomas is a pseudonym.

The different groups that Sally speaks about were confirmed in my analysis of Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive which included fashion, Big Beautiful Women (BBW), eating disorder recovery, self-love, and fitspiration. Fashion posts were photographed similar to editorial images you might find in a magazine, highlighting the clothes, accessories, and make-up of influencers (Figure 5). These posts often tagged designers or stores and used hashtags like #plussizefashion and #ootd (outfit of the day). BBW posts were often highly sexualized images with women in lingerie that used the hashtag #BBW (Figure 6). Eating disorder recovery posts often had longer captions where influencers spoke about their journey recovering from an eating disorder and developing a more positive relationship with their bodies (Figure 7). The group that has the highest number of posts and which spanned across groups focused primarily on self-love. The images and captions of self-love posts varied widely, but the overall message was that one should embrace and love their body no matter what. Finally, fitspiration posts were often thin-bodied white women discussing fitness, food, and weight-loss that used both #bodypositive and #fitspiration (Figure 8). Fitspiration was originally intended to be separate from body positivity, but as I discuss later, has co-opted much of the language and hashtags associated with body positivity. With at least five groups, all with different goals, claiming to be #bodypositive it is hard to pinpoint exactly what the collective identity of body positivity is. How do body positivity influencers collectively fight for anything when the group stands for so many different things? Jes highlights this notion: "I think for me body positivity shies away in it's general-ness, in order to be an umbrella, in order to capture as many people as possible, in order for corporations to use it to their advantage. I think that it's a very watered down basic toothless movement that can encapsulate anything and everything."

Jes' statement gets to the final reason influencers believe body positivity lacks a singular definition with specific goals—they believe that corporations co-opt body positivity and dilute its meaning. As body positivity has moved from counterculture to mainstream audiences, influencers see companies using the language of body positivity to sell products and messages that they identify as the antithesis of body positivity. For instance, Sally explained that although in recent years body positivity has become "popular and trending…for [her] it never was a buzzword." Sally explains that that the trendiness of body positivity is seen by "brands who say they're inclusive and then you go on their site and you're like, but I can't buy past a large." For her, the lack of inclusivity "hurts the community" because, as I describe below, inclusivity is a major aspect of body positivity. My conversation with Jes showed a similar disdain for companies who claim to be body positive but lack inclusive sizing. She described how some companies like Dia&Co "have used this popularity to spread messages from actual people who don't fit into our traditional standard," but other companies, like Lane Bryant, have "nothing to do with actually advancing self-esteem but really just selling…Lane Bryant does not really do inclusivity because they definitely have a size limit on their worthiness." Amber continued this sentiment that the use of body positivity by corporations has been done in ways opposite of its original message:

> a political movement that was created by marginalized folks, like for people who already aren't being served by society, to create our own culture has now been co-opted and sort of de-fanged. The power that it had of being a radical movement has been watered down because of capitalism's interest in it. Because, it's easier to sell someone a beauty product they found out through positive reinforcement rather than shame.

Whether it is lacking inclusive sizing for clothing or encouraging consumers to buy products to make them meet the current standards of beauty, influencers see this messaging as altering what it means to be body positive. For my participants, the involvement of corporations in body

positivity has ultimately contributed to the confusion of what is and is not body positive. Even with the confusion, uncertainty, and vagueness of what it means to be body positive and what the goals are, it's apparent from the quotes by Sally, Jes, and Amber that there are some aspects of body positivity that are clear to influencers, including inclusivity and fighting standards of beauty, otherwise there would not be a reason to be upset with its co-optation.

Although at times it was difficult for my interviewees to succinctly answer the question "what is body positivity," based on my conversations with influencers and advocates, I found there were common themes about what body positivity is and what its goals are. Body positivity is a conglomeration of five interrelated, yet contentious tenets: (1) a connection to the fat acceptance movement; (2) an opposition to diet culture; (3) the belief that all bodies are good bodies; (4) celebrating self-love; and (5) proclaiming that all people have a freedom to be beautiful. My findings are consistent with previous scholars examining websites and social media who contend that body positivity seeks to challenge the normalization of the ideal feminine body represented by mainstream media, but builds on this work by talking to the influencers themselves and exploring aspects not previously discussed (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Darwin 2017, Miller 2016, Sastre 2014b).

In the following sections, I will describe these five aspects of body positivity. I show how influencers engage in a "complicated dance of negotiation"—both using and distancing themselves from stereotypical discourses of gender, beauty, and health in defining body positivity (Bobel and Kwan 2011:2). Further, I show how body positivity defines what it is by what it isn't—the fat acceptance movement or fitspiration—and how several of the goals are disputed among influencers.

A WATERED-DOWN FAT ACCEPTANCE MOVEMENT

The fat acceptance movement (FAM) has been fighting anti-fat discourses and discrimination since the late 1960s (Cooper 2016), first through public demonstrations and the development of organizations like the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance and then, with the development and proliferation of the internet, via the fatosphere (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Bronstein 2015, Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008). In both physical and virtual settings, fat activists have sought to challenge the medical association of fatness with ill-health, draw attention to weight-based discrimination, and celebrate and normalize body diversity (Gailey 2014, Kwan 2009a, Lupton 2013, Saguy 2012b). The similarities between the FAM and body positivity are undeniable because as both Sastre (2014b) and Cwynar-Horta (2016) argue, body positivity was born out of the FAM. Influencers, like Jes and Jessamyn, agreed, telling me that "body positivity did stem from originally the fat acceptance movement that started in '60s, '70s. But it has changed into something completely different" and "body positivity…is the child of fat positivity and fat acceptance," respectively.

However, as Sastre (2015:930) explains, "though closely linked to more established initiatives like the fat acceptance movement…drawing the boundaries of the body positive movement is a nebulous task," yet influencers do just that. For influencers one of the key differences between the two groups is that the FAM explicitly focuses on fat bodies whereas body positivity is (supposed to be) inclusive of all bodies. While fatness might remain central to body positivity, the group also (claims to) focus on issues of race, ability, age, gender, and sexuality. In this way, influencers are building on the work of feminist theorists like Crenshaw (1990) and Collins (1991) by taking up an intersectional feminist paradigm "that views race-ethnicity, class, gender, [age, body size] and sexuality as interlocking systems of oppression, forming a 'matrix of domination' in which one social identity cannot be understood completely

without considering all aspects of a person" (Reger 2012:22). Gia explained: "[Body positivity

is] a movement that started primarily for fat acceptance, fat bodies, and it's evolved into a

movement that is inclusive of marginalized bodies including people of color, disabled

individuals, age, and sexuality and gender orientation and kind of a mixture of all of that."

Melissa Gibson, a 30-year-old, white woman, agrees saying that "the fat activist movement

doesn't necessarily fully take into consideration" the "multiple ways that our bodies are judged"

whereas body positivity understands "there's intersections beyond [fatness]." Although Gia and

Maddie, like many influencers, preach inclusivity and advocated for an intersectional approach

to body positivity, they often had difficulty discussing these issues. For example, Gia's "kind of

a mixture of that" statement suggests she's still not quite comfortable articulating other forms of

oppressions. This is not unlike what Reger (2012) found in her research on self-identified

feminists in the United States who advocated for intersectionality, but lacked the ability to

engage in antiracist discourses. Like her respondents, body positive influencers understand the

importance of inclusion, but had no real direction on how to achieve it.

Although some influencers believe that taking an intersectional approach to anti-fat

discourses is an improvement upon the original movement, even if they didn't have the capacity

to understand or enact it, others remained skeptical. For example, Virgie, who identifies more as

a fat activist, but uses the language of body positivity because it's accessible and prevailing,

explained that while she "like[s] the idea of there's this more inclusive umbrella concept for

justice in our bodies" she feels that the language of inclusion is not "an accident because it did

directly come out of the desire to create a less threatening language around fat activism and fat

liberation." Virgie was the only participant to overtly link the inclusivity of body positivity to the

anti-feminist, anti-fat backlash against the FAM, but other influencers, like Margaret, shared a

similar sentiment: that "[body positivity is] a watered-down version of [fat liberation]." While the FAM might be too radical to be mainstream, body positivity certainly has not faced that same obstacle with both popular news sources and my participants calling body positivity "trendy" and "mainstream" (Jones 2016, Ospina 2015). Jes summed this up in her 2017 blog post "Lisa Frank BoPo and Why It's Just Not Enough," by describing "mainstream" body positivity as "Lisa Frank BoPo:" "glittery, colorful, and endlessly positive. Also: shallow, uncritical and exclusive" (Baker 2017). The palatability of body positivity—in its ambiguousness and ability to shy away from more controversial topics—make it what the FAM is not and thus has contributed to its success. Jes would go on to elaborate that while fat activists are still around and engaging in radical politics they don't "really want to be included in something that is so mainstream because it just takes all of the teeth out of it" and is a "form of assimilation." Jessamyn agrees with Jes' notion that fat activists would not consider themselves as body positive, saying, "I think that generally the feeling within this group is that body positivity is kind of bullshit because it is so easily co-opted, because the message is so general and vague that it can lean toward not really being very revolutionary or very radical." For both Jes and Jessamyn, in the move from the FAM to body positivity, the radical politics of the FAM have been lost to make it accessible to a wider variety of people. Rather than challenging discourses of health, beauty, and gender, body positivity has chosen to assimilate. The assimilation often comes in the form of "companies…using body positivity as a term to push certain collections that they have or health advocates…using it to correlate it with fitness" (quote by Gia). For example, Margaret mentioned how "Dove commercials over the last two years" have taken the political aspects of body positivity out and given people a version that is "oh, yeah I shouldn't hate my body, but in this kind of watered-down way." In body positivity's goal to include not just fat bodies, but all

marginalized bodies, members have had to dilute the movement and in doing so made it more susceptible to be co-opted by corporations. Even with such disagreement over the watering down of the FAM and body positivity's commercialization, what is clear is that body positive influencers believe that body positivity is rooted in the FAM. The belief that body positivity is born out of the FAM is what provides the foundation for many of their goals I describe below.

IN OPPOSITION TO DIET CULTURE

Previous research on the FAM makes clear that one of the key features of the movement is discarding the notion of the moral failing of fat people (Gailey 2014). In doing this, fat activists sought to reframe fat bodies as healthy, positive, and attractive by fighting for the right to nondiscriminatory healthcare, to refuse weight-loss interventions, and to be free from phobia, shame, and harassment (Cooper 2016, Kwan 2009a, Lupton 2013). Ultimately, the FAM was and is opposed to diet culture. Diet culture can be understood as the combination of (1) the multi-billion dollar diet industry (e.g. diet pills, weight-loss programs such as Weight Watchers, fitness trackers, bariatric surgery, etc.) and (2) the social and cultural atmosphere that normalizes fatphobia through the pursuit of thinness by any means (Farrell 2011, Tovar 2018). Via diet culture citizens are encouraged to take personal responsibility for their bodies under the indirect threat of death (i.e. if you're fat you will die) (Foucault 1978, Murray 2008). In this way, thin bodies are upheld as healthy, attractive, and valuable—the ideal to which all citizens should aspire and to encourage (or shame) others to achieve. For all the confusion and uncertainty over body positivity and its goals, my participants made clear that one of the main goals of body positivity, like the FAM, is opposing and dismantling diet culture.

Amber succinctly said, "I think body positivity to me is sort of the opposite of diet culture." Maddie Silverstein, a 27-year-old white, Jewish woman known as Chunky and Funky

Maddie to her almost 10,000 followers, agreed, saying body positivity is "getting rid of dieting and liberating yourself from a lot of societal norms, and patriarchal bullshit, and doing the same for other people." Maddie's mention of the "patriarchal bullshit" of diet culture highlights the gendered nature of diet culture. Margaret emphasized this point when she said: "I think on its face [body positivity is] a reaction to years of diet culture that have been forced upon people of all genders, but women in particular, and women trying to reclaim a little bit of space free from those pressures." While men achieve social value because of what they can do, women's social value comes from their appearance. As such, women face intense pressure to perform femininity "appropriately" by being thin and participate in beauty work, such as dieting, at rates higher than men to ensure their status (Bartky 1990, Contois 2017, Kwan and Trautner 2009). The embodiment of thinness as the ideal of femininity and beauty is what Wolf (1991:187) calls "an obsession about female obedience" and argues that "dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history."

The high rates of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating and exercising, negative body image, and depression among women demonstrates that diet culture has material consequences (Bessenoff 2006, Bordo 2003, Tiggemann and Slater 2004), many of which my participants experienced firsthand. By fighting against diet culture, influencers feel women will be able to live more freely and feel better about themselves. For example, Margaret continued her discussion of body positivity as a reaction to diet culture by saying, "I think that [body positivity's] ostensible purpose is to help women in particular feel better about their bodies and take off the pressure from them having to lose weight." Similarly, Maddie's "personal goal…is to…get people to stop dieting" and "live the life [they] want in the body [they're] in" instead of waiting until "[they] lose five pounds." Influencers, like Maddie and Margaret, believe that by

undoing diet culture, body positivity will enable people to feel better about themselves and live their lives more fully. In doing so, influencers seek to expand the boundaries of what a beautiful, healthy, and worthy body looks like to include people outside the thin ideal.

Body positivity as the antithesis of diet culture was made even more clear when influencers talked about fitspiration. Like body positivity, fitspiration uses social media to post images and captions that constitute new rules of femininity and beauty standards (Boepple et al. 2016). However, unlike body positivity, fitspiration does not seek to reduce the stigma attached to fatness, but to promote women's strength and muscularity through the pursuit of a "healthier" lifestyle, including clean eating, exercise, and self-care (Boepple et al. 2016, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015). When discussing fitspiration, influencers were quick to voice their disgust and annoyance. For instance, Maddie said, "Ugh Fitspiration. [Body positivity] does get lumped in with freaking Fitspiration, drives me up a wall. Drives me up a wall! OH...Like that is so much of what is wrong with the mass media version of body positivity is that Fitspiration, wellness bullshit." Carina agreed with Maddie's assessment that fitspiration and body positivity are often conflated and showed a similar annoyance by this. She explained, "the whole fitspo thing is like, oh god stay all away from that because…they literally go on the body positive tag and take photos that are meant for people to feel perfect…then have them be…inspiration to get thinner…that makes you the antithesis of what we're trying to teach people." Like many influencers, Maddie and Carina believed that fitspiration *is* diet culture because it promotes fitness, focuses on clean eating, and celebrates thin, muscular bodies. According to my interviewees and based on my content analysis of posts tagged #fitspiration, fitspiration influencers' primary goal is to promote thin, muscular, and strong bodies as healthier, more

beautiful, and harder working than fat bodies—the exact thing body positive influencers are working against.

Even though influencers see fitspiration as the opposite of body positivity, they also recognized that fitspiration influencers have co-opted body positive language and hashtags on Instagram. For Amber, the co-optation of body positivity by fitspiration is "super problematic" because "fit or healthy is usually just a code word for thin and so when I've seen fitspiration…it's got the same old bullshit from diet culture with like before and after photos and the rhetoric of no excuses." Jes experienced the co-optation of body positive by fitspiration first-hand when her hashtag #FatGirlsCan "started being used…by women who were plus-sized and then losing weight and the message was fat girls can lose weight," rather than it's intended message of rejecting fatphobia. She explained why she thinks this co-optation happens, saying, "I think people want a piece of the liberation, but there's so much socially ingrained applause. There's just applause for diet culture and there has been this very amazing sneaky twisting of, we're talking about plus-size and the wellness culture, of taking wellness culture and pretending that it's not a diet." Maddie also experienced the co-optation of body positivity by fitspiration when she had to unfollow somebody she knew "because they're into fitspo" and trying to "convince people that working out to lose weight is being body positive, and it's not." She said of the experience, "I cannot watch you post about your body transformation and using body positive as the hashtag…You're telling people that the way you looked before could have been improved upon and this is your improved version of yourself. So, what you're saying is that if someone looks like that, they can be improved upon."

By calling weight-loss an accomplishment, a way to be "well," or as an "improvement" fitspiration is supporting diet culture under the guise of body positivity. And in doing so, it is

muddying what body positivity is and its goal to fight the shame associated with diet culture and celebrate all bodies, not just thin ones. The intensity to which influencers pointed to fitspiration as not body positive and the use of such language as inappropriate, further cemented that an opposition to diet culture was a major component to body positivity. Even as body positivity is co-opted and diluted, whether by fitspiration or commercial interests, influencers were clear that body positivity is anti-diet culture because diet culture supports the idea that some bodies (i.e. thin) are better than other bodies, which opposes the third belief body positive influencers have adopted: all bodies are good bodies.

ALL BODIES ARE GOOD BODIES

The third aspect of body positivity is explained by Amber, who says, "if diet culture tells us that only certain bodies are valuable, meaning like thin, able bodies, then body positivity widens that spectrum and says that we all have inherent worth in our bodies. No matter what they look like, what our ability is, what our age is, what our body status is." This notion was reiterated by several of my participants, including Jessamyn: "the idea that…you are inherently wrong, that there's something wrong with the human body at all times…that as opposed to that, [body positivity] believe[s] that every human being exactly as they are today is perfect." Amber and Jessamyn illuminate the foundational logic of diet culture, a logic that is part of the disciplinary gaze and surveillance that attempts to normalize and control bodies deemed out of control, excessive, and pathological—a threat to society (Lupton 2013). Rather than buy into these discourses that are part of the apparatus of disciplinary power (Foucault 1980), body positive influencers seek to dismantle the correlation between thinness and worthiness, expanding what it means to be "good."

As Margaret says, "I think body positivity can kind of be summed up by *all bodies are good bodies*" (emphasis added). This easily remembered, but powerful phrase is one that influencers repeatedly brought up in interviews. Further, the phrase's power is seen in the over 257,000 posts on Instagram that use the hashtag #allbodiesaregoodbodies, some of which were in my sample of posts tagged #bodypositive (Figure 9). For Jes, the phrase is an "intentionally vague way to say 'Okay, we see the oppression that has been handed to us and we reject that.'" In the contemporary United States bodies deemed "good"—moral, normal, beautiful, and healthy—receive privilege and cultural capital while others face oppression in the form of shaming, work place discrimination, and even acts of violence (Conley and Glauber 2005, Farrell 2011, Puhl and Brownell 2001). By challenging the dichotomy of good/bad bodies, influencers seek to work against systems of oppression like racism, sizeism, ageism, and sexism to create a more equal world.

Carina also abides by the popular phrase, saying that it enables people to "accept the way that you and others are and also that somebody else's body is none of your business and it is not your business what anybody else's opinion of your body is. I feel like bodies are this communal thing right now and it's like, no your body is just yours and that's where it stops." What Carina highlights is that the notion of a good or bad body is deeply rooted in the regulation and normalization of bodies through the act of surveillance for the (seemingly) good of society (Bartky 1990, Foucault 1979). As Carina describes, bodies are communal in that we feel entitled as citizens to monitor each other rendering bodies more productive, but we have also internalized these disciplinary narratives and police ourselves. However, by accepting our bodies as good we challenge this web of governmentality. Instead of being trapped in the prison that is women's bodies, women might use their time to gain power and to stop injustices (Wolf 1991). For

example, Melissa explains that as a lawyer, she's experienced "assumptions [being] made about [her]…because of [her] body size" such as being seen as not "worthy, capable, or strong." She says, "I was able to recognize through body positivity, when I'm faced with these stereotypes or when I'm faced with these lies that are being told about fat people around me, I'm able to identify them. And then, when I am faced I'm able to speak against them." Body positivity may give people the tools to combat discrimination and oppression because they are able to recognize the fallacy of diet culture logic. But not only are influencers and their followers potentially gaining the tools to challenge these notions, it also allows the individuals to look inward at their feelings about their own bodies and help them to accept and love them.

SELF-LOVE

Like Miller (2016) and Cwynar-Horta (2016) argue, Melissa claims that "…body positivity has become synonymous with self-love." As the most ubiquitous, yet controversial belief of body positive influencers, Maddie describes self-love as, "being able to look in the mirror and be happy with yourself both outwardly and inwardly…being kind to yourself with your own emotions and realizing that there is nothing wrong with you… that we are good enough the way we are." For Sally and Margaret, and many other influencers, self-love was a fundamental aspect of body positivity. Sally said, "body positivity is just trying every single day to positively love yourself and think highly of who you are." Similarly, Margaret explained, "I think body positivity is on its face trying to encourage people to accept whatever bodies they have." This is not unlike body positivity's predecessor, the FAM, who has "acceptance" in its name. For example, in examining fat acceptance blogs, Afful and Ricciardelli (2015) found that bloggers spent time trying to encourage people to accept their fat bodies. Given body positivity's relationship to the FAM it's understandable they would also undertake a similar goal.

The focus on accepting one's body in body positivity was central to my interviewees'

own personal journeys and how they interacted with their followers on Instagram. For example,

"as somebody who [grew] up as a fat woman in a society that's very much anti-[fat]," body

positivity was a way for Amber "to start to accept my body." As such she explains, "I was able

to quit dieting, be okay with myself, and use all that energy on other things, which in my case is

helping other people to do that similar path." Amber helps people to follow this "similar path" in

part via the messages she posts on Instagram. In one post she asks followers "who taught you to

hate your body?," telling followers about her journey from "postponing her 'real life' until the

day [she] lost weight and became thin" to now living her life by "enjoy[ing] time at the beach,

mak[ing] bold moves in [her] career…and liv[ing] out loud," and challenging them to do the

same (Figure 10). Chloe Meghan, a 24-year-old white woman who focuses on motherhood on

her Instagram to more than 12,000 followers, told me that showing her confidence on Instagram

has led to many women messaging her to say "how much it's helped them and that they went to

the beach, or they wore a crop top, something like that." She continued to say that she hopes her

messages help people to say "screw what people think, just live your life. Do what makes you

happy, because you only have this one chance, so you want to do it right." And this was evident

in her Instagram posts—all of which mentioned self-love. For instance, in one image Chole is

shown lifting her shirt up to show her round, stretch marked stomach with a long caption that

proclaims, "I LOVE MY BODY. [no matter what anyone thinks]" (Figure 11). She goes on to

tell followers: "You are f****** gorgeous in every single way. Those stretch marks, that belly,

those milkers, all the cellulite—THAT ASS. It's all you girlfriend so OWN THAT SHIT.

There's no other you on this planet. Don't ever ever EVER let anyone bring you down."

Both Amber and Chloe highlight that although body positivity is focused on *self*-love, influencers are also worried about the community of bodies that have been subject to the disciplinary gaze. Therefore, influencers seek to encourage other women to engage in self-love. As mentioned previously, bodies are communal in that we monitor each other in attempts to regulate non-normative bodies, but by learning to love ourselves we disrupt the need to be critical of and to control our own bodies and others. As Sally explains, "When you do those little things, where you stop talking negatively about yourself and then you also stop talking negatively about others and it just starts to change your mindset and you see yourself in this whole new light and you see others around you in a whole new light as well." However, even if an outcome of self-love is that all people learn to love their bodies, it is still rooted in the individual pursuit of betterment and does not disrupt the larger discourse that values certain bodies over others. Self-love is not collective change, but individual change that can result in changes to the communal body. Influencers must balance their individual self-love journeys with that of encouraging others to follow suit.

Not only are influencers engaging in self-love rhetoric on their Instagram posts, but also every day users who tag posts #bodypositive. Of the 105 Instagram posts I examined tagged #bodypositive, just over half (58) referenced self-love and/or embracing and accepting one's body. Further, this dimension is unique to body positivity, as only 12 of the 105 posts tagged #fitspiration mentioned self-love or embracing one's bodies. Some of the #bodypositive posts solely relied on a simple hashtag such as #loveyourself or #selflove without any other messaging related to self-love (Figures 12), while others had longer captions discussing the topic. For example, next to an image of a white woman with her head turned, highlighting the freckles on her face, neck, chest, and shoulders and red curly hair, the caption reads:

Dear freckles and red hair... I love you. ..All my life I listened to bullies taunt my sisters and I for being so unique. But over the last 10 years or so, I've learned to embrace the difference and love the rarity. To my beautiful sisters and to anyone who has ever been bullied for your appearance, know that you are worthy and no bully should ever validate how you love and see yourself. Be you. There's only one you. ....#beauty #ginger #love #redhair #freckles#natural #naturalhair #curlyhair #redhead#girlswithfreckles #glow #selflove #beyou#unicorn #unique #curls #bodypositive (Figure 13)

Not only does "deeder93" use the hashtag #selflove, but their caption centers embracing bodily difference (i.e. red hair and freckles) and encouraging followers to know their worth, a rhetoric that is central to self-love. This post is similar to the other 57 posts that speak about self-love—discussing a shift from hating one's body to accepting their body through body positivity and encouraging others to do the same along with photos and selfies of women in lingerie, eating snacks, hanging by the pool and more.

Jessamyn believes that this self-love narrative would not have been possible without the creation of Instagram and the selfie. She said, "The fact of taking your photo and looking at yourself and being forced to look at the things that you've been told to hate and finding a way to love yourself through that experience of seeing yourself, and I don't think that could have ever existed without technology and without social media." What Jessamyn highlights is that the context of social media is central to body positivity. As Lupton (2015) argues, the selfie has become the standard representation of the body. As such, when influencers and users post selfies on Instagram they get to decide what bodies are deemed worthy and valuable. Rather than thin, large-breasted, photoshopped models that grace the covers of mainstream magazines, influencers and users display new types of bodies rarely seen, such as big, stretch-mark filled bellies and freckle-covered red heads. And beyond being displayed, they are championed, loved, and embraced by members of body positivity. These images demonstrate the importance of prosumption, the move from passive consumption to active production and dissemination of

content, in social media as it enabled users to expand what bodies are represented (Beer and Burrows 2010, Ritzer 2014). Without social media images of non-normative bodies, body positive influencers might not have gotten the space to show off their bodies, let alone tout a message of self-love to hundreds of thousands of followers. Overall, self-love, as a defining aspect of body positivity, has been aided by the development of social media and the ability for people, in particular women, to photograph and post intimate pictures of their bodies.

Anti-Self-Love: An Unrealistic, Individual Pursuit to a Structural Problem

Although previous scholars and I argue that self-love is a central aspect of body positivity (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Miller 2016), I find that the relationship between self-love and influencers is contentious with some seeing it as a detriment. The aversion influencers have for self-love is reflected in their Instagram posts. While 55% of the Instagram posts I examined with the hashtag #bodypositive mentioned self-love and embracing one's body, only 28% of the posts I examined of my Influencers mentioned these notions. Further, most of these posts come from three influencers. In contrast, another two influencers had posts that specifically spoke against self-love. For those who are "anti-self-love," the dislike stems from three issues: (1) "love" is unrealistic; (2) self-love is an easily co-opted and commercialized concept; and (3) it is an individual pursuit, not a collective, systemic, or structural one.

Love is unrealistic. The discourses of health, beauty, and femininity are a cultural nexus that links thinness with success and happiness and exerts disciplinary power (Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012). As women try, and often fail, to become thin they face immense trauma, including depression, discrimination, and disordered eating (Bessenoff 2006, Bordo 2003, Tiggemann and Slater 2004). But rather than getting rid of these standards altogether, body positivity has created a new impossible standard—that no matter what your body looks like and

no matter what society says it should look like, you should love it. For some of the influencers, self-love was just another unrealistic goal for people to have. Carina explains, "first we gotta get to just not hating ourselves. It's unrealistic to expect people to just, with a couple posts, all of a sudden love themselves. It takes years and years and years of practice. It's like telling somebody 'Oh go to the gym twice and you'll be able to run a marathon.' Just like a marathon we have to train our bodies and our minds to build up to the point of loving ourselves." Ashleigh Shackelford, a 28-year-old black non-binary femme who is the creator and director of a southern body liberation organization, Free Figure Revolution, felt that self-love ignores the deep trauma that people carry with them because of the years of oppression experienced for their non-normative bodies. Although Ashleigh might be read as confident, loud, and resilient by followers, they don't feel that way. They explain:

> I don't feel joyful in my survival. I feel exhausted. I feel tired…I feel like the idea that somehow, we're going to achieve this level of self-love through body positivity, like one day we will all love ourselves, these are projections and expectations and limitations…There's so much trauma that each one of us has endured and is still enduring that there is no way to put a time limit on that or just say that somehow one day you will achieve this thing. Just like thinness. Again, it's another achievement that's being dangled in front of your face…

Because body positivity and self-love have become inextricably linked, several influencers have begun to distance themselves from body positivity by adopting the term body neutrality. For them body neutrality allows a space for people to exist outside of the standard of thinness that cultivates self-hate and the new standard of self-love. In one of her Instagram posts, Jes posted an image of a quote which read (Figure 14):

> Don't tell me to "love my body" if I'm still getting to know my body. Don't tell me to "be ok" with my body if I'm still unable to sit with the most uncomfortable parts of who I am. Please remember you're telling many of us to "love" bodies that the world still dismisses, ridicules and wishes we keep hidden.

Along with the quoted image, in her caption, Jes apologized for relying too much on "loving your body" as she was first educating herself on body positivity and that #ItTakesTime to feel neutral, let alone positive about one's body, and that these are "unique and VERY personal" journeys. For Jes, rather than focus on self-love, her "personal goal is to make peace with my body, to learn to trust it again because that trust had been stripped away since I was a child and to appreciate it for what it is and then let it blend into the background, as much as society will let it, so that I can live my best fucking life." Jes' realization of self-love as unrealistic continues to center the individual as it is a "unique and very personal" journey, but she also recognizes how her support of self-love in the beginning of her career was harmful to the community of body positive followers who might not have been able to achieve self-love. Ultimately, this highlights the difficulty in balancing the needs of the individual with the community of body positive followers. Amber also prefers the term body neutrality saying that instead of going from "my body is disgusting, I hate my body to I love my body, my body is awesome," it's easier for people to say "I have a body. It's bigger than some, it's smaller than others." Ultimately, body neutrality should enable people "to not really think about [their body] so much." Instead, taking "all the mental energy and the time and the money that we've been spending on obsessing over our appearance or our diet, which is linked to our appearance, or our clothing which is like, you know all of those things, and just have those resources to put somewhere else."

As Jes and Amber see it, self-love is an extension of the same preoccupation of women's bodies—a new standard for women to put their minds and energies into. In 1980, Young (1980) argued that women have been socialized to be perpetually aware of their bodies; almost 40 years later Engeln (2017) believes not much has changed. In fact, she argues that women suffer from beauty sickness: "when women's emotional energy gets so bound up with what they see in the

mirror that is becomes harder for them to see other aspects of their lives" (Engeln 2017:5).

Rather than focusing on their education, their careers, the state of the economy or environment, women spend their time and energy obtaining the perfect selfie to post to Instagram, learning to apply makeup, and worrying if they look fat. Women are imprisoned by their bodies (Wolf 1991). But what could women do if they weren't focused on loving or hating their bodies, but just let it blend into the background or put those resources elsewhere like Jes and Amber suggest? Given that the current generation of women is the most educated group society has ever seen, marked by ambition and determination, women could change laws, revolutionize healthcare, increase media representations, basically, do everything that men are able to do without inhibitions because society isn't obsessed with their appearance.

Commercializing Self-Love. While some influencers dislike the notion of self-love because they see it as an unrealistic pursuit, others found self-love problematic because it has been co-opted by capitalist interests. Corporations have begun to use slogans of self-love and embracing one's body, capitalizing on the success of body positivity, to sell products. Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" was, as Amber explained, "kind of was the first one to do it. Like showing a lot of diversity in their ads and talking about loving your body while they're still selling you things to make your body more beautiful or acceptable or palatable." Through a variety of hashtag campaigns such as #MyBeautyMySay and #BeautyBias Dove encourages consumers "to stand up for their own beauty[9]"and "show the world that the only rules we live by are our own[10]" by purchasing their shampoos, soaps, and deodorants. As Murray (2013:98) argues, Dove's branding "perpetuates an oppressive ideology of 'real beauty' requiring a

---

[9] https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns/my-beauty-my-say-copy.html
[10] https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns/women-get-told.html

behavior ("self-esteem") that underscores neoliberal self-improvement benefiting the corporation's power."

Jessamyn, who interestingly partnered with Kotex for their U by Kotex Fitness line and appeared in a nation-wide commercial for the product[11], explained to me that the corporate involvement in "encourag[ing] the idea of self-love" has "watered down" body positivity. They said: "It's literally just a way for any business to just be like 'yeah, love your body because I love myself and look how great my life is' and then the brand is like 'yeah, if you buy our clothes, you can love yourself' and it's just, I don't know what any of that has to do with body positivity." Similarly, Ashleigh argues that body positivity has become "the commodification of something else to buy into…that you can't necessarily achieve." For them, "it's really about selling you joy and happiness through this lens of…self-love. So, it really…has commodified the same beauty standards that we're fighting against. In the sense that it's like 'But now, add self-love on it…'" The corporate co-optation of feminism is not a new phenomenon—through terms like "corporate feminism" (Messner 2002), "feminist consumerism" (Johnston and Taylor 2008), and "market-place feminism" (Zeisler 2016), scholars have understood that corporations employ feminist themes of empowerment to market products to women. Both Jessamyn and Ashleigh highlight how the feminist politic of body positivity has fallen victim to this cycle because self-love is seen as achievable via a product for sale. Corporations play into the "neoliberal vision of the empowered individual, whereby any decision or choice can be presented as feminist simply by virtue of the fact that a woman chose it" (Rivers 2017:59). By selling women products to achieve self-love, corporations depoliticize body positivity and use it simply to further their own success. As Maddie argues, "when brands start putting money behind a social and political

---

[11] https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8073651-u-by-kotex-findyourfitness/

90

movement, it takes on a dollar value and a…capitalist kind of agenda." Not only do the goals of

body positivity get lost, they get warped because now buying products to make yourself more

beautiful IS body positive. In creating this new standard, companies reify the same good

body/bad body dichotomy that influencers have sought to dismantle, yet people feel as if they've

achieved equality.

Not only does body positivity become a commodity that is bought and sold via the

commercialization of self-love, the most non-normative bodies get abandoned in mainstream

media campaigns. As Maddie explains:

> I see a lot of people posting photos of themselves, and they're a size six, eight, and they're just like rolling over and kind of grabbing skin and calling it body positivity. And at the end of the day that's great that you're making people feel better about their little rolls, but what are you doing to spread the message of equality for everybody who maybe doesn't have the size six, eight body.

This was recently seen when Aerie launched a new iteration of their #AerieREAL campaign in

February 2019 by introducing a new set of "role models" which included: a "body positivity

activist," several actresses, two athletes, a YouTuber, and an artist[12] (Figure 15). After one of the

role models announced the partnership on her Twitter saying, "No retouching and inclusive of

everyone," body positive followers on Twitter were quick to call her out saying[13]:

> @alakazannah: looool aerie only sells up to XXL and that size is only available online. thin people think this is inclusivity

> @selflovesarah: And not a SINGLE fat woman in sight. @jameelajamil everyone; singlehandedly destroying the #bodypositivity movement one bullshit post at a time.

Amber argues that Aerie's rationale was "what better way to sell online than to jump into the

hashtags of the media where people hang out." By using the language of body positivity, Aerie

has a built-in market they can sell clothing to. However, as Amber explains, "Do I think Aerie is

---

[12] https://www.ae.com/featured-aeriereal/aerie/s-cms/6890055
[13] https://www.buzzfeed.com/eleanorbate/jameela-jamil-inclusive-aerie-campaign

committed to body positivity and doing any real activism in the world? NOPE. Do I think that

they're actually serving anyone that is not already served by the mainstream industry? NOPE."

Ultimately, what Amber and the rest of the influencers averse to self-love argue is that

when corporations use body positive language they transform it into something it wasn't meant

to be, and which is the antithesis of their larger goals. While influencers don't want any person to

hate themselves, they also don't want people to rely on products sold by corporations to achieve

self-love which is just another new standard of beauty. Further, in doing so brands and

advertisements often center conventionally beautiful women, like in the #AerieREAL campaign,

and ignore the most marginalized persons.

Individual vs. Structural Reforms. The final reason that influencers give for disliking self-

love is that it centers the individual rather than the collective, systemic, or structural issues in

combating discourses of beauty, health, and femininity that idealize and normalize thin bodies.

Virgie explains that this is a key difference from the FAM. She says, "the question of fat

liberation, fat activism was, 'How can we liberate subjugated bodies, subjugated people?' The

question of body positivity is, 'How can I love my body?'" For her, the "scope of ambition" in

these two questions is very different as the latter "much more easily dovetails into the status quo

because the status quo is focused on the individual pursuit of bettering. So, there's not room for

collective liberation under capitalist hetero-patriarchy but there is room in capitalist hetero-

patriarchy for questions like, "How can I personally love my body more?" Amber also agreed

that the focus on the individual is much different from the movement body positivity was born

out of—the FAM. She said, "Fat acceptance is about equal treatment and equal dignity, respect,

and access for people of size…like let's get anti-discrimination laws passed that address size,

that kind of stuff. Whereas, body positivity can often be based around appearance and respecting different bodies no matter what you look like or what your health status is."

For Virgie and Amber, body positivity is different than the FAM because it doesn't make structural demands that might benefit all. Instead body positive influencers and users make patriarchal bargains, deals in which an individual accepts and perpetuates some of the costs of patriarchy in exchange for receiving some of the rewards (Kandiyoti 1988). All citizens enmeshed in a neoliberal society are required to engage in disciplinary practices, such as self-surveillance, but this is not experienced equally. Women's bodies are subject to the normalizing and interiorizing gaze much more than men (Bartky 1990). This means that neoliberalism and patriarchy are intimately connected so that the more docile bodies of women can be more easily controlled by those in power (i.e. men). By engaging in the same self-surveillance neoliberalism requires of its citizens, now framed as self-love, individuals get to bargain for maximized autonomy, safety, and well-being, but patriarchal, neoliberal systems and institutions remain unthreatened. Some of these institutions include work, healthcare, and education. For example, employers still get to profit from fat oppression—by terminating fat employees at any point solely based on weight (Roehling, Roehling and Elluru 2018) and enhancing their bottom line since the pay gap between thin women and super fat women is twenty-six percent (Roehling 1999). In addition, women have historically faced intense medicalization as a way to control women's bodies (i.e. make them more docile) especially as it relates to reproduction, but also body weight (Clarke et al. 2008, Murray 2008). As such, fat women face many obstacles in trying to access quality healthcare including, facing stigmatization by health care providers and diagnosing all ill-health to being fat (Pausé 2014b). This is also true of fat men and women trying to access equal education with reports of fat students receiving poor evaluations and lack

of college acceptances due to their weight (Puhl and Brownell 2001). Rather than tackle these larger forms of discrimination which harm fat women (and men) as a group, some body positive influencers and users choose to focus on self-love in the hopes that individually they can access more status, success, and be treated better overall.

Melissa believes "when we choose to fight back against the systemic oppression and discrimination that marginalized people feel or experience by just telling marginalized people to love themselves we're actually being really harmful to them as well." In focusing on the individual, she says, we ignore the fact that "our experience in our body is not just determined by how we feel about our body…it's determined by the way the world treats us and sees us." Fat women can love their bodies all they want, but that does not mean they aren't going to be refused diagnostic procedures because of their fatness (Pausé 2014b). This also frames the achievement (or lack thereof) of self-love as one's personal responsibility, a narrative prevalent in traditional health, beauty, and gendered discourses (Lupton 2013, Murray and Meleo-Erwin 2008). It is up to YOU to make sure you love yourself, it is NOT diet culture's fault if you feel bad about your body. For Virgie, body positive influencers are "fighting for a feeling," and although "feelings are good, you can have more than that…you can actually have rights." Beyond just feeling good about one's body, some body positive influencers want to make collective change, such as implementing anti-size-discrimination laws or ensuring access to judgement-free healthcare which equate to material power rather than just attention (Bartky 1990, Kirkland 2008).

Because of body positivity's emphasis on individual reforms, some influencers are distancing themselves from the language of "positivity." Like body neutrality, some influencers have adopted the term "liberation" that to them better conveys collectively dismantling structures that oppress non-normative bodies. This was true for Margaret who identifies her work as body

liberation because it's about "fighting against injustices that are actively happening. Dismantling those oppressive systems that are in place." Ashleigh came from a similar perspective when they told me that they identify as a futurist and body liberationist. For them, identifying with body liberation was a way to distance themselves from the "self-love narrative shit" that "white people" who have a little bit of "pudge" use to make themselves feel better. Ultimately, they argue, "I also think too that it's like, how you personally feel about your body doesn't directly correlate to marginalization." Like Margaret and Ashley, Jes too has been moving towards body liberation over body positivity, saying: "liberation acknowledges…that we can love ourselves as much as we want and we still have to acknowledge that there are outside oppression…we can love the fuck out of ourselves but that does not mean that I now have, like, access to unbiased health care."

Instead of the individual notion of self-love, influencers who identify with body liberation, and some who don't, advocate for collective, systemic change such as dismantling notions of appearance-based worth, increasing representation, and ensuring access to non-discriminatory healthcare. For example, Maddie wants to "eradicate[e] those systems [that oppress our bodies] so that people can live their lives freely and be who they want to be and just totally get rid of these crazy social constructs we have." It is also about the survival. As Ashleigh explains, "I don't think that life is accessible to everybody, I don't think that humanity is accessible to everybody." Therefore she's "fighting for all people to have access to humanity, resources, affirmation, and life." Similarly, Carina wants people to "live in a world where people don't commit suicide because they're body shamed. Or where people aren't denied healthcare because doctors are fatphobic and pieces of trash and where people based on how they look or what gender they're presenting in and whatnot aren't denied jobs." While the goals influencers

want to achieve affect individual people, influencers are seeking to make changes at the level of the institution—medicine, work, and fatphobia.

Whether influencers take on individual or structural reforms or if they buy into self-love as a primary goal of body positivity, it is clear from my conversations with influencers and from my examination of Instagram posts that self-love is a key aspect of body positivity. Although not without controversy, self-love has proven to be tantamount to body positivity and has taken over the mainstream narrative of body positivity, going so far as to be the primary way influencers see body positivity as being commercialized. Even if self-love might be an unrealistic goal, followers (even if not the influencers) of body positivity seem to be doing everything they can to achieve it.

FREEDOM TO BE BEAUTIFUL

Even though some influencers are focused on pursuing structural reforms, most recognize that body positivity still centers the individual. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the last goal of body positive influencers would also be focused on an individual pursuit: the freedom to be beautiful. The ideology of having a "freedom to" be beautiful challenges the notion that there is one form of beauty by arguing that all bodies are beautiful (or at least have a right to access beauty). Both Sastre (2014b) and Cwynar-Horta (2016) similarly found that body positive websites and Instagram images seek to challenge normative constructions of beauty. Further, fat activists, as part of the FAM, have also engaged in challenging beauty standards, especially as it relates to fashion (or "fatshion") (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Connell 2013, Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013). Building on this, I argue that the focus on altering beauty standards is likely related to the fact that body positivity consists primarily of women. Of the 101 people in #bodypositive posts only 6 presented as men. The ubiquity of women in the discourse of body

positivity was something that influencers repeatedly mentioned. For instance, Margaret said, "body positivity is completely female-dominated as far as I can tell." Gia agreed, saying body positivity was created for "primarily fat bodies and primarily women." Related, both Carina and Sally make content for women saying, "I'm here for fat women and femmes…" and "My goals are to help women and young women all over the world," respectively.

It is clear from my discussions with influencers and with the images I examined on Instagram that body positivity is by and for women. I would argue that the focus on women's experiences is exactly why body positivity is focused on appearance-based worth, since "the message that women receive is that our worth is based in our appearance" (quoted from Amber), but more specifically adhering to the normalized feminine beauty standards, particularly being thin, fair-skinned, young, able-bodied, and demonstrating femininity through hair, make-up, and clothing (Bartky 1990, Kwan and Trautner 2009). Whereas women's value is derived from her appearance, men's power does not rest solely on their looks—making the body and beauty a particularly feminized domain. Along these lines, Amber argues that women are "taught to hate their bodies from a very young age and boys are taught to use their bodies from a very young age" which leads to higher rates of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and negative body image compared with men (Bessenoff 2006, Bordo 2003, Tiggemann and Slater 2004). Melissa explains, "I think also women's experience in their body is much more devastating. It affects our lives more…There's more emphasis on women's bodies than there are on men's bodies…I think that's kind of why [body positivity is] focused on women."

The gender differences in beauty and bodies are also seen in relation to who can be fat and when. Fat has simultaneously been constructed as feminine and masculine because fat takes up space (masculine), but is soft, fleshy and seen as excess (feminine) (Gailey 2014, Wolf 1991).

Because of gendered discourses around fatness, Margaret explains that, "women are judged on their fatness at much smaller sizes than men. I think that once men reach a certain size they experience oppression in a very similar way to what fat women experience, but it takes a lot longer for them to get to that size." The framing of fat as feminine also plays out in that the "excess" of women's material bodies is believed to correlate to an excess of sexual desires or a hypersexuality (Prohaska and Gailey 2009). This is compounded by the fact that women are already more objectified and fetishized than men in media and everyday life (Hatton and Trautner 2011). Maddie highlighted this idea when she said, "I mean it's a way of, in my opinion, oppressing women…but I think [women's] bodies are important because it's a way to show, you're here to please men… I think we are such a body-obsessed culture because fuckability is really important to a lot of people."

Influencers also recognized that body standards were compounded for those who were transgender or queer. Carina explained that "for transgender and gender nonconforming people their body is a huge part of what they deal with" because they have to deal with "what gender [they're] presenting as" and "the size of [their] body." Amber agreed with this assessment saying that "if you're transgender or fall somewhere else on the spectrum, there is a whole other set of issues because…societal expectations of gender and what a real woman or a real man is…supposed to be is tied up in our physical body because this is the way that we interact with the world." Gia, a transgender woman, experienced the intersection of gender and fatness firsthand. She said that "prior to transitioning, I didn't really have to worry about my body" because "I was never looked down upon either by men or women. I never thought to myself, oh my God, I'm so big. I can't do this or that or I can't wear that." However, after transitioning she "started to look more at [her] body," saying "I think it's a mixture of the standards that we put on

women as well as just personally my own views of my body and how I was addressing my gender dysphoria and all of that. But I think it became difficult. I was looking at my body and how big I was, my weight, and whether I had large hips or large breasts, things like that." In trying to adhere to proscribed gender norms, Gia was confronted with the reality that her fat body became an issue to achieving her desired gender identity.

With this knowledge, influencers were clear that a major aspect of body positivity was addressing issues of beauty standards, especially as they relate to women. For Gia, body positivity does address "the whole policing of women's bodies because…society tends to tell women that they have to look a certain type of way" and body positivity is "kind of telling society, fuck you, I'm a woman and I'm fat and I'm fine." A woman existing proudly in a fat body is a radical act. As Gailey (2014:74) argues, "such a body defies normativity in appearance, practice, and stylization and fails to situate itself easily in dominant categories and roles. Because the body is a site of investment, control, and cultural production, anomalous bodies can be understood as threatening to the social order." By posting images of fat bodies that are happy and thriving on Instagram, influencers and followers push back against discourses that define them as unattractive and pathological, which is threating to power structures. Whereas the patriarchal ideal of the thin body is one that is contained, controlled, and subordinated, fat bodies are not as easily disciplined and might demand equality.

For influencers then, one of the primary goals or outcomes of body positivity is to move the benchmark of what it means to be beautiful in today's society, specifically to include fat bodies. Influencers do this in part by drawing attention to the existence of a system which perpetuates certain bodies as more beautiful than others. For instance, Margaret explained that body positivity allows women "to come to grips with beauty standards and realizing that they're

part of this system that maybe they weren't even aware of like, 'Oh, there are forces that were making me feel like I had to live up to a certain standard of beauty in this culture.'" Chloe agreed, saying, "being body positive is trying to break the whole stigma of you have to look a certain way and that's beauty." Once people recognize the constructed nature of beauty discourses, they can begin to expand what counts as beautiful. Although not a specific goal for Jessamyn, they recognize that "there's this narrow idea of what beauty is," but that body positivity "expands the definition of beauty" through "the message of 'you're okay exactly as you are today.'" However, for some in my sample moving the benchmark of beauty standards was a major goal for them. For example, Sally's goal for body positivity is "to help people recognize that there isn't one ideal of beauty and that we all are beautiful in our own ways. And that's what makes every single person unique in this world. And there shouldn't be just this one pedestal version of beautiful."

The influencers I spoke to recognized that there is a narrow definition of beauty and those few people who can fulfill that definition are put on a pedestal and rewarded by increased prospects at work, in education, and marriage (Kwan and Trautner 2009). For example, there is a positive association between women's perceived attractiveness and earnings. In contrast, increases in women's weight results in a decrease in family income and occupational prestige (Conley and Glauber 2005). By letting more people access beauty standards by expanding who can be considered attractive, more people are able to compete for access these rewards. Jes describes this goal using the metaphor of a "bubble of exclusion." She said, "all the cool kids are in the middle of this bubble and what we wanna do is we wanna tear open that bubble and be like, "Me too! Include my body, too!"" Amber and Ashleigh agree, saying that mainstream body

positivity is heading towards the notion that "you're all pretty" and wants to "move the benchmark…of beauty standards," correspondingly.

Expanding the definition of beauty and allowing all people the opportunity to be beautiful potentially also impacts the type of representations we see in mainstream media. If more bodies are represented in these arenas, then beauty standards can be widened, or vice versa. Issues of representation is a primary reason that Carina uses Instagram. She explained that "in every facet of media" there are "archetypes of fat women that are disgusting, if anything they're matronly or the funny girl or whatever, but they're never portrayed as someone that you could be attracted to." By posting images of her "very large stomach…huge arms…big boobs and a big butt" to Instagram she hopes to "be slowly shifting what beauty means and what attraction means but it's just gonna take some time and it's gonna be like a muscle that people need to be trained in" (Figure 16). Like Carina, one of Gia's main goals is "pushing for representation" by "trying to break down those barriers of why we don't see fat people on the media or disabled individuals or people of color as to the extent that we see white individuals." Chloe also thinks that body positivity can increase representation in media, saying that "if we can accept [different bodies] as beautiful and that's okay, then why can't we have more black women in movies? Why can't we show more gay people? It's definitely a whole different mindset." For Jessamyn, the reality of representation hit her after she appeared in a commercial and people started coming up to her saying "'I never saw someone who looked like me on TV until I saw you!' Like, 'I never saw a fat black person practicing yoga until I saw you!' and I'm just like 'Damn dude, that's not okay' because there's so many of us out here…"

For each of these influencers, representation was an opportunity for people to see beyond the beauty standards of a thin, white, cis-woman and to be reflected in the media that they are

consuming whether that is a commercial, movie, or something else. Influencers' attention to race, disability, sexuality, and size in issues of representation reflect a realization of the importance of intersectional feminism in body positivity, but again they lack the ability to talk about these issues in coherent, thoughtful ways. For example, Chloe touches on people of size, black women, and gay people as potentially being impacted by increased representation, but she doesn't see how these identities might be overlapping, nor does explain how these systems of oppression are related to who does or doesn't get to be in movies. Even so, influencers recognize the importance of representation in setting a new standard of beauty for all people even if they can't articulate how to achieve it.

Freedom FROM beauty

Like self-love, the fifth goal of body positivity, freedom to be beautiful, is not without contention. Although influencers and previous research recognize that moving the benchmark of beauty standards to include more bodies is a major goal of body positivity (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Sastre 2014b), some are choosing to distance themselves from appearance-based worth. Rather than being free to be beautiful, influencers want people to be free from beauty standards altogether. For Melissa, freedom to beauty asks, "is there one form of beauty?" Whereas, freedom from beauty asks, "how do we actually dismantle" the "world where people do recognize beauty?" But for Melissa, and some of the other influencers I spoke to, the latter is where the real social change and power lies.

For instance, Jes argues that social change cannot happen within the same system of oppression that beauty exists in because "with every liberation there will be a new oppression, and so with the rise of plus sized models we then saw this resurgence of wellness culture. You can be plus-sized as long as you're healthy." As boundaries of acceptable forms of beauty expand

to include fat women, boundaries of health and wellness tighten to ensure that any real change is stifled. You can now be beautiful, but you still cannot access judgement-free healthcare or be free from discrimination in the workplace. Instead of "prying into something that will be exclusive forever," Jes says we need to "step away" and "figure out what [our] reality is for [us]" without the need to be "recognized" by the "beauty industry." For influencers like Virgie, this isn't just about the new boundaries of wellness that Jes describes, but "substituting one beauty standard for another." As Virgie explained: "I've been talking to so many fat people who were just like, 'Oh my god, I'm not thin but I'm not that kind of beautiful, gorgeous, over-the-top, amazing fat that's on Instagram either.' So, it's like, 'Oh my god, I'm not just failing at being a thin beautiful person. I'm failing at being a fat beautiful person, too.'" Because of the "freedom to" ideology, fat women not only have to contend with a beauty discourse that tells them they need to be thin, but also one that tells them if they are going to be fat they have to be fat in very specific ways. Amber added to this argument when she said, "if we're just saying that beauty doesn't end at a size six, now it ends at a size sixteen or a size twenty-six, that we're not really making that much progress because we're saying we'll place all this importance and worth on what you look like as long as we got to play too." Rather than "mak[ing] the measuring stick longer," Amber argues that "we need to get rid of it all together" because "this whole notion of loving yourself for your appearance is rooted in oppression."

Both Virgie's comment of "failing at being a fat beautiful person" and Amber's "now ends at a size sixteen" comment show that beauty standards as presently derived are still limiting. Even as the boundaries of beauty standards are expanding, not ALL people have a freedom to be beautiful, only a few more people. Amber continued, telling me that she believes body positivity needs to "smash [the system of appearance-based worth] all together and create our own

standards of worth that aren't based in beauty because beauty is inherently a system of oppression…based in capitalism and white supremacy and patriarchy." This is similar to Virgie who also wants body positivity to ask for more than appearance-based worth. She says, "In my mind you could have just not hating your muffin top. That's the bare minimum, but you could also be free and you could demand more." For Virgie, this is akin to the patriarchal bargains that women make when choosing self-love over structural change, which she "find[s] troubling." Virgie explains:

> [People in body positivity are] sort of silently bargaining with the status quo and they're like, "Listen, we're not going to try and destabilize hetero-patriarchy or even call you guys that. We're just going to try and move this thing just a couple inches over so that the most privileged among us can have a better life and we're just going to stop negotiating once the people who are most privileged have that, and then we promise we're going to leave the bargaining table and go back to being subjugated."

Like self-love, beauty is an individual pursuit to a structural problem. Rather than focus on an individual embracing their beautiful body, Virgie and Amber, among others, want influencers and users to combat the systemic issues related to beauty standards. This is similar to the structural goals and outcomes some influencers have towards self-love. By combating discrimination and bigotry at the institutional level, many of the individual pursuits, like self-love and a freedom to be beautiful, are achieved by-products. More specifically, changing the cultural understandings around size at the structural or systemic level trickles down to changes at the individual level. As many of these influencers suggest it might be more radical for people to stop focusing on appearance based worth and instead focus on dismantling the system that forces us to feel like we need to achieve beauty at all costs.

THE DANCE OF NEGOTIATION & ACCESSIBILITY OF BODY POSITIVITY

Bobel and Kwan (2011:2) argue that "every action…potentially contains elements of both resistance and accommodation. At times, resistance is a clever and complicated dance of

negotiation, and it is rarely a zero-sum game." The contention between influencers specifically around the goals of self-love and a freedom to be beautiful demonstrate the multiplicity of ways people can go about challenging discourses of beauty and gender. For some influencers and users, the idea of self-love is a liberatory act that enables them to challenge ideas that their fat bodies are unworthy. However, others find self-love as another unrealistic standard that perpetuates a neoliberal focus on the individual. This disconnect is also seen in the controversy between influencers who adopt a "freedom to" versus "freedom from" ideology. Although influencers who support the former see it as expanding the boundaries of beauty, those who support the later argue that change cannot happen within the same system that values appearance over everything. Both sides demonstrate how resistance is multifaceted and how some continue to draw on the discourses they seek to challenge.

The contradictions among influencers about these goals reflects the reality that it is quite difficult to get beyond these discourses. For example, in trying to challenge the discourses of beauty and gender which idealizes thin as the standard of beauty and femininity, some influencers and users continue to draw on or accommodate the notion of beauty. Rather than dismantle notions of appearance-based worth, influencers operate within them, just seeking to expand the boundaries to include more people. But if influencers and users both ultimately want to challenge the idea that only certain bodies are good, lovable, and beautiful in traditional discourses, why do they keep using the same discourses that they seek to disrupt? The reliance on traditional discourses might be in part because they are the most prevalent, defined, and coherent ways of representing and discussing people (Lupton 2013). These discourses are such a hegemonic and embedded part of our everyday life that it is difficult to reflect upon them critically and to create new discourses outside of them. As Butler (1993:231) argues "the practice

by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production." The repetition of oppressive and painful gender and beauty norms often forces us to work within the discourses we seek to challenge by both miming and displacing conventions (Butler 1993). Although influencers mime the notion of beauty in their quest to allow everyone to be free to pursue appearance-based worth, they also displace the boundaries that dictate only a particular kind of person (i.e. white, thin, able-bodied, young, heterosexual) can be beautiful. In this way, influencers are simultaneously using and re-shaping the discourses of beauty and gender by both resisting and accommodating them.

Further, some people might not be ready or able to disavow notions that are so deeply embedded in U.S. culture and therefore feel more comfortable making individual change rather than systemic or collective change. In fact, one of the reasons influencers continue to use the language of body positivity, rather than body neutrality or body liberation even though they might personally be more aligned with these ideologies, is that body positivity is accessible. Ashleigh explains, "I think accessibility to movements and to this work has to start somewhere that feels good and I won't lie, body positivity sounds good as shit when you say it." Similarly, Virgie argues, "I can speak from a place of utter compassion around maybe you're not ready to hear about fat liberation out the gate and body positivity feels less threatening because it is less threatening, right? I mean, I believe ultimately that it can be an entry point." For influencers the hope is that people will come into body positivity because of the gentle, positive messaging like self-love, but will move beyond that into more "political" action such as challenging discriminatory healthcare and dismantling appearance-based worth. Margaret said, "I personally believe that [body positivity] is a useful entry point for people who are not political, and my agenda is to help people become aware of the politics and the deeper issues behind all of this."

Like Margaret, Amber wants people to continue "coming in through fashion, keep coming in through these positive affirmations about bodies and learning to wear a bikini or whatever," but then after some time to be "more political and more radical." Although some influencers see the benefit in mantras of self-love, all bodies are good bodies, and a freedom to be beautiful to introduce people to body positivity, they identify the structural, systematic, and collective reform described above as the more radical and political place "where we can…make some change" (quoted from Amber). Ultimately, the disconnect between influencers and users of Instagram demonstrates that challenging discourses is not an "either-or story." Instead it is a constant negotiation of accommodation and resistance to get people interested in body positivity while also recognizing the difficulty in working against deeply embedded discourses like beauty, gender, and (as I will discuss in the following chapter) health.

CONCLUSION

Body positivity includes a complicated and contentious group of influencers each with their own discourses, which can make answering the question "what is body positivity" difficult. Defining body positivity is made even harder because it lacks a clear leader or organizing body. There are various groups making different claims. Further, because corporate entities have commercialized body positivity, definitions and goals have morphed and varied. Even with the forces that complicate and distort what body positivity is for influencers, there were still five tenets of body positivity that repeatedly showed up in my conversations with them.

First, while body positivity is distinct from the FAM, influencers see the former as born out of the latter. The major distinctions influencers identified between body positivity and the FAM were that the FAM focuses on structural solutions whereas body positivity is more interested in the individual and more inclusive of a variety of bodies, not just fats. Ultimately,

influencers see body positivity as a watered-down version of the FAM. Even though some influencers see body positivity as a distinct, diluted "child" of the FAM, the FAM provided the foundation for several of body positive influencers core beliefs and goals. In particular, the opposition to diet culture, self-love, and a freedom to beauty are all goals the have origins in the FAM. With this in mind, the second tenet body positive influencers had was to oppose diet culture. This was made especially clear when influencers talked about fitspiration, which they saw as deeply embedded in diet culture because of its promotion of fitness and celebration of a thin, muscular body type. The third tenet of body positivity was that influencers believed all bodies are good bodies. Unlike discourses of health, beauty, and femininity, which frames thin bodies as worthier than fat bodies, body positive influencers argue that all bodies have inherent worth.

The fourth goal, and defining aspect of body positivity, builds on the idea that all bodies are good, by saying that you should love that good body. One of the more prolific yet contentious goals, self-love, is the notion that one should embrace their body wholly despite what discourses might argue. However, many influencers felt that self-love was an unrealistic goal that was easily co-opted by corporations to sell products and ignored the more structural issues of discrimination and fatphobia. The final goal of body positivity is for all people to have the freedom to be beautiful. Influencers recognize beauty is a feminized pursuit with narrow standards. Through body positivity, influencers are attempting to move the benchmark of what it means to be beautiful to include more people. However, some influencers find this goal problematic and believe body positivity should be fighting for freedom from beauty. For them freedom to beauty continues to leave people out of standards of beauty because it just replaces

the standard with a new one and a more permanent solution would be to get rid of appearance based worth altogether.

Since these are the five defining aspects of body positivity according to my participants it would make sense that these would reflect and shape the images of body positivity on social media. As described above, social media has been instrumental for body positivity as it has allowed influencers to both produce and consume original or remixed content which gives them the opportunity to actively shape what bodies are represented in body positivity. Whereas traditional sources of media, like television, magazines, and movies, have constructed fat bodies as pathological and unattractive, influencers and users are given the opportunity to change these discourses and represent a new image of what it means to be fat. With this in mind and given that my interviews provided a foundation with which to understand what body positivity is and what its goals are, I can now explore more thoroughly what the images on Instagram look like and how they represent femininity, health, and beauty.

CHAPTER 5: ARE ALL BODIES GOOD BODIES (ON INSTAGRAM)?

As I have shown, body positive influencers pointed to five contentious tenets of body positivity: (1) an opposition to diet culture; (2) the belief that all bodies are good bodies; (3) celebrating self-love; (4) proclaiming that all people have a freedom to be beautiful, and (5) a connection to the fat acceptance movement (FAM) which provides a foundation to many of the goals listed above. How do these translate into the images we see on Instagram, the place where body positivity predominantly lives? If all bodies are good, beautiful bodies then a diverse sample of bodies represented on Instagram would demonstrate that influencers and users[14] take these beliefs seriously by putting them in action. Ultimately, the bodies represented on Instagram tell us what bodies are valued, but also in what forms of embodied resistance[15] influencers and users are engaged. More specifically, the Instagram posts reveal how body positive influencers both resist and accommodate traditional discourses of beauty, health, and gender in their bid to accomplish the four goals outlined above. This is further highlighted by a comparison to Instagram posts tagged #fitspiration. By comparing #fitspiration and #bodypositive posts I can examine the similarities and differences among movements resisting normative ideals of female bodies by how they draw boundaries on what they see as feminine/unfeminine, healthy/unhealthy, and beautiful/unattractive, but also to see which bodies aren't being represented and/or valued by these influencers.

In the following chapter, I show how, despite influencers' claims that body positivity is for all, Instagram posts center white, young, able-bodied, cis-gender-presenting women who

---

[14] Users are people who have and post to Instagram accounts, but may or may not have the status of Influencers. When I use the term user I am referring to people whose post used the hashtag #bodypositive or #fitspiration and were found via the Explore page (see methods).

[15] I use Bobel and Kwan's (2011:2) definition of embodied resistance as "oppositional action or nonaction that defies contextual body norms."

fulfill conventional standards of beauty and femininity. In addition, I demonstrate that the few #bodypositive posts that mention health resemble #fitspiration posts because they adhere to stereotypical understandings of health as rooted in fitness, clean eating, achieving thinness through weight-loss, and engaging in personal responsibility narratives. Finally, I show how followers endorse the messages of body positivity users and influencers, except when it comes to issues of health. Ultimately, influencers and users work within traditional discourses while simultaneously displacing them because these discourses are deeply embedded and valued in the United States.

INCLUSIVE OF ALL?

As I discussed earlier, instead of focusing solely on fat bodies, like the Fat Acceptance Movement (FAM) does, influencers claim that body positivity is inclusive of all bodies—taking into consideration body size, race, gender, ability, sexuality, and age. As Chloe explains, "No matter if you're skinny, you can be body positive. If you're a different color, you can be body positive. It doesn't discriminate." Gia agreed telling me that body positivity is "inclusive of marginalized bodies" which included, "brown people, African American individuals…Middle Eastern individuals" and "disability and age and sexuality." Although influencers are clear about this intent, in practice, body positivity is not as inclusive as influencers want it to be, despite their best intentions—seen both in how influencers talk about intersectionality and which bodies are represented on Instagram. The two quotes by Chloe and Gia highlight the disconnect between wanting to take an intersectional approach to body positivity but lacking the ability to articulate it. For example, in saying "a different color," Chloe centers her whiteness as the unmarked category whereas anyone else is the "Other." This type of "othering" is exactly what Collins (1991:79) described when she discussed beauty standards: "[b]lue-eyed, blond, thin women

could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair." If influencers are unable to talk about identities and oppressions in a thoughtful and coherent way, that will often be reflected in the representations on Instagram.

As such, many people whom influencers claim should be included in body positivity are left out, especially persons of color, transgender persons, and old women. Maddie told me, "people of color, queer people, and disabled people…are totally being left out in the conversation that is happening" around body positivity. Margaret agrees saying that: "Body positivity at this point, 2018, is small- to medium-sized white middle-class women's bodies…Yes, other races, other abilities, other genders, other sexual orientations, other classes, are being left out." As I discuss in more detail below, although some bodies, particularly old, disabled, and queer bodies, are truly left out, others, like people of color, are represented in body positivity, but they are on the periphery. This is highlighted by Margaret who argues that body positivity centers bodies already supported by traditional discourses (i.e. "small- to medium-sized white middle-class women") to the detriment to other bodies who do not already receive such privilege. Therefore, #bodypositive posts does not meet the definition of inclusivity set forth by some feminist and disability scholars who argue that historically marginalized bodies (i.e. people of color, old bodies, queer folks, disabled people) should be foregrounded instead of merely incorporated (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, Rohrer 2005, Young 2002). Further, Margaret suggests that the cause of this exclusion is because "the body positivity movement is centered on Instagram." For her, "if you're not somebody who has time to post all these selfies; I don't know what the movement looks like if you don't have that luxury." And Margaret is correct that social media is a luxury because not all citizens have equal access to social media or the

expertise to use digital technologies for activism or money-making purposes (Fischer 2016, Fuchs 2013, Lupton 2015). Becoming an influencer or getting highlighted on Instagram's "Explore" page requires a certain set of skills such as knowing what hashtags to use and what images will get the most likes. Sally agreed, explaining, "I feel like because I am in the influencer realm, I know a lot of really diverse groups who are involved. But at the same time, if you don't have a platform it's hard to be seen right?" Finally, the influencers I interviewed were highly educated and the majority did not have children. Becoming an influencer and/or just having the time to participate in Instagram culture and body positivity means one needs to have the time, energy, and resources. Therefore, one must be relatively class-privileged to contribute to body positivity on Instagram.

Amber also believes that the lack of inclusivity is related to who is "offered partnerships with these companies or who easily get followers when their content gets shared because they are conventionally attractive" on Instagram, but thinks that "it takes those people really using the privilege and the power that they have to amplify the work of people who maybe don't have that same privilege." For instance, she suggests, "that each of us needs to look at the ways we're using social media and where could we do better, how could we amplify the voices of the people who aren't getting pushed to the top with these algorithms?" Whether it is social media algorithms, who can access social media, or a general lack of intersectional thinking by influencers and users, influencers feel body positivity is leaving out many people despite its intentions to be inclusive. But if so many people are left out of body positivity who is left in? And how does this reflect and shape body positive influencers, users, and followers understandings of beauty, femininity, and health?

WHO IS REPRESENTED?

Who is represented in body positivity on Instagram is best described by Amber and Jessamyn. First, Amber argues that the "people who fit the conventional standard of beauty— like thin, white, cis-gender women—end up being kind of centered...and…that the same hierarchies that play out to who's popular and sexy online, those same beauty standards and that image plays out in the body positivity community." Jessamyn agreed saying that in the "more mainstream versions of body positivity you're really only seeing cis-het-presenting femmes who are like 35 and under and who are either white, black, beige and they all are going to have an hourglass body shape." Amber and Jessamyn's characterization of the bodies represented on social media is exactly what I found in my examination of #bodypositive Instagram posts and what previous research on body positivity has found (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Miller 2016).

Race

Of the 101 people in posts tagged #bodypositive on Instagram, 70.3% present as white, 1.9% Asian, 14.9% black, 8.9% Latinx, and the race of 3.9% is indeterminable.[16] This is roughly the same for posts tagged #fitspiration. Of the 91 people in posts tagged #fitspiration, 76.9% present as white, 3.29% Asian, 12.1% black, 3.29% Latinx, and 4.4% are of indeterminable race. Although these percentages are somewhat proportionate to the racial demographics of the United States[17], with slight overrepresentation of white persons and slight underrepresentation of Asian and Latinx persons, for some influencers this is not enough. As Margaret explained, "I think

---

[16] Race was determined via a multi-step process. First, I looked for any reference to the person's race in their hashtag or caption (i.e. #latina). When there was no reference to race, I would determine their racial category based on their appearance in the image, most often via skin color and other bodily characteristics. When possible, especially if race was difficult to determine, I would try to find the user's account and search for verification of their race there (i.e. mention of race in profile, hashtags, and/or caption). I recognize that this is my perception of their race, not how they self-identify and therefore I cannot adequately capture all racial nuance or categories (i.e. multi-racial; white, Hispanic). However, despite this limitation it is important to remember that Instagram is a social media platform based on images. Therefore, how a person's race is perceived by outsiders is just as important to take into account even if that is not how they self-identify because that's how most Instagram users and followers interact with one another.

[17] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218

body positivity has been very white, very, very white. People of color are pushed to the fringes." Similar to feminist and disability scholars' discussions of inclusion politics (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, Rohrer 2005, Young 2002), rather than being proportional to the population, some body positive influencers want to center marginalized races, rather than white women. For example, Amber explained that she thinks it's a problem that "cis-gender, thin white women center themselves and their feelings" in body positivity over someone "who is in a larger body, an activist who is a person of color, who's queer, who's Muslim." She continued:

> Not because they're better than cis white women, not because white women don't belong in the movement, but because remember who this movement is for and if you're a conventionally attractive thin white women, society is already saying good girl. Society is already rewarding you with, you can buy clothing in your size, you can probably bet that if you apply an apartment you're going to get it, you can bet that your resumé will land on the top because you have a white sounding name.

Given white women already receive a lot of privilege and attention in mainstream media, for some influencers it is about expanding the representation of people of color and others on the margins. For them that is what inclusivity looks like and as such, they seek body positivity failing that goal in their representation of bodies on Instagram.

Carina felt the domination of white women in body positivity was particularly problematic because "it was created by [and for] fat black women." This idea is shared by Darwin (2017) who argues that body positivity came out of Second Wave Feminist movements like "Black is Beautiful." For Carina the appropriation of body positivity from black women was a part of a long history of "people of color creating something and then white people fuck it all up." Her notion of this history dovetails with scholars' findings that symbols, artifacts, genres, and rituals of black culture have long been used by white culture and mainstream media without substantive reciprocity, permission, or compensation (Rogers 2006). From hip-hop and rap (Rodriquez 2006) to linguistics (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015) and soul food (Witt 2004), black

culture has served to line the pockets of white people, and also position themselves as cool by

association. Jessamyn similarly recognized the complicated relationship body positivity has with

race, saying:

> Much of the body positivity movement has been within white communities of white people or white adjacent people or people of color kickin' it with white adjacent people, present company included. I would say that there's almost like racist undertones at times within the body positive community, unintentional, but there's just as much opportunity for microaggressions or for cultural appropriation, for all kinds of violent unintentional or intentional actions.

Although women of color are in the images tagged #bodypositive, none of the captions discuss

issues such a white supremacy, racism, or issues regarding race except for the occasional race-

related hashtag such as #melanin, #blackgirlswhoblog, and #latina. For some influencers, like Jes

and Ashleigh, these issues should be addressed by body positive influencers because they deal

with the well-being of people and their bodies. For example, Jes said, "I think that when people

think of body positivity they are not thinking of the children being held in cages in Texas and

that is a part of body positivity." Similarly, for Ashleigh, "there is no way to have this

conversation without talking about black people, without talking about blackness and fatness and

how those things are deeply related" because "the violence that we're talking about in masses are

specifically derivative of anti-blackness and white supremacy." Jessamyn discussed racism in

one post, writing (Figure 17):

> Where are the lines for considering oneself a minstrel show? Do I draw the line at "inspiring others"? Does "inspiring others" negate a minstrel show? At what point do I accept the spectacle that I've allowed others to expect from me? Happy, fat, black- you are only allowed to show yourself when and how it suits other people. Otherwise you'd better shut your mouth and be grateful…Everyone wants the happy fat black girl as long as they can own her. And this is my truth- this is where my yoga practice has led me…Things are really good right now. I am spending less time on social media and more time with my cats…

Traditional beauty standards in the United States frame whiteness as the default in opposition to black women (Collins 1991, Havlin and Báez 2018). Carina supported this notion, saying, "I think that because people have been for so long fed this idealized European vision of what beauty should look like, people just have literally not been trained to even look for beauty in anything past a thin white woman." The centrality of white women in the images tagged #bodypositive highlight how body positive influencers and users still implicitly link whiteness with beauty. However, the 26 people of color in posts tagged #bodypositive does show that body positivity, even in small ways, is challenging the notion that beauty always equals whiteness. For example, in one post a black woman is seen posing three different ways, spliced together showing off her "curvy" body in a flowered dress along with the hashtags "#effyourbeautystandards," "#honormycurves," and "#blackgirlswhoblog" (Figure 18). In another post, a Latina woman is photographed from the chest up with her large breasts centered. She is wearing a full face of make-up, has curly black hair down past her shoulders, and is staring off camera with a smile on her face (Figure 19). The caption reads, "day dreamin' already 😇 #effyourbeautystandards #tbt #fatbabe#bodypositive #makeup #plussize #motd#goldenconfidence." By connecting images of women of color with hashtags of beauty like these posts do, users expand the boundaries of what can be a beautiful body to include women of color, especially those who are fat. However, as I will discuss below, most of these women continue to rely on hyper-feminized and hyper-sexualized versions of themselves which may balance out the transgressions of their size and race as a "mode of survival" (Havlin and Báez 2018:14).

Men

As discussed in the previous chapter, body positivity is by and for women, meaning that men are largely ignored in discussions and representations of body positivity. As Chloe succinctly put it, "I don't see a lot of body positive men." And Margaret concurred, saying, "I think that often men are being left out in a bad way from these conversations." The lack of men in body positivity was evident in my examination of Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive. Of the 101 people, only 6 presented as men. This was somewhat surprising given Caruso and Roberts (2017) demonstrated that body positive men are active on Tumblr, signaling that perhaps since young women are the largest user base on Instagram (Anderson 2015) that men are just not as active on this platform. However, for posts tagged #fitspiration, there were considerably more men, with 21 out of 91 people presenting as men. The higher number of (white) men in #fitspiration posts is reasonable given that bodybuilding, which is related to fitspiration, constructs and signifies culturally dominant notions of manhood through teaching men to withhold expressions of pain and engaging in masculine bodily behaviors like aggression and strength-building (Vaccaro 2011).

Besides the domination of women on Instagram, the lack of men in body positivity could be attributed to it being a feminine space, not only because it is dominated by women, but also because in the United States body image issues are framed as "women's issues"—seen as frivolous, trivial, and subordinate to that of the mind. Although attractiveness matters for men, for women femininity is based in their ability to be attractive (to men). By supporting or speaking up about beauty, self-love, or diet culture men's social value and power might be threatened and thus they avoid contributing to body positivity. The men who did use #bodypositive on their posts were either queer (Figure 20) or used hashtags seen in #fitspiration posts, such as #fitness or #getfit (Figure 21). These are men who might be particularly equipped

to manage threats to their status because of their association to body positivity. For example, queer or gay men fail hegemonic masculinity because of their sexuality and stereotypes that frame them as effeminate (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Therefore posting about body positivity might be less of a threat to their already spoiled identity (Goffman 2009). Whereas the men who engage in fitness offset any threats to their manhood by demonstrating masculinity through muscularity. Further, for men demonstrating that they care about appearance is less about being seen as "attractive," a decidedly feminine ideal, but in demonstrating dominance, control, and activity via muscularity (Vaccaro 2011).

However, influencers recognized the increasing importance of body image issues in men's lives. Gia explained, "I think that we, women in the movement, never understood how big of an issue it actually is amongst men because I think a lot of men are coming out now saying that they have their own guilt or their own kind of perception of their body and they're trying to address all of those issues." Sally similarly felt that men's body image issues were becoming a bigger deal, telling me about how an ex-boyfriend and her brother "had body confidence issues" and were "bullied in middle school for being a chubby little kid." She explained, "I think that body positive issues affects both genders. One hundred percent…I'm sure you know males that struggle with it and I know males that struggled with it and of course females too." In recent years, research has begun to support the rise of body image concerns and obsession with appearance plaguing boys and men, known as the Adonis Complex (Pope, Phillips and Olivardia 2000). Men are engaging in higher rates of appearance-related work, such as going to the gym, taking steroids, and participating in disordered eating in higher numbers than seen in previous eras (Bordo 2000, Kwan and Trautner 2009). As such, influencers like Maddie agree that "there needs to be more of a movement for male body positivity."

LGBTQ

Six #bodypositive posts mention Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer (LGBTQ) identities or issues, while there was only one mention of this in posts tagged #fitspiration. The lack of explicit engagement with LGBTQ identities and issues was surprising given that the FAM, the group from which body positivity emerged, was, according to Virgie, "resoundingly queer and centered around people who specifically identified as femme." Examples of the queerness of the FAM include the National Organization for Lesbians of Size and "fatshion" blogs that focused on femme style (Cooper 2016, Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013). Fat and queer identities have also been connected by researchers who argue that both have been "culturally constructed in and through heteronormative discourses and practices that render them 'deviant'" (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013:278). Drawing on McRuer (2006) and Rich (1980), Wykes (2016) explains that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory thinness are "mutually constitutive." Just as compulsory heterosexuality works to "structure social, political, economic and cultural life according to an asymmetrical system of binary gender" it is also contingent on an asymmetrical system of body size and ability (Wykes 2016:1).

Of the six images that did present LGBTQ identities or issues, there were no explicit references to lesbian women. However, four featured masculine-appearing bodies with tags that identified them as gay, queer, or transmen. While contemporary cultural representations of beauty in the United States emphasize a feminine ideal of slenderness, for men masculinity is centered around strength and muscularity (Bordo 2000, Bordo 2003, Pope, Phillips and Olivardia 2000). However, gay men have been able to challenge this traditional ideal, one that looks very similar to feminine standards of beauty—centering young, white, thin, hairless, effeminate queens as the ideal—and gay men face enormous pressure to conform to this ideal body type

(Locke 1997, Pyle and Klein 2011). However, bears or big men have sought to value a different version of male beauty—one that centers fat men and hairiness (Pyle and Klein 2011). All six posts that featured masculine-appearing bodies fulfilled both beauty norms described above. For example, in one image a male-bodied person faces straight towards the camera, head resting on his hand, shirtless, highlighting the thinness of his body with the hashtags #gayboy (Figure 22). In another post, we see a much larger male-bodied person, dressed in a green t-shirt, tight around his breast tissue, with a full beard, using the hashtags #gay and #bearsofinstagram (Figure 23). As described previously, gay men fail hegemonic masculinity because of their sexuality (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Therefore, posting images of men in non-normative masculine bodies (i.e. not muscular) is less of threat to an already spoiled masculinity.

The remaining two images related to LGBTQ tagged #bodypositive featured a queer person and a transwoman. In addition, two of the influencers I interviewed were transgender, one identifying as a transwoman and the other as a non-binary femme. There was a third participant who identified as a queer femme. Although there were not many #bodypositive posts that focused on LGBTQ identities, some of my influencers engaged in these discussions. All of the posts I sampled for Gia, who identifies as a transgender woman, referenced her trans-identity. While some posts simply used hashtags like #transisbeautiful, others discussed her trans experience. For example, in one post she describes how she came to understand she was trans (Figure 24) and in another she discusses the difficulties that come with accessing her hormone replacement therapy (Figure 25). However, Ashleigh, a non-binary femme, and Jessamyn, a queer femme, did not refer to their gender identities in any of the Instagram posts I sampled. Although Ashleigh and Jessamyn identify outside of the gender binary, they, like many of the other posts I sampled are at risk of being misidentified. Virgie explained that "the transformation

of [fat activism] to body positivity" was through a "misinterpretation of queer gestures by straight culture, especially around fashion, makeup, attitude, and these things that are clearly manifestations of resilience and survival and strength are then sort of transmogrified into confidence and style." The misrepresentation and co-optation of queer gestures might also explain why there were so few LGBTQ references in my sample of posts tagged #bodypositive. As a straight, white, cis-gender woman I might be mis-reading queer signals. However, some people might also be choosing to pass as gender and sexuality conforming.

This misrepresentation might also occur in the performance of the images themselves, as what many of the images share is that they are hyper-feminine (or hyper-femme) and hyper-sexual. For example, in one post celebrating her birthday, Ashleigh is in a tight, scoop-neck, white shirt that emphasizes her large breasts. Her hair is long and straight, and her makeup and nails are fully done in pink hues (Figure 26). In an image posted by Jessamyn, she sits on a log, legs wrapped around either side, wearing nothing but greenery and flowers strategically placed over her breasts and crotch. Her hair is shoulder-length and red to match the color of her lipstick (Figure 27). Even though these images might be read as hyper-feminine and hyper-sexual, both Ashleigh and Jessamyn challenge this assessment. In the same post, Jessamyn, in part, wrote:

> Because my physical body has been fetishized on every level, there's a part of me that feels shame when looking at it. Even though, in some ways, it epitomizes my erotic power. And my erotic power is not a source of shame- it's my fount of strength. And HOW IMMA ACCESS MY TRUE STRENGTH IF A BITCH IS OUT HERE FEELING ASHAMED…I'm 31 tomorrow and that's plenty old enough to stop fearing the source of my strength.

In my interview with Ashleigh, they discussed a similar difficulty in being able to choose if and when to access their sexuality. Ashleigh said, "I think that a large part of people following me for my body liberation work is specifically because they also want to fuck me… And I think that even in my work if I wasn't pretty, if I did not hyper-feminize myself to anyone watching me, I

don't think I would have the same platform I have today." What Ashleigh and Jessamyn highlight is how the intersection of their blackness, queerness, and fatness constructs them as hyper-sexual by followers. On the one hand, this benefits them because it enables them to have 53,200 and 411,000 followers, respectively. On the other hand, it limits their ability to express themselves in ways that are meaningful to them.

Age

There were no posts with either hashtag that featured a person who looks over the age of 35. Further, age is hardly mentioned except for a few ageist comments. For example, next to a before and after weight-loss image, the user "lifeandbeautyrehab" writes, "I just want healthy/sexy [sic] and to always look 10yrs younger than I really am," along with a slew of hashtags including #bodypositive, #healthylifestyle, and #diet (Figure 28). Similarly, a post tagged #fitspiration had a caption that focused on a woman who started a "nightly FRÉ skincare routine" which made her "fine lines and wrinkles…much less visible and [her] skin…obviously brighter" (Figure 29). Both captions highlight the lengths these women will go to look young. This is unsurprising given that the contemporary United States values young bodies over old and that markers of age (i.e. wrinkles) can decrease women's social power (Calasanti 2005). That said, one post tagged #bodypositive did call out ageism, though did not feature on old woman. Next to an image with the words "Youth is beauty" crossed out and replaced with "truth is beauty," the caption read (Figure 30):

> When we perceive the lines of aging or the marks of childbirth as ugly, we are also suffering body dysmorphia. In reality, aging is not ugly. This is only a deep-seated, culturally-conditioned belief which strips women of our power, as well as our finances and energy..This is a feminist issue, due to the extreme double standard of "acceptable aging" for men and women. One reason why our culture perpetuates the "youth as beauty" myth for women? Because, often, younger women have not stepped into their power the same way as older women. Youth glorification in women is another way our culture seeks to repress women's power…#selflove

Again, this post was an outlier, but was more in line with how influencers understand body

positivity as being inclusive since all bodies, including old bodies, should love themselves and be

considered beautiful. However, it still did not feature an image of an old body and in fact, the

account user is a relatively young woman. Overall, the lack of old women in both #bodypositive

and #fitspiration posts highlights how two groups who claim to be challenging norms of beauty

actually uphold beauty discourses. By only showcasing young bodies, influencers and users send

the message to followers that young bodies are superior to old bodies and that old bodies should

attempt to look younger though anti-aging activities (Calasanti et al. 2016). As Carina explains,

"They're not even aware that they're shaming people…they don't even think about it as

something that could hurt somebody or harm somebody. It's so ingrained in our culture that like

"Oh, of course you shouldn't want to get old, you shouldn't want to look old." Here's this Botox,

they don't even think of it as a bad thing." Carina's statement sheds light on how easy it is to

become complicit in the reproduction of ageist and stereotypical notions of beauty. Beauty and

gender discourses are so culturally pervasive we often don't notice them as problematic. Though,

like the post that challenges ageism, there may be some pockets trying to confront this narrative.

Further, some influencers and users, like Maddie, would like to see "older" bodies in body

positivity. She said, "I would love to see more middle-aged women. I think they really need it."

However, "middle-aged women" aren't that old. What about women over sixty?

Disability

There were three posts tagged #bodypositive that mentioned disability and one tagged

#fitspiration. However, only one of the posts tagged #bodypositive featured a visible disability

with an image of a woman with muscular dystrophy in a wheelchair accompanied by the hashtag

#disability, #wheelchair, and #inclusion (Figure 31). A second post challenges followers to talk

about the "uncomfortable topics" including, "body shaming, sexual assault, disabilities, equality (or a lack of), mental illness, sexuality, [and] unpopular opinions to name a few" along with a photo of her doing yoga with the aid of a tree and advertising "the new fall collection from @aolyoga" (Figure 32). The third does not mention "disabilities" explicitly, but instead talks about how "chronic health problems affect so much more than just your body but your mind and everyone who you interact with" next to an image of a woman in a t-shirt that says "the struggle is real" (Figure 33). The lack of bodies with disabilities in the Instagram posts I examined highlights the ways in which these bodies are invisible and denied the status of being fully human (Garland-Thomson 2002).

The lack of visibility for disabled bodies is furthered by the reality that disabled body positive influencers exist. Amber explains, "There's a couple people I follow on Instagram who have different visible or invisible disabilities and talk about body positivity through that lens." The invisibility of bodies with disabilities on posts tagged #bodypositive implicitly supports discourses of health, beauty, and gender by denying these bodies the recognition of being healthy, attractive, and feminine (Cheng 2009, Gerschick 2000). Rather than challenging these discourses, through their absence, body positivity affirms that "disabled individuals with prosthetic legs or larger-bodied women, women with no hair, women with I think it's called an osteo bag, stuff like that…[don't] fall under what society tells you the normal, perfect, beautiful woman should look like" (quoted from Gia). This algorithmic oppression is not unique to disabled bodies. People of color, women, LGBTQ individuals, and other marginalized groups face invisibility and the perpetuation of stereotypes because of private, capitalistic interests, the monopoly of information, and the lack of diversity in Silicon Valley (Noble 2018). Algorithms

are not objective or neutral code. They perpetuate oppression through the type of information displayed or withheld.

The invisibility of people with disabilities or discussion about disability in body positivity was also apparent in my interviews with influencers. Even though all but one influencer mentioned ability at least once, it was usually in a long list of other identities such as gender, sexualities, and body size rather than a longer discussion of the issue race. This was also true of the influencers' posts on Instagram. Only 6 of the 54 posts from influencers mentioned issues related to disability and this was usually in a long list of other identities. For example, in one post which features an image of Jes sitting on a throne in an ornately adorned room in Paris, the caption reads, "I am on a mission to turn our society's concept of beauty on its oppressive head because every person is worthy of respect and feeling valued regardless of their size, shape, race, sex, ability, gender, age or health records" (Figure 34). In another post, next to an image of her in a swimsuit lounging by the pool, Maddie similarly writes, "Regardless, be nice to plus-size, fat, and disabled people at the pool. If your friends are snickering or being rude, stop them!" (Figure 35). Again, while influencers wanted to engage in intersectional feminist discussions regarding disabilities and ableism, many had a difficult time doing so. For instance, when Maddie tried to explain to me that she wanted to see more people with disabilities engaging with body positivity, she often did not know how talk about these issues:

> It's just a matter of them getting visibility. Because I know that there are people in wheelchairs who have a disability but there's only a few of them. I don't know proper medical terms so I'm not going to say anything. I don't want to misspeak on it. But you know, somebody who might have a genetic disorder that might make them look a certain way, they probably don't have as much visibility. Or burn victims or people like that.

Although body positive influencers might want to discuss issues related to ability and want people with disabilities to be represented in #bodypositive Instagram posts they are largely

missing. This may be a reflection of a larger issue of feminist organizations and communities not being successful in taking an intersectional approach despite ideologically wanting to (Reger 2014).

Body Size and Shape

The most diversely represented body attribute in #bodypositive posts was body size. Of the 101 people in posts tagged #bodypositive on Instagram 34 had a thin or fit body type, 27 were small fat, 25 were fat, 5 were superfat, and 10 were hard to determine given they focused on the face, with no body. #bodypositive was considerably more diverse in body size than #fitspiration where only 5 of the 91 people in posts were small fat. The remaining bodies were thin or fit (N=59), hypermuscular (N=21), or undeterminable (N=6). It is unsurprising that body size would be so divergent between the two groups since fitspiration focuses on muscular, strong bodies, while body positivity comes out of the FAM and thus has always centered fat bodies.

Unlike body size, body shape was far more difficult to discern because of the way people pose. Women would often contort their bodies in ways which highlighted the small-ness of their waist or turned to the side so followers could see the curve of their butt. Further some were engaged in activities such as yoga, sitting, or laying on a bed which made it difficult to determine the exact shape of their body. Even so, it was clear that hourglass body shapes were most represented either because that was the persons actual body shape or because users wanted to give the illusion that it was their body shape through posing. The focus on hourglass body shapes was true for both #bodypositive and #fitspiration posts. However, #bodypositive posts also had round and pear shape bodies whereas #fitspiration posts had virtually none. Further, because of #fitspiration's higher rate of male bodies featured there were more triangular body shapes while #bodypositive posts had none.

Although there is more body size and shape diversity in body positivity than in fitspiration, smaller bodies are still central to each group. There are size limits of acceptability in body positivity and, like Patterson (2014) found in her examination of plus size models, hourglass silhouettes are favored over pear shapes. The lack of very fat women continues to put forth the discourse that smaller is better, more beautiful, and as I will discuss later in this chapter, healthier. This was a concern for influencers who felt that there was a difference between women who had a "little padding" or "tummy rolls" and fat women who face more size discrimination and lack of visibility. For example, Maddie told me about a time when a model on Instagram wanted people to consider her plus-size because she has "freaking tummy rolls." Maddie's friend "commented back" and said, "it's great that you have cute tummy rolls, but you have to understand that a lot of us that are over a size 20, don't have visibility, and you as a size 12-14 plus-size woman, have a lot more visibility, and your body is totally accepted because you only have rolls when you sit over, and I have rolls all the time." Carina agreed that there are differences between women who are size 12-14 and women over size 20. Women who are "passably skinny" don't have to worry about the lack of visibility and discrimination fat women encounter: "you can sit on the airplane seat, you don't have to worry about where you're gonna get your clothes from…about losing your job or just not even getting hired at the job…being ridiculed, becoming a meme online…being openly body shamed on the street, on the internet." These forms of discrimination that Carina and Maddie describe are materially real. Fat employees can be terminated at any point based solely on their weight, with no regard to job performance (Roehling, Roehling and Elluru 2018). "Beautiful" people are often treated better, encounter more opportunities, and have greater peer acceptance (Kwan and Trautner 2009). Fat

women are less likely to appear in TV and movies and when they do they are often characterized as unattractive, lazy, and a joke (Richardson 2016).

Even though body positive Instagram posts are widening the boundaries of what types of bodies can be considered beautiful and feminine by showcasing women from size 8 to 26, the lack of women at the higher end of this spectrum highlights that these boundaries are only widened so much. Like Sastre (2014:930) found in her examination of body positive websites the bodies mostly represented on Instagram are "not-quite thin enough to stand in as an ideal" yet "not-quite large enough to incite panic." This was bolstered by Virgie who said, "I think this goes back to this idea that people don't want to end fatphobia. The folks who are following these folks [who are size 8 to 12], maybe they're not ready or maybe they never want to end fatphobia. They just kind of want to feel okay about their muffin top." Jes agreed with this idea, telling me, "you don't see the largest [bodies on] Instagram accounts…You won't see that on their profiles because that's just too controversial. That's just too far, too radical." Body positive influencers and users are engaging in a "complicated dance of negotiation" whereby they are both accommodating and resisting discourses that frame fat as negative (Bobel and Kwan 2011:2).

By demarcating certain fats as newly beautiful and others as still problematic, users and influencers expand the boundaries just enough to include some, but not all people. This is a patriarchal bargain, a deal in which an individual accepts and perpetuates some of the costs of patriarchy in exchange for receiving some of the rewards (Kandiyoti 1988). Patriarchal bargains are not always conscious decisions, but ways in which to make the best out of our limited options—to survive and/or to receive some privilege. By highlighting small fats, some body positive influencers and users get to attain some of the benefits awarded to those deemed beautiful, such as increased income and an association with happiness, talent, and competency,

but not all (Conley and Glauber 2005, Farrell 2011). As discussed in the previous chapter, this was a central issue for influencers who wanted more structural change but saw people "silently bargaining with the status quo" by saying "we're not going to try and destabilize hetero-patriarchy…we're just going to try and move this a couple inches over so that the most privileged among us can have a better life" (quoted from Virgie). Upending the hetero-patriarchal system might mean nobody gets to be rewarded, and for some unconsciously or not, it is better to move the line of acceptable body size to ensure their individual life is better (versus fat women as a whole). This might be especially true for women who often can only access power via their looks (Wolf 1991). Thus, increasing their chances to access power for themselves over the group is a trade they're willing to make. For Amber the dance of negotiation is problematic because it reproduces the things body positivity is trying to fight against. Amber said, "I think we really have to look at it…from a lens that understands that oppression and worth-based appearance are going to creep into every political movement and that we have to really guard against that by amplifying marginalized voices. Otherwise, then it's just the same standard of beauty, we just added 50 pounds."

Although body positivity is supposed to be inclusive of all bodies, based on my examination of Instagram and my conversations with influencers, body positivity is most often represented by thin, white, young, able-bodied, cis-gender-presenting women. For some influencers this went against their larger goal of not only being inclusive of all bodies but highlighting those that are often ignored by mainstream media representations. As Amber explains, "if we are going to say all bodies are worthy, that includes cis-gender thin white women, but they were already being told that their bodies were worthy. So, I think that we have to look at it from an intersectional perspective, or the people who are truly on the margins get

pushed out again." As I alluded to above, the centering of this particular type of woman often means that certain discourses of femininity are upheld rather than dismantled proving the ubiquitous-ness of these discourses and the value that they have for influencers and users. In the following section, I more fully explore how discourses of beauty and femininity are displayed in the bodies represented.

ARE ALL BODIES BEAUTIFUL BODIES? DISCOURSES OF FEMININITY AND BEAUTY

Traditional discourses of beauty have limited who can access beauty to those who are white, able-bodied, young, cis-gender, heterosexual, and thin (Bordo 2003, Calasanti et al. 2016, Garland-Thomson 2002, Havlin and Báez 2018, Hutson 2010). However, some body positive influencers have sought to challenge this homogenous ideal of beauty and expand the boundaries of who can be beautiful. In adopting the ideology that everyone should have the "freedom to be beautiful," the body positive influencers I spoke to truly believed that all bodies are beautiful. Carina told me, "I think all bodies are beautiful and the more you see them and the more time you spend looking at bodies that are as outside of what we consider beautiful, like wow!" Similarly, Gia said, "I think all bodies are good bodies and all bodies are beautiful." However, some influencers took a "freedom from beauty" perspective, arguing that influencers and users needed to "free ourselves from this measuring stick of appearance based worth and make our own definitions of what worthy or successful is" (quoted from Amber). Jes argued that by following a "freedom to" ideology "we're still looking to this beauty standard for recognition and validation and the reality is that this is carefully crafted, has been around forever and it will never truly include anyone." She argues that "prying into something that will be exclusive forever is not the answer," and instead says we need to "step away from that." Even with this disconnect between influencers in whether they should or shouldn't be attempting to achieve beauty by

131

expanding ideas of who can be beautiful to include all bodies posts tagged #bodypositive

reflected the "freedom to" ideology. Through the combination of images, captions, and the use of

the hashtags like "#BeautyBeyondSize" and "#EffYourBeautyStandards," users are bucking

stereotypical beauty ideals and challenging women to do the same.

For example, in one post the image centers on a fat woman, hand on hip, taking a selfie

(Figure 36). They are wearing a rainbow jumpsuit with a deep-v neckline, breasts semi-exposed,

with a rainbow colored mohawk, makeup, and hair to match. The caption reads, "Still gagging

over this look. Fits like a glove. I have never had so many people stop what they are doing and

stare at this beautiful fat body." Followed by rainbow heart emojis and slew of hashtags

including, #effyourbeautystandards, #fatfemme, #nobodyshame, and #hourglassfigure. In

another post, a small fat woman sits naked and through the use of a mirror takes a photo

simultaneously of her face, but also of her fleshy back and butt—highlighting her rolls and

cellulite (Figure 37). Along with hashtags that include, #bodylove, #jamaicangirl, and

#ladieswithlocks, her caption reads:

> Friendly reminder to all of my Queens: Love and accept yourself and your body and all
> of your curves. Love the skin that you are in. Even with all of the weight that I have
> gained I am still feeling beautiful. Reminder to self; give your body love every day, not
> just the Sunny ones! I love my stretch marks and I love the diamond on the small of my
> back. These things bring me much joy. It's always the small things. Loving me today,
> hope you are somewhere loving yourself!
> You are beautiful 💎 🤍 ⌘

Via the intersection of femme and fatness, the first example tells discourses of beauty to "eff

off," expanding boundaries of beauty to include her experience. The second example encourages

women or "queens" to love themselves (another goal of body positivity) by sharing her own

experiences of self-love—seeing beauty in her own stretch marked body. Both posts challenge

beauty and femininity standards by saying their queer, non-white, fat bodies are attractive despite what discourses have perpetuated about bodies like theirs.

The body positive influencers I spoke to also posted images and captions to convey that their bodies are beautiful despite what traditional standards of beauty claim. For example, in one image Carina is seen in black lingerie, positioned on her arms and knees with her butt propped up, with a friend similarly dressed and positioned whose head is out of frame (Figure 38). Her caption says, "I mean the media and society can keep trying to tell us that fat is a bad thing and that fat people can't be attractive but I'll continue to be over here making them look a goddamn fool because if I might say so myself, this fat lady is serving up sexy, sultry, sensual AND savage looks!" Like the previous posts, by displaying her fat body Carina engages in a radical act that challenges the notion that fat bodies like hers cannot be attractive and potentially expanding followers' ideas about beauty. She told me, "I get comments all day every day from people who are like 'Wow, I have never even considered being attracted to a plus size person but now I saw your photos and I'm like wow maybe I actually could be…'"

However, given the co-optation of body positivity, especially by fitspiration, there were still images of and captions that denigrated fatness and fulfilled conventional standards of beauty. An instance of this can be seen with a before and after weight-loss image (Figure 39). In both images she wears shorts and a bralette with her stomach exposed. She flexes her arm to show the muscle she's gained and the weight she's lost since the first image was taken. In the caption she recounts her weight-loss journal over the past 3 months through "fitness and nutrition." She writes, "Pic on the left— 170 lbs , just started power lifting, falling in love with the sport and with herself. Pic on the right— 156 lbs, consistently training 6 days a week, reminds herself every day how bold, beautiful and brilliant and strong she is, and believes every

word" with 30 hashtags that include #fitspiration, #beautybeyondsize, #allbodiesaregoodbodies, and #weightloss. In another post, a young, blond woman also has a series of photos: her pregnant body at full-term, her body at 13 weeks postpartum, and 20 weeks postpartum (Figure 40). As the photos progress her stomach gets smaller, her thigh gap gets larger, and her cellulite lessens. The caption reads in part, "Being accepting of where you are at, wherever that may be…For me, pregnancy didn't necessarily come with a whole bunch of chub (Defo some), BUT…it did come with a whole bunch of cellulite…Now, I am #4monthspostpartum and I am feeling STRONG! The last 7 weeks I've just been chipping away at my strength and starting to see and feel changes… #bodyafterbaby #bodypositive #shreddingforthewedding."

Both posts do not explicitly say fat is bad or unattractive, but by claiming one is more beautiful at 14 pounds lighter and that one needs to "shred for the wedding" these posts implicitly support the feminine beauty ideal of slenderness; framing fat as unattractive, pathological, and problematic (Bordo 2003). Before and after posts weren't the only posts that continued to fulfill conventional standards of beauty. I routinely saw images of conventionally attractive young women with thin, able bodies who were hyper-feminized and hyper-sexualized, with long hair, heavy make-up, and revealing clothing, using hashtags like #beautiful, #everybodyisbeautiful, and #effyourbeautystandards along with #bodypositive (See Figure 41 and 42). These types of images serve to reinforce the discourses that influencers have sought to challenge by centering people already deemed beautiful. While the mantra "all bodies are beautiful bodies" means that the bodies that fit traditional standards are also beautiful and included in body positivity, their proliferation ultimately undermines the goals of body positivity.

These images that focus on weight-loss and which feature conventionally attractive women despite being tagged #bodypositive are very similar to the images I saw for posts tagged

134

#fitspiration. As previous research has reported, fitspiration celebrates and privileges a homogenous female body (Carrotte, Prichard and Lim 2017, Lupton 2017b, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016), one that is young, toned, white, thin and displays normative forms of feminine embodiment. Like the weight-loss posts tagged #bodypositive, #fitspiration posts had many before and after posts. For example, a "before" photo shows a tan, thin (barely small fat) woman on the beach in a bikini. In the "after" photo the same woman is posing again on a beach in a bikini, this time she is visibly smaller and her arms more toned (Figure 43). In the caption she discusses her relationship with her weight saying she doesn't "pretend to know" what very heavy women go through "because [she] was carrying an extra 15-20lbs of vanity weight that [she] managed to lose." Later she goes on to write that "your worth is not measured by any number on a scale" with the hashtags #muscleisbeautiful, #progresspic, and #girlswithmuscle. Although the user claims that weight is not a barometer of worth, the image and the focus on muscle gain and weight-loss reads as a contradiction. Like the #bodypositive post, the implicit message is that losing weight will make you happier and more beautiful.

The addition of the hashtag "#muscleisbeautiful" is something not seen in body positivity and demonstrates how fitspiration users are trying to expand the boundaries of beauty and femininity to include muscularity. Muscularity has been understood as a way to signify masculinity among men (Gillett and White 1992). As such, women who have developed visible muscles have faced stigmatization as unfeminine and lesbians (Boyle 2005, Dworkin 2001). By proudly developing muscles and displaying them on Instagram with the hashtags #strongoverskinny, #beautiful, and #girlswithmuscles, women in fitspiration are doing what body positive influencers are trying to do for fatness, just with muscularity—expand the boundaries of what is considered beautiful and feminine. However, like #bodypositive, in

#fitspiration posts I overwhelmingly saw images of conventionally attractive young, white women with thin, able bodies who were hyper-feminized and hyper-sexualized despite efforts to expand normative understandings of beauty and femininity (FIGURE 44). In addition, while users of #fitspiration did talk about beauty, they were more likely to phrase it in the terms of physique or aesthetic. For instance, in one post a caption reads:

> If you were to tell me a year and a half ago, you are going to be lean have abs and have a booty I would have laughed so hard. I wouldn't believe you but here I am now with a physique I ever thought I'd have, but trust me it's was not easy but was it worth it? Hell yeah it was. 💪🤙🍑 #transformation #instafit #booty#homeworkout #bootybuilder #diet#dedication #fitfam #fitness #couplegoals#fitspiration #fitcouple #HITT #gym #fitfam#healthy #squats #leggings #longhair#cellulite #workoutvideo #workoutvideos#booty #bootyworkout #fit #abs#relationshipgoals #wshhfitness (Figure 45).

This was especially true of posts which featured men. For example, one post shows a man standing sideways, flexing his arms to highlight his muscles, wearing a muscle-t and baseball cap in front of a set of weights (Figure 46). The caption reads, "Monday Motivation- Was going to type out this long motivational quote, but it comes down to this…Run your day or let the day run you!!...#muscle #physique#fitspiration #inspiration #homegym#motivationalquotes #motivation#bodybuilding #swoledad#swoledadfitness #swolfie…#fitdad." In another post, a young man similarly poses sideways in front of a set of weights, but this time flexing his legs (Figure 47). The caption uses similar hashtags like #physique, #bodybuilding, and #aesthetics. The use of terms like physique and aesthetics over beauty could be attributed to the fact that beauty is seen as a "woman's issue" whereas strength and muscularity are associated with masculinity (Gillett and White 1992, Kwan and Trautner 2009).

Overall, whether it is #beauty or #physique, both body positivity and fitspiration are concerned with issues related to appearance. For some body positive influencers this means challenging beauty norms related to body size and for fitspiration it is muscularity, but those

seem to be the only beauty norms these two groups are challenging. Traditional beauty standards are still in line in every other way and in fact, it seems that they rely on displaying hyper-femininity and hyper-sexuality to offset these gender transgressions. As such, some body positive users and influencers are meeting their goal to expand the boundaries of femininity and beauty, but not as expansively as some influencers want.

Hyper-Femininity and Sexuality on Instagram

Femininity is performed habitually through our bodies via the ornamental surface, such as clothing (e.g. lingerie, dresses, floral patterns, etc.), makeup, hair, and being thin, and through gestures, movements, and postures (e.g. sitting inward, making one's body small, contorting it to a S-curve, etc.) (Butler 1993, Young 1980). Although #bodypositive posts and #fitspiration posts defy femininity norms by celebrating fat and muscular bodies, respectively, influencers and users continue to uphold many other standards of femininity—the women pictured have long hair, wear heavy makeup, have their nails long and painted, are dressed in gender specific clothing like bikinis, pose in gendered ways, and expose lots of skin. In one post by "curvyameila" she says, "NEVER apologize for being curvy" next to an image of her performing femininity through wearing black and grey lingerie that highlights the smallness of her waist, yet largeness of her breasts (Figure 48). She also performs femininity through wearing makeup, her lips pink and glossy, and while her hair is up in a bun, it is clear it is long with wisps of hair framing her face. Finally, her pose is coy with her hand near her face and body just a little asymmetrical.

Like the "curvyameila," posing in sexy lingerie was a prominent way in which women using the hashtag #bodypositive demonstrated their femininity and sexuality. For example, in another post a white woman encourages her followers to "When in doubt, wear red," with the hashtags "#effyourbeautystandards" and "#cleavagefordays," next to an image of her dressed in

a red, lacy teddy (Figure 49). Her hair is dark, long and straight with blunt bangs and lipstick to match her outfit. She also performs femininity through her posturing with her hand on her jutted-out hip and knee bent. Similarly, in a post by "amazonangel_" we see a black woman dressed in a bright pink, silk, negligee smiling seductively at the camera (Figure 50). Her hip also juts out as she bends her knee, shoulders back to push forward her breasts with a caption that asks followers to "comment if you like me in pink." The themes of long hair, lots of makeup, and gendered posing seen in the images described above were seen throughout even when the women weren't wearing lingerie.

For instance, there were many "fashion" posts that still adhered to these norms of femininity. An example of this can be seen in a post by "ansleymorgan" who hashtagged her post with "#psfashion," (plus size fashion) and "#ootd," (outfit of the day), among others (Figure 51). In the image she is surrounded by greenery, with her body twisted so it is not directly facing the camera, and she wears a white button-up, a red-striped skirt, and matching sandals. Like the other posts, her hair is long with a barrette holding back one side and full-face of makeup. Another fashion post that upholds norms of femininity features a black woman posing in front of an orange-brown backdrop (Figure 52). She is wearing a form-fitting blue romper with her reddish-brown hair piled in a braided bun, big earrings, and a glowing face. The curves of her body are highlighted by the way she is posed—hands on waist, hip jutted, and one leg in front of the other. Like "ansleymorgan," she uses the "#plussizefashion," along with "#curves," and "#lookoftheday." All of the women in the posts I've described, in lingerie or streetwear, emphasize their femininity and sexuality through gendered and sexually suggestive posing, often-revealing and feminized clothing, and hair and makeup. These displays are all in line with traditional forms of femininity and beauty except that these women are fat.

The hyper-femininity and sexualization is something that my interviewees noticed and were often complicit in. Carina explains, "a lot of [Instagram users] present this glam version of whatever marginalized group they are…basically a lot of fat people will post these photos with lots of makeup and their hair is all done and they're wearing all these expensive clothes." Although Carina would go on to say that these images are "unrealistic" she is also known for creating burlesque content for her followers. For example, in one post she can be seen in light pink lingerie sitting on all fours with her butt propped up; her hair so long it almost touches the floor with red lips and long pink finger nails (Figure 53). In contrast, the caption reads:

> My photos have never been just for the male gaze, never been just for attention or followers or money. My work has always existed to create representation, for self expression, to transform the way society perceives fat people and the way we perceive ourselves, to create a seat at the table for fat people that haven't had their voices heard - for fat femmes.

The message in her caption was something that I heard repeatedly in our interview—that her content was not for men, but for fat femmes. However, she routinely encountered men who objectified her body mis-reading the content as made for them. More so, she explained that "people are not used to seeing a large body be sensual and so, it immediately reads in their brains as vulgar and I get overly sexualized…and it's fatphobic af" (as fuck). Like the queer bodies discussed earlier in this chapter, Carina brings up the idea that bodies can be misread on Instagram. Although she sees her work as a space to create representation for fat femme bodies, others might see this content as reaffirming discourses of femininity. While Carina finds these displays of femme-ness empowering, other influencers find it constraining. Ashleigh has found herself "not even wanting to be this high-femme person" she portrays herself to be on Instagram, but knows that "if [she] stopped doing [femme-ness]…people would stop wanting to even engage [her] work because [she] would no longer be fuckable to them."

This type of feminine and sexual imagery was also seen in posts tagged #fitspiration. For example, in one image a tan woman with long brown hair, perches her fully exposed butt on a table next to a potted plant (Figure 54). She is dressed in a thong and white crop-top sweater with her hand on her lower back, looking down. The caption reads, "Your daily dose of motivation" with peach emojis and hashtags such as "#aesthetics," "#booty," and "#fitgirls." In another post, a young white woman stands outside, surrounded by green grass and a bush, wearing a bikini (Figure 55). Her body is muscular, and she flexes her legs, arms, and abs as she stands with one leg out and her hip pushed out to the side. Both of these images, like #bodypositive posts, display lots of skin to demonstrate their femininity and sexuality, along with long hair, makeup, and feminized clothing and posing.

Although there were plenty of images of women that were "sexy" or sexualized, women in fitspiration posts were more often seen in feminine work-out attire, rather than the lingerie seen in body positivity. For instance, in a post by "holisticrx" a woman is dressed in a pink sports bra and matching leggings holding two bottles of "fermented turmeric booster powder" (Figure 56). In a second post, another white woman is seen wearing leggings and a crop-top (Figure 57). Like many of the images I've described she is surrounded by greenery and she is pushing her hip out to the side. Her hair is long and blonde, and she is seen touching it. In addition, she is wearing heavy eye-liner and other makeup and the post is tagged "#strongissexy," "#bootybuilding," and "#fitchick." Even if fitspiration women are more likely to be clothed or covered, they still display their femininity and heterosexuality through posing, clothing, and makeup in ways similar to body positive influencers and users. These displays are all in line with traditional forms of femininity and beauty, like body positivity, except that these women are muscular.

To be acceptably fat or muscular, the women featured in posts tagged #bodypositive or #fitspiration needed to fulfil other aspects of femininity and beauty. In essence, these women "apologize" for transgressing gender (i.e. being fat or muscular) by emphasizing their femininity in other ways (Mears 2015). Female athletes have long been understood to perform exaggerated forms of femininity, such as wearing heavy makeup and feminine clothing, and highlighting heterosexuality through being seen with men, or even looking promiscuous, in order to manage the cultural tensions between athleticism and femininity (Davis-Delano, Pollock and Ellsworth Vose 2009, Dworkin and Messner 2002). This is also true of women bodybuilders who must negotiate femininity and muscularity like that seen in fitspiration (Dworkin 2001, Krane et al. 2004). For the fat women engaged in body positivity a similar logic applies. Fat women tend to be associated with masculinity because they take up a lot of space so "as a fat woman, if you're feminine, you have to assert that femininity every day. You have to fight for it every day" (quoted from Virgie). To expand the boundaries of what bodies are beautiful and feminine, as body positivity seeks to do, Instagram influencers and users rely on traditional discourses of beauty and femininity to allow themselves access to these spaces. Even if for some, like Amber, body positive influencers aren't "really making that much progress because we're saying we'll place all this importance and worth on what you look like as long as we got to play too. And I don't think we need to like make the measuring stick longer, we need to get rid of it all together." Maddie illuminates this complicated and contradictory issue, saying:

> [Body positivity is] very sexy, which is awesome. I find that very liberating, but where's the balance? Why are these big sexy pics getting likes? It could be a more modest, more conservative look, even if the person is feeling really powerful in it. I just think that addressing why certain things are the way they are, is where body positivity loses out on addressing the patriarchal issues.

Though there is no right or wrong way to challenge discourses of beauty and femininity, it is important, like Maddie suggests, to think about the ways in which the patriarchal systems in which influencers work can be constraining to their liberation efforts. Here the contradictions between influencers on the ideologies of "freedom to beauty" versus "freedom from beauty" are illuminated. By focusing on a freedom to beauty via Instagram some influencers reify the same discourses that other influencers, adopting a freedom from beauty, seek to dismantle. For the latter, some body positive influencers and users are working inside a system which will always be exclusionary and constraining.

Racialized and Femininized "Belfie"

It is evident that body positive (and fitspiration) users and influencers utilize forms of hyper-femininity and sexuality in their posts on Instagram. But in my examination of Instagram one body part reigned supreme—the butt. As Maddie put it, "the body positivity movement has…booties galore." Close to 40% of the posts on Instagram for both #bodypositive and #fitspiration emphasized the butt, hips, and curves of a woman or mentioned them in their caption. For example, in one image tagged #bodypositive, along with the tags, "#honormycurves" and "#beautybeyondsize," among others, a fat Latinx wears a gingham swimsuit and thigh-high stockings surrounded by greenery (Figure 58). Her back is turned to the camera while she looks over her shoulder, her butt mostly exposed. In another post tagged #bodypositive, a white, thin woman is bent over a kitchen island wearing a black swimsuit (Figure 59). Her long blonde hair obscures her face, but her fully exposed butt is the focus of the image next to the caption, "Wednesday's are for wine and booty" with the wine and peach emoji, followed by various hashtags including "#booty," "#loveyourself," and "#belfie" (an amalgamation of butt and selfie). Posts tagged #fitspiration were similar. For instance, another

142

white thin woman with long brown hair is seen looking over her shoulder, her butt exposed by her white thong body suit (Figure 60). Her caption reads, "How many mirror belfies am I going to post in a row 🙈…#selflove #strongnotskinny…"

These are just three examples of the dozens and dozens of "belfies" I saw on posts tagged #bodypositive and #fitspiration. The belfie is a new iteration of the selfie, photographic self-portraits taken by oneself using a cellphone or similar digital device. Selfies have become the standard representation of the body in social media and have been lauded for giving users the opportunity to shape their bodily image online in ways that allow them full control of what the image looks like (Lupton 2015). The development and proliferation of the belfie across social media, not just in body positivity and fitspiration, signals that when given the opportunity to visually represent one's body the butt is a particularly worthy body part. What that body part conveys though is particularly feminine as no man showcased their butt in the images I examined. As Gailey (2014:112) explains, fat women's bodies are "ultrafeminine because they are soft, curvy, and fleshy." Even thin women want to appear as if they have curvy bodies by highlighting their butt because it solidifies their status as "real women," but also sexually available women. Attractiveness, as an important barometer of worth for women, is based in the heteronormative ideal that they need to be attractive *to* men (Kwan and Trautner 2009). Women's curves, and particularly the curve of their butt, demonstrates their sexual appeal and contributes to a sexualizing male gaze (Hatton and Trautner 2011).

The butt and curves as displaying femininity is explicitly referenced in this caption that reads, "I feel great, and I love looking like a woman. I love being curvy and having big beautiful boobs and hips. It's hot. I don't ever want to be size zero…#sexyatanysize… #effyourbeautystandards…#bigandbeautiful…" (Figure 61). The image that accompanies this

caption features a fat white woman in a black bra and underwear. She can be seen pulling up on her underwear accentuating the curves of her body. A second post by "curves_by_tracy" also demonstrates the importance of curves for (heterosexual) womanhood because it is what men are attracted to. The caption says:

> My fiancé took this photo of me and, to be completely honest, I kind of hated it at first. He LOVES it! All I saw was my tummy, back rolls, and cellulite. Then I thought...uh hello this is what your body looks like and he loves this photo because he knows what your body really looks like when it's not perfectly posed for Instagram!!...#curvymodel #selflove…#womenempowerment…" (Figure 62).

Like the other posts described, the image that accompanies this caption highlights the woman's butt and curves by having her pose to the side wearing a revealing blue swimsuit. What both the captions and images communicate is that to be a real woman you need to have curves and those curves need to be in the right places, particularly your butt.

However, the image of the butt as a cultural icon is deeply racialized. Historically, the emphasis on black women's butts has contributed to the stereotype that black women are hypersexual and has been used to justify their oppression (Collins 1991, Gilman 1985, Hobson 2018). The controlling image of black women as signifying excess has been traced to the lasting impact of Sarah Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus (Gilman 1985). In the early eighteenth century, Baartman, a Khosian woman from South Africa, was toured around Europe as a spectacle because of her "protruding buttocks" and genitalia (Gilman 1985:213). After her death, her body was dismembered and stored in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 2002 when her remains were finally returned to South Africa. Baartman was literally reduced to her sexual parts and that association between a "protruding buttocks" and sexual excess has continued to inform black women's sexualities. Margaret explains, "I think there are very few people who know that the beauty standards in our Westernized culture are at least in part a reaction to

144

wanting to separate white bodies from black bodies. The thin ideal coming out of wanting to be

more Northern European and thin and tall and slim versus African bodies that are more plump

and curvy." The prominence of butts on Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive and #fitspiration,

especially by white women, is a co-optation of a body part considered a signifier of black

women's sexuality, yet without any of the historical baggage.

This isn't to say that black women aren't posting belfies on Instagram; in fact several

black women in my sample posted belfies (see Figure 63). However, the response to images of

black women and their butts is decidedly different than the response to white women in

mainstream media. For example, Kim Kardashian is mostly applauded for her butt and was

rewarded with a reality television show after an amateur sex tape was leaked to the press (Sastre

2014a). However, when black rapper Nicki Minaj released her 2014 music video for

"Anaconda," which featured her twerking in various butt revealing outfits such as shorts and

thongs, she was chastised by public commenters for being too sexy (Hobson 2018). Existing

between these "two ends of the a racial continuum, with one end populated by un-raced White

individuals, and the other occupied by an intensely race Black group" is Jennifer Lopez's famous

butt (Collins 2006:179). As Guzmán and Valdivia (2004: 218) argue, "Latinas occupy that in

between space between the White booty…and the Black booty whose excess falls beyond the

boundary of acceptabilty and desirability within U.S. popular culture." Jennifer Lopez's ability

to perform "whiteness" (or at least hybridity) has allowed her an experience closer to Kim

Kardashian's than Nicki Minaj's. The proliferation and celebration of butts on posts marked

#bodypositive may seem like an expansion of what a beautiful body can be, but this is only true

for white women. Ashleigh explains that body positivity influencers goal of moving the

benchmark of beauty standards, "does not shift or change anything for black…or non-white

people." They would go on to link this directly to the ubiquity of butts in body positivity, saying, "I mean even how we've seen how Kim Kardashian did revolutionize this narrative of asses for white people…but like still it doesn't change shit…Even if I was the same size as a thin white person, I would still be seen as fatter than them because I'm black." Because of the racist and sexist stereotypes about black women that are associated with their butts, black women do not necessarily benefit from the proliferation of the belfie. The marginalization of black women in these representations of the butt is similar to Mireille Miller-Young's (2014:4) metaphor for black women's sexuality, "brown sugar:" "Like sugar that has dissolved without a trace, but has nonetheless sweetened a cup of tea, black women's labor and the mechanisms that manage and produce it are invisible but nonetheless there." The whiteness of the images on Instagram demonstrates how white women can use curves to gain visibility and financial success in ways black women are rarely allowed to do or at least without any of the burdens that typically accompany black women.

Although the question of "are all bodies beautiful" resulted in a resounding yes from body positive influencers, my examination of #bodypositivty on Instagram told a slightly different story. It was clear through captions and hashtags, such as #effyourbeautystandards and #beautybeyondsize, that users and influencers on Instagram were deeply concerned with expanding the boundaries of what can be considered beautiful and thus upholding traditional norms of femininity and beauty except for in relation to body size. This is in contrast to the few influencers who would rather body positivity as a whole and on Instagram take a freedom from beauty perspective and dismantle appearance-based worth altogether. Women were allowed to be fat as long as they fulfilled femininity in other ways, particularly through wearing gender specific and revealing clothing, having long hair, posing in gendered ways, and emphasizing

their butt. This was true of #fitspiration posts, but rather than focusing on fatness, users were focused on muscularity. Issues of beauty continue to be a major aspect of body positivity both off and on Instagram, but where does health fit within this narrative of beauty and gender? Are influencers interested in the discourses of health that paint fat bodies as pathological (as was the FAM) and how does this show up on Instagram?

ARE ALL BODIES HEALTHY BODIES? DISCOURSES OF HEALTH

One of the central goals of body positive influencers is to expand the boundaries of what it means to be beautiful in the contemporary United States, specifically to include fat bodies. But do body positive influencers seek to also expand the boundaries of what it means to be healthy? Although beauty was a prevalent discourse in body positivity, health discourses were largely ignored by influencers both in interviews and on Instagram. The lack of focus on health in body positivity was in stark contrast to fitspiration. The posts tagged #fitspiration gave a clear message on heath, one which is in line with discourses on healthism (Crawford 1980) and wellness: to be healthy was to work out, eat "clean" and be thin, yet toned or muscular.

For example, a post by "alexcrockford" shows an image of a shirtless, muscular man lifting weights in a gym (Figure 64). The caption reads in part, "For me, every day is an opportunity to reach closer to my best version - physically, emotionally, spiritually. And that's what keeps me motivated…#fitness #health #motivation #physique#strength #core #abs #workoutmotivation#fitspiration #nevergiveup…" This post highlights several important findings related to health on #fitspiration posts. First, health is intimately connected to appearance and thinness is a sign of good health (Chrisler 2012, Metzl and Kirkland 2010). The image of "alexcrockford" along with the hashtags #physique, #abs, and #health emphasizes that to be healthy is to look like he does—thin and muscular. This is reaffirmed by many of the

before and after images described earlier in this chapter. To be thin is to be not only more beautiful, but healthier than fat bodies and serves as one's ultimate goal and motivation. Second, good health and appearance are achieved through the individual activity of working out. In a neoliberal society filled with "good" (e.g. working out) and "bad" (e.g. eating fast food) options to choose from, "every day is an opportunity to reach closer to [our] best version" (i.e. thin version) by making the right choice to exercise (Lupton 2013). Fitspiration posts were filled with these messages of personal responsibility. As good neoliberal citizens concerned with the wellbeing of the state, we monitor our own conduct and measure it in relation to dominant health discourses (Murray 2008). As "alexcrockford" posts, we should "#nevergiveup" and use images like his as "#workoutmotivation" because if we don't it's our own fault if we are unhealthy (i.e. fat).

While #fitspiration posts promoted "#healthylifestyles" through the promotion of working out, clean eating, and celebrating a thin, muscular body type rooted in notions of personal responsibility, body positivity's relationship to health on Instagram was much less consistent. This is unsurprising given that my interviewees responses to questions about health varied wildly, demonstrating that body positivity as a group has a complicated relationship with health. An example of the diverse responses about health in body positivity can be seen when comparing Carina's perspective versus Gia's. Carina argues that "there's not even remotely enough people talking about [the] actual real-life issues surrounding health and body positivity" because people are more concerned with "here's a pretty picture of me in a bikini." For her, body positive influencers should be talking about the "people actually dying because we're not getting the same type of medical care" or because "they're killing themselves because they're being body shamed." Gia represents the other side of the spectrum saying "there's really no place in

the body positive community to discuss health" because body positivity serves as "a space for individuals to feel good about themselves regardless of what society perceives their bodies to be like." Bringing health into the conversation might make people feel like they don't belong and would "regress the work" of giving "visibility to all bodies."

The one thing that influencers did agree on in relation to health was that "you cannot tell someone's health status by looking at them" (quoted from Amber). Both thin and fat people can engage in both healthy and unhealthy behaviors; like fitspiration, healthy behaviors mean eating "right" and working out to body positive influencers. As Chloe explains, "My mom, she used to be a size 0 when she was 18, but she said she lived off Twinkies and Coke. Just because you're skinny, that does not make you healthy." But Chloe, who identifies as fat, is a "crazy health food person" who "buys everything organic," "started eating salads more often and "love[s] raw smoothies." Amber agrees with this sentiment saying that "we all have the skinny friend who drinks like a fish and smokes and has terrible eating habits and is stressed out to the max, we also have a fat friend who eats a balanced diet and works out all the time and all their blood markers are perfect." Before getting involved with body positivity Maddie was engaged in a cycle of gaining and losing weight because of dieting and "workout bulimia" that was "really bad for [her] body." But since learning about self-love though body positivity, she is "way healthier than I ever have been" because she works-out and drinks and eats less.

In these discussions of "fat people can be healthy too," some influencers unconsciously reify the boundaries of healthy and unhealthy. In doing so, "fat subjectivity continues to be formed in and through the discourses underlying the 'obesity epidemic' – that fat is the straw man in the legitimate concern over a global health and financial crisis that is really being caused by sedentary lifestyles and poor diets (regardless of body fat)" (Chalklin 2016:111). Essentially,

influencers pit the "good fatty" against the "bad fatty." By working out, drinking less, and eating

organic these women perform a fatness that is socially palatable (i.e. good) while simultaneously

throwing fat women who don't do fatness in this way under the bus (Chalklin 2016, Pausé 2015).

Influencers are then able to define their "good-ness" by what the non-working out fatties are

doing. For example, Sally says that on her "platform" she is "health positive because [she]

think[s] it's a really important aspect of living a very happy, successful life." However, she takes

issue with people who go "to the extreme," saying:

> there's this whole realm within the body positive industry that's takes fat positivity to an
> extreme, in my opinion, where they just preach like you can weigh over 300 pounds and
> not work out and not be healthy and still accept yourself. And I'm not saying that you
> can't, but for my platform personally, I'm always saying you can accept yourself while
> still working to be your best self.

By "working out and…trying to eat healthy because that's what makes [her] feel best" Sally

frames herself as a "good" fatty and those who don't as not being their "best self." As a result,

Sally and other body positive influencers legitimize their existence by assimilating into

traditional health discourses rather than defying them. Margaret explains this urge:

> We're in a neoliberal system that tells us that we have to be good citizens and healthism is
> inherent in that. So, it's our responsibility as individuals to maintain our healthy bodies.
> That is another thing I think that separates body positivity from these more liberatory
> movements because body positivity is like, "Oh, yeah, strong, not skinny," those sorts of
> messages that are just like substituting one thing for another but are still part of the
> system that's telling us we have to be a certain way.

She would go on to explain when she works with clients as a life coach they come to her saying

"Well, okay, I'm willing to accept my body as it is, but I still want to live a long life, and I want

to be healthy. How do you help me do that?" From her perspective, then, "a large, large part of

body positivity is this won't impact your health and telling people that they can still pursue health

while in these bodies." Amber agreed that this narrative of the "good fatty" exists in body

positivity in that she often hears people say "body positivity is fine, unless you're unhealthy,

unless you look super, super obese, or unless you're blood pressure is high, or unless you have diabetes and like that's gross…." But Amber was also quick to point out that health "it not completely under our control," saying that "you can do all the quote, unquote 'right things'…and tomorrow you might get sick. Tomorrow you might get hit by a bus." Further, Margaret points to the reality that health is not equally accessible to everyone: "There are fat people who either choose not to access medical care or cannot access medical care either because they're afraid to go to the doctor because they have a pre-existing condition related to their fatness and that they can't get insured, because the equipment in the medical offices doesn't accommodate their size or their weight." There are factors outside of the seemingly biological and individual determinants of health, such as access to healthcare, discrimination, and economic conditions, that informs our status as "healthy" people (Anderson, Smith and Sidel 2005, Porter 1997).

But what is "health" according to body positive influencers; especially if you can't tell it by looking at someone? Once again, influencers struggled to define what health was for themselves, let alone have a consistent narrative among themselves. For some influencers, health is "when you're feeling the best" and is variable from person to person (quoted from Chloe). Chloe explained, "If cutting out all the meat and if you want to be a vegetarian or something, that makes you feel the best, and the doctor says, 'Yeah, you're doing really good,' then that's what you need to do for yourself. It's whatever, whoever you are at your best." Sally felt similarly saying, "I feel like it's different for everybody but for me it's just feeling my best because I know that when I'm in a like a workout slump I just don't feel very good, my day doesn't go as well, I don't have as much confidence." Although both Chloe and Sally agree that health is about doing whatever makes you feel your best, they still reference traditional notions of health in that the doctor is the authority and that working out is key to feeling healthy. This was also true of

Amber and Margaret, except they went a step further and questioned the importance of health altogether. For example, Amber explained that "health is spectrum" and "not an easily definable thing" since you can "ask a dozen different health experts and they are all going to say something different." However, she also recognizes that health is "not completely under our control" and that we can do all the "quote unquote 'right' things that all the top government health organization…measure it by…and tomorrow you might get sick, tomorrow you might get hit by a bus." But she asks, "are we supposed to wait till she gets better to give her the same respect and care and access to resources and healthcare and everything else? Obviously not, so when health is used kind of as a weapon against…I think it's really problematic. So…kind of being aware that health is not a barometer of worthiness, it's not under our control, it's not a prerequisite for respect." Similarly, Margaret prefers the term well-being, because health "doesn't leave enough room for us to be humans and the complexity of how many different things could go wrong in our bodies." Well-being captures, "how you feel about how you feel" saying, "someone who has a chronic disease for instance may not be 100% perfectly 'healthy,' but if they are coping well and their mental health is being supported, they might consider that their well-being is very good overall." She finished by saying, "No not everyone is healthy, and that's okay. There are people of all sizes, all shapes, all colors, all orientations that are healthy and people of all sizes, shapes, orientations, et cetera, that are unhealthy. To me, that's the more important message…". Both Amber and Margaret challenge the healthism narrative by claiming it is irrelevant to a person's value as a human being. Like most things in body positivity, influencers didn't fully agree on what health is and its importance, except that health is variable and cannot be determined based on appearance.

Given the complicated understanding of health by body positive influencers it's

understandable why the relationship between body positivity and health on Instagram is not as

clear or dominant as seen in fitspiration. Of the 105 #bodypositive posts examined, only 23 were

related to health and unlike fitspiration, which told a consistent narrative surrounding health,

#bodypositive posts did not. Some users were concerned with ending diet culture, one of the

tenets of body positivity. For example, in one post "loveme_katie" describes sitting "outside

[her] child's gymnastics class and heard" a group making fat shaming comments like "I don't

want a flabby tummy/I don't want to be chunk/I want to look nice" (Figure 65). Her caption

continued:

> All I could think (can think; I'm still sat here [sic]) was 'what must they think of me?'I'm
> confident in myself, my never failing body and my choices to be part of the anti diet
> revolution but I'm so sad these…conversations are such a normal part of everyday life
> and I'm fearful [for] the fragile people that overhear. Consider your words, and the long
> lasting negative impact your words have. And remember that weight DOES NOT equal
> health!...#healthateverysize…#loveyourself…#iamwellandgood…
> #stopbodyshaming…#effyourbeautystandards…#enddietculture #stopdieting

Here "loveme_katie" challenges the fatphobic comments she overhears by telling her followers

that these types of comments are problematic and hurtful.

Like #bodypositive posts, the influencers' posts also largely missed the opportunity to

talk about health, except when it came to opposing diet culture such as in the example above. For

instance, in one post, Jes shares a screenshot of an article she wrote for the 2018 "weight issue"

of Self magazine that featured body positive influencer and model Tess Holiday on the cover

(Figure 66)[18]. The title reads, "Nope, I'm Not Trying to Lose Weight" and she captions the

image with an excerpt from the article that says:

> "It took me a quarter of a century, but I eventually began to figure out that after years
> of a lifestyle dedicated to a smaller body and the promises that were attached to it, I had
> been cheated. I began to realize that diet culture was not going to give me the peace and

---

[18] https://www.self.com/story/im-not-trying-to-lose-weight

happiness it promised. It was a thief, and I have spent half a decade trying to recover all of the things it has robbed me of" …No body size is "better or worse" than another…

In another post, Ashleigh wears a fishnet body suit with a t-shirt that says, "IDGAF ABOUT YOUR DIET SUSAN," with a caption that reads, "Fuck diet culture and the toxic projections folks will cast upon your body/ your audacity to exist in your fat body" (Figure 67). Both of these posts from influencers, like many I saw from other influencers, and the ones like "loveme_katie's," emphasize the idea that diet culture is problematic and exists to make certain bodies seem more valuable than others. However, by fighting against the narrative that thin bodies are somehow healthier and more valuable than fat bodies, society can realize that all bodies are good bodies, the mantra of body positivity.

Although there were posts related to fighting diet culture, most posts were the opposite of this—promoting weight-loss, endorsing fitness and clean eating, and engaging in the personal responsibility narrative seen in posts tagged #fitspiration. This is in part because fitspiration has co-opted the language and hashtags associated with body positivity. For example, in one image a fit, white woman wearing a black tank top and multi-colored leggings can be seen posing for a selfie in her home (Figure 68). Her caption explains to followers that she's "working, working out and working again" and asks them for suggestions for a #dietbet[19] she can join" followed by 32 hashtags including, "#healthandfitness," "fattofit," and "#progressnotperfection." Another post tagged #bodypositive that looks and sounds eerily similar to #fitspiration has two photos side-by-side of the same woman (Figure 69). The photo on the left shows her in a long-sleeve crop top and a pair of leggings, turned so her butt is emphasized with the word "Fit" underneath. In the photo on the right she appears the same except this time she is wearing shorts, her cellulite

---

[19] Dietbet is an app-based weight loss program where participants bet a certain amount of money that they'll lose a certain percentage of their body weight in a certain time frame.

on display with the words "Not Fit?" underneath. Her caption explains that "many women let cellulite define how fit (or not fit) they are," but that she "train[s] about 4 times a week and eat[s] nutritious foods as much as [she] can, and [she] still [has] cellulite!" The caption ends by saying, "First of all you're definitely 100% not less worthy or beautiful when you've cellulite [sic]! You can reduce cellulite by exercising and eating the right foods, but there's a big chan[c]e it never really goes away…#fitness…#weightloss…#health…#dedication." Like the posts tagged #fitspiration, the posts tagged #bodypositive focus on thinness as a sign of health with both posts above supporting #weightloss or going from #fattofit. Although the posts both reference expanding the boundaries of what can be considered beautiful, whether it be women with cellulite or distancing themselves from perfection, it is clear that they both uphold normative views of thinness as healthy and beautiful in ways similar to fitspiration.

Even with the overlap with fitspiration (and subsequent emphasis on stereotypical barometers of health), body positive posts also addressed an aspect of health rarely seen by fitspiration: mental health. For example, one caption reads, "i spot a scar and see 🪄 something special i see blotchy skin and i think 🫧 beautiful it's often the little things we need to find more kindness for. it might feel too little, maybe even unimportant. But starting to give love to little parts of you that you didn't even know you needed ? seems like a sweet place to start :)…#everybodyisbeautiful…#edrecovery…#loveyourbody…#mentalhealth…" (Figure 70). "_kellyu" connects her self-love talk as an important way to combat her eating disorder (seen in her hashtags) and address her mental health. By learning to love and accept the "little" things Instagram users might challenge narratives that contribute to the high rates of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating and exercising, negative body image, and depression among women (Bessenoff 2006, Bordo 2003, Tiggemann and Slater 2004). Mental health was also an

important topic among influencers' Instagram posts with eight out of the twelve influencers mentioning it. In one caption, Amber talks about how she takes "medication for depression (along with a bunch of vitamins and probiotics)" next to an image of her hand holding six pills (Figure 71). She then writes that, "As a culture, we need to end the stigma of getting treatment for mental health. The mind is part of the body. There shouldn't be shame in seeking help or treatment for any illness, no matter what the cause. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are no different." If some members of body positivity want to challenge the discourses surrounding health, then mental health can and should be a part of this discussion. Just as fat people are stigmatized and feel shame going to the doctors, so too do people with mental health issues; and in fact, these groups often overlap (Farrell 2011).

The last point in relation to health I want to illuminate is one that was mentioned in the previous chapter—individual versus structural goals. Many of the goals of body positivity are individual, such as learning to love one's self, having a freedom to be beautiful, and seeing that your body is of value. But as I discussed previously, for some influencers this is problematic because they feel body positivity should be looking to make structural change that is for the good of many. One way that this shows up in my interviews with influencers, but rarely on posts tagged #bodypositive, is that everyone deserves access to equal and non-discriminatory healthcare. This was an important issue to Carina, who was one of the only influencers to post about it on her Instagram. She told me that health is "not really obtainable" for all people, especially "plus size people or trans people…and they don't get the same type of medical attention that thin and cis people get." She also told me a story about "somebody's mom" who was plus size and had cancer, but when they went to the doctors she was told "go lose weight." This is very similar to the story of Ellen Maud Bennett, a 64-year-old Canadian woman who died

shortly after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. Her death made headlines in July 2018

because of the message she requested be in her obituary:

> A final message Ellen wanted to share was about the fat shaming she endured from the
> medical profession. Over the past few years of feeling unwell she sought out medical
> intervention and no one offered any support or suggestions beyond weight loss. Ellen's
> dying wish was that women of size make her death matter by advocating strongly for
> their health and not accepting that fat is the only relevant health issue.[20]

Because I was conducting interviews during the time this story was in the press, I believe this

injustice was especially on my participants' mind. Maddie said, "fashion's come a long way for

body positivity and inclusiveness, but health has not. And you hear about horror stories, where

people are sent away saying they need to lose weight because they have pain, and then it turns

out they have cancer, and the doctor didn't even bother looking." For those like Carina and

Maddie, who are interested in challenging the medical institution, this is about life and death.

Ashleigh highlighted this point when she said: "I think that the health I am fighting for is

accessibility to resources and to your actual wellbeing. Like, I am not well because the world is

actively trying to kill me. That's the health I am fighting for versus like 'oh wow, you eat

this…'".

   As Maddie says, body positivity "falls short" when it comes to health. For many fat

women, especially those who are also women of color, queer, old, and disabled, the discourses

surrounding their bodies are a matter of life and death. The narrative of health paints fatness as

pathological, unhealthy, and a personal failure. The images on #fitspiration, and to some extent

#bodypositive uphold this narrative—celebrating (young white) thinness by any means. The

question of whether all bodies are healthy bodies can be answered easily with a "no" based on

the images and captions seen on Instagram. However, some body positive influencers and users

---

[20] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/laurenstrapagiel/obituary-calls-out-fat-shaming-doctors

are trying to expand the boundaries to include "good fatties" by recognizing that appearance does not correlate with health. And some influencers and users are trying to make some structural change to notions of health by dismantling diet culture and attempting to ensure equal access to judgement-free healthcare. But these structural messages are far outweighed by normative understandings of health on Instagram. Interestingly, at the same time health is a contested discourse among body positivity influencers, it is also the most highly criticized aspect of body positivity.

HOW IS BODY POSITIVITY RECEIVED?

The comments on the posts tagged #bodypositive and on the posts created by the influencers tells us the messages of gender, beauty, and health are received and adopted by commenters. Do followers agree with the message that all bodies are beautiful, especially as it relates to fatness? Are they buying that diet culture is negatively impacting women's lives and must be stopped? Do they adopt the beliefs of influencers and users?

One of the first things to grab your attention as you scroll through the lines of comments is the plethora of emojis. From colored hearts and heart-eyes smiling faces to praising and clapping hands, these emojis digitally represent support of the images and messages posted on Instagram. Beyond that, there are words of encouragement and support such as "love everything about this post," "yas queen," and "you're amazing." Some commenters thanked the users and influencers for posting a message they needed to hear, for being an inspiration, and for helping them get through hard times. For example, one comment read, "This was so needed today ♡♡♡ thank you so much!! It made me cry like crazy. It can get so tough at times, but we are like superheroes- we get through it no matter what." Others said, "Thank you for being such a huge inspiration to me! As to many other women. I needed this today ♡" and "Go on and

SLAY! I see a HUGE HEART and CARING SOUL. You helped me be nicer to myself, so

THANK YOU.”

Besides general encouragement, praise, and thanks, the largest type of comment were one's that remarked on the beauty of the poster. Over 621 comments mentioned the users' looks. Many were simply "beautiful," "gorgeous" or "you look amazing." Others specifically commented on their curves: "You're very beautiful and have a great curvacious [sic] body" and "you look beautiful! love your curves." The bombardment of comments focused on predominately women's looks and bodies is not surprising given that women's value is directly tied to their appearance. Since attractiveness in women is nearly compulsory, followers comment on these women's bodies even if it has little to do with the message their caption is trying to convey. Further, because many of the users' focus is on expanding the boundaries of what it means to be beautiful to include fatness, comments like these show support for their message. However, some of the comments cross the line of commenting on an influencer or user's look and instead sexualizes and fetishizes them. For example, some comments read, "Want to put my tongue in a**hole," "Yummy love to eat your pu**y honey," and "Why do I always entertain the thought of undoing your strings." These posts move beyond supporting ones beauty as a way to challenge beauty discourses, and objectifies the influencer or user by reducing them to their sex appeal (Hatton and Trautner 2011). However, some commenters and even the influencers themselves call out this type of sexualization. For example, in the comments of one of Carina's posts a user named "jeichandler" said, "Her thong looks like a spider web I'd LOVE to get tangled up in." Carina responded, "nobody cares to hear what you want to do to my body keep that shit to yourself." Angered by this response, "jeichandler" replied, "nobody said anything about your body. Dumb wench. Shut the fuck up. Keep my comments to myself??? Keep your

pictures to yourself. You WANT the attention…You're probably a dude, fronting off another bitch's pics." After this, other followers rallied against "jeichandler" calling him out for his misogynistic behavior. One follower commented, "hello Mr Misogyny! Gotta love when men don't get the attention they want so they try and degrade the woman. Way to be just another lame example of the patriarchy we women are fighting against!"

Again, overall, the comments to the Instagram posts were largely positive, but there was one outlier to this: that body positivity promotes obesity and unhealthy lifestyles that will lead to death. One post that received a significant amount of negative comments compared to other posts came from Ashleigh's "IDGAF ABOUT YOUR DIET SUSAN" post (Figure 67). One commenter responded, "Well you should give a fuck about a diet because you'll die sooner if you don't try to lose weight." Others made comments along similar lines, including: "You'll care about it when you have a heart attack," "oh well guess you'll die then," and "This is gross, be fat if you want but don't promote/flaunt it online. I've lost all faith in humanity." Each of these comments feeds into the traditional health narrative surrounding fatness and the "obesity epidemic" by claiming that fatness equates to ill-health, like a heart attack, and will eventually lead to death (Boero 2012). Further, these comments contribute to the moral panic surrounding "obesity" by defining Ashleigh's "flaunting" of her fatness online as "promoting" a lifestyle that commenters deem problematic and meet it with hostility (LeBesco 2010). The hostility of the comments and fat shaming might be understood as part of the traditional disciplinary gaze and surveillance that attempts to normalize and control fat bodies because they are seen as excessive, out of control, and pathological. This form of biopower encourages citizens, like Ashleigh, to take responsibility for their own bodies (and life) under the threat of indirect death (Foucault 1978). The implied hope is that Ashleigh will take the shaming and threats from commenters and

act on it by becoming thin and healthy, thus improving the "health" of the state (Murray 2008, Zola 1972).

Ashleigh wasn't the only influencer to receive negative comments about her health. Carina and Jes also received these types of comments, though in fewer numbers. After Carina "popped up on [their] explore page," "magnussocial" decided they wanted to ask her "a fair question" about her weight. They asked, "how do you feel about, the fact you might not live a healthy long life?" The user further clarified that, "You will most likely have joint pain and heart problems when you turn 50 something. I'm not criticizing your choice, but I want to ask how you are going to handle those things, because there is a very high chance of that happening." Again, this comment relies on the notion that fat most likely equals ill health even though Carina makes no reference to her health status. As Carina told me, "Every single day all of my work is out there for people to rip apart and tell me they think I should die and that I don't have a right to live. That in their minds I'm costing them money, with like health insurance." Jes' also had to deal with assumptions about her health as someone who is over 300 pounds (Figure 66). The comment reads:

> …No one's body is intuitively telling them to eat enough to be or stay at 300 lbs. If anything the body will start fighting that, if it hasn't already, once it's not able to keep up with the increased workload. You're right, fad diets don't work longterm but you (and a lot of others I've seen in the FA/BoPo group) are off track in understanding what people mean by making a lifestyle change. It means not overdoing it on portion sizes (this isn't starving yourself, but people more often eat way more than their bodies actually need). It means eating more healthy options rather than fast food and sweets all the time. Personally I do 90/10 where I eat healthy most of the time and splurge on fast food or some chocolate or whatever the other 10%) …

Embedded in this comment is the personal responsibility narrative—YOU could be thin if you wanted to be, if you tried hard enough, if you practiced self-control and didn't "overdo it on the portion sizes."

The comment made to Jes, like most, misses the point of the caption, that losing weight does not equate to happiness and that no body is better or worse than another. Instead these comments demonstrate that for some, these messages of self-love, beauty, anti-diet culture, and that all bodies are good are too radical and need to be educated on what they should be doing. But for influencers, comments like these are just part of body positivity and, although I did not see any, can be much crueler. Gia says she hears criticisms like this "all the time." She continued, "There's just a lot of, especially health nuts and…trolls that come on your pages and say that we're terrible for accepting fat people and that we just want them to die and that we don't care about their health." Similarly, Margaret says, she often hears people saying, "you can't love yourself as is because that's unhealthy." But what influencers, like Amber, want followers to take away is that "health is also not a barometer for worth. Just like beauty isn't. We don't deserve respect and dignity and care and autonomy because we're healthy, we deserve it because we're humans."

Although influencers receive negative responses to their posts around health, even though a majority of their posts don't even mention health, users of #bodypositive posts don't face this same problem. Comments to #bodypositive posts are different in one way from the influencer comments and from the general praise described above. Because of the co-optation of #fitspiration in #bodypositive some of the comments praise weight-loss and engage in some fat shaming rhetoric, which goes against the larger goals of body positivity. For example, in posts that discuss someone's weight-loss journey, many of the comments praise them for losing weight, such as, "Keep going strong..u r truly a motivation for me," "Amazing transformation!," "Hard work and dedication pays off." Although these comments are not overtly fat shaming, they do send the message that thin is better and that through hard work and dedication everyone can

and should attain thinness. In this sense, the message of these body positive users on Instagram is well-received, but the message is in conflict with what influencers say body positivity is. That said, there were a few comments that engaged implicitly in fat-shaming such as, "I'd kill for ur body. Whoever calls u fat is a complete moron," and "Fat??????who the hell calls you fat? Thats absurd! You look amazing and happy to read that you dont care about idiot, jelous people opinion [sic]." These messages make clear that being called fat is negative and should be avoided at all costs.

How influencers and users respond to negative comments varies. For the most part, influencers, who received the most negative comments, ignored trolling comments, instead engaging with people who have positive comments. Like the commenters, they send lots of heart emojis to their followers, but they also offer extra words of encouragement to those who need it and thank followers for their kind comments. What is more common is that followers come to the defense of influencers who receive negative comments, to the point that many the trolls delete their comments all together.[21] For example, in one post "beck_thompson" must have made a comment about Amber's decision to take medication for her mental health issues, however the comment has since been deleted (Figure 71). I know the comment existed because Amber and her followers came to her defense. Amber says in part, "…I don't feel like it's an appropriate response on a post where I'm talking about the stigma of getting help and taking medication. You specifically mentioned side effects of depression meds. This is not the appropriate place for that conversation. I said what I said and I'm asking you to respect the boundaries I'm setting around the topic…" While a commenter responded to "beck_thompson":

> are you seriously giving unsolicited medical advice on Instagram?!Not only is what you
> said a generalization which may or may not be true, and it doesn't take Ambers specific

---

[21] This methodological issue is discussed in chapter 3.

case in mind but is also beyond your scope of practice since she is not a client nor patient of yours. For you a prescribe a dose of humility with a side of mind your own business.

And this continued, with followers responding to "beck_thompson" and more or less telling them to "mind their own business."

But followers didn't just respond to trolls, they also commented on other people's comments in support. In one of many instances, a follower, "lisafiggie" commented saying:

> I am 43 years old and still hate my body and self. I watch the years pass me by and still have not learned to get out of this crappy slump. I have hated myself since as far back as I remember. It may have come from my mother actually. All I am doing is getting bigger the harder I try to lose weight. I don't know how to change it for myself quite frankly. I don't even like looking at myself in a mirror as I am so grossed out by me.

Followers rallied around her in support saying things like "you are perfectly made sweets ♡," and "Check out #youaintyourweight, they have a great podcast too..♡." Responses like these served to help "lisafiggie" feel better about her body and learn to love it, a major belief of body positive influencers. Another example comes from a post by Margaret who reposted a photo from the artist Cecile Dormeau which featured a drawing of a small breasted woman with the words "cute" underneath and a second drawing of a large breasted woman with the word "vulgar" crossed out and replaced with "also cute" (Figure 72)[22]. In response a follower exclaims, "Yessss!!" and describes how as an eighth-grade teacher she raised the issue of larger breasted students getting "chastised for inappropriate dress while smaller breasted students would wear the exact same outfit and no one would say a thing." Many followers applauded her for "advocating for her students" and shared how they "needed a teacher like [her] when [they] were younger" because they were "told to cover up" as their body was "too distracting for guys."

---

[22] The original image rather than the post by Margaret is used to protect her identity since she wished to remain anonymous.

As the women shared their stories about their large breasts and the shame they were made to feel the original commenter responded with support: "your wounds are real. I see you. I am here."

The community within the comment section of these Instagram posts demonstrates that some have deeply taken on the mission of body positivity and are living it and expressing this in the comments. Between the supportive community described above and the overall positive response from commenters, the comments to Instagram posts show that body positivity is having some positive impact on them. Although some commenters are resistant to the idea that fat bodies can be healthy or that health is irrelevant to making a life worth living, the fact that these are immensely outweighed by positive comments demonstrates that overall body positivity is well-received. The goals of self-love and expanding boundaries of beauty, along with touting the mantra that all bodies are good bodies, are ideas that followers are getting behind, even if health is the final frontier of resistance.

CONCLUSION

Body positivity stands by the mantra all bodies are good bodies; but are all bodies beautiful? Healthy? For some influencers a central aspect of body positivity is to expand the boundaries of what counts as a beautiful body while claiming body positivity is inclusive of all. In fact, this expansion to all bodies is what is supposed to distinguish the group from the FAM. However, in practice body positivity is not as inclusive or representative of all bodies as some influencers want it to be. For example, even though body positive posts feature images of people of color at similar proportions to the United States, for some influencers this is not diverse enough. Body positive Instagram posts don't just need to include people of color, they need to be centered in a way not seen in other forms of media. For some influencers body positivity is "by [and for] marginalized people" and by centering cis-gender, able-bodied, young, heterosexual

women, body positivity continues to keep those traditionally marginalized at the margins (quoted from Melissa). Comparing #bodypositive posts to #fitspiration posts highlights the relative lack of inclusion. Although a greater variety of bodies appear in posts tagged #bodypositive, including trans and fat bodies, than those tagged #fitspiration, both center hyper-feminized and sexualized white, young, able-bodied, cis-gender-presenting women who transgress norms of femininity in one dimension, fatness or strength. These results suggest that, while body positivity expands femininity, allowing women to be fat (especially in their butt), it does so only if other aspects, such as whiteness and heterosexuality, remain.

Although body positive influencers disagree whether the group should fight for "freedom to" or "freedom from" beauty, it was very clear from the prevalence of posts that highlight messages of all bodies are beautiful, that a "freedom to" ideology reigns supreme on Instagram. Expanding the boundaries of what counts as a beautiful body is central to most body positive influencers and users on Instagram. Less clear was body positive influencers and users' relationship to health discourses. While #fitspiration posts were consistent in their messaging that thinness is a sign of good health and each of us is responsible for achieving health through working out, clean eating, and losing weight, this was not the case for #bodypositive posts. Although some posts for the latter did fall in line with traditional discourses of health, others focused on ending diet culture, challenging fatphobia and the idea that fat people cannot be healthy or happy. Further, some decided to tackle issues related to mental health, something not seen in fitspiration posts. The variability in health-related posts, when they did emerge, was unsurprising given that influencers also had a complicated relationship to health—some touting a "good fatty" narrative, while others thought health should not enter conversations around body positivity at all. This conflicting narrative of health in body positivity is likely because

influencers had different ideas of health altogether. Although most influencers agreed that "health" could not be determined by one's appearance and that it is variable from person to person (i.e. whatever makes someone feel best), that was about the only thing they agreed on. Some influencers adopted traditional barometers of health, especially as it relates to working out and listening to your doctor. While other influencers challenged whether people should care about health at all since your worth is not based in being healthy and, furthermore, being unhealthy is "okay." Once again, the disconnect between influencers and their engagement within (or outside of) these traditional discourses demonstrate a dance of negotiation as influencer try to enact embodied resistance whereby some mime the discourses and others displace them.

Issues related to traditional discourses of health also showed up in comments on influencers and users' Instagram posts. While comments were overwhelmingly supportive of the messages influencers and users touted and even adopted them in their interactions with other followers, the few that weren't specifically took issue with the idea that these fat women could be healthy. Instead some commenters felt they influencers were part of the problem with the obesity epidemic. Comments that influencers would die or have a heart attack were framed in narratives of personal responsibility. These fat-shaming comments can be understood as part of the disciplinary gaze and surveillance that seeks to tame bodies deemed a threat to society. Although followers were less receptive to challenging discourses of health, overall, they supported body positive influencers and users' messages of self-love and moving the benchmark of beauty. Not only were they receptive, they were practicing these in the comments with other followers.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Many women in the United States today experience "normative discontent," a consistent and perpetual bodily dissatisfaction (Gailey 2014, Kwan and Trautner 2009). The intensity to which women feel normative discontent often results in disordered eating and exercising, depression, and copious amounts of beauty work to achieve the "ideal" body (Bordo 2003, Kwan and Trautner 2009). These material harms are often a consequence of beauty, health, and gender discourses that emphasize and perpetuate a homogenous and ubiquitous ideal of thinness. The discourses of gender, health, and beauty are "defined and coherent ways of representing and discussing people…as expressed in a range of forums…and contribute to how we think about, live, and treat bodies" (Lupton 2013:8). Rather than exert force or control over bodies directly and through violent means, governments seek to encourage their citizens to take personal responsibility over their own bodies through techniques of surveillance and regulation to comply with these discipling discourses (Foucault 1978). In the contemporary United States, this power is pervasive, yet relatively invisible as it is such a ubiquitous part of citizens' daily life. Through body-shaming, lack of access to a wide variety of clothing sizes, the domination of weight-loss supplements, the abundance of photoshop software, and the absence or degradation of fat bodies in mainstream media citizens internalize the narrative that fat is unattractive and unhealthy (and for women unfeminine). As such, via these disciplining discourses, it is our personal responsibility to control and fix bodies that exist outside traditional and ideal standards of thinness (and whiteness, able-bodied-ness, and youth).

More specifically, discourses of health have helped to medicalized fat bodies as pathological and thereby in need of treatment (Murray 2008). The threat of fatness as a

postmodern epidemic[23] reached peak intensity when both the World Health Organization and the

American Medical Association officially recognized fatness as the disease obesity (Gailey 2014).

More so, many sources, including the media and health practitioners, have constructed fatness as

a catastrophe that threatens societal interests despite some reports that show the link between

fatness with poor health and morbidity is erroneous and highly exaggerated (Campos 2004,

LeBesco 2010). Similarly, discourses that paint fatness as unhealthy have also depicted it as

unattractive (Bordo 2003, Kwan and Trautner 2009). Chernin (2009) describes society's

obsession with (feminized) thinness and the ways in which it regulates and polices bodies into

this beauty ideal as the "tyranny of slenderness." And some people, especially women, will go to

great lengths to achieve this ideal of beauty including dieting, plastic surgery, and exercise

(Kwan and Trautner 2009). Further, health and beauty are "intimately connected" (Metzel and

Kirkland 2010:2). To be considered beautiful, one needs to be thin; and that thinness also

demonstrates that you are healthy. In addition, discourses of beauty and health are deeply

gendered (Bordo 2003). Women are expected to be attractive to men, regardless of their sexual

orientation. And women's bodies have been more fully medicalized than men's bodies (Conrad

1992). For example, issues of reproduction (e.g. childbirth; hysteria) have been regulated by

medical institutions and "treated" via medical interventions. In working towards the pursuit of

health and beauty (i.e. the thin ideal), women also display the proper styles of feminine

embodiment (Bartky 1990, Kwan and Trautner 2009). Ultimately, the discourses of health,

beauty, and gender are part of what Foucault (1979) understands as disciplinary power. Through

techniques of surveillance, regulation, and norms, each of these narratives help to create good

---

[23] As stated previously, Boreo (2012) describes a postmodern epidemic as a non-contagious, non-pathological illness
for which science has yet to find a "magic bullet" to explain biological or genetic causes or cures.

neoliberal citizens who keep the state functioning with minimal burden and direct intervention by taking personal responsibility for their bodies.

Even with the dominance and pervasiveness of these discourses, groups also emerge who seek to resist the constraining ideals of normative bodies because even within systems of power, there will be spaces of opposition and resistance (Frank 1991). Three of these were central to this study. The first is the Fat Acceptance Movement (FAM), a group that developed in the 1960s that focuses explicitly on challenging anti-fat discourses and discrimination (Cooper 2016). Second, is a group of social media influencers who promote women's strength and muscularity known as fitspiration. Finally, and most importantly to this study, is body positivity. This group of social media influencers and users exploded into mainstream media in 2015, gaining the attention of celebrities, fashion companies, and even Barbie (Jones 2016, Ospina 2015, Sciarretto 2016). However, there has been little definitive agreement on what body positivity is among popular culture outlets (Dalessandro 2016). That said, the few scholars examining body positive websites and social media contend that it seeks to challenge the normalization of the ideal feminine body represented by mainstream media (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Darwin 2017, Miller 2016, Sastre 2014b).

Given the lack of consensus on the goals or contours of body positivity, despite its proliferation in the media, I have sought to understand better what body positivity is, how it is represented, and how it is received. I have done so by speaking to the influencers themselves and examining body positivity where it is located, on Instagram. In addition, I have explored to what extent body positivity modifies understandings of femininity and related body ideals, including race, age, and ability, and, in doing so, to what extent body positivity uses and re-shapes the related discourses of health and beauty. By understanding influencers' goals (and how they differ

from that of the FAM and fitspiration), and identifying what bodies are represented in body positivity, I have shed light on the difficulty of engaging in embodied resistance and modifying boundaries of femininity outside of traditional discourses. Further, by examining how body positivity is received by followers, I was able to demonstrate which narratives are most embedded in our culture.

My interviews show that while influencers struggle to define neatly what body positivity is and what its goals are, they ultimately understand body positivity as (1) rooted in the FAM. Despite diverging from the FAM in many ways, body positive influencers understand that both are (2) opposed to the diet culture in which fitspiration is deeply embedded. In addition, some influencers describe body positivity as (3) fighting for all bodies to be recognized as good, and for (4) individuals to embrace and love their bodies. Finally, some influencers also work to ensure that everyone has the (5) freedom to be beautiful by moving the benchmark of beauty standards.

However, these five tenets of body positivity were not without controversy. Many influencers often couldn't agree on what position to take on these goals. In particular, influencers often disagreed with the goals of self-love and a "freedom to" be beautiful ideology. Further, the goals influencers described often conflicted with the images on Instagram. Ultimately, I found that body positivity is full of contradictions, a reflection of how ubiquitous discourses of health, gender, and beauty are. Every action taken by influencers and users is a dance of negotiation that contains elements of both resistance and accommodation which reflects the difficulty in expanding and/or upending discourses so embedded in the contemporary United States (Bobel and Kwan 2011).

NEGOTIATING INCLUSIVITY

One of the negotiations that influencers had to manage was in regards to the issue of inclusivity. Drawing on intersectional feminist frameworks that stress the importance of recognizing how race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and body size are interlocking systems of oppression, influencers argued that body positivity is inclusive of all marginalized bodies (Collins 1991, Crenshaw 1990). As Melissa argues, body positivity "is a movement by marginalized people. Who are marginalized based on the way that their body looks and that includes body size, race, age, ability, and…gender" and recognizes that "there's certain people in the world are treated differently just because of the stereotypes and the stigma associated with the way that their body looks." Coming out of third-wave feminist discussions, inclusion does not mean just having a "token" person to check off each box in the list of oppressions, but "foregrounding queer and non-white issues in an attempt to move away from white middle-class hegemony" (Evans and Chamberlain 2015:399). As Young (2002) argues, inclusion can maintain the status quo when marginalized groups are merely incorporated into institutions without the hegemonic dominance of those institutions being challenged. Therefore, inclusion politics should integrate and center the concerns and representation of bodies that have been socially, historically, and politically excluded. With this in mind, the notion of inclusion is embedded in many of the body positive influencers' goals. For example, *all* bodies are good bodies no matter how one's body looks or their identity. Therefore, influencers oppose diet culture that depicts some bodies as worthier than others and support the notion that all people should love their bodies despite discourses that argue otherwise. For influencers, their inclusivity was distinct from their "parent," the FAM, which they argue "centers the fat experience" by attempting to recognize how fatness is also shaped by one's race, gender, sexuality, and age

(quoted from Melissa). However, even though influencers argue that body positivity is supposed to be inclusive of all bodies, for some influencers it was not inclusive enough.

In my examination of #bodypositive on Instagram I found that body positivity centers white, young, able-bodied, cis-gender-presenting women who fulfil conventional standards of beauty and femininity, including thinness. This is not the picture of inclusivity that some influencers strived for because "full-inclusion politics do not assume a center to which other elements are peripheral" (Rohrer 2005:35). Although the racial demographics of #bodypositive and #fitspiration posts were somewhat proportional to the United States, for some influencers, who identified body positivity as by and for "marginalized people" (especially black women), because these posts did not focus on people not already served by society, it is not meeting its tenet of inclusivity. In addition, the relative and/or complete lack of old, disabled, and queer bodies further suggests that body positivity does not measure up to how feminist and critical disability scholars, as well as, some body positive influencers define inclusivity.

Traditional discourses of beauty and femininity have limited who can access beauty to those who are thin (white, able-bodied, young, cis-gender, and heterosexual) (Bordo 2003, Calasanti et al. 2016, Garland-Thomson 2002, Havlin and Báez 2018, Hutson 2010). However, #bodypositive and #fitspiration posts challenge this narrative by depicting fat and/or muscular bodies. Although body sizes in #bodypositive posts were more likely to be thin or small fat, posts also included fat and superfat bodies, whereas #fitspiration depicted predominately thin/fit or hypermuscular bodies. However, thinness is just one marker of a larger system of markers that signifies femininity—including makeup, long hair, clothing, such as lingerie or dresses, and posing (Bartky 1990, Butler 1993). By following norms of femininity, each of these markers work together to signal to ourselves and others our gender as feminine woman. My examination

173

of Instagram posts shows that although a greater variety of body sizes appear in posts tagged #bodypositive than those tagged #fitspiration, both center hyper-feminized and sexualized white women who transgress norms of femininity in one dimension, fatness or muscularity. These results suggest that, while body positivity expands femininity, allowing women to be fat, it does so only if other aspects, such as whiteness and heterosexuality, remain. As such, it's clear the Instagram posts often rely on the traditional discourses of femininity and beauty and that body positivity centers women who can perform femininity in culturally appropriate ways.

The goal of moving the benchmark of beauty standards to include fat bodies is one of the more contentious goals among influencers. Some body positive influencers preferred a "freedom to be beautiful" ideology that challenges the notion that there is one form of beauty. I found that some influencers and users adopting this ideology seek to argue that all bodies are beautiful despite discourses that depict otherwise. In contrast, some influencers want to move away from appearance-based worth altogether because the "freedom to" ideology just substitutes one beauty standard for another. Therefore, they adopt a "freedom from beauty" ideology and challenge people to dismantle beauty as a system. Even though body positive influencers disagreed about how to address beauty discourses, it was clear that Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive were more interested in giving people the freedom to be beautiful. This is similar to previous research that also found that body positive websites and Instagram images seek to challenge normative constructions of beauty (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Sastre 2014b). With captions dedicated to discussing topics related to beauty and hashtags such as #BeautyBeyondSize and #EffYourBeautyStandards, some body positive influencers and users were interested in challenging the homogenous and ubiquitous representation of beauty that emphasizes the feminine ideal of slenderness (Bordo 2003, Hesse-Biber 2007). However, rather than trying to

174

dismantle notions of appearance-based worth altogether like some body positive influencers sought to do, these Instagram posts used beauty discourses. In this way, some body positive influencers and users who adopted a "freedom to" stance reified the notion that attractiveness is "essential, nearly compulsory" for women by placing a lot of emphasis on fat women being included in this discourse (Kwan and Trautner 2009:59).

Although women were fat (and thus transgressed gender norms), they engaged in what Mears (2015) calls "apologetic behaviors:" heightening one's femininity to offset gender transgression. Women in posts tagged #bodypositive "apologized" for their fatness by adopting other signifiers of femininity such as, displaying lots of skin, having long hair, wearing make-up and feminine clothing such as lingerie and dresses, and posing in ways that highlighted their curves. The issue of curves was also central to discourses of femininity and beauty in that the butt is heralded as THE way to demonstrate you are a real, beautiful, and sexually available woman. However, the proliferation of the butt in body positivity ignores the complex history of the butt as signifying black women's oppression (Collins 1991, Gilman 1985, Hobson 2018). By expanding notions of beauty to include white women who have big butts, influencers and users overlook the fact that this isn't much of a victory for black women. In a similar vein of feminist protests that focused on (white) women's right to work in a time when women of color were already in the workforce, some body positive influencers and users preoccupation with the butt does little to address black women's oppression linked to their bodies (Collins 1991, Laughlin et al. 2010). To be clear, defining fat as feminine, as some body positive influencers do, is a radical act. Fat bodies are inherently subversive because they defy normativity in appearance, practice, and stylization by denying the patriarchal ideal of the perfect female body (Gailey 2014). The iterative reality of gender (and beauty) discourses makes it so that women (and men) are

constantly embedded in them (Butler 1993). Since some might argue that traditional discourses are all any one has and in fact, we are surrounded by gender at every possible moment, the only thing body positive influencers can to do is disrupt one gender signifier at a time, while miming the rest. Yet, for another set of influencers, this disruption is not quite radical or subversive enough. For some, inclusion is not about assimilation or "conformity to traditional gender scripts," but a future world that they can't yet fully describe in which it's not just one signifier, but the system that is subverted.

The disagreement among influencers about beauty was also seen in relation to health, but on a smaller scale since, in stark contrast to fitspiration, body positive influencers and users often ignore health discourses. However, when discourses did occasionally arise they were contradictory. On the one hand, some influencers defined health as something that varied to person to person, but as long as you felt your best you were healthy. However, feeling your best was often connected to working out, eating "right," and doctors confirming that your choices are okay—narratives all consistent with traditional discourses of health. On the other, another set of influencers took what might be deemed a "freedom from health" ideology. Like beauty, some influencers argued health was not a barometer of worth and that it is okay to be unhealthy. That said, all influencers agreed that health could not be determined based on one's appearance. However, in arguing that fat bodies can be healthy too, some influencers unconsciously frame fat women who perform traditional health behaviors like working out as "good" while fat women who don't as "bad." By trying to allow fat women to be seen as healthy, some influencers unintentionally go against their larger goal to define all bodies as good bodies.

Besides the differences in how to define health, body positive influencers disagreed over whether or not health should be an aspect of body positivity. While some influencers saw health

as integral to ending diet culture, others felt health would scare people from seeking out body positivity. Given the contention about health, it was unsurprising that the messages of health on Instagram posts tagged #bodypositive were inconsistent and relatively nonexistent compared to messages about beauty. First, a few posts tagged #bodypositive featured images and captions that depicted influencers' larger goal of ending diet culture. In these posts, influencers and users challenged the discourse of health by arguing that weight does not equal health and that no body is more valuable than another because they are "healthy." Second, most posts were consistent with #fitspiration posts by promoting weight-loss, endorsing fitness and clean eating, and engaging in narratives of personal responsibility. As with beauty and gender discourses, body positive users reified health discourses that depict health as intimately connected to appearance by associating thinness as a sign of good health even though all body positive influencers disagreed with this notion (Lupton 2013, Metzl and Kirkland 2010). In addition, by ignoring the social factors related to health, such as lack of access to healthcare, discrimination, and economic disparity (Anderson, Smith and Sidel 2005, Porter 1997), some body positive users present health as the result of individual hard work and dedication, which is also a part of the traditional discourses of health. By participating in traditional health behaviors (e.g. working out and eating organic foods), some influencers legitimize their fat, yet fit, existence by assimilating into traditional health discourses. However, in doing so some influencers and users confirm the good fatty/bad fatty dichotomy described by Pausé (2015). This is another type of apologetic behavior that influencers and users engage in. By working out, drinking less, and eating organic fat women can apologize for the transgression of being fat by claiming health while simultaneously pointing to fat women not engaged in these behaviors and saying as least I'm not like them (Chalklin 2016, Pausé 2015).

Although influencers claim to be inclusive of all bodies, it is clear from the images and captions presented on Instagram which center conventionally attractive, white, young, relatively thin cis-women, body positivity upholds the white supremist, hetero-patriarchal visions of beauty and health that some influencers seek to dismantle. The disconnect between intersectional intentions and actually achieving it in practice is not unfamiliar to feminist groups (Laughlin et al. 2010, Reger 2012). As Reger (2014:47) argues, "most examinations of contemporary feminist organizations, communities, and networks find that overall contemporary feminists have not been successful in their goals of building social movements that acknowledge White privilege." And I might include other forms of privilege as well (e.g. age and ability) in Reger's (2014) statement. Again, drawing from feminist and disability scholars, inclusivity is not about proportionality, but about foregrounding historically marginalized people (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, Rohrer 2005, Young 2002). Given the lack of old, disabled, and queer bodies, along with the centrality of whiteness, body positive Instagram posts often do not meet the standards of some influencers.

Further complicating attempts at inclusivity and other tenets of body positivity is inconsistent ideas about how to address goals. Some body positive influencers want to work within the traditional discourses of beauty, health, and gender by choosing to expand them to include fat women. While another set of influencers would prefer to dismantle these discourses altogether. For the former group of body positive influencers, by drawing on the discourses they seek to challenge, they reify some of the boundaries, while expanding other ones. Yet, for the later group they struggled to concretely describe what a world without these discourses would look like. Both sets of influencers demonstrate how embedded gender, health, and beauty discourses are in our every day life and how difficult it is to get beyond them. We repeatedly

inhabit, imitate, and perform these discourses as a "regularized and constrained repetition of norms" that become so natural it is hard to identify them as anything but natural (Butler 1993:95). Because of the prevalence and ubiquity of the discourses of gender, health, and beauty, for influencers to subvert them they often are required to both mime and displace them simultaneously, even if for some the goal is to dismantle them entirely. Further, the positive reception from followers on posts #bodypositive on Instagram highlights that in order to encourage participation or consumption of the movement it needs to be accessible to them. By veiling more radical politics as "glittery, colorful, and endlessly positive," influencers more easily connect with their audience because the followers already identify with traditional ideas of femininity, health, and beauty (Baker 2017). For example, the most negative comments were often directed at posts which did not rely on traditional ideas of health. This might signal that such posts are deemed too uncomfortable, inaccessible, or radical and thus result in pushback. Overall, influencers and users must negotiate their goals of inclusion and all bodies being good bodies with the realities of getting and maintaining followers, but also with their own privilege. How influencers engage in this negotiation highlights the ways in which they draw upon discourses some seek to dismantle or expand, and which ultimately ends up framing some bodies as more "good" than others.

NEGOTIATING INDIVIDUAL VS. STRUCTURE

Beauty, health, and gender are disciplining discourses that frame thinness as the ideal and citizens surveil non-normative bodies to encourage them meet this ideal by any means. These disciplining discourses contribute to micro-level interactions that play a role in regulating bodies, such as body shaming and self-disciplinary practices (i.e. beauty work) (Farrell 2011, Gailey 2014). However, disciplining discourses also appear in macro-level, structural and systemic

179

regulations, including spaces that do not accommodate fat bodies, workplace and healthcare discrimination, and campaigns like *Let's Move!* that promote weight-loss to U.S. citizens (Boero 2012, Murray 2008, Pausé 2014b). Many of the goals that influencers have for body positivity address issues at the micro-level. For instance, one of the most prominent goals that some influencers have is to encourage individual people to embrace and love their bodies despite discourses that depict them as pathological and unattractive. Relatedly, some influencers also champion the idea that every person has a right to be free to pursue beauty regardless of narrow beauty standards.

Although these goals were both prominent in my discussions with influencers and in posts tagged #bodypositive, they were also a major source of contention among influencers. My interviews show that, despite body positivity's roots in the more radical FAM, some influencers feel body positivity has become a diluted and commodified version of its former self. Some influencers argue that the individualist notion of self-love is an unrealistic and easily commercialized pursuit, and instead they advocate for collective, structural change such as dismantling notions of appearance-based worth in both beauty and health systems, increasing representation of marginalized bodies in mainstream culture, and ensuring access to such resources as judgement-free healthcare. This was also the case for influencers who felt that the group should focus on a "freedom *from*" beauty rather than a "freedom *to*" beauty. Like self-love, some influencers argue that the "freedom to" ideology creates a new impossible standard that women must now meet. Further, both goals overlook the material consequences of beauty and gender discourses.

Some of these material consequences include fat women being stigmatized by their health care providers which results in poor care and reduces patient access to health care (Pausé 2014b),

hiring and salary prejudices against fat people including fat employees being less likely to receive a raise than their thin counterparts (Roehling, Roehling and Elluru 2018), and lower rates of college acceptances due to weight (Puhl and Brownell 2001). What some influencers want is to focus on reforms in the areas of health, employment, and education where the discrimination described above occurs rather than focusing on individuals' feeling better about themselves. For them, there is more power in trying to dismantle the discourses of beauty, health, and gender altogether. However, this is in stark contrast to the images seen on Instagram which predominately focus on self-love and beauty. Working from Foucault (1979), Murray (2008:12) argues that disciplinary power functions by encouraging "individuals to monitor their own conduct and measuring it in relation to dominant health discourses." Following Bartky (1990), I would add beauty and gender discourse to this statement because issues of self-love and beauty are individualist notions that fit well into a neoliberal framework that celebrates personal responsibility. If you are unhealthy or not beautiful you are the cause, because of your lifestyle choices, your immorality, and your inability to control yourself. Further, this is exacerbated by the United States' neoliberal, capitalistic economy which encourages people to buy products to meet these new standards—"if you don't love yourself, here is a deodorant that will help you," says Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign! This individual betterment can be understood as a patriarchal bargain, a deal in which an individual, unconsciously or consciously, accepts and perpetuates some of the costs of patriarchy in exchange for receiving some of the rewards (Kandiyoti 1988). By focusing on self-love and beauty, individuals get to bargain for maximized autonomy, safety, and well-being, but patriarchal (and often neoliberal) systems and institutions remain unthreatened. By drawing on and working with traditional discourses of health, beauty, and gender at the individual level, some influencers and users "keep things the same except

moving them just a little bit so that more people can benefit from hetero-patriarchy" at the expense of the group at large (quoted from Virgie). Again, these discourses are such a dominant and embedded part of our everyday lives that its hard not to want them or see the value within them (Lupton 2013).

The disconnect between the structural reform that some influencers want, and the self-love and beauty focus that other influencers want, and which dominated #bodypositive posts on Instagram, left some influencers "disillusioned by the entire movement and how washed out it's become" (quoted from Gia). As a result, some influencers are turning towards body neutrality and/or body liberation, which they identify as making more radical change because it conveys a focus on collectively dismantling structures that oppress non-normative bodies. For some influencers, working within the traditional discourses of gender, health, and beauty means body positivity will never be liberatory, will never include all bodies, and will always be rooted in oppression. The tensions between individual and structural reforms might further reflect why body positivity is so difficult to define.

NEGOTIATING CO-OPTATION & COMMERCIALIZATION

The idea that body positivity has been commercialized is not new. Not only can the commercialization of body positivity be seen by flipping through any magazine or turning on the TV with advertisement campaigns like Dove's Real Beauty (Johnston and Taylor 2008, Murray 2013) and Aerie's #AerieREAL, but both Miller (2016) and Cwynar-Horta (2016) have shown that body positivity has been commodified by corporations, often at the expense of their transgressive messages. My research builds on the work of these previous scholars by examining how influencers themselves understand the commercialization of body positivity while also exploring how such commercialization is evident on Instagram. Further, I argue that it is not just

commercial interests that are co-opting the language and imagery of body positivity, but also fitspiration.

The proliferation of corporations employing feminist themes of empowerment to market products to women, also known as market-place feminism, is not new (Zeisler 2016). Zeisler (2016) argues that companies have recognized that selling women products by focusing on their empowerment is just as effective, if not more, than targeting women's insecurities. Messner (2002) argues that Nike's advertisements surrounding women and sports have been appropriating feminist ideas for years. Most recently this can be seen in their "Dream Crazier" commercial. Narrated by Serena Williams, the commercial features clips of women athletes competing in a variety of sports, including gymnast Simone Biles, snowboarder Chloe Kim, and fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, that fades into the caption "it's only crazy until you do it". Willams says, "If we show emotion, we're called dramatic. If we want to play against men, we're nuts. And if we dream of equal opportunity, we're delusional. When we stand for something, we're unhinged. When we're too good, there's something wrong with us. And if we get angry, we're hysterical, irrational, or just being crazy. So if they want to call you crazy, fine, show them what crazy can do." According to influencers, this same type of co-optation of feminist messaging to sell products is also prevalent in body positivity. Corporations like Target, Lane Bryant, and Weight Watchers all have used messages of self-love and all bodies are good bodies in their advertisements. For influencers this type of co-optation is in part the reason why it is so difficult to define body positivity because corporations have diluted and depoliticized it. In fact, for influencers many of the corporations embody the exact opposite of what body positivity is, by not being inclusive, by engaging in diet culture, and by encouraging women to buy products to make their bodies more palatable.

Similarly, some body positive influencers argue fitspiration has appropriated their symbols, artifacts, genres, and rituals even as they embody the exact opposite of what body positivity is—diet culture (Rogers 2006). For body positive influencers fitspiration is distinct from body positivity because it is embedded in diet culture by promoting fitness, focusing on clean eating, and celebrating thin, muscular bodies. Therefore, the use of body positive language, messaging, and hashtags is problematic. However, fitspiration's co-optation of body positivity is undeniable in that a little over 30% of the posts tagged #bodypositive were also fitspiration posts. For some body positive influencers, the co-optation by fitspiration is a way to increase fitspiration influencers and users' platforms. And given Instagram is increasingly a money-making platform (described in detail below), this is similar to the economic interests of companies. As Melissa explains, "they saw that body positive hashtags were becoming a thing, so they just kind of started using them." Margaret agreed saying, "I definitely find the co-option frustrating and also inevitable in the capitalistic system where whatever is trendy is the thing that is the object for your marketing." In a time when being an influencer can be a full-time job, making sure you use the right hashtags and position yourself in prominent groups can help to ensure that you get more followers which can equal more income. Given the popularity of body positivity in mainstream culture, it might be advantageous for fitspiration influencers to jump on the bandwagon.

Further, the relative lack of inclusivity in body positivity previously described might be a result of the co-optation of body positivity by corporations. Advertisements have long centered thin, white, young, able-bodied women who are hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualized (Kilbourne 1994). Perhaps body positivity was more inclusive and radical like some influencers claim, but as the group has been commercialized the images have become homogenous. Influencers

certainly argue that through the commercialization of body positivity, non-normative bodies have been abandoned for thin white women who are a "little pudgy." Through these advertisements, body positivity has been made into a commodity that can be bought and sold. Not only that, to access body positivity these companies and advertisements frame body positivity as something you can only access by buying their products. For example, to love your body you need to first buy an Aerie swimsuit and then post about it on Instagram. It's clear that despite some influencers objections body positivity has been taken up by corporations and fitspiration and warped into something influencers did not intend for it to be. Therefore, influencers must negotiate the image followers see in these advertisements with what influencers see as their more authentic ideas about body positivity, even though, as I discuss below they themselves are complicit in some of this commercialization.

While not discussed in the previous chapters, it is important to note that influencers belief that body positivity has been commercialized is not without merit. Close to 20% of the posts tagged #bodypositive were sponsorships, ads, and links to or tagging corporations. For example, one post by "glitterandlazers" reads "paid partnership with modcloth" (Figure 73). Next to an image of a white, fat woman wearing a "black circle skirt with white flowers and yellow mock neck short sleeve sweater" the caption discusses "#selfacceptance" while also mentioning "her entire look is from @modcloth." This post highlights what my influencers argued—that self-love and acceptance becomes a commodity that one can purchase via a "yellow mock neck short sleeve sweater." By becoming something one can buy, body positivity continues to draw on the disciplinary discourses of gender and beauty by underscoring the neoliberal idea of the personal. You can achieve anything—beauty, health, femininity—as long as you make informed, appropriate choices (Lupton 2013, Murray 2008).

Users of the hashtag #bodypositive were not the only people engaging in sponsored

content. Despite some influencers vehemently chastising the co-optation of body positivity by

corporations, like Cwynar-Horta (2016), I found that some influencers also posted sponsored

content, tagged brands, and promoted their own money-making business. For instance, one post

of Jessamyn's was a "paid partnership with Nike" (Figure 74). Rather than talking about self-

acceptance, Jessamyn's caption discusses another important aspect of body positivity:

inclusivity. Next to an image of Jessamyn stretching on a bridge in leggings and a sports bra, the

caption reads:

> Inclusivity in the fitness community is something that we always need to be striving for.
> It's so vital that we take active steps in addressing our biases and asking ourselves
> difficult questions. At the end of the day, the truth is simple — how do we make fitness
> and wellness environments more inclusive? By believing that the human experience
> comes in every flavor, with no experience counted as more worthy than another. When
> we shift that paradigm, sky's the limit in terms of inclusivity. @Nike #BETRUE
> #oneofthem#UntilWeAllWin #ad

Although Jessamyn argued that "capitalists…will find a way to use whatever is at their

disposal to make money…so we need to continue to reinforce that no matter what the brands and

companies do we can't look to them for the definition of body positivity 'cause they'll say

fucking anything, they will switch the definition around to mean the complete opposite," she is

still engaging in capitalism by using her platform to sell Nike leggings. However, she

rationalizes this decision by saying she "would never work with a brand that [she] didn't have a

positive feeling about, either their message or their product." I heard this sentiment repeatedly

from influencers—that they were "very picky about the brands [they] work with" (quoted from

Sally). The brand had to have a message the influencer supported, they had to be inclusive, and

often were "products that [they] actually would have used with [their] own money" on (quoted

from Carina). Jes recognizes that often followers get upset because she engages in sponsorships

as if she were "selling out." She said: "Do I want a world void of like predatory capitalism and consumerism? Fuck yeah. Is that possible? No. Not right now. It's not. So, let's look at the tools we have and how can we use them to benefit us. So, I do work with companies. One, because I deserve to get paid. Two, I'm very careful about who I choose." Some influencers are negotiating their desire for body positivity to not be commercialized with the reality that sponsored content pays well, it might allow them to reach a wider audience, and it increases the representation of non-normative bodies. However, some influencers claim that the purposefulness to which they choose sponsorship opportunities enables them work with companies that are more in line with their goals for body positivity.

Once again, influencers have to simultaneously accommodate and resist systems which are deeply embedded in traditional discourses of beauty, health, and gender (Bobel and Kwan 2011). Just as Jes has posts that were sponsored (Figure 75), she also had posts that challenged advertisements embedded in diet culture (Figure 76). For example, in one post Jes "fixed" a Billboard advertisement in Times Square for appetite suppressing lollipops that reads, "Got Cravings? Girl, Tell Them To #SUCKIT" (Figure 77). In her alternate image, the Billboard now reads, "Got Cravings? Girl, Just Eat SOMETHING! #SuckItFlatTummy." The caption reads:

> 🔍 Remember that one time @FlatTummyCo put up a super toxic billboard that sold appetite suppressant lollipops in Times Square for a month?
> -
> FIXED IT🤜.
> -
> Today on my blog: a no-holds-barred critique of their (continuously harmful) messaging and ten DIFFERENT messages that could have spent a month in Times Square INSTEAD 💝 (Link in bio!)
> -
> #SuckItFlatTummy#70MillionEatingDisordersAndCounting

Jes' mix of posts that both engage in and fight against advertisements and sponsorships demonstrates first-hand the complexities influencers must traverse in deciding what is and isn't

body positive, and how best to meet their goals. Embodied resistance is multifaceted and often requires working both within and outside the systems one is trying to challenge. This might be particularly important given that much of the resistance is happening via social media like Instagram which is deeply embedded in capitalism.

THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

For many influencers, "social media has created this special window into the possibility that people can have a different relationship to their body" (quoted from Virgie). For body positivity, like for many other groups, including Black Lives Matter, Occupy, and MeToo, social media has served a powerful space for documenting and challenging political authority and modes of social control (Castells 2013, Lupton 2015, Treem et al. 2016). Further, social media, such as Instagram, allows groups to reach a wider audience outside the confines of geographical location (Castells 2013, Earl and Kimport 2011, Treem et al. 2016). For example, though Virgie identifies several negative issues with social media, one of the upsides is "we have like 400,000 new potential converts." Another aspect of social media that has been instrumental to body positivity is the ability move beyond the passive reception of images prevalent in mass media to participation in the creation and dissemination of content, known as prosumption (Beer and Burrows 2010, Ritzer 2014). Melissa explains that social media eliminated barriers, noting that "all of a sudden marginalized people were able to represent themselves and not through the lens of someone who's not marginalized. And so, it was kind of like well, finally I get to speak out and I get to be seen and I get to see people like me."

Rather than the stereotypical images of fat persons in mainstream media as unattractive, unhealthy, and unworthy, body positive influencers and users can produce and consume media that emphasizes fat as attractive, healthy, and good—expanding the boundaries of traditional

discourses. Through selfies and other images posted to social media, the posts tagged

#bodypositive that I examined show fat women as sexy, happy, able to work out, and thriving in

a variety of other circumstances. However, the women in #bodypositive posts are also engaged

in hyper-feminine and hyper-sexual behavior. This was best seen in the proliferation of the

"belfie" or butt selfie. With close to 40% of the posts on Instagram for #bodypositive

emphasizing the butt, hips, and/or curves, it was clear that the new standard of "representing the

body/self" in body positivity was centered around the butt (Lupton 2015:176). The hyper-

sexualization and feminization of these images is another way that influencers and users draw on

traditional discourses of gender and beauty. Rather than totally dismantling these ideas, some

influencers and users utilize them to demonstrate they are still feminine and still beautiful despite

being fat. Even when given the autonomy to represent their bodies in any way they want, they

are still constrained by ubiquitous gender norms (Butler 1993) and as such represent themselves

in ways that are typical to mainstream media and advertisements (Kilbourne 1994, Richardson

2016).

Adhering to traditional beauty and gender discourses also ensures that influencers get and

maintain followers. For some body positive influencers, performing traditional forms of

femininity was enjoyable and subversive, but for other influencers it was very constraining. For

the latter influencers, they felt that is they stopped performing a glam version of femininity they

would lose followers. This is especially concerning for them because Instagram was a way they

made a living. Although Instagram can be a site of empowerment, it also provides the means to

surveil others and ourselves as part of a larger disciplinary apparatus (Baer 2016). As Duffy

(2017) argues, through likes and comments we learn to self-monitor, censor, and adapt our

bodies to ensure continued observation and support of the content we create. To ensure

popularity, to gain sponsorships, and to spread their messages of body positivity, some influencers and users must negotiate their more radical ideals with what is accessible and appealing to followers. Therefore, relying on the traditional and prevalent ways of representing and discussing people (i.e. traditional discourses of health, beauty, and gender) might ensure that some influencers can reach people without turning them off entirely from body positivity. My examination of comments on Instagram demonstrate that this assimilative tactic is somewhat successful since a majority of the comments were positive; many of the followers commented positively and directly about each woman's appearance. By mimicking the gender and beauty norms while also displacing them through being fat, some influencers and users are still able to achieve their goals of allowing people a freedom to be beautiful and loving their bodies.

As influencers and users negotiate resistance and accommodation via the images they post to Instagram, followers are not the only aspect of Instagram that shapes their experience. It is important to remember that Instagram, although was originally intended as a social networking service, has quickly grown into an advertising platform (Cwynar-Horta 2016, Laestadius 2016). This was most recently seen in March 2019 when Instagram unveiled its newest feature "Checkout," which allows users to "buy from brands without leaving Instagram."[24] Instagram feeds directly into the commercialization of body positivity described above, in that the platform, in which body positivity is centered, is in the business of commodifying content. By using Instagram, influencers are thrust into using traditional discourses of beauty, health, and gender because the platform basically requires it if you're going to "sell" your message to followers. Further, each act of communication via social media is transformed into aggregated digital data that is then used by corporations to advertise and sell direct to consumers (Lupton 2015, Thrift

---

[24] https://instagram-press.com/blog/2019/03/19/instagram-checkout/

2005). In using Instagram to disseminate their message of body positivity, some influencers open the group up to the commercialization they claim to resent because advertisers see the promise of body positive messaging to sell products. Further, the algorithms that are used to bring up ads in one's feed and which selects photos to display on an "Explore" page may also contribute to the lack of representation and inclusivity on posts tagged #bodypositive. As Noble (2018) argues, algorithms are not as objective as they are portrayed as and can contribute to the invisibility and the perpetuation of stereotypes of women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, old people, and disabled people. It may be that there is a diverse body of body positive influencers and users, but algorithms may be suppressing images of such bodies. However, it is also possible that many marginalized people aren't represented on Instagram because they don't have the class privilege to access it. Not all citizens have equal access to social media platforms because they lack the time and resources to cultivate those accounts (Fuchs 2013). For example, becoming an influencer or a user requires thoughtful planning, expertise, and an ability to create viral content. Someone barely making ends meet while working a full-time job and raising children might not be able to dedicate a considerable time to producing content for Instagram. The demographics of the body positive influencers I spoke to illuminate this notion because they are all well-educated, all but one have no children, and their primary employment is being an influencer or something related to their work in body positivity.

Overall, social media has been essential for body positive influencers because it provided a semi-autonomous space that enabled them to represent bodies missing from mainstream media and speak out against discourses they deem problematic. However, Instagram also ultimately contributes to many of the contradictions that influencers face, including reifying traditional discourses, issues with inclusivity, and dealing with the commodification of body positivity.

Although there is a lot of promise to social media as a place to resist, there are many pitfalls that constrain the type of resistance influencers can engage in.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project I sought more fully to understand what body positivity is and its impact, especially as it relates to gender, health, and beauty, and in the context of social media. The larger concern underlying my research was to understand to what extent body positivity modifies understandings of femininity and related body ideals, including race, age, and ability, and, in doing so, to what extent body positivity uses and re-shapes the related discourses of health and beauty. To address these larger concerns, I examined what body positive influencers goals are and how they differentiate their goals from related groups such as the fat acceptance movement and fitspiration. I found that while there is a lot of uncertainty about what body positivity is because it lacks a single organizing body, has various groups making claims to it, and have been commercialized there are five tenets of body positivity: (1) a connection to the fat acceptance movement which underlies many of the following goals; (2) an opposition to diet culture (and thus fitspiration); (3) the belief that all bodies are good bodies; (4) celebrating self-love; and (5) proclaiming that all people have a freedom to be beautiful. However, these beliefs are not free of controversy. Influencers are divided over the ways in which to challenge normalizing discourses that frame certain bodies as normal and valuable. The disconnect between what some influencers want and what they see represented on Instagram highlights the difficulty in challenging these discourses because they are deeply embedded in our everyday life and it can be difficult to distance ourselves from the privilege these discourses may reward us with. Further, influencers disagreement about whether the group should tackle individual versus structural concerns also demonstrates the complicated negotiation they must endure to challenge

discourses of beauty, health, and gender. Often resistance means accommodating the discourses influencers seek to challenge.

Second, I sought to address my larger concerns by examining and comparing the bodies represented in posts tagged #bodypositive to posts tagged #fitspiration on Instagram. Despite some influencers claims that body positivity is inclusive, my examination of Instagram posts shows that although a greater variety of body sizes appear in posts tagged #bodypositive than those tagged #fitspiration, both center hyper-feminized and sexualized white, able-bodied, young cis-women who transgress norms of femininity in one dimension, fatness or muscularity. Some challenge that body positivity is inclusive because it doesn't measure up to their ideas of what inclusion looks like. Following feminist and disability scholar, for some body positive influencers inclusion means not having historically marginalized people on the periphery of the movement, but foregrounded. As such, some influencers and users draw upon the same discourses of gender, beauty, and health they seek to challenge by expanding the boundaries to include fat women in these narratives. For other body positivity influencers, while this is subversive, it is not enough since they believe that the group should be dismantling these discourses, not accommodating them. Even with this disagreement, most Instagram posts follow the logic of accommodation and as such have expanded what it means to be feminine, beautiful, (and to a lesser extent) healthy by including fat people. However, many other bodily aspects such as race, ability, and age must remain traditionally "normative" to offset the transgression of fatness (or muscularity for #fitspiration posts). Although, body positive influencers claim that all bodies are good bodies, ultimately, the lack of representation of all bodies gives the impression that all bodies might not be good bodies or at least some bodies continue to be seen as more "good" than others.

Finally, by exploring the response to these Instagram posts by followers I was able to get a sense of how the goals of body positivity were being received and adopted by others. The widespread positivity in comments directed at posts, as seen in the abundance of emojis and praise, demonstrates that followers are receptive to the goals and messages of body positive influencers and users. Clearly, drawing on discourses of beauty, health, and gender is an effective strategy to ensure that followers support your cause. Not only are followers supporting the cause, but they have adopted it in their interactions with other followers in the comments section. The primary place where influencer receive resistance is when it comes to discourses of health. Many commenters are deeply in line with the idea that fatness is unhealthy and will lead to death. This demonstrates that while the discourses of femininity and beauty are more flexible, the discourse of health might be particularly immovable. I argue that this might be the case because beauty and gender might be identified as trivial pursuits, but health is seen as a matter of life and death. Disrupting thinness as a signifier of beauty and femininity is a subversive act that modifies the boundaries of femininity to include fat bodies. And it also becomes a new standard of femininity and beauty that women must meet. By requiring fatness to be beautiful we might be doing fat people a disservice because femininity, beauty, and health continue to be discursively linked. What is at stake when beauty and health are not separated is that fat people continue to be discriminated by doctors, refused treatment, and face stigma and shaming that has negative consequences to their health (Farrell 2011, Pausé 2014b). Women, like Ellen Maud Bennett,[25] continue to die, not because they are fat, but because of the systemic discrimination they endure because of how their body looks. In an Instagram post by Virgie linked to an article

---

[25] As described in chapter five, Ellen Maud Bennett was a 64-year-old Canadian woman who died shortly after being diagnosed with cancer after years of seeking out medical intervention and being told she'd feel better if she just lost weight.

she wrote for ravishly.com on "7 Tips For Medical Self-Advocacy As a Fat Person[26]," her caption reads, "This article is dedicated to #EllenMaudBennett who had to use her obituary to advocate for medical care free from fat negative bias. Humane, proper medical care should be something all people — regardless of size or health status — have access to. Link in bio." (Figure 78).

As a whole, this research on body positivity highlights the ways in which groups can utilize social media in their attempts towards embodied resistance, but that how to enact this resistance is contested. Although some body positive influencers and users want to expand the boundaries of which bodies are considered feminine, other influencers argue that this reifies traditional discourses and continue to exclude bodies. Ultimately, this project demonstrates how difficult it is to challenge discourses because they are so regularized and repetitive, we feel a deep sense of connection to them, and they help to spread our message. Although feminist scholars like Butler (1993) argue that these conventional discourses are all people have and so our resistance happens one disrupted signifier at a time, some body positive influencers are part of a fourth wave of feminism (Evans and Chamberlain 2015) that is asking people to do more.

Future research would do well to more systematically examine body positive influencer's Instagram accounts. Although I did try to capture an accurate representation of the images influencers posted between the months of June and August, taking a longitudinal look would better reflect how influencers own positions change the longer they are within body positivity and may be able to catch themes I was unable to given my small sample size, unsystematic sampling, and short time frame. Further given my small sample of influencers I interviewed, my study is limited in being representative and generalizable to all body positive influencers.

---

[26] https://ravishly.com/medical-self-advocacy-fat-person

Although I did try to interview more influencers for this study, I found it difficult to get influencers to respond to my requests for interviews. In addition to my difficulties recruiting participants, it is important to recognize that collecting data from Instagram is still a developing process among social scientists. As such, much of data collection was done through trial and error and had to be adapted throughout. The most apparent limitation to this study is my problem capturing comments. Posts and comments are "living" in that they can constantly be changed and deleted. Even as I tried to capture posts and comments as quickly as possible, comments could be deleted just a quickly and lost to me forever. This was especially true of negative comments that were often met with hostility by some influencers and users and were shamed into deletion. Therefore, some of my data might not accurately portray how body positivity is received.

It is important to remember that Instagram as a platform is evolving daily. As I was conducting my study Instagram unveiled IGTV which enables users and influencers to post and watch "long-form, vertical video from your favorite Instagram creators."[27] Further, videos and "stories," short photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours and which can also be captured live, continue to be popular on the app originally created for photos. With this in mind, future work should examine how body positive users and influencers utilize these spaces and whether or not it is different from the traditional posts. This might be especially important because videos allow influencers to talk to followers directly and are longer form. As such, influencers and users might be able to talk more frankly about their ideas because some posts disappear quickly. Finally, I would propose future research to explore other embodied resistance groups by interviewing fat acceptance activists and fitspiration influencers in addition to body positive influencers to better understand the nuances between these movements. This might be especially

---

[27] https://instagram-press.com/blog/2018/06/20/welcome-to-igtv/

important given that the FAM is portrayed by body positive influencers as more radial while fitspiration is depicted as less so. As such, each group might provide interesting ideas to how to modify or dismantle boundaries of femininity.

APPENDIX A

I. Demographics
   a. Gender Identity: In terms of gender, how do you identify? Pronouns?
   b. Marital Status: What is your marital status?
   c. Children: Do you have any children? If so, how many? And what ages?
   d. Educational level: What is your highest level of education?
   e. Employment: Do you presently work for pay (or are you involved in paid work?) What is your occupation? Is this work full or part time?
   f. Age: In what year were you born?
   g. Race: In terms of race, how do you identify?
   h. Ethnicity: In terms of ethnicity, how do you identify?
   i. Nationality: Where were you born? What country do you currently live in?
   j. Sexual Orientation: In terms of sexual orientation, how do you identify?
II. Introductory Questions
   a. How did you learn about body positivity?
   b. Why did you get involved?
      i. How long have you been involved?
III. Defining Body Positivity and its Goals
   a. What does body positivity mean to you? How would you define or describe it?
   b. What do you think the general goals of body positivity are?
      i. What are your personal goals for body positivity?
   c. Why do you think body positivity is needed/important?
      i. Why do you think people care about bodies? Put another way, why is there all this focus on bodies? What is it about bodies that you think matters?
   d. What, if any, differences do you see among various influencers concerning these goals? For instance, do some prioritize some goals over others, or disagree concerning some of the goals?
   e. When we think about women's bodies, issues of beauty often arise. I'd like to ask you about your ideas concerning body positivity and beauty.
      i. Do you think body positivity addresses issues related to beauty and beauty standards? If yes, how? If no, why not (Are there other issues that you or body positivity deems more important)?
      ii. Do you think all bodies are beautiful? Why/not?
   f. Some people judge bodies on the basis of health. I'd like to ask you about your ideas concerning body positivity and health.
      i. Do you think body positivity addresses issues related to health? If yes, how? If no, why not?
      ii. In your opinion, how does body positivity understand/define health?
      iii. Do you think all bodies are healthy? Why/not?
   g. To what extent do you think gender influences the way people see their bodies?
      i. Does being a woman/man/gender non-conforming/trans have an impact on how people see their bodies?
      ii. Do you think body positivity addresses these issues related to gender? If yes, how so? How does body positivity respond to these issues we've been discussing, if at all?

      iii. Do you think body positivity is trying to change the way we think about women/men's bodies? In what way/s?

           1. Do you think body positivity is interested in gender non-conforming or trans bodies? Do you think body positivity addresses issues related to these populations?

  h. Do you think body positivity addresses issues related to race/ability/age/sexuality (ask separately)? If yes, how? If no, why not?

  i. Does body positivity include all bodies? Are there any that are left out?

  j. So we've talked a lot of body positivity's goals and some of the issues you and body positivity are interested. How do you go about achieving your goals?

      i. What specific activities have you participated in as a member/influencer of body positivity? (Both offline and online)

IV.   Social Media

  a. How do you use social media for body positive purposes?

      i. What kinds of things do you use it for? What kinds of things do you post? (Selfies; inspirational text; food; memes)

      ii. How do you decide what to post?

      iii. How do you choose what hashtag(s) to use?

      iv. Are there any specific tactics you use to reach more people in making use of social media for body positivity?

           1. Have companies sought to work with you? Have you had any sponsorships?

           2. If yes, do you feel that this influences what you post in any way? Were you given any guidelines concerning what you could/not post?

  b. Why do you use social media for body positivity? What is your intent for your social media posts?

  c. What kinds of reactions do you get from your body positive posts on social media? Can you tell me about the positive ones?

      i. What negative reactions do you get from your body positive posts on social media? How do you respond to these?

  d. Whom do you follow on social media for body positivity related posts? Why?

V.   Bodies in Body Positivity and Differences Between Groups

  a. In your opinion, are there any groups of people that you don't see represented or involved in body positivity that you would like to see represented or involved?

      i. Why do you think these groups are not represented or involved?

  b. Do you think that women are more involved than men? Why do you think this is the case?

      i. Do you think men and women face similar or different body issues?

  c. Have you noticed body positivity getting lumped together with other body centered movements/trends (i.e. fat acceptance movement, fitspiration, eating disorder recovery)? Which ones?

      i. Why do you think that is?

      ii. How/is body positivity similar/different from these other movements/trends?

      iii. What is the relationship between body positivity and fat acceptance?

                    1. How is body positivity similar/different from fat acceptance?
            iv. Earlier we discussed body positivity's position on things like health and beauty. Do you think that these positions are different from these other groups/trends you've mentioned?
      d. What do you think about fitspiration Instagram posts?
            i. How do you feel about fitspiration Instagram posts that use #bodypositive or similar body positive hashtags? (Do you think that is an appropriate use of the hashtag?)
            ii. How do you feel about businesses (i.e. Aerie; Lane Bryant) using the hashtag or language of body positivity in their advertising?
      e. Do you ever hear criticisms of body positivity? If so, what are they?
            i. How do you feel about these criticisms?
            ii. How do you respond to such critiques?
            iii. Do you have any criticisms of body positivity?
      f. Is there anything you'd change about body positivity? Explain.
VI.   Personal experiences of health, beauty, and gender and wrap up
      a. What have been the positive aspects of your involvement with body positivity, first, as being someone who ascribes to body positivity as a philosophy? Second, as someone who is an influencer and is known for their involvement and influence over body positivity?
            i. Negative? What challenges have you faced because of your involvement with body positivity?
      b. Have you seen any changes in your body or how you feel about your body since getting involved with body positivity? Explain.
            i. Are there any other changes you have seen in yourself and life because of body positivity? If yes, what?
      c. Has being a part of body positivity changed your ideas about being a [based on gender they identified at beginning of interview—i.e. woman/femininity/man/masculinity/non-conforming/queer or gender in general]?
      d. Has body positivity influenced your understandings of beauty? Of health? If yes, in what ways?
            i. What contributions do you think you've made to body positivity?
      e. What impact do you think your actions and that of body positivity, as a whole, have had on both followers of body positivity and body positivity itself, but also larger society?
            i. Do you think body positivity is meeting its goals (and/or changing how we understand health/gender/beauty?)
      f. Is there anything else you would like to add that you didn't get a chance to say or a point you really want to highlight before we go?

TABLE I

Name	# of followers as of March 2019	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Nationality	Sexual Orientation	Marital Status	Children	Educational Level	Employment
Jes Baker	109k	Cis-gender woman	32	White	American with Irish Mexican descent	US	Pansexual	Unmarried	0	Some graduate	Author; Speaker; Blogger
Melissa Gibson	226k	Woman	30	White	White	US	Straight	Divorced	0	Masters	Student
Amber Karnes	18.9k	Female	36	White	White	US	Queer	Married	0	Bachelors	Self-employed Yoga Instructor
Chloe Meghan	11.9k	Female	24	White	White	US	Heterosexual	Married	1	Some Bachelors	Self-employed; Owns landscaping company
Margaret Nelson*	3,991	Female	37	White	White	Canada; Currently lives in the US	Heterosexual	Married	0	Bachelors	Self-employed; Life Coach
Gia Natalia Narvaez	28.4k	Transgender Woman	28	Latina	Hispanic	US	Straight	Single	0	Masters	Social Service Employee
Ashleigh Shackelford	53.4k	Non-binary (femme)	28	Black	Black	US	Queer	Single	0	Some graduate	Sex work; Solutions Not Punishment Collaborative; Full Figure Revolution
Carina Shero	506k	Cis-woman	30	White	White	Germany; Currently live in the US for the last 10 years	Pansexual; Demisexual	Single	0	Bachelors	Model; payed through Patreon; Photography business
Maddie Silverstein	9,852	Female	27	White & Jewish	Ashkenazi & Irish	US	Mostly Straight	Single	0	Bachelors	Advertising; Aspiring Model, Comedian, Writer; Performer
Jessamyn Stanley	411k	Queer femme	31	Black	Black/African American	US	Queer	Single	0	Some graduate	Yoga Teacher; Writer
Sally Thomas*	451k	Female	27	Caucasian	White	US	Heterosexual	Married	0	Bachelors	Blogger
Virgie Tovar	47.5k	Woman	36	Mexican; Iranian	Latin	US	Straight	Single	0	Masters	Independent Contractor; Self Employed; Writer; Lecturer

*Pseudonym
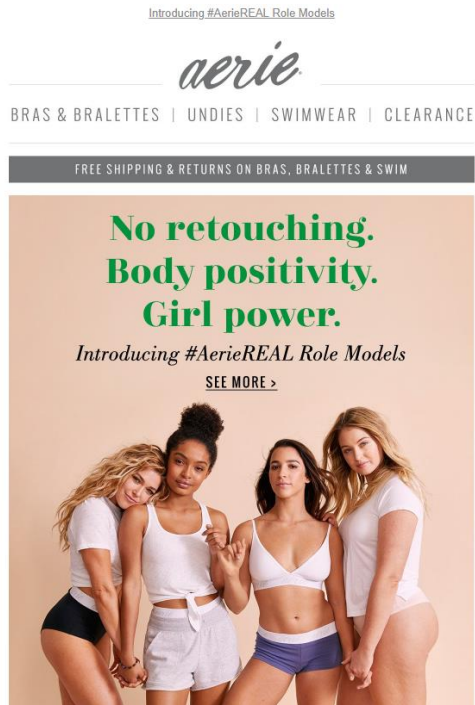
Figure 1: Screenshot of 2018 advertisement emailed to subscribers of Aerie promoting their #AerieREAL role model campaign.
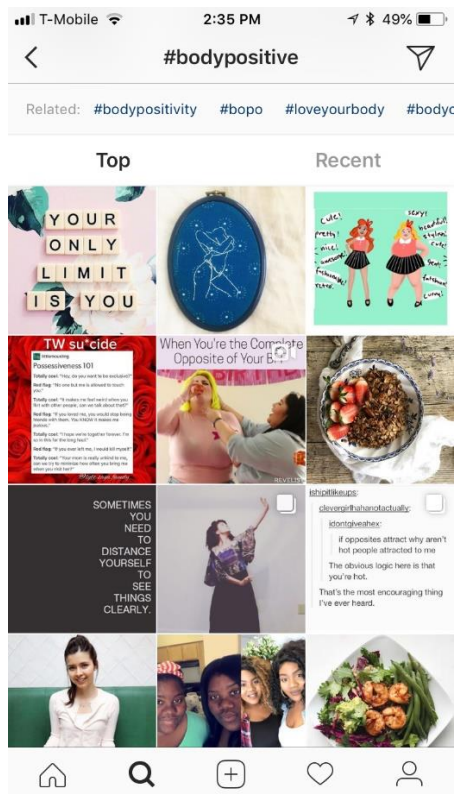
Figure 2: Screenshot of search results on Instagram app.
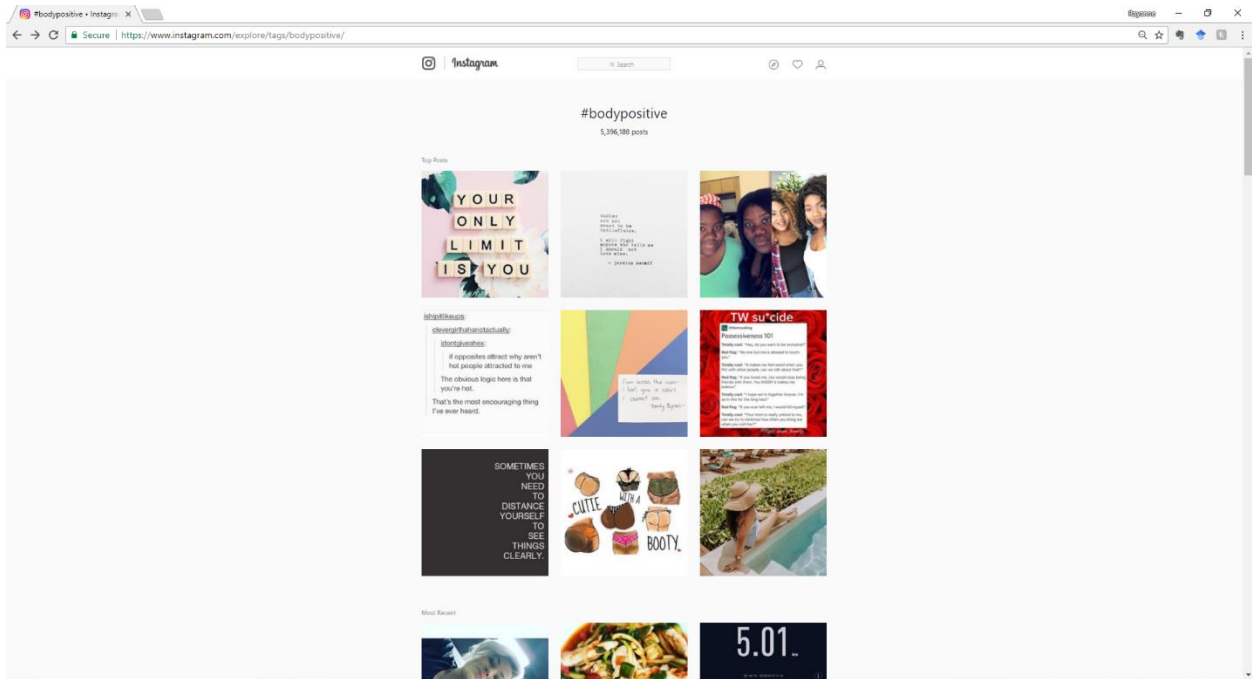
Figure 3: Screenshot of search results on Instagram website.
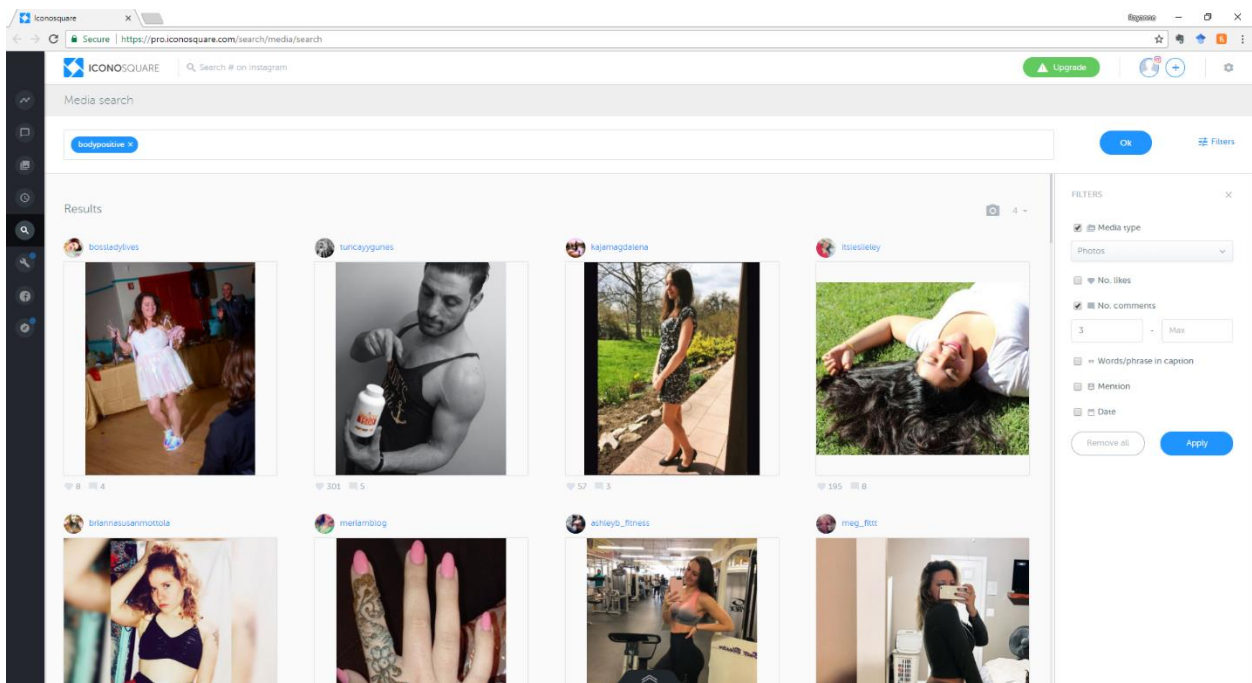
Figure 4: Screenshot of filtered search results on Iconosquare.

Figure 5: Example of a post centered around fashion

Figure 6: An example of posts centered around BBW

Figure 7: An example of an eating disorder recovery post

Figure 8: An example of posts that conflated #bodypositive with #fitspiration

Figure 9: Example of a post that uses the hashtag #allbodiesaregoodbodies

Figure 10: Post from Amber Karnes that illustrates accepting your body

Figure 11: Post from Chloe that demonstrates self-love

Figure 12: Example of a post that uses the hashtag #selfiesforselflove and #bodylove

Figure 13: Example of posts that focus on notion of self-love in caption

Figure 14: Post from Jes Baker that demonstrates anti-self-love narrative

Figure 15: A screenshot of a promotional image for 2019 #AerieREAL campaign

unskinnyshero • Follow

unskinnyshero Instagram has been silently terminating and shadow banning accounts that feature plus size and fat people that are unapologetic in showcasing their bodies in swimwear and lingerie that are breaking the stereotypes about larger bodies.

This image depicts a group or fat and free babes in bikinis that all have had their Instagram accounts deleted/deactivated or shadow banned simply for existing (except @iridessence who is standing in solidarity). Were any of these women skinny they

10,613 likes

JUNE 18

Add a comment...

Figure 16: Example of the type of images Carina Shero uses to increase representation of fat women.

Figure 17: A post by Jessamyn discussing issues related to race.

Figure 18: A post which features a black woman.

Figure 19: A post which features a latinx woman.

Figure 20: An example of a post that features a masculine-appearing person who discusses queer issues.

Figure 21: An example of a post that features a masculine-appearing person who references fitness.

Figure 22: A post which features a queer man.

Figure 23: A post which features a gay man.

Figure 24: A post by Gia which discusses her experience as a transwoman.

Figure 25: A post by Gia which discusses her experience as a transwoman.

Figure 26: A post by Ashleigh that highlights her hyper-femininity.

Figure 27: A post by Jessamyn that highlights her hypersexuality.

Figure 28: An example of a post with an ageist caption.

Figure 29: A #fitspiration post with an ageist caption.
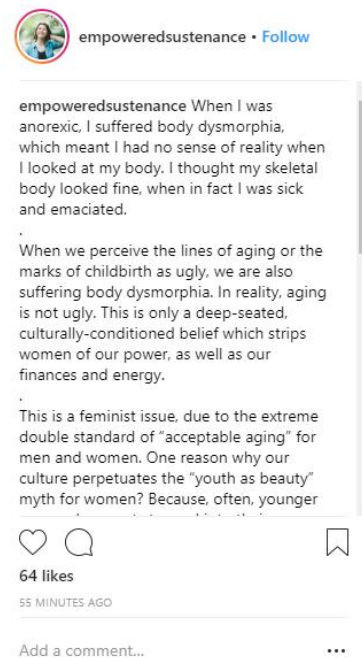
Figure 30: A post that challenges ageism.

wheelchair_rapunzel • Follow
Tunnel

wheelchair_rapunzel I feel at home in the bright lights and bumping bass of a club. It's not like walking down the street where I get children and adults looking at me with a smug curiosity. When I'm in a club, I'm embraced. I never feel uncomfortable stares or like I'm the object of entertainment/curiosity. In a bar/club we are all there to do the same thing: get sloshed, dance until the sweat is dripping down places it shouldn't drip, and take a cute guy home. No words need to be exchanged to vibe with someone (phew, because my little SMA voice gets drowned by the bass). Instead, dancing with someone who is feeling the same beat as you while you're both singing "my neck, my back" is the route of communication. If you ask me, that's better then most conversations I have. That's what happened

371 likes
1 HOUR AGO

Add a comment...

Figure 31: A post which represents a woman with visible disabilities.
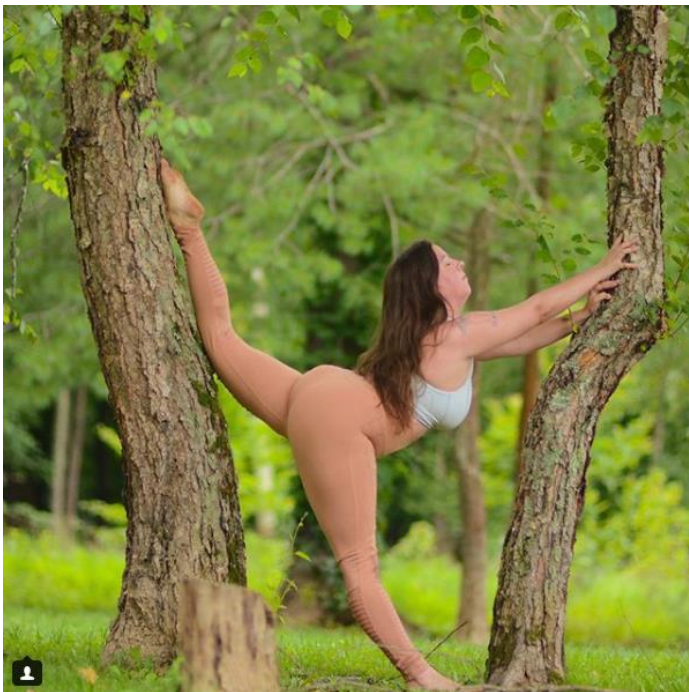
joe_lizzzzzz_yoga • Follow

joe_lizzzzzz_yoga What if no one talked about the uncomfortable topics? Body shaming, sexual assault, disabilities, equality (or a lack of), mental illness, sexuality, unpopular opinions to name a few. What if every time someone commented "i wish you would talk about something less heavy" "i wish you would share something more positive" "i don't want to read about this", that person stopped talking? What if the silence society asked for become a reality? How would we grow? How would we evolve? || From uncomfortable conversations come new ideas, shifts, changes. We promote the opening of minds and deepening of conversations. Keep talking. Keep writing. Keep CARING. If you want to talk about body shaming, talk about body shaming. If you want to talk about your menstrual

1,655 likes
4 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...

Figure 32: A post which mentions disabilities in the caption.

Figure 33: A post which discusses chronic illness.

Figure 34: A post from Jes that mentions disability in the caption.

Figure 35: A post from Maddie that mentions disability in the caption.

Figure 36: A #bodypositive post that challenges beauty discourses.

psychodelicweirdo • Follow

psychodelicweirdo Friendly reminder to all of my Queens: Love and accept yourself and your body and all of your curves. Love the skin that you are in. Even with all of the weight that I have gained I am still feeling beautiful. Reminder to self; give your body love every day, not just the Sunny ones! I love my stretch marks and I love the diamond on the small of my back. These things bring me much joy. It's always the small things. Loving me today, hope you are somewhere loving yourself! You are beautiful 💎 💙 ♓

#instamood #instadaily #iphonesia #happy #heady #girlswithdreads #ladieswithlocks #wonderlocks #dreadhead #dreadsofinstagram #gratefuldreads #dreadgang #dreadfam #smiles #instaweird #weirdo #weirdcontent

45 likes

MAY 31

Add a comment...

Figure 37: A #bodypositive post that challenges beauty discourses.

unskinnyshero • Follow
London, United Kingdom

unskinnyshero I mean the media and society can keep trying to tell us that fat is a bad thing and that fat people can't be attractive but I'll continue to be over here making them look a goddamn fool because if I might say so myself, this fat lady is serving up sexy, sultry, sensual AND savage looks!
Wanna see the rest of this photo with the sizzling @yazminthefox and 50 other photos of us? Then click the link in my bio and subscribe to the $4 tier on my Patreon! I'm wearing a teddy from @fredericks_hollywood from 6 years ago

13,034 likes

JUNE 25

Add a comment...

Figure 38: A post by Carina that challenges beauty discourses.

220

Figure 39: A #bodypositive post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 40: A #bodypositive post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 41: A #bodypositive post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 42: A #bodypositive post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 43: A #fitspiration post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 44: A #fitspiration post that adheres to beauty discourses.

Figure 45: A #fitspiration post that focuses on aesthetics.

Figure 46: A #fitspiration post that focuses on aesthetics.

Figure 47: A #fitspiration post that focuses on aesthetics.

Figure 48: A #bodypositive post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality.

Figure 49: A #bodypositive post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via lingerie.

Figure 50: A #bodypositive post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via lingerie.

ansleymorgan • Follow
Athens, Georgia

ansleymorgan ❣️Casual Saturday❣️
bleu22_clothing 👍👏
leididonna_luxury_room ❤️❤️❤️
nattylight16 Love this one! Beautiful as always!
ansleymorgan @nattylight16 thank you Natalie!
darahdor Great job
waxbuffalo + this is lovely. (heart emoji)
ansleymorgan @waxbuffalo thank you 😊
ansleymorgan .
.
.
.
.
#readbetweenthehemlines #psfashion #psblogger #styleblog #fashionpodcast #stylepodcast #fashionpodcaster

143 likes
4 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...   ...

Figure 51: A #bodypositive post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via fashion.

plusmodelsxylxy • Follow
Houston, Texas

plusmodelsxylxy @fashionnovacurve Saved me!💙😓Today(and everyday😩)in the🌭it's hot as fish grease! Wearing SZ 1X😵 Romper does stretch👌
.
#ontrend #plussizefashion #novababe #curvemodel #body #curves #lookoftheday #pluspositive #loveyourself #fashion #vacationvibes #goddess #thick #celebratemysize #curvyfashion #thickfit #confidence #bodypositive #fashiongram #fashionnova #fashionnovacurve #hotness #plussize #summeroutfit #romper #curvy #summertimefine #bodied #trending #summerlooks

Load more comments
h_nitty 😍
nefeligrammatikaki Wow you slay..🔥

1,885 likes
3 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...   ...

Figure 52: A #bodypositive post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via fashion.

Figure 53: A post by Carina that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality.

Figure 54: A #fitspiration post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality.

Figure 55: A #fitspiration post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality.

Figure 56: A #fitspiration post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via work-out clothes.

Figure 57: A #fitspiration post that demonstrates hyper-femininity and sexuality via work-out clothes.

Figure 58: An example of a belfie using the hashtag #bodypositive.

Figure 59: An example of a belfie using the hashtag #bodypositive.

Figure 60: An example of a belfie using the hashtag #fitspiration.

Figure 61: A #bodypositive post that connects curves to womanhood.

Figure 62: A #bodypositive post that connects curves to womanhood.

Figure 63: An example of a belfie post that features a black woman.

Figure 64: A #fitspiration post that addresses health.

loveme_katie • Follow

loveme_katie Are you a fat shamer?
Do you comment on people's size, how
much they eat, what they wear? Do you say
things like 'I don't want to be skinny but...I
don't want a flabby tummy/I don't want to
be a chunk/I want to look nice'? Do you
think about the impression these
conversations give to those around you?
Do you realise that you're an active
member of the fat phobia commity? Do
you care about how that makes people feel
around you? Those that don't fit the
societal norm.

I sat for an hour outside my child's
gymnastics class and heard all of the above
from two different tables. Even being an
active member of the Bopo community
didn't give me the confidence to challenge
any of this. All I could think (can think; I'm

27 likes

1 HOUR AGO

Add a comment...

Figure 65: A #bodypositive post that addresses diet culture.

SELF

Nope, I'm Not Trying to Lose Weight

And by the way, there are way more interesting things about me than my BMI.

themilitantbaker • Follow

themilitantbaker "It took me a quarter of a
century, but I eventually began to figure
out that after years of a lifestyle dedicated
to a smaller body and the promises that
were attached to it, I had been cheated. I
began to realize that diet culture was not
going to give me the peace and happiness
it promised. It was a thief, and I have spent
half a decade trying to recover all of the
things it has robbed me of."
-
The number I share regarding my weight is
irrelevant- simply meant to inform the
@selfmagazine audience that I'm not their
"perfect curvy size 18 body positive role
model" - it doesn't matter what anyone
weighs. No body size is "better or worse"
than another. Diet culture is not the way
towards learning your body and working
towards holistic wellness... Period.

4,272 likes

JUNE 27

Add a comment...

Figure 66: A post by Jes that addresses diet culture.

Figure 67: A post by Ashleigh that addresses diet culture.

Figure 68: A #bodypositive post that upholds traditional discourses of health.

Figure 69: A #bodypositive post that upholds traditional discourses of health.

Figure 70: A #bodypositive post that addresses mental health.

Figure 71: A post by Amber that addresses mental health.
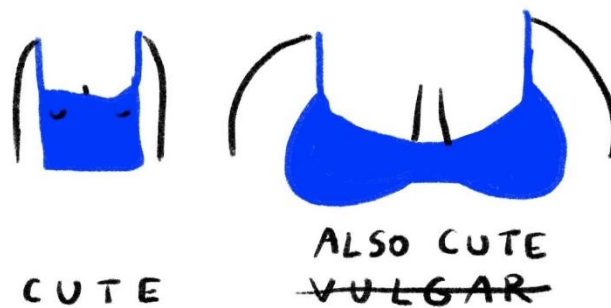
Figure 72: A drawing by Cecile Dormean that Margaret reposted to her Instagram.

Figure 73: An example of sponsorships in posts tagged #bodypositive.

Figure 74: An example of a sponsored post by Jessamyn.

Figure 75: An example of a sponsored post by Jes.

Figure 76: An example of a post that is fighting against diet culture in advertising.

Figure 77: An advertisement in Time Square by Flat Tummy Co that Jes Baker mocks.

Figure 78: A post by Virgie Tovar bringing attention to Ellen Maud Bennett.

REFERENCES

Afful, Adwoa A and Rose Ricciardelli. 2015. "Shaping the Online Fat Acceptance Movement: Talking About Body Image and Beauty Standards." *JOURNAL OF GENDER STUDIES* 24(4):453-72.

Anderson, Matthew R, Lanny Smith and Victor W Sidel. 2005. "What Is Social Medicine?". *Monthly Review* 56(8):27-35.

Anderson, Monica. 2015, "Men Catch up with Women on Overall Social Media Use", Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 28, 2017 (http://pewrsr.ch/1KS03ST).

Baer, Hester. 2016. "Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism." *Feminist Media Studies* 16(1):17-34.

Bailey, Carol A. 2007. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Baker, Jes. 2017, "Lisa Frank Bopo and Why It's Just Not Enough". (http://www.themilitantbaker.com/2017/07/lisa-frank-bopo-and-why-its-just-not_11.html).

Barker, Kristin K. 2008. "Electronic Support Groups, Patient-Consumers, and Medicalization: The Case of Contested Illness." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 49(1):20-36.

Barnes, Brooks. 2017, "In a Body-Positive Moment, Why Does Hollywood Remain out of Step?": The New York Times. (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/movies/in-a-body-positive-moment-why-does-hollywood-remain-out-of-step.html).

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1990. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*: Psychology Press.

Beer, David and Roger Burrows. 2010. "Consumption, Prosumption and Participatory Web Cultures: An Introduction." London, England: SAGE Publications

Belous, Christopher K and Melissa L Bauman. 2017. "What's in a Name? Exploring Pansexuality Online." *Journal of Bisexuality* 17(1):58-72.

Bessenoff, Gayle R. 2006. "Can the Media Affect Us? Social Comparison, Self-Discrepancy, and the Thin Ideal." *Psychology of women quarterly* 30(3):239-51.

Bird, S Elizabeth. 2011. "Are We All Produsers Now? Convergence and Media Audience Practices." *Cultural studies* 25(4-5):502-16.

Bobel, Chris and Samantha Kwan. 2011. *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*: Vanderbilt University Press.

Boepple, Leah, Rheanna N Ata, Ruba Rum and J Kevin Thompson. 2016. "Strong Is the New Skinny: A Content Analysis of Fitspiration Websites." *Body image* 17:132-35.

Boepple, Leah and J Kevin Thompson. 2016. "A Content Analytic Comparison of Fitspiration and Thinspiration Websites." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 49(1):98-101.

Boero, Natalie. 2012. *Killer Fat: Media, Medicine, and Morals in the American" Obesity Epidemic"*: Rutgers University Press.

Bonilla, Yarimar and Jonathan Rosa. 2015. "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42(1):4-17.

Bordo, Susan. 2000. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*: Macmillan.

Bordo, Susan. 2003. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*: Univ of California Press.

Boyle, Lex. 2005. "Flexing the Tensions of Female Muscularity: How Female Bodybuilders Negotiate Normative Femininity in Competitive Bodybuilding." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33(1/2):134-49.

Bronstein, Carolyn. 2015. "Fat Acceptance Blogging, Female Bodies and the Politics of Emotion." *Feral Feminisms* 3:106-18.

Butler, Judith. 1985. "Embodied Identity in De Beauvoir's the Second Sex." Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*: Routledge.

Butler, Robert N. 1969. "Age-Ism: Another Form of Bigotry." *The Gerontologist* 9(4):243-46.

Calasanti, Toni. 2005. "Ageism, Gravity, and Gender: Experiences of Aging Bodies." *GENERATIONS-JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY ON AGING* 29(3):8-12.

Calasanti, Toni, Neal King, Ilkka Pietilä and Hanna Ojala. 2016. "Rationales for Anti-Aging Activities in Middle Age: Aging, Health, or Appearance?". *The Gerontologist*:1-9.

Campos, Paul. 2004. *The Obesity Myth: Why Our Obsessions with Weight Is Hazardous to Our Health*: Penguin Group.

Carr, Deborah and Michael A. Friedman. 2005. "Is Obesity Stigmatizing? Body Weight, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being in the United States." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46(3):244-59.

Carrotte, Elise Rose, Ivanka Prichard and Megan Su Cheng Lim. 2017. ""Fitspiration" on Social Media: A Content Analysis of Gendered Images." *Journal of medical Internet research* 19(3).

Caruso, Alexandra and Steven Roberts. 2017. "Exploring Constructions of Masculinity on a Men's Body-Positivity Blog." *Journal of Sociology*:1-20.

Castells, Manuel. 2013. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*: John Wiley & Sons.

Center, Pew Research. 2018, "Social Media Fact Sheet". (http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/).

Chalklin, Vikki. 2016. "Obstinate Fatties: Fat Activism, Queer Negativity, and the Celebration of 'Obesity'." *Subjectivity* 9(2):107-25.

Cheng, Ryu P. 2009. "Sociological Theories of Disability, Gender, and Sexuality: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of human behavior in the social environment* 19(1):112-22.

Chernin, Kim. 2009. *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*: HarperCollins.

Chrisler, Joan C. 2012. ""Why Can't You Control Yourself?" Fat Should Be a Feminist Issue." *Sex Roles* 66(9-10):608-16.

Clarke, Adele E, Janet K Shim, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Ruth Fosket and Jennifer R Fishman. 2008. *Biomedicalization: Technoscience and Transformations of Health and Illness in the Us*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Cohen, Stanley. 2002. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*: Psychology Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2006. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*: Temple University Press.

Conley, Dalton and Rebecca Glauber. 2005. "Gender, Body Mass and Economic Status." Vol.: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Connell, Catherine. 2013. "Fashionable Resistance: Queer 'Fa(T)Shion' Blogging as Counterdiscourse." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41(1-2):209.

Connell, Robert W and James W Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & society* 19(6):829-59.

Conrad, Peter. 1992. "Medicalization and Social Control." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18:209-32.

Conrad, Peter and Valerie Leither. 2004. "Medicalization, Markets and Consumers." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 45:158-76.

Contois, Emily. 2017. ""Lose Like a Man": Gender and the Constraints of Self-Making in Weight Watchers Online." *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* 17(1):33-43.

Cooper, Charlotte. 2016. *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*: Hammeron Press.

Crawford, Robert. 1980. "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life." *Int J Health Serv* 10(3):365-88.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1990. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stan. L. Rev.* 43:1241.

Cuadraz, Gloria Holguin and Lynet Uttal. 1999. "Intersectionality and in-Depth Interviews: Methodological Strategies for Analyzing Race, Class, and Gender." *Race, Gender & Class* 6(3):156-86.

Cwynar-Horta, Jessica. 2016. "The Commodification of the Body Positive Movement on Instagram." *Stream: Inspiring Critical Thought* 8(2):36-56.

Dalessandro, Alysse. 2016, "15 Definitions of Body Positivity Straight from Influencers & Activists": Bustle. (https://www.bustle.com/articles/165804-15-definitions-of-body-positivity-straight-from-influencers-activists).

Darwin, Helana. 2017. "The Pariah Femininity Hierarchy: Comparing White Women's Body Hair and Fat Stigmas in the United States." *Gender, Place & Culture* 24(1):135-46.

Davis-Delano, Laurel R, April Pollock and Jennifer Ellsworth Vose. 2009. "Apologetic Behavior among Female Athletes: A New Questionnaire and Initial Results." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 44(2-3):131-50.

DeAngelis, Tory. 1997. "Body-Image Problems Affect All Groups." *Monitor on Psychology* 28(3).

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2000. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." Pp. 1-28 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Dickins, Marissa, Samantha L Thomas, Bri King, Sophie Lewis and Kate Holland. 2011. "The Role of the Fatosphere in Fat Adults' Responses to Obesity Stigma: A Model of Empowerment without a Focus on Weight Loss." *Qualitative Health Research* 21(12):1679-91.

Donaghue, Ngaire and Anne Clemitshaw. 2012. "'I'm Totally Smart and a Feminist .. And yet I Want to Be a Waif': Exploring Ambivalence Towards the Thin Ideal within the Fat Acceptance Movement." *WOMENS STUDIES INTERNATIONAL FORUM* 35(6):415-25.

Duffy, Brooke Erin. 2017. *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*: Yale University Press.

Dumit, Joseph. 2012. *Drugs for Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Dworkin, Shari L. 2001. "'Holding Back": Negotiating a Glass Ceiling on Women's Muscular Strength." *Sociological perspectives* 44(3):333-50.

Dworkin, Shari L and Michael A Messner. 2002. "Introduction: Gender Relations and Sport." *Sociological perspectives* 45(4):347-52.

Earl, Jennifer and Katrina Kimport. 2011. *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*: Mit Press.

Eberhardt, Maeve and Kara Freeman. 2015. "'First Things First, I'm the Realest': Linguistic Appropriation, White Privilege, and the Hip-Hop Persona of Iggy Azalea." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 19(3):303-27.

Ellis, Katie and Gerard Goggin. 2014. "Disability and Social Media." Pp. 126-43 in *The Social Media Handbook*, edited by J. Huntsinger and T. Senft. New York: Routledge.

Engeln, Renee. 2017. *Beauty Sick: How the Cultural Obsession with Appearance Hurts Girls and Women*: Harper.

Epstein, Steven. 1996. *Impure Science: Aids, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Evans, Elizabeth and Prudence Chamberlain. 2015. "Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism." *Social Movement Studies* 14(4):396-409.

Eves, Alison. 2004. "Queer Theory, Butch/Femme Identities and Lesbian Space." *Sexualities* 7(4):480-96.

Farrell, Amy Erdman. 2011. *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Fikkan, Janna L. and Esther D. Rothblum. 2012. "Is Fat a Feminist Issue? Exploring the Gendered Nature of Weight Bias." *Sex Roles* 66(9):575-92.

Fischer, Mia. 2016. "# Free_Cece: The Material Convergence of Social Media Activism." *Feminist Media Studies* 16(5):755-71.

Flegal, Cynthia L. Ogden; Margaret D. Carroll; Cheryl D. Fryar; Katherine M. 2015. *Prevalence of Obesity among Adults and Youth:*
 United States, 2011–2014 Congress.

Flegal, K. M., B. K. Kit, H. Orpana and B. I. Graubard. 2013. "Association of All-Cause Mortality with Overweight and Obesity Using Standard Body Mass Index Categories: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *JAMA* 309(1):71-82.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*. New York: Random House.

Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*: Pantheon Books.

Frank, Arthur W. 1991. "For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review." Pp. 36-102 in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, edited by M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B. S. Turner.

Friedman, Vanessa, ed. 2015. *Instagram Has Become a Body-Image Battleground*. (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/14/fashion/instagram-has-become-a-body-image-battleground.html?_r=2).

Fuchs, Christian 2013. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*: SAGE Publications.

Gaesser, Glenn A. 1999. "Thinness and Weight Loss: Beneficial or Detrimental to Longevity?". *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 31(8):1118-28.

Gailey, Jeannine A. 2014. *The Hyper(in)Visible Fat Woman: Weight and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Society*, Vol. Firstition. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. 2002. "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory." *NWSA journal* 14(3):1-32.

Gerschick, Thomas J. 2000. "Toward a Theory of Disability and Gender." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 25(4):1263-68.

Gerstein, Julie. 2016, "Welcome to Body Positivity Week", BuzzFeed. (https://www.buzzfeed.com/juliegerstein/this-is-why-were-doing-body-positivity-week?utm_term=.gewx1N1MB#.unddvDv31).

Gillett, James and Philip G White. 1992. "Male Bodybuilding and the Reassertion of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critical Feminist Perspective." *Play & Culture*.

Gilman, Sander L. 1985. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12(1):204-42.

Gleason, Benjamin. 2013. "Occupy Wall Street: Exploring Informal Learning About a Social Movement on Twitter." *American Behavioral Scientist* 57(7):966-82.

Goffman, Erving. 2009. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*: Simon and Schuster.

Grosz, Elizabeth A. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*: Indiana University Press.

Guillaume, Jenna. 2018, "Here's Why "Insatiable" Is Actually Incredibly Offensive and Fatphobic". (https://www.buzzfeed.com/jennaguillaume/insatiable-fat-shaming?utm_term=.qdZ93yW68#.bf1BDroRb).

Gurrieri, Lauren and Hélène Cherrier. 2013. "Queering Beauty: Fatshionistas in the Fatosphere." *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 16(3):276-95.

Guzmán, Isabel Molina and Angharad N Valdivia. 2004. "Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in Us Popular Culture." *The communication review* 7(2):205-21.

Hancké, Bob. 2009. *Intelligent Research Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hand, Martin. 2016. "Visuality in Social Media: Researching Images, Circulations and Practices." in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by L. Sloan and A. Quan-Haase. London: SAGE Publications.

Hatton, Erin and Mary Nell Trautner. 2011. "Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of Rolling Stone." *Sexuality & culture* 15(3):256-78.

Havlin, Natalie and Jillian M Báez. 2018. "Introduction: Revisiting Beauty." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46(1):13-24.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 1996. *Am I Thin Enough Yet?: The Cult of Thinness and the Commercialization of Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 2007. *The Cult of Thinness*: Oxford University Press.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 2014. *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Hobson, Janell. 2018. "Remnants of Venus: Signifying Black Beauty and Sexuality." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46(1):105-20.

hooks, bell. 1993. *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*: South End Press Boston.

Hutson, David J. 2010. "Standing out/Fitting In: Identity, Appearance, and Authenticity in Gay and Lesbian Communities." *Symbolic Interaction* 33(2):213-33.

Instagram. 2019, "Our Story". Retrieved March 10, 2019 (https://instagram-press.com/our-story/).

Johnston, Josée and Judith Taylor. 2008. "Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 33(4):941-66.

Jones, Jalessa M. 2016, "Body Positivity Has Hit the Mainstream. Now What?": USA Today. (https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2016/10/07/body-positivity-mainstream/91458824/).

Julien, Heidi. 2008. "Content Analysis." in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by L. Given. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1988. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender & society* 2(3):274-90.

Kilbourne, Jean. 1994. "Still Killing Us Softly: Advertising and the Obsession with Thinness." Pp. 395-418 in *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*, edited by M. A. K. Patricia Fallon, Susan C. Wooley. Guilford Press.

Kirkland, A. 2008. *Fat Rights: Dilemmas of Difference and Personhood*: NYU Press.

Klein, Richard. 1996. *Eat Fat*: Pantheon.

Krane, Vikki, Precilla YL Choi, Shannon M Baird, Christine M Aimar and Kerrie J Kauer. 2004. "Living the Paradox: Female Athletes Negotiate Femininity and Muscularity." *Sex Roles* 50(5-6):315-29.

Kreydatus, Beth. 2008. "Confronting the" Bra-Burners:" Teaching Radical Feminism with a Case Study." *The History Teacher* 41(4):489-504.

Kwan, Samantha. 2009a. "Framing the Fat Body: Contested Meanings between Government, Activists, and Industry." *Sociological Inquiry* 79(1):25-50.

Kwan, Samantha. 2009b. "Competing Motivational Discourses for Weight Loss: Means to Ends and the Nexus of Beauty and Health." *Qualitative Health Research* 19(9):1223-33.

Kwan, Samantha and Mary Nell Trautner. 2009. "Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency." *Sociology Compass* 3(1):49-71.

Laestadius, Linnea. 2016. "Instagram." in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by L. Sloan and A. Quan-Haase. London: SAGE Publications.

Laughlin, Kathleen A, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore and Leandra Zarnow. 2010. "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor." *Feminist Formations*:76-135.

LeBesco, Kathleen. 2010. "Fat Panic and the New Morality." Pp. 72-82 in *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*, edited by J. Metzl and A. Kirkland. New York: New York University Press.

Locke, Philip. 1997. "Male Images in the Gay Mass Media and Bear-Oriented Magazines: Analysis and Contrast." Pp. 103-40 in *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, edited by L. K. Wright.

Loeb, Elizabeth. 2008. "Cutting It Off: Bodily Integrity, Identity Disorders, and the Sovereign Stakes of Corporeal Desire in Us Law." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36(3/4):44-63.

Lovejoy, Meg. 2001. "Disturbances in the Social Body: Differences in Body Image and Eating Problems among African American and White Women." *Gender & society* 15(2):239-61.

Lupton, Deborah. 1995. *The Imperative of Health: Public Health and the Regulated Body*, Vol. 90. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lupton, Deborah. 2013. *Fat*. New York: Routledge.

Lupton, Deborah. 2015. *Digital Sociology*: Routledge.

Lupton, Deborah. 2017a. "Digital Media and Body Weight, Shape, and Size: An Introduction and Review." *Fat Studies* 6(2):119-34.

Lupton, Deborah. 2017b. "Vitalities and Visceralities: Alternative Body/Food Politics in New Digital Media."

Martin, Linda G., Robert F. Schoeni and Patricia M. Andreski. 2010. "Trends in Health of Older Adults in the United States: Past, Present, Future." *Demography* 47:S17-S40.

Marwick, Alice E. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*: Yale University Press.

McRuer, Robert. 2006. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*: NYU press.

Mears, Ashley. 2015. "Girls as Elite Distinction: The Appropriation of Bodily Capital." *Poetics* 53:22-37.

Meleo-Erwin, Zoë. 2012. "Disrupting Normal: Toward the 'Ordinary and Familiar' in Fat Politics." *Feminism & Psychology* 22(3):388-402.

Messner, Michael A. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*, Vol. 4: U of Minnesota Press.

Metzl, Jonathan and Anne Kirkland. 2010. *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Miller, Amara Lindsay. 2016. "Eating the Other Yogi: Kathryn Budig, the Yoga Industrial Complex, and the Appropriation of Body Positivity." *Race and Yoga* 1(1).

Mokdad, Ali H., James S. Marks, Donna F. Stroup and Julie L. Gerberding. 2004. "Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 291(10):1238-45.

Mollow, Anna. 2015. "Disability Studies Gets Fat." *Hypatia* 30(1):199-216.

Murray, Dara Persis. 2013. "Branding "Real" Social Change in Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty." *Feminist Media Studies* 13(1):83-101.

Murray, Samantha. 2008. "Pathologizing "Fatness": Medical Authority and Popular Culture." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25(1):7-21.

Murray, Samantha and Zoe Meleo-Erwin. 2008. "Fat." Pp. 165-96 in *Cultural Encyclopedia of the Body*, edited by V. Pitts-Taylor. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*: University of Minnesota Press.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*: NYU Press.

Ogden, C. L., M. D. Carroll, B. K. Kit and K. M. Flegal. 2014. "Prevalence of Childhood and Adult Obesity in the United States, 2011-2012." *JAMA* 311(8):806-14.

Oliver, J. Eric. 2006. *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ospina, Marie Southard. 2015, "21 Most Body Positive Moments of 2015 Because This Was the Year the Movement Got Mainstream"*,* Bustle. (https://www.bustle.com/articles/127288-21-most-body-positive-moments-of-2015-because-this-was-the-year-the-movement-got-mainstream).

Patterson, Courtney J. 2014. "Plus Size Black and Latino Women: The Implications of Body Shape and Size for Apparel Design." Pp. 256-72 in *Designing Apparel for Consumers: The Impact of Body Shape and Size*, edited by M.-E. Faust and S. Carrier. Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing.

Pausé, Cat. 2014a. "Causing a Commotion: Queering Fat Cyberspace." Pp. 75-88 in *Queering Fat Embodiment*, edited by C. Pausé, J. Wykes and S. Murray. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Pausé, Cat. 2014b. "Die Another Day: The Obstacles Facing Fat People in Accessing Quality Healthcare." *Narrative inquiry in bioethics* 4(2):135-41.

Pausé, Cat. 2015. "Rebel Heart: Performing Fatness Wrong Online." *M/C Journal* 18(3).

Pennington, Diane Rasmussen. 2016. "Coding of Non-Text Data." in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, edited by L. Sloan and A. Quan-Haase. London: SAGE Publications.

Perez, Marisol and Thomas E Joiner. 2003. "Body Image Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating in Black and White Women." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 33(3):342-50.

Peters, Lauren Downing. 2013. "Queering the Hourglass: Beauty and New Wave Fat Activism." in *Inter-Disciplinary 3rd Global Conference on Beauty: Exploring Critical Issues*. Oxford, United Kingdom.

Pope, Harrison, Katharine A Phillips and Roberto Olivardia. 2000. *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*: Simon and Schuster.

Porter, Dorothy. 1997. *Social Medicine and Medical Sociology in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 43: Rodopi.

Prohaska, Ariane and Jeannine Gailey. 2009. "Fat Women as "Easy Targets": Achieving Masculinity through Hogging." Pp. 158-66 in *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by E. Rothblum and S. Solovay.

Puhl, Rebecca and Kelly D Brownell. 2001. "Bias, Discrimination, and Obesity." *Obesity* 9(12):788-805.

Pyle, Nathaniel C. and Noa Logan Klein. 2011. "Fat. Hairy. Sexy.: Contesting Standards of Beauty and Sexuality in the Gay Community " Pp. 78-87 in *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*, edited by C. Bobel and S. Kwan: Vanderbilt University Press.

Reger, Jo. 2012. *Everywhere and Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States*: OUP USA.

Reger, Jo. 2014. "Debating Us Contemporary Feminism." *Sociology Compass* 8(1):43-51. doi: 10.1111/soc4.12118.

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 5(4):631-60.

Rich, Emma, Lee F. Monaghan and Lucy Aphramor. 2011. *Debating Obesity: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Richardson, Niall. 2016. *Transgressive Bodies: Representations in Film and Popular Culture*: Routledge.

Ritzer, George. 2014. "Prosumption: Evolution, Revolution, or Eternal Return of the Same?". *Journal of Consumer Culture* 14(1):3-24.

Rivers, Nicola. 2017. *Postfeminism (S) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides*: Springer.

Robinson, Lily, Ivanka Prichard, Alyssa Nikolaidis, Claire Drummond, Murray Drummond and Marika Tiggemann. 2017. "Idealised Media Images: The Effect of Fitspiration Imagery on Body Satisfaction and Exercise Behaviour." *Body image* 22:65-71.

Rodriquez, Jason. 2006. "Color-Blind Ideology and the Cultural Appropriation of Hip-Hop." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(6):645-68.

Roehling, Mark V. 1999. "Weight-Based Discrimination in Employment: Psychological and Legal Aspects." *Personnel Psychology* 52(4):969-1016.

Roehling, Patricia V, Mark V Roehling and Austin Elluru. 2018. "Size Does Matter: The Impact of Size on Career." Pp. 105 in *Research Handbook of Diversity and Careers*: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Rogers, Richard A. 2006. "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation." *Communication Theory* 16(4):474-503.

Rohrer, Judy. 2005. "Toward a Full-Inclusion Feminism: A Feminist Deployment of Disability Analysis." *Feminist studies* 31(1):34-63. doi: 10.2307/20459006.

Saguy, Abigail. 2012a. "Why Fat Is a Feminist Issue." *Sex Roles* 66(9):600-07.

Saguy, Abigail C. 2012b. *What's Wrong with Fat?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Saguy, Abigail C. and Kjerstin Gruys. 2010. "Morality and Health: News Media Constructions of Overweight and Eating Disorders." *Social Problems* 57(2):231-50.

Saguy, Abigail C. and Anna Ward. 2011. "Coming out as Fat: Rethinking Stigma." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74(1):53-75.

Salam, Maya. 2017, "Why 'Radical Body Love' Is Thriving on Instagram", The New York Times. (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/09/style/body-positive-instagram.html).

Sastre, Alexandra. 2014a. "Hottentot in the Age of Reality Tv: Sexuality, Race, and Kim Kardashian's Visible Body." *Celebrity Studies* 5(1-2):123-37.

Sastre, Alexandra. 2014b. "Towards a Radical Body Positive: Reading the Online "Body Positive Movement"." *Feminist Media Studies* 14(6):929-43.

Schreier, Margrit. 2014. "Qualitative Content Analysis." in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, edited by U. Flick. London: SAGE Publications.

Schutt, Russell K. 2001. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Pine Forge Press.

Sciarretto, Amy. 2016, "Barbie Is Getting a Major Body Positive Markeover for 2016": Bustle. (https://www.bustle.com/articles/138271-barbie-is-getting-a-major-body-positive-makeover-for-2016-photos).

Senft, Theresa M. 2013. "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self." Pp. 346-54 in *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, edited by J. B. John Hartley, Axel Bruns: Wiley-Blackwell.

Slater, Amy, Neesha Varsani and Phillippa C Diedrichs. 2017. "# Fitspo or# Loveyourself? The Impact of Fitspiration and Self-Compassion Instagram Images on Women's Body Image, Self-Compassion, and Mood." *Body image* 22:87-96.

Smith, Marquard. 2013. "Theses on the Philosophy of History: The Work of Research in the Age of Digital Searchability and Distributability." *journal of visual culture* 12(3):375-403.

Solovay, Sondra. 2000. *Tipping the Scales of Justice: Fighting Weight Based Discrimination*: Prometheus Books.

Soriano, Cheryll Ruth Reyes. 2014. "Constructing Collectivity in Diversity: Online Political Mobilization of a National Lgbt Political Party." *Media, culture & society* 36(1):20-36.

Spade, Dean. 2013. "Mutilating Gender." Pp. 331-48 in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by S. W. Susan Stryker: Routledge.

Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1982. "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views." *Feminist studies* 8(1):109-31.

Talbot, Catherine Victoria, Jeffrey Gavin, Tommy van Steen and Yvette Morey. 2017. "A Content Analysis of Thinspiration, Fitspiration, and Bonespiration Imagery on Social Media." *Journal of eating disorders* 5(1):40.

Taylor, Verta and Nancy E Whittier. 1992. "Collective Identity in Social Movement."

Thrift, N. 2005. *Knowing Capitalism*: SAGE Publications.

Thrift, Nigel. 2006. "Re-Inventing Invention: New Tendencies in Capitalist Commodification." *Economy and Society* 35(02):279-306.

Tiggemann, Marika and Amy Slater. 2004. "Thin Ideals in Music Television: A Source of Social Comparison and Body Dissatisfaction." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 35(1):48-58.

Tiggemann, Marika and Mia Zaccardo. 2015. ""Exercise to Be Fit, Not Skinny": The Effect of Fitspiration Imagery on Women's Body Image." *Body image* 15:61-67.

Tiggemann, Marika and Mia Zaccardo. 2016. "'Strong Is the New Skinny': A Content Analysis of# Fitspiration Images on Instagram." *Journal of health psychology*.

Tovar, Virgie. 2018. *You Have the Right to Remain Fat*. New York: Feminist Press.

Trainer, S., A. Brewis, A. Wutich, L. Kurtz and M. Niesluchowski. 2016. "The Fat Self in Virtual Communities: Success and Failure in Weight-Loss Blogging." *Current Anthropology* 57(4):523-28.

Treem, Jeffrey W, Stephanie L Dailey, Casey S Pierce and Diana Biffl. 2016. "What We Are Talking About When We Talk About Social Media: A Framework for Study." *Sociology Compass* 10(9):768-84.

Tremain, Shelley. 2006. "On the Government of Disability: Foucault, Power, and the Subject of Impairment." in *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by L. J. Davis: Routledge.

Tufekci, Zeynep and Deen Freelon. 2013. "Introduction to the Special Issue on New Media and Social Unrest." Sage Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA.

Vaccaro, Christian Alexander. 2011. "Male Bodies in Manhood Acts: The Role of Body-Talk and Embodied Practice in Signifying Culturally Dominant Notions of Manhood." *Sociology Compass* 5(1):65-76.

Wee, Christina C, Karen W Huskey, Dragana Bolcic-Jankovic, Mary Ellen Colten, Roger B Davis and MaryBeth Hamel. 2014. "Sex, Race, and Consideration of Bariatric Surgery among Primary Care Patients with Moderate to Severe Obesity." *Journal of general internal medicine* 29(1):68-75.

West, Candace and Don H Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & society* 1(2):125-51.

Witt, D. 2004. *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America*: U of Minnesota Press.

Wolf, Naomi. 1991. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*: HarperCollins.

Wray, Sharon and Ruth Deery. 2008. "The Medicalization of Body Size and Women's Healthcare." *Health care for women international* 29(3):227-43.

Wykes, Jackie. 2016. "Introduction: Why Queering Fat Embodiment?" Pp. 1-12 in *Queering Fat Embodiment*, edited by C. Pausé, J. Wykes and S. Murray: Routledge.

Young, Iris Marion. 1980. "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3:137-56.

Young, Iris Marion. 2002. *Inclusion and Democracy*: Oxford University press on demand.

Young, Iris Marion. 2005. *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zeisler, Andi. 2016. *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to Covergirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*: Public Affairs.

Zola, Irving Kenneth. 1972. "Medicine as an Institution of Social Control." *The Sociological Review* 20(4):487-504.